Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis

Jared Black

Omega Graduate School

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Professor

Dr. David Ward

**Assignment**

***Developmental Readings***

Review Assignment #3, the course essential elements, assigned readings, and recommended readings to identify selections of books and scholarly articles to identify and select developmental reading sources and entries.

* Refer to the “[Student Guide to Developmental Readings](https://drive.google.com/file/d/161V_FaYR2BnNGCSFUlWPjUSIQzcH04Hq/view?usp=share_link)” for updated information on sample comments, rubrics, and key definitions related to developmental readings.

**Jared, good job on your Developmental Reading log for PHI 943-32! The only reason for any mark down was the Developmental Reading Rubric where it addressed the need for current sources and more peer reviewed journals. Dr. Ward**

**Source 1:** Banerjee, N. (2008, February 26). Poll finds a fluid religions life among Americans. *The New York Times National*.

 **Comment 1:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"A Pew survey of 35,556 Americans shows that more than a quarter of adults have left the religious affiliations of their childhoods."

**Essential Element:** This quote deals with orthopraxis.

**Additive/Variant:** This at first appears significant.  Yet, as the article equally quips, this does not mean that Americans have jettisoned faith altogether.  There is a mixture of the disintegration of staunch denominationalism as well as a more fluid boundary between Christian faiths and general faith expressions. It appears to me that there are too many moving parts to let this figure become greatly alarming or guiding.  It simply begs the deeper questions of what a transfer of affiliation is saying and how the milieu of options is having an effect on this number.

**Contextual:** I am less concerned than I used to be with "church attendance" as a factor in defining a person's or nations spiritual temperature.  Perhaps institutions have life cycles just like other organic matter and reach an age where their effectiveness is simply fractional compared to its vigorous years.  I have wondered if the evangelical church, in particular, is simply at the end of its life cycle and there are new sprigs waiting to grow in its place utilizing the nutrients left from its natural decay into the soil of culture.

**Source 2:** Bass, D. B. (2013). *Christianity after religion: The end of church and the birth of a new spiritual awakening* (Reprint edition). New York: HarperOne.

**Comment 2:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

“Christianity did not begin with a confession. It began with an invitation into friendship, into creating a new community, into forming relationships based on love and service.”

**Essential Element:** This quote addresses orthopraxis.

**Additive/Variant:** The author really drives at the relational realities within the formation stages of early Christianity that can be reclaimed to help orient the present functions of Christianity.  By locating the initial impulse of Christian expression in relational terms, the author distances from the more cold, creedal assumptions of a religion whose adherents simply recited common beliefs.

**Contextual:** Bass has written and intriguing work that I am extremely interested in.  She has written based on the theological questioning of Bonheoffer back in the 1930s and 1940s.  The notion of religionless Christianity has captivated many, and Bass takes a stab at trying to articulate what that might look like in our present day.  This has a direct correlation to transformational leadership in that a fresh understanding of the nature of Christianity can equip both leaders and followers into a new value set that allows for fresh articulation of Christ within culture.

**Comment 3:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

“There is, however, something odd about this pattern. Other than joining a political party, it is hard to think of any other sort of community that people join by agreeing to a set of principles. Imagine joining a knitting group. Does anyone go to a knitting group and ask if the knitters believe in knitting or what they hold to be true about knitting? Do people ask for a knitting doctrinal statement? Indeed, if you start knitting by reading a book about knitting or a history of knitting or a theory of knitting, you will very likely never knit.”

**Essential Element:** This quote addresses orthodoxy leading to orthopraxis.

**Additive/Variant:** Bass argues that from its formulation, Christianity had to be more than a "club" replete with membership dues and monotonous mantras.  The larger point she drives toward is in direct conflict with the *sola scriptura* that arrives from the Reformation.  Her point is well stated, a person or group can never consider themselves a practitioner if the only experience they have is having read a manual.

**Contextual:** I like this.  I am not sure I am quite comfortable with its ultimate end.  However, because the church of Jesus in the west has for so many years adopted a subtle stance of Father, Son, Holy Bible, I think Bass' critique is warranted.  To only focus on the Bible and assume that knowing what it says is the same as being a follower of its words is senseless and ineffective.

**Comment 4:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

“If we think of belonging only as membership in a club, organization, or church, we miss the point. Belonging is the risk to move beyond the world we know, to venture out on pilgrimage, to accept exile. And it is the risk of being with companions on that journey, God, a spouse, friends, children, mentors, teachers, people who came from the same place we did, people who came from entirely different places, saints and sinners of all sorts, those known to us and those unknown, our secret longings, questions, and fears.”

**Essential Element:** This comment addresses orthopathy.

**Additive/Variant:** Bass expands the understanding of belonging beyond the traditional confines of safety, predictability, and security.  Instead, she flips it on its head (a very Christian thing to do, it seems), to illustrate that belonging in the Christian sense is the full embrace of risk, insecurity, with open arms to all manner of different people and unknowns.

**Contextual**:  There is value in this approach.  The biblical story is a story of gathering and scattering.  There are times of gathering together in like-minded, ethnic groups, and then there are seasons of "going out into all the world".  God is the chief gatherer and scatterer and seems to biblically initiate both realities at different times in history.  Perhaps that is why the biblical push ultimately ends with membership within the Kingdom of God, which encompasses both realities of the gathered-scattered.

