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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY: THE ART OF WELCOMING DIALOGUE FOR THE SAKE OF MUTUAL CHRISTIAN COLLABORATION TOWARD PEACEMAKING, JUSTICE, AND ETHICAL CITIZENSHIP

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

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PROJECT FACULTY:

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PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2023

PORTLAND SEMINARY
George Fox University

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

Tiffanie Paige Wilson

has been approved by
the Evaluation Committee on March 16, 2023
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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Dedication

To Sephia, Marly, and Finn: You are the greatest gifts in this world to your Dad and me. I thought of each of you as I worked on this project, partly because I want to embody this research and hope to engage in practices that unify our communities and partly because you three have served as the best interruptions. You have kept me grounded in motherhood and helped me lift my eyes off of the books and laptop and onto your sweet faces. I pray that you each know how deeply you are loved, by our good and gracious God and me. Stay wild and curious, and live into your questions. I trust you will find a Companion to accompany you well.

Acknowledgments

To Joey, my rock of a husband. You have supported me endlessly. You have listened to hours of conversation on Ecumenical Diplomacy, you have kept me hydrated and fed. You have done more than your fair share of the housework so I could study, write, and balance our family life. You are a constant partner, an incredible father, and are as steady as they come. Thank you, and I love you.

To my Mom, who is "Marney" extraordinaire, thank you for showing up and cheering on my dreams, being a wonderful grandparent to our children, and for offering countless opportunities for fun breaks. They were much needed, and remind me to play. Thank you.

Family and Friends: To my extended family and close friends, thank you for listening to me talk about my research. You helped me process it and move it along, sometimes by asking great questions, sometimes by editing and offering feedback, and always by being patient with my sometimes lack of free time. Thank you for meeting me where I have been. I hope this work has and can enrich your life, even if in some small way.

Mentors and Professors: Dr. MaryKate Morse, Dr. Kurtley Knight, and Dr. Ken Van Vliet, Thank you for what you are building, both in this program and in us as students. I knew it would be a good adventure, but had no idea it would be this good. Thank you for sharing of yourselves, for guiding well, and for appropriately pushing me forward. This experience has been pure gift, and the transformation, palpable. I am beyond grateful for each of you. MaryKate, studying under you is why I came to the George Fox program, and it did not disappoint. I have thoroughly enjoyed learning from you, especially from your perspective as a woman. You are a gentle force and have taught me in ways that become caught. Kurtley, I appreciate you offering yourself as our cohort priest. Your presence is warm and conversations with you come from a deep place of thoughtfulness, and you helped redeem the slap of suffering. (I would insert an emoji here if I could.) Ken, I cannot even fully express how much I needed your guidance in this program, especially in the way you bring your whole enneagram 8 self. You have held my strong energy in a way that I didn't have to edit or tamp down, and I deeply have needed that space in the context of our work on leadership and formation. Thank you. Dr. Cliff Berger, Heather Rainey, and Jen McNab, thank you for keeping track of so many details and providing students with such clarity every step of the way. These details are the gifts of God for the students of God (How's that for a liturgical reference?!) As daunting as a doctoral process can be, you each worked to make it as seamless as possible, ensuring that I always knew where I was in the process. The work you do matters immensely and has certainly affected my engagement in this program, and thus my growth. I didn't have to go discover the details needed for next steps because you all provided them, taking it off of our plate so we could focus. And to Ty Sohlman, I would not even be in this program if it weren't for the guidance you offered in the admissions process. Thank you - I am incredibly grateful for this experience.

To my Journey group and Cohort: Our time together has been a gift beyond expectation. As I write this, I am already noticing some feelings of grief and sadness that our time will come to a close in the way we know it. Our cohort truly is *awesome* and it has been an honor to get to know every

single one of you. You made this program such a rich experience by bringing all of yourself. Thank you for the shared stories, wrestling out the questions, solving the world's problems, holding space for deep inner work, making sure it was a safe community, and for a lot of laughter. Let's make some holy trouble together!

To the Stakeholders and Research Participants: Your time, participation, and feedback have been immeasurable. Truly, this project would not have reached completion without you. Thank you for being brave, vulnerable, and just risky enough to share your thoughts on controversial issues. You brought heart and passion, and gave me energy and drive to keep going when I saw your excitement. Thank you.

Epigraph

"I come into the peace of wild things." - Wendell Berry

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Preface

This work was born out of a deep desire to see relationships mended that are torn apart in the midst of intense polarization in American politics, particularly among Christians, and to lay out a pathway for a better way forward. My prayer*: that our hearts may be transformed, that our hearts may be transformed*.

List of Abbreviations

SD – Spiritual Direction

SF – Spiritual Formation

Glossary

Ecumenical Diplomacy: The art and science of appealing to Christian individuals and groups who espouse various theological beliefs and practices in order to maintain peaceful relations through sensitive, effective, and transformative methods of communication and connection.

Ethical Citizenship: Engaging as a community member and attending to needs using knowledge, morals, and virtues that will serve the society well and provide a more just and peaceful experience for all.

Spiritual Formation: Embodied repetitive practices that form us below a cognitive level and bring us into greater unity with Christ (which would bring us into greater unity with others if we are following Christ in the Great Commandment to love God and love others).

Ethical Policy: As it relates to humanity, creating a system that appropriately reflects and affirms the dignity of people.

Political Involvement: This is our shared life together and how it plays out: forming, norming, and sustaining our life together. Political practices should move toward ethical policy goals, and ethics should be at the base of political decision making as the two are inseparable.

Research Method

This Doctoral Project utilized a blended research and design methodology called 'Collaborative Design for Ministry and Nonprofit Contexts'. In Collaborative Design, practitioners work with stakeholder representatives to address a Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) in their context. Using a combination of bibliographic resources, local knowledge derived from stakeholder Workshops, and an iterative process of continuous adjustment using 'just enough' feedback information at each juncture of development, practitioners produce an application-oriented Project that seeks to effect Christ-centered change.

Abstract

The project was developed in response to the NPO: How can we become proficient in better listening to and learning from each other to understand the ethical and intellectual commitment and stakes behind theological, political, and social perspectives different from our own? In a pluralistic society, such deep understanding is necessary to enable working together toward ecumenical diplomacy.

A key insight emerging from research was just how impactful the path of ecumenical diplomacy would be for participants. People are truly weary of the polarization experienced in the United States, particularly theologically and politically, and are eager to learn a new way forward together.

My ministry context is that I serve as a spiritual director. Through the space offered in spiritual direction, as well general conversations I have had with others either in person or virtually through social media, I gathered there was a stirring to learn how to process through challenging issues through the lenses of theology, political engagement, ethics, and spiritual formation. I have brought my practitioner skills into this project and have utilized the soul care posture to guide participants through the path to ecumenical diplomacy, enabling them to integrate what they are learning into their life, recognizing it all belongs.

This project is a twelve-week, practitioner facilitated course that guides participants through the path to Ecumenical Diplomacy. The research process uncovered multiple causes of disunity among Christians in regard to theological, social, and ethical dilemmas and the course serves to offer a pathway toward unity by addressing the topics of Imago Dei, Ecumenical Unity, Critical Thinking, Ethics, Theology Processing, Story: Knowing Ourselves and Others, Political Formation, Spiritual Formation, Connecting Belief and Action, Practical Implications of Ethics, and finally, a Case Study.

Introduction

This project is a twelve-week, practitioner facilitated course that guides participants through the path to Ecumenical Diplomacy. The research process uncovered multiple causes of disunity among Christians in regard to theological, social, and ethical dilemmas and the course serves to offer a pathway toward unity by addressing the topics of Imago Dei, Ecumenical Unity, Critical Thinking, Ethics, Theology Processing, Story: Knowing Ourselves and Others, Political Formation, Spiritual Formation, Connecting Belief and Action, Practical Implications of Ethics, and finally, a Case Study.

I have created a course that takes participants through each identified topic to better understand one another and the issues we face together theologically, politically, and socially. This course is facilitated currently in a one-on-one manner with myself serving as a soul care practitioner.

Ecumenical Diplomacy is showcased via visual slides, and also includes notes that reflect participant experience as they advanced through the course. I have also included samples of personal ethical statements and case studies created by participants to reveal how the course helped them integrate and apply what they learned. The goal is better understanding, not uniformed thinking, so the path to ecumenical diplomacy can be applied to a variety of ethical, theological, and social issues.

Introduction to the Project

Pedagogically, the intention for the *Ecumenical Diplomacy* project is a one-on-one and/or a small group format. The participant group who completed the course in the fall of 2022 expressed this context worked well. The course could also be utilized via a teaching video where content was covered, followed by an individual session to assist the participant in processing and implementing what they are learning. With proper formatting, I could see the course being used for retreats and consulting (primarily for ministry and Christian non-profit leaders) or as an academic course, although it would require some adjustments as well as a reading list that would accompany the course. *Ecumenical Diplomacy* can be used in synchronous and/or asynchronous formats. Participants could either view the material before the discussion session or in a live setting.

Doctoral Project

Ecumenical Diplomacy Course

Unit 1: Introduction

ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY:

The Art of Listening and Welcoming Dialogue for the Sake of Mutual Christian Collaboration Toward Peacemaking, Justice, and Ethical Citizenship

TIFFANIE PAIGE WILSON

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INTRODUCTION

Research Question
Root Causes of the Problem
Guiding Scriptures
Defining Terms
Path to Ecumenical Diplomacy

It all started with a Question...

How can we become proficient in better listening to and learning from each other to understand the ethical and intellectual commitment and stakes behind theological, political, and social perspectives different from our own? In a pluralistic society, such deep understanding is necessary to enable working together toward ecumenical diplomacy.

WHY THIS RESEARCH TOPIC?

Political conversations - both observation and participation

Desiring a better relational experience for all of us

Our beliefs and actions matter, especially when PEOPLE are involved

Research Process

- Gathered from stakeholders over a 3 year process
- Voices come from across the country and hold diverse theological and political perspectives

Through workshops and individual interviews, many questions arose...

How does following the Greatest Commandment play out in our social and political lives?
How do we continue to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God?
How does loving your neighbor intersect with politics / policy?
What is the intersection between faith and works in the context of human rights and ethics?
How does being a follower of Jesus affect our participation in the world ?
How do we address the personal and systemic sin that causes harm in the world?
How can we learn to listen and better understand one another?

I asked the stakeholders....

What caused disunity among Christians?

Here are the responses...

- Not recognizing all of humanity as a reflection of Imago Dei
- Forgetting what unites us
- Not embracing Christian unity and welcoming differences
- Laziness in critical thinking; contentment in echo chambers
- Failure to learn and consider various theological perspectives
- Lack of listening to one another
- Lack of understanding religious, social, political formation
- Shallow spiritual formation
- Struggle in connecting to orthopraxy
- Polarized stances in regard to a myriad of ethical issues

Guiding Scriptures

Genesis 1:26 - 27 - “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” NRSV

Isaiah 1:17 - “Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” NRSV

Micah 6:8 - “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” NRSV

Jeremiah 22:3 - “Thus says the LORD: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place.” NRSV

Psalms 82:3 - “Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” NRSV

Defining Terms

Ecumenical Diplomacy:

The art of appealing to Christian individuals and groups who espouse various theological beliefs and practices in order to maintain peaceful relations through sensitive, effective, and transformative methods of communication and connection

Defining Terms

Ethical Citizenship:

Engaging as a community member and attending to needs using knowledge, morals, and virtues that will serve the society well and provide a more just and peaceful experience for all

Defining Terms

Spiritual Formation:

Embodied practices that form us below a cognitive level and bring us into greater unity with Christ (which would bring us into greater unity with others if we are following Christ in the Great Commandment to love God and love others)

Defining Terms

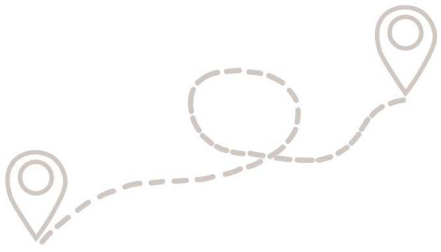
Ethical policy:

(As it relates to humanity): Creating a system that appropriately reflects and affirms the dignity of people (made in the image of God)

Political involvement:

This is our shared life together and how it plays out: forming, norming, and sustaining our life together. Political practices should move toward ethical policy goals, and ethics should be at the base of political decision making as the two are inseparable

PATH TO ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY



- Imago Dei
- Ecumenical Unity
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- Story: Knowing Self and Others
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- Spiritual Formation
- Connecting Belief and Action
- Practical Implications of Ethics
- Case Study

How do we use this pathway?

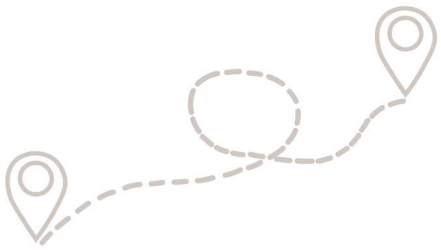
Through the diagnostic process of understanding the research question as well as the root causes of the problem, the course topics arose as a guide toward a remedy.

Each topic in the course is integral for a holistic understanding of the dynamics.
It is not geared toward the outcome of one solution. The goal is that we learn to listen, understand, and unify even when we do not agree.

The PROCESS is meant to be interactive and immersive with the hope of transforming us, using embodied practices to integrate our mind, heart, and actions so we can work together toward mutually beneficial ethical citizenship.

Unit 2: Imago Dei

PATH TO ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY



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Imago Dei

Meaning: Image of God

What does it mean to be made in the Image of God?

Are all humans made in the image of God?

What does mean to made in the Image of God?

Fr. Richard Rohr signifies the importance of properly understanding Imago Dei in humanity and practice.

Rohr's idea is that God has gifted connection to all creatures and that each one uniquely carries divine DNA.
While he refers to this as original blessing/original innocence, Owen Barfield used the term“original participation.”

The Image of God bestowed upon humans is static and unmoveable. Regardless of the state or actions of humans, they cannot increase or decrease the Imago Dei within themselves.

Rohr, Richard. The Universal Christ : How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe. First ed. New York, NY: Convergent Books, 2019, 60-61

Rohr states that one of the main problems is that humans have been trying to ascribe value and determine who does or does not mirror God’s image. Rohr says, “It is pure and total gift, given equally to all.”

Rohr, Richard. The Universal Christ : How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe.60-61; Barfield, Owen. Saving the Appearances. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988, ch. 60-61

It is simply not us who decides who is worthy of justice, protection, and care because the very image of God is reflected in every single one of us.

It is imperative that we understand and apply that all humans are created in God's image, and as such, should be treated with utmost dignity.

To be made in the Image of God is to reflect something of our Creator who created us in love and affirmed that humanity is a very good gift.

When you think of yourself being made in God's image, what stirs up in you?

Does Imago Dei apply to all of humanity?

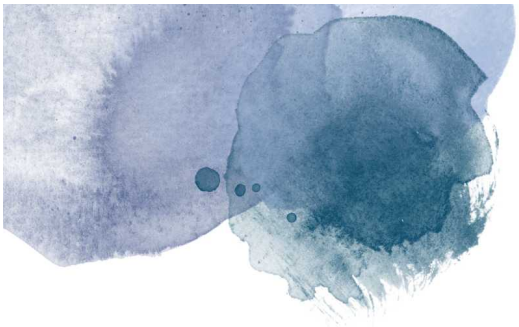
What do you think?

Does Imago Dei apply to all of humanity?

Biblical scholar, Dr. Nahum Sarma, eloquently answers with resounding **equality**.

"Hebrew 'adam is a generic term for humankind... The resemblance of man to God bespeaks the infinite worth of a human being and affirms the inviolability of the human person." Men, women, children - all of humankind - are included. God already made the decision to bestow value, we get to receive it.

Sarna, Nahum M. Genesis = Be-reshit : The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation. 1st ed. JPS Torah Commentary. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 12



To be an Image-bearer means that we can partake in God's communicable attributes, specified as life, personality, truth, wisdom, love, holiness and justice.

The language used here implies something much deeper than a flat, portrait-like depiction. Rather, it reflects in a dynamic way including attributes that have life. This is the embodied aspect of Imago Dei.

Bruce Waltke and Cathi Fredericks offer the perspective of D.J.A. Clines, who suggests God "gave people ears to show that he hears the cry of the afflicted and eyes to show that he sees the plight of the pitiful (Ps.94:9)."

Walvoord, John F., Zuck, Roy B. "The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament" (Cook Communications Ministries, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Cook Communications, Paris, Ontario. Kingsway Communications Ltd, Eastbourne, England, 1983, 2004), 29

grace

James Bryan Smith echoes Eugene Peterson in making the case that, we have to understand ourselves to offer grace to our community.

He calls us "splendid, never-to-be-duplicated stories of grace" and goes on to make the point that it is when we let this truth sink in for ourselves that we are able to attend to the needs of others. Perhaps we are judging people based on what we think their worth is, because we are using outside factors to determine our own worth, rather than trusting that God initiated Imago Dei within us.

Smith, James Bryan. The Good and Beautiful Community : Following the Spirit, Extending Grace, Demonstrating Love. Smith, James Bryan. Apprentice Series. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2010, 72

"The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you."

- Frederick Beuchner

https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2016/9/9/grace

We can be mindful of the truth that we are made in God's image and understand we have a responsibility to live accordingly, but what are the formative experiences that emerge from the Imago Dei identity?

I am reminded of St. Ignatius' spiritual exercises which begin with an awareness of God's love.
In many Christian traditions, including the one I grew up in, we started with theology that says we first are sinners. Ignatius starts with our belovedness and ensures that this truth is deeply established before moving onto teaching about brokenness in the world.

Warner, Larry. Journey With Jesus: Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010, 63

ONLY WHEN WE KNOW WE ARE LOVED CAN WE EXTEND THIS GRACE TO OUR FELLOW HUMANS AND DISCOVER HOW TO TREAT OTHER HUMANS ETHICALLY AS PART OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND LIVING INTO THESE ATTRIBUTES WITH OUR COMMUNITY.

Do you welcome your own belovedness as an Image Bearer?

Are you treating everyone equally as Image Bearers?

What is the most challenging aspect of "Imago Dei" for you?

Brennan Manning, in The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus, offered a connection between the way we see the image of God, essentially in how we perceive to know what God's character is like, and how that image essentially makes us. Meaning, we are transformed into the image of the God we image, whether or not that image is actually God's. Manning writes,

"It is always true to some extent that we make our images of God. It is even truer that our image of God makes us. Eventually we become like the God we image. One of the most beautiful fruits of knowing the Good Jesus is a compassionate attitude toward ourselves. Faith in the God of Jesus nurtures free, confident, people. The God of love fosters a loving people. Jesus' experiences of God made Him the person He was. It freed Him from all self-concern and enabled Him to related to people with warmth, ease, sympathy and liberating love... In healing our image of God, Jesus frees us of fear of the Father and dislike of ourselves."

Unpacking our understanding the Imago Dei invites healing for our shamed and weary selves.

The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus, Brennan Manning.Baker House: Grand Rapids. 1986, 2004, 29 - 30

Imago Dei

I INVITE YOU TO...

Ponder that you are made in the Image of God and that you are deeply loved just as you are.

Practice this with yourself as you catch a glimpse of yourself in the mirror.

Practice this with others, too. Acknowledging that someone else, whether it is someone we love or someone we are struggling with, is made in the Image of God, softens our hearts and perspectives.

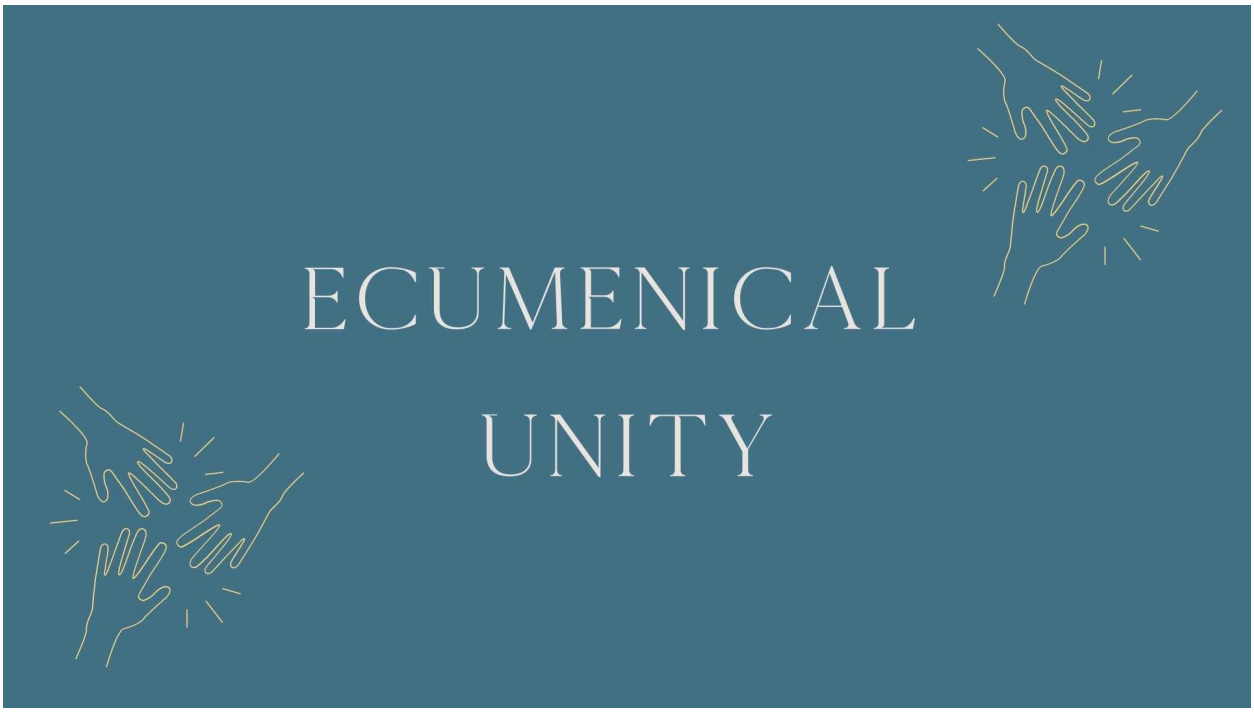
WE NEED SOFT, YET STRONG, HEARTS FOR THIS JOURNEY IF WE WANT TO WORK TOGETHER FOR THE GOOD OF OUR FELLOW IMAGE BEARERS.

ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY

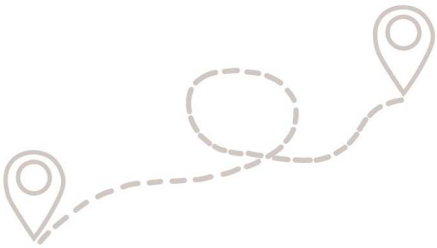
What does Imago Dei tell us about:

Listening and Welcoming Dialogue?
Mutual Collaboration?
Peacemaking?
Justice?
Ethical Citizenship?

Unit 3: Ecumenical Unity



PATH TO ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY



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Case Study

Ecumenical Unity

Ecumenical Unity reminds us of the principles that bring us together as well as why we must remember what unites the church.

It is important that the church:

- strive to be unified where we can
- remember what it is that we have in common (sharing good news of God's love for the world)
- offer charity when we disagree, without vilifying those who disagree with us

How are we treating others that disagree with us?

In addressing the challenges we face
when it comes to pursuing unity within the church,
here are some of the questions & comments
that surfaced during the research workshops...

The church is made up of different denominations and congregations. These bodies experience success in some areas and failures (at worst) or gaps (at best) in other areas.

How does each church/denomination reflect a unique aspect of God's character?

Does the church need all parts of the national (and global) body?

If so, in what ways?

What if we were united around Christ instead of making assumptions because “we” or “they” are a part of a particular church or denomination?

This one is incredibly challenging as we all make assumptions.

What are some assumptions you have made?

Are we in an echo chamber?

Are we engaging with our spiritual siblings outside of our denomination or affiliation?

Do we assume that the liberals, middles, or conservatives (depending on our views) have it all right or all wrong?

Do we believe that the “other” is not or should not be a part of the Church?

What about those who are walking away from the church? Are they still included?

Many are following Christ but feel the church does not reflect their Christian values.

Recognizing our blind spots is a good first step...

- Perhaps we have become too focused on our own "right" perspectives that often remain unchallenged and tend to not explore other theological perspectives.
- We have not learned to welcome differences and tend to find contentment in echo chambers which include our own churches and denominations, rather than considering other Christian theological perspectives.
- We have forgotten the sacraments and creeds that unite us and have too polarized stances in regard to a myriad of ethical issues that are theologically based.

Does this align with your own experience?
If so, how?
If not, what is your experience?

Anglican Archbishop Foley Beach offered a sermon on the topic of disagreement with other believers on a myriad of issues, but particularly theological differences. He said,

"THROUGH ECUMENICAL DISCUSSIONS, WE SEEK TO BRIDGE THOSE CHASMS."

"Chasm" denotes a considerable fissure in relations (more than a mere disagreement) among those who claim to value unity. Just as it is foundational to recognize that we are all created in the Imago Dei, so it is also imperative that we understand the value of Christian unity.

Archbishop Foley Beach. Sermon Quote from February 20, 2022 at Mission Chattanooga in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Although it may feel like our current state of disunity is an increasing chasm, the church began in a climate of different ideas as to how to live out the Christian life.

Theologian, Justo Gonzáles, says that issues of disunity arose at the beginning as evidenced by the apostle Paul when he wrote about theological differences and practices between Jewish believers and Gentile converts. From there, debates surrounding theology and practice continued to arise.

"All the controversies were significant, and often bitter. But in those early centuries, the only way to win such a debate was by solid argument and holiness of life."

Gonzáles, Justo. The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day. Peabody, Mass.: Prince Press, an imprint of Hendrickson Publishers. 1984, 1985, 2004 reprint. 158

They wrestled out the controversies via solid conversations and continuing to life a holy life of love, just as Jesus had called the disciples to do.

Love is the mark of those who follow Christ. John 13:35

Developing theology, which is what the early church fathers and mothers were doing, was certainly challenging much like it is today as we are navigating an ever changing landscape of the issues up for consideration.

Despite controversies, the early church worked diligently to maintain unity.

There are two significant splits that happened within the church.

The East-West Schism, or Great Schism, in 1054 separated the church into two: the Eastern and Western Church.

The next significant split was at the Reformation in 1517.

In their book, Come, Let Us Eat Together: Sacraments and Christian Unity, George Kalantzis and Marc Cortez share how in the early church baptism and the Eucharist were the practices that united Christians and helped maintain their commitment to “catholicity (in the sense of universality) of Christianity”.

George Kalantzis, and Marc Cortez. Come, Let Us Eat Together : Sacraments and Christian Unity. Wheaton Theology Conference Ser. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018. 3

Martin Luther’s posting of the Ninety-Five Theses marked a religious and political turn as the church leaders considered errors, abuses, and unpack the relationship between faith and works. “With the reformation, radical differences developed in both the theology and practice of the sacraments. Theologians on every side of the various debates accused the others of undermining the graciousness and efficacy of the sacraments and endangering the well-being of God’s people. Even if we set aside disagreements about whether things like marriage and ordination should properly be viewed as sacraments and the strong criticisms raised by the Protestant Reformers regarding confession and penance, the differences surrounding the Eucharist and baptism alone were sufficient to cause significant disunity in the church.”

George Kalantzis, and Marc Cortez. Come, Let Us Eat Together : Sacraments and Christian Unity. Wheaton Theology Conference Ser. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018, 4

In one of the essays in Come, Let us Eat Together, Rev. Dr. D. Zac Niringiye, bishop, theologian and activist in Uganda, suggests the failure of unity "can be traced to an underlying tendency to focus more on "other-ness" than "oneness," which is itself grounded in social-political rivalries and power structures."

So, what does Scripture say about unity?

George Kalantzis, and Marc Cortez. Come, Let Us Eat Together: Sacraments and Christian Unity, 6

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT WE FIND THE WISDOM OF UNITY IN PSALM 133:1

"HOW VERY GOOD AND PLEASANT IT IS WHEN KINDRED LIVE TOGETHER IN UNITY!"

The gospel of John shares a prayer from Jesus that reflects his desire that his followers are one as the Trinity is one.

John 17:23

The apostle Paul repeatedly writes of unity in his letters to the church. Starting in the book of Corinthians, Paul describes the collective followers of Christ as a body, expressing that though there are many members to the body, it remains one body.

In Ephesians 4, Paul urges believers to make every possible effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and later likens unity of the faith to maturity.

Finally, he writes in the letter to the Colossians to encourage them above anything else to clothe themselves with love which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

John 17:23, 1 Cor. 12:12, Ephesians 4:3, 13, Colossians 3:14

Theologically, What can we unify on?

THE NICENE CREED

The Nicene Creed originated in 325 A.D. and modified in 381 A.D. and is the only ecumenical statement of the Christian faith generally accepted by the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Church.

THE NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father; God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God; begotten not made, one in being with the Father. Through Him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven. By the power of the Holy Spirit He was born of the Virgin Mary and became man. For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered, died, and was buried. On the third day He rose again, in fulfillment of the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son He is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

We are coming to understand the importance of pursing unity throughout church history and Scripture, but how do we do this when there are so many opposing perspectives?

Perhaps we have valued being correct more than we have valued what each person, reflecting the Image of God, can bring to the family table. I would like to suggest that we lay down our idol of being correct, allow our hearts to be softened, and take a cue from Christ himself on engaging with a diverse population of characters. Jesus interacted with religious folks and with those who were considered by their peers to be outcasts. (Note this consideration is by society, not how God views them.)

I would like to note that Jesus did not always answer questions for the goal of teaching a correct answer. He often answered questions with another question which seems to invite engagement and mystery, a wrestling out of the faith life, over pure certainty.

Often, there was not a clear consensus to these matters, which is why unity is so important.

This is an invitation into relationship with Christ and with one another.

In The Holy Envy, Barbara Brown Taylor reflects on the story of the Tower of Babel and includes an intriguing interpretation by a fellow professor. Emmanuel Lartey, professor of pastoral theology, reimagined the story of Babel, in a way that for Brown, was reminiscent of the Jewish madras tradition.

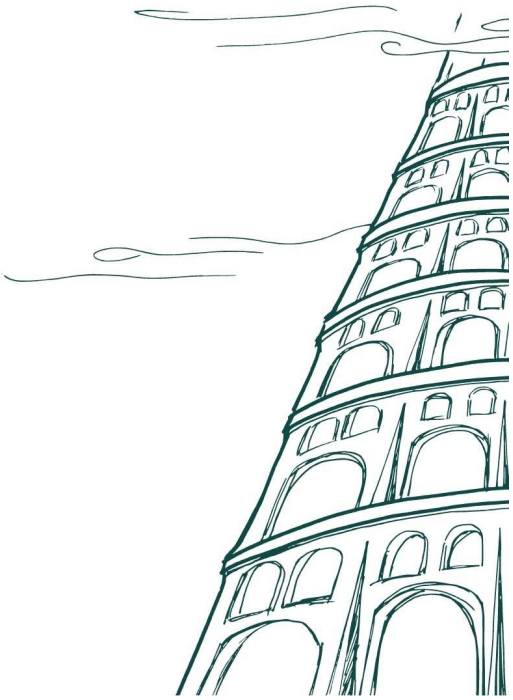
"The way he reimagined the story of Babel, it was not about God's judgment on diversity but God's judgement on the dominance of one people, with one language, whose wish to make a name for themselves took over their lives.God saved them by confusing their language, so they could not complete their domination project.... In this telling, the moral of the story is that God favors the diversity of many peoples over the dominance of any one people.

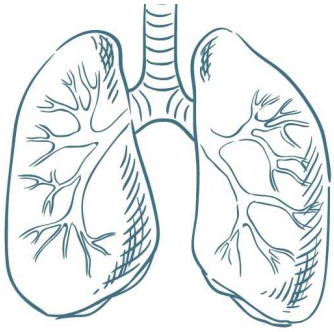
Barbara Brown Taylor, Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others, New York: HarperCollins, 2019, 179

Of this biblical account, Taylor writes,

"For reasons no one may ever understand, God decided it would be helpful for people to be different instead of the same, if only because it would slow them down a little bit. God decided it would be good for them to have to stop on a regular basis and say, "Could you say that a different way please? I don't understand what you mean" or "Can you show me with your hands?" God decided it would be good for them to stop taking their communication for granted and work a little harder at trying to understand each other."

Barbara Brown Taylor, Holy Envy, 180





Have we considered that just as the body has all of the different parts, yet is one, that we may not only need to tolerate diversity but that we actually are dependent on it?

The Eastern and Western Church, after the schism, have sometimes been referred to as the left and right lung; both are needed.

I would extend the sentiment to the Catholic and Protestant churches, as well as to the many denominations present in the United States (as well as the world, but we will start with America for this research project).

We must remember that each person is a reflection of God and we get to see something of the presence and character of God in each person we meet. This also can translate into the necessary diversity needed within the church. What would it look like, I mean truly, how could the world change, if we learned to celebrate our diversity and welcome unity? This interconnectedness is reflected in Scripture time and time again. Jesus often chose parables, stories, for teaching. Those parables often involved relationships.

Stories and relationships are what the church should do best, but instead are we often spending more time taking each other apart rather than coming together?

We need to learn to have hard conversations over controversy.

To achieve unity does NOT mean we have to agree on everything.

On the contrary, our disagreements can help iron sharpen iron.

We have to learn how to do this well which means keeping unity and peace at the center.

Discussion & Donuts

One of my favorite memories of my college experience involved getting into debates over theology or various perspectives on a particular passage of Scripture and how we think it should be interpreted. Put theology students in a room, bring up a challenging topic, and let's just say it can get lively! We could have been on complete opposite sides of the issue of the day, but when class was over, we packed up and walked to our favorite hole-in-the-wall donut shop to continue our conversation over a cup of coffee and a maple bar. We sharpened each other.

What we learned...

- Our challenged perspectives made us think more deeply about our own deeply held opinions and beliefs. Sometimes it even changed our minds, but at the very least we came to a better understanding of one another.

- We asked hard questions, tried to put ourselves in one another's shoes, and in turn got a front row seat to human experience and how theology interacted with our real lives. This was a formative practice, more so than we even knew at the time.

- We respected one another deeply and recognized that all of us are doing the best we can to follow after God. We saw the Imago Dei in one another and pursued unity even amidst disagreement. This required us to use our minds and hearts as we hung on for dear life not to let go of any piece of the Body because we knew that every part mattered. What we need now is to seek understanding, rather than certainty.

We must remember:

- Each person is a reflection of God
- We get to see something of the presence and character of God in each person we meet

What would it look like if we learned to celebrate our diversity and welcome unity?

This interconnectedness is reflected in Scripture time and time again. Jesus often chose parables, stories, for teaching. Those parables often involved relationships.

Stories and relationships are what the church should do best, but instead are we often spending more time taking each other apart rather than coming together?

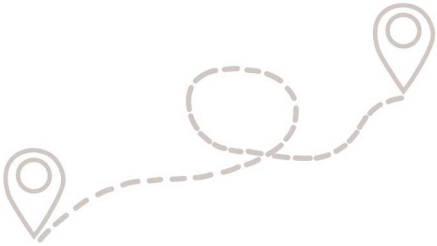
ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY

What does Ecumenical Unity tell us about:

Listening and Welcoming Dialogue?
Mutual Collaboration?
Peacemaking?
Justice?
Ethical Citizenship?

Unit 4: Critical Thinking

PATH TO ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY



- Imago Dei
- Ecumenical Unity
- Critical Thinking
- Ethics
- Theological Processing
- Story: Knowing Self and Others
- Political Formation
- Spiritual Formation
- Connecting Belief and Action
- Practical Implications of Ethics
- Case Study

Critical Thinking

Does honoring the Imago Dei and pursuing unity mean that all perspectives are considered equally?

This is where the lens of Critical thinking will serve as our next tool for gaining deeper understanding, particularly in that it will help us brush up on how to handle the subtleties of asking hard questions and searching for answers especially about matters that are close to our minds and hearts.

We will learn to ask questions such as whether or not we have all of the necessary information, and evaluate if we have heard from those who disagree with us or who only share our viewpoint. Again, we need the full body!

a little history...

John Dewey, an American philosopher, is credited with first using the term critical thinking and defined it as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief of supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends".

Dewey more commonly referred to this idea as REFLECTIVE THINKING.

To be reflective implies an attempt to curiously gain understanding both of ourselves and the world around us, rather than a fixed perspective that could be judgmental if solely expressing an adverse opinion (although that may be necessary part of the process).

