



# The Telos Collective

ANGLICANS AT THE INTERSECTION OF GOSPEL AND CULTURE

## **ENGAGING CULTURE** Learning Community Curriculum

### **LEADER'S GUIDE**

Based on the 2018 Intersection Conference, this 8-week curriculum will help you facilitate conversation groups in your local community.

# PART 1: ABOUT THE ENGAGING CULTURE CURRICULUM

In May 2018, more than 100 missional leaders from 19 dioceses in the Anglican Church in North America gathered for the 2018 Intersection Conference—the Telos Collective’s second annual event. Led by Telos Collective Founder and Leader Bishop Todd Hunter, the conversation centered on Engaging Culture: An Interdisciplinary Conversation. Seven speakers explored key areas of cultural engagement (Bible, Theology, Justice, Arts, Multiculturalism, Worship, Witness) with a goal of reimagining how the Anglican Church in North America relates to culture.

The sessions from these world-class teachers are the foundation for this 8-week Learning Community Curriculum. Learning Community participants will watch each session or a clip from the session. Then, they will work through discussion questions designed to help them journey toward effectively engaging culture with the gospel. Participants can utilize the additional resources to take the conversation a step further, if desired. Finally, participants are encouraged to try the Weekly Practice and report on how it went at their next meeting.

For answers to more general questions, check out the [Learning Community Guide](#).

## PART 2: HOW TO USE THE ENGAGING CULTURE CURRICULUM

**Here are a few practical tips for using this curriculum.**

- 1. Invite a group of 5-10 people to be part of a Learning Community.** In your first meeting, or by email, be sure to:
  - Define a Learning Community—a group that comes together to listen to one another and talk about engaging culture with the gospel.
  - Talk with participants about what they each hope to experience in this Learning Community.
  - Emphasize that the group is a confidential, safe place to share thoughts, ideas and fears about faith and the Church.
  - Solidify a place and time that works for everyone to meet over the next 8 weeks.
- 2. Meet with your Learning Community group each week for 8 weeks, consecutively if possible.** At each meeting, your group will:
  - Watch the assigned conference session, or a brief clip from the session if preferred.
  - Answer the discussion questions, or as many as time allows.
  - Take advantage of the additional resources, if desired. If it's an article, you may want to print and hand it out, or if it's books, distribute a reading list. You may want to choose one book to all read together.
  - Complete the weekly practice. Ask participants to come to the next meeting ready to report on how the practice went.
- 3. At the end of the 8 weeks, thank your participants and gather feedback about their experience, whether by email or sending them a brief online survey. As the leader, think about how you might share your Learning Community experience with the Telos Collective. We would love to hear and share it with others!**

You are welcome to continue to meet as a Learning Community beyond this curriculum. If you need ideas for where to go next, email Ryan ([ryan@teloscollective.com](mailto:ryan@teloscollective.com)).



## WEEK 1: "INTRODUCTION TO CULTURE"

BY BISHOP TODD HUNTER

**WATCH OR LISTEN TO THE SESSION:** [BIT.LY/2JMOTLY](https://bit.ly/2JMOTLY)

**SYNOPSIS:** It's been said that culture is one of the most complex words in the English language. We usually speak about culture in terms of the atmosphere in which we live, the customs and patterns that define our lives and work, and/or what human beings do with God's creation. Culture is the environment in which we live where decisions are made and courses of actions are chosen, based on all sorts of factors and influences.

Nancy Ammerman writes, "Culture includes all the things a group does together...Culture is who we are and the world we have created to live in. It is the predictable patterns of who does what and habitual strategies for telling the world about the things held most dear" (Studying Congregations, p. 15; pp. 78- 79). She suggests that there are three dimensions to a culture: "what we do here (rituals and routines), what we make (artifacts), and the stories we tell (language, myths, local histories, sacred stories)." Learn more here: [studyingcongregations.org/culture-frame](https://studyingcongregations.org/culture-frame).

With such a broad description of culture, the engagement of Gospel and culture is no easy task. But the crucial question that Bishop Todd Hunter suggests we need to keep at the forefront is this: Is my culture-making in alignment with the Gospel and aims of Jesus, or is it aimed at a telos other than which God was doing in and through Jesus? The goal of this discernment should be to cultivate a distinctiveness that points to the world's future, while living and working in the world's present.