**Comment 5:**

**Quote/Paraphrase**:

“Although churches seem the most natural space to perform spiritual awakening, the disconcerting reality is that many people in Western society see churches more as museums of religion than sacred stages that dramatize the movement of God's spirit.”

**Essential Element:** This quote reflects experiences within orthopraxis.

**Additive/Variant:** This observation by Bass may not play out if studied methodologically, however, I see and value the point she is attempting to make.  There is a cultural, overarching, apparent atmosphere here in the West that suggest the cultural value of the church is more of a monument to times past, instead of a vibrant current expression of God with us.  Yet, there are many vibrant communities where there are documented spiritual awakening that are specifically a result of the intentional efforts of the local church.

**Contextual**: I suspect the church in its various forms will always be a natural space for spiritual transformation and awakening to occur.  What it means to be the church and how each culture looks to challenge the days of past expressions will ultimately influence its effectiveness in any given society.  Yet, the very nature of having a church as church will remain an invitation for those weary souls seeking spiritual awakening.  It is quite clear that seeking people will eventually try the church to answer its deeper spiritual questions.  The further question will remain as to how equipped that present expression of the church is to offer an invitation into the dramatized movement of God's spirit, or simply a tour through the now stale movement of God in days gone by.

**Comment 6:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

“Spiritual awakening is not ultimately the work of invisible cultural forces. Instead, it is the work of learning to see differently, of prayer, and of conversion. It is something people do.”

**Essential Element:** This addresses orthopraxis.

**Additive/Variant:** I don't wholeheartedly agree with Bass' assessment here.  She categorically links spiritual awakening with the work a person can perform from within himself/herself.  I would contend that since God is Spirit, as biblically articulated, that God must be involved in the work of spiritual awakening.  A person can posture himself/herself for spiritual awakening, but that awakening will be a work of the Spirit of God, not of the efforts of the individual.  However, I do agree with Bass that spiritual awakening is not cultural phenomenon.

**Contextual**:  I suspect that spiritual awakening is eventually seen as social justice and enhancement.  In short, there is physical and cultural fruit to be had following spiritual awakening.  As such, a transformational leader can begin to better understand the role that spiritual activism can have in developing leadership strategies meant to impact culture.

**Source 3:** Clark, R. A. (1983, June). *Praxis makes perfect: Beyond conceptual integration in sociology*. Presented at the The Association of Christians Teaching Sociology, Eastern College.

**Comment 7:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"Think of a person who has integrity.  Their life is a whole; it has unity, coherence around purposes and principles, a consistency of word and deed, thought and action...Integrity, and integration, involve a harmonious unity...one that goes beyond conceptual integration to include right thinking and right living, orthodoxy and orthopraxis." [3]

"Theory and practice, knowing and doing, should be organically related." [3]

**Essential Element:** This address the interplay between orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

**Additive/Variant:**This understanding of integrity via its more root concept of "integrate" brings fresh clarity.  To integrate something is to bring together component parts in favor of a demonstrable whole.  This harmonizes with the Jewish notion of Shalom whereby all areas of life are coordinated in peace; that is, they are working together and not apart.  This begs the question of whether cultural integrity could be a sought after reality.  In order for that to be the case, culture would have to, as this author indicates, marry right thinking with right living.

**Contextual:**I appreciate this author's tone and desire to see praxis as a very real concern in the academic and social arena.  What I hear the author arguing for is the reality that praxis from the researcher may actually give the substance that his/her thinking alone will not generate.  Personally, I feel this to be the case.  We are all familiar with the old adage "do as I say, not as I do", and that line of thinking seems to be what the author is challenging.  Yet, as the author indicates, it may not be simply hypocritical behavior at stake, but true validity and transformative power that occurs when praxis can be verified as the stated result of right thinking.

**Comment 8:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"In the context of these concerns, then, one can best understand Marx's concept of praxis.  Praxis as 'practical-critical activity', action informed by thought, transcends contemplative philosophy and reunites thought and action, theory and practice into an organic whole." [5]

**Essential Element:** This quote reflects orthopraxis.

**Additive/Variant:** In his Letters and Papers from Prison, Bonheoffer postulates that the German church has lost her voice and influence within culture precisely because her words and deeds did not line up.  The remedy, according to Bonheoffer was the for church to silently perform the acts of the church until a day when those actions would build up the credibility for instructive speech to be accepted again.  Practical-critical activity is a powerful concept.  The western church need listen...and act!

**Contextual:**"I'll think while other people do."  This is the mindset of much of managerial American business.  Managers, it seems, can easily fall prey to being inactive while others carry the burden of performance.  Those that can marry the practice of thinking and acting, uniting, as Clark, concludes, philosophy and practice become the agents of change or solution that theory alone might articulate, but practice fulfills.

**Source 4:** Girard, R. (n.d.). Are the gospels mythical? Retrieved April 22, 2014, from <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/10/002-are-the-gospels-mythical>

**Comment 9:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"the plausibility of the dogmatic claims of religion that the earlier theorists had hoped to supersede: if science itself cannot formulate universal truths of human nature, then religion—as manifestly inferior to science—must be even more devalued than we had supposed."