Hitchcock, David, "Critical Thinking", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/critical-thinking/>; Resource - definition of critical thinking. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-thinking/ ; (Dewy 1910: 6; 1933: 9).

Robert H. Ennis emphasized the importance of including “dispositions to care about the dignity and worth of every person” and went on to say that without a correlative disposition “critical thinking would be less valuable and perhaps harmful”.

For Dewey, both individuals and the broader society as a whole would benefit from the fruit yielded from critical, or reflective, thinking.

Hitchcock, David, "Critical Thinking", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/critical-thinking/

Hitchcock offers eleven components that are present in critical thinking:

OBSERVING - WONDERING - IMAGINING - INFERRING - KNOWLEDGE - EXPERIMENTING - CONSULTING - IDENTIFYING AND ANALYZING ARGUMENTS - JUDGING - DECIDING

Hitchcock has also outlined what he refers to as “initiating dispositions” that are needed to think critically:

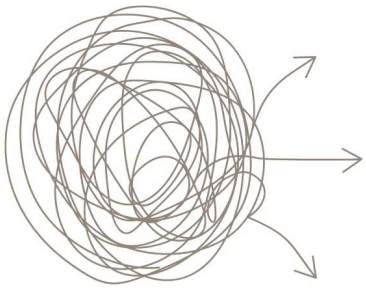
ATTENTIVENESS - HABIT OF INQUIRY (or willingness to inquire about that which we do not understand) - SELF-CONFIDENCE - COURAGE - OPEN-MINDEDNESS - WILLINGNESS TO SUSPEND JUDGMENT - TRUST IN REASON - SEEKING THE TRUTH

This process is embodied and involves both curiousity and intellect.

Hitchcock, David, "Critical Thinking", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/critical-thinking/

"The basic idea is that critical thinking is about (a) being skeptical of absolute claims to knowledge, from a belief that there are many different ways of looking at problems and issues, both in science and society. Critical thinkers are able to (b) consider different perspectives, and (c) ultimately decide what to do or believe. If this is how one understands critical thinking, then it can be taught through an educational strategy that one could call "engagement with multiplicity." This entails confronting students with different ways of looking at problems or issues, so that they learn that there is never only one way of looking at matters, but rather that many different perspectives have something to add to understanding the problems at hand."

Dekker, Teun J. "Teaching Critical Thinking through Engagement with Multiplicity." Thinking Skills and Creativity 37 (2020): 100701.



Thoughts?

ONE OF OUR PRIMARY CHALLENGES IS THAT WE ASSUME OUR OWN CORRECTNESS WITHOUT CONSIDERING THERE MAY BE MORE THAN ONE WAY TO APPROACH A SITUATION.

Why do we hold certain beliefs so closely without examining them with much thought?

Kathryn Schulz says that we assume we are right and as soon as we make that assumption our focus is narrowed in such a way that we tend to only see and receive those details that support our already formed notion that we are correct. It is only when we become aware that we have the propensity toward error that we tend to listen better and hear the perspective of someone else.

Schulz, Kathryn. Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.

Critical Thinking

Critical examination begins with an open posture.
Schulz points out that many of the beliefs we hold the most deeply and dearly are the perspectives we heard first, which will greatly be affected by our society, culture, and family. Note this adoption of belief is more of a chance than it is a well considered argument. We must attend to, instead of ignore, the counter evidence with which we are presented.

Schulz, Kathryn. Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.

Let's take a look at some common logical fallacies that can be a barrier to critical thinking...

The following is taken from an incredibly helpful and succinct quick source document that serves as a catalog for logical fallacies.

https://utminers.utep.edu/omwilliamson/ENGL1311/fallacies.htm

The A Priori Argument: “A corrupt argument from logos, starting with a given, pre-set belief, dogma, doctrine, scripture verse, “fact” or conclusion and then searching to any reasonable or reasonable sounding argument to rationalize, defend, or justify it.”

The Ad Hominem Argument: “The fallacy of attempting to refute an argument by attacking the opposition’s intelligence, morals, education, professional qualifications, personal character or reputation, using a corrupted negative argument from ethos.”

The Appeal to Heaven: “An ancient, extremely dangerous fallacy (a deluded argument from ethos) that of claiming to know the mind of God (or History, or a higher power), who has allegedly ordered or anointed, supports or approves of one's own country, standpoint or actions so no further justification is required and no serious challenge is possible.”

The Appeal to Tradition: “The ancient fallacy that a standpoint, situation or action is right, proper and correct simply because it has "always" been that way, because people have "always" thought that way, or because it was that way long ago (most often meaning in the audience members' youth or childhood, not before) and still continues to serve one particular group very well. A corrupted argument from ethos (that of past generations).”

The Bandwagon Fallacy: “The fallacy of arguing that because "everyone," "the people," or "the majority" (or someone in power who has widespread backing) supposedly thinks or does something, it must therefore be true and right.”

Blind Loyalty: “The dangerous fallacy that an argument or action is right simply and solely because a respected leader or source (a President, expert, one’s parents, one's own "side," team or country, one’s boss or commanding officers) says it is right. This is over-reliance on authority, a gravely corrupted argument from ethos that puts loyalty above truth, above one's own reason and above conscience.”

Confirmation Bias: “A fallacy of logos, the common tendency to notice, search out, select and share evidence that confirms one's own standpoint and beliefs, as opposed to contrary evidence. This fallacy is how "fortune tellers" work--If I am told I will meet a "tall, dark stranger" I will be on the lookout for a tall, dark stranger, and when I meet someone even marginally meeting that description I will marvel at the correctness of the "psychic's" prediction. In contemporary times Confirmation Bias is most often seen in the tendency of various audiences to "curate their political environments, subsisting on one-sided information diets and [even] selecting into politically homogeneous neighborhoods” (Michael A. Neblo et al., 2017 Science Magazine). Confirmation Bias means that people tend to seek out and follow solely those media outlets that confirm their common ideological and cultural biases, sometimes to an degree that leads to a false (implicit or even explicit) conclusion that "everyone" agrees with that bias and that anyone who doesn't is "crazy," "looney," evil or even “radicalized.”

Gaslighting and Emotional Invalidation: “A recently-prominent, vicious fallacy of logic, denying or invalidating a person's own knowledge and experiences by deliberately twisting or distorting known facts, memories, scenes, events and evidence in order to disorient a vulnerable opponent and to make him or her doubt his/her sanity. E.g., "Who are you going to believe? Me, or your own eyes?" Or, "You claim you found me in bed with her? Think again! You're crazy! You seriously need to see a shrink." A very common, though cruel instance of Gaslighting that seems to have been particularly familiar among mid-20th century generations is the fallacy of Emotional Invalidation, questioning, after the fact, the reality or "validity" of affective states, either another's or one's own.”

Moral Superiority: “An ancient, immoral and extremely dangerous fallacy, enunciated in Thomistic / Scholastic philosophy in the late Middle Ages, arguing that Evil has no rights that the Good and the Righteous are bound to respect. That way lies torture, heretic-burning, and the Spanish Inquisition. Those who practice this vicious fallacy reject any "moral equivalency" (i.e., even-handed treatment) between themselves (the Righteous) and their enemies (the Wicked), against whom anything is fair, and to whom nothing must be conceded, not even the right to life. This fallacy is a specific denial of the ancient "Golden Rule," and has been the cause of endless intractable conflict, since if one is Righteous no negotiation with Evil and its minions is possible; The only imaginable road to a "just" peace is through total victory, i.e., the absolute defeat and liquidation of one's Wicked enemies.”

The Narrative Fallacy: “The ancient fallacy of persuasion by telling a "heartwarming" or horrifying story or fable, particularly to less-educated or uncritical audiences who are less likely to grasp purely logical arguments or general principles.”

The Non Sequitor: “The deluded fallacy of offering evidence, reasons or conclusions that have no logical connection to the argument at hand.”

Othering: “A badly corrupted, discriminatory argument from ethos where facts, arguments, experiences or objections are arbitrarily disregarded, ignored or put down without serious consideration because those involved "are not like us," or "don't think like us.”"

The Paralysis of Analysis: “A postmodern fallacy that since all data is never in, any conclusion is always provisional, no legitimate decision can ever be made and any action should always be delayed until forced by circumstances.”

The Post Hoc Argument: “The classic paranoia fallacy of attributing an imaginary causality to random coincidences, concluding that just because something happens close to, at the same time as, or just after something else, the first thing is caused by the second.”

The Red Herring: “An irrelevant argument, attempting to mislead and distract an audience by bringing up an unrelated but emotionally loaded issue.”

Reductionism: “The fallacy of deceiving an audience by giving simple answers or bumper-sticker slogans in response to complex questions, especially when appealing to less educated or unsophisticated audiences.”

Scapegoating: “The ancient fallacy that whenever something goes wrong there's always someone other than oneself to blame. Although sometimes this fallacy is a practical denial of randomness or chance itself, today it is more often a mere insurance-driven business decision ("I don't care if it was an accident! Somebody with deep pockets is gonna pay for this!"), though often scapegoating is no more than a cynical ploy to shield those truly responsible from blame. A particularly corrupt and cynical example of scapegoating is the fallacy of Blaming the Victim, in which one falsely casts the blame for one's own evil or questionable actions on those affected.”

Scare Tactics: “A variety of Playing on Emotions, a corrupted argument from pathos, taking advantage of a emergent or deliberately-created crisis and its associated public shock, panic and chaos in order to impose an argument, action or solution that would be clearly unacceptable if carefully considered.”

Shifting the Burden of Proof: “A classic fallacy of logos that challenges an opponent to disprove a claim rather than asking the person making the claim to defend his/her own argument.”

The Straw Man: “The fallacy of setting up a phony, weak, extreme or ridiculous parody of an opponent's argument and then proceeding to knock it down or reduce it to absurdity with a rhetorical wave of the hand.”

Zero Tolerance: “The contemporary fallacy of declaring an "emergency" and promising to disregard justice and due process and devote unlimited resources (and occasionally, unlimited cruelty) to stamp out a limited, insignificant or even nonexistent problem.”

Exploring these, as well as the full list, of logical fallacies can aid us in the process of having civil dialogue with those whom we disagree. It can also assist in further evaluating our own positions and serve as a brackets so we do not get sidelined in fallacies that do not help us arrive at logical conclusions. The goal is to work together and examining how we dialogue as well as learning to dialogue better will move us further on our path to ecumenical diplomacy.

HOW DO YOU THINK EMBRACING AN OPEN POSTURE COULD AID US IN OUR JOURNEY OF WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE GOOD OF SOCIETY?

Learning to recognize the Imago Dei in ourselves and in every human, remembering the importance of unity, and learning to think critically is imperative when diving into a conversation on the importance of ethics.

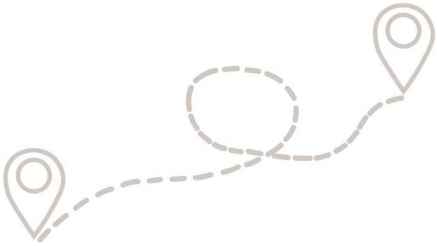
ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY

What does Critical Thinking tell us about:

Listening and Welcoming Dialogue?
Mutual Collaboration?
Peacemaking?
Justice?
Ethical Citizenship?

Unit 5: Ethics

PATH TO ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY



- Imago Dei
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- Spiritual Formation
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- Practical Implications of Ethics
- Case Study

Ethics

Ethics are where we get the opportunity to apply themes of justice and value to issues humans face in everyday life; this is a foundation for love in action.

The conversation of human dignity and rights has been integral in ethical policy, both here and internationally since the 18th century.

Barilan, Yechiel Michael. Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility : The New Language of Global Bioethics and Biolaw, 23

Augustine noted that God is searching for people who define justice “according to divine rules, not human ones.”

Atkins, E. M., and Dodaro, Robert. Augustine Political Writings. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 207

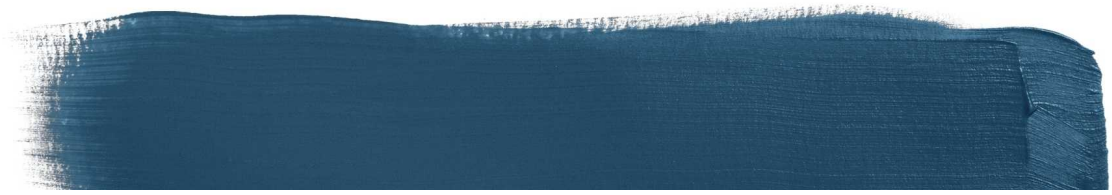
DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

One the leading voices in Christian Ethics is that of German theologian,Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
In his book Ethics, Bonhoeffer writes, “It is only at the price of an act of self-deception that he can safeguard his private blamelessness against contamination through responsible action in the world. Whatever he may do, that which he omits will give him no peace.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, Touchstone, New York, 1955, 69

Bonhoeffer's perspective was that God's ethical commandment (revealed in Jesus Christ) embraces the whole of life.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, 272, 275



"In all circumstances the "ethical" demands clarity, directness, purity and consciousness in human motives and deeds. It cuts any knotty growth in life. The commandment of God permits man to be man before God. It allows the flood of life to flow freely. It lets man eat, drink, sleep, work, rest, and play. It does not interrupt him. It does not continually ask him whether he ought to be sleeping, eating, working or playing, or whether he has some more urgent duties. It does not make man a crisis and judge of himself and of his deed, but it allows him to live and to act with certainty and with confidence in the guidance of the divine commandment. The self-tormenting and hopeless question regarding the purity of one's motives, the suspicious observation of oneself, the flaring and fatiguing light of incessant consciousness, all these have nothing to do with the commandment of God, who grants liberty to live and to act. The permission to live, which is granted in the commandment of God, takes account of the fact the roots of human life and action lie in darkness and that activity and passivity, the concourse and the unconscious, are inextricably interwoven. Light comes into this life only though taking advantage of this divine permission; it comes only from above."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, 278-9

Considering church history, the ideas of human value based on human judgment, not on God's act of deeming worth, have infiltrated the church and have marred the idea that all humans are included in Imago Dei.

"Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical Rerum Novarum (1891), attributed dignity to "the Christian character" of people and not to mere human nature...The spiritual shift left much space for the endorsement and toleration of abuses that are otherwise considered profoundly offensive to human dignity - capital punishment, torture, prostitution, prosecution of heretics, and holy wars."

Barilan, Yechiel Michael. Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility : The New Language of Global Bioethics and Biolaw, 48-49

SOMETIMES THESE ATROCITIES ARE ALLOWED BECAUSE WE DO NOT VIEW ALL PEOPLE AS IMAGE BEARERS AND/OR BECAUSE WE FAIL TO ACT ON BEHALF OF ANOTHER, SOMETIMES EVEN BLAMING THE AFFLICTED FOR THE AFFLICTION.

#blessed

Kate Bowler wrote on the dangerous thread within American Christianity that recognizes wellness and fortune as a sign of divine favor. Bowler argues the prosperity gospel measures faith alone as the component that leads to health, wealth, and victory thus discounting one's political, social, or economic standing. This view "inscribes materiality with spiritual meaning" wherein adherents are promised blessings in the form of wealth, health, and victory if their faith is strong enough.

When the church ascribes human dignity only to those who are blessed, this ideology has a profoundly negative effect on the way those who are vulnerable are viewed.

Bowler, Kate. Blessed a History of the American Prosperity Gospel. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 7-8

Instead of being moved by compassion,
are we accusing others of not being holy enough,
marking the vulnerable as less dignified?

I doubt this is what God had in mind when inviting us to love God and love our neighbor, particularly calling out those most in need. Humans do not have to earn dignity by any account of faithfulness or character. Surely this is not embodying a healthy ethic.

MUST WE ENGAGE?

David Gushee describes Jesus' preaching as "intending to convey that God acts to bring justice, peace, healing, inclusion of the excluded, and rescue from oppression and suffering. God is "saving" the world in Christ, understood as a holistic salvation that meets the full range of human needs as we experience them in this sinful world...The kingdom of God is therefore both spiritual and political... Christians work for the kingdom through all that we do... on behalf of the victimized, the oppressed, the tortured, the wrongly imprisoned, the sex slaves, those suffering in war... The message of the kingdom is not a message that must pull us out of engagement in public life and politics."

THERE IS NO LACK OF VULNERABLE AND OPPRESSED PEOPLE AMONG US.
THE NEED IS THERE, AND WE HAVE AN INVITATION AS KINGDOM PEOPLE TO PAY ATTENTION.

Gushee, David P. The Future of Faith in American Politics The Public Witness of the Evangelical Center. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008, 9-10

As described by David Gushee and Glen Stassen...

Jesus set the example of living into a kingdom practice which includes measures of "peacemaking, healing, community building, and deliverance" particularly toward "the great social sins of violence, injustice, domination, and exclusion, sins that have crushed the lives of millions."

"We sin as individuals and as collectives. We sin against ourselves, against our near ones, against strangers, against enemies. We sin in using our great God-given physical and intellectual powers to inflict harm on others. We murder, steal, rape, dominate, and humiliate one another. We mislead, deceive, and slander one another. We look upon each other's sorrows with indifference or even perverse joy. We sin in what we do and in what we fail to do. We sin in the numerous lies we tell ourselves about what we do and fail to do."

Gushee, David P., and Stassen, Glen Harold. Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context. Second ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016, 13, 15

Gushee and Stassen advocate for a societal return to
attend to social sin and personal sin, which would lead to both personal and collective deliverance.

Jesus preached a message of peace and justice in the midst of "political subjugation and economic exploitation" that promoted exclusivity. The invitation of Jesus was inclusive and transformative, offering freedom "in a world filled with political, economic, and legal structures of sin and various arenas of human life."

Gushee, David P., and Stassen, Glen Harold. Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context, 15

Perhaps before jumping into action, we have an invitation to reflect on both personal and social sin and seek repentance.

This is the thin space between theology and formation, allowing what we are learning to be transformative and both are integral in laying the foundation of why we care as Christians about ethics and human rights.

IF WE WANT TO ENGAGE IN AREAS OF ETHICAL POLICY, WHERE DO WE START?

Gushee and Stassen offer guidelines, called kingdom ethics, that discern ethical positions which lead to "deliverance, peace, justice, healing, inclusion in community, joy, and God's presence (and) whether it advances justice for the disinherited and would be good news from their perspective" as well as an encouragement to "listen for the voice of the oppressed themselves and not just those who would like to help them."

If Christians fail to provide ethical solutions that actually benefit those we are serving, then we are merely serving ourselves at least and at worst, causing further harm and not bringing the right kind of change.

Gushee, David P., and Stassen, Glen Harold. Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context, 38

Will we put into practice what we believe?

Stanley Grenz says that Christian theologians need to be committed to applying theology to real life situations as well as to endeavor into Christian ethics."

Grenz says "humans are the special recipients of God's love" and that it is this love which "forms the context for the repeated biblical intimation that God takes up the cause of the destitute and oppressed" and because of this, "God calls us to be his instruments in bringing about the divine vision of love, justice, and righteousness for all humankind."

Grenz, Stanley J. Theology for the Community of God, 76

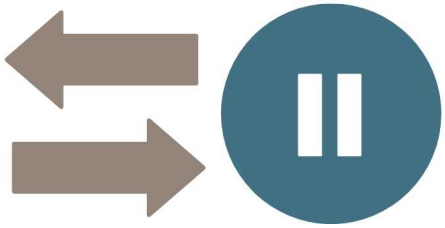
If we are attempting to evaluate our own worth on human merits, we will evaluate others' worth on their merits, instead of mutually resting in God.

We have significant inner work to do, in addition to aligning our lives with the justice values we find in Scripture, and both are responses to the invitation to love.

Jesus' values of justice, peacemaking, and healing are inclusive and we need to further understand how to live these practices out, engaging in both personal and collective actions to do so.

Instead of swinging the pendulum to extreme polarizing positions, one way to further consider our response is to pause and reflect, taking into account as much as possible, all sides of the argument. As a culture who is immersed in social media, everyone is often racing to be the first to respond to the issue of the day.

Perhaps our perspective is wide but lacking depth which leads to shallow responses that aren't thought out well, much less have any capacity to be executed well. This takes thought and reflection, so that we may apply theology to life in a way that brings ethical solutions, and this is where spiritual formation is particularly useful.



Reflecting and taking action to engage responsibly inevitably means that we are going to falter along the way. None of us have perfect perspective and we certainly will fall short but even so, we have an invitation to practice ethical theology that requires we show up. It is important to align our theological and religious beliefs with our ethical actions and practices.

Good information would include ideas and practice: learning and doing. Perhaps we need the collaboration of theologians, policy makers, pastors, social workers, and the voices of the vulnerable, etc. to come up with ethical solutions that would take into account the purpose of each role and that are advantageous and loving to all.

I think this will require humility to admit where we have gotten it wrong both historically and currently, courage to fail and get back up again, and a willingness to be formed into Christlikeness.

Perhaps, like the blind man asking to be healed, we need to ask God to help us see how we have been complicit, actively or passively, in a system that harms others. Or, maybe we have eyes to see but we intentionally cross to the other side of the street as so many did in the story of the Good Samaritan. We need to ask the question of, are we avoiding the destitute? In a society that values power over vulnerability, can we lead with love and listen to the tender hearts in the world? We need to see God in every human being whose eyes we look into and be reminded that they are dearly loved. Maybe looking into the mirror and trusting this truth for ourselves is a good first step. Agreement on Jesus' teachings and expectations would be nice, but maybe that is not what is necessary to learn of and live out ethical theology. Perhaps the iron sharpening iron would be useful in this discipline as well, and maybe the forging of ethics and theology together happens as we ourselves are formed.

Scripture teaches us to love God and our neighbor, but what does it mean to practice love to our neighbor?

This is the discussion of theological ethics.

TO HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE ETHICS CONVERSATION, WE TURN TO PLATO AND AUGUSTINE

PLATO

Plato introduced us to the four Cardinal virtues: temperance, courage, wisdom, and justice.

Ronald Nash defines the virtues: "Temperance or self-control is the proper virtue of the passions. Courage means fortitude in the face of adversity, which is what the spirited part of the human soul requires. Wisdom means excellence in selecting the proper means to an end; its relation to the rational part of the soul should be obvious. The fourth virtue, what Plato calls justice, is the overarching virtue that is present when humans are temperate, courageous, and wise."

Nash, Ronald H. Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy. Grand Rapids, MI. Zondervan, 1999, 89

Nash assumes that all humans are image bearers, and states this is a foundational tenet of Christianity. His statement makes the point that the question of who our neighbor is would be inclusive of everyone, all Image Bearers. He says this explains why humans "are capable of reasoning, love, and God - consciousness" and why we have moral capacity.

"Because of the image of God, we should expect to find that the ethical principles of the Christian worldview reflect what all of us at the deepest level of our moral being know to be true." Nash also recognizes the effect of the presence of sin which has "distorted the image of God and explains why humans turn away from God and the moral law."

Nash, Ronald H. Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy. 161-2

AUGUSTINE

St. Augustine's ethics were guided by law, love, character (virtue), and well-being. The invitation is to love God, and love our neighbor.

"Augustine rejects any suggestion that law and love can be antithetic. No Christian should ignore the place of law in the moral order. The Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20 are divine commands that provide indispensable guidance for human life. Another essential ethical passage in the Bible includes Jesus' words in Matthew 22, words that summarize the first four commandments, our duties to God, under the single commandment "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." The last six commandments, our duties to other humans, are summarized under the commandment "Love your neighbor as yourself." The apostle Paul then throws additional light on the relationship between law and love when he teaches in Romans 13 that love is the fulfillment of the law. God's law identifies sinful actions and tell humans how love ought to be manifested." Theology and ethics are aligned.

Nash, Ronald H. Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy. 161-2

THOMAS AQUINAS

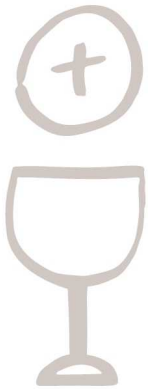
Thomas Aquinas is also an important figure in this field of study. Augustine and Aquinas agreed that both law and morality governs the world, and that physical and moral order contribute to the well-being of humanity. Conversely, sin pains our spirit, heart, and soul.

Aquinas teaches that God has given both virtues and laws to guide both internally and externally, and shares the outcome of practicing morality is that both our works and character are perfected in a way that affects our mind and will. The notion of practicing is actively engaging in spiritual formation, and not only theory. Aquinas separated the cardinal virtues (prudence, courage, temperance, justice) and theological virtues (faith, hope, love) but maintained that love was the foundational virtue that spurred us on to other virtues. He taught that "cardinal virtues are natural in the sense that they are known not by special revelation, such as Scripture, but from general revelation in the created nature of things. The cardinal virtues are relevant to all humans, not just Christians."

If all humans are included in regards to Image Bearing, are all humans responsible to one another?

Nash, Ronald H. Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy. 182-3

As we look back at these historical Christian writings, even when the focus is on theology, we find social context, cultural traditions, and political power. Religious life is part of the canvas of events.



"As important as Augustine may be for the development of theology, far more important is the eucharistic practice that sustained the Church that made Augustine such an important theologian."

Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 35

Christian ethics include active participation, rather than only scholarly debates, meaning ethics is more of what we do than what we think. They point to the action of the Gospel, particularly of the action of Christ and the invitation for us to follow.

Hauerwas and Wells aspire to recover the "key practices of the Church, and showing how those practices constitute the most significant Christian witness in the face of oppression and indifference, blind injustice and bland tolerance... This means that theological ethics is a discipline that reflects on the practices of the Church, seeking to understand how those practices shape the character of Christians.". This is the work of putting ethics into practice.

Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 35

In Kingdom Ethics, authors David Gushee and Glen Stassen clearly state in the preface their goal is to view Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as the standard for Christian ethics. According to Gushee, much of the conversation on ethics is focusing on prerogatives Jesus never focused on, while simultaneously disregarding issues that Jesus drew to the attention of his followers. They draw our attention to seven distinguishing factors of God's kingdom that include salvation, justice, peace, healing, restoration, joy, and God's presence. Gushee and Stassen insist that it is necessary we understand the characteristics of God's kingdom reign as well as the ethical implications that flow from the Jesus' teaching on the kingdom. They assert that God's kingdom is a partnership of divine and human work and that it is performative and participative. God initiates and invites us to participate.

Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context. Second Edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016. Pg. xvii, 10, 12, 13

What would a partnership of divine and human work look like in your context?

How might you be invited to participate?

The invitation extended to us to engage in kingdom work that actually participates in bringing peace to a broken world is both heavy and exhilarating.

Heavy, because the task at hand requires significant care and attention to ensure that consequences produce love, justice and peace.

Exhilarating because the consequences can produce love, justice, and peace which is truly good news to both the bound and the oppressed.

I have long been drawn to the term of practice over disciplines in the context of spiritual growth because it emphasizes the opportunity to try, learn, and become more apt to the task by practicing; it serves as an inherent reminder within the definition that grace abounds within practice.

Bruce Chilton and J.I.H. McDonald introduce “kingdom praxis” as something we enter into and do, rather than something we wait for. “We enter the kingdom as we do kingdom praxis such as justice, peacemaking, healing, community building, and deliverance. Jesus did such praxis, and we must do the same... The kingdom is a “place we go” only by doing its practices.”

This assertion is a reminder that Christ followers cannot simply disengage; we must take the words of Jesus seriously.

Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context. Pg.13

Virtue Ethics of Aristotle and Jesus

The Greek virtues are courage, temperance, prudence, and justice.

Aristotle's teaching was based on interacting in relationships with people who are similar and equal. Jesus taught that relationship should be extended to outcasts and enemies which differentiates a virtue ethic from the Christian perspective.

Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context. Pg.39

"Virtues are character traits that enable us to contribute to community - to the particular society in which we live... Character ethics intends to correct disconnected individualism, emphasizing virtues that contribute to the common good of the community... In biblical character ethics, the good we serve is the reign of God (God's presence and salvation) and community with our fellow human beings (peace and justice). The biblical virtues are keys to our community well-being: peacemaking, hungering for justice, doing mercy, integrity, humility, and caring for the poor and the mourning. And they are the way of participation in community with God."

Injustice surrounds us, permeated throughout our culture, yet there is evidence of God stirring the hearts of people to follow in the way of Christ. We are invited to incarnationally enter into this work with Christ, and not in a hypothetical eschatological sense, but in a way that presently affects society.

Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context. Pg.40

A kingdom praxis could help adjust the church's view and serve as a reminder to attend to the social sins of injustice before us.

Proper exegesis will help us further understand from a biblical and historical perspective how Jesus spoke to and engaged in kingdom ethics, while we discern what this kind of praxis looks like within our current context.

Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context. Pg.16

INCLUSIVE

One of the most radical aspects of this transforming work of Christ is that it is inclusive of all people, and as we are yielded to God, we too are invited into the peacemaking grace that includes all. This ideal is pulled from Scripture but has, at times, been misunderstood.

For instance, "Those who want to make the Sermon on the Mount into impossibly high ideals interpret the summary verse, 5:48, as demanding moral perfection, as a Greek idealist ethics might. They assume, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" means moral perfection. But it would be odd in Hebrew and Aramaic to presume to speak of God as morally perfect in that Greek sense. Rather, the word here means complete or all-inclusive, in the sense of love that includes even enemies. This is the point that Jesus has been emphasizing in this particular teaching: God's love that includes the complete circle of humankind, with enemies in it as well, by contrast with tax collectors and Gentiles, who love one their friends."

Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context. Pg.100

This is phenomenal news for so many who have felt like outcasts.

It also is a breath of fresh air to understand that we are not continual failures who cannot meet an impossible ideal of perfection.

PRACTICE: We participate in the grace of God by participating in love on behalf of outcasts, and through the love of our enemies.

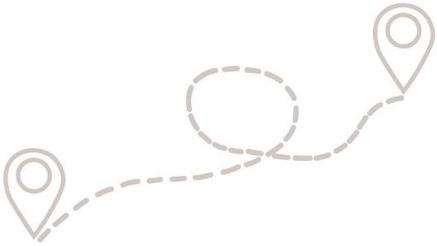
ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY

What does Ethics tell us about:

Listening and Welcoming Dialogue?
Mutual Collaboration?
Peacemaking?
Justice?
Ethical Citizenship?

Unit 6: Theology Processing

PATH TO ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY



Imago Dei
Ecumenical Unity
Critical Thinking
Ethics
Theological Processing
: Story: Knowing Self and Others
Political Formation
Spiritual Formation
Connecting Belief and Action
Practical Implications of Ethics
Case Study

Theology Processing

Theology processing, or theological processing, will help explore how to handle the subtleties of asking hard questions and searching for answers especially about matters that are close to our minds and hearts.

I initially used this term to identify a kind of session I offer to clients that will help them discover and unpack a variety of theological issues and stances.

The word process was included because it is indeed, a process. This is not a one time experience in a session where our questions are automatically sorted out in pretty boxes with bows tied on top.

Theology processing involves:

- Examining Scripture well and thoroughly, not only looking at the individual verse but taking in the context, initial intention of the writer to the audience, and overall narrative.

- Following an issue throughout the history of God's interactions with people, as well as through the history of the church.

- Open hands and open hearts, using the foundations we have previously built so far, keeping in mind that we are created in love and that God desires to dialogue with us, letting us wrestle out our questions in the context of a safe, loving relationship with God.

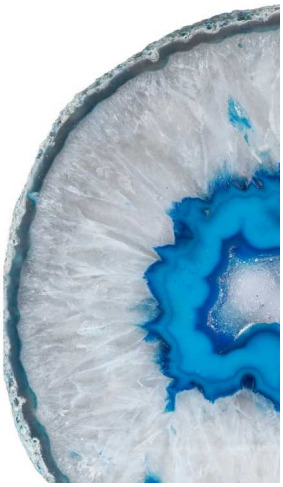
- Connecting to our bodies and emotions, and often re-examining our image of God.

For instance, we may see God as angry and ready to punish us, or we may feel that God is detached from our lives. Often, clients say that they cognitively believe that God loves them and is involved, but they are not experiencing this reality in their lives. This is where theology processing comes in.

IT NOT ONLY HELPS US COGNITIVELY EXAMINE WHAT WE BELIEVE BUT IT IS DEEPLY CONNECTED WITH OUR EXPERIENCE OF GOD.

Again, this is a process. There is no time limit on what it takes to unpack our beliefs, examine them, and listen internally for what is stirring up within us. I believe that God longs to heal us, and soul care in the setting of spiritual direction can be incredibly helpful in this process.

There are times when we have adopted poor theology and are believing things about God and perhaps even ascribing certain character traits to God that simply are not true. It is only when we can see a different perspective that we can come to a place where we feel safe enough to explore with God.



I like the analogy of a geode when describing our theology experience. On one side, we see a mostly solid one color mass, but when we flip it over we see texture, color variations, and light. There are more layers than we initially can see.

Before I move forward, I must mention the considerable impact of the work of Dr. Samuel Youngs had on my understanding of this topic.

I took his course, Missional Theology, in seminary and was first introduced to the Wesleyan quadrilateral as one of the tools we can use as we are learning how to make connections between theology and actual dilemmas we presently face as Christians. Dr. Youngs also uniquely contributed two extra additions to the quadrilateral, which are Community and Culture.

These connective understandings are truly what planted the seeds for this entire project. Now, I would like to further expound on the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

THE WESLEYAN QUADRILATERAL

Scripture: What does the Bible say?

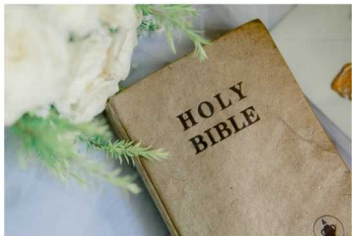
Tradition: What has church history said about the issue?

Reason: Is our understanding reasonable?

Experience: What does experience teach us?

Scripture

It is important that we consider the overall message of Scripture, taking into account the type of literature we are engaging with, and contending with the intent of the original language. This is a step beyond simply reading the text.



There are some passages in Scripture that do not align with our understanding of ethical action and call for critical reflection.

For instance, in Exodus 21:20, the law suggests that if someone beats a slave to the point of death, they must be punished, but they would not be punished if the slave recovered within a couple of days, noting that the slave is their property. In Imago Dei, we covered what it is to be made in God's image and how this reflection includes inherent dignity. We would not use property, in today's culture, to refer to a human because it would take away from their inherent dignity.

Lecture notes from Dr. Youngs for Missional Theology course; Richmont Graduate University, Mission School of Ministry.
Updated notes shared with Tiffanie Wilson in 2022.

We could also note the seeming discrepancy between the charge to participate in sacrifices and several passages that communicate God does not desire sacrifice. Psalm 51:16-17, Hosea 6:6, and Isaiah 1:13 - 17 communicate God desires a contrite heart, acknowledgment of God, and a call to seek justice, help orphans and stand up for widows' rights. In a lecture on Missional Theology, particularly on the topic of Scripture, Youngs unpacks the placement of sacrifice in Scripture and references Greg Boyd's, "Animal Sacrifice". "Since God must relate to people where they are at in order to gradually lead them forward, just as a missionary must do when going to pagan cultures, it seems to me that God accepted this barbaric practices as an accommodation to his fallen, culturally conditioned people (see Leviticus 17:7). It seems sacrifice doesn't reflect God's ideal will. It rather reflects his accommodating will."

Youngs, Samuel. Lecture notes from Dr. Youngs for Missional Theology course; Richmont Graduate University, Mission School of Ministry. Updated notes shared with Tiffanie Wilson in 2022.

The last example offered is that of women teaching and preaching within the church community and participating in ministry. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 specifically states that women are not allowed to teach or have authority over a man, rather admonishing her to be quiet and learn submissively. However in Acts 8:26, we see the active ministry of Priscilla (women, and named first) and Aquila and their encounter of teaching Apollos who had just been teaching in the synagogue. In Romans 16:3 - 7, we see another reference to Priscilla and Aquila as they are called co-workers and we are also introduced to Junia who is called as an outstanding apostle. We cannot simply say, "If Scripture says it, I believe it." because it is much more nuanced and complex when we consider the entire body and arc of Scripture.

Youngs, Samuel. Lecture notes from Dr. Youngs for Missional Theology course; Richmont Graduate University, Mission School of Ministry. Updated notes shared with Tiffanie Wilson in 2022.

Tradition

What position has the church held historically?

This does not always mean the church has been historically right so we need to also explore where the church has repented and pivoted (or needs to do so).

It is also imperative to carefully consider early church history, rather than only attending to the current denominational stance, as well as exploring other denominational thoughts.

This process will inevitably require that we read opposing sources. If we are only reading theologians of the side we already agree with, we will remain in an echo chamber without having challenged our thoughts.