When big changes in culture happen, it often causes deep anxiety. And the Christian church is no stranger to this. When the once-dominant religion feels threatened by trends in the surrounding culture, it causes a desperate fear. Specifically, what can emerge along with these cultural changes is an increase of our fear of the "other," or people who are different from us. Xenophobia exists both inside and outside of church, and it is a common reaction to these massive cultural shifts. Bishop Todd asserts that when it comes to cultural proposals, fear is a very bad master. We cannot let fear dictate our attitudes and actions, much less our discernment toward the question of how we engage culture.

Instead, we turn to God's telos, or ultimate plan for the world, as our authority and guide, as a way to enter into cultural engagement without fear. Jesus' pattern of life clearly sets out his chief aim—to create a people who partner with God in putting the world to right. We have

the privilege of participating with him in his work. During his time on earth, Jesus modeled for us a winsome, non-anxious presence in culture, and sent us out as co-creators of culture—on mission because God is mission. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we strive to faithfully and fruitfully engage culture with Christ, but without fear because we know the telos.

As we go through these 8 weeks, let's keep this crucial question in mind: Is our engagement with culture in alignment with the gospel and aims of Jesus?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How would you define culture? What are some common aspects of culture?
2. Do you think God is pro-culture? Why or why not?
3. Think about your "cultures" (family, work, church, neighborhood, city, etc.). Can you think of at least three rituals, routines, artifacts, and/or language/stories that exist in those spaces?
4. Take one of above rituals, routines, etc., and map them out over the Gospel and aims of Jesus. How would you say they line up?
5. Where have you seen the church "reacting out of fear" to cultural shifts?
6. In our culture, most of us—to one degree or another—have a fear of the "other." Where do you see this playing out in your cultural spaces? What are the effects of this fear on our culture, and on us?
7. What do you think it means to have a non-anxious presence in culture? How could that kind of presence change the culture in your home, school or workplace?

## WEEKLY PRACTICE:

Try to embody a non-anxious presence in your home, school, or workplace this week. This might involve:

- Practicing active listening with others, especially with those who are hard to listen to
- Not trying to "win" or have the last word in an argument (especially on social media!)
- Letting go of perfectionism
- Purposely letting someone else take the spotlight
- Noticing when you feel anxious or fearful as you engage with people different from you
- Going out of your way to affirm and encourage those around you
- Praying for those whom you meet or encounter, or people you struggle with
- When feelings of fear and anxiety arise, pray "Lord, your will be done" or "The Lord is my shepherd; I do not have to be in want"



## WEEK 2: "A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE CULTURE CONVERSATION"

BY SCOT MCKNIGHT

[WATCH OR LISTEN TO THE SESSION: BIT.LY/2JMOTLY](https://bit.ly/2JMOTLY)

**SYNOPSIS:** Scot McKnight defines a Christian culture as one that strives toward Christoformity (being formed by the life, teachings, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ) in all ways. This subversive Christoformity is vital in regard to the church's engagement with culture, because it distinguishes Christian culture from the "world"—a culture that is often in contradiction to the redemptive ways of Christ. Christoformity will never perfectly align with North American culture because Christoformity has different aims. It is a culture made possible only by the Spirit and those open to the Spirit. And it can only be partly achieved in this world as we await full redemption and restoration in the coming kingdom of God.

McKnight highlighted 8 distinctives of a Christoform culture of the Church and its leaders:

1. **A Culture of People** - The focus is not on ideas and sermons, but on the people who come in our doors, and who we meet in our neighborhoods (2 Cor. 11:28, 1 Thess. 2:7).
2. **A Culture of Spiritual Formation** - We must be committed to nourishing and cultivating character and wisdom through spiritual formation (Phil. 4:9, 1 Cor. 11:1).
3. **A Culture of Listening** - We must be listeners of Scripture and of people (specifically, those in our lives).
4. **A Culture of Prophetic Witness** - God has given us a revelation, and we must speak it subversively in our culture.
5. **A Culture of Presence** - God is always present and at work, and we are called to bring this presence to the people we encounter daily.
6. **A Culture of "Priesting"** - We are called to mediate God's redemption, wisdom, and presence to those around us - through our speaking, intercession and worship.
7. **A Culture of Servanthood** - We are called serve others before all else (Mark 10:42-45, Phil. 2).
8. **A Culture of (Subversive) Leaders** - We must avoid the temptations of celebrity and power, and be willing to subvert these influences to draw others into a Christoform life.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Scot McKnight says the true mark of a Christian culture is Christoformity in all ways, and then highlighted 8 distinctives of a Christoform culture. Do you agree with his list? Would you add any distinctives to the list?
2. Which of the 8 distinctives are strengths for you? Which are weaknesses?
3. Which of the 8 distinctives are strengths in your church/leadership? Which are weaknesses?
4. If we measured American culture by the standard of Christoformity, what would it tell us? How can we identify what is “worldly” in our culture?
5. For the Apostle Paul, radical Christoformity meant avoiding the ideals of eloquence, titles and images that the Corinthians valued. What would radical Christoformity look like in today’s culture? What would be the result?
6. Scot quoted Eugene Peterson as saying: “I am undermining the kingdom of self and establishing the kingdom of God, helping people become who God wants them to be, using the methods of subversion.” What do you think it means to subvert worldliness? What might subversive leadership look like?
7. Paul was persecuted for his Christoform life. What might persecution for living a Christoform life look like today in North America?
8. What practices could you adopt in your church(es) to further cultivate a Christoform culture?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