"The world’s myths do not reveal a way to interpret the Gospels, but exactly the reverse: the Gospels reveal to us the way to interpret myth."

"Ancient people typically regarded ritual dancing as the most mimetic of all arts, solidifying the participants of a sacrifice against the soon to be immolated victim."

"When scandals proliferate, human beings become so obsessed with their rivals that they lose sight of the objects for which they compete and begin to focus angrily on one another."

"If the only peace humanity has ever enjoyed depends on unconscious victimization, the consciousness that the Gospels bring into the world can only destroy it."

**Essential Element:** These quotes highlight issues within orthodoxy.

**Additive and Variant:** Girard takes on the old debate regarding the similarity of the Jesus Passion story and many other ancient world myths dealing with the mimetic victimizing of the one, who is killed and returns again.  Girard's point is that the gospel narratives actually tell a different type of story, biblically aligned, and consistent with Jesus' own message regarding the former Prophets who became victims in their culture.  In short, the Gospel flips it on its head.  In the Myths, it is the people who are the victims of otherwise hapless semi-divine figures.  Once the victims (all the people) coalesce in agreement as to the cause of their victimization (the one), they exact justice, rid themselves of the victimizer, and have a period of restored harmony.  However, the bible is replete with examples where this mimetic victimization is ultimately revealed as false.  The victim is the one innocent.  The victimizers are the crowd, stirred up to violence in hopes of their own liberation, yet unaware that this Jesus is being maligned *because* he is not subject to the mimetic tendencies of crowd violence.  By become the true victim of human sin and aggression, Jesus displays the real cause of the human plight.  In the resurrection, Jesus reveals a band of bold followers who are also (now) no longer mimetic victimizers, but now boldly proclaim the freedom of the human from the *skandalon* and the *Satan*.

**Contextual:** Hermeneutically, Girard's argument is to set the Gospels apart from other preceding and contemporary myths.  He skillfully attempts to unmask would-be similarities, yet exposing them to be exact opposites once the outcome is assessed.  His focus allows for a biblical worldview to be orienting in always pointing out who the true victims are, and by doing so, leaving no doubt as to whom the real victimizers are in the process.

**Source 5:** Pannenberg, W., & Crim, K. (1983). *The church*. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Pr.

**Comment 10:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"By regarding the apostolic age as the norm, the church lost its freedom to recognize which elements of its way of life and thought were limited and conditioned by the times." [55]

**Essential Element:** This quote deals with orthopraxis.

**Additive and variant material:** This is a large idea.  It has at its core the understanding that context matters.  It mattered the day the scripture was written down.  It mattered the day the action being spoken of occurred.  It matters today as the reader attempts to gain access as to "what" the text is speaking.  Pannenberg suggests that for the church to isolate a particular context, a moment in the history of the people of God, and frame it as both the norm and the goal is a tremendous fail.  It fails the church, and consequently the world the church is meant to serve, because it looses touch with context; both the setting and atmosphere that produced the written word, and the current needs of the culture in which the scripture might be seeking to speak anew.

**Contextualization:**

Hailing from the South, there is a particular brand of Christianity that has become stereotyped concerning the way many Southern Christians view the world.  The old bumper sticker comes to mind: "If John the Baptist read the King James Bible, then its good enough for me!"  This simply illustrates the point that it is very easy to let the importance of context get blended in such a way that reality is very hard to recognize.  Just like the stalwart KJV-Only Christian can no longer see nor discern the ridiculousness of assuming that all people of God read the King's English, it is equally foolish to assume that my version or lens on the "truth" is the same held by the originators of the Faith in the days of the Apostles.  Much work has been done by denominations to fortify their particular "brand" of Christianity by appealing to "authentic" Christianity; that is, appealing to their way of expressing the Christian faith is most like that of the Apostles from days of old.  The inherent weakness, of course, is that neither the context of the exploits and belief of the Apostles is remotely close to the context of the modern-day reader.

**Comment 11:**

**Quote/paraphrase:**

" I shall endeavor to show that the problems are insoluble if the apostolic period as such is accepted as the norm for the later church history.  I will also endeavor to show that on the other hand the concept of apostolicity contains an eschatological motif from the teachings and activities of the apostles which moved forward beyond their age, leaving behind those features of the apostolic age which were conditioned by the times, and having significance as a guide for later generations, generations that were not at all in the range of vision of the early church but that find themselves on the road to that future toward which the work of the apostles was oriented." [45]

**Essential Element:** This reflects a consideration of orthopraxis.

**Additive and variant material:**

Similar to the above idea but taking the trajectory beyond and answering the questions surrounding what units the church of history with the church of the present.  What made the apostolic time so valuable, according to Pannenberg, was its adherence toward a future hope.  What bound the church together in unity was the hope toward eschatological promise, made real in the present Lordship of Jesus.  It is the eschatological hope of the present and future Lordship of Jesus that is the tie that binds all believers, past, present, and future, together.  The apostolic faith is not an adherence to a way of doing Christian life in a first century context.  The apostolic faith engulfs the present needs of any particular history with the future hope.