Church history, or tradition, can be incredibly helpful for us in many ways, but again this does not mean we forsake a critical approach just because tradition has held for quite some time. Augustine, hailed as a saint and certainly a significant contributor to theology as we know it, blamed the rape of women on their character, essentially stating their pride or some hidden sin contributed to God allowing their rape. I would like to say this thought is preposterous in our current culture climate, but with “Me Too” movement coming into conversation, there are still those who believe that women are to blame if they get raped for wearing the wrong kinds of clothes, for going on a too early or too late run alone, for having a drink, etc. The proper place to responsibility should be on the rapist and not the victim, and this instance, tradition came down on the wrong side.

Youngs, Samuel. Lecture notes from Dr. Youngs for Missional Theology course; Richmont Graduate University, Mission School of Ministry. Updated notes shared with Tiffanie Wilson in 2022.

Martin Luther, priest and theologian who served as the seminal figure of the Protestant Reformation, and who made some excellent contributions, also had some atrocious views about Jewish people and those who helped them. Even the title of this book, On the Jews and Their Lies, is anti-semitic and thus incredibly problematic. Luther wrote, “To whoever [among Christians] feels the desire to shelter and feed the Jews, to honor them, will be fleeced, robbed, plundered, defamed, and vilified by them, and suffer every evil at their hands - these venomous serpents and devil’s children, who are the most vehement enemies of Christ our Lord and of us all. And if that is not enough [for the Christian], let him crawl into the Jews’ behind and worship there... Then he will be a “perfect Christian”, filled with works of mercy - for which Christ will reward him on the day of judgment, together with the Jews - in the eternal fire of hell.” I cannot condemn these erroneous views enough. Perhaps Luther was missing the hospitality passages throughout the Old Testament as well as the Sermon on the Mount. Luther allowed a cultural understanding to muddy his perspective on the Jewish people. These examples show us that we must continue to questions and evaluate tradition to see what principles truly stand the test of time.

Youngs, Samuel. Lecture notes from Dr. Youngs for Missional Theology course; Richmont Graduate University, Mission School of Ministry. Updated notes shared with Tiffanie Wilson in 2022.

Reason

How does reason help us in understanding the teachings of Scripture?
"While reason does not contribute any substance to our beliefs, it brings logical coherence. It empowers us to make sense of the Scriptural text and historical tradition. It arbitrates between contrary arguments and competing interpretations of Scripture. It helps in the identification of Christianity’s essential truths. It protects from careless and harmful teaching. Like John Wesley, we think reason “is a fundamental principle” and “that to renounce reason is to renounce” Christianity, because they “go hand in hand.”"

https://www.wesleyan.org/the-wesleyan-quadrilateral
John Wesley, “Letter to Dr. Rutherford,” 28 March 1768, The Letters of John Wesley, 8 vols., ed. John Telford (London: Epworth, 1931): 5:364.

Reason

Christians are tasked with doing theology, and this includes our own active participation in using reason. “[Christianity] is not so much a script that the church learns and performs as it is a training school that shapes the habits and practices of a community. Improvisation means people formed in the right habits trusting themselves to embody their tradition in new and often challenging circumstances. In improvisation there must always be an element of creativity.” This a process in which we must fully engage all parts of ourselves and the tools we have available to us to determine if our considerations are indeed, reasonable. This may invite questions such as, “What would the extremes this spectrum on this issue look like? What are possible correlates for this doctrine for modern people? What past theological views could be most unhelpful?”

Youngs, Samuel. Lecture notes from Dr. Youngs for Missional Theology course; Richmont Graduate University, Mission School of Ministry. Updated notes shared with Tiffanie Wilson in 2022.

Experience

What are our personal experiences? What do we know of the experience of others? How does our personal experience enlighten what we are considering?

"There is an experiential dimension in human knowing. What Scripture teaches, tradition affirms and reason supports, must be experienced in Christian community and lives. Without authentic experience, we never move beyond the faith of the devils. Christian truth leads to a living orthodoxy."
https://www.wesleyan.org/the-wesleyan-quadrilateral

Our experiences are subjective, and can be vastly different even when compared with someone who experienced the same thing with us. “A grave difficulty lies in an appeal to experience as a separate source… Experience cannot form a separate source because we never receive experience uninterpreted. Any appeal to an individual experience is wholly subjective.” In the next chapter and course topic, we will explore the concept of story and how knowing and learning to understand ourselves and others, and thus the experiences that have formed us, is essential on our path to ecumenical diplomacy. I think this category will hold space for experience well, so I will further address the topic there.

Youngs, Samuel. Lecture notes from Dr. Youngs for Missional Theology course; Richmont Graduate University, Mission School of Ministry. Updated notes shared with Tiffanie Wilson in 2022.

Culture and Community

The task of missional theology is that of doing theology for the sake of our culture and community. “Doing theology means reflecting on the signs of the times (Matthew 16:3). We have to bring the vision of salvation to ever new and changing places and times, thus renewing the face of the earth. Doing theology is an attempt to renew the face of the earth. Doing theology is a way to attend to the wounds of our time.” Culture and community considerations invite us to practice theology in a way that makes it culturally relevant in order that it may serve as a healing salve to the community. “Only a theology firmly rooted in a culture can be genuinely prophetic in that same culture. To stand completely outside is to be ignored. The more contextually rooted a theology, the more acute its prophetic voice and action.” Dr. Sam Youngs connects community and culture to each piece of the quadrilateral, offering a few additions. Youngs uses the following paradigm as a Missional Wesleyan Quadrilateral: (Critically reasoned) Scripture, (Culturally shaped) tradition, (Experience calibrated) Reason, and (Tradition bound) experience, all while allowing community and culture to serve as connectors between each contribution.

Youngs, Samuel. Lecture notes from Dr. Youngs for Missional Theology course; Richmont Graduate University, Mission School of Ministry. Updated notes shared with Tiffanie Wilson in 2022.

ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY

What does Theology Processing tell us about:

Listening and Welcoming Dialogue?
Mutual Collaboration?
Peacemaking?
Justice?
Ethical Citizenship?

FORMATION

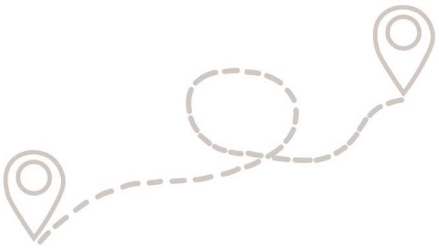
Story: Knowing Ourselves and Others

Political Formation

Spiritual Formation

Unit 7: Story

PATH TO ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY



- Imago Dei
- Ecumenical Unity
- Critical Thinking
- Ethics
- Theological Processing
- **Story: Knowing Self and Others**
- Political Formation
- Spiritual Formation
- Connecting Belief and Action
- Practical Implications of Ethics
- Case Study

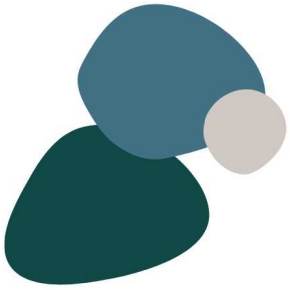
Story: Knowing Ourselves and Others

Understanding our story and the stories of those around us (in our community and throughout the world) will bring these justice dilemmas into a more personal focus and help us remember we are discussing real humans and not just issues.

Belonging in sharing stories...

"True belonging is the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being a part of something and standing alone in the wilderness. True belonging doesn't require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are."
- Brené Brown

Atlas of the Heart, 156-7



What is your experience?

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SIGNIFICANT PARTS YOUR STORY?

What has our life experience taught us?

What is our story in engaging with the “issue” before us?

What is our social context?

Research Workshop Conversation:

There is a significant opportunity for spiritual leaders to listen and hear how varying populations have experienced circumstances to make them feel disadvantaged.

How about the life experience of others?

Of those we know?
Of those we do not?

Can you think of a time that hearing someone's story has impacted your perspective in a considerable way?

Are we attempting to understand what it may be like to walk in someone else's shoes?

"Compassion is fueled by understanding and accepting that we're all made of strength and struggle - no one is immune to pain or suffering. Compassion is not a practice of "better than" or "I can fix you" - it's a practice based in the beauty and pain of shared humanity."

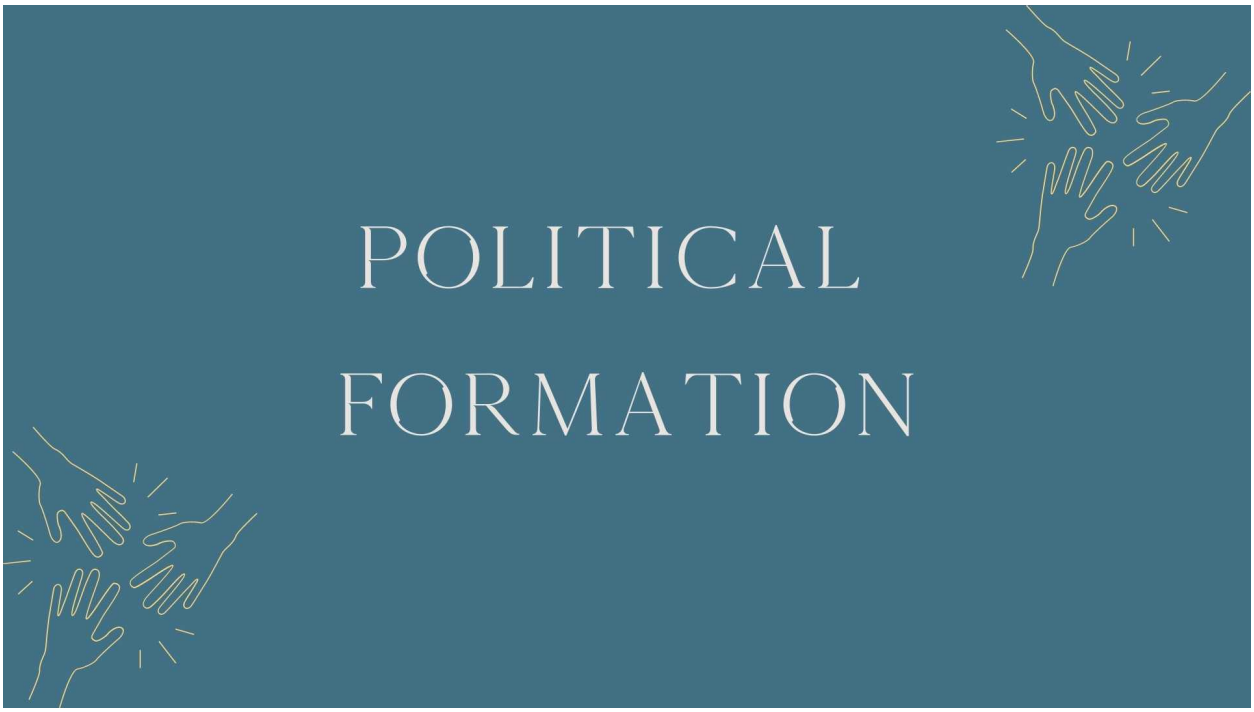
-Brené Brown, Atlas of the Heart, pg. 118

ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY

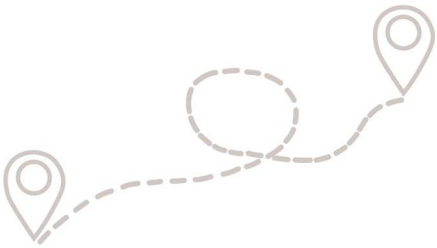
What does Story: Knowing Ourselves and Others tell us about:

Listening and Welcoming Dialogue?
Mutual Collaboration?
Peacemaking?
Justice?
Ethical Citizenship?

Unit 8: Political Formation



PATH TO ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY



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Observations that frequently surfaced from the research workshops:

- Pastors are particularly experiencing an awareness of the spiritually formative power of politics on congregants.
- Society tends to get in "camps" of agreement and likeminded ideologies rather than to seek understanding with those whom they disagree.
- Because we share life together as a society, we should be forming, norming, and sustaining life together. Our collective political practices should ideally head toward ethical policies that work toward the good of humans.
- Human rights work should drive political decision making as the two are inseparable. This is particularly the case for Christians as we hold a high value that all are made in the Image of God and thus have value, dignity, and purpose because we are loved by our Creator God.
- Political life and consequential decisions affects ALL of us, however we do need to be mindful of the most vulnerable populations who may not have the same resources.

These are the questions and observations that we are invited to ponder.

Again, the goal is not to necessarily deliver us all onto the very same page of the book, rather invite us to notice what page the other is on and better understand where they are coming from in hopes that we all may find a way to work together in unity. The invitation is to hold these questions curiously.

Of these questions, what is most stirring up within you?

Reminder...

These are some of the policy / faith questions that we have been contending with...

How does following the Greatest Commandment play out in our social and political lives?

What is the intersection between faith and works in the context of human rights and ethics?

Can a follower of Christ also engage in the citizenship of a nation / state?

How does being a follower of Jesus look different in how it plays out in the world?

What is the role of the church? Role of individuals in ethical policy engagement?

How have you been politically formed?

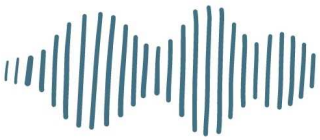
Sarah Stewart Holland and Beth Silvers utilize their law backgrounds to write and discuss faith and policy, emphasizing the importance of having nuanced conversations around divisive political topics. Both women value hard conservations where opposing viewpoints challenge our philosophies.

Stewart and Holland suggest that “having calm, kind conversations from opposing perspectives is more than possible - it is a spiritual imperative”. They pose that we should take off our partisan jerseys, so to speak, representing a specific political affiliation in favor of beneficial policy making. “Removing our jerseys can help us understand not only what laws we want passed but also what kind of people we are and what kind of country we want to live in. It is essential to living out our values... The central tenet of every tradition of faith or virtue is that we are all one and should treat each other lovingly.”

Holland, Sarah Stewart, and Beth Silvers. I Think You're Wrong (but I'm Listening): a Guide to Grace-Filled Political Conversations. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2020, xiii, 46

LISTEN.
LISTEN...

IF WE CAN REMEMBER THAT EVERY PERSON WE ENCOUNTER IS DEEPLY LOVED BY GOD AND REFLECTS SOMETHING OF THE IMAGO DEI, PERHAPS WE WILL COMPASSIONATELY LISTEN TO THE PLEAS OF THOSE AROUND US, SEE ONE ANOTHER AS FELLOW CITIZENS INSTEAD OF ADVERSARIES, AND TOGETHER, SEEK ETHICAL SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS WE FACE.



Madeleine Albright shares that she aligns with unity views as well, saying,

"It is a perversion of faith to turn religion into a source of conflict and hate; it also creates severe problems for America and for the world."

If we separate scholarly arguments from the practical aspects of actually serving people, perhaps we miss an important perspective. Both theory and practice are necessary.

Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs. 1st Harper Perennial ed. New York: Harper Perennial, 2007, 13

Gaining a different perspective...

Seneca Chief, Red Jacket, shared his frustration with a Christian missionary who assumed Native Americans lacked a connection with God because it looked different.

Red Jacket said, "Brother, you say there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it?... We also have a religion... It teaches us to be thankful for all the favors we receive, to love each other, and to be united."

The doctrine was different, but Red Jacket was essentially sharing that Native Americans, too, had a way of weaving spirituality and ethics together for the good of the people.

Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs, 21

IN CONSIDERING POLITICAL POSITIONS...

Are we beginning with good information?

Are we looking at and listening to a variety of sources?

Do we gather information that includes Scripture, tradition, reason, experience, ethical considerations, and hearing from the perspective of all parties involved and who will be affected?

Do we quickly put ourselves in one camp or another, considering the opposing view as completely faulty due to our own half- baked notions?

Albright shared her hope of inviting all of America along as she toured the world. She described the terrible conditions in which people lived and felt certain that America would respond with generosity if only they could see. "I did not want to sound like a bleeding heart in describing the basis of our foreign policy. So as soon as I returned home, I would enumerate all the practical reasons Americans should care: because we had an interest in stability, in prosperous overseas markets, in strengthening the rule of law, in extending our influence, and in burnishing our reputation."

I can't help but wonder if her desire to not sound like a bleeding heart has anything to do with the perception of a woman in leadership. This consideration is reminiscent of the foundational work from Genesis of humankind being created in the image of God. Perhaps the ways in which we individually reflect God's character, particularly the way women reflect the image of God, may be something to explore. Is there a gap in the ways that theology and ethics have been shaped thus far throughout history because the dominant voices have been those of men and the perspective of women has not always been considered?

Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill.
The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs, 51

"A policy-maker must both want to do what is right and be able to predict what that might be. Ideally, he or she would have the conscience of a saint, the wisdom of a philosopher, and the presence of a prophet. In reality, we stumble along as best we can despite shortages in all three qualities."

Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs, 57

There has been some disagreement on whether Jesus participated in political philosophy but these elements mentioned are reminiscent of the process of growing in spiritual formation and navigating the complexities of living a life that honors God and serves people

ARE WE INTERESTED IN DOMINATION RATHER THAN CULTIVATING JUSTICE?

James Davison Hunter in his book, To Change the World, argues that the "contemporary political culture in America is marked by a ressentiment manifested by a narrative of injury and, in turn, a discourse of negation toward all those they perceive to be to blame."

Hunter argues this ressentiment is present among the Christian Right, Christian Left, and Neo-Anabaptists, acknowledging the respective values are grounded in Scriptural authority and appeal to democratic ideals and that conservatives and progressives alike are motivated by a desire for domination.

James Davison Hunter. 2010. To Change the World : The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World. New York: Oxford University Press., pg. 168-69

While I definitely agree with his assessment of ressentiment and agree that it is has most been vocal among conservatives, I am seeing a rise in this amongst progressives. I suspect that this is rising with the comfortability of critiquing the church as an established institution, as well as the increased awareness of spiritual/religious trauma.

I find it both problematic that many who would have previously identified as a conservative, went through deconstruction, emerged as a progressive, yet still remain just as fundamentalist as they were previously, except now lobbying for the opposite of the social issues. It seems that just as compassion as empathy opened up (rightfully so) to others who were different, the vitriol was replaced from former outsiders toward the group they were previously in.

And so, I ask us to consider again...

ARE WE INTERESTED IN DOMINATION RATHER THAN CULTIVATING JUSTICE?

In her book, The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor, Kaitlyn Schiess explores how the church is formed spiritually by political forces.

Scheiss says, “Decades of political disagreement among American Christians should remind us that there’s no easy “what the Bible says” about politics, to say nothing about centuries of disagreement among Christians around the world.” She adamantly states that she believes the one most imminent tasks for the American church is to “examine our spiritual formation in a political direction”.

Scheiss, Kaitlyn. The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation For The Sake Of Our Neighbor. Downers Grove, IL. InterVarsity Press, 2020, 11 - 12

Scheiss writes, “I use that phrase, “spiritual formation in a political direction,” in two ways: the ways we are spiritually formed by the political forces around us, and the ways our intentional spiritual formation practices form us in political ways. The word direction is important. We tend to compartmentalize, splitting our theological and political convictions. Instead, both have a moral and spiritual element, and neither are content to stay in their own corners... Political values don’t stay political; they become ultimate. We often treat our political convictions as if they operate on a lower rung than our theological convictions. We can value wealth or security on this lower political level while maintaining that on a higher spiritual level we value God’s kingdom. But our political tendencies and practices influence more that this lower realm - they inevitably fight for dominance in our lives. The things we do in a voting booth and a church pew alike will shape the values we hold.”

Scheiss, Kaitlyn. The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation For The Sake Of Our Neighbor. Downers Grove, IL. InterVarsity Press, 2020, 12-13

a few things to ponder...

Are we leaning toward a particular political stance because this is the position of the party, or the position of our families?

Have we examined our political beliefs against the other areas of life that inform our moral decisions? This would include Scripture / theological beliefs.

Sometimes the “easy” answer is to say that there is biblical evidence for such a position, but we need to recognize that many Christians who all are influenced by Scripture and the Spirit land in different positions from the basis of their biblical understanding.

Most of these issues require a careful consideration rather than “easy” answers.

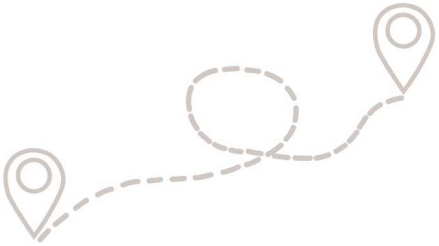
ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY

What does Political Formation tell us about:

Listening and Welcoming Dialogue?
Mutual Collaboration?
Peacemaking?
Justice?
Ethical Citizenship?

Unit 9: Spiritual Formation

PATH TO ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY



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Case Study

Before we get to the formational aspect of spirituality, I want to talk about spirituality itself. One of the most impactful books I have read on this topic is Ronald Rolheiser's, The Holy Longing, in which he writes on spirituality and desire.

Rolheiser writes, "Inside of us, it wold seem, something is at odds with the very rhythm of things and we are forever restless, dissatisfied, frustrated, and aching... We are driven persons, forever obsessed, congenitally dis-eased, living lives, as Thoreau once suggested, of quiet desperation, only occasionally experiencing peace. Desire is the straw that stirs the drink. At the heart of all great literature, poetry, art, philosophy, psychology, and religion lies the naming an analyzing of this desire... Spirituality is, ultimately, about what we do with that desire. What we do with our longings, both in terms of handling the pain and the hope they bring us, that is our spirituality... Augustine (said) "You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." Spirituality is about what we do without our unrest."

Rolheiser, Ronald. The Holy Longing: The Search for Christian Spirituality. Random House, New York. 1998, 1999, 2014, 2019, 3

SPIRITUAL FORMATION IS THE PROCESS OF FORMING THOSE DESIRES.

Spiritual Formation

Are we approaching these issues through prayer, reflection, and dialogue with our community?

Are we using discernment tools to adequately examine the material and circumstances before us?

How do we know if we are following Christ, and allowing the Spirit to transform us?

Do our actions and behaviors follow the teachings of Christ?

What do we do when we discover dissonance?

How do we participate in the ministry of peace and justice without experiencing burnout?

Spiritual formation:
embodied repetitive practices that form us below a cognitive level and bring us into greater unity with Christ.

What is forming us?

It could be that we are claiming our source as Scripture
when actually other factors are involved, such as media, tradition,
family, geographic location, economics, or racial and cultural bias.

Another great definition of spiritual formation...

"Spiritual formation is our continuing response to the reality of God's grace shaping us in to the likeness of Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith, for the sake of the world."

Greenman, Jeffrey P, and George Kalantzis. 2010. Life in the Spirit : Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective. Downers Grove, Ill.: Ivp Academic. Pg. 24

I am particularly drawn to this working definition because it highlights that formation is a continuing response to God's grace; it is not a one-and-done situation, rather a participatory process. Further, this grace work that is being done by the Spirit to conform us into Christ's likeness actually has a reverberating effect in the world, primarily within the context of our relationships.

Our task is to align our theological views and political stances with both being undergirded by spiritual formation. As we grow, this may mean that our views shift and change.

Are we willing to allow God's Spirit to work in our spiritual, theological, and political lives? And what does it look like for these views to shift as we become more transformed into the likeness of Christ?

Kaitlyn Scheiss suggests “Practices for Good Posture.”

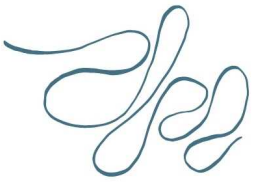
- Reading the whole story of Scripture in the context of community
- Practicing lament over issues of injustice
- Submitting to the moral authority of Scripture
- Humbly receiving Scripture as a gift of story rather than a rule book meant for dissection.

Scheiss, Kaitlyn. The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation For The Sake Of Our Neighbor. Downers Grove, IL. InterVarsity Press, 2020, 82, 84, 86, 88

So far, we have talked about intentional, specific practices for formation.

Equally as important to our spiritual formation are the ordinary parts of our daily lives, including practices that may seem mundane, but are incredibly transformational.

Our invitation is to pay attention to what is stirring around us.



When I read these lines of Eugene Peterson's it immediately reminded me of both the mundane and gritty aspects of the participatory formational process.

"God's great love and purposes for us are all worked out in messes in our kitchens and backyards, in storms and sins, blue skies, the daily work and dreams of our common lives. God works with us as we are and not as we should be or think we should be."

Peterson, Eugene H. 2008. Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places : A Conversation in Spiritual Theology. London: Hodder & Stoughton. Pg. 75

Another aspect of spiritual formation, which is wonderfully expressed in the context of direction, is to live into our questions about God, ourselves, our relationships, our vocation, and the process by which we are formed.

In Letters to a Young Poet, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote:

"Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."

Spiritual formation is a process.

God has already accomplished grace for us, giving us the invitation to live intentionally yet curiously.

Belovedness: We are made in God's image and deeply loved by our Creator

Participatory Process: Co-working with God; Journey that's both solitary & with community

Spirit Work: Initiated by God and responding to the Spirit's invitations

World Effect: Formation is not only for our growth, but for the sake of the World

Ordinary: Spiritual formation includes the mundane and gritty, highs and lows of life

Live Into the Questions: Formation is not a quest to be solved, but a process to be lived into

Spiritual Formation Practices

There are some specific practices, tools so to speak, that can accompany us on the path of formation. Richard Foster offered a wonderful resource to on spiritual practices, which he calls spiritual disciplines. (Personally, I tend to prefer the term practices because it insinuates that we can practice, again and again, rather than directly aiming for perfection.)

Foster outlines spiritual disciplines in three categories: inward, outward, and corporate disciplines. the inward disciplines include meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. The outward disciplines include simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. The corporate disciplines are confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. Foster writes, "Joy is the keynote of all the Disciplines. The purpose of the Disciplines is liberation from the stifling slavery to self-interest and fear. When the inner spirit is liberated from all that weighs it down, it can hardly be described as dull drudgery."

Foster, Richard. Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth. 1978, 1988, 1998. Harper Collins. New York. pg.2

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun wrote, Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us, which serves as a more extensive guide to spiritual practices. Calhoun divides this up into seven main parts with more specific practices listed in each category. Worship includes celebration, gratitude, Holy Communion, rule for life, and sabbath. Opening ourselves to God includes contemplation, examen, journaling, practicing the presence of God, rest, retreat, self-care, simplicity, slowing down, teachability, and unplugging. Relinquishing the self includes confession and self-examination, detachment, discernment, secrecy, silence, solitude, spiritual direction, and submission.

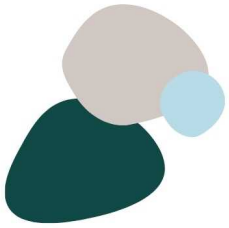
Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us. InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005

Sharing our life with others includes accountability, chastity, community, discipling, hospitality, mentoring, service, spiritual friendship, unity, and witness. Hearing God's Word includes Bible study, devotional reading, mediation, and memorization. Incarnate the love of Christ includes care of the earth, compassion, control of the tongue, humility, justice, stewardship, and truth-telling.

Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us. InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005

Finally, prayer includes the following kinds of prayer: breath, centering, contemplative, conversational, fasting, fixed-hour, inner-healing, intercessory, labyrinth, liturgical, praying with partners, praying Scripture, recollection and prayer walking. This list is not meant to be used a check-list to make sure we are doing each of these all the time. Rather, it can serve as a tool box for practices that can accompany us on our spiritual journey.

Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us. InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 2005



Nouwen writes, “Compassion is hard because it requires the inner disposition to go with others to the place where they are weak, vulnerable, lonely and broken. But this is not our spontaneous response to suffering. What we desire most is to do away with suffering by fleeing from it or finding a quick cure for it... And so we ignore our greatest gift, which is our ability to enter into solidarity with those who suffer.”

For Nouwen, compassion brings freedom because it is only there that we lay down the desire to measure and judge others. Compassion is the tool that obliterates the distance and division caused by judgement.

Nouwen, Henri J. The Way of the Heart: Connecting With God Through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence. New York: Random House. 1981, 24, 25, 26

Spiritual Direction

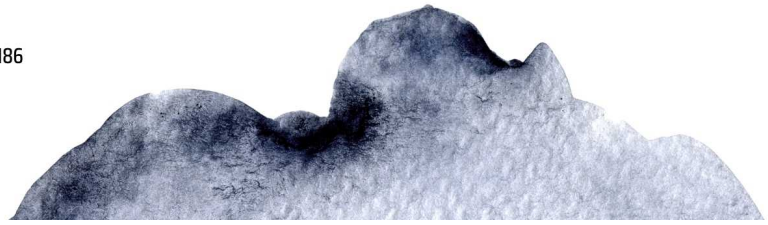
Spiritual Direction can be a helpful formational tool for people to processing the inner life with God within the context of a safe, confidential, and non-judgmental relationship.

Dom Augustine Baker, a 17th century Benedictine mystic, wrote that a spiritual director is “God’s only usher, and must lead souls in God’s way, and not his own.”

Foster, Richard. Celebration of Discipline, 185

God is the real director and the human spiritual director simply serves as a companion for the journey. One cannot lead where they have not been. “A spiritual director myst be a person who has developed a comfortable acceptance of himself or herself… Spiritual directors must be on the inward journey themselves and be willing to share their own struggles and doubts.”

Foster, Richard. Celebration of Discipline, 186



Although spiritual direction certainly addresses the inner, spiritual life, it is imperative to remember that all is sacred and all parts of our lives belong.

Foster writes, “spiritual direction takes up the concrete daily experiences of our lives and gives them sacramental significance.”

Foster, Richard. Celebration of Discipline, 186

Thomas Merton told of a Russian spiritual director who spoke often with a peasant woman in regard to caring for her turkeys. Some criticized this wasn't spiritual direction, but Merton insisted that it indeed was as her turkeys were a significant part of her daily life.

Foster, Richard. Celebration of Discipline, 186

David Robinson, in his book, Ancient Paths, suggests some qualities to look for in a spiritual director. Robinsons says a director should love and teach in the ways of Jesus, guide through example as well as words, use both firm and gentle approaches to direction (considering the individual), should not fear facing dark trouble and spiritual sickness, treat each person as a unique pilgrim, understand the weight of the task of soul care, hold themselves accountable, and who practices with humility.

Robinson, David. Ancient Paths: Discover Christian Formation the Benedictine Way. Paraclete Press: Brewster, Massachusettts. 2010. 70-72

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

I would be remiss to not mention to the component of emotional health in spirituality. It is unwise to lean only into spirituality while neglecting emotional health. Peter Scazzero, in Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, gives us a two bulleted lists for emotional health and spirituality. Scazzero writes, "Few Christians committed to contemplative spirituality integrate the inner workings of emotional health. At the same time few people committed to emotional health integrate contemplative spirituality. Both are powerful, life-changing empress when engaged in separately. But together they offer nothing short of a spiritual revolution, transforming the hidden places deep beneath the surface. When emotional health and contemplative spirituality are interwoven together... people's lives are dramatically transformed. They work as an antidote to heal the symptoms of emotionally unhealthy spirituality."

Scazzero, Peter. Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ. Integrity: Franklin, TN. 2006, 44

Scazzero dexcribes emotional health as:

- Naming, recognizing, and managing our own feelings
- Identifying with and having active compassion for others
- Initiating and maintaining close and meaningful relationships
- Breaking free from self-destructive patterns
- Being aware of how our past affects our present
- Developing the capacity to express our thoughts and feelings clearly, both verbally and nonverbally
- Respecting and loving others without having to change them
- Asking for what we need, want, or prefer clearly, directly, and respectively
- Accurately self-assessing our strengths, limits, and weaknesses and freely sharing them with others
- Learning the capacity to resolve conflict maturely and negotiate solutions that consider the perspective of others
- Distinguishing and appropriately expressing our sexuality and sensuality
- Grieving well

Scazerro describes contemplative spirituality as:

- Awakening and surrendering to God's love in any and every situation
- Positioning ourselves to hear God and remember his presence in all we do
- Communing with God, allowing him to fully indwell the depth of our being
- Practicing silence, solitude, and a life of unceasing prayer
- Resting attentively in the presence of God
- Understanding our earthly life as a journey of transformation toward ever-increasing union with God
- Finding the true essence of who we are in God
- Loving others out of a life of love for God
- Developing a balanced, harmonious rhythm of life that enables us to be aware of the sacred in all of life
- Adapting historic practices of spirituality that are applicable today
- Allowing our Christian lives to be shaped by the rhythms of the Christian calendar rather than the culture
- Loving in committed community that passionately loves Jesus above all else

Scazzero, Peter. Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, 45-46

Scazerro notes that although there are some differences in emotional health and contemplative spirituality, there is considerable overlap as well. He offers three transformative gifts of integrating emotional health and spirituality. These gifts are slowing down, anchoring in God's love, and breaking free from illusions in order to live in truth.

Scazzero, Peter. Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, 47

Tending to the spiritual life is incredibly important, and we cannot forsake the going into the quiet places and only head for the action. Activists need contemplation, too.

Jan Johnson writes, "Contemplatives make good activists. Their activity becomes focused, powerful, and sustained. Significant doers draw from a well of quietness before God."

Johnson, Jan. When the Soul Listens: Finding Rest and Direction in Contemplative Prayer. NavPress: Colorado Springs, 2017. pg. 166

ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY

What does Spiritual Formation tell us about:

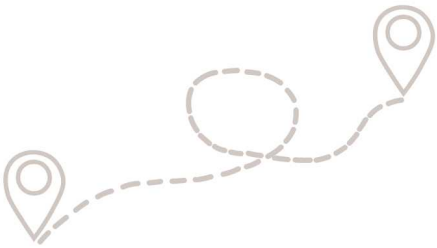
Listening and Welcoming Dialogue?
Mutual Collaboration?
Peacemaking?
Justice?
Ethical Citizenship?

PRAXIS

Connecting Belief and Action
Practical Implications of Ethics
Case Study

Unit 10: Connecting Belief and Action

PATH TO ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY



- Imago Dei
- Ecumenical Unity
- Critical Thinking
- Ethics
- Theological Processing
- Story: Knowing Self and Others
- Political Formation
- Spiritual Formation
- Connecting Belief and Action
- Practical Implications of Ethics
- Case Study

Connecting Belief and Action

During the research workshops, participants consistently shared they thought there was a disconnect between inner spiritual life and orthopraxy. (Orthopraxy - correct practice / right living).

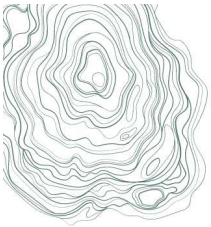
These questions came up...

How do we address the personal and systemic sin that causes harm in the world?

In what ways does spiritual formation impact outward reflection of faith v. cultivating inner piety?

Is there a correlation between willingness to grow in spiritual formation and engagement in ethics / human rights / social justice?

How should Christians engage with the world?



What are are missing?

We may not think that spiritual formation has anything to do with our outward actions.

We may have information but we lack transformation.

There may be a false dichotomy between spiritual self and political self.

There may be a discrepancy in what we say we believe and what we actually believe.

Once we have examined our intellectual beliefs, established a personal ethic, and examined our hearts along with our ego, we must examine if our actions are following our beliefs.

Where do we find connection?
Where do we notice disconnection?
How can we make our beliefs and actions more congruent?
How do we put this into practice?

In Ronald Rolheiser's, The Holy Longing, he asks the question, What is Christian social justice?

Rolheiser states there are two markers. The first is that for Christians, social justice needs to move beyond the practice of private charity. Rolheiser wisely encourages, "One does not walk away from the Sermon on the Mount or the challenge Jesus gave to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and give of our lives and resources to those less fortunate than ourselves with a clear conscience. Thus, the fuel that fires our quest for justice must be drawn from the same source as the truth of justice itself, namely, from the person and teaching of Jesus."

The second marker is that justice demands the transformation of systems. Roleiser writes, "To practice social justice is to examine, challenge, resume as far as possible to participate in, and try to change those systems (economic, social, political, cultural, mythic, and religious) that unjustly penalize some even as they unjustly reward others."

Rolheiser, Ronald. The Holy Longing: The Search for Christian Spirituality. Random House, New York. 1998, 1999, 2014, 2019. 168

In A People's Christianity, Diana Butler Bass reflects on the Plague of Galen (165-180) and describes how Christians cared for the sick.

"Their acts of mercy extended to all the suffering regardless of class, tribe, or religion... Christians did this on the basis of Jesus' Great Command to love God and to love one's neighbor."

"As John Chrysostom, one of the greatest early Christian preachers, proclaimed, "This is the rule of the most perfect Christianity, its most exact definition, its highest point, namely, the seeking of the common good... for nothing can so make a persona an imitator of Christ as caring for his neighbors."