A blog article by Scot McKnight, “What Makes a Culture Christian?” ([teloscollective.com/what-makes-a-culture-christian/](https://teloscollective.com/what-makes-a-culture-christian/))

## WEEKLY PRACTICE:

Choose one way to demonstrate/pursue Christoformity this week in your sphere of influence. Some ideas:

- Be the presence of God in a difficult situation.
- Intercede for someone in need.
- Serve someone without expecting anything in return.
- Practice active listening and engaging a spouse, child, co-worker, or neighbor in a deeper way.
- Go out of your way to speak encouraging words to someone.



## WEEK 3: "PAST AND PRESENT PROPOSALS ON THE INTERSECTION OF CHURCH AND CULTURE" BY DAVID FITCH

WATCH OR LISTEN TO THE SESSION: [BIT.LY/2JMQLTY](https://bit.ly/2JMQLTY)

**SYNOPSIS:** Everyone has a theology of church and culture. Two bad habits: 1. All culture is bad. 2. All culture is good. Neither option engages the culture. The question is: How shall we engage culture?

David Fitch believes American theologians Richard and H. Reinhold Niebuhr treat culture as one big lump that needs only a single strategy for engagement, and that we are all under the influence of Niebuhrian thought on culture. Christendom has long assumed that we're in charge and have power to influence. But the reality of post-Christendom in North America is that we've lost this power and influence. A Neo-Anabaptist critique, Fitch argues, might be helpful in this new space, centered around five points of divergence:

1. **Jesus:** Where Niebuhr saw Jesus as a principle to be applied, Fitch argues we need to see Jesus as a person, as the Lord whom we follow.
2. **Culture:** Where Niebuhr viewed the world as one monolithic culture—one that is Christian and has power—Fitch argues that we live in a world with many cultures, some that are in alignment with the reign of God and some that aren't. Our job is in the realm of discerning these cultures.
3. **Church:** Niebuhr argued that his principles focused on leaders of the church speaking to those outside of the church, hoping to influence them. But Fitch argues that the church needs to be the locus of an alternative "visible" culture and community that can witness to the larger world. The church has to be a way of life, visible to the world. We must first show how to be a different community, and then let God use it with the credibility that we gain in the world.
4. **Creation:** Where Niebuhr characterized God the Father and creation as the source of Christian ethics distinct from Jesus, Fitch argues that this distinguishes too much between God and Jesus, and we need to bring them together, allowing Jesus to help us understand the Father and creation more fully.
5. **Power:** Niebuhr considers Jesus' teaching as impractical regarding power, and that the withdrawal from power is unhelpful. But Fitch argues that a different power is needed, not through coercion, but through the Cross of Jesus. There are two kinds of power, the power of the world (the sword), and the power of the Spirit and presence. This changes the way we move into the world, making space for God to work as opposed to doing God's work for Him. And this changes everything.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. David Fitch warns against “applying” Jesus on our own terms, for our own ends. What do you think he means?
2. How have you seen the Church use power in ways that have been unhelpful to the aims of Jesus?
3. Now that our culture is officially post-Christian, how do we respond? Why does David Fitch say this is an opportunity?
4. When we disrupt the world and its patterns, people are going to be upset. Why? How can we handle the conflict and pushback?
5. If the church is actually a culture, an alternative community, is it a culture you’d choose to be part of? Why or why not?
6. What is a practical, visible way that we can witness to culture what it means to live under the Lordship of Christ, one that engages a posture of presence?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

An article that David Fitch referenced in his session:

[“Knitting While Detroit Burns?”: The Reformed “Both/And” versus the Anabaptist “First/Then”](#)

## WEEKLY PRACTICE:

For one day, witness to the culture by intentionally sharing power with the powerless. This might look like going to those who don’t have power in your community, and doing the following:

- Listening instead of speaking
- Putting another person’s needs first
- In your encounters with people, asking instead of telling
- Helping a person develop and perform as highly as possible, without taking credit
- Considering what it looks like to be present to people, instead of giving them principles to live by



## WEEK 4: "THE PRACTICE OF EUCHARIST TO SHAPE A JUSTICE- ORIENTED PEOPLE" BY KYUBOEM LEE

[WATCH OR LISTEN TO THE SESSION: BIT.LY/2JMOTLY](https://bit.ly/2JMOTLY)

**SYNOPSIS:** Monuments are not just mere objects, they are signs that signify larger realities. In the case of the recent events surrounding Charlottesville, a Confederate statue was a monument signifying a certain kind of power and principality. These types of monuments speak into how we should structure world, society, what rules our hearts and minds, and what defines what is real and true and important. In addition, Lee argues, monuments demand loyalty and allegiance.

The Eucharist acts as its own kind of monument, a witness to the Kingdom of God through Christ. As such, it serves as a counter-monument to all the other kingdoms of the world (i.e., white supremacy, in the case of Charlottesville) that stand in opposition to God's kingdom.

In the Kingdom of God, there is equality at the foot of the cross. Unfortunately, many kingdoms of the world often lift up some at the expense of others. Many who receive the Eucharist also readily declare allegiances to other kingdoms. As the Western Church, we must guard ourselves against our tendency to co-opt the good things of God, given to us for the sake of shalom and peace, and use them for our own purposes and power. It's all too easy for us to misappropriate the Eucharist to exclude or keep people out, contributing to racial, economic, and social division. Instead, we are called to grow as a kingdom of hospitality—so that we welcome the "other" as God's image bearer.

But this is hard work, for a number of reasons. First, it is easier, in many ways, to keep the Eucharist in the realm of the individual, as a personal, pietistic encounter with God. It is easy to forget that it is a social and communal act of the church, with a justice and shalom-oriented character. And we must flesh out these social, communal, and justice-oriented aspects of the Eucharist, helping our communities cultivate imaginations with this kind of Eucharistic character in mind.

Lee gives two Scripture passages that describe our task: First, he cites 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, where the Eucharist was being served in different ways to different groups (rich vs. poor). Paul saw the Lord's Supper as a witness to the classism that was dividing the church in Corinth. One cannot proclaim one body and one cup and practice classism in this way; it is a betrayal of the heart of the Eucharist. Second, Lee shares Luke 14:15-24, the Parable of the Great Banquet, as a vision for what the Kingdom of God might look like at the Eucharistic table. The big question of the parable is: Who is going to make it in, and who are the VIPs at the table in this kingdom? Luke is clear: It is the poor, the blind, the lame.

At the heart of the Eucharist is hospitality—God's invitation to sinners to taste of his goodness. When the church heeds the call to practice hospitality and welcome in the poor, the blind, the cripple, it's a sign that the kingdom of God is here now.

This brings us back around to the second reason why a justice-oriented, hospitality-driven Eucharistic imagination is hard—because it often requires us to change. It requires us to step outside our normal comfort zones to embrace those not like us, to embrace and welcome in the poor, the marginalized and the downtrodden. It requires repentance, turning away from the kingdoms and powers of this world and turning toward the kingdom of God.

In summary, we need a vision of the “kingdom society” to be fed into our souls as we eat at the Table together each week. And this weekly Table practice needs to feed our imagination of what it means to be the Body of Christ in the world. This requires a people who are deeply, spiritually, imaginatively formed toward the justice and shalom of the Kingdom. The question before us is: How do we cast vision for and practice the Eucharist in such a way that it forms us into these kinds of people?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Kyuboem Lee offered a few “monuments” that many in the world are loyal to (white supremacy, racism, classism, etc.). Can you think of other monuments that the Eucharist might “counter?”
2. What are the “kingdoms of this world” that you are tempted to align with? Which of these has had an impact/influence in your formation?
3. Read through the two passages Lee referenced: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 and Luke 14:15-24. What do the passages communicate about the social/communal significance of the Eucharist? What eschatological realities are the Eucharist/Banquet Table signifying, according to Paul and Jesus?
4. Jesus said those who are on the outside—marginalized, forgotten—are the honored guests in his kingdom. How should this inform how we engage culture?
5. In your church or community, are the rich and poor sitting at the same table, giving a glimpse into God’s future society? If not, why? Are there other forms of exclusion happening?
6. Kyuboem Lee warns against Christianity’s history of paternalism, or restricting people’s freedom for “their own good.” Why do we do this, and what might be a better way to relate to culture?
7. Why is hospitality deeply challenging for you, personally? Thinking about your church as a whole, what are some of the challenges you face in practicing hospitality? Consider and identify a few simple, practical steps you and your church could take to practice hospitality more fully in the next weeks and months.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