**Contextualization:**

I find this concept uniquely compelling.  I see in it the unification of a broad swath of Christianity, both "church based ministry" as well as every manner of mundane Christian interaction within our present world.  I see that my historical bond with the church of the past is due largely to the same future hope to which we both now adhere.  That is what binds me to the orthodoxy and tradition of days gone by.  It is not the methods and practices of any particular "successful" period of Christian history that is to be imitated.  Instead, it is in capturing the present and Future Lordship of Jesus that allows me, as church, to contextually engage the needs of my present culture and setting.

**Comment 12:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"It is generally recognized today that early Christianity was characterized by a remarkable eschatological consciousness, a consciousness of living in the presence of ultimate reality, which is still future for the world, but in Jesus Christ and thus in his church is already reality, though for the church it is reality only through faith in Christ and in the expectation of a future consummation." [48]

**Essential Element:** This quote deals with orthodoxy.

**Additive and variant material:**

Pannenberg advances the specifics as to what this eschatological connection is between all phases of apostolic Christianity; and thus, the tie that binds all strands together in apostolic faith.  The apostles functioned out of the perspective of already living in the "ultimate reality".  And that reality contains the present and future hope in the world today, for the world today.  The Christian faith asserts that Jesus Christ has secured the present and future reality.  It is faith in Jesus, in the claim and action of securing Lordship both now and into the future that the Church rallies around for its connection throughout the ages.

**Contextualization:**

As Pannenberg details the connective tissue of "historic" Christian faith, I find I am at once intrigued and excited!  I am compelled to see myself as a part of a framework that has always been meant to be unapologetically engaged in my day and age, with all of its uniqueness and distinct features, yet holding firm to the present and future Lordship of Jesus.  This is the tether with the Church of history.  This is the primary tradition that has been adopted throughout the various epochs and seasons and will be until the final Eschaton.  I feel apart of something through this orientation.  No long just a "club" that has these "membership requirements".  Instead, I see the life...the living expression of an eternal God, unencumbered by the specific needs of the present, yet not unconcerned with them either.  I see a faith that is alive, connected, and active.  I want in!

**Comment 13:**

**Quote/paraphrase:**

"...the eschatological mission of the apostles could be continued by the churches which they established only by being changed, that is, only by including in their entirety their own historical differences from the apostles and the apostolic age in their understanding of the message of Christ as a message to the people of their own time." [54]

**Essential Element:** This is a quote dealing with orthopraxis.

**Additive and variant material:** Further implications for the Church are presented in this idea by substantiating that the constant connection between the churches throughout the ages is, in fact, their dynamic *changeable-ness* throughout those ages.  It is the ability of the church to adapt to and adopt from the prevailing culture of its own day that sustains the Church's connection, tethered to ages past and ages to come.  The trajectory of that tether bursts forth from the present, awaiting the future ages where presumably, the Church will equally flourish and function to the present needs of that day.

**Contextualization:** Again, I see the historic and future value of changing toward this remarkable lens of viewing all of church history through an eschatological reality.  In sharpening my own lens through which I view life and the mission of the church in this way, I see the open invitation for a full embrace of the needs of my time; the urgent need of a knowledge of the present Lordship of Jesus during our culture.  Yet, not only present knowledge, but also a future hope upon which to set our gaze and in so doing find ourselves connected with the deep history of the people of God who found themselves (and possibly still find themselves) staring into the future at the exact same thing.

**Comment 14:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"To be apostolic is to set forth the finality, that is, the truth, of that which occurred in the person of Jesus and was proclaimed by the apostles.  In this context, finality means the future truth of the world, which is not yet brought to completion, that is, has not yet fulfilled its essence." [53]

**Essential Element:** This is a quote dealing with orthodoxy.

**Additive and variant:** The concept of "finality" set forth by Pannenberg begins to set the stage for discussions of doctrinal heritage.  If it is true that the apostles adhered to a specific doctrinal perspective, then how much of their perspective is to be passed forward through the ages, and how much is to be assumed to be contextually locked in the passing of the apostles? What seems to be Pannenberg's answer is that that apostles adhered to the finality, i.e. the truth, that they were to be bearers of the message that what Jesus has accomplished has established the last word, the finality for creation.  This is a huge thought and brings into focus some of the *Christus Victor* perspectives that I hope to dissect in future material posts.

**Contextual:** What I am hearing is that the "message" of the unified church concerns the present proclamation of the future truth for the whole world.  It is in the witness of this finality that the completion for the world is brought to bear.  The world is not yet fulfilled its essence.  This is a deep thought.  What is the worlds' essence?  Philosophically it refers to the meaning of its existence.  Could it be that the meaning of the world's existence, its essence, is to be the hearer of the finality and then, finally, the receiver of the fullness of that truth in its full restoration?  If so, then I see the Church as the bringer of *strange* news to a world that will most decidedly have difficulty receiving the news that Jesus has this all buttoned up.  Yet, that is the future hope, relevant to the Church in the present, and the makeup of both our message and our historical connection with the Church of the ages.

