LDR810 – Cross-Cultural Dynamics

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Professor

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***Assignment #3 – Essay***

* 1. 1. Write a 5-page essay based on one (1) of the three (3) items below:

1. Write a paper highlighting a cross-cultural experience that involved a project or work-related activity to which you could have applied Community Development principles. Discuss principles you violated and principles you used. Give a synopsis of, now being aware of the principles, you could have proceeded for a positive outcome.
2. Paper Outline Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.
   1. Use a minimum of **eleven** scholarly research sources (two books and the remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).
   2. What is Community Development?
      1. Principles of Community Development Start where people are
      2. Introduce new ideas after relationships have been established
      3. Keep the program simple
      4. Involve the community
      5. Conduct training on location as possible
      6. Train in locally acceptable facilities and formats
      7. Train trainers who can train others
      8. Identify and involve local leadership, both existing and emerging
      9. Cooperate with local, regional and national governments
      10. Encourage interdependent relationships rather than dependent or independent relationships

The idea for the community group now called Thought Architecting came out of a book I read about a decade prior to inviting a cross-section of men from the various Christian faith expressions within my hometown of Columbia, TN. It was an obscure book, from an unknown author, from a small, independent publishing house that I can no longer locate nor have on my bookshelf. I cannot even recall the title of the book. The gist of the book, however, undoubtably melded itself into my psyche. The premise was this: reading together and discussing what has been read is an invaluable tool assisting the development of authentic Christian community…*especially* amongst adults of varying backgrounds. By reading and discussing the same words, the same ideas, the same themes, the likelihood of learning to listen to one another, i.e. to hear each other’s thoughts, grows into learning to love and care for one another’s hearts in community.

For more than two decades, the implementation of “dialogue” as a means of assisting people from different backgrounds or belief systems to find common, communal ground has been bourgeoning. Both interfaith dialogue – two distinctly different confessions of faith, and intrafaith dialogue – differences within the same confession of faith, have shown to be invaluable as a catalyst and a future trend for closing the gap of division between and within groups of faith and culture alike (Popovksa, 2017).

As N. Longworth observes as far back as 2003, “the watchword for today is ‘community’ in every meaning of that word, whether it is a geographical entity as in a learning city or a learning region, or a community of people with common sense of purpose or interest, as in a religious or a tribal community (Longworth, 2003). Sharpening the focus to distinct communities within the Christian faith with its splintered history, currently understood within three large categories as Eastern Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestant variations, the need for healthy interaction amidst the Christian expressions, defined as intrafaith dialogue, is vital for healthy community development. N. Dumitrascu examines the ongoing inter and intra ecumenical efforts documented in a recent publication from Ecumenical Patriarchate, stating an optimism in dialogue’s ability to bridge and even heal the fractures of disparate faith histories (Dumitrascu, 2022).

In her work *Christianity after religion*, D.B. Bass notes that “Christianity did not begin with a confession. It began with an invitation…into creating a new community, into forming relationships based on love and service (Bass, 2013). Many of the divisions withing Christendom are confessional in nature, creedal in origin. Yet, as Bass argues, it is not the confession nor the creeds that attracts people to join a particular group in broader society. Does anyone join a knitting group by asking for the knitting doctrinal statement, she posits? Of course not. People join a knitting group because they want to knit (Bass, 2013). Just as Christianity began as an invitation into a participatory, community relationship, so might be the remedy to today’s polarities found within the creedal and confessional Christian islands that have formed through centuries of drift.

Wolf describes the work of dialogue between faith traditions as an act of “translation” by utilizing specific religious documents to tease out healthy discussion on religious belief (Wolf, 2021). The centralizing of the reading which fuels dialogue is vital to allowing participants to find shared meaning even amongst words that are used in common by the different faiths. The very same word may, in fact, carry different meanings within the specific faith group that must be translated in efforts to assimilate a healthier, developing, shared, communal space. The task of translation becomes the means for productive cross-cultural communication. As this relates to my current project, the divergent cultures are occurring within the same basic framework of Christian faith.

