PHI 943-32

Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis

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Professor

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Assignment #3 – Essay

1. Write a 5-page paper using the Examination of Christian Practice essay outline [Course

Resources].

2. Paper Outline

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

d. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the

remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

An Examination of Christian Practice Within a Personal Context

In the quest to grow in orthodoxy (right beliefs) and improve orthopraxy (right actions) (Stone & Duke, 2023) for personal enhancement, the current author examines an experience where theological reflection has been applied. Why this experience? It was chosen for three reasons:

1. To illustrate why Christian leaders must be wise in orthodoxy and orthopraxy.
2. To understand and examine the ensuing personal struggles following the event.
3. To gain wisdom to protect oneself from experiencing future trauma and build resiliency to avoid further academic and professional setbacks.

The setting occurred when this author's ministry co-hosted a red-carpet movie event with a local church several years ago. The order of events consisted of an opening prayer (given by the church pastor), introductions, this author's testimony, and another prayer (offered by a regional men's ministry leader) before showing the movie “Unplanned.” After personally sharing a 20-minute testimony on how abortion nearly destroyed this author's life (to educate non-post-abortive audience members about the potential harm and connect with those possibly struggling with after-abortion issues), the men's ministry leader took the stage. However, before he prayed, he opened by telling the following story.

When our daughter was about four years old, we were driving along one day…listening to American Family Radio, and there was some news article being shared that used the word abortion. And my four or 5-year-old daughter in the backseat said, ‘Daddy, what's an abortion? What does abortion mean?'

Well, talk about your pop quiz moments with a 4- or 5-year-old daughter and have to figure out what to do with that. So, I said, 'Do you know we've told you that you grew in mommy's tummy?'

She said, 'Yes, daddy.'

And I said, 'You know how we were so excited to see you, and we wanted you to be here, and we were looking forward to seeing you? And we were loving you before we ever saw you?'

And she said, 'Yes, Daddy, I know that.'

And then I said, 'Well, sweetheart, there are some mommies who have babies growing in their tummies and for whatever reason don't love their babies, and they kill 'em'.

And there was an audible gasp in the backseat. Our 4-year-old daughter understood there's something wrong with that.

Initially, this author was shocked and horrified by what was said and uncertain what to do next. Because of the tight schedule and not knowing how to handle the situation correctly, the movie started, the event was over, and his comments were not addressed for over a year. Wanting to crawl into a hole and hide is what this author essentially did. However, based on Galatians 6:1 (NKJV, 2007), it felt obligatory to meet with him to let him know that his words were potentially further wounding and not healing to those with post-abortion issues.

Due to COVID-19, a phone call was made instead of meeting in person, and the conversation went differently than anticipated. Instead of being open and seeing this author's point of view, he offered reasons why he was correct in what he said and did. That is, to get his point across that, even his young daughter knew the wrongness of abortion. After further attempts to discuss the matter, he smirkingly stated that he didn’t get the gift of mercy. After that, this author ended the call. Feeling rejected, misunderstood, humiliated, and deflated, this author's husband referred to Micah 6:8, where mercy is a requirement from the Lord, not a gift. Nevertheless, these two separate events negatively impacted this author, adding to the compilation of adverse reactions from other Christians while speaking on the abortion topic.

Reflecting and writing about the situation has been physically and emotionally challenging, as well as insightful. Being a highly sensitive person with a history of abortion trauma and having had prior negative experiences involving other church members regarding abortion, the struggle presented itself as an opportunity for growth through serious contemplation, questioning, and reflection. This ever-present internal battle is prevailing, and when all attempts were made to complete the assignment, this author cried out to the Lord for help, and He is answering the prayer.

The red-carpet event demonstrated that we both acted upon our operational beliefs, where we shared what we both felt was the most essential information needing to be conveyed to audience members related to abortion. We were both drawing upon our individual embedded theology (Stone & Duke, 2023) in different contexts and for different purposes. My belief about him and his actions demonstrated a person who was wrong, judgmental, condemning, and unsafe to be around. Additionally, narcissistic, condescending, uncaring, and insensitive after the phone conversation took place. Subsequently, I deemed that church this way, and the consequences of this assumed belief resulted in avoidance issues with regular church attendance and not growing in my faith. In addition, anger and resentment issues were left unresolved. Mine is not an isolated event, as other women have had similar experiences. Historically, church trends have been to teach abortion as taking a life and a sin (orthodoxy) while focusing time and resources on abortion prevention through providing time and resources to pregnancy care centers (orthopraxy).