**Comment 15:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"The catholic community of the church includes not only all presently existing Christian groups but also those of its past, back to the origins of Christianity, and those of the future, down to the end of this world.  Only in the glory of the eschatological consummation will the church be fully and completely catholic..." [62]

**Essential Element:** This quote resembles orthodoxy.

**Additive and variant:** Here Pannenberg takes on the deep church tradition concerning catholicity.  On the one hand, the notion of catholicity was a response to the gnostic teaching concerning the need for sectarian inclusion into the "true" revelations necessary to have life in God.  As scriptures become recognized and utilized, there was also a growing debate as to whether the spoken word of a church official had dominance over the written word of the Scriptures.  In a way, catholic tethering was needed to solve the argument.  Iraneas is credited with asserting that unity amongst the leaders was necessary.  Yet, it was the Reformation that attempted to pull the string in favor of Scriptural authority.  Either way, Pannenberg argues that true catholicity won't be found in a strictly backward-looking, tradition-centered search for origins.  In fact, it is in the consummation of all the church, past, present, and future that true catholicity can be accounted.

**Contextual:** I find Pannenberg very refreshing.  He articulates in a clear and exciting manner some ideas I have "felt" but not been sure how to formulate.  The idea of the Church, being so much larger than any one generation, movement, denomination, segment in time, etc. just makes sense.  It also takes off the pressure to have to "perform" the church for my present age by some random coding of rules that men have said is the only true catholic way.  Because, truly, true catholicity will only be able to be accounted for once the entire church, past, present, and future is accounted for in the Eschaton.

 **Source 6:** Schlossberg, H. (1983). *Idols for destructions: Christian faith and its confrontation with American society*. New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

**Comment 16:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"A society conscious of its place in history is seldom content merely to note changing circumstances with no attempt to evaluate their meaning...We want, rather, to be able to understand their meaning, and we cannot do that without having an idea about the end toward which those events are proceeding." [4]

"These teleological visions are agglomerations of values, often having powerful emotional force even if one it not conscious of their components." [4]

"Christianity, along with its Hebraic antecedents, is by nature historically minded...The doctrines of creation and of eschatology are explicit statements that history has both a beginning and an end and that it is possible to say something intelligible about both.  Events between the two termini are also intelligible, and, being related to them, have meaning. From those relationships we may infer that general evaluations of the state of our society ought to be of great interest to Christians and that Christian faith has insights of close relevance to this discussion." [5]

**Essential Element:** These quotes suggest moves toward orthopathy.

**Additive/Variant:** This quote synthesizes that the beginning and the end are very much deterministic in the now.  Where a person asserts the beginning, and his/her trajectory of how things end decidedly determines the quality of the ideas that person can assert.  It would be untrue to assert that a person can be void of a teleological vision.  As such, whatever that vision happens to be, will be determinative of the components of their ideas.

**Contextual:** I am finding increased validity is understanding my own beliefs concerning beginnings and eschatology in the range of ideas concerning the present world and its systems.  In short, these beliefs or origins and endings are quite deterministic.

**Comment 17:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"But anyone with a hierarchy of values has placed *something* at its apex, and whatever that is is the god he serves.  The Old and New Testaments call such gods idols and provide sufficient reason for affirming that the systems that give them allegiance are religions." [5]

**Essential Element:** This quote reflects concerns of orthodoxy.

**Additive/Variant:** This is a clearly worded reality of attempting to think and act in the everyday.  Something is driving whether it be considered a belief, idea, value, or "truth".  As such, we all serve something.  What we serve, and how we serve it is negotiable.  However, serving something, seems to be a universal reality.

**Contextual:** Acknowledging this certainty places the scholar in a two-direction process.  One must bring sharp articulation to ones own values and beliefs, where those come from, and even why one holds those systems as authoritative in order to adequately articulate ideas and solutions involving the future.  In this way, the present, as inferred from this chapter, could be considered the convergence of belief systems concerning origins and endings as both extremes play a large role in bringing meaning to the present.

**Comment 18:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"Spatial and biological analogies are incompatible with biblical thinking because they are both quantitatively oriented and deterministic...In place of these analogies the biblical explanation of the end of societies uses the concept of *judgment*." [5,6]

"Idolatry in its larger meaning is properly understood as any substitution of what is created for the creator." [6]

"Idolatry and its associated concepts provide a better framework for us to understand our own society than do any of the alternatives." [6-7]

"Western society, in turning away from Christian faith, has turned to other things. This process is commonly called *secularization*, but that conveys only the negative aspect.  The word connotes the turning away from the worship of God while ignoring the fact that something is being turned *to* in its place." [6]

**Essential Elements:** These quotes reflect orthodoxy considerations.

**Additive/Variant:** Both spatial and biological analogies for culture move in an evolutionary mentality.  As such, meaning can only be derived from any present situation.  However, the biblical precedent which ascribes God as the giver of meaning and hence the judge of society and culture, appears to be more adequate.  Society thus is not to be viewed strictly organically as if it progresses in a life cycle.  Nor is it to be ultimately understood as a placeholder in ongoing history alone.  Instead, a society lives or dies as a result of its proclivity to adopt idolatrous ideologies and practices.