Diana Butler Bass, A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story, New York, HarperOne 2009, 59 - 60

Bass writes on hospitality,

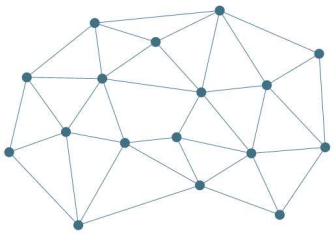
"To us hospitality is an industry, not a practice, one that summons Martha Stewart to mind more quickly than Jesus Christ. But to ancient Christians hospitality was a virtue, part of the love of neighbor and fundamental to being a person of the way. While contemporary Christians tend to equate morality with sexual ethics, our ancestors defined morality as welcoming the stranger... From Paul to Ambrose to pagan reporters, hospitality equaled Christian morality."

Diana Butler Bass, A People's History of Christianity, 61-62

Bass, on caring for the helpless...

"It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of our many opponents,"claimed the African theologian Tertullian. "Only look,' they say, 'look how they love one another!""

Diana Butler Bass, A People's History of Christianity, 64-65



Where have you noticed a connection between your beliefs and actions?

Where have you noticed a disconnection between your beliefs and actions?

A prayer for justice by Ronald Rolheiser...

"Our Father ... who always stands with the weak, the powerless, the poor, the abandoned, the sick, the aged, the very young, the unborn, and those who, by victim of circumstance, bear the heat of the day.

Who art in heaven ... where everything will be reversed, where the first will be last and the last will be first, but where all will be well and every manner of being will be well.

Hallowed by thy name ... may we always acknowledge your holiness, respecting that your ways are not our ways, your standards are not our standards. May the reverence we give your name pull us out of the narcissism, selfishness, and paranoia that prevents us from seeing the pain of our neighbour.

Your kingdom come … help us to create a world where, beyond our own needs and hurts, we will do justice, love tenderly, and walk humbly with you and each other.

Your will be done … open our freedom to let you in so that the complete mutuality that characterizes your life might flow through our veins and thus the life that we help generate may radiate your equal love for all and your special love for the poor.

On earth as in heaven … may the work of our hands, the temples and structures we build in this world, reflect the temple and the structure of your glory so that the joy, graciousness, tenderness, and justice of heaven will show forth within all of our structures on earth.

Give … life and love to us and help us to see always everything as gift. Help us to know that nothing comes to us by right and that we must give because we have been given to. Help us realize that we must give to the poor, not because they need it, but because our own health depends upon our giving to them.

Us … the truly plural us. Give not just to our own but to everyone, including those who are very different than the narrow us. Give your gifts to all of us equally.

This day … not tomorrow. Do not let us push things off into some indefinite future so that we can continue to live justified lives in the face of injustice because we can use present philosophical, political, economic, logistic, and practical difficulties as an excuse for inactivity.

Our daily bread … so that each person in the world my have enough food, enough clean water, enough clean air, adequate health care, and sufficient access to education so as to have the sustenance for a healthy life. Teach us to give from our sustenance and not just from our surplus.

And forgive us our trespasses … forgive us our blindness towards our neighbour, our obsessive self-preoccupation, our racism, our sexism, and our incurable propensity to worry only about ourselves and our own. Forgive us our capacity to watch the evening news and do nothing about it.

As we forgive those who trespass against us … help us to forgive those who victimize us. Help us to mellow out in spirit, to not grow bitter with age, to forgive the imperfect parents and systems that wounded, cursed, and ignored us.

And do not put us to the test … do not judge us only by whether we have fed the hungry, given clothing to the naked, visited the sick, or tried to mend the systems that victimized the poor. Spare us this test for none of us can stand before this gospel scrutiny. Give us, instead, more days to mend our ways, our selfishness, and our systems.

But deliver us from evil … that is, from the blindness that lets us continue to participate in anonymous systems within which we need not see who gets less as we get more.
Amen."

Rolheiser, Ronald. The Holy Longing, 189 - 191

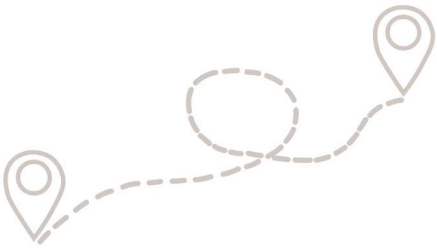
ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY

What does Connecting Belief and Action tell us about:

Listening and Welcoming Dialogue?
Mutual Collaboration?
Peacemaking?
Justice?
Ethical Citizenship?

Unit 11: Ethics–Practical Applications

PATH TO ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY



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Imago Dei
Ecumenical Unity
Critical Thinking
Ethics
Theological Processing
Story: Knowing Self and Others
Political Formation
Spiritual Formation
Connecting Belief and Action
Practical Implications of Ethics
Case Study

Ethics - Practical Implications

This is where we can examine the practical implications of our ethics.

How do all of the pathway parts come together to actually assist us in engaging an ethical dilemma?

What are we steadfast on?
Could we develop a personal ethical statement to help guide us as we approach controversial topics?

I want to invite you to think of a statment that could reflect the posture you hope to take in regard to each of these issues...

Imago Dei
Ecumenical Unity
Critical Thinking
Ethics
Theological Processing
Story: Knowing Self and Others
Political Formation
Spiritual Formation
Connecting Belief and Action

I'll offer some suggestions but I want to encourage you to make this personal...

Imago Dei
Every person is created in the Image of God and thus deserves to be treated with dignity.

Ecumenical Unity
All parts of the church have something to contribute. I will keep an open posture to learn from others.

Critical Thinking
I resolve to not check my mind at the door, but instead endeavor to engage in the hard work of thinking critically about ethical dilemmas, including examining my own biased perspectives and bringing my experience.

Ethics
I will advocate for ethical positions which lead to deliverance, peace, justice, healing, inclusion in community, joy, and God's presence.

Theology Processing
When faced with a theological challenge, I will endeavor to filter it through Scripture, tradition, reason, experience, community, and culture.

Story: Knowing Ourselves and Others
I will commit to doing my own inner work to understand my story and listen to the story of others as well, giving the time and space needed to do so.

Political Formation
I will examine the ways I am being politically formed and will ask the Spirit to help me follow God instead of blindly following a political leader or party.

Spiritual Formation
I will tend to my spiritual life and make sure my roots are healthy so I can continue to grow.

Connecting Belief and Action
I will examine connections and disconnections, remaining of aware of the places I need to take. action.

ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY

What does Ethics: Practical Implications tell us about:

Listening and Welcoming Dialogue?
Mutual Collaboration?
Peacemaking?
Justice?
Ethical Citizenship?

Unit 12: Case Study

The case study is designed to offer an example of how to put the path to Ecumenical Diplomacy into practice. I will be using the example of how we care for the homeless population. I invite you to think of an ethical / social issue that you would like to further explore.

Reminder: The goal is greater understanding and an approach to learning that allows for building on what we have when encountered with new information.

The following is a sample set of questions that could be used for a case study on how to navigate the theological, social, political, and ethical questions in regard to caring for those who are unhoused.

This will serve to give an idea of how the case study can be used, but just as with the ethical statement, some of the questions are personal to each context.

Imago Dei - What does Imago Dei teach us about caring for those who are unhoused?

Ecumenical Unity - What are the positions of the church? Are there organizations who are working well with the unhoused?

Critical Thinking - What are some possible solutions to the homelessness crisis?

Ethics - Are the proposed solutions good news to the vulnerable? How do we help w/o hurting while inviting accountability?

Theological Processing - What does Scripture, tradition, reason, experience, community, and culture contribute to this issue?

Story: Knowing Self and Others - What is our personal experience with interacting with those who are unhoused? Have we listened to the story of someone who was/is unhoused to see what might be helpful to them?

Political Formation - Are we being influenced by (or against) a particular political leader or party? Are we working toward a bipartisan solution?

Spiritual Formation - What does it look like to follow the way of Jesus? Is there an invitation for our formation?

Connecting Belief and Action - Is there an action step I can take?

Practical Implications of Ethics - Am I bringing my personal ethical statement to the case study issue?

Handouts: Sample Case Studies

Here are some examples of case studies submitted by research participants.

I want to invite you to do a case study of your own...

Choose a topic that you would like to further understand.

Consider what questions come up for you as you think of your topic in the context of each step of the path to ecumenical diplomacy.

Spend some time reflecting on and writing what stirs up in you around those questions. There may be some solid answers, but remember the goal is to push us a little further in our understanding of these topics, not necessarily to solve every dilemma.

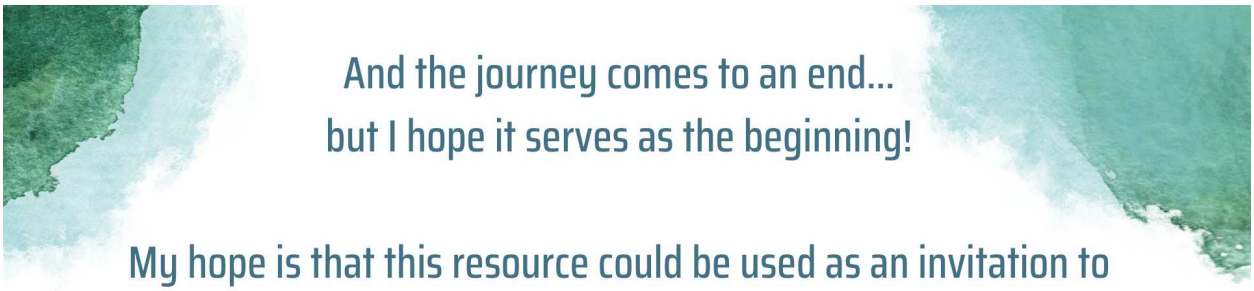
Imago Dei
Ecumenical Unity
Critical Thinking
Ethics
Theological Processing
Story: Knowing Self and Others
Political Formation
Spiritual Formation
Connecting Belief and Action

ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY

What does the Case Study tell us about:

Listening and Welcoming Dialogue?
Mutual Collaboration?
Peacemaking?
Justice?
Ethical Citizenship?

Unit 13: Conclusion



My hope is that this resource could be used as an invitation to examine all kinds of ethical issues. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I want to remind once again that my goal here was not a seismic shift, but rather small steps taken from deep considerations that will eventually lead to healing the deep chasms we experience and the wounding that has come from those fissures might be healed as we learn to work together.

ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY

What have you learned about:

Listening and Welcoming Dialogue?
Mutual Collaboration?
Peacemaking?
Justice?
Ethical Citizenship?

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

D.MIN, LEADERSHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

DOCTORAL PROJECT: ECUMENCIAL DIPLOMACY

TIFFANIE WILSON

Participant Artifacts

I have also included samples of personal ethical statements and case studies created by participants to reveal how the course helped them integrate and apply what they learned. The goal is better understanding, not uniformed thinking, so the path to ecumenical diplomacy can be applied to a variety of ethical, theological, and social issues.

Participant Ethical Statements

Participant Exhibit 1, Ethical Statement

Imago Dei

I will celebrate each human I have the honor of interacting with, and endeavor to remember they bear the image of God, especially when we are at odds with each other.

Ecumenical Unity

I will take care in interacting with those I disagree with, and endeavor to look deeper at the heart of the issue, the other side's heart, and my own heart.

Critical Thinking

I will look deeper into issues, actions, and statements, and endeavor to wrestle with things that are important.

Ethics

I will make sure that issues that are important to the wellbeing of others are not ignored and endeavor to ensure all people can be safe, whole, and welcome.

Theology Processing

I will seek theological perspectives I have previously ignored, and I will endeavor to filter it through Scripture, tradition, reason, experience, community, and culture.

Story: Knowing Ourselves and Others

I will listen with respect, curiosity, and empathy to my own story and the stories of others, and endeavor to bring open hearted presence to these interactions

Political Formation

I will look deeper into issues, actions, and statements, and endeavor to form decisions based on my values.

Spiritual Formation

I will tend to my spiritual life and endeavor to authentically engage with my faith.

Connecting Belief and Action

I will examine my actions and endeavor to make sure they reflect my beliefs accurately.

Participant Exhibit 2, Ethical Statement

Imago Dei

Each and every person is made in the image of God and should be treated as such.

Ecumenical Unity

I can and should learn from others with different church views, backgrounds, etc. I endeavor to approach those differences with humility and curiosity.

Critical Thinking

When faced with an issue, I will seek to learn from many sources, using my intelligence as my guide. I will read and listen to the stories of those who have different experiences than I in order to learn other perspectives. I will not assume my experience/perspective is the only valid one.

Ethics

I will use my position in my communities to advocate for ethical laws and policies which lift the oppressed as Jesus did, and I will vote accordingly.

Theology Processing

When faced with a theological challenge, I will endeavor to filter it through Scripture, tradition, reason, experience, community and culture.

Story: Knowing Ourselves and Others

I will recall and analyze my story and how it affects my views. I will listen to the stories of others with humility and curiosity and without judgment.

Political Formation

I will filter my political views through the actions of Jesus, leading with love.

Spiritual Formation

I will continue to develop spiritually through listening for the Holy Spirit, reading and analyzing scripture and learning from those who have spent years doing so.

Connecting Belief and Action

When I am faced with a belief I disagree with, I will first examine my beliefs and actions to ensure they are connected/congruent.

Participant Case Studies

Participant Exhibit 1, Case Study

Problem: The term "Christian" has been co-opted by many whose actions and words do not align with those of Jesus. How can we spread the truth of the gospel in this environment?

Imago Dei

When faced with those who call themselves Christians yet do not follow his teachings of befriending the friendless, caring for and raising up the oppressed and loving all our neighbors, I will remember that each of them bears the Imago Dei and Jesus loves them. Only by being open to having conversations with them do I have the hope of sharing the love of Christ.

Ecumenical Unity

My motto has become, "Be Curious, Not Furious". By taking the time to learn the stories of those I disagree with, I will be able to truly see them as people and hopefully, they will see me that way as well. Where did their beliefs originate? Are they surrounded by only those who think as they do? Are they fearful of changing their minds? In what ways do they think their beliefs align with Jesus? Why do I believe as I do?

Critical Thinking

In this time of social media and soundbites, it is very easy to put others in a box and think we know all we need to know about them and their beliefs. I endeavor to treat each person as an individual, not as a monolithic "other". Only by having conversations can we learn about someone's heart and motivation. I will also take the time to research (read books, listen to podcasts) the history behind the "Christian" beliefs that, to me, seem counter to Jesus 'teachings.

Ethics

In these conversations as well as in my actions, including my votes, I will continue to share my knowledge of issues that are negatively affecting the wellbeing of others. It is important that, even as we endeavor to hear each person's story and view them as individuals, if that person's actions, words or votes are acting to oppress others, they must be held accountable for their actions. For example, the concept of "free speech" does not give anyone the right to say anything they choose if it is hurting others. Actions have consequences. When those who consider themselves Christians invoke Biblical teaching to justify actions that hurt others, it prevents the truth of the gospel from being known and spread.

Theology Processing

One difference between those who use Christianity as a source of *power over* others and those who believe Jesus stood with the oppressed is how the Bible is read and interpreted. I will continue to read and learn about different translations and to view scripture through the lens of not only tradition but reason, people's lived experiences and our culture in 2022. I will be comfortable

enough with this knowledge that I am able to share it when faced with those who use the Bible to justify actions that prevent certain demographics from being safe and seen and valued.

Story: Knowing Ourselves and Others

I will try to remember that I have a story, too. The way I was raised, the people I have had in my life, the jobs and co-workers I've had as well as the way God gave me an empathetic heart all influence the way I view Jesus 'teachings re: loving others. As I speak with others, I will share my stories so that they feel confident to share theirs with me. The best way to convince others that Jesus wants us to care for and love others is to show that I care for and love others, even those who disagree with me.

Political Formation

As hot topics come up in the news, I will continue to learn about and research those issues so that I know the truth, not the soundbites being shared. One reason we have become polarized is because we listen exclusively to the same voices who tell us what to think about issues rather than thinking for ourselves. Being a lifelong learner is one of my key values, and I will encourage others to learn about issues before passing judgment.

Spiritual Formation

The more I learn about Jesus and the more I allow myself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, the more I will be able to walk the walk and be known as someone who knows Jesus and demonstrates His heart for loving people.

Connecting Belief and Action

"We are called to share the gospel with the *aroma* of Jesus." - Ian Simpkins

The bottom line is that if my actions as I go about my life do not reflect the light of Jesus to others, none of my words matter. My faith in Jesus, and his love and sacrifice for me, enables me to look at those with whom I disagree and see the face of Jesus. And if I share His love freely and without self-righteousness, the truth of the gospel will continue to spread.

Participant Exhibit 2, Case Study

Case Study for Ecumenical Diplomacy

Question: How do we look at voting, voter participation, and voter education (about options not their education level) to better participation in democracy in our country?

Imago Dei

All is/are created in the image of God. "all that is, seen and unseen"

People are doing their best. Having just spent an hour researching and doing my homework to vote, I understand that a lot of people don't have that time or luxury. Add to it folks who don't have

the ability or access to vote day of or in advance. There are so many barriers. I think it might be helpful to consider trying to encourage others to think about this: what is one way you can help one person vote in the next election?

Ecumenical Unity

I strive to listen openly

I would love to have open conversation with folks who say they don't vote. Why is that? What is keeping them from it? I think it would also be helpful to hear from folks who do vote. Why do they vote? How does the church treat this topic? What message are we hearing?

Critical Thinking

I question my own beliefs and those of others. I use valued, legitimate resources to engage in critical comparison, including those of authors with whom I might not agree.

Why is voting such a hard thing to do in the US?

Ethics

All means all. The marginalized, and those doing the marginalization.

What are ways that historically marginalized communities have been suppressed in the past? What about today?

Theological Processing

Scripture, tradition, reason. Conversation.

What does the Bible tell us about voting? What does our own tradition tell us about voting (within the denomination, within a parish, etc.)? How do we look at this participation through a theological lens? How does separation of church and state come into play?

Story: Knowing Self and Others

Give myself space to hear my own story. Listen to others.

Why is voting important to me? How was I raised to value voting?

Political Formation

Utilize the above to inform beliefs, decisions, and candidate selection.

How does where we live impact what we think about voting and voting access? What are we hearing from our own political representation?

Spiritual Formation

Inward and outward

What resources or groups have helped me come to this conclusion?

Connecting Belief and Action

Where do I take action well? Where do I need improvement?

What do I actually DO about this problem? Do I encourage others or ask them or send a text?

Practical Implications of Ethics

Which of these areas am I thinking about more than others? Where do I need to be doing more consideration?

Participant Exhibit 3, Case Study

Situation- How should a small church with decreasing tithing membership approach the decreased income?

Imago Dei

Everyone bears the image of God. Everyone is seen as having unique and inherent value because of the Imago Dei, not because of what they can contribute to the functioning of the church. Also, God is the original creator, if we believe He is creative, as those who acknowledge we bear the image of God (including His creativity) perhaps we can explore creative ways to function as a church that are less expensive than the traditional model? Perhaps most importantly, interaction with one another requires engaging with the human bearing God's image with a profound and radical love. This is not a transactional and extractive relationship. We don't ask people to come to our church so we can get something out of them (the tithe)

Ecumenical Unity

Are there unique partnerships within our local community that we can explore? Partnerships that are based on mutual respect and reciprocity would strengthen both groups. Partnerships based in quid pro quo and motivated by getting something from the other group will not form healthy relationships. What have other churches done in similar situations? Are we willing to look at how nonreligious organizations have handled decreased income? Can I ask fellow leaders to consider a different approach to the decreased income with humility and generosity of heart that invites dialogue?

Critical Thinking

How might we examine this issue honestly and with fresh eyes? What is our "why"? Why are we here? What are the essential functions of our church? Is love foundational to our "why"? What is our mission statement? Does it need to be adjusted or changed? Does our mission statement fully describe what we value? Do we value what God values? What motivates us to take a particular course of action? As we consider ways to increase income and decrease expenses, what is underneath each approach? How does each approach reflect or not reflect the deep love we are

called to have towards other people? In what ways are we bypassing radical love to accomplish a goal? (ends justify the means)

Ethics

What do we value? What are our values? Does our mission and our "why" align with our values? Do our actions align with our values? Do our values acknowledge the Imago Dei in each human being? Has "the ends justify the means" crept into our thinking? What level of "the ends justify the means" is acceptable if other people don't see it that way? Is ecumenical unity more important than values? On a personal level, at what point do I say "this policy or action violates my values and I can stay and be complicit in it"?

Theological Processing

How does the Bible, tradition, reason, culture, community, and experience address: what a church's "why" is, tithing , getting/asking/manipulating people to give, seeking out people to contribute/rather than simply serving people in our community

Story

What is the story of our church? Is there abuse of giving here? Can we humbly make amends for that and strive not to perpetuate it? What parts of the church's story can we honor? What are some strengths? How might that help us moving forward? What is the story of each leader? How does your history influence your point of view? What triggers you? What barriers do you have that keep you from considering another point of view? What is the story of the community? What kind of history does the church have in the community? Do people not trust us? Perhaps they don't even know we exist. Can we listen to their story as they tell it and not force our own interpretation on it? Can I honestly and humbly consider these stories, take them in, and let them change me?

Political Formation

What political ideologies are influencing us?

Spiritual Formation

How do I allow Christ to be formed in me as I consider the "whys" and stories of others and myself? Connecting Belief and Action-After considering our "whys" and stories, what actions can we take? How do we reduce spending and increase income?

Table 1: Summary of Case Study

What	We need more people to tithe
Why	It is a biblical mandate, and we want people to do the right thing

Ethical Consideration	Are we seeing people as potential funding sources instead of other humans to be with and love? It is wrong to give an appearance of healthy community when there is actually unhealthy control and manipulation motivating how we go about increasing the number of people coming to church (seeing them as potential funders)
History Communal	23% tithe was expected, almost demanded (35 years ago) Some people are coming from an extremely abusive cult-like church. They need to heal
History Personal	I'm tired of being manipulated, controlled, and forced to do things, and don't want to do that to other people
Proposed Action	Let people decide how much to give when they are ready to give and from a heart to contribute to the community not because you have to. Preach that instead of 10% is mandated for every church goer.

Participant Notes / Responses

The format of my project is a hybrid dissertation and course. For the course portion, I have taken participants through weekly sessions where we review the chapter topic and discuss what is stirring up with each of them as they engage the material. Some of their responses in regard to what they processed as we moved through the course can be found in Appendix E: Milestone 5 - Project Appendix Documentation. "I" is often used, but is referencing multiple participants and includes their questions, comments, and feedback.

Assessment

Success benchmarks:

-At least 5 participants complete the Ecumenical Diplomacy course.

This benchmark was successfully completed in a little over twelve weeks in the fall of 2022 through a combination of

one-on-one sessions and group sessions. The courses were held consecutively once per week until we took a two week break in between the Practical Implications of Ethics and the Case Study. The reason for this was to give participants time to develop their case studies. .

-At least 3 participants will understand the course material enough to create a personal ethical statement and complete a case study of their own to further explore an ethical/social/theological issue using each step on the path to ecumenical diplomacy to inform their topic.

The participants successfully completed personal ethical statements which helped to inform their individual case studies, which were also successfully completed. Some participants even submitted multiple case studies to help them further process pressing issues in their personal and ministry life.

-Once the course is complete, pastors or non-profit leaders would express interest in engaging with the course to help their leaders better understand ecumenical diplomacy. This is a long-term goal.

In November 2022, I was able to meet with the Mayor of Chattanooga's Chief of Staff to discuss how this research could locally impact social issues in our community, especially concerning the involvement of local churches and faith leaders. The meeting went well, they expressed interest in helping host this conversation, and the next steps are up to me as how to how proceed. My desire is to wait until the doctoral project has been officially assessed by the committee and passed before I formally present the full scope of Ecumenical Diplomacy to the community faith leaders.

Quality benchmarks:

-Course participants express that they feel better equipped to engage in disagreeing conversations while maintaining an open and inviting posture.

In the last course session when we discussed Case Studies, I asked course participants to share what went well and what could be improved. One participant shared that the process of this course, especially having the one-on-one sessions, changed her life. I was honestly shocked and humbled to hear her share this. She said she felt supported in thinking through these thoughtful issues. The other participants echoed similar statements of gratitude in getting to participate in this. They all said they would like to see this course happen in the context of their ministry/professional spaces and stated the importance of people having a space to be seen and heard as they process challenging dilemmas.

-The content has a professional, high-quality aesthetic with quality contend and presentation. Other professionals believe it to be high quality as well.

I think the slides as presented in the course are high quality and aesthetically pleasing. Participants commented affirmingly.

-My intended audience will find my course to be easily understandable and implemented. I may need multiple iterations of this project.

Although the initial intention of this course was to be accessible to a diverse audience, I realize it is more geared to an educated audience. I would like to target leaders first, and then if I need to create a new iteration to appeal to a broader audience, I can do so.

Project Launch Plan

NPO

How can we become proficient in better listening to and learning from each other to understand the ethical and intellectual commitment and stakes behind theological, political, and social perspectives different from our own? In a pluralistic society, such deep understanding is necessary to enable working together toward ecumenical diplomacy.

Project Description

This project is a twelve-week, practitioner facilitated course that guides participants through the path to Ecumenical Diplomacy. The research process uncovered multiple causes of disunity among Christians in regard to theological, social, and ethical dilemmas and the course serves to offer a pathway toward unity by addressing the topics of Imago Dei, Ecumenical Unity, Critical Thinking, Ethics, Theology Processing, Story: Knowing Ourselves and Others, Political Formation, Spiritual Formation, Connecting Belief and Action, Practical Implications of Ethics, and finally, a Case Study.

Ecumenical Diplomacy is showcased via visual slides, and also includes notes that reflect participant experience as they advanced through the course. I have also included samples of personal ethical statements and case studies created by participants to reveal how the course helped them integrate and apply what they learned. The goal is better understanding, not uniformed thinking, so the path to ecumenical diplomacy can be applied to a variety of ethical, theological, and social issues.

Pedagogically, the intention for the Ecumenical Diplomacy project is a one-on-one and/or a small group format. The participant group who completed the course in the fall of 2022 expressed this context worked well. The course could also be utilized via a teaching video where content was covered, followed by an individual session to assist the participant in processing and implementing what they are learning. With proper formatting, I could see the course being used for retreats and consulting (primarily for ministry and Christian non-profit leaders) or as an academic course, although it would require some adjustments as well as a reading list that would accompany the course. Ecumenical Diplomacy can be used in synchronous and/or asynchronous formats. Participants could either view the material before the discussion session or in a live setting.

Audience

The intended audience is Christians who are processing how to better come together and unify amidst polarization. Initially, I hoped for this to be targeted toward a diverse audience. However, I am finding that the language used is targeting individuals with a college education. There may need to be further iterations or edits in order to include a broader population.

Development Plan

The twelve-week course has already been developed and completed by participants. The next step is to continue to offer it to the community once the project has officially been passed.

Development Process

I gathered verbal and written feedback during one-on-one and group sessions with course participants. I also gathered feedback through participant ethical statements and case studies that showed how participants were able to implement what they learned into a real-world, personal, ethical or social issue in which they desired to have a greater understanding. These interactions, particularly in the last course where participants reflected on the entire course, were helpful as they expressed this was a transformative process for them. They also expressed they feel they now have the necessary tools to apply this framework to other issues as well.

I would like to present this courser within the community and have already met with government and clergy leaders to host the Ecumenical Diplomacy course.

Appendix A–
Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

Personal Research Manifesto

As I approach my NPO, I want to be courageous when I am fearful of error, welcome doubt, remain open-minded and curious, listen deeply, and stay present.

NPO Statement

I would like to research if and how spiritual formation impacts one's high value of humanity as reflected in Imago Dei which lends to practical support for policies promoting and defending human rights.

NPO Scope and Constraints

Non-negotiables: I want to ensure that this research process began and will continue to be representative of diverse perspectives to gain a holistic understanding of the issues at hand. This commitment includes inviting individuals to participate who I know have a different perspective than myself. I do not anticipate any costs associated with researching this NPO.

NPO Context

The context for this NPO is the Church consisting of a wide variety of denominations represented, as well as inclusive of those who identify as spiritual but not religious, or perhaps are not associated with a particular church. Because the Church spans geographical, denominational, cultural, socio-economical, and generational context, I have aimed to do the same in representing this NPO.

Root Causes

The root causes discovered consist of: a lack of awareness of what is forming us, lack of awareness that we may be substituting influences other than Scripture for formation, media, political influence, culture of individualism, scarcity mentality, and/or general woundedness of humanity. I am inclined to state the root cause is a lack of awareness of what is forming us. Due to this lack of awareness, other named issues could very well be incorporated. Once we become aware, we perhaps appropriate adjustments can be made accordingly.

Discovery Workshop Stakeholders

Pastor/author/theology professor/politically engaged

Social program employee/human rights advocacy

PhD student in religion and politics/ former government worker

Pastor/human rights advocacy

School counselor/ministry/ human rights advocacy

Seminary student/author on liturgy and politics

Author on family and politics/daughter of former Presidential candidate

Social worker/foster care/human rights advocacy

One-on-One Interviews

Attorney/political podcaster and author

Attorney/Political Podcaster and Author

Spiritual Director

Executive Director of Non-Profit/works in anti-trafficking/prison reform

MDiv/Pastor

Spiritual Director/Works with the homeless population

Seminary student/ human rights advocacy

3–5 Key Biblical Texts

Isaiah 1:17 - "Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." NRSV

Micah 6:8 - "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" NRSV

Jeremiah 22:3 - "Thus says the LORD: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place." NRSV

Psalms 82:3 - "Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." NRSV

Academic Resources

I would like to research those who speak to the issues of spiritual formation, human rights, and politics from theological and political perspectives. This includes Dr. David Gushee - Christian ethicist, Dr. James K. A. Smith - Philosopher, St. Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas. I'd like to include writers who have held political offices and written about their faith, such as former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. I'd like to explore the letters written for the first 100 days of

the Trump administration by various scholars, academics, and religious leaders via the "American Values, Religious Voices Campaign". I'm interested in the work of Sarah Stewart Holland and Beth Silvers on how to have these challenging conversations when we disagree, as well as Katelynn Scheiss who recently wrote about liturgy and politics.

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Appendix 1

After initial discussion of the NPO, we set out to brainstorm the key issues around formation, human rights, and politics. Here are some of the questions and phrases that arose:

How does following the Greatest Commandment play out in our social and political lives?

How do we continue to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God when our government isn't doing these things?

Separation of church and state - is it good for religion and politics to mix and mingle?

How does loving your neighbor as you love yourself make sense when it comes to politics?

The intersection of faith and works - what does this look like regarding human rights and politics?

Can a follower of Christ be a citizen of a nation / state?

How does being a follower of Jesus look different in how it plays out in the world we engage in?

How do we address systemic sin?

Does one's spirituality impact their ability to connect with others outside of the church?

Are spiritual ideals an influence on how one views/interprets social issues?

What is the social context one finds themselves in?

Did we have a partisan affiliation during our child/ young adult formation; what was the parental influence?

What is the role of the corporate body, the church vs. the role of the individual in political engagement?

How does political conflict affect spirituality?

Does exposure to political means of protecting or gaining human rights itself function as spiritually formative?

In what ways does spiritual formation impact outward reflection of faith v. cultivating inner piety?

Is there a correlation between willingness to grow in spiritual formation and engagement in human rights/political involvement?

How do we measure spiritual formation and political involvement?

Different "brands" of spiritual formation will have a different focus on social justice.

The need to define the terms of "spiritual", "formation", "human rights", and "political involvement" is imperative.

Some patterns and commonalities we found:

- Whether or not there should be a relationship between church and state
- Spiritual formation and how it affects politics AND how political leanings affect spiritual formation
- Varying views possibly influenced by social context and geographical location
- Varying denominations will define terms differently

Defining terms (working definitions):

Spiritual formation: embodied repetitive practices that form us below a cognitive level and bring us into greater unity with Christ.

Human rights: creating a system or base line of opportunities for dignity of people who are made in the image of God. The goal for equality is that humans would be able to start at the same position, or at least not a significant deficit. Human rights include a basic sense of freedom and rights, including access to resources like education and medical care, and systemic justice that doesn't discriminate as well as defense when discrimination comes into play.

Politics: Our shared life together and how it plays out; forming, norming, and sustaining our life together. Political practices should head toward human rights goals. The question was raised: What does the system control or account for versus what is our personal responsibility? Human rights should drive political decision making as the two are inseparable.

Who is potentially impacted by the NPO?:

- Our siblings of other languages/ cultures
- People who are most likely to "fall through the cracks"
- LGBTQ persons
- Oppressed groups and people who practice a different faith
- Congregational leaders and educators
- Those who don't have access to social media or email
- Immediate communities surrounding churches
- Those who are unengaged (spiritually, politically, socially)
- The general community because the community will have to reap what they have sown.

- The most vulnerable: marginalized populations (minorities, lower socioeconomic status, children, non-spiritual (if in America).
- Those who do not see the connections or the gaps

Who should we most focus on to understand the NPO?

- Clergy / spiritual leaders
- Marginalized populations

Some discoveries regarding spiritual leaders were:

- A disconnect between inner spiritual conditions and outer political life
- Awareness of the spiritually formative power of politics on their congregants
- Awareness of the challenge clergy face in confronting the external influences on their flock
- There is opportunity for spiritual leaders to listen and hear how varying populations have experienced circumstances to make them feel disadvantaged (whether the disadvantage is perceived or real). This came up regarding some predominately white males feeling disadvantaged by women or POC entering academia and work forces.
- The problem could be that the privileged have failed to see their own privilege and inequities experienced by others.

Some discoveries regarding the marginalized populations:

- Assessing spiritual formation, maturity, and growth may not be on their radar in the hierarchy of needs.
- The problem could be impacted by a sense of inequality.
- Marginalized people do not have the same access to resources which would lead to prosperity.

Among these two choices, a vote was taken and the consensus was unanimous to focus the NPO on clergy / spiritual leaders so that they might affect change for marginalized people.

Unpacking the empathy map: What would the audience say, think, feel, or do differently when the NPO is addressed?

Says: Able to articulate more clearly how spiritual formation guides political opinions; there would be less talk and more listening; a recognition that the kingdom of God is here and now.

Thinks: “I matter.”; Mental transformation (Romans 12); Equality is possible; There is hope and people genuinely care.

Does: Participates in the bringing of God's kingdom to earth; break generational curses; looks less like the world; Rising levels of religiosity within congregations would lessen; help the overall society grow and prosper; more people would become active and engaged.

Feels: Hopeful, at peace, not threatened; feels seen and validated, equal and worthy; more secure in their relationships with other believers; optimistic about future possibilities.

Why can't the things expressed on the empathy map be experienced now?

- Early political affiliation prior to spiritual formation.
- Particular lens we look through when we think of politics.
- Politics have formed us before religion has formed us.
- We need to listen first.
- As we become more mature, we would be more opened to having a broader perspective.
- God is continuing to soften and transform our minds and spirits, but we aren't there yet.

WHY exercise: Why is this a NPO? Post-it responses for this question:

- Inequality damages the image of God in humanity - reflective of all people, including privileged and marginalized. Christ's words and actions, as well as Scripture encourages us to care and value all life.
- Varying groups of people aren't afforded the same access and opportunities, perhaps due to one group's power and privilege and fear of sharing along with a desire for control. We are in a broken world and create broken systems; woundedness is present but we desire to be wounded healers and work toward a society where are are all supporting and nurturing one another while still attending to the issues. We are working toward a loving society where justice prevails and we are not there yet. Materialism, tribalism, scarcity, as well as a hyper focus on individualism may be at play which leads to fear of allowing others to have an equal opportunity in society.
- We may not think that spiritual formation has anything to do with outward actions as it relates to a marginalized population. We may have information, but lack transformation. There may be a false dichotomy between spiritual self and political self because of individualism versus collective faith. We need to widen our perspective knowing that we are not the total picture.
- There may be a sense of hypocrisy between the Bible and politics as we understand them. Patriarchy, submission, enslavement, are present. There is a great interest in protecting one's own family from outsiders. We need to discover what is the primary tool forming us? It could be that we are claiming our source as Scripture when actually other factors are involved such as media, tradition, family, geographic location, economics, and race. There

> may be a discrepancy between what we say we believe and what we actually believe. We are building legislation on certain principles; it depends on what biblical principles we are highlighting.