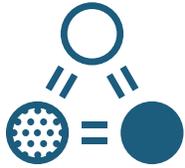
Books Kyuboem Lee referenced in his session

[When Helping Hurts](#) by Steve Corbett  
[The Color of Law](#) by Richard Rothstein  
[Family Properties](#) by Baryl Satter

[Race and Place](#) by David Leong  
[American Apartheid](#) by Douglas Massey  
[Exclusion and Embrace](#) by Miroslav Wolf

## WEEKLY PRACTICE:

Practice hospitality by reaching out to and inviting someone different from you out for coffee, or if possible, over for a meal in your home or space—even if it requires you to be uncomfortable.



## WEEK 5: "TOWARDS A MORE DIVERSE ANGLICANISM" BY ESAU MCCAULLEY

[WATCH OR LISTEN TO THE SESSION: BIT.LY/2JMOTLY](https://bit.ly/2JMOTLY)

**SYNOPSIS:** The Anglican Church in North America has a mission statement: "Reaching North America with the transforming love of Christ." But Anglicanism has largely been absent from the African American experience, and the reasons for this are many. African Americans are often portrayed as statistics, or as victims of their history or environment. But African Americans are not simply acted upon; they are actors. They need Jesus. What they don't need are human saviors. If the Church is to reach African Americans, the Church can't come in with the attitude that they are somehow better than the communities they serve. The Church must actually care about the reality African Americans face, and disciple them through relationship. Moreover, the Church must develop a plan for reaching African American communities—becoming a part of them, serving them, evangelizing them and integrating them into community. It is impossible to reach North America with the transforming love of Christ without thinking about people of color.

Esau articulated several important things to consider as we move towards a more diverse church:

- We must develop a plan towards church planting in inner-city communities, where the majority of African Americans live, that goes beyond mere outreach and coming in to give services. It must involve becoming a part of these communities and serving there, then developing ways to integrate the people there into our church communities.
- We must be unrelenting advocates for those who suffer, particularly in these communities. As Esau mentioned, this crucial question needs to be addressed: What is your concern for the poor and the marginalized?
- We must take seriously some of the statistics that Esau mentioned, like that 36% of Evangelicals believe that racism against African Americans is a major problem, while 88% of African Americans believe it is. And our responses to statistics like this are important.
- The Church must get over what Esau called a "shadow battle" with a distorted black religiosity. The majority of black Christians in North America are faithful, orthodox followers of Jesus. Anglicans must get over this shadow battle against a black liberalism that has never been the dominant voice of the black community. The inability to get over this dilutes our witness.
- Esau suggested one of the first steps to reaching African Americans could be on college campuses, amongst the emerging black middle-class students who attend these institutions.

- There must be intentional plans at all levels to devote time and resources to the recruitment and development of African Americans into leadership positions in the church.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Esau McCaulley says, “Concerns with black bodies lying in the street is part of evangelism.” Respond to this statement. How might it influence the way you think about evangelism, particularly towards minorities and people of color?
2. What can we learn from the faith of African Americans, which is tied to their survival in incredible hardship?
3. What are your cultural/racial stereotypes? What would repentance and change look like toward these stereotypes?
4. What are some of the reasons why more Africans Americans don’t exist in your church community? What are some of the steps you might take to change this?
5. How can the Church develop a real plan for reaching African American communities? What would it take to make the plan a reality? In your context?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

### **Books:**

[\*Trouble I’ve Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism\*](#) by Drew Hart

[\*Free At Last: the Gospel and the African American Experience\*](#) by Carl Ellis

### **Articles by Esau:**

[After Lemonade: The Future of Black Christians in the Diaspora](#), The Witness, May 2018

[The invisible: African Americans in North American Anglicanism](#), The Living Church, May 2016

## WEEKLY PRACTICE:

Commit to having a deeper conversation with a person of color whom you know. Or, if you don’t know someone, find a space in your city or locale (coffee shop, restaurant, etc.) that African Americans frequent, and commit to being present there regularly.