**Contextual:** Idolatry is largely connected to the understanding of origins.  If God is seen as the creator, then God is understood as the author of relational and moral boundaries.  To insert any other notion beyond a creator God and ascribe primacy to any other created entity as the starting place for proper relating is idolatrous because meaning will no longer be derived from God alone.

**Comment 19:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"German sociologist Karl Mannheim reveals the intellectual barrenness of thinking that one has said something when he has pasted a label.  'Nothing is simpler than to maintain that a certain type of thinking is feudal, bourgeois or proletarian, liberal, socialistic, or conservative, as long as there is no analytical method for demonstrating it and no criteria have been adduced which will provide a control over the demonstration.'" [9]

**Essential Element:** This is orthodoxy.

**Additive/Variant:** The quote given by Mannheim resonates with Bonhoeffer's discourse on the fool.  The fool retreats behind slogans and rhetoric in self-centered promotion of his own version of reality, which is always self-reliant, and thus disconnected from God and truth.  Mannheim rightly depicts the contemporary problem of non-thinking simply by foolishly labeling another's position and in so doing foolishly believing one has intellectually overcome the other person's position.

**Contextual:** I find that I am now hunting for the methodology that can enter into discourse in a world and system that is determined only to "think" in the manner that Mannheim describes.  From Facebook conversations, to twitter feeds, to the comment sections of inflammatory blog posts, the forum for debate appears to be locked in rules of engagement dictated by foolishness.  How do we overcome?

**Source 7:** Vanhoozer, K. J. (2002). *First theology: God, scriptures and hermeneutics*. Dover, IL: InterVarsity Press.

**Comment 20:**

 **Quote/Paraphrase:**

"Theology is an attempt to evaluate world performance by the criterion of the Word of God.  Interpretation is doubly part of theological work: not only the Word but the world itself must be interpreted." [309]

**Essential Element:** This quote reflects orthodoxy.

**Additive/Variant:** I am contemplating whether I agree with this definition of theology.  Broken down, the definition asserts that theology is first and foremost an attempt.  This places theology as a man-toward-God directive, as man attempts to solve problems through what he/she can determine concerning God.  Although I agree in part this process, it is incomplete as theology as a discipline appears to reveal that the divine/human interaction is always at the initiative of God.  Therefore, it seems skewed from the outset to define theology as mankind's attempt.

**Contextual:**Hermeneutics, although traditionally the language of theological endeavor, is a necessity in every human enterprise. The ability to interpret and make/discern meaning appears to be the necessity of every culture and society.  To the degree that a people are successful in discerning quality meaning and value determines the health and integrity within that social structure.

**Comment 21:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"If the theologian is to minister the Word of God to today's world, both the Word and the world must be understood.  Theology must engage in both biblical and cultural hermeneutics.  Interpretation is one of the fundamental categories of theological thinking.  Theology should be in the business...of cultural interpretation." [311]

**Essential Element:** This quote blends orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

**Additive/Variant:** Agreed!  Understanding the word and world is the process humanity has been engaged in since day 1 (well, day 6, perhaps).  It appears that God has designed a world and a two-kingdom reality that must be understood in two directions.  First, understanding can be gained by peering into the theological foundations of creation.  Yet that alone is not enough.  Understanding must also be derived by mining in the other direction, starting with what is observed in present culture and allowing those observations to illicit questions and answers that then can be measured with an in-process theology.

**Contextual:**I desire to become a better social interpreter.  I have years of time invested in learning the art of theological reflection for which I am grateful.  However, I feel weakest when it comes to reading the paper, or watching the news feed and discerning appropriate, thoughtful and solid thoughts concerning interpreting present events with long held theological ideals.

**Comment 22:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"That there is more need than ever for the theologian to be interpreter and critic of contemporary culture, as well as champion of a counterculture that should be embodied in ecclesial existence -- that is, in the church." [312]

**Essential Element:** This quote essentially reflect orthodoxy.

**Additive/Variant:**This is a powerful phrase.  The idea of the church finding her role as the interpreter of culture as well as the champion of counterculture (contrary reality) practice excites me to no end.  It suggests a matured church that is neither afraid of the culture in which she lives, nor is confused about the mission and calling and tethering from which she operates.  She is at once present tense, past enlightened, and future oriented.

**Contextual:**I love the idea of the church.  I am less inclined to defend her need for institutional survival.  The church, as I see her, is solid and fluid, free and tethered, expectant and content, meek and powerful.  She has the ability to stand in the midst of her culture with compassion and grace, yet fiercely challenge the death cult by her very existence as she spews words of life that challenge the status quo.  She is the champion of humanity, the lover of God.

**Source 8:** Vanhoozer, K. J., Anderson, C. A., & Sleasman, M. J. (Eds.). (2007). *Everyday theology: How to read cultural texts and interpret trends*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

**Comment 23:**

 **Quote/Paraphrase:**

"Everyday theology is simply faith seeking everyday understanding; a grasp of what is going on in ordinary situations (and why), an attempt to make sense of one's surroundings" [16]

**Essential Element:** I believe this speaks more to orthopraxis.

**Additive/Variant:** This concept attempts to initiate practically the Christian understanding of the God who is "with" us.  Although unseen in the five senses sense, the presence of God is understood to be in all settings and circumstances.  As such, faith attempts to apprehend the "with-ness" of God even, and especially in, the ordinary events of the everyday.  This resonates with me.  Therefore it is not an inappropriate application of theology to stress its implication in the everyday, to practice the theological understanding resonate in the mundane, and inquire of new ways of understanding.