The final thoughts around the NPO all centered around clergy leaders as the audience. Utilizing all perspectives, the discoveries included: a disconnect between the spiritual and political formation of Christians; the spiritually formative power of politics on congregants, and a disconnect between inner spiritual life and outward political expression. The causes were: individualism, scarcity mentality, lack of awareness of what is forming us, unawareness that we are substituting something other than Scripture for formation, outside forces of media and politics, and our own woundedness. The posed solution outcomes were: greater attention to the flourishing society among vulnerable people, more cohesive political efforts to resolve human rights issues, changed perspectives on formation, a more unified church leading to greater joy, equality and dignity, transformation, and a better expression of God's kingdom on earth.

MURAL link for virtual whiteboard: https://app.mural.co/t/tiffaniewilsondoctoralresear4777/m/tiffaniewilsondoctoralresear4777/1601917107471/c5b65b7d32083e4584091109296600330a574be6

Discovery Workshop Description

The discovery workshop was held online via zoom. We utilized MURAL for a virtual, collaborative white board. The workshop was held on October 13, 2020 and lasted for 4 hours. The Discovery Workshop participants included the following: A pastor/author/theology professor who is politically engaged, a social program employee who participates in human rights advocacy, a PhD student in religion and politics who is also a former government worker, a pastor who also participates in human rights advocacy especially among the LGBTQ community, a school counselor who is significantly involved in ministry and also engaged in racial justice, a seminary student who authored a book on liturgy and politics, an author who wrote about family and politics and who is the daughter of a former Presidential candidate, a social worker particularly engaged in foster care, immigration, and racial justice.

The stakeholder interviews took place via zoom and phone. The participants were presented with the workshop discoveries prior and were asked the following questions: What is your understanding of spiritual formation? What is your understanding of the terms human rights and political engagement? Do you see a connection between spiritual formation and engaging with human rights via politics? Regarding the discovery workshop findings: With what do you agree? Why? What do you disagree with? Why? What is missing?

The stakeholder interviews consisted of the following candidates: An attorney/political podcaster and author from the democatic perspective, an attorney/political podcaster and author from the

republican perspective, a spiritual director, an executive director of a non-Profit who works in anti-trafficking and prison reform, a pastor from a conservative perspective, a spiritual director who also works with the homeless population, and a seminary student who is engaged human rights advocacy and wants to work as a human rights officer with the United Nations.

Discovery Statement

The discovery workshop set out to define the terms of spiritual formation, human rights, and politics, and then develop the NPO discovery statement. Especially given the polarizing topic, the workshop was a success! There was diverse and equal participation among stakeholders, and we were able to come up with the following statement:

Considering spiritual leaders, (audience)

we have discovered a disconnect between spiritual and political formation, (NPO)

which is caused by a lack of awareness of what is forming us. (root cause)

If solved, it would mean changed perspectives on formation, more cohesive alignment spiritually and politically - leading to greater efforts to resolve human rights issues and further equality. (outcome)

Critical Insights from Discovery Workshop

I initially set out to discover if and how spiritual formation affects our engagement in human rights as it relates to political involvement. Between an audience of spiritual leaders or marginalized populations, the workshop revealed the audience would be focused on spiritual leaders. The workshop also revealed a disconnect between the spiritual and political formation of Christians, which is possibly caused by: lack of awareness of what is forming us, individualism/scarcity mentality, substituting influences outside of Scripture for formation, media and cultural influence, and our own general woundedness. If the NPO is solved, some outcomes could be: changed perspective on spiritual and political formation, greater attention to the flourishing of marginalized groups and vulnerable populations, a more unified church and world leading to greater equality and dignity for marginalized people, less divisiveness, and a general better expression of God's kingdom on earth.

One-on-One Interview Discoveries

The data from one-on-one interviews was collected from six individuals. Each interviewee maintained that there does seem to be a disconnect between spiritual formation and political formation, however, there were varying opinions on the root cause of the disconnect in spiritual and political formation. Interviewees also consistently stated that there is a connection between engaging in human rights and political involvement. Yet, there was a broader understanding on what constitutes human rights and what political engagement entails. Additionally, each interviewee offered not only a unique perspective but was able to expound upon the workshop in ways that offered new insights and trails of research that I would like to explore.

Synthesis

The interview findings were consistent with the workshop discoveries regarding the intended audience (spiritual leaders), and the discovery as stated in the NPO (a disconnect between spiritual and political formation). The root cause (a lack of awareness of what is forming us) was debated. Some interviewees agreed with these workshop findings, while some agreed provisionally or wanted to expound further and explore other areas of the root cause. Essentially, some interviewees thought the root cause was not comprehensive enough. I think the discrepancy is partially caused by interviewees lack of understanding that the NPO stated is just the beginning of research, however their desire to expound offered new research opportunities for me to explore related to the NPO. Finally, the outcome (changed perspectives on formation, more cohesive alignment spiritually and politically - leading to greater efforts to resolve human rights issues and further equality) was generally agreed upon between workshop attendees and interviewees.

Next Steps

There are several trails that I would like to explore including the use and abuse of power, and how we define and come together on a basic understanding of human rights. I would also like to research the idea of blessing stemming from the Abrahamic covenant (as a barometer of sorts: if people are not being blessed because of our relationship with God, then perhaps we are not in step with the intention of the covenant and that the experience of blessing should be true for all of those we come in contact with and not only those within the spiritual community), and the fruit that comes from spiritual formation (i.e. love, patience, kindness, goodness, etc.) because this seems closely tied to formation and human rights. The other great area of interest is researching how political leaders have been formed, spiritually and politically, as well as the outcome of those experiences as they relate to human rights.

Discovery Workshop Documentation

After initial discussion of the NPO, we set out to brainstorm the key issues around formation, human rights, and politics. Here are some of the questions and phrases that arose:

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- As we become more mature, we would be more opened to having a broader perspective.
- God is continuing to soften and transform our minds and spirits, but we aren't there yet.

WHY exercise: Why is this a NPO? Post-it responses for this question:

- Inequality damages the image of God in humanity - reflective of all people, including privileged and marginalized. Christ's words and actions, as well as Scripture encourages us to care and value all life.
- Varying groups of people aren't afforded the same access and opportunities, perhaps due to one group's power and privilege and fear of sharing along with a desire for control. We are in a broken world and create broken systems; woundedness is present but we desire to be wounded healers and work toward a society where are are all supporting and nurturing one another while still attending to the issues. We are working toward a loving society where justice prevails and we are not there yet. Materialism, tribalism, scarcity, as well as a hyper focus on individualism may be at play which leads to fear of allowing others to have an equal opportunity in society.
- We may not think that spiritual formation has anything to do with outward actions as it relates to a marginalized population. We may have information, but lack transformation. There may be a false dichotomy between spiritual self and political self because of individualism versus collective faith. We need to widen our perspective knowing that we are not the total picture.
- There may be a sense of hypocrisy between the Bible and politics as we understand them. Patriarchy, submission, enslavement, are present. There is a great interest in protecting one's own family from outsiders. We need to discover what is the primary tool forming us? It could be that we are claiming our source as Scripture when actually other factors are involved such as media, tradition, family, geographic location, economics, and race. There may be a discrepancy between what we say we believe and what we actually believe. We are building legislation on certain principles; it depends on what biblical principles we are highlighting.

The final thoughts around the NPO all centered around clergy leaders as the audience. Utilizing all perspectives, the discoveries included: a disconnect between the spiritual and political formation of Christians; the spiritually formative power of politics on congregants, and a disconnect between inner spiritual life and outward political expression. The causes were: individualism, scarcity mentality, lack of awareness of what is forming us, unawareness that we are substituting something other than Scripture for formation, outside forces of media and politics, and our own woundedness. The posed solution outcomes were: greater attention to the flourishing society among vulnerable people, more cohesive political efforts to resolve human rights issues, changed perspectives on formation, a more unified church leading to greater joy, equality and dignity, transformation, and a better expression of God's kingdom on earth.

MURAL link for virtual whiteboard: https://app.mural.co/t/tiffaniewilsondoctoralresear4777/m/tiffaniewilsondoctoralresear4777/1601917107471/c5b65b7d32083e4584091109296600330a574be6

One-Page Post-Workshop Message to Stakeholders

Dear, _____:

Thank you for your participation in the research workshop! I appreciate your attentiveness and active participation, and am thankful for your unique perspective to help me better understand the intricacies of my research topic. You contributed a great deal to the conversation, and drew my attention to new concepts in ways I had not yet considered in this context.

I wanted to share the current working NPO with you that emerged from the discovery workshop:

Considering spiritual leaders, (audience)

we have discovered a disconnect between spiritual and political formation, (NPO)

which is caused by a lack of awareness of what is forming us. (root cause)

If solved, it would mean changed perspectives on formation, more cohesive alignment spiritually and politically - leading to greater efforts to resolve human rights issues and further equality. (outcome)

Do you have any feedback for me about the workshop?

Or have any other thoughts come up for you that you want to share?

Best,

Tiffanie Paige Wilson, M.A.

One-on-One Interview Documentation

Fall 2020 - One-on-One Interview Documentation

Overview: This is the overview of the discovery workshop, the NPO, and the research questions that were sent to each interviewee:

The beginning phase of this research is to discover a Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO).

I initially set out to discover if and how spiritual formation affects our engagement in human rights as it relates to political involvement. Between an audience of spiritual leaders or marginalized populations, the workshop revealed the audience would be focused on spiritual leaders. The workshop also revealed a disconnect between the spiritual and political formation of Christians,

which is possibly caused by: lack of awareness of what is forming us, individualism/scarcity mentality, substituting influences outside of Scripture for formation, media and cultural influence, and our own general wounded-ness. If the NPO is solved, some outcomes could be: a changed perspective on spiritual and political formation, greater attention to the flourishing of marginalized groups and vulnerable populations, a more unified church and world leading to greater equality and dignity for marginalized people, less divisiveness, and a general better expression of God's kingdom on earth.

Taking these things into consideration the NPO statement I landed on, is:

Considering spiritual leaders, (audience)

we have discovered a disconnect between spiritual and political formation, (NPO)

which is caused by a lack of awareness of what is forming us. (root cause)

If solved, it would mean changed perspectives on formation, more cohesive alignment spiritually and politically - leading to greater efforts to resolve human rights issues and further equality. (outcome)

What we will discuss in the interview:

Regarding the above…

With what do you agree, why?

What do you disagree with, why?

What is missing?

Additionally...

What is your understanding of spiritual formation?

What is your understanding of the term, human rights and political engagement?

Do you see a connection between spiritual formation and engaging with human rights via politics?

INTERVIEWER A

With what do you agree, why?

I definitely agree with disconnect between spiritual and political formation. We are selective about spiritual and political formation that we are introducing. Much of this stems from the moral majority moment - a sense of protection of unborn; missing a sense of concern for the whole and only focusing on the unborn. Republicans are prioritizing that issue and claiming only legalistic (lawmaking) ways to work out protection of the unborn - the party is concerned with the law. We rarely see grappling with the teachings of Jesus - abortion emerges as the most important issue or

that the law is the best way to change abortion. No political messages at church - disconnect - politics and church are two separate boxes. Free will and importance as individuals choosing for themselves as to what path to follow. The only way to address abortion is law and punishment. What are the other ways we make it easier to nurture and care for (babies and mothers)?

What do you disagree with, why?

Nothing. They are too far apart and they are too close together. Two sides of the same coin: legalistic approach making the injection of faith into politics too powerful and not powerful enough. Disconnect. Not sure that we are navigating faith broadly enough.

What is missing?

Layer that comes later. Hardest question that comes for me is what is the purpose or the motivating purpose with faith and politics? What is the motivation? Accepting church or bible teaching as guideposts. Coherent worldview? I don't look at my faith as a series of rules, and it is not looking at faith to tell me how to vote but how to be as I vote and talk to others about it. Sense of disconnection. I grew up in a different denomination, SBC. The SBC pastor blended Catholicism and evangelicalism. Religions of the world were taught in VBS. Then I took a hiatus from church in college and didn't go back to church until 2016 when I needed an anchor because of DT. I felt spiritually dehydrated. I was drawn to women pastors.

What is your understanding of spiritual formation? New term, but all of the inputs in developing understanding of faith and place in the world. Everything from education from church through your own study of spiritual texts, yoga, meditation, taking a walk on a beautiful day.

What is your understanding of the term, human rights and political engagement?

A concerted effort on a system level to uphold dignity of each person, persistent pressure to align systems is political engagement.

Do you see a connection between spiritual formation and engaging with human rights via politics? The potential to be effective is there. Define by what it is not. Spiritual formation and political engagement currently happen in an individualistic way. The idea of protecting the unborn becomes elevated because we can individually develop a sense a righteousness around one choice, which leads to weird dysfunction around trafficking because we label good people and bad people and

a rule based sense of faith. A more productive and holistic view of SF and PE - ask harder questions about climate change and refugees and income equality, where it isn't one person or one right or wrong, about how we collectively function. Asking questions that go beyond choices that go right or wrong. The individualism aspect needs to become more collective. SF as it relates to Politics - existential good vs evil battle is cartoonish - I almost never think about good and evil instead of focusing on greater good - more of a richness of purpose and deeper connections to one another and to God. Asking questions both individually and in the community. We need a more collective approach to SF, and take some pressure off of every decision. Opens up some doors to wonder about how things could be more beneficial to people, not necessarily utilitarian but we are treating politics like and avengers movie right now.

Interviewer B

With what do you agree, why? Individualism and lack of awareness - currently capitalistic system makes us unaware. If you are lacking, we have something to fix it. We benefit when we are numbed out - lack of awareness on what is forming us. We want to think we are moving about with full free will. Disconnect with what is forming us.

What do you disagree with, why? Nothing, Agreed.

What is missing? Lack of language around these issues (even spiritual and politics) don't capture what we are talking about. Too binary - binary that doesn't exist for a lot of people. Language missing. Cultural space, you have to be either a political or spiritual. Thinking about and contemplating awareness of what is motivating us is a luxury that many don't have. It takes leisure time, no acute issues such as trauma, financial constraint. Deeper contemplation is a process of maturing and aging. Lack of life experiences. Evolving contemplation matters, and is evolving to higher levels and is important for individuals; individualism is harmful.

What is your understanding of spiritual formation? Too often SF sounds like intellectualizing to me; in western protestant community, SF becomes classes. Formation that puts it in realms of things can you do. Real spiritual evolution is more complex than that.

What is your understanding of the term, human rights and political engagement? Human rights - rights available based solely on status as a human through the lens of nations states and what the role of government is to protect based on status as human being and citizen. Politics - having convos with fellow citizens. Pragmatic engagement - voting, political campaigns. etc but relationship component is important as well.

Do you see a connection between spiritual formation and engaging with human rights via politics? Yeah, for sure. Everything we do is SF in a way, political formation works on us spiritually - separating is hard and things are woven. Hard core political engagement and separation has harmed the church, it is more complex. People want guidance and community and connections - can be connection and disconnection .

Interviewer C

With what do you agree, why? One of my core values (Brian McLaren helped clarify in generous orthodoxy) merging of good impact in lives of people and the salvific work of the church in the world not being two different things can be merged but being the same thing, framed around the Abrahamic covenant. If people are not being blessed, we are not in step with the covenant. Peoples lives should be being made better because of our faithfulness to the message of Christ. If they join, great - if not, they and us have been blessed in the exchange.

Barometer - the question - how do we define blessed? What do we mean when we say blessed?

We need to look back to the original meaning around the language, how is it understood with the original audience? What is the meaning on barometer? Can we agree on what blessing is at a meta level, and we also need to agree on the use of the measurement.

What do you disagree with, why? None.

What is missing? Are you focused on any region of the world, and region of the church? Narrow down even more, create a working definition that is agreed upon on what American evangelicalism means. Who are the occupants under this big tent? Evangelicals aren't interested in what the Catholic, Anglican, orthodox communities have to say. Sadly. These convos (regarding human rights) are easier had with the Anglican, Catholic, community etc. Look at the methodists, presbyterians, baptists, etc. The work you have to do to get to commonality will be at least double the work and you have half the odds. Context is king. To get at the meta, you have to understand the foundational components. Meta is not informed by the components but we can't understand meta without the component make up is. If we are having a breakdown, trying to get to meta, we are missing something that is there foundationally. We may not see it, or don't understand it, or are improperly implying it.

What is your understanding of spiritual formation? For me, it is still a definition in progress and process because it took a while to recognize I was confusing SF with discipleship. (TW note: I need

to define and share difference between the two terms:). Becoming more clear about what it means to be a human being, to be yourself. Spiritual being is not separate or even alongside human being. We are talking about one thing. More that I develop as fully me, the deeper broader and stronger my formation becomes. I can rest on Ephesians 2 through X work he has created a whole new humanity. Religious environment told me I was sin and my humanity equaled sin, I had to wade through that. Christ didn't come to make us non-human, but FULLY HUMAN. Am I becoming a fully formed and fully alive human being? Christ makes that possible now in this realm.

What is your understanding of the term, human rights and political engagement? Everyone has the right to basic human rights of freedom of person and personhood, basic right that we share in the bounty that every nation has; food, shelter. To be a person should be enough to qualify us for the things that keep us alive, healthy; basic decency and dignity. Because of an understanding and commitment to human rights, people, groups, causes that I advocate and vote for in every case need to be reflective of the fact that I claim all people are due basic protection and livelihood and my national identity or doctrinal insistence is in opposition to what I said about human rights, then I need to adjust those things - not my understanding of human rights; the theological framework would be underdeveloped and not in step with the words of Christ. Often we think of political engagement as one dimensional (voting or going to rallies). Those practices would likely be incongruent with other practices. What about spending habits? How are you showing up for people with whom they have the most connection and impact? How gracious and forgiving? My political engagement allow me to work in the spaces I work; they know I believe what I believe and am not going to try to nail them for what they believe unless they decide they are going to espouse something that gets people hurt.

Do you see a connection between spiritual formation and engaging with human rights via politics? Yes. I have always seen that but I didn't know it. I have always been very interested in politics and evening news, political conventions. Just as aware and engaged when politics and theology was more conservative. Politics are informed by theology not the other way around. It is incumbent that we are informed. (Perhaps I need to define the terms informed.) How about read the constitution!! It doesn't say a lot of things you are convinced it says. Our organizing docs need to be brought into the conversation. In the same way we are trying to interpret Scripture, we are trying to interpret these docs. Nuance, mystery, context is harder.

As the Xian community, we have many rights and privileges, but our rights and responsibilities outweigh privileges, and we are not bringing solutions to the least of these, we are not following the gospel of Jesus. I was sick, hungry, imprisoned, etc. Theological soundness and political engagement as a reflection of theological soundness are being taken care of. If we are not

engaged, we are not theologically sound. A generous orthodoxy should lead us to a generous ortho-praxy. The phrases are empty platitudes if we are not loving with our actions.

We need to redefine politics. Politics in and of itself isn't bad. There is a give and take of everything in life, our marriage is even an exercise in the political. We each bring experiences, hopes, desires and partners bring the same - together but still existing as two separate people. Some decisions get made for the good of the couple/family. Sometimes we endeavor to make decisions that are the best individually. Whatever is good for us, the family will benefit as well. Even planning Thanksgiving is an exercise int he political - some people get their way more than others. We are bad at politics when we are completely self absorbed. When we are good at politics, we bring good! The point around political engagement is not to do away with the political but to make the political good. Jesus - the government would be on his shoulders - and because of that fact how should I live? Who should I be? Are we delivering GOOD NEWS??

Interviewer D

With what do you agree, why?

I agree that the evangelical church hasn't had these convos in the way that many churches have. It is the white evangelicals, not POC evangelicals. Frustration with white evangelicals not thinking of this world or engaging in this world. America church: how does each tradition engage in this work? Anabaptist for instance are engaged as a church, but but not politically in the ways we think of. The disconnect between SF and political formation …. problem is around the kind of SF is happening. If we are thinking of theology in an individualized way, and not in the collective community, it focuses so much on us individually that we are voting about what matters to us and not what matters in the whole. Positive things - no criminal record = my own righteousness. Criminal record, poor, sick, would lend people to think that they caused it some how. It is their own fault. In order for marginalized people to be included in our political visions, they need to be included in our theological visions. Divisiveness isn't consistently condemned and they celebrate division when they consider it to be a moral issue - there is no peacemaking. No compromising. Peacemaking doesn't just mean who can control and lay down so there is no conflict. Peacemaking involves conflict. How are we engaging in conflict. Moralistic, individualistic views… we can have differing opinions that can be valued in different circumstances. If we would grasp this, it would make a big difference in the conversation. We could come to realize that …What is great for me, may not be great for another neighbor. We don't have conflict skills - the fundamentalist church is always about the black and white - no grey. You are either in or you are out. PEACEMAKING. Can't have convo with someone who sees things dichotomously.

What do you disagree with, why? (see above).

What is missing? Define what a more unified church means. Is it churches who are open to ecumenical dialogue? More aligned in what we agree is right? More willing to work together in what we disagree on? What do I see as What is forming the American church. Define the American church. Identify what SF means.

What is your understanding of spiritual formation? things that form me spiritually; personally - attending services (chapel, church, Bible studies), constantly bringing to mind the things of God, learning, experience God prompting me through different messages or songs, bringing to mind something I didn't do as well as I should have in relationships, a practice that I need to take up. Intentional convo w/ other Xians about God. Diversity is formative - gave wide perspectives on what is important spiritually, and what God is "doing/moving".

What is your understanding of the term, human rights and political engagement? We see many communities not engaging in human rights. What are the processes that different communities go through that engage human rights issues and comparing who is making a difference and who is lacking? Human rights - ways for people to live equally, not determined by religion. Challenging to navigate what this means in reality. Even if people don't agree with LGBT rights religiously they should 100% agree civically. Equal access to healthcare, education, caring for families, jobs. Human rights no matter what someone has done (doesn't believe in the death penalty, due to measure of doubt, and ethics when we can rehabilitate - they have a human right to live). Everything we do is political - when we buy something, what are we supporting. All of these little things have political implications. Fair trade - chocolate, diamonds. We can't be dichotomous because these things are complicated. We don't always want to do the work of recognizing the complexity. This goes back to theology. If theology says we need to be pure, (we need to be perfect). Repentance - we keep going back to God. Purity culture around sex is a great mirror of the rest of our theology concerning out standing before God and moral uprightness; otherwise we are not able to see the capacity for the grey in our lives.

Do you see a connection between spiritual formation and engaging with human rights via politics? home church - American flag on the stage. Raised not very political. Raised in Christian foundations connected with America. This is first presidential election I voted in. I didn't have civics classes - raised fundamentalist, homeschooled. Didn't engage in politics growing up. Politics meant evacuations and rebels growing up - that's when things aren't working well.

Interviewer E

With what do you agree, why? We are always being formed by something; there for sure, esp right now in this current political climate. Push toward going inward but not in a self awareness way. Isolated and lonely with pandemic. We are not connecting with each other and def not connecting with people who are different from us. Must be intentional to not be comfortable. Needs awareness and guarded and fought for with the forces around us - being individualistic. Deep desires to grown and belong, our environment is not conclusive to that.

What do you disagree with, why? No

What is missing? Emphasis on internal and external. Action only - motives can be skewed, exhaustion can set in, easy to retreat into piety. Contemplation and action. All needs to stem from image of God in each person. Care about for ourselves belonging and we can see one another that way no matter what they think, or how different they are, it's easy to forget.

What is your understanding of spiritual formation?the shaping of our souls or character into something. As a Xian shaping us into image of the fullness of X beyond salvation.

What is your understanding of the term, human rights and political engagement? the value and dignity of all people before God and each other and politics engagement is the response to that. Justice in terms of the outflowing of the formation into Christ likeness. Participating with God and making things the way they should be.

Do you see a connection between spiritual formation and engaging with human rights via politics? absolutely. SF w/o an outward display of that is not spiritual formation.

Interviewer F

Regarding the above…

With what do you agree, why? It is too convoluted to answer genuinely and honestly. What does spiritual leaders mean? Who decides the term of spiritual leader? Self proclaimed? Para- church?

Denominational recognition? People with spiritual influence - absolutely there is a disconnect between spiritual formation. Yes, agree with outcome.

What do you disagree with, why? Root cause - disagree. not comprehensive enough. giving people the benefit of the doubt. Intentional and unintentional ignorance. *Agree with the broader definition of root cause above the NPO. The rest of that would fall under intentional ignorance.

What is missing? The statement in its entirety is accurate in intention but inaccurate in description because people who are not formed SF and PF cohesively then they have not formed in Christ. Or at least it is immature. Possibly Christian in name only and not Christ followers. Arriving there from life experience, living in other cultures. Being a student of God's Word, a scholar of Scripture. Reading in a scholarly way - hermeneutics, language, context. And also reading as a spiritual discipline. What is my purpose in studying? In wanting to know the God of the universe. Praying before reading Scripture. God gives us everything we need to know but not all there is to know. The power in reading and working it out together. Working out the Scripture together.

Moderate and a tick closer to conservative.

What is your understanding of spiritual formation? Reading Dallas Willard - SF is in the tradition of JC is the process of transformation of the inner most dimension - the heart, spirit, and will - t is being transformed in a way that it becomes the deeds of Christ done in the power of X. Even staying in the Gospels to see how Jesus acted it would call us to action.

What is your understanding of the term, human rights and political engagement?

Researching and voting. Bringing the presence of God into being a poll worker.

Do you see a connection between spiritual formation and engaging with human rights via politics? How can you read Scripture and justify not acting like opening your home to people who are homeless?

If you keep following my path, you should just keep getting blessings. Welcome the foreigner, care for women and children, the poor. Life is devoted to showing people how to live how God told us to live.

Sanctification begins at conversion and then constant sanctification - Nazarene.

*note - recognizing children as image of God; culturally different (while some people view children as gifts others view adding to humanity as overwhelming our environment).

Unrest in the last year, God is using it to sift out who wants to really follow X.

Define Christianity. Corporate? Individual? Barometer: we can't really know; it is God's business?

Our responsibility as spiritual leaders - Kingdom mindset - my desire is that when I am kneeling at God, that I bring as many people with me.

Appendix B– Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay

Biblical And Theological Foundations

Key Biblical Texts That Inspire/Influence The Npo

Genesis 1:27 - "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." NRSV

Isaiah 1:17 - "Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." NRSV

Micah 6:8 - "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" NRSV

Jeremiah 22:3 - "Thus says the LORD: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place." NRSV

Psalms 82:3 - "Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." NRSV

Spiritual Formation, Human Value, and Ethical Policy in the Biblical World

The partnership of theology and spiritual formation may be foundational in further considering the view of Imago Dei within humanity as well as the resulting ethical practices governing mutual human care according to Biblical principles. I would like to understand the connection between the practical implications of Imago Dei theologies, namely human value, as well as the practices stemming from those theologies, which are the formative experiences that shape our inner lives and outer praxis. I am also interested in discovering if and what our responsibility is to advocate for protective policies regarding human rights.

In traversing the landscape of biblical text and historical theological perspective, we find a consensus that humans are made in God's image. Yet, does this apply to everyone, or are only men created in God's image? I would like to explore who this applies to as well as what it means to be made in God's image. From there, I am curious what our responsibility toward humanity may be, particularly for those who experience marginalization socially, politically, economically, or culturally. I want to consider how we participate in themes of value and policy ethics in an equitable way using examples throughout Scripture as well as pondering potential best practices when it comes to advocating for humanity.

Textual Discussions

Imago Dei in Humanity

Fr. Richard Rohr signifies the importance of properly understanding Imago Dei in humanity and practice. His idea is that God has gifted connection to all creatures and that each one uniquely carries divine DNA.1 While he refers to this as original blessing/original innocence, Owen Barfield used the term"original participation".2 For Rohr, the Image of God bestowed upon humans is static and unmoveable. Regardless of the state or actions of humans, they cannot increase or decrease the Imago Dei within themselves. He states that one of main problems is that humans have been trying to ascribe value and determine who does or does mirror God's image. Rohr says, "It is pure and total gift, given equally to all."3 It is simply not us who decides who is worthy of justice, protection, and care because the very image of God is reflected in every single one of us.

Does Imago Dei apply to all of humanity? Biblical scholar, Dr. Nahum Sarma, eloquently answers with resounding equality. "Hebrew 'adam is a generic term for humankind… The resemblance of man to God bespeaks the infinite worth of a human being and affirms the inviolability of the human person."4 Men, women, children - all of humankind - are included. God already made the decision to bestow value, we get to receive it. Stephen Dilley and Nathan Palpant expound in recognizing the task of understanding dignity is a process, simplifying the qualifications for human particularity and how we continue to be curious about human nature and existence, yet affirming that humanity is set apart and superior to the rest of creation.5 Dilley and Palpant title this the "human exceptionalism" criterion, and the imago Dei, the view that humans reflect the divine image in a way unique in the created order."6 According to The Bible Knowledge Commentary, to be an Image-bearer means that we can partake in God's communicable attributes, specified as life, personality, truth, wisdom, love, holiness and justice. I appreciate the acknowledgment that our

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[1] Rohr, Richard. The Universal Christ : How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe. First ed. New York, NY: Convergent Books, 2019, 60-61

[2] Rohr, Richard. *The Universal Christ : How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe*.60-61; Barfield, Owen. *Saving the Appearances*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988, ch. 6

[3] Rohr, Richard. *The Universal Christ : How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe*. 60-61

[4] Sarna, Nahum M. *Genesis = Be-reshit : The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation*. 1st ed. JPS Torah Commentary. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 12

[5] Dilley, Stephen ; Palpant, Nathan J. "Human Exceptionalism and the Imago Dei: The Tradition of Human Dignity." In *Human Dignity in Bioethics*, 33-60. Routledge, 2013, 20

[6] Dilley, Stephen ; Palpant, Nathan J. "Human Exceptionalism and the Imago Dei: The Tradition of Human Dignity." In *Human Dignity in Bioethics*, 33-60. Routledge, 2013, 20

imaging God does not translate into us doing so perfectly.7 There is also the embodied aspect of Imago Dei. Bruce Waltke and Cathi Fredericks offer the perspective of D.J.A. Clines, who suggests God "gave people ears to show that he hears the cry of the afflicted and eyes to show that he sees the plight of the pitiful (Ps.94:9)."8

James Bryan Smith quotes Euguene Peterson in making the case that we have to understand ourselves to offer grace to our community. He calls us "splendid, never-to-be-duplicated stories of grace" and goes on to make the point that it's when we let this truth sink in for ourselves that we are able to attend to the needs of others.9 Perhaps we are judging people based on what we think their worth is, because we are using outside factors to determine our own worth, rather than trusting that God initiated Imago Dei within us.

We can be mindful of the truth that we are made in God's image and understand we have a responsibility to live accordingly, but what are the formative experiences that emerge from the Imago Dei identity? I am reminded of St. Ignatius' spiritual exercises which begin with an awareness of God's love.10 The exercises serve as an invitation for theology to form us and lead us to knowing the truth of who we are in the depths of our souls. If we cannot pour from an empty cup, perhaps only when we know we are loved can we extend this grace to our fellow humans and discover how to treat humans ethically as part of our relationship with God and living into these attributes with our community.

Ethics - Themes of Value, Justice, and Policy with Imago Dei as the Roots

Throughout Scripture, we find themes of value and justice as seen in Isaiah 1:17, "Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" and Micah 6:8, "what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" God invites us into relationships where "individuals act justly (be fair in their dealings with others), love mercy (hesed, "loyal love"), and walk humbly... Doing justice "is a way of living mercy."11 In James 1:27, "Religion that is pure and undefiled… is this: to care for orphans and

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[7] Walvoord, John F., Zuck, Roy B. "*The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*" (Cook Communications Ministries, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Cook Communications, Paris, Ontario. Kingsway Communications Ltd, Eastbourne, England, 1983, 2004), 29

[8] Waltke, Bruce K., and Fredricks, Cathi J. *Genesis : A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001, 65-66

[9] Smith, James Bryan. *The Good and Beautiful Community : Following the Spirit, Extending Grace, Demonstrating Love*. Smith, James Bryan. Apprentice Series. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2010, 72

[10] Warner, Larry. *Journey With Jesus: Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010, 63

[11] Walvoord, John F., Zuck, Roy B. "*The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*", 1489

widows in their distress". Ultimately this responsibility to care for others is found in an invitation to love, "love your neighbor as yourself" in Matthew 22:39.

Recognizing human dignity is the starting point of love in action. The Hebrew Bible, Stoicism and Christianity have all contributed to the ideology of human dignity. The conversation of human dignity and rights has been integral in ethical policy, both here and internationally since the 18th century.12 Augustine noted that God is searching for people who define justice "according to divine rules, not human ones."13 Considering church history, the ideas of human value based on human judgment, not on God's act of deeming worth, have infiltrated the church and have marred the idea that all humans are included in Imago Dei. "Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical Rerum Novarum (1891), attributed dignity to "the Christian character" of people and not to mere human nature...The spiritual shift left much space for the endorsement and toleration of abuses that are otherwise considered profoundly offensive to human dignity - capital punishment, torture, prostitution, prosecution of heretics, and holy wars."14

Kate Bowler wrote on the dangerous thread within American Christianity that recognizes wellness and fortune as a sign of divine favor.15 Bowler argues the prosperity gospel measures faith alone as the component that leads to health, wealth, and victory thus discounting one's political, social, or economic standing. This view "inscribes materiality with spiritual meaning" wherein adherents are promised blessings in the form of wealth, health, and victory if their faith is strong enough.16 When the church ascribes human dignity only to those who are blessed, this ideology has a profoundly negative effect on the way those who are vulnerable are viewed. Instead of being moved by compassion, are we blaming the victim for not being holy enough, marking the vulnerable as less dignified? I doubt this is what God had in mind when inviting us to love God and love our neighbor, particularly calling out those most in need. Humans do not have to earn dignity by any account of faithfulness or character.

In considering the relationships between theology, politics, and ethics, I would be remiss to not mention sovereignty. According to Joshua Daniel and Rick Elgendy, "Because of the historical and theoretical ties between the human sovereign and God, political theologians are often concerned

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[12] Barilan, Yechiel Michael. *Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility : The New Language of Global Bioethics and Biolaw*, 23

[13] Atkins, E. M., and Dodaro, Robert. *Augustine Political Writings*. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 207

[14] Barilan, Yechiel Michael. *Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility : The New Language of Global Bioethics and Biolaw*, 48-49

[15] Bowler, Kate. *Blessed a History of the American Prosperity Gospel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 7

[16] Bowler, Kate. *Blessed a History of the American Prosperity Gospel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 7-8

to elaborate the scope of divine sanction for human authority and the relation between "cities," "swords," or "kingdoms" imagined as overlapping but in tension. Other theorists who often call themselves social, religious, and theological ethicists - have returned again and again to questions of sovereignty and responsibility for the management of social institutions."17 I would like to consider our responsibility to explore and respond to God's invitation to us to love, namely within the purview of God's kingdom.

David Gushee describes Jesus' preaching as "intending to convey that God acts to bring justice, peace, healing, inclusion of the excluded, and rescue from oppression and suffering. God is "saving" the world in Christ, understood as a holistic salvation that meets the full range of human needs as we experience them in this sinful world...The kingdom of God is therefore both spiritual and political… Christians work for the kingdom through all that we do… on behalf of the victimized, the oppressed, the tortured, the wrongly imprisoned, the sex slaves, those suffering in war… The message of the kingdom is not a message that must pull us out of engagement in public life and politics."18 There is no lack of vulnerable and oppressed people among us. The need is there, and we have an invitation as kingdom people to pay attention.

As described by David Gushee and Glen Stassen, Jesus set the example of living into a kingdom practice which would include measures of "peacemaking, healing, community building, and deliverance" particularly toward "the great social songs of violence, injustice, domination, and exclusion, sins that have crushed the lives of millions.19

Gushee and Stassen advocate for a societal return to attend to social sin in addition to personal sin, which would lead to both personal and collective deliverance. Jesus preached a message of peace and justice in the midst of "political subjugation and economic exploitation" that promoted exclusivity; The invitation of Jesus was inclusive and transformative, offering freedom "in a world filled with political, economic, and legal structures of sin and various arenas of human life."20 Perhaps before jumping into action, we have an invitation to reflect on both personal and social sin and seek repentance. This is the thin space between theology and formation, allowing what we are learning to be transformative and both are integral in laying the foundation of why we care as Christians about ethics and human rights.