## WEEK 6: "NO SUCH THING AS ATHEISM - SECULARIZATION AND IDOLATRY"

BY WILLIAM CAVANAUGH

[WATCH OR LISTEN TO THE SESSION: BIT.LY/2JMOTLY](https://bit.ly/2JMOTLY)

**SYNOPSIS:** There is a great deal of concern in the Church over the rise of "Nones," and the rise of atheism in general in our culture. Many argue (Charles Taylor, et al.) that, with the rise of the modern world, a "disenchantment" occurred that split the natural world from the transcendent, and this has given rise to the movement of so many away from the Church and into atheism (lack of belief in God). Cavanaugh suggests this argument is misguided, however, and wants to reframe it through the lens of a biblical critique of idolatry.

According to Cavanaugh, the Bible is silent on atheism because it is assumed that atheism is not possible for most human beings. The Bible does have a lot to say about idolatry, but not always in the ways we have typically understood the term. Cavanaugh argues that idolatry in the Scriptures is far more about behavior than it is about belief. It is less about a conceptual error, but rather about error in devotion. In other words, idolatry exists both towards the transcendent and immanent realms (worship of others "gods" and worship of things in the natural world alike). Humans are worshipping creatures whose devotion falls on all kinds of things that are not God. As David Foster Wallace once said: "In the day to day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism, there is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships...". Cavanaugh goes on to consider nationalism and consumerism as two examples of how idolatry exists in our current cultural context. Both demand loyalty/commitments from us, both are manifested in symbols/rituals, both employ narratives of salvation, etc.

As we consider our current cultural context, this biblical critique of idolatry is one way we can consider the church's engagement with the world. We can acknowledge that we all have devotions and commitments (idols) that are not God; and underneath everything we do, we're all longing for transcendence. This is the basis for a sympathetic outreach. In the end, however, the only way to oppose a false enchantment is to offer people a better enchantment, one that is rooted and grounded in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. We need to proclaim that the world is enchanted by the true God, who came to us in material form. And we need to show that Christianity is a practice of seeing and enacting the presence of God in all things.

Cavanaugh suggests the Eucharist as a means to demonstrate this reality each and every week, arguing that it is not just some superfluous ritual, but a different, richer way of dealing with the material world, and an important way for us to reject the artificial division between secular and sacred. "So the formal sacraments of the church are the burning focal points of God's presence in material reality." And we need these "focal points," not only to train our senses to see God's presence everywhere else, but also to change our desires and longings away from our idols and towards God.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think it would be effective to engage culture on the grounds of mutual idolatry—that is, all of us are idolaters of something that is not God (“everyone worships”)? Why or why not? How might this change your current witness to those around you?
2. Cavanaugh mentioned nationalism and consumerism as two examples of modern “immanent” idolatry. Can you think of tangible ways these two examples are idolatrous? Can you think of other examples of idolatry?
3. Cavanaugh said: “Idolatry critique in the Bible is most properly self-critique. We would do well to direct idolatry critique at ourselves and our own daily practices, because we are all idolaters, of course.” What idols (transcendent or immanent) do you find yourself worshipping?
4. Can you think of questions that might help start a conversation about idolatry/worship with non-Christians/atheists/Nones?
5. How can we teach/train the people in our communities to see and understand the sacraments in the way Cavanaugh describes as “burning focal points of God’s presence in material reality”? Do your current sacramental practices and teaching point toward this reality?
6. Outside of the sacraments, how can the Church “offer better enchantments” than the world has to give? What might that look like?
7. Near the end, Cavanaugh argued that the Eucharist (and sacraments more generally) are not just better “enchantments” for people to consume, but they also “turn the act of consumption inside-out” and consume us, reconstituting the Church into a different community that, like bread, is defined by “being broken and given away and shared and consumed.” What are the implications of this perspective on the Eucharist and the church’s witness to the world?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

### Books by William Cavanaugh:

[\*Field Hospital: The Church’s Engagement with a Wounded World\*](#)

[\*Migrations of the Holy: Theologies of State and Church\*](#)

[\*Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire\*](#)

[\*Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ\*](#)

### A speech and book Cavanaugh referenced in his session

[\*“This is Water” Commencement Speech\*](#) by David Foster Wallace

[\*Infinite Jest\*](#) by David Foster Wallace

## WEEKLY PRACTICE:

Consider a friend or acquaintance who is a non-Christian/atheist/None who would be open to an honest conversation about worship/idolatry. Present Cavanaugh’s argument to them and have a conversation about it. What is worship? Can we worship material things? What does that look like? And do you think it’s true that this is tied to a longing for transcendence?

or

Take an hour to reflect, either by yourself or with a small group, on the modern-day idols you worship. What are the beliefs, rituals and symbols, grand narratives of providence and/or salvation, and employments of sacrifice that are involved in these “idols?” How have these influenced you?