**Contextual:** In the past 10 years, my wife and I moved to rural Tennessee to attempt a life more connected to the land and the natural rhythms.  What we have seen is that there are many diverse understandings just waiting to be discovered in the ordinary, mundane, and momentary occurrences of each day.  In fact, there are so many, it can be dulling to the senses.  So, there must be intentionality to stay engaged in absorbing and bringing understanding to the everyday revelations that continually flow.

**Comment 24:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"Indeed, there is more than a verbal similarity between 'signs of the times' and the *Zeitgeist* or 'spirit of the age, ' for to interpret the signs of the times *is* to discern the mode of the Spirit's presence in the spirit of the age." [17]

**Essential Element:** This could be leaning towards orthopathy.

**Additive/Variant:** Here is a relevant blending of theology and the sociological task.  The spirit of the age suggests theological overtones and themes that aid in understanding what is "really" going on beneath the surface of culture.  Likewise, learning to understand the signs of the times; that is, the cultural cues as symptoms of deeper realities allows the researcher to arrive at similar conclusions only from the other direction.  Both are looking to meet in the middle (middle-range theory?) at conclusive understanding.  Theology starts from the bottom going up and sociology starts from the top going down.

**Contextual:** The biblical terming of spirit of the age is compelling to me.  I see it describing the surrounding attitudes, atmosphere, the sea through which each culture must inevitably swim.  There is no getting around it, only discerning in the midst of it.  I would like to define better personal strategies for bringing discernment of our own Spirit of the age as displayed in my own life process.  Likewise, I desire research and methods for prescriptive research that discovers theologically grounded and sociologically practical solutions to the unique problems each age of spirits displays.

**Comment 25:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"culture proceeds from freedom alone.  Indeed, in its broadest sense, culture refers to everything that humans do voluntarily as opposed to involuntarily (e.g. by nature, reflex, or instinct)." [21]

**Essential Element:** This is a quote reflecting orthopraxis.

**Additive/Variant:** I appreciate the author's dissection of culture and society.  Culture derives from direct, willful, human action.  Because of that, it can provide necessary litmus testing concerning the attitudes and morality resident in culture as a people group.  Consequences can be the social outcome the researcher is looking into.  Society, on the other hand, appears to come about more passively.  Yes, it is influenced by culture, but it more readily consists of more static institutions and systems that are pushing into culture and culture most continually and actively respond and react against.

**Contextual:** I have a growing interest in the concept of the powers and principalities as defined by scripture and viewing them in line with structures and institutions.  The authors are helping to delineate the sociological functions that studying the powers might employ.  This level of inquiry takes the side of studying the effects of an "outside" force on the individual, and thus concerns itself with causes within culture verses a cultural appeal which investigates the role the actor has in swaying and defining culture.

**Source 9:** Webber, R. E. (1979). *The Secular Slant: A Case for Evangelical Social Responsibility*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

**Comment 26:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"The content of Genesis 1-11 provides...the basis for our understanding of man in culture." [35]

**Essential Element:** This quote reflects a biblical orthodoxy.

**Additive/Variant**:  These are the chapters of the entirety of the Scriptures that I have spent the most time in.  I follow this line of thinking proposed by Webber as I too have discovered a rich well of understanding just within the 11 chapter making up the "prehistory" of civilizations.  I cannot imagine a better springboard for the collision of theological study and sociological understanding than the grid presented in these eleven chapters.

**Contextual:** This is encouraging that these 11 Biblical chapters are recognized as being essential to understanding foundational concerns surrounding culture and society.  Having the majority of my studies to date having been in the field of Biblical studies and theology, it is exciting to see that these studies can become a springboard into the field of sociology as well.

**Comment 27:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"Abraham Herschel, and outstanding Jewish scholar of this century [holds in common] this idea that 'there is something in the world that the Bible does regard as a symbol of God.  It is not a temple nor a tree, it is not a statue nor a star.  The one symbol of God is man, every man.' " [36]

**Essential Element:** This quote reflects biblical orthodoxy.

**Additive/Variant:** I am increasingly interested in word based and image based cultures.  Naturally, as a Biblical student, any discussion concerning the effect and import of "images" has to run through Genesis 1:26 and the claim of mankind's image and likeness associated with God.  Herschel combines the notion of image and symbol here.  This is a move that I am dissecting to see if it appropriate to use the terms synonymously or if distinction is necessary.

**Contextual:** I have a growing interest in targeting image, symbol and word based cultures as a focus of study throughout my OGS program.  Knowing that Herschel has done some work regarding mankind as image of God has been noted and will be revisited should this focus continue for me.