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[17] Daniel, Joshua, and Elgendy, Rick. *Renegotiating Power, Theology, and Politics*. New Approaches to Religion and Power. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 3

[18] Gushee, David P. *The Future of Faith in American Politics The Public Witness of the Evangelical Center*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008, 9-10

[19] Gushee, David P., and Stassen, Glen Harold. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Second ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016, 32

[20] Gushee, David P., and Stassen, Glen Harold. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 34

If we want to engage in areas of ethical policy, where do we start? Gushee and Stassen offer guidelines, called kingdom ethics, that discern ethical positions which lead to "deliverance, peace, justice, healing, inclusion in community, joy, and God's presence (and) whether it advances justice for the disinherited and would be good news from their perspective" as well as an encouragement to "listen for the voice of the oppressed themselves and not just those who would like to help them."21 If Christians fail to provide ethical solutions that actually benefit those we are serving, then we are merely serving ourselves at least and at worst, causing further harm and not bringing the right kind of change.

We must put into practice what we believe. Stanley Grenz says that Christian theologians need to be committed to applying theology to real life situations as well as to endeavor into Christian ethics."22 Grenz says "humans are the special recipients of God's love" and that it is this love which "forms the context for the repeated biblical intimation that God takes up the cause of the destitute and oppressed" and because of this, "God calls us to be his instruments in bringing about the divine vision of love, justice, and righteousness for all humankind."23

Synthesis of Themes, Values, and Commitments

Stanley Hauerwas insists upon the union of theology and ethics, saying they "cannot be separated; indeed, theology is first and foremost an exercise in practical reason. Again, this is not to say that theology is about anything else than the truth. But the truth it is about involves us as creatures of God, made in God's image, even if falled. So we cannot speak this truth without it having worked truthfully in us. Speaker and what is spoken cannot be separated if Christians' claims about God and God's world have the purchase of truth. "Witness" is the crucial grammar that upholds and enfolds these claims… if witness is only spoken of theoretically, it empties out."24 Hauerwas recognizes the significant contribution of Christian ethicist, Reinhold Niebuhr, who, among others, had a primary objective to convince Christ followers that held theology has political implications. "Niebuhr reminded Christians that we do not live in a world in which sin can be eliminated, but we nonetheless must seek to establish the tentative harmonies and provisional equities possible in any historical situation."25

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[21] Gushee, David P., and Stassen, Glen Harold. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 38

[22] Grenz, Stanley J. *Theology for the Community of God*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000, 25

[23] Grenz, Stanley J. *Theology for the Community of God*, 76

[24] Hauerwas, Stanley. *Approaching the End : Eschatological Reflection on Church, Politics and Life*. London, England ; Norfolk, England: SCM Press, 2013, 43

[25] Hauerwas, Stanley. *Approaching the End : Eschatological Reflection on Church, Politics and Life*, 73-74

We are not going to align theology, ethics, and politics perfectly, but it doesn't mean we don't practice. John Langan offers some perspective, "Like the demands of religious faith, the moral and political requirements of human rights, when comprehensively understood, are likely to be so extensive that churches and religious agencies, as well as government and political movements, will surely fall short of the righteousness of God and the obligations we owe to those who, as human beings of whatever persuasion or origin, are in the image of God. Both religious and political actors will be, in the classic Lutheran formulation, simul justus et peccator, at once both just and sinful - and thus is need of both affirmation and forgiveness."26 Perhaps the invitation before us is found in Fr. Rohr's words, "The true and essential work of all religion is to help us recognize and recover the divine image in everything… until all things know who they are."27

Topic History

Scripture teaches us to love God and our neighbor, but what does it mean to practice love to our neighbor? This is the discussion of theological ethics. For Arthur Holmes, forming an ethics requires both theological and philosophical efforts using Scripture as a guiding format.[28] Scripture and tradition offer guidance, but neither can solve every moral dilemma. If we consider making modern day decisions based on generalities in the Bible, "then we have invoked a structure of ethical thought that distinguishes general principles from more specific matters and that employs modes of moral reasoning" which moves into the arena of ethical theory.[29] Ethics helps us understand not only moral rules, but the exceptions to those rules. It also delves into the individual and collective moral responsibility of humanity. [30] Perhaps spiritual formation, in addition to theology and philosophy, also plays a role in understanding our responsibility to engage in ethical policy.

Plato & Augustine

Plato introduced us to the four Cardinal virtues: temperance, courage, wisdom, and justice. Ronald Nash defines the virtues: "Temperance or self-control is the proper virtue of the passions. Courage means fortitude in the face of adversity, which is what the spirited part of the human soul requires. Wisdom means excellence in selecting the proper means to an end; its relation to the rational part of the soul should be obvious. The fourth virtue, what Plato calls justice, is the overarching virtue

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[26] Langan, John. "Contrasting and Uniting Theology and Human Rights." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 26, no. 2 (1998): 249-55, 254.

[27] Rohr, Richard. *The Universal Christ : How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe*, 59

[28]Holmes, Arthur F. *Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions*. Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press Second Edition, 2007, 14

[29] Holmes, Arthur F. *Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions*. 15

[30] Holmes, Arthur F. *Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions*. 15

that is present when humans are temperate, courageous, and wise."31 Augustine essentially believed that the four cardinal virtues were vices for pagans, motivated by selfish pride, unless one is a Christian believer, then the motivation is bringing love and honor to God.32 The idea, "Love God and do as what thou wilt… let the root of love be within, of this root can nothing spring but what is good", is Augustine's ethical theory.33

Nash assumes that all humans are image bearers, and states this is a foundational tenet of Christianity. His statement makes the point that the question of who our neighbor is would be inclusive of everyone, all Image Bearers. He says this explains why humans "are capable of reasoning, love, and God - consciousness" and why we have moral capacity. "Because of the image of God, we should expect to find that the ethical principles of the Christian worldview reflect what all of us at the deepest level of our moral being know to be true."34 Nash also recognizes the effect of the presence of sin which has "distorted the image of God and explains why humans turn away from God and the moral law."35 For Augustine, God's holy character is foundational in the invitation for humanity to mirror ethical morality, thus "there is no room for ethical relativism."36

Augustine's ethics were guided by law, love, character (virtue), and well-being.37 The invitation is to love God, and love our neighbor. "Augustine rejects any suggestion that law and love can be antithetic. No Christian should ignore the place of law in the moral order. The Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20 are divine commands that provide indispensable guidance for human life. Another essential ethical passage in the Bible includes Jesus' words in Matthew 22, words that summarize the first four commandments, our duties to God, under the single commandment "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." The last six commandments, our duties to other humans, are summarized under the commandment "Love your neighbor as yourself." The apostle Paul then throws additional light on the relationship between law and love when he teaches in Romans 13 that love is the fulfillment of the law. God's law identifies sinful actions and tell humans how love ought to be manifested."38 Theology and ethics are aligned.

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[31] Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. Grand Rapids, MI. Zondervan, 1999, 89

[32] Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. 162

[33] Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. 163

[34] Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. 161

[35] Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. 162

[36] Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. 162

[37] Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. 161

[38] Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. 162

Aquinas

Augustine and Thomas Aquinas agreed that both law and morality governs the world, and that physical and moral order contribute to the well-being of humanity. Conversely, sin pains our spirit, heart, and soul.[39] Aquinas teaches that God has given both virtues and laws to guide both internally and externally, and shares the outcome of practicing morality is that both our works and character are perfected in a way that affects our mind and will.[40] The notion of practicing is actively engaging in spiritual formation, and not only theory. Aquinas separated the cardinal virtues (prudence, courage, temperance, justice) and theological virtues (faith, hope, love) but maintained that love was the foundational virtue that spurred us on to other virtues. He taught that "cardinal virtues are natural in the sense that they are known not by special revelation, such as Scripture, but from general revelation in the created nature of things. The cardinal virtues are relevant to all humans, not just Christians."[41] If all humans are included in regards to Image Bearing, are all humans responsible to one another?

Under the general term of law, Aquinas created the categories of eternal, natural, human, and divine law. Nash parces out the definitions, stating that all of creation is under eternal law, including moral and physical law. Natural law, however, solely applies to humans and is an integral part of human nature. "The content of the natural law corresponds to humankind's basic inclinations when they are not corrupted or impeded by sin. Since Thomas believed our natural human tendency inclines toward the good, the most general statement of the natural law is to do good and avoid evil."[42] The efforts made by humanity to self govern is an example of human law.[43] When it comes to divine law, Aquinas held that there are two sides to God's moral law. Scripture reveals supernatural law whereas human reason can be connected to natural law. These laws are not at odds, because both are sourced by God. Nash importantly notes, "while Aquinas suggests that natural law is for unbelievers and God's divine law is for believers, this is too simple. Life is full of circumstances when believers for one reason or another can be aided by their knowledge of the natural law and when unbelievers can be instructed in the content of revealed morality."[44] This begs the question of how we are formed spiritually outside of theology.

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[39] Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. 182-3

[40] Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. 183

[41] Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. 183-4

[42] Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. 184

[43] Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. 185

[44] Nash, Ronald H. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. 185

Key Voices

Stanley Hauerwas & Samuel Wells

Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells are leading voices in the area of Christian ethics and wrote an article, *Why Christian Ethics Was Invented*. Hauerwas and Wells describe Ernst Troeltsch's views on ethics from his work, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*. Troeltsch taught that Jesus' preaching, and thus connecting Scripture and ethics, was not influenced by a social movement. He described early Christianity as apolitical and disconnected with any social issues of the ancient world. Although he acknowledges Jesus preached to the oppressed, he views Jesus as concerned with matters of religion more than attempts to change social order.[45] Troeltsch recognizes that Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, but argues that it was not an attempt to improve society or bring relief to the suffering. He assumes that ethics are more concerned about religious life, both collective and personal, and not about social questions. Hauerwas and Wells refute Troeltsch's position.

Ethics, to be consistent, need to be understood and agreed upon by everyone via moral obligation and reason. For Immanuel Kant, an ethic would be a universal law shared by humans all over the world who have different cultures, beliefs, and histories.[46] Kant's ethic provided hope that it may be possible to resolve conflicts without people who disagreed going to war with one another over differences and instead pursue a pathway to peace. Kant wanted to show that Christian thought was in line with moral law.[47] Kant also held that it is "possible for the autonomous person to identify Christ as the embodiment of the moral law" even though he maintained that the historical Jesus was not the crux of ethics.[48]

At times, the ethics of Jesus were contrasted with legalism. "The debates of the Reformation concerning the relation between law and gospel became the way the relation between Jesus' ethic and that of Judaism were understood. It is against this background that Christian ethics became an

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[45] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, 39-40

[46] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, 30

[47] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, 32

[48] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 32

identifiable discipline distinct from theology."[49] The Social Gospel was propelled across America by Protestant liberal theologians, including Troeltsch, as they attempted to combine the teachings of Jesus and the ethics of Kant.[50]

Hauerwas and Wells utilize the work of H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* in his reflection of Troeltsch's work. "Niebuhr sought to offer a richer canvas to display the variety of ethical "types" that Troeltsch had provided. While Troeltsch had presented a threefold typology of church, sect, and mystical forms of addressing the social order, for Niebuhr there are five types of Christian ethics: Christ against culture (1 John, Tertullian, and Tolstoy); Christ of culture (Gnosticism, John Locke, A. Ritschl, Rauschenbusch); Christ above culture (Justin Martyr, Clement, Thomas Aquinas); Christ and culture in paradox (Paul, Marcion, Luther, Kierkegaard); and Christ the transformer of culture (the Gospel of John, F. D. Maurice). Niebuhr's five types were extremely persuasive, providing a way for the Christian ethicist not only to characterize the "ethics" of past Christian theologians, but also to characterize various contemporary alternatives."[51] Yet, Hauerwas and Wells offer a different perspective on Niebuhr's work.

John Howard Yoder argues against Neibuhr's perspective saying that his types don't take into account the practices of the early church, and calls his views unorthodox. Yoder writes Niebuhr's view of Christ and culture has a Kantian bent that expresses the finitude of humanity, and criticizes his view of the Trinity reminding us that Father, Son, and Spirit are not separate, but "that in the Incarnation and in the continuing life of the church under the Spirit there is but one God."[52] This criticism attempts to show that ""Christian ethics" has become – indeed, for the 200 years of its life has, perhaps, always been – the story of how the Church has set aside its practice and adopted a Kantian epistemology in an effort to secure relevance and consensus. It has been so much taken for granted that the Church had a fundamental stake in the sustenance of liberal social orders that it has gone without question that the Christianity applicable to Christian ethics was that outlined by Kant and characterized by Ritschl and Troeltsch – a Stoic inner conviction of human dignity and individual autonomy, with a sense of finitude and an orientation toward common striving, sometimes called brotherhood. There is no significant place in such an account for the concrete practices of the Church – practices such as baptism, preaching, interceding, breaking bread, being reconciled. Such practices require the Church to explore what it means to worship Father, Son, and

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[49] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 32

[50] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 32

[51] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 33

[52] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 33

Holy Spirit – not just as concepts, but as habits, attitudes, and forms of life. When practices such as baptism are ignored on the grounds that baptism has nothing to do with "ethics," then the history of Christian ethics cannot help but become an account of what this or that historical figure said about this or that moral problem."[53] Perhaps it all belongs and could be thought of as connected instead of separate.

We have many examples of Christians throughout history seeking to live a faithful life, "from Clement on the problem of riches, Augustine's "On the Morals of the Catholic Church" and portions of *The City of God*, examples from monasticism such as Benedict of Nursia's *Rule*, Bernard of Clairvaux's "On the Love of God" and Eckhart's "Sermons" to illustrate the "ethics of mysticism," followed by selections from Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Baxter, Barclay, Butler, Wesley, Edwards, Kierkegaard, and Rauschenbusch… But such a selection cannot help but give the impression that "ethics" is a subject that can be distinguished if not isolated from the liturgical life, daily habits, and elementary practices of the Church. Beach and Niebuhr give the impression that the study of Christian ethics is the study of ideas about ethics by theologians."[54] Hauerwas and Wells believe the criticism is important because the initial story was taken out of context, withholding that these Christians were engaged in their own tradition and practices. Theology and ethics cannot be separated from the ecclesiology.[55] As we look at the accounts of Christians throughout history, particularly from the early church, it is helpful to understand that they were concerned more with developing theology than ethics and likely would not have been able to distinguish between the two.[56] The work of theology and ethics are tightly bound.

Sometimes conflict invites historical writing, and other times it is the ordinary. Haurwas and Wells write, "We do not doubt that scholarly divisions of labor can often be of service to the Church. But we have argued that attempts to distinguish ethics from theology in modernity have distorted the character of Christian convictions and practices."[57] As we look back at these historical Christian writings, even when focus is on theology, we find social context, cultural traditions, and political

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[53] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 33-4

[54] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 33-34

[55] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 34

[56] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 35

[57] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 34

power, and religious life as part of the canvas of events. They emphasize, "as important as Augustine may be for the development of theology, far more important is the eucharistic practice that sustained the Church that made Augustine such an important theologian. That is why this book is focused on the practices that make the Church the Church rather than on the individual theologians that were formed by those practices."[58]

Haurwas and Wells offer, "If ethics names the process through which people acquire habits and the virtues that habits make possible, in ways shaped by the determinative narratives shaping a community, then the "ethics of Christianity" cannot help but be different from the ethics of Plato and Aristotle."[59] Christian ethics include active participation, rather than only scholarly debates, meaning that ethics is more of what we do than what we think. They point to the action of the Gospel, particularly of the action of Christ and the invitation for us to follow. Hauerwas and Wells aspire to recover the "key practices of the Church, and showing how those practices constitute the most significant Christian witness in the face of oppression ***and*** indifference, blind injustice ***and*** bland tolerance… This means that theological ethics is a discipline that reflects on the practices of the Church, seeking to understand how those practices shape the character of Christians.".[60] This is the work of putting ethics into practice.

Madeleine Albright

If we separate scholarly arguments from the practical aspects of actually serving people, perhaps we miss an important perspective. Both theory and practice are necessary. Madeleine Albright offers her perspective on ethics within the purview of her experience as Secretary of State in her book ***The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs***. She offers several examples of world leaders and their views on theology and ethics. It is interesting to see her perspective especially since she is in the area of policy. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, saw mutual respect and offering help to one another as a primary aspect of his religious faith. Masaryk held that although faith helped to encourage morality, one could be moral without having a belief in God. Albright shares that she aligns with those views as well, saying "It is a perversion of faith to turn

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[58] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 35

[59] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 35

[60] Hauerwas, Stanley, and Wells, Samuel. "Why Christian Ethics Was Invented." In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 28-38. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 35

religion into a source of conflict and hate; it also creates severe problems for America and for the world."[61]

Albright offers an example of early Presidents navigating theology and the qualifications for leading a virtuous life. "The early American presidents, for example, were firm believers in a divine being, but not wedded to the finer points of church doctrine."[62] Albright says that John Adams, a Unitarian, did not consider the doctrine of the Trinity to be of importance. Adams asserted that liberty was a gift from God, while democracy was a creation of man.[63] Albright also offered the perspective of Thomas Jefferson, who studied both science and ethics. Jefferson "dismissed the Christian clergy as "the greatest obstacles to the advancement of the real doctrines of Jesus".[64] The weight of this assumption is sobering.

Are there ways to practice ethical theology through varying lenses? Seneca chief, Red Jacket, shared his frustration with a Christian missionary who assumed Native Americans lacked a connection with God because it looked different. Red Jacket said, "Brother, you say there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it?... We also have a religion… It teaches us to be thankful for all the favors we receive, to love each other, and to be united."[65] The doctrine was different, but Red Jacket was essentially sharing that Native Americans, too, had a way of weaving spirituality and ethics together for the good of the people. Yet, Native Americans were treated terribly, as were African Americans beginning with the practice of slavery.

These atrocities were often done in the name of God with Christians using Scripture to justify their horrific actions. Religion is present, but ethic policy is not. Albright offered a poignant example, "If true Christianity consists in carrying out in our daily lives the teachings of Christ, who will say that we are commanded to civilize with dynamite and proselyte with sword?... Imperialism finds no warrant in the Bible. The command, 'Go ye in into all the world and preach the gospel to every

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[61] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*. 1st Harper Perennial ed. New York: Harper Perennial, 2007, 13

[62] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 17

[63] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 17

[64] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 17

[65] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 21

creature' has no Gatling gun attachment."[66] Church and state may be separate but theology, ethics, and policy are still very much intertwined. Do we have a history of claiming moral superiority, specifically choosing which Scriptures to adhere to in order help people, while exploiting other Scriptures to justify harm? "George Kennan has warned that for Americans to see themselves "as the center of political enlightenment and as teachers to a great part of the rest of the world [is] unthought-through, vainglorious and undesirable."[67] At times, Americans and Christians seem to have believed that we are due exceptions.

Secretary Albright shared a piece of leadership advice that would be beneficial for the theology and ethics alike. She said, "To make smart decisions, our leaders must begin with good information. When I was secretary of state, I started each day in my kitchen reading newspapers over a cup of coffee. By the time I arrived in my office on the seventh floor of the State Department, a packet of information from the department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research would be on my desk. The bureau's analysis was especially good on the history and diplomatic context of particular situations: who was doing what to whom, why, and since when."[68] Have we started with good information? Particularly, do we gather information that includes Scripture, tradition, reason, experience, ethical considerations, and hearing from the perspective of all parties involved and who will be affected?

It seems that many of the issues we face, like how to love God and how to practically love our fellow humankind, are incredibly complex. Hence, why we have so many varying perspectives. Do we quickly put ourselves in one camp or another, considering the opposing view as completely faulty due to our own half- baked notions? For Albright, she sought out to strike a balance. "I did not understand how we could possibly steer a steady course without principles to help guide us. What does this mean? To me, morality is measured by the impact of actions on lives."[69]

Albright shared her hope of inviting all of America along as she toured the world. She described the terrible conditions in which people lived and felt certain that America would respond with generosity if only they could see. "I did not want to sound like a bleeding heart in describing the basis of our foreign policy. So as soon as I returned home, I would enumerate all the practical reasons Americans should care: because we had an interest in stability, in prosperous overseas markets, in strengthening the rule of law, in extending our influence, and in burnishing our

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[66] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 25

[67] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 31

[68] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 48

[69] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 50

reputation."[70] I can't help but wonder if her desire to not sound like a bleeding heart has anything to do with the perception of a woman in leadership. This consideration is reminiscent of the foundational work from Genesis of humankind being created in the image of God. Perhaps the ways in which we individually reflect God's character, particularly the way women reflect the image of God, may be something to explore. Is there a gap in the ways that theology and ethics have been shaped thus far throughout history because the dominant voices have been those of men and the perspective of women has not always been considered?

In addition to figuring out how to best care for those immediately around us, in our country for this purpose, we also need to consider what the priorities are regarding care for the world at large. According to political theorist and philosopher, Michael Walzer, "A country's first priority is to protect the life and liberty of its own citizens; if it fails to do that, it cannot put itself into a position to help others. A country's second duty is not to inflict harm. Its third is, when possible, to help people avoid man-made and natural disasters. Its fourth is to assist those who want aid in building better and less repressive political systems."[71] Whether speaking of here or abroad, Albright offers policy guidelines to achieve moral results. "A policy-maker must both want to do what is right and be able to predict what that might be. Ideally, he or she would have the conscience of a saint, the wisdom of a philosopher, and the presence of a prophet. In reality, we stumble along as best we can despite shortages in all three qualities."[72] There has been some disagreement in whether Jesus participated in political philosophy but these elements mentioned are reminiscent of the process of growing in spiritual formation and navigating the complexities of living a life that honors God and serves people.

An example of a practical policy considering ethics and theology is that of the possibility of the moral acceptability of war. Taking into account the atrocities Roman citizens were enduring by invaders, Saint Augustine came to the conclusion that war could be a justified action for a Christian because it was in an effort to "defend the vulnerable other."[73] The doctrine of "Just War" was later developed by Saint Thomas Aquinas and Hugo Grotius, who founded international law. The criteria they developed to determine what makes a war just is foundational to both international legal documents as well as in the Geneva Convention. These guidelines ask the question of morality both before a war begins and while it is being fought. "Generally speaking, a "just war" is one

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[70] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 51

[71] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 51

[72] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 57

[73] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 58

carried out by a competent authority with moral intentions for a cause that is right. The effort must have a reasonable chance of success, with the expectation that it will result in no greater harm than the injury that produced it."[74]

Not everyone agrees that war can be moral or just. Hauerwas believes that pacifism and professing Christianity go hand in hand. It should be noted that Hauerwas is speaking as a theologian and ethicist. Secretary Albright was in a much different position. While she understands Hauerwas' logic, she does not agree with him. "No story is more uplifting than Christ's example in dying while forgiving at the same time. But the whole point of the doctrine of "just war" is that military actions are sometimes necessary for moral reasons. Hauerwas rejects the doctrine because, he says, it has been used to justify too many wars, and he is right about that. However, a sound doctrine does not become discredited because it is, on occasion, misused."[75] Secretary Albright desired to participate in peacemaking, but pacifism was not necessarily the conclusion at which she arrived. "Attending church while in office, every time I heard "Blessed are the peacemakers," I took the words deeply to heart. I cherish peace and admire Gandhi, the Quakers, and other proponents of nonviolent resistance; but when I consider Hitler and the many episodes of ethnic cleansing and genocide, I cannott agree that nonviolence is always the best moral course."[76]

Mark Twain's War Prayer brought up the ethical issue of praying for victory in a war, and I supposed assuming that God is on our side for the win. "Even to pray for victory in war is tantamount to asking that horrors be visited upon the innocent of the opposing side. The duty of leadership, however, is inescapable: to try to make moral choices despite the immense difficulty of doing so, and at the risk of being wrong."[77] Wars are fought over all manner of issues, but when a religious component is involved, according to studies, the wars "last longer and are fought more savagely than other conflicts."[78] Albright goes on to share it is too simple to blame religion as the root of our relational difficulties. She compares religion to a powerful force but that the power is not in and of religion itself but in the actions taken by those who are inspired, for better or worse,

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[74] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 58-9

[75] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 59-60

[76] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 60

[77] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 61

[78] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 65-66

by their faith.[79] This is precisely where a holistic theological ethic and good, full information is imperative.

Faith has the potential to both unify and divide, so Albright suggests that policy-makers have the task of harnessing the unifying aspects of religion and the foundational requirement for this task is considering the study of spiritual matters as a worthy cause. "Too often, as the Catholic theologian Bryan Hehir notes, "there is an assumption that you do not have to understand religion in order to understand the world. You need to understand politics, strategy, economics and law, but you do not need to understand religion. If you look at standard textbooks of international relations or the way we organize our foreign ministry, there's no place where a sophisticated understanding of religion as a public force in the world is dealt with."[80] Albright emphasizes that it is of utmost importance to consider religious principles and the correlation to policy, seeing as how faith can influence how individuals think and feel about issues, and then act on those beliefs.[81]

Secretary Albright, in considering faith through the lens of policy, understands that we are made in God's image and intimately connected with one another, even if we live a world apart. Consequently, she says that because of this we are responsible to our neighbors. This principle "provides both a solid foundation for religion and a respectable basis for organizing the affairs of secular society."[82]

Sarah Stewart Holland & Beth Silvers

Sarah Stewart Holland and Beth Silvers host a podcast called Pantsuit Politics, and they also wrote *I Think You're Wrong (But I'm Listening: A Guide To Grace Filled Political Conversations)*. Utilizing their political and law backgrounds, Holland and Silvers write and discuss faith and policy, emphasizing the importance of having nuanced conversations around divisive topics. They value hard conservations where opposing viewpoints challenge our philosophies. Stewart and Holland suggest that "having calm, kind conversations from opposing perspectives is more than possible - it is a spiritual imperative".[83] They pose that we should take off our partisan jerseys, so to speak, representing a specific political affiliation in favor of beneficial policy making. "Removing our

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[79] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 65-66

[80] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 65-66

[81] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 65-66

[82] Albright, Madeleine Korbel., Woodward, William, and Clinton, Bill. *The Mighty and the Almighty : Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, 72-73

[83] Holland, Sarah Stewart, and Beth Silvers. *I Think You're Wrong (but I'm Listening): a Guide to Grace-Filled Political Conversations*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2020, xiii

jerseys can help us understand not only what laws we want passed but also what kind of people we are and what kind of country we want to live in. It is essential to living out our values… The central tenet of every tradition of faith or virtue is that we are all one and should treat each other lovingly."[84]

One way to do this is to remember God's grace in our life and the lives' of our fellow humans. According to Frederick Buechner, "The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn't have been complete without you."[85] If we can remember that every person we encounter is deeply loved by God and reflects something of the Imago Dei, perhaps we will compassionately listen to the pleas of those around us, see one another as fellow citizens instead of adversaries, and together, seek ethical solutions to the problems we face.

Synthesis and Conclusion

Judeo - Christian Scriptures emphasize justice, but what does the pursuit of justice entail? Even if we theologically agree that we have a responsibility to respond justly to our fellow humankind, what do our collective actions show? Christians who profess to adhere to Scripture and follow Christ, are divided on issues like war and capital punishment. Often, these issues are more complex than the issue itself because real people are involved. It is further complicated when culturally we ascribe human dignity to some and not others. Society does not collectively act as if everyone reflects the image of God.

Perhaps one of the most foundational considerations of how we treat one another, is that of how we view the other - and this is certainly debated. If we believe that we are made in the image of God, and that each person is bestowed with goodness that reflects that of our Creator, it would be easier for us to see good in the other. Yet, maybe even deeper than the question of how we see the other, is how we see ourselves. This is complicated, in part because we all are in the process of learning and growing, and hopefully coming to understand how deeply we are loved. If we cannot lead others where we have not gone, then the task of treating others ethically and justly will need to start in our own hearts. We will need to individually understand that we are created in God's image, and receive that we are deeply loved by God before we can offer this to others.

This is what James Bryan Smith and Eugene Peterson were discussing when they described us as stories of grace. If we are attempting to evaluate our own worth on human merits, we will evaluate others' worth on their merits, instead of mutually resting in God. We have significant inner work to do, in addition to aligning our lives with the justice values we find in Scripture, and both are responses to the invitation to love. Jesus' values of justice, peacemaking, and healing are inclusive

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[84] Holland, Sarah Stewart, and Beth Silvers. *I Think You're Wrong (but I'm Listening): a Guide to Grace-Filled Political Conversations*, 46

[85] Holland, Sarah Stewart, and Beth Silvers. *I Think You're Wrong (but I'm Listening): a Guide to Grace-Filled Political Conversations*, 90

and we need to further understand how to live these practices out, engaging in both personal and collective actions to do so. Instead of swinging the pendulum to extreme polarizing positions, one way to further consider our response is to pause and reflect, taking into account as much as possible, all sides of the argument. As a culture who is immersed in social media, everyone is often racing to be the first to respond to the issue of the day. Perhaps our perspective is wide but lacking depth which leads to shallow responses that aren't thought out well, much less have any capacity to be executed well. This takes thought and reflection, so that we may apply theology to life in a way that brings ethical solutions, and this is where spiritual formation is particularly useful.

Reflecting and taking action to engage responsibly inevitably means that we are going to falter along the way. None of us have perfect perspective and we certainly will fall short but even so, we have an invitation to practice ethical theology that requires we show up. It is important to align our theological and religious beliefs with our ethical actions and practices. Further research is needed to discover what practices would be helpful to individuals and the church to ensure that ethical theology is both a practiced habit and a scholarly concept. It seems to me that both have their place in this discussion. Good information would include ideas and practice: learning and doing. Perhaps we need the collaboration of theologians, policy makers, passtors, social workers, and the voices of the vulnerable, etc. to come up with ethical solutions that would take into account the purpose of each role and that are advantageous and loving to all. I think this will require humility to admit where we have gotten it wrong both historically and currently, courage to fail and get back up again, and a willingness to be formed into Christlikeness.

Perhaps, like the blind man asking to be healed, we need to ask God to help us see how we have been complicit, actively or passively, in a system that harms others. Or, maybe we have eyes to see but we intentionally cross to the other side of the street as so many did in the story of the Good Samaritan. We need to ask the question of, are we avoiding the destitute? In a society that values power over vulnerability, can we lead with love and listen to the tender hearts in the world? We need to see God in every human being whose eyes we look into and be reminded that they are dearly loved. Maybe looking into the mirror and trusting this truth for ourselves is a good first step. Agreement on Jesus' teachings and expectations would be nice, but maybe that is not what is necessary to learn of and live out ethical theology. Perhaps the iron sharpening iron would be useful in this discipline as well, and maybe the forging of ethics and theology together happens as we ourselves are formed.

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Appendix C–Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report

Introduction

This is a report on the Design Workshop hosted in November 2021, the interviews that followed, and the plan and components that are needed to continue research of my NPO.

NPO Statement

In a polarized church, how can we listen and learn from each other to understand the intellectual commitment and stakes behind theological, political, and social perspectives different from our own? In a pluralistic society, such deep understandings is necessary to enable working together toward ethical policy and shared goals.

NPO Scope and Constraints

Non-negotiables: I want to ensure that this research process is representative of diverse perspectives to gain a holistic understanding of the issues at hand. This commitment includes inviting individuals to participate who I know have a different perspective than myself. I do not anticipate any costs associated with researching this NPO.

NPO Context

The context for this NPO is the American church consisting of a wide variety of Christian denominations represented, as well as inclusive of those who identify as Christian but are not associated with a particular church. Because the Church spans geographical, denominational, cultural, socio-economical, and generational context, I have aimed to do the same in representing this NPO.

Root Causes

The root causes of our disunity consist of a lack of understanding our religious, social, and political formation via media, not recognizing that all of humanity is a reflection of the Imago Dei, not embracing Christian unity and welcoming our differences, laziness around critical thinking and contentment in echo chambers, failure to recognize and consider various theological perspectives, forgetfulness around the creeds and sacraments uniting us, shallow spiritual formation, a struggle in connecting to orthopraxy, and polarized stances in regard to a myriad of ethical policy issues.

Definition of 'Done'

The hopeful outcome of this research is to seek understanding of one another via a paradigm which can be used to filter diverse ideas toward an outcome that would result in a set of ethical commitments to inform public policy brought about by unity, rather than the lack of movement we experience at present due to contradiction.

Three Big Ideas

One: I can look at each contributing factor of the root root cause and possible solutions in an equal manner, all centering on Christ, with the hope that integrating each topic will lead to the accomplished goal of understanding and unity.

Two: I can begin with the hopeful solution of ethical commitments and what the world would look like if this goal were accomplished and then work outward in an attempt to understand the relationship between contributing factors and possible solutions.

Three: I can consider that a formula of attending to theology, spiritual formation, and critical thinking would lend to a solution of ethical policy.

3 Concept Pitches

Most of the material in my three concept pitches are the same with the exception of the three big ideas, which vary in the ways I intend to approach moving forward. I sent the three options via a white board drawing, along with a written description, to a few people and asked them to vote on which concept made the most sense. The consensus so far is what I have defined under concept pitch number one.

Concept Pitch No. 1

Big Idea: I can look at each contributing factor of the root cause and possible solutions in an equal manner, all centering on Christ, with the hope that integrating each topic will lead to the

accomplished goal of understanding and unity.

Audience: This is intended primarily for leaders and congregants in the North American church.

NPO: The problem to be addressed is the lack of unity in the church resulting in lack of compromise in regard to ethical solutions.

Benefit: Churches and congregations would benefit from a deeper understanding of one another, particularly those we disagree with, would lead to co-working on ethical solutions.

Approach: The approach to meeting the need is not unique in regard to each individual contributing factor, but I think it is unique in offering a framework to view all of the contributing factors and possible solutions in one place.

Risks. Why might it fail? There are many contributing factors, possibly too many, to measure which could lead to failure if the understanding or presentation is too shallow and not niche enough.

Assumptions/hypotheses to test: I would like to host a focus group once the research is fleshed out to see if there are any changes from experiencing the paradigm.

Benchmarks of success: I need to finalize the outline and flesh out each contributing factor. I could take an inventory of held beliefs/perspectives/biases, present the material, and measure if there is an increased openness once participants go through the paradigm or not.

Other Approaches: I have come across plenty of research that addresses the contributing factors but I have not come across any research that puts into a simple paradigm that could be further understood in the course of reading one book.

Concept Pitch No. 2

Big Idea: I can begin with the hopeful solution of ethical policy and what the world would look like if this goal were accomplished and then work outward in an attempt to understand the relationship between contributing factors and possible solutions.

Audience: This is intended primarily for leaders and congregants in the North American church.

NPO: The problem to be addressed is the lack of unity in the church resulting in lack of compromise in regard to ethical solutions.

Benefit: Church leadership and congregants would benefit from a deeper understanding of one another, particularly those we disagree with, would lead to co-working on ethical solutions.

Approach: The approach to meeting the need is not unique in regard to each individual contributing factor, but I think it is unique in offering a framework to view all of the contributing factors and possible solutions in one place.

Risks. Why might it fail? There are many contributing factors, possibly too many, to measure which could lead to failure if the understanding or presentation is too shallow and not niche enough.

Assumptions/hypotheses to test: I would like to host a focus group once the research is fleshed out to see if there are any changes from experiencing the paradigm.

Benchmarks of success: I need to finalize the outline and flesh out each contributing factor. I could take an inventory of held beliefs/perspectives/biases, present the material, and measure if there is an increased openness once participants go through the paradigm or not.

Other Approaches: I have come across plenty of research that addresses the contributing factors but I have not come across any research that puts into a simple paradigm that could be further understood in the course of reading one book.

Concept Pitch No. 3

Big Idea: I can consider that a formula of attending to theology, spiritual formation, and critical thinking would lend to a solution of ethical policy.

Audience: This is intended primarily for leaders and congregants in the North American church.

NPO: The problem to be addressed is the lack of unity in the church resulting in lack of compromise in regard to ethical solutions.

Benefit: Churches and congregations would benefit from a deeper understanding of one another, particularly those we disagree with, would lead to co-working on ethical solutions.

Approach: The approach to meeting the need is not unique in regard to each individual contributing factor, but I think it is unique in offering a framework to view all of the contributing factors and possible solutions in one place.

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Other Approaches: I have come across plenty of research that addresses the contributing factors but I have not come across any research that puts into a simple paradigm that could be further understood in the course of reading one book.

Design Workshop Stakeholders

The design workshop stakeholders consisted solely of pastors. As determined from the last design workshop in 2020, the focus of the NPO was unanimously (among stakeholders) determined to begin within the context of spiritual leaders.

One-on-One Interviews

The individual interview participants were made up of doctoral students, lay and ordained ministers, and a lawyer.

3–5 Key Biblical Texts

2 Corinthians 13:11 - "Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you." NRSV

Isaiah 1:17 - "Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." NRSV

Micah 6:8 - "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" NRSV

Jeremiah 22:3 - "Thus says the LORD: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place." NRSV

Annotated Bibliography

Haidt, Jonathan. 2012. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided By Politics and Religion*. New York: Random House.