Therefore, I invited Eastern Orthodox men, Catholic men, and various stripes of Protestants to read together and to dialogue together, to develop community amidst our cross-section of faith cultures. Because Theo-centricity is common between us, we have been able to readily adopt Pratt’s conclusions of the Vatican and the World Council of Churches’ summation of 5 key theological dynamics that undergird the translation efforts, as mentioned by Wolf, to model ecumenical complementarity: contextual, communal, theocentric, responsive, and salvific lenses to assist dialoguers in developing common ground (Pratt, 2020).

A 2024 survey from National Civic Review, displays that changing the attitudes (or beliefs) of participants is primarily relational work. This work is described by G. Christopher as occurring withing positive intergroup interactions which alter cognitive representations in the categories of individuation, perspective taking, and increased contact with differing views and cultural perspectives (Christopher, 2024). In short, consistency plays an important role along with spaces designed for each person’s perspective, making room for a person’s ability to grow into new cognitive (or belief) frames.

Participants in intrafaith and interfaith dialogue are naturally bringing to any discussion their own thoughts, feelings, motivations, actions, contexts, or as Bou Zeineddine describes, their own “system of systems” which have co-evolved together and in various ways within an individual (Bou Zeindeddine, 2021). The act of translation described by Wolf (2021) embodies the opportunity, fostered by shared reading targets, to assist an individual in defining, within themselves, their own evolved system of systems that contributes to their current strand of thinking and belief. This process of individuation, as described by G. Christopher (2024), establishes the framework for understanding not only one’s own perspective, but creates the openness to consider the perspectives of another, allowing for further “evolution” of a person’s connection within community.

Utilizing a shared text or document to fuel dialogical individuation creates the environment for more subtle factors, imperative to the communal dynamic, to surface. Carter and Nicolaides (2023) study the barriers to critical self-reflection in their article *Transformaitve learning: An Emotional (r)evolution*. They introduce a concept of edge emotions which often act as barriers to relevant critical reflection. According to the research of Daniel Kahneman (2011), the emotional center is the “fast thinking” mechanism upon which much initial “thinking” is done. It is the “slow” thinking processes, which includes the capacities for rationalization and critical reflection, that must be given time and space to access. Thinking, fast and slow, creates the arena of edge emotions which serve as defense mechanisms for critical reflection. However, intentional, focused, dialogical intrafaith settings establish the backdrop for the movement of a participant from edge emotions toward what Carter and Nicolaides (2021) call the “comfort zone” within which a participant begins critical reflection; or what Kahneman (2011) calls “slow thinking.” It is this slow thinking that is particular fostered in an intentional, intrafaith group containing the various system of systems to the confines of a shared text.

One more subtle, but powerful, factor must be accounted for in the facilitating of an intrafaith dialogical group. H. Gutterink (2022) develops the concept of “meta-perceptions” which invariably influence an individual’s capacity to move from fast to slow thinking within a group setting. In the article *Thinking of you thinking of me: An integrative review of meta-perception in the workplace*, Gutterink condenses decades of research demonstrating that how a person believes they are seen by others which plays a major role in a person’s ability to perceive and appraise the viewpoint of others. An important feature of individuation, leading to perspective taking, is the capacity for an individual to evaluate their own internal narrative about how they believe people view their own belief systems. As these meta-perceptions are brought to the foreground during individuation, assisted by mutual reading material, thinking begins to cross the barrier of edge emotions towards a comfort zone (Carter and Nicolaides, 2021) and proceeds to slow down (Kahneman, 2011), allowing the participant to find themselves and their current beliefs, their system of systems (Bou Zeineddine, 2021), within the broader context of an intrafaith community dynamic.

There is no greater assistance to the development of a cross-cultural community than the gelling that occurs withing properly facilitated, intentional dialogue. In my particular group, Thought Architecting, now in its fourth year, the grown capacity for participants to self-identify as well as critically reflect upon material that was once mysterious, suspect, or foreign, now shows the harmonious values established in intrafaith dialogue. What has resulted has been a group of men, from various Christian expressions, that can not only thinking critically together, but more importantly, have learned to listen to one another with a true slowness of intention. Inescapably, our shared community context has developed into a community of men, intent on valuing and caring for one another.

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