 **Comment 28:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"From a contemporary point of view, the content of Genesis 3 is no isolated piece of history...It is a truth for our times, for it helps us to see ourselves in the perspective both of God and of history.  We are what we are because we have broken away from God's will. And the history of culture, as well as the turmoil of our own times, witnesses to our alienation." [41]

**Essential Element:** Another quote reflecting orthodoxy.

**Additive/Variant:** This is a standard hermeneutical movement to jump from contextual scripture toward generalized conclusion.  Although I don't disagree with this method at all, I do recognize that care must be taken in making the leap so as not to academically disqualify oneself with rational fallacies.  Yet, the point made by Webber rings true, that what was recorded in the prehistory can be used as a lens to understand the daily disconnect within present culture.

**Contextual:** In accord with Webber, my heritage and upbringing, along with years of instruction has set Genesis 3 and "the fall" as the cornerstone understanding of individuals, creation, culture, and resultant societal structures. Theologically, the fall is central in my understanding of the nature of the originating problem, and thus must be contended with academically in order to proffer societal solutions.

**Source 10:** Wilberforce, W. (2006). *Real Christianity*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

In this chapter, Wilberforce contrasts authentic faith with cultural Christianity.  In short, Christianity cannot be inherited, but authentic faith is intentionally cultivated through dedicated study of the Bible as God's gift to humanity to adequately learn to discern right and wrong.

**Essential Element:** This quote reflects orthopraxis.

**Additive/Variant:** Wilberforce's initial questions meant to detect the reader’s level of "cultural-ness" in regards to his/her Christianity are quite specific.  They appear meant to offer the reader a detection device to determine where one resides between cultural Christianity and authentic faith.  In short, how determinative the gospel reality of Jesus plays into the everyday life expression of the person (in family, business, education, etc.) is a litmus test for that person's immersion in the Christianity of the day versus the authentic conversion faith of Jesus.

**Contextual:** I find the initial questioning of Wilberforce quite haunting.  I saw in my answers to his questions a dominant skewing toward what Wilberforce concludes as cultural Christianity.  That said, I do fully resonate with the desire toward an authentic Christian faith.  What I question, however, is can that authentic faith be gained strictly through the dedicated study of the Bible, as Wilberforce asserts.  What the Bible says, or rather, is allowed to say, is so culturally locked in its own history of interpretation, it is often very difficult to discern the "truth" it is purported to assert.

**Comment 30:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"We live in a time when the common man in our country is thoroughly influenced by the current climate in which the cultural and educational elite propagates an anti-Christian message." [20]

**Essential Element:** This quote establishes the need for orthodoxy amidst the necessity of cultural orthopraxis.

**Additive/Variant:** I am struck by the notion of the "anti-Christian message".  This is not as insidious as I have at once believed.  An anti-Christian message does not necessarily imply a message that is hostile to Christianity in a point-counterpoint approach.  Instead, any message is anti-Christian when it fundamentally does not acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, and hence the culmination and essence of being and truth.  As such, any message that does not come from that orientation, even if it is increasingly moralistic and "good" societally, may still be decidedly anti-Christian.

**Contextual:** The early church belief that Jesus is Lord as the most basic of early Christian proclamation.  To be oriented by any other understanding appears to open the door wide for humanistic or fatalistic interpretations of the current cultural climate.  Regardless of the optimism associated with the approaches, any pursuit that is disconnected from the orienting Christian notion of the incarnate Jesus suffers the fate of anti-Christ.

**Comment 31:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"What we believe determines how we live. Men who sincerely believed that what they were doing was right have perpetrated many of the most hideous crimes against humanity." [24]

**Essential Element:** This is orthodoxy leading to orthopraxis.

**Additive/Variant:** Both present experience and a cursory look over recent history seem to corroborate this sentiment.  Although evil seems ever-present in our world systems, it is also evident that many of the people operating in these systems sincerely believe they are going good and moral actions.  The result is often incredible acts of injustice even though the projected intent was to somehow right the world of a perceived wrong.

**Contextual:** I am a big proponent of the notion that a person's actions ultimately give away his/her belief system.  The belief and value set of a person is ultimately revealed in the accumulated actions he/she commits.  In my own Christian experience, I am found of acknowledging that my actions continually illustrate my true beliefs.  For example, if I continue to live in the constant state of stress and fear, my actions are clearly displaying that I don't have a real belief that God is trustworthy.

**Comment 32:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:**

"An authentic faith requires an honesty of mind, the consistent use of the means of knowledge and instruction, the humility that fosters a desire to be instructed, and an unprejudiced conclusion about what this inquiry reveals." [24-25]

**Essential Element:** This deals with orthodoxy.

**Additive/Variant:** This idea presents the openness to "new" ideas and approaches that contemporary Christianity appears to be awakening to.  In past seasons of history, it was the Christian inquiry that was unafraid of uncharted territory of knowledge, allowing scripture, reason, knowledge, and experience to blend together into a powerful elixir of truth and reality.  This is quite a different perspective from the staunch portrayal of current evangelicalism in our country that is confounded by its own antiquated ideology that has reduced its relevancy to quaint dogmatism.

**Contextualization:** Christianity, specifically Christian scholastics, must recapture the humility and ardent commitment to truth and knowledge that can receive from a variety of culturally informed sources to amass a present understanding of truth.  A future hallmark of Christian studies will hopefully be an unprejudiced commitment to inquiry and the answers the inquiry reveals.

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