Dr. Jonathan Haidt is a social psychologist and professor of ethical leadership at New York University. Haidt offers an examination of moral considerations among varying political cultures and moral foundations. His goal is to help Americans not only understand but also learn from one another, which is an aspect of my research hope as well. Haidt's work is intersecting morality, politics, and religion through the lens of a polarizing or apathetic stance. He explores the moral judgements in relation to intuition, and attends to both the cooperation and divisive conflicts Americans experience. In the subtitle, he names "good people" and I am curious to see if there are connections between the goodness I also begin with via the Imago Dei perspective.

Rolheiser, Ronald. 1998, 2019. *The Holy Longing: The Search For Christian Spirituality*. New York: Random House.

Dr. Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I. is the President of Oblate School of Theological in San Antonio, Texas. Rolheiser specializes in spirituality and systematic theology. I am particularly drawn to the chapters on Ecclesiology and Spirituality of Justice and Peacemaking. Regarding ecclesiology, the issue of community and the important role it plays in the church continued to surface in both the workshop and the one on one interviews and I think Rolheiser will give me the opportunity to consider ecclesiology in an honest way. The draw to delve into the chapter on justice (an underlying virtue) and peacemaking is largely due to the integration of Christian spirituality Rolheiser presents.

Schulz, Kathryn. 2020. *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error*. New York: HarperCollins

Ms. Schulz is an American author and staff writer at The New Yorker. Schulz argues that while we all make errors, we have a hard time admitting to them. She advocates for us to embrace our propensity to err since it is inevitable. I am interested in implementing this research because I may need to make an introductory case that we humans are not always right, and it's ok to be an erring

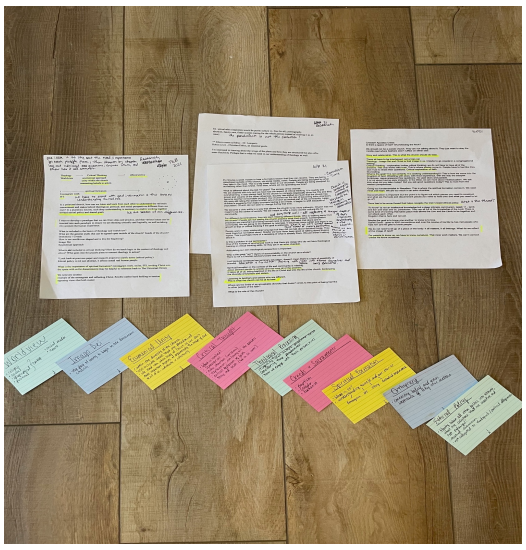
human. If we cannot acknowledge our limitations, we may not be able to get to the next steps of understanding our own role within polarization or apathy.

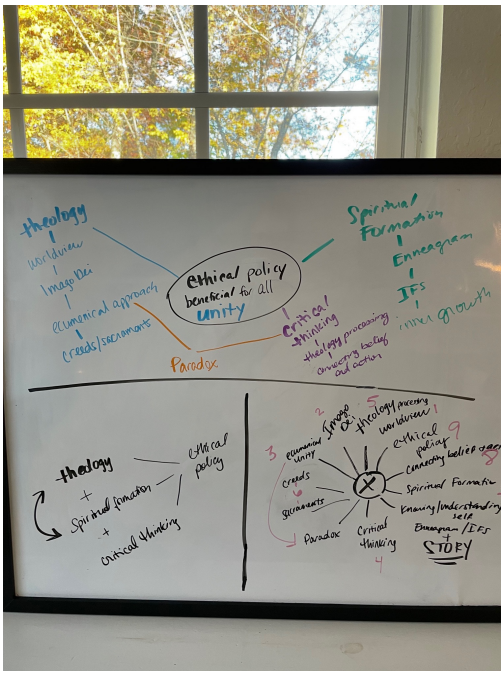
Appendices

Design Workshop Description

The workshop was hosted on November 4, 2021 at 6:00pm EST. The workshop was held virtually via the zoom platform. I intentionally wanted to gain perspective solely from pastors for this workshop, and include more diverse perspectives in the one on one interviews. At the beginning of the workshop, I presented an overview of the research that was conducted last year in the design workshop, gathered from interviews, and how it developed over the course of the year. At the last workshop, I planned very specific activities and this time I wanted to leave it more open ended so that I could gain a better perspective of what I may be missing instead of leading the conversation to where I wanted it to go. I would give the workshop a score of 4 out of 5. I am very pleased with the dialogue of the workshop and the information I received from the workshop. There were a few participants who did not make it to the workshop as planned. One participant had a death in the family, so I knew they would not be present. Two other participants missed the workshop due to timing; one mixed up the time zone and the other accidentally realized they missed it 30 minutes in. Both participants texted me to ask if they could still join and I didn't see the messages until it was over. I should have reminded the participants.

Design Workshop Documentation





Post-Workshop Message to Stakeholders

Dear _____,

Thank you for your participation in the research workshop! I appreciate your attentiveness and active participation, and am thankful for your pastoral perspective to help me better understand the intricacies of my research topic. You contributed a great deal to the conversation, and drew my attention to new ways of formatting my research in ways I had not yet considered. I am including a report of the findings so far, including what we discussed.

Do you have any feedback for me about the workshop? Or have any other thoughts come up for you that you want to share?

Best,

Tiffanie Paige Wilson, M.A.

The working research question at this time is: In a polarized church, how can we listen and learn from each other to understand the rationale commitment and stakes behind theological, political, and social perspectives different from our own? In a pluralistic society, such deep understanding is necessary to enable working together toward ethical policy and shared goals.

The hopeful outcome of this research is to seek understanding of one another via a paradigm which can be used to filter diverse ideas toward an outcome that would result in ethical policy brought about by unity, rather than the lack of movement we experience at present due to contradiction. This paradigm would take into account a myriad of factors including the following concepts: worldview (religious, social, geographical context), Imago Dei (namely, that all of humanity is created in the image of God), the necessity of ecumenical unity within the paradox of diversity, the importance of critical thought (beginning with listening), theological processing (the consideration of multiple theological perspectives and the manner stating the reality of and engaging said perspectives), the role of creeds and sacraments, the essential posture of spiritual formation (including knowing and understanding the embodied self and our stories), and finally orthopraxy (connecting belief and action). The goal is finally to arrive at the conversation of ethical policy, having taken each of these factors into consideration, not to arrive at specific answers but rather to creatively develop solutions that are not limited to the polarized options we have become accustomed to, both in theological and political allegiances.

There are three big ideas of ways I can approach the "problem". I am leaning toward option number One. One: I can look at each contributing factor of the root root cause and possible solutions in an equal manner, all centering on Christ, with the hope that integrating each topic will lead to the accomplished goal of understanding and unity. Two: I can begin with the hopeful solution of ethical policy and what the world would look like if this goal were accomplished and then work outward in an attempt to understand the relationship between contributing factors and possible solutions. Three: I can consider that a formula of attending to theology, spiritual formation, and critical thinking would lend to a solution of ethical policy.

Definition of Done:

The hopeful outcome of this research is to seek understanding of one another via a paradigm which can be used to filter diverse ideas toward an outcome that would result in ethical policy brought about by unity, rather than the lack of movement we experience at present due to contradiction.

Benchmarks of Success:

I need to finalize the outline and flesh out each contributing factor. I could take an inventory of held beliefs/perspectives/biases, present the material, and measure if there is an increased openness once participants go through the paradigm or not.

One-on-One Interviews Documentation

The interviewees will receive an email prior to their scheduled interview that will present the findings of the research so far, as noted in the letter to the stakeholders. We will then discuss in the interview the following questions: With what do you agree, why? What do you disagree with, why? What is missing?

Interview A

Given the issues we face with disunity, perhaps we have a lack of imagination and lack of creativity. Maybe we need to cast a vision for a better story, one of hope that could lead to understanding one another more fully. Story, and the act of connecting with another, activates something different in us in a way that is shared and invokes compassion for one another. This process allows us to be more appreciative, sympathetic, and compassionate. Jesus engaged in the story of those around him via parables, or literally entering into the lives of those he encountered. How do we cast a vision for story and listening? We need to recognize our own bias and limits which may lead us to deliberately believe that we don't have the full story. We also can recognize that when we view things from different planes, our experience and their experience can both be true. The interviewee shared an experience of their spouse who had participated in a community building practice where they met 52 people in 52 weeks simply to get to know a new person and ask about their experience. This interviewee also shared about the importance of a measure of commitment to one another in the church and to encourage the value of hanging on among disagreements by keeping Christ at the center is the only way forward toward unity.

Interview B

This interviewee responded to my pre-interview letter via email, so some of this content is from that exchange in addition to the content of the interview. He encouraged me to further define what I mean by ethical policy, particularly in differentiating between public and church policy.

He asked if the goal is a process to be used by participants. (This is my goal.) Understanding one another may not result in agreement about policy so if the goal is to create ethical policy then the process needs to include some way to weigh differences and eliminate alternatives. The Friends business meetings could be a form to look at. He asked, what is the difference between "specific

answers" and "solutions?" and also wanted me to clarify what the "root cause" is, and asked if it is the conflict we experience. If the goal is understanding and unity (not uniformity) then it does seem that I am trying to locate/define a process by which a set of congregants converse/dialog using the epic list of "perspective influencers" as topics of conversation. These all can be parts of one's mental model that people are often unaware of. By "foregrounding" them through a defined process, perhaps you can create tools for a church to use. He also wondered about the phrase, "filter diverse ideas toward an outcome that would result in ethical policy." If people enter a conversation thinking that the goal is for a decision to be made about a policy that is different from their own, the defensiveness will be high. If the goal is understanding the "other," I think the bar is lowered and attainable. (This is my goal. Later in, and through, the conversation, I came to a shift toward using the language of ethics instead of ethical policy.) We need a community with which to dialogue about our ethical differences. One challenge may be the process of getting people to a place where they can notice their incoherence; this process can be disruptive for the individual. Perhaps this is a space where spiritual direction and formation could offer a framework. One question that may help assess our ideological foundations is to ask, who put the basic building blocks there that we hang on to so much? We have to recognize that we have a practice of rejecting one other and often even do so in the name of God. Another consideration would be to understand where we disagree on ethics. His perspective is that the disagreements are mostly around the HOW of enacting policy, which he refers to as the brass tacks of politics. He affirmed the approach of making this project accessible to leaders and laity, and encouraged the emphasis on spiritual formation and theology processing, specifically helping people understand their theology. We discussed how one goal is to raise awareness to all of the elements of the pinwheel (the word he used to reference the photo previously included) as to how they assess how they are navigating in the world. He suggested that I could create a tool whereby people do an assessment of their perspective that would help us learn about ourselves, where we are strong/weak, need to grow, and need to seek paradox. As previously mentioned he recommended I stick with the topic of ethics and take out policy. This could be helpful in focusing on public issues, so that the conversation does not turn political or polarized before it even starts.

Interview C

Our society is not practicing critical thinking well. Cause and effect is not understood even at the basic level. We are not starting with the factors or holding a standard of accuracy of views; all perspectives do not hold the same weight. We need to have an understanding of ideas without labeling one another. We need an integrated view of theology, history, law and politics. If you really get to know other people, it opens up opportunities for examination of ideas that would otherwise be untouchable. This is rare, especially among people who hold divergent views on varying important issues. He came to that conclusion not just as an academic but because he spent time in Africa with someone who had done this when the government was going to allow all of the people in South Africa to vote in an upcoming election. His friend got to know people from the other varying “parties”and brought people together in a secret location so they could get to know each other more intimately through sharing their narrative. The diplomats were unsuccessful in the endeavor but through relationships this person accomplished the goal of unifying through

storytelling. It formed the foundation for the way (interviewee) approached his law practice. Both sides demonize the other and often both sides have done wrong. He gets to know lawyers on the other side; this rarely happens. He then uses a win-win approach to search for hidden interests in order to come up with creative solutions. Compassion and admission of honest fault goes a long way. Asking for a neutral party in the middle is necessary to finding the truth and serves the interests of all parties. The Africa story - it was not theory, it was practice.

Relationships are imperative. Deep connection forms. Paradigm shifts can occur. A deep dive is only possible with candor and vulnerability within relationships and when we share our narrative, thus understanding interests and obstacles at a deeper level. We often try to unify by attending to the lowest common denominator, but this is counterproductive.

What it takes to do this:

"Check your ego at the door, Radical honesty, be capable of listening with your heart and your head, demonstrate your goodwill and interest in the other person's well being and the people who may benefit from discussions, desire to follow Jesus. Then you should facilitate or create an environment where you can (w/o distraction) have the conversation."

The power of narrative is very important on so many levels.

He mentioned a study where brain parts were shut down upon hearing certain ideas. I would like to look into this further.

Is this teachable/learnable?

The obstacles to discussion of transcendent ideas is that some view that it is improper to discuss religious ideas.

Myth of neutrality from the secular side, but the neutral position is not neutral it is relativism.

Interview D

Critical thinking is so crucial. Technology may be a contributing factor in decreasing our ability to think critically. Our picture is either black or white and so we respond right away from a moral perspective. Evangelicalism has contributed to our understanding of right and wrong. The question is no longer relevant. Social dilemma (this may be an aspect of this).

*VOICE is imperative. Clubhouse - town hall meeting weekly; people are less likely to be angry with you with their voice then they are on a screen. People are less likely to cancel you or leave the room because they are using their voice. We tend to dehumanize someone on a screen more than we would in hearing their voice.

Who holds these conversations? The woke conversation? Who is responsible for creating the nuance in this? Setting up the ground rules. Some people get tired of the conversation. How to create a conversation that is not carried by the victims?

*** see the covenant from residency in regard to creating a safe space.

Fear is such a huge component here. What makes us not assume the best of the other?

Especially in church, fear is protecting the “gospel”. (maybe this is because the church is operating in early stages of The Critical Journey)

These conversations are done better in the context of relationships. Investment in relationships may also decrease fear.

In some churches, we are punished for critical thinking. Maybe higher ed is safer than the church. (Some people are going to seminary when they have questions especially if their church is not comfortable with critical thinking and asking questions. .

We need to be willing to hold a greater knowledge of tension and the experience of tension.

Appendix D–Milestone 4 Design Research Report

Introduction

The prototype is an in-process dissertation which is divided into three sections at this time, and each chapter has a topic. Some of the chapters are beginning to be fleshed out, while others are yet to be written. Currently, it contains approximately 12,000 words and the end goal is at least 50,000. I have included some image overviews in the appendices, and I can send the in-process dissertation document if desired.

Prototype Summary and Findings

Prototype Description:

The prototype will be a dissertation / book that will address each contributing factor of the root cause and possible solutions in an equal manner, all centering on Christ, with the hope that integrating each topic will lead to the accomplished goal of understanding and unity. The chapter topics are: Imago Dei, Ecumenical Unity: core Christian beliefs and foundational church practices, Critical Thinking, Theology Processing, Story: Knowing Ourselves and Others, Spiritual Formation, Political Formation, Connecting Belief and Action, and Ethics.

Upon completion of the Design Workshop Report in December 2021, I reached out to two professor friends, Dr. Sam Youngs and Dr. Preston Hill, who are both local to Chattanooga. Throughout the workshops and many one-on-one conversations with clergy, lay persons, and those who are engaged in justice work, I felt confident in the direction of my project. However, I wanted to lay out the entire structure of what I was planning to Dr. Youngs and Dr. Hill because I wondered about the overall connectedness; namely, whether each section actually connected in a cohesive way. Although I have gotten incredible feedback via the online format from workshops, it was incredibly helpful to be able to physically and in person lay out the hopes for my project to Dr. Youngs and Dr. Hill, who I knew would approach this in a more analytical and systematic way. I also trusted that because of the nature of their professions they would be willing to be brutally honest if needed about what was missing or what needed to change.

Dr. Sam Youngs is a professor at Richmont Graduate University and Bryan College. I had the opportunity to study under Dr. Youngs as a graduate student. Dr. Preston Hill is a professor at Richmont Graduate University as well. Both Dr. Youngs and Dr. Hill earned their Ph.D and are actively engaged in the crossover space between academia and practitioners. After laying out the major chapter topic themes, I asked the following questions: What is working well? What am I missing? Is this cohesive? Does the order make sense?

When I met with Dr. Youngs, he suggested I look into the concept of moral imagination, and further explore virtue ethics. Dr. Youngs also suggested that I ask the questions, "What is true about the world now?" and "What can be made different?". To help with flow, he recommended that I organize the main topics into three major categories. The chapter topics remained the same but where divided into three main sections: Thinking / Intellectual, which would explore "What is true?"

Imago Dei, Ecumenical Unity, Critical Thinking, and Theology Processing fit into this category. The second section reflected, "What can be true?" and included the categories of Story: Knowing Ourselves and Knowing Others, Political Formation, and Spiritual Formation. The third section is Praxis: Doing Well, and included Connecting Belief and Action and Ethics: Practical Implications. I implemented these organizational suggestions, and I also added readings on moral imagination and virtue ethics to my bibliography list. Dr. Youngs suggested that the church currently suffers from a narrow or deficient moral imagination and he thinks this project could aim to equip the church through moral imagination as it pertains to the controversial and divisive issues facing the church.

Dr. Preston Hill, who's specialty is the intersection of theology and trauma, encouraged me to explore the psychological correlates of theological virtues. He emphasized the importance of calling people out of their inward posture toward the goodness of God, which I understood to be in the context of spiritual transformation language. Dr. Hill encouraged me to explore missiology to properly understand how to approach this particular audience. He also suggested I take a deeper dive on Bonhoeffer, which I did this semester. Dr. Hill expressed that he would like to be kept apprised of the project as he interested in following along.

There is one other area of potential expansion within this project that I am considering post the initial submission of this report, which is the possible inclusion of practical ways to journey through this process with people, step by step. This could be for church leaders, lay persons, para-church organizations or community leaders and may include conversation while sharing a meal together. I am wondering if adding the context of community could be an asset to implementation.

NPO Statement

In a polarized North American church, Christians can listen and learn from each other to understand the intellectual commitment and stakes behind theological, political, and social perspectives different from their own. In a pluralistic society, such deep understanding is necessary to enable working together toward ethics and shared goals.

Research Question:

In a polarized North American church, how can we listen and learn from each other to understand the intellectual commitment and stakes behind theological, political, and social perspectives different from our own? In a pluralistic society, such deep understanding is necessary to enable working together toward ethics and shared goals.

Assessment Benchmark(s):

Participant Description - At this point, my intention is to focus on the written portion of research, reflecting on the work of other scholars. I intend to continually and casually have conversations about the research and will share with fellow colleagues as to gain feedback. I have no intention of hosting an official workshop for the purpose of gathering new info as I think my topic is already a broad collection. I have considered engaging with a small group of participants once the work is

complete to experiment with taking the group through the material chapter by chapter. My hope is to have this dissertation 70% completed by the end of summer so that I will have to time to engage a group of people with the material if required or desired.

Learning Summary: Every time I have spoken with someone in regard to this topic it has produced rich conversation. People seem to be very interested in learning how to further consider their own thoughts in ethical issues as well as an interest in learning how to engage with those who think differently. At this point, the next step would be to finalize research, complete writing, and get the material in the hands of stakeholders and fellow scholars.

Most Important Discovery: The most important discovery is that people are indeed interested in this conversation and in the potential outcomes of unity that could be experienced. The workshop, along with the one-on-one interviews continued to affirm that the research is headed in the right direction. Additionally, I met informally with two friends who are theology professors and also deeply invested in spiritual formation. We discussed my research at length and they both were affirming and encouraging. It is reassuring to have supplementary support (at least thus far) from other professors in the field in addition to the approval of my Project Faculty, Dr. Lomperis.

Background Research Essay on the Emerging Solution

The background research is only representative of one aspect of the emerging solution, however it is a vital piece. One of the primary resources I discovered this semester is Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context by David P. Gushee and Glenn H. Stassen and I think their text could be a cornerstone for my project. Dr. Gushee and Dr. Stassen, both professors, took an academic approach with their work and produced an almost 500 page text on kingdom ethics from a Christian perspective. Although my research is academically based, I intend to write with a more general audience in mind. To come to a solution as a community, a collaborative effort is needed. If the work here is done in the arena of academia but it is not transmissible to the average churchgoer, how can we communicate in a way that is understood by the majority? As far as I can tell, I have not discovered new research. However what I think is unique in the approach I am taking is that I am attempting to combine these solution categories and distill the information in a way that is more accessible. For this reason, I intend to draw immensely from Gushee and Stassen's research while integrating my approach as a practitioner.

In Kingdom Ethics, the authors clearly state in the preface their goal is to view Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as the standard for Christian ethics. According to Gushee, much of the conversation on ethics is focusing on prerogatives Jesus never focused on, while simultaneously disregarding issues

that Jesus drew to the attention of his followers.[86] They draw our attention to seven distinguishing factors of God's kingdom that include salvation, justice, peace, healing, restoration, joy, and God's presence.[87] Gushee and Stassen insist that it is necessary we understand the characteristics of God's kingdom reign as well as the ethical implications that flow from the Jesus' teaching on the kingdom. They assert that God's kingdom is a partnership of divine and human work and that it is performative and participative.[88] God initiates and invites us to participate.

The first part of the text lays out the methodology for kingdom ethics including a robust Old Testament foundation as well as heavily drawing from the Sermon on the Mount. Gushee and Stassen explore virtues reflective of people who are walking within God's kingdom, how Scripture is consistent in encouraging an ethical approach, the role of moral structure, the invitation to follow Jesus in actually living out the Sermon on the Mount, engaging in the cardinal Christian virtues of love, justice, and the sacredness of life, and finally, in walking in faithfulness. The latter part of the book addresses moral issues within kingdom ethics including the topics of criminal justice, gender, sexual ethics, truth, war ethics, economic ethics, creation care, racism, and bioethics. Although the second portion will certainly inform my research and will likely make a greater appearance in the dissertation, I will primarily unpack the first part, the foundations, for this portion of the report.

I cannot fully express how important I think this work is. The invitation extended to us to engage in kingdom work that actually participates in bringing peace to a broken world is both heavy and exhilarating. Heavy, because the task at hand requires significant care and attention to ensure that consequences produce love, justice and peace and exhilarating because the consequences can produce love, justice, and peace which is truly good news to the both the bound and the oppressed.

I have long been drawn to the term of practice over disciplines in the context of spiritual growth because it emphasizes the opportunity to try, learn, and become more apt to the task by practicing; it serves as an inherent reminder within the definition that we get to practice entering the kingdom of God. Bruce Chilton and J.I.H. McDonald introduce "kingdom praxis" as something we enter into and do, rather than something we wait for. "We enter the kingdom as we do kingdom praxis such as justice, peacemaking, healing, community building, and deliverance. Jesus did such praxis, and

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[86] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Second Edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016. Pg. xvii

[87] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.10

[88] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.12,13

we must do the same… The kingdom is a "place we go" only by doing its practices."[89] This assertion is a reminder that Christ followers cannot simply wait and hope for a future kingdom reality; we must take the words of Jesus seriously. One of the byproducts of the focus on a personal relationship with Christ and individual morality is a lack of attention to collective sin. A kingdom praxis could help adjust the church's view and serve as a reminder to attend to the social sins of injustice before us. Proper exegesis will help us further understand from a biblical and historical perspective how Jesus spoke to and engaged in kingdom ethics, while we discern what this kind of praxis looks like within our current context.[90]

Spiritual formation is imperative to the process of participating in kingdom ethics. There has been a movement among Christian ethicists away from moral rules and principles and toward virtue ethics, reasoning, "it is not enough to teach rules and principles about right and wrong; we need to nurture the kind of character and virtues that lead people actually to do the right and avoid the wrong. Deeds are right or wrong; persons are virtuous or not virtuous."[91] Jesus introduces us to the joys of virtue in the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are more than wise and moral teachings. Biblical scholar Robert Guelich advised a grace based prophetic approach to the Beatitudes emphasizing that God's action "delivers (rescues, frees, releases) us from mourning into rejoicing."[92] This is an invitation to participative grace emphasizing God's transforming work within us, rather than the our merit. However, as Bonhoeffer noted, this is not a "cheap grace" inclined toward passivity.[93] "A central theme in Bonhoeffer's writing is participation in what God is doing in Christ. Through God's grace in Christ, we become active participants in God's grace, and Christ takes shape in us… Grace is christomorphic, not amorphic; it has a specific shape, a shape revealed in Christ. Its shape is the shape of the kingdom, of the Beatitudes, of the way of Jesus as seen in the New Testament. The shape of grace is Christ taking form in us. We participate by answering Jesus's gracious call: Come, follow me."[94] Following Jesus into participatory grace means entering into the story and plight of

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[89] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.13

[90] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.16

[91] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.21

[92] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.23

[93] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.25

[94] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.25

others. The instructions we find in the Beatitudes are a solid guide, and this will likely be further expounded on within the dissertation.

It is at this juncture where virtue ethics are introduced. The Greek virtues are courage, temperance, prudence, and justice. Aristotle's teaching was based on interacting in relationships with people who are similar and equal, yet Jesus taught that relationship should be extended to outcasts and enemies which differentiates a virtue ethic from the Christian perspective.[95] "Virtues are character traits that enable us to contribute to community - to the particular society in which we live… Character ethics intends to correct disconnected individualism, emphasizing virtues that contribute to the common good of the community… In biblical character ethics, the good we serve is the reign of God (God's presence and salvation) and community with our fellow human beings (peace and justice). The biblical virtues are keys to our community well-being: peacemaking, hungering for justice, doing mercy, integrity, humility, and caring for the poor and the mourning. And they are the way of participation in community with God."[96] Injustice surrounds us, permeated throughout our culture, yet there is evidence of God stirring the hearts of people to follow in the way of Christ. We are invited to incarnationally enter into this work with Christ, and not in a hypothetical eschatological sense, but in a way that presently affects society.

How do we know what resources can be used to guide us in fleshing out ethical engagement? Jesus looked to Scripture as a starting place, but even so Christians often disagree on how to implement the directives derived from Scripture. Gushee and Stassen recall where Christians looked during the Holocaust in determining the appropriate crisis response. To quickly overview, here are some of the sources they consulted seeking an authoritative direction: the Bible, direct divine guidance, moral conscience, moral traditions, church leaders, other persons of significant moral authority in the lives, nation's heritage and national values, facts of their life situation, and experiences.[97] I understand that in academia we can unpack the process of how we tend to source ethical guidance, but this is not generally understood or sourced among the general public. For instance, Christians often refer to Scripture as the sole source for morality without recognizing that other factors are influencing our perspective.

Part of what I hope to do in the context of my research is raise some awareness for the general church public that ideological captivity exists. "Frequently, Christians reflect their ideological captivity by failing to consider distinctive Christian sources of moral authority with eyes able to see and ears able to hear, because they are blinded and deafened by prevailing ideologies. Many carry

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[95] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.39

[96] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.40

[97] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.45

the name Christian and yet habitually fail to live their lives within the moral horizon actually established by Christian faith, or with reference to the fonts of moral conviction that exist within that faith."[98] We must talk about this and expose our shortcomings if we have any hope of repentance and remedy. It is necessary that Christians learn how to prioritize and utilize each authoritative source.[99] I will further unpack and expound on how Christians can appropriately evaluate authoritative voices through the use of Scripture, tradition, moral judgements / moral agency, moral philosophy, general revelation, the Wesleyan quadrilateral, social and natural sciences, human experience, and character ethics. These resources can be used as a guide, an interpretive grid of sorts, with the goal of a full heart transformation that moves us toward compassion for humanity even to the point of loving our enemies.

This is the transformation Christ initiated, and we see this readily in the Sermon on the Mount. Gushee and Stassen introduce the term of transforming initiative, in that the teaching may start with a value but continues to build in a transformative way having the power which "transforms the person who was angry into an active peacemaker; it transforms the relationship from one of anger into a peacemaking process; and it hopes to transform the enemy into a friend" by engaging with God in a grace filled peacemaking effort.[100] This takes us back to the practices and gives us the opportunity to learn by the way of participation and let it lead to transformation. As Doctors of the Church, we learn to diagnose the illness, identify the cause and stresses of the sinful habits that personally and collectively lead to unjust outcomes. We learn from Jesus the remedy repentance, correction, and participation in a new practice to walk in freedom from captivity.[101] "Christian virtues, as taught by Jesus in the Beatitudes, include being surrendered or yielded to God… is connected with being peacemakers… The transforming initiative is participation in God's active presence and God's grace."[102]

One of the most radical aspects of this transforming work of Christ is that it is inclusive of all people, and as we are yielded to God, we too are invited into the peacemaking grace that includes all. This ideal is pulled from Scripture but has, at times, been misunderstood. For instance, "Those who want to make the Sermon on the Mount into impossibly high ideals interpret the summary verse, 5:48, as demanding moral perfection, as a Greek idealist ethics might. They assume, "Be perfect,

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[98] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.45

[99] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.46

[100] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.96

[101] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.97

[102] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.100, 101

therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" means moral perfection. But it would be odd in Hebrew and Aramaic to presume to speak of God as morally perfect in that Greek sense. Rather, the word here mans complete or all-inclusive, in the sense of love that includes even enemies. This is the point that Jesus has been emphasizing in this particular teaching: God's love that includes the complete circle of humankind, with enemies in it as well, by contrast with tax collectors and Gentiles, who love one their friends."[103] This is phenomenal news for so many, even in our church communities, who have felt like outcasts! It also is a breath of fresh air to understand that we are not continual failures who cannot meet an impossible ideal of perfection. This, however, is something that we can practice. We participate in the grace of God by participating in love for the outcasts, and love for our enemies.

"Tiff, I appreciated your thoughtfulness and passion behind the essay and the urgency of problems that you raise. My main suggestion for revision (with an eye on the completion of the actual disseration and then a book manuscript) is to clearly distinguish where Gushee and Stassen's argument ends and where yours begins. In its current form, although I sense that you have re-interpret and re-engaged their argument from your own, original perspective of a practicioner, the actual lines between their thoguhts and your thoughts are blurred in the paper in ist current form. As a result, in the absence of clear verbal markers (see below), I remain unsure what solution this paper offers that has not been previosuly proposed by Gushee and Stasse. For the actual book, a simple strategy to fix this issue, would be to create verbal markers throughout the chapter, such as …" Gushee and Stassen have argued.XXX.," Using XXX, I will demonstarte / argue/ suggest" etc."

MVP (Most Viable Prototype)

Based on what I learned from prototype planning and background research, Option One is my Most Viable Prototype. The prototype is an overview of the dissertation. This will become my project in year 3.

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(These were either read this semester, or will be read this summer as I continue to work on my dissertation.)

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[103] Gushee, David P, and Glen Harold Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics : Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Pg.100

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Appendices

The following is a visual overview of the dissertation.

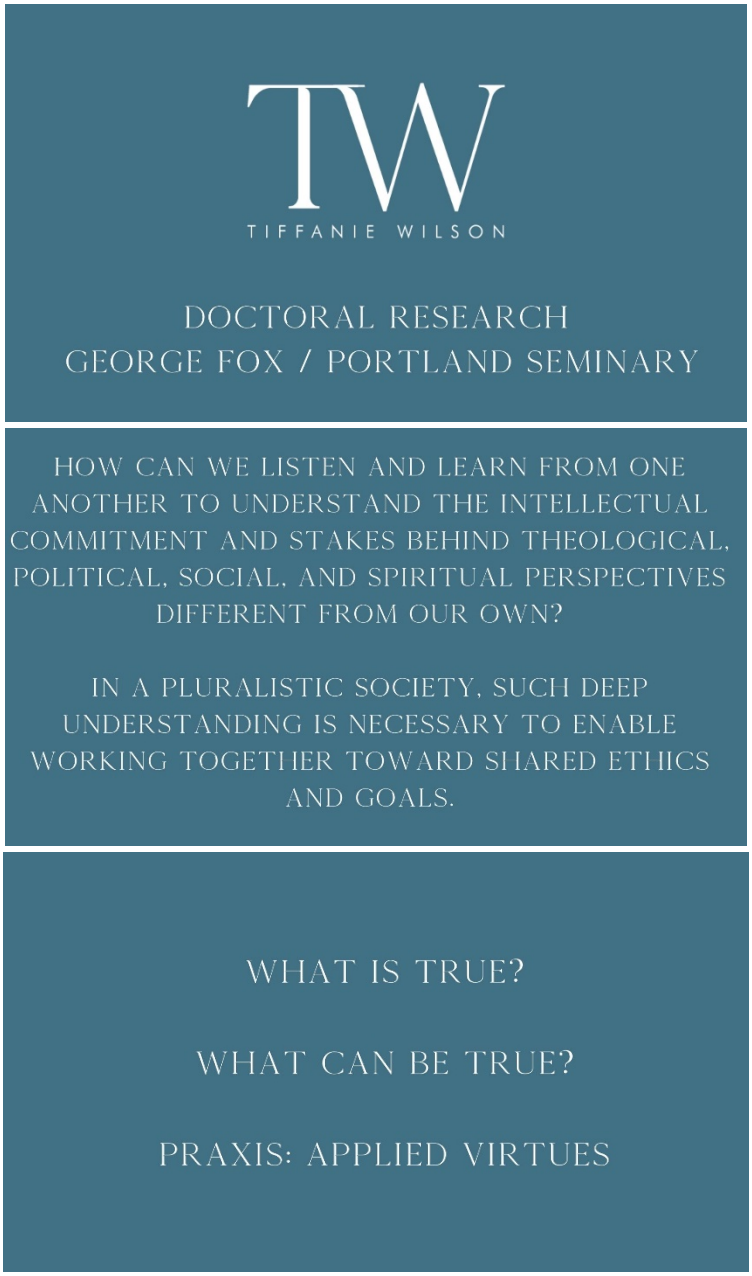
Image 1: Introduction

Image 2: Research Question

Image 3: The dissertation in 3 general sections.

Image 4: Chapter Topics

Image 5: Filtering Grid. The line to the left is hopefully the "issue" or case study topic that will then be filtered through the chapter topics, in hopes of potential solutions that are not solely polarized options. The hope is that by filtering, we can evaluate better solutions, disregard ineffective solutions and consider all possible valid and researched perspectives.


TW
TIFFANIE WILSON
DOCTORAL RESEARCH
GEORGE FOX / PORTLAND SEMINARY
HOW CAN WE LISTEN AND LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER TO UNDERSTAND THE INTELLECTUAL COMMITMENT AND STAKES BEHIND THEOLOGICAL, POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES DIFFERENT FROM OUR OWN?
IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY, SUCH DEEP UNDERSTANDING IS NECESSARY TO ENABLE WORKING TOGETHER TOWARD SHARED ETHICS AND GOALS.
WHAT IS TRUE?
WHAT CAN BE TRUE?
PRAXIS: APPLIED VIRTUES

Chapter Explanations:

I would like to share the working title of the dissertation to help paint a broad picture of what I hope for these conversations, in hopes that the dialogue (over a myriad of theological and social issues) would lead to effect ethical action that would benefit all of us. The working title is: *Ecumenical Diplomacy: The Art of Welcoming Dialogue for the Sake of Mutual Collaboration Toward Peacemaking, Justice, and Ethical Citizenship*.

My hope is that we do the work of truly trying to understand what is at stake theologically, spiritually, socially, politically, and ethically. My other hope is that we approach this with grace and understanding for one another, and that we give one another the space to grow, learn, and be in process; essentially to put these things into practice, albeit imperfectly. I will be the first to admit that this is a work in progress, and inherently designed to not have one perfect and complete answer.

These are the working categories, through research with real humans, that I have categorized as important in the task of understanding, not just this issue, but many areas of disagreement among Christians. My intention for this larger project is that each of the topics below will be a chapter and the project as a whole will have the capacity to serve as a grid of sorts to help us evaluate the pressing issues of our time as well as our responses individually and collectively. This will involve in depth study and an openness to ask questions and explore using our minds and hearts.

Imago Dei: We are ALL created in the Image of God, and thus are valuable and worthy of dignity. Are we treating everyone equally as Image Bearers? Are there some humans we consider "less-than"? We need to explore this and repent when needed.

Ecumenical Unity: It is important that the church strive to be unified where we can, to remember what it is that we have in common (sharing good news of the love of God for the world) and offer charity when we disagree, without vilifying those who disagree with us. How are we treating others that disagree with us?

Ethics and Critical Thinking: What are the principles that govern our behavior? Have we taken the time to carefully and critically consider our perspectives? Do we have all of the information? Have we heard from those who think differently?