## WEEK 7: "REPENTANCE AND HUMILITY AS POLITICAL WITNESS"

BY JENNIFER MCBRIDE

[WATCH OR LISTEN TO THE SESSION: BIT.LY/2JMOTLY](https://bit.ly/2JMOTLY)

**SYNOPSIS:** The gospel is political because it concerns how we order our lives in relation to neighbor, strangers, and enemies. Christian discipleship is about following Jesus into the world as he embodies and proclaims the reign of God—a reign that is made concrete when we love enemies, welcome strangers, have mercy, seek peace, etc.

The politics of the Gospel offer a third way beyond partisan politics. But this third way is difficult in a culture that is so highly partisan, divided and, in many ways, marked by a triumphalism that contaminates all sides. Triumphalism, as Jennifer McBride defines it, is arrogant or self-righteous confidence in a set of ideas or beliefs that closes down productive learning—confidence in political or religious ideologies that is disconnected from embodied engagement with the world.

A non-triumphal witness is necessary for two reasons: 1. Flourishing of a common good in our pluralistic democracy, and 2. Faithfulness to the crucified Christ. But we also need a public witness that is bold, as we attempt to remain faithful to our Christian witness. How might we participate in our culture in a way that is both non-triumphal and retains our distinctive Christian witness? McBride suggests that it comes through a disposition of confession and repentance.

Confession – a pattern of speaking arising from humble acknowledgement of complicity in specific injustice and the church’s inherent entanglement with society’s structural sin. Repentance – the church’s concrete social and political engagement that arises from taking responsibility for such sin. Energized by courage and hope because the church can become a vehicle of concrete redemption and participates in God’s healing transformation of this world.

Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer views the Church as called out, chosen for a mission, but not specially favored, morally or physically. He asks, “How do we go about being ‘religionless-worldly’ Christians? How can we be ekklesia, those who are called out, without understanding ourselves religiously as privileged, but instead seeing ourselves as belonging wholly to the world? Christ would then no longer be the object of religion, but something else entirely, truly lord of the world.” The importance here is being in solidarity with the world.

If we are not morally superior to the world, McBride says, we need a public witness that is not based on privilege or asserting power over others. What does it mean to be chosen? The church is chosen to carry on the work of the incarnate crucified and risen God. The church’s election is not for itself, but the church is chosen to exist for others, for the world. And it does so, by taking the form or the shape of Jesus in public life.

Jesus belonged wholly to the world by taking the form of a sinner, culminating on the cross by taking

responsibility for sin. Jesus was in solidarity with sinners in three ways:

1. He assumed sinful flesh (Romans 8:3) (solidarity with humans).
2. He was baptized with sinners in response to John's call to repent. In being baptized by John, Jesus numbers himself with the transgressors.
3. Refusing to be called good, Jesus accepted responsibility for sin as a convicted criminal on the cross.

Bonhoeffer comments, "In an incomprehensible reversal of all righteous and pious thought, God declares Godself guilty towards the world, and thereby extinguishes the world's guilt; God treads the humble way of reconciliation and thereby sets the world free." Ultimately, Jesus displays a posture of repentance. Jesus' posture displays an active determination that judgement falls on him and not on others. This is the definitive expression of goodness and love.

We need to declare Jesus is Lord and participate in our culture through a disposition of repentance—demonstrating sorrow and confession for our own sinfulness and complicity in society's structural sin. This makes for a non-triumphal witness to Christ, a witness that breaks through partisan politics and establishes solidarity with sinners.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do you think the Church should display power/influence in the public sphere? What have you seen that is effective in witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus?
2. What are some of the ways we unknowingly demonstrate "triumphalism," and how does it impact the way culture perceives us?
3. What motivates our need to feel morally superior to culture?
4. How could the practice of confession and repentance guide a church into more healthy engagement with culture?
5. What are some practical expressions of confession/repentance that you could imagine for your church and her witness to the world?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

### Books mentioned by Jennifer McBride:

[\*Whiteness and Morality\*](#) by Jennifer Harvey

[\*Letters and Papers from Prison\*](#) by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

[\*Ethics\*](#) by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

[\*The Cost of Discipleship\*](#) by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

## WEEKLY PRACTICE:

Think of a friend, family member, or acquaintance who is anti-religion or church. In a way that feels natural, have a conversation with them about their experience of you (as a Christian) or religion/church in general, and pay attention to moments where it might be appropriate to confess to them your failure to live out Christ's commands, and ask for their forgiveness.