**“**A God-centered worldview brings every issue, question, and cultural concern into submission to all that the Bible reveals, and frames all understanding within the ultimate purpose of bringing greater glory to God” (Mohler, 2014, p. 45). Applying critical thinking to Scripture, several Biblical images have come to mind regarding this experience. Considering abortion, I can picture Jesus turning over abortion tables and calling the abortion industry a den of thieves defiling the fruit of the womb with death and destruction. Next, Jesus demonstrates perfect orthodoxy and orthopraxy to the adulterous woman and the condemning crowd. He saw her and knew her heart, and His actions showed warmth and compassion toward her, not judgment. To the citizens ready to stone her, Jesus perfectly asks a question invoking Christian critical thinking, whereupon they recognize their hypocrisy, drop their stones, and walk away, acknowledging in action we all have sinned.

The following Scripture passages were identified for faith-reflection and sensing God’s transformational work.

Micah 6:8: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (NKJV, 2007)*.* As leaders, we need to remember this applies to all Christians, and examining our own hearts is a requirement.

James 1:19-2: *“*So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (NKJV, 2007)*.*

Matthew 7:24 – 26 “Therefore whoever hears these saying of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

“But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who builds his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and bear on that house, and it fell. And great was its fall” (NKJV, 2007). This represents the need for me to grow more in orthodoxy so when difficult situations arise in the future, I will be stronger in my faith, more confident in His strength, and overall, better prepared to withstand the uncertainties of life.

Romans 12:2: “And do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable will of God” (NKJV, 2007). Renewing of the mind is a daily need. It is too easy for this author to fall prey to victimhood, resulting in what Jaffe, (1985), refers to as an abdication of personal power, “and you become helpless not only within the extreme situation but by implication in each succeeding situation as well” (p. 107).

Luke 23:34 “Then Jesus said, ‘Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do’” (NKJV, 2007). This author has prayed this prayer when situations arise where others lack emotional intelligence (Orthopraxy) regarding abortion. Because I am a highly sensitive person, this helps ground me emotionally. However, I’ve learned through this process of critical thinking not to become self-righteous by holding contempt in my heart and remembering apart from God we are nothing and cannot do anything (John 15:5, NKJV, 2007).

Matthew 7:3: “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?” (NKJV, 2007).

Culturally, abortion views are all over the place, and heated debates are constant. Poignant to this paper is the lack of understanding, recognition, and rejection of abortion’s detrimental effects on one’s overall well-being. Indeed, research reveals an abundance of studies recognizing harm, (Coleman, 2011, Rafferty & Longbons, 2020 Reardon et al., 2023 Rue et al., 2004). These failings represent evidence of Institutional betrayal that “occurs when an institution causes harm to an individual who trusts or depends upon that institution” (Smith & Freyd, 2014, p. 578), a component of Moral Injury where a person feels betrayed by a powerholder (Shay, 2014). Thankfully, academic articles are beginning to recognize abortion as morally injurious (Congdon, 2016; Dombo et al., 2013; Koenig & Al Zaben, 2021), but little to no research studies have been published to date focusing exclusively on abortion-related Moral Injury.

The theological significance of the event has opened a new way of analyzing and preparing for abortion conflict within the church and its members. Understanding the difference between orthodoxy and orthopraxy allows this author to move forward and appreciate the divide, rendering it easy to explain and comprehend. With this new revelation, it feels as though the anxiety might lessen, and more grace is shown to others by recognizing the context of where one is leaning.

The way forward is to conduct additional research on Institutional Betrayal Trauma (IBT) (Smith & Freyd, 2014) and to help explain how IBT is an element of moral injury – abortion (MI-A). Symptoms such as “guilt, shame, spiritual/existential conflict, and loss of trust…depression, anxiety, anger, reexperiencing, self-harm, and social problems” (Jinkerson, 2016, p. 122) are characteristics of people living with MI-A. Therefore, the purpose of relating IBT to churches would be to prevent ill-treatment by religious people that may contribute to others' desire to avoid religion (Sumerau et al., 2016). This will require trusting God to give future direction, words, ability, wisdom, and courage on how, when, and where to move forward with the newly acquired knowledge, where, ultimately, healing and a coming together can take place for the glory of God. Finally, as Mohler (2014) states, “Know that explaining what you believe is the very mission that brought you to this position of leadership” (p. 166). Amen.

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