Theology Processing: Although more expansive than this, one start is the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. This is where we consider Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Scripture: What does the Bible say? It is important that we consider the overall message of Scripture, taking into account the type of literature we are engaging with, and contending with the internet of the original language. Tradition: What has church history said about the issue? Note: this does not always mean the church has been historically right so we need to also explore where the church has repented and pivoted. It is also imperative to carefully consider early church history, rather than only attending to the current denominational stance, as well as exploring other denominational thoughts. Reason: Is this reasonable? How does reason help us in understanding the teachings of Scripture? Experience: How does our personal experience enlighten what we are considering? This process will inevitable require that we read opposing sources. If we are only reading theologians of the side we already agree with, we will remain in an echo chamber without having challenged our thoughts.

Story - Knowing Ourselves and Others: What is our story in engaging with the "issue" before us? What has our life experience taught us? How about the life experience of others, of those we know and of those we do not? Have we done an adequate job at attempting to understand what it may be like to walk in someone else's shoes?

Political Formation: Are we leaning toward a particular political stance because this is is the position of the party, or the position of our families? Have we examined our political beliefs against the other areas of life that inform our moral decisions? This would include Scripture / theological beliefs. Sometimes the "easy" answer is to say that there is biblical evidence for such a position, but we

need to recognize that many Christians who all are influenced by Scripture land in different positions from the basis of their biblical understanding. Most of these issues require a careful consideration rather than "easy" answers.

Spiritual Formation: Are we approaching these issues through prayer, personal reflection, dialogue with our community? Are we using discernment tools to adequately examine the material and circumstances before us?

Connecting Belief and Action: Once we have examined our intellectual beliefs, established a personal ethic, and examined our hearts along with our ego, we must examine if our actions are following our beliefs. Where do we find connection? Where do we notice disconnection? How can we make our beliefs and actions more congruent?

Ethics (Practical Implications): This is where we can examine the practical implications of our ethics, specifically as it relates to policy. What are we steadfast on? What has shifted for us as we have gone through the process of better and fully trying to holistically understand the issue at hand?

Again, I cannot overstate here that the goal is not a perfect consensus on the solution. Rather, the hope is that we will engage in a thorough examination of our own thoughts and positions, gain an understanding to the intricate nuances of complex issues, learn to listen to the stories and experiences of others and discover a willingness to work together toward creative, non polarized solutions, thus strengthening our community and engaging in the work of justice we are encouraged to do via Scripture.

Appendix E–Project Appendix Documentation

Participant Responses

The format of my project is a hybrid dissertation and course. For the course portion, I have taken participants through weekly sessions where we review the chapter topic and discuss what is stirring up with each of them as they engage the material. Here are some of the responses.

(I asked for feedback on style, font, readability, etc and have since redacted those remarks once making the necessary changes for the sake of brevity.) Additionally, I am editing/cleaning up some of these notes for readability as I took quick notes live in the sessions. "I" is often used, but is referencing multiple participants and includes their questions, comments, and feedback.

Introduction

I am interested in this project as a politically moderate, Jesus follower, who fears for our country and the current polarization experienced.

I appreciate the defining terms.

The phrasing of people who are made in the Image of God may imply that only some people are made in the image of God, not all. (Make sure it implies that all are made in the image of God not just some.)

Participant brings experience from work in public health communication and familial connection to an independent non partisan group that evaluates government programs.

This project may need multiple iterations for various people groups; currently worded too academically for general population. High school diploma, G.E.D., or less, college educated (geared toward freshman level of reading)

Is this geared toward the white church population?

Participant is a librarian and a non-violent communication participant.

I felt pressured by the church to stay faithful even when things were taking a wrong turn and not in line with gentleness and love.

Spiritual formation is done in private and in community.

I grew up in the church, evangelical church, conservative, purity culture. Wondering if there is a progressive path for her faith. Impetus for "deconstruction" was having children.

Moving from literal to conceptual can make people feel like they are ungrounded.

"No one cares about me" - it's about the spiritual health of the kids. Feels displaced in groups.

GRID - need to find new term for grid since it is not a grid. (* This was eventually replaced with the "path" to ecumenical diplomacy, rather than use of the term grid.)

Imago Dei

ID was never taught /spoken of. The idea was skirted around; there was an innate idea God is printed on me. Spirit of God was only in me because of salvation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Christians were more special. Idea of us vs. them (both Christians and not Christians and (competition) of sorts among other denominations. Made me arrogant jerk and thought I was better and they were "less than".

ID helps me see qualities that benefit everyone. Open heart, not trying to fix others. Wants to learn from others. Flips the scripts instead of marginalization. No longer outsiders. No need for transactional relationships. ID understanding is a pathway to knowing God better.

Original blessing - God who loves and likes me and delights in me means that I am not an awful worm that God cannot look at.

ID takes the striving out; nothing I can do to increase ID in me.

Humanity was seen as cursed instead of as a good gift.

Almost like a contest (who is more like God); so much striving (do, do, do for God)

What stirs up when you think of yourself being made in God's image?

Wholeness. Not perfect, but not fundamentally flawed and broken.

I liked the very good humanity line.

Consequence of no ID understanding - Former unhealthy ways of mistake making or failing

Once Christians are made in the image of God or reflect the ID, fear of new ideas because of eternal damnation.

Compassion is sacred. Connection felt when someone is in pain and I can be with them - this is a holy feeling. Not fixing which is uncomfortable to sit with folks in turmoil; I can't fix them no matter how much church/ leaders say this is possible. Looked more like control instead of being seen and known and heard.

Had understanding that people are made with the qualities of God

People are not comfortable with anything black/white, nuanced. We like to put people in categories who does or does not have ID.

Maybe we even see a group os people who are not made in the image of God.

Self in God's image: worthy of taking up space and having opinions, loved, significant

Very loved growing up in family and in church

All of humanity? Always believed yes. Parents modeled this for her. mom was involved in black community, and was a CASA.

When we have opinions about a group of people, do we even know anyone in this community?

If you grew up believing God was harsh, then these attributes affect the Image of God causing questions like, is God good?

Imago Dei, seeing God in spaces that aren't specifically Christian or religious

What does it reflect back on God? (diversity we see here)

Assume belief because no one talked about it

Asking self - Do i actually believe Imago Dei is static and immovable?

Christian or not, saved or not? Does this affect ID?

Self ID - know intellectually - avoid thinking about it, break it down to specifics and parts that reflect ID

Welcome belovedness - sometimes. in seasons of life, find it more challenging for myself

Imago dei - Another way God shows love through creativity

Connected to how we create; creating space for understanding

Self in imago Dei? sometimes; doesn't feel universal. I know my own faults. external (others) instead of internal. That didn't cross my mind.

If you don't want to lice in the nuance of American culture, you can just have a single "stamp".

ID in creation and abstract ideas like community

Welcome belovedness at brain level, in my heart shame comes up.

We negotiate a lot to return ourselves to our own belovedness

What is it really telling me about my own desire?

We either build ourselves up or tear ourselves down/ berate ourselves.

Maybe we could approach curiously instead of admonishment?

Most challenging part - work is a process, lifelong learning.

I don't treat everyone equally. I want to do it perfectly so it's a barrier to make progress in smaller ways.

Part of everything and everyone, felt oneness

Developing growth vs fixed mindset

Self ID - I can choose my response and not lean into victim mentality

Welcoming belovedness? Reminding myself that I am loved, but making mistakes makes this hard.

ID - nothing physical - ability for self-conscious, morally aware, ability to be growing; humanity all of us have that purpose / intuition of self awareness and can choose to let the awareness be reflected within us

Loving God and others as an expression of God

What stirs up in thinking about imago dei within you? grounding sense, I can sit with this, pure source is in unchanging which brings rest amidst fear when other thoughts and ideas feel uncertain. Feels certain amidst uncertainty.

We think of salvation as the gift to receive; we had a gift before that!

Sitting with own imago Dei before going out to practice on others. We jump to the mission. It feels like it wasn't taught to center self first in imago dei then go from there. People muddy this.

Welcome our belovedness? Yes this is plumb line - peace of knowing. I am here. I am enough. This rings true; I am loved.

Challenge: ID is hidden/ not given access to it.

What are my reflections of the ID? Judgmental when I am not doing my own ID work.

ID images - joy in togetherness, community

Starting with own self/ belonging rather than what I can be for others and looking for in others.

Hillary McBride - newest book; embodied

One participant expressed that they felt overwhelmed by the Imago Dei in them, as it created a significant amount of felt responsibility to tend to the justice issues of the world. Imago Dei also feels harder to apply to those who are actively practicing evil.

Ecumenical Unity

Creates dissonance; we are separate because we disagree.

Charity without vilifying, how do we do that?

Diversity is important; when we come together all the needs are met.

Does this align with your experience? UMC is welcoming denomination, concerning the split, don't ask don't tell.

Jesus answering with a question - evidence that Jesus wants us to be thinking and not just black/white thinking? Otherwise, Jesus would have said, here's the deal.

Parables are not literal. How does that apply to my situation in current or current issues? People learning about different perspectives.

Church shopping - looking for one who most aligns (not tending to look for diversity)

Example of being on a board - boards must talk and discuss things, learn how to see other aspects of who someone is even amidst disagreement on "issues" or solutions.

Assumptions - charismatics are too emotional, uneducated; mainline churches lack expressiveness and heart.

Church went from toxic echo chamber to a space of holding multitudes becuase folks stayed and did the work. Pastors are very gentle; also burned out quickly. Some people left. 6 years of process.

Wholehearted faith; Rachel Held Evans - if you care about the Scriptures you will wrestle it out

When eternity / salvation hinges on right thought; perfect apologetics, orthodoxy, the pressure is high.

Easy to catch myself inwardly treating, judgement. for instance, you are excluding gay people are going to exclude you. the cycle of judgment can be so intense.

We are all in process in different areas.

Everyone deserves this love and we are all deserving.

As a whole, no one is great at treating people well that they disagree with especially in practice instead of just thinking it. I can say all I want that we are inclusive and affirming but the moment someone is in that community, how do I respond?

When someone is actively discriminating or hurting - how to know when to intervene?

Holding space for people in process / in process of learning

Holding that tension while also making sure certain attitudes/language is making people feel safe

We all love certain people groups better than others.

What might be preventing someone from getting to the space where they can even have the conversation? In the moment it is hard to give that space.

Assumptions - experience at Duke has been very helpful in humanizing interactions with folks in different denominations, areas of the country.

Some assumptions made are: charismatics - uneducated snake-handlers; Catholics - holier than thou, Episcopal Anglican Catholic - no Spirit, all liturgy.

Non-denominational has enjoyed working with mainline because of access to liturgy

Knowing a denomination - assuming a church is affirming or non affirming

Making the assumption that all black churches are the same

Pentecostal and prosperity gospel got lumped into one

Being in class with people gives space to ask questions that you couldn't ask a stranger, learning not by doing research but by hearing a person's personal perspective

Eucharist conversation - eucharist is sad (umc) so they don't have it on easter

Episcopal perspective is different.

How is Eucharist painted to you and to me?

People walking away from episcopal church - not being where people are; expecting people to come to us; not doing enough for racial justice

Creating Christian community that is separate from the institution

What elements count as elements?

Otherness vs oneness

Two party system immediately creates divide

Places who have more parties tend to have more collaboration

The binary that has been created politically and in other speeches draws us toward the otherness which certainly created disunity

It would be helpful to see the Scripture on the slides. What does Scripture say we go along?

Not just seeing souls for conversion but seeing them for people

Critical Thinking

The word critical has such a negative connotation.

11 components - applied to things like student debt cancellation this week

Another perspective to consider is….

A posture of curiosity says i don't have all the answers and I don't know everything.

Embracing open posture could be helped in every area

For instance, racism doesn't only affect people of color, it affects our society as a whole

Current argument present in spaces particularly with young people around. What is the difference in providing space to learn critical thinking and indoctrinating them?

Self confidence does not mean that we don't ask questions. Adults need this reminder too.

Culture of the expert has made this a problem, expert is good but there is value in someone else bringing a different perspective.

Analysis paralysis - looking at resources for replacement sermon in worship.

There are some areas I assume I am wrong, and other areas I assume I am right.

People shift but latch onto the new ideals (extremism; seen in deconstruction where former fundamentalists become liberals)

Our assumptions of daily life based on our family of origin

Marriage - different rhythms of family of origin; this can spill over into religion

Last question - helps us treat others more like human beings

Opens and listening is a foundational relational thing. if you don't do that , you cannot work together for anything.

This is what Jesus did, so aren't we supposed to do this as well?

Critical thinking to change perspective - technology could be a great tool here.

It is much easier to listen to a podcast or read about a controversial issued than engage after having listened to multiple perspectives.

Podcasts give me enough language to allow me to even have a conversation

Is there a platform to actually host various perspectives?

Program where you could be matched with someone to have a 15 mine phone call to have a convo about disagreement

Wish there were more centrist groups to host something like this

For my most conspiracy believing friends - what will change their view of viewing the world?

(maybe the INFLUENCER book and direct experience may help?)

What will happen if they continue to not change their mind? It brings up anxiety and sadness. There is some hope but also despondence.

Habit and practice is a great concept - we don't have to be accomplished at something to do it.

The need to belong and be in a group is so strong. We have to overcome a lot to speak up and be the only dissenting voice. Confidence is needed because we don't want to be rejected and still belong.

This needs a deep understanding of our own belonging and our own Imago Dei. We will be ok even if we don't fit in the whole group.

This closes conversations, "I know the truth" or "The Bible says it, so it's clear"

Too focused on independence instead of interconnectedness

Expressed in different ways, Spanish speaking kids in class, nonverbal, etc

How might we be curious if we are not trying to be perfect in our knowing?

How could it aid? We could see our tightly help beliefs may not work outside our little circle.

When I was a librarian, there were many people living in poverty, there was an assumption they were lazy or they didn't want to work. In getting to know them, I found out this wasn't true.

Am I voting in ways that would benefit these people? Although I wanted to do good, I wasn't effective because I didn't know the people.

Even in knowing there is always something else that needs to be uncovered.

If we learn to celebrate diversity, it would actually look diverse. It's not going to be male white patriarchy. People do not want to move and welcome otherness to the table. Ot goes back to otherness and not oneness.

(This may need a direct experience. Our cohort is an example. Sharing stories. Feeling safe.)

It feels like it is more about control. People often vote on a one ballot issue. How do we shake that sense of one-ness and go for other-ness?

It is this mentality of scarcity.

We are living lot on our phones and the internet and we are very disconnected.

We often skip right to identifying and analyzing arguments instead of wondering and imagining; there is a whole quiet movement at the forefront that is needed before we jump to conclusions. we are missing out some tools we need to engage critically and reflectively.

Twitter - is not critical -this is something that is needed in emergency situations

maybe we are missing some foundations.

How do you think of open posture… story and making it personal, starting with the Imago Dei, putting real people and community in our lives, we let go of the grabbing headline and hear something deeper. If you are prepared in advance to hear someone's story (without making arguments in your own mind) then you can be more open.

Ethics

American dream and how it got mixed in with faith.

Lack of engagement still happens on an individual level in the mainline churches

We have shifted more to dancing around the idea of sin and using brokenness and really is people insinuating sin and just not saying the word.

If sin is used it is a collective sin not individual.

Inoculated to the talk of sin.

Partnership of divine and human work. Some of the work that might look like this is being avoided because it might look too political. This work may be political but it may not be political. For instance, boycott Disney but not help the poor.

Is tending to the vulnerable overwhelming because it is never going to be enough?

I wonder if the church let this task go to mostly the government.

What is the church's role and what is not the church's role?

What is different about your faith going your choices on abortion and your faith guiding your choices on welfare?

Governmental shift toward using faith based orgs but are those orgs really solving the problem?

How to we tend to support people in the moment, while also tending to the bigger work that needs to be done. We support a soup kitchen once a month.

Background of Augustine and Aquinas is drawing in what we need to be reminded of and how they are in conversation with one another. While it is a lot, it is necessary. Where are we coming from when we talk about ethics? And how has that translated over time?

Here is the heady knowledge and here is how it connects to the kingdom praxis.

There are a lot of different arguments within history and it is helpful to know that there are different perspectives. The arguments we are having about the Bible are similar built as the arguments being made about virtues/ethics.

Divine and human work coming together in your context? I think about this often but I don't have an answer. I do so much of reading and learning but I don't do a lot of doing. I feel strongly about what is right and about what we should be doing but it seems so big that I don't know how to start or where to start.

What I need to do is have the conversations who seem to have a different take on what being a Christian in the world means. I don't know how many of them get from reading the Bible and what Jesus did, how they get from there to being so exclusive and see these people are good and these people are bad. The bad people are not worthy of anything. I don't understand this. It breaks my heart that the current situation we are in with Christian nationalism. It is driving so many people away from ever even considering Christianity. They are louder than the people who are trying to live like Jesus.

Individuality - there is such a personal emphasis

A Hole in the World, Rachel Held Evans sister, writing about grief and grief practices. Focus on individual relationship with Christ. In her grief, she lost that. But what brought her back was going through practices and liturgies. It was those practices that brought her back.

I may serve but do I think it is important to vote or to do anything to change the systemic needs of the vulnerable?

We must see all as image bearers, otherwise the Christian worldview is harmful and not good news for all "I have the spirit of God, you don't. You are bad, I am good."

Theology Processing

Participants watched a video for this because I had to cancel sessions (sick kiddo) and they ended up really loving getting the material to review first!

My initial/immediate feedback:

I'm not good at self-control of paying as good of attention to a video. It's not personal, it's just a me problem. If I know I'm engaging with a person, or that its likely you're going to ask me a question, I'm listening a little closer! However, I also assume that our usual conversation gets us on tangents that might not be relevant, and this is a good way of avoiding that.

This was a good one for me to be able to watch, since I'm familiar with the quadrilateral it was easy for me to follow along. I imagine others have some questions (or there would be other topics that I might have question about) and that would make this format harder, potentially.

Being able to watch and then process like you mention at the end would make a lot of sense to me. It would be helpful to me if there are notes of what questions you want to ask, that in a live session you would usually ask right then, but in this case so we know what to prepare for other than just what stirs up in us… unless that's the outcome!

Thanks! I love theological processing, wish we all got to do it more 😊

Oh, I loved this topic! So many of our current issues are caused by not knowing how to read the bible. And/or, not knowing that there is more to it than the literal translation. But, most of us do not have the time or intellect or passion for diving into each word of text, learning the context in which it was written, etc. Therefore, I read and listen to those who are able to do so and have done the study and can share it with us. (I listened to a podcast with Erin Moon the other day where she suggested if there is a certain bible passage that is really driving our thinking and our life, we should study it deeply to make sure we have a full understanding of it. I would be interested in knowing if there is a "simple" method for normal humans like me to dive into a particular passage, beginning with the original language and going forward to now.)

As a slow processing introvert, I LOVE being able to watch the video in advance of our discussion! I am happy to participate in a case study, but I don't currently have any good suggestions for it. (Processing slowly haha)

I LOVE getting a pre-video to prepare me to think about the topic. My husband and I listened to it together.

If you don't have a topic, I have been thinking about Satan and demons. I am questioning the belief that demons are active in the earth messing with my day to day life. I am not sure they exist and would love to hear what the theological history of Satan and demons are and what some other theologies are about them. They are mentioned in the bible multiple times.

I have also seen the beliefs around Satan and demons weaponized. If you experience hard things people can say "demons are attacking you because you aren't following God close enough". However if you are in the "in crowd" and you go through bad times, they say it's because Satan is attacking you because he's afraid your good works are damaging to the evil he is doing. Ugh

It can really be harmful.

I've heard the CS Lewis quote ad nauseam about not thinking about Satan all the time but also not believing the devil is real. It was brought up again when I pushed back on the belief that if I preach at church, Satan is going to attack me, I asked if they thought that belief might be a little superstitious. I haven't made up my mind about it but I think we've gotten it wrong in my faith tradition. They treat that CS Lewis quote like it's holy scripture. Oh well CS Lewis said it, so I guess that settles it. (sarcasm)

PS. I'm going through a really hard time and I'm going to preach at church in a few weeks, soooo if I admit my struggle it will be labeled as an attack from Satan. What I really want is to have my church,

(what I believe should be a safe place to struggle and suffer within a loving community) just be with me in the struggle. I risk getting a bunch of harmful beliefs thrown at me, and judgement for being a human being if I am honest.

PS. I am honest with a few safe people, and maybe that's just going to be the way it is. But oh, I want so much more for my church.

STORY: Knowing Ourselves and Others

For introductions, I want to invite you to introduce yourself in the context of who you are, and not what you do. I realize that a big part of what we do makes up who we are, but often in social settings we tend to lead with status and accomplishments. So here are a few prompts for introduction, but feel free to add your own: What brings you joy? Is there a place or activity that makes you feel the most yourself / the most alive?

For the conversation,

What drew you to participate in this research?

What are some of the significant parts of your story?

Is there any one particular issue on the path to diplomacy that you are most drawn to?

What breaks your heart?

Can you think of a time that hearing someone else's story has impacted your perspective in a considerable way?

Responses:

Drawn to the healing of polarization, I want to make my corner of the world just a little bit better

I am mission driven, personal mission to help people flourish and thrive

Motherhood helped me see that I am also worthy of love; I just loved my kids so much, just the way they are.

Therapy - why did I stay in environments that were damaging to me, including the church?

2016 elections were so tough, because good and kind people supported what I perceived as a bully.

Dad passed away and the grief shaped who I am and what I am passionate about.

What breaks my heart? Spiritual abuse causes so much harm, by well intentioned people. Idea of community coming together for healing.

Reading stories about people of poor impacted me in a meaningful way, as did stories of people in the lgbtq community. I thought I was a compassionate person but I didn't see how my beliefs on the way the world worked was dehumanizing them. Getting to know people and reading books helped! Gay community - the idea I had in mind didn't match up with their experience.

I don't really get to interact with people of color very much and I would like to.

I worked in a very poor community and my job required me to interact with people on a daily basis in a way that I had never done. My ideas of poverty changed (they weren't lazy). When I started to rethink that, it invited a new outlook on other people groups too.

Listening feels like going to therapy.

How Minds Change - new book - the way minds change is talking to people about their own stories, who are poor, who are gay. People have to change their own mind and they do so by having interactions with people.

Normal uneventful childhood but I realized when I had children that people just are what they are. I have always been very empathetic. Part of it I got from my mother. I am very sensitive when I see unfairness. It breaks my heart. The latest thing that seems front and center is watching Christianity be turned into a weapon that is being yielded for power and oppression. This is completely counter to Jesus teachings and life.

George Floyd's murder - inadvertently started a book group at church. We read 13 books. Austin Channing Brown. I worked in the corporate world in many years. My experiences as a woman were tough, but hearing her perspective as a black woman was eye opening.

Her friend in the praise band didn't have money for food and hearing that helped her understand his views a little more.

Drawn to research because having spaces where people having conversations who are different from you is uncommon yet so needed.

Participated in a story convo that was slower and not actively (in seminary)

How can we create those types of communities?

Lacking pieces of my childhood that did not equip me to be a healthy adult. Emotional maturity, talking about emotions, having emotions, setting boundaries, holding boundaries, was important to the trajectory of where I am now, not just personally but professionally.

The church has remained a constant and gave me space but also gentle prodding to figure it out. What would it have looked like if I had to deconstruct? Healthy spirituality from her denomination.

Demographic markers

Want to engage because I am bad at it. You don't support that, then you can't be involved.

D.C. trip, who is our neighbor? homeless coalition had speakers who were wither currently or previously homeless. One woman had gone to college and worked at a hospital and still wound up homeless.

DO YOU FEEL SAFE TO BE YOURSELF WITHIN YOUR OWN COMMUNITY?

If there is a fear there, what is the fear? Or what is the cost?

Desire to engage in diversity, but not sure where to get that? Would you participate if the opportunity was provide it? What does that question even feel like? What fears come up for you?

Question responses from email (post session)

DO YOU FEEL SAFE TO BE YOURSELF WITHIN YOUR OWN COMMUNITY?

I am beginning to feel safe within subsets of my faith community (church)

I do feel safe in my deconstructing faith community. In most groups I start off with some agreements to foster safety with intention.

If there is a fear there, what is the fear? Or what is the cost?

My fear with some people in my church is that if I share a vulnerability or struggle I will be judged. Instead of being seen as I am, they will try to fix me OR they will dismiss me as "lacking faith" and determine I'm not spiritual enough. I want to be fully myself, and right now that means I'm struggling, but I need to be cautious about who I share my struggles with.

One of the common things I see happening is when I share something someone disagrees with or wants to fix they don't talk to me directly about it, so we could dialogue about it. It gets spiritualized and the person either shares the correction via a sermon, share in a group setting or prayer where I can't offer a counter point. (how toxic!)

The worst case scenario is that my point of view won't count. I may be an "outcast".

Desire to engage in diversity, but not sure where to get that? Would you participate if the opportunity was provide it? What does that question even feel like? What fears come up for you?

The deconstructing faith community has a little more diversity than the neighborhoods I live and work in. Our church has some people from Africa. I did an online study of the book Multiethnic Conversation: an eight-week journey toward unity in your church with Mosaic Church in Arkansas. The author is one of the pastors of the church and the leaders of the group were people of color.

One of the exercises asked us to reflect on the ways I interacted with people who were different (people of color) on a weekly basis. I was acutely aware of how little I did, and thought about how I could change that

I read How to Fight Racism by Jemar Tisby with the deconstructing faith group (The New Evangelicals) I now facilitate the zoom groups (including the book club). My big concern is "Are we being respectful of people of color when we as white people, talk about racism." Our groups are mainly white people, and I want to make sure we honor the experiences of people from marginalized communities (differently-abled, neurodivergent, LBGTQ, BIPOC) A big fear is that I don't want to get it wrong while working through anti-racism, I don't want to harm people.

So YES, I would enthusiastically participate in opportunities to be with people who are different. Especially in safe environments with facilitators who are people of color and it was an atmosphere to learn (and not feel like we had to come in and be perfect)

STORY experiences: Loved that experience . felt like a did a good job moderating and having people speak for a set amount of time.

Participant would be interested in an IN - person retreat.

Political Formation

Loved being able to have the video ahead of time. Slow processor so it is helpful to have it in advance.

Pantsuit politics was a big hit! Great podcast. Smart, thoughtful.

Political party background? Did not grow up where there was one correct party. We didn't talk about politics. When we did, it was measured, looking at candidates and what they stood for. Mom tended to vote democrat and dad tended to vote republican. It wasn't a hard and fast rule.

The greatest commandment and how it plays out in our social and political lives. People tend to pick Scripture verses to support their views; it should be seen through the lens of the greatest commandment. This gets lost. This should be the mission statement of the church. HOW TO CONNECT THIS TO PRACTICE. We should be the hands and feet of Jesus because of this commandment.

Churches love food banks, food drives, and soup kitchens. When you start to talk about the issues of WHY these problems exist, you get labeled a socialist.

How Minds Change book - how people get into these camps, group think situations

Being in conversation keeps me engaged but also having time to think about is helpful to have the extra time.

Could be helpful to have the workbook ahead of time to look into something. She would really find a workbook to be helpful so she could look back. And recognizing it is a building curriculum. Look back again and see if I still agree with myself or not? Writing it out would help flesh it out more. Make it an option.

Story of parishioner who gets upset when minster says "go vote" even though it is bipartisan.

Intellectually I can understand how I am supposed to react certain ways but I get frustrated when I want to engage. What is the effective way to engage instead of just shutting down?

It goes against your religion for YOU to do it but does it go against your religion for someone else to do it

Marsha Blackburn talking bout how women in Iran/Iraq should not be forced to cover their heads. Guy relating it to TN abortion laws

Grew up in household where it was not a straight ticket. If I don't have the info, I will base it off of one issue or I default to a party. Her parents weren't in the same social class when they were kids as she was growing up so maybe that helped not tp have a straight ticket so to speak.

Political and Spiritual Formation:

The things we need to do to be informed is work. In doing the work, we become more authentically engaged with the world round us. If you passively take what your church teaches, or whoever teaches, and don't do the work, it is disengaging from the work we are called to do. This takes away from our authenticity. My former approaches to political formation and spiritual formation were just letting people dominate me, without me engaging in the work. I gave up my authenticity and questions to be a part of the group. It felt like the easy way out, but I lost big pieces of myself along the way.

Gabor Mate (spelling?) we look for safety and often give up authenticity as children to have safety. Giving up some of who I am for safety (if anger isn't welcome in your family, etc)

Being uncomfortable and being ok with being uncomfortable is part of the process, and not just letting someone hand me what I am supposed to believe. Rachel Held Evans, engaging our faith with questions.

Spiritual Formation

Are we approaching this with our community?

SF was mostly for me targeted individually, but it isn't really shared in the church space. I don't feel like I have dialogue with community, church wise, but I do this within my family.

Reformed University Fellowship

Longing for community. I have always been fascinating about reading on the topic of religion.

I feel like I have more of an intellectual relationship with Christ than a feel him, less holy spirit and more intellectual.

We are always learning, I don't think we will ever fully have the answers on earth. Living into the questions poem really spoke to her.

Comfort with uncertainty and welcoming mystery.

Yes… in reality, everything ends up forming us, especially if we're not careful to "guard" it (that word is a bit too evangelical for me 😊 but I think it can fit.

Mmm story vs rule book is so good!!!

How to assess where to begin with a group if you don't know if they are yet ready to "live into the questions" instead of just seeking answers to them.

Connecting Belief and Action

Participants wanted to meet in a group for this. They discussed areas where they feel like they are connecting their beliefs and actions well, and some vulnerable areas where they are not. One topic we spoke of was homelessness.

Ethics - Practical Implications

Group meet. Developing an ethical statement to approach how we handle the path to ecumenical diplomacy and have a proper posture of heart to do so. Participants are given a set of questions to help guide them through their own ethical dilemma. I included some ethical statements from this session in the Artifact section.

Participant A

Imago Dei

Each and every person is made in the image of God and should be treated as such

Ecumenical Unity

I can and should learn from others with different church views, backgrounds, etc. I endeavor to approach those differences with humility and curiosity

Critical Thinking

When faced with an issue, I will seek to learn from many sources, using my intelligence as my guide. I will read and listen to the stories of those who have different experiences than I in order to learn other perspectives. I will not assume my experience/perspective is the only valid one

Ethics

I will use my position in my communities to advocate for ethical laws and policies which lift the oppressed as Jesus did, and I will vote accordingly.

Theology Processing

When faced with a theological challenge, I will endeavor to filter it through Scripture, tradition, reason, experience, community and culture.

Story: Knowing Ourselves and Others

I will recall and analyze my story and how it affects my views. I will listen to the stories of others with humility and curiosity and without judgment.

Political Formation

I will filter my political views through the actions of Jesus, leading with love.

Spiritual Formation

I will continue to develop spiritually through listening for the Holy Spirit, reading and analyzing scripture and learning from those who have spent years doing so.

Connecting Belief and Action

When I am faced with a belief I disagree with, I will first examine my beliefs and actions to ensure they are connected/congruent.

Participant B

Imago Dei

I will celebrate each human I have the honor of interacting with, and endeavor to remember they bear the image of God, especially when we are at odds with each other.

Ecumenical Unity

I will take care in interacting with those I disagree with, and endeavor to look deeper at the heart of the issue, the other side's heart, and my own heart.

Critical Thinking

I will look deeper into issues, actions, and statements, and endeavor to wrestle with things that are important.

Ethics

I will make sure that issues that are important to the wellbeing of others are not ignored and endeavor to ensure all people can be safe, whole, and welcome.

Theology Processing

I will seek theological perspectives I have previously ignored, and I will endeavor to filter it through Scripture, tradition, reason, experience, community, and culture.

Story: Knowing Ourselves and Others

I will listen with respect, curiosity, and empathy to my own story and the stories of others, and endeavor to bring open hearted presence to these interactions.

Political Formation

I will look deeper into issues, actions, and statements, and endeavor to form decisions based on my values.

Spiritual Formation

I will tend to my spiritual life and endeavor to authentically engage with my faith.

Connecting Belief and Action

I will examine my actions and endeavor to make sure they reflect my beliefs accurately.

Case Study

Participants are given a set of questions to help guide them through their own ethical dilemma. We reviewed case studies and discussed what went well and what could be improved in the overall course.

I would have liked to start the case study from the beginning and work it out along the way.

I liked approaching the CS generally and not having dilemma was helpful.

Having journal prompt from each week on what i was saying, thinking, doing; they could use it or not

I used the ethical statement from the week before to develop the case study and how it relates to my dilemma. This was helpful.

These are deep important issues that I am walking through; it was therapeutic for me to process

Well: I felt really supported in the first one on one session. It changed my life. It was affirming to know there was someone who thought like I did. I felt relief. You put the work in ahead of time to think this through

Better: If I had written a workbook that would have been helpful. (content in the workbook)

Slim workbook that doesn't have too much in it.

Workbook that has one page per topic

Having the slides in whatever format so that I could refer to them and have space to write.

I agree, it has been a great experience for me. I love talking about these things and it gave me a space to do this.

I don't think well on the spot, I am a slow processor. I liked the videos so I could know what we are going to talk about.

Finding someone who thinks like you is something that is so needed. Everyone needs to be seen and have a safe space to talk about these things.

It was an inviting space for calm discussion which these topics do not present themselves in a calm way. Everyone was frantic on the day of the election in a group text. Felt heightened emotionally even amongst folks who agree. There is no space to have a calm rational conversation. Fostering that space and experience is an important aspect that is intentional and reflects your skills as a spiritual director. Non-anxious presence was helpful. The goal is not to bring more anxiety. That doesn't mean there won't be people that feel anxious but the whole thing should not be mired in anxiety. Conversation, not a tirade. Humanness is important to name as valuable. It cannot be created otherwise.

Appendix F–Milestone 6 Project Launch Plan Documentation

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

DMIN 951: PROJECT LAUNCH PLAN

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

TIFFANIE WILSON

PROJECT FACULTY:

DR. EKATERINA LOMPERIS

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2023

Doctoral Project Description

NPO:

How can we become proficient in better listening to and learning from each other to understand the ethical and intellectual commitment and stakes behind theological, political, and social perspectives different from our own? In a pluralistic society, such deep understanding is necessary to enable working together toward ecumenical diplomacy.

Project Description:

This project is a twelve-week, practitioner facilitated course that guides participants through the path to Ecumenical Diplomacy. The research process uncovered multiple causes of disunity among Christians in regard to theological, social, and ethical dilemmas and the course serves to offer a pathway toward unity by addressing the topics of Imago Dei, Ecumenical Unity, Critical Thinking, Ethics, Theology Processing, Story: Knowing Ourselves and Others, Political Formation, Spiritual Formation, Connecting Belief and Action, Practical Implications of Ethics, and finally, a Case Study.

Ecumenical Diplomacy is showcased via visual slides, and also includes notes that reflect participant experience as they advanced through the course. I have also included samples of personal ethical statements and case studies created by participants to reveal how the course helped them integrate and apply what they learned. The goal is better understanding, not uniformed thinking, so the path to ecumenical diplomacy can be applied to a variety of ethical, theological, and social issues.

Pedagogically, the intention for the *Ecumenical Diplomacy* project is a one-on-one and/or a small group format. The participant group who completed the course in the fall of 2022 expressed this context worked well. The course could also be utilized via a teaching video where content was covered, followed by an individual session to assist the participant in processing and implementing what they are learning. With proper formatting, I could see the course being used for retreats and consulting (primarily for ministry and Christian non-profit leaders) or as an academic course, although it would require some adjustments as well as a reading list that would accompany the course. *Ecumenical Diplomacy* can be used in synchronous and/or asynchronous formats. Participants could either view the material before the discussion session or in a live setting.

Audience

The intended audience is Christians who are processing how to better come together and unify amidst polarization. Initially, I hoped for this to be targeted toward a diverse audience. However, I am finding that the language used is targeting individuals with a college education. There may need to be further iterations or edits in order to include a broader population.

Development Plan

The twelve-week course has already been developed and completed by participants. The next step is to continue to offer it to the community once the project has officially been passed.

Development Process

I gathered verbal and written feedback during one-on-one and group sessions with course participants. I also gathered feedback through participant ethical statements and case studies that showed how participants were able to implement what they learned into a real-world, personal, ethical or social issue in which they desired to have a greater understanding. These interactions, particularly in the last course where participants reflected on the entire course, were helpful as they expressed this was a transformative process for them. They also expressed they feel they now have the necessary tools to apply this framework to other issues as well.

I would like to present this course within the community and have already met with government and clergy leaders to host the Ecumenical Diplomacy course.

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