## WEEK 8: "THE DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND MISSION"

BY W. DAVID O. TAYLOR

[WATCH OR LISTEN TO THE SESSION: BIT.LY/2JMOTLY](https://bit.ly/2JMOTLY)

### SYNOPSIS:

W. David O. Taylor's central theses:

- Art and mission is not a replacement for traditional efforts in mission.
- Art and mission can go places where traditional missional efforts cannot.
- Art and mission can do things that traditional mission cannot.
- Art and mission can take a host of expressions and perform a wide range of purposes.

Taylor's central question: How might the arts participate in the mission of the church? He goes on to give numerous examples in a wide array of artistic mediums, from visual arts to music to church buildings to art ministries. Our encounters with various forms of art, including our physical, bodily encounters (singing, dance, liturgical movements), all have the ability to shape us in ways that only art can.

Ideas matter, and the content of the Gospel message in our churches is necessary to the life of the Church. But we also have to remember that we are all in the business of storytelling, culture-shaping and heart-forming. In order to change a society, we have to capture people's imaginations. And the arts are crucial to this endeavor. Typically, Taylor argues, conservative Christians don't take the arts seriously enough. If Christians are to shape the imagination of the public square, it will be due to the body of Christ, everywhere across the globe, releasing artists to remain faithful to their vocations. We need to cultivate works of art that enable us to name and celebrate all that is good in the world, art that helps us to articulate the world's brokenness and inspires us to do something about it, art that invites us to want the good and the Source of all that is good.

For so many people today (including the "Nones" in our culture), it is difficult to imagine how the Gospel could be good news. People fail to feel that God is a loving and good God. They see no tangible evidence of the Gospel in their personal, social, and public lives. This is why the arts matter. The arts enable people to grasp the Gospel, to feel it deeply, and believe what may seem improbable or impossible about the kingdom of God. Any time art allows human beings to become whole or makes tangible the Shalom of God in the world, it fulfills the mission of the Trinity.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. W. David O. Taylor says that artists deeply crave hospitality. What are a few tangible ways that we as the Church can intentionally care for and show hospitality to the artists in our congregations?
2. Why is it crucial for the Church to come alongside artists and help them grow?
3. Have you personally experienced the power of art to communicate the Gospel? Have you seen it engaging “Nones,” or religiously unaffiliated people in our culture? How/why do you think this was effective?
4. Why is it important for the Church to embrace the art forms found in our diverse culture? For example, how might singing songs in a foreign tongue shape us?
5. What do you think W. David O. Taylor means when he says that works of art make the familiar gospel strange again?
6. Are you aware of art organizations, groups, or ministries in your city or community? How might your church consider partnering with them to support their work, or to collaborate on some project for the good of the city or neighborhood?
7. What is one way in which your church building might show concrete love to your immediate neighbors?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

### Books W. David O. Taylor referenced in his session

[\*For the Beauty of the Church\*](#) by W. David O. Taylor

[\*The Theater of God's Glory\*](#) by W. David O. Taylor

[\*Contemporary Art and the Church\*](#) by W. David O. Taylor

[\*Worship and Culture\*](#) by Glaucia Vasconcelos Wilkey

### A ministry W. David O. Taylor referenced in his session

David Bailey's [\*Arrabon\*](#)

## WEEKLY PRACTICE:

Show an artist hospitality by inviting him or her into your home or taking them out for coffee. Take time to truly see their work. If you don't know an artist personally, support the local arts scene by going to see a new singer/songwriter, taking your family to a local art exhibit, purchasing items handmade by a local artisan, etc.

# CONCLUSION

In recent history, the evangelical church in North America has been focused on getting its way in culture. However, the trends in culture have stayed and deepened. Why do we lose every cultural battle? Perhaps because fighting and winning are not kingdom ideas. We have adopted a paradigm that is not even close to Christ and the kingdom that He announced, embodied and demonstrated. We try to rise up and control culture more than God is even trying to.

We need a vision: to be a people of the coming reign of God. The church offers to the world a contrast society. In this society, there is no coercive intent. It's invitational. Our goal is not to enforce on the world our definition of Christianity. It's to move from what we believe to what we must be.

At the beginning of the 8 weeks, we asked a question: Is our engagement with culture in alignment with the gospel and aims of Jesus? Jesus was fully differentiated from the world, but stayed connected to it through a non-anxious, non-coercive presence. Jesus did not send his students out to start governments or even church

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