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BETHEL UNIVERSITY
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THE CRUCIBLE OF ORTHODOXY AND ORTHOPRAXY:
EXAMINING THE INTERSECTIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE,
MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND THEOLOGY

A THESIS PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE
IN GLOBAL AND CONTEXTUAL STUDIES

BY
EYDIE DYKE SHYPULSKI
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

MAY 2017

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Thank you to my husband Michael for inspiring me to think big, for making me laugh every day and for loving me in deep and inexpressible ways. You bring joy and adventure to my life. I am so happy and blessed to share it with you. Thank you to my Mom and Dad, the most rare and generous of parents who have loved me without measure. Thank you Joshua, Jordan, Zachary, Elijah and Elizabeth. You are a constant source of love and laughter and I am so grateful for each of you. My family is beautiful and complete because of you.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to better understand the relationship between moral development, theology and social justice within a Christian context. An apparent disconnect exists regarding how people of faith apply personal morals and theological perspectives when positioning themselves with regard to public policy and social justice issues. The researcher sought to extract information that would have implications for professional social practice, social work ethical and practice pedagogy, for faith-based institutions of higher learning and for the broader Christian community.

A theological reflection included a brief examination of Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophies of moral and ethical development followed by a deeper investigation into Reinhold Niebuhr's protestant imagination, non-violent atonement theology, the contextual theological constructs of Stephen Bevans and Catholic Social Teaching. The literature review included a brief review of Freud and Skinner's views on moral development followed by a closer examination of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development and a second look at Niebuhr to understand his view on the development of morality.

The researcher employed an exploratory quantitative study design which included two separate survey instruments that were distributed to undergraduate students at a faith-based institution. The first survey instrument was developed by the researcher and was designed to gather information on respondents' opinions on what they believe about social justice and how they apply those beliefs to specific contexts and situations. The

second survey instrument was a standardized test that is used to measure the moral development of individuals based on Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development.

Data from the surveys indicated that students at Bethel University show higher levels of moral development than the findings reported by the Center for the Study of Ethical Development at the University of Alabama. The study also demonstrated that although people of faith indicate that they believe social justice to be central to Christian practice, there is significant disagreement regarding what social justice is and how it is accomplished.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Frank and Ruby Dyke, my Dad and Mom. You always believed in me, always hoped and always loved me without ceasing. You taught me kindness and compassion for all people. You gave me a beautiful life filled with adventure. I am who I am today because of you. I could not have done this without you.

God does not appear, and flow out, only from narrow chinks and round bored wells here and there in favored races and places, but He flows in grand, undivided currents, shoreless and boundless over creeds and forms and all kinds of civilizations and peoples and beasts, saturating all and fountainizing all.

John Muir,
Bade's Life and Letters of John Muir.

It is appropriate still to think of the True, Good, and Beautiful as names for the Being of God, with the true revealed by the Holy Spirit, expressed through wisdom, and studied by logic; with the good revealed by the Creator, expressed through justice, studied by ethics; and with the beautiful revealed by Christ, expressed through compassion, literally meaning "suffering with," and studied by aesthetics.

Kimberly Vrudny
"Conforming Beauty:
Amnesty International's Campaign Against Child Soldiers"
in Society for the Arts: Religious and Theological Studies

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Statement of the Problem

The problem this thesis project addressed was the presenting disconnect between moral development and theology as applied to contemporary social issues within a Christian context. The researcher examined Catholic Social Teaching, Non-Violent Atonement theology as well Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development and Rienhold Niebuhr's political theology. The research provided theoretical insight into how people of faith apply personal morals and theological perspective when positioning themselves with regard to public policy and social justice issues. The research offers implications for social professional practice and pedagogy. The researcher conducted field research with undergraduate students at Bethel University in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Delimitations of the Project

The field research was limited to studying students at Bethel University in Saint Paul, Minnesota. It data subjects were limited to social work students and non-social work students at Bethel University who are largely evangelical and tend to be more conservative than students at secular universities.

Assumptions

The first assumption is that this researcher is a Christian social worker who believes that social justice is an integral part of personal faith.

Setting of the Project

Bethel University, located in Saint Paul, Minnesota, has just under 3,000 undergraduate students and represents more than 65 denominations, 49 states and 21 countries.¹ Bethel University was founded by Swedish Baptists and eventually became a part of the Baptist Conference and more recently Converge Worldwide, which in 2015 became Converge. Bethel has 88 majors, 43 minors, eleven pre-professional programs and five professional programs (social work, nursing, business, health and applied science, and education). Nearly 75 percent of traditional undergraduate students study abroad.

Background of the Problem

The Sermon on the Mount provides teaching that becomes foundational for Christian ethics and practice. The words of Jesus in Matthew 25 compel his disciples to engage in an orthopraxy which demonstrates the practice of Christ-like being. Blessed are the poor, the meek and those who mourn. Blessed are those who demonstrate mercy. Blessed are the peacemakers. The Psalmist calls for the people of God to “defend the weak and the fatherless, to uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. (Psalm 82:3) Jesus teaches that Christians are to let the strangers in. (Matthew 25:43) This is the work of social justice which advances the rights of all people.

Currently, there is an unprecedented migration of people throughout the world. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that there are an estimated 65.3 million people across the globe who have been forcibly displaced from

¹ “Bethel at a Glance,” Bethel University, accessed March 21, 2015, <https://www.bethel.edu/about/bethel-glance/>. <https://www.bethel.edu/about/bethel-glance/>

their homes. Of those, 21.3 million are refugees, half of whom are under the age of 18.² Additionally, there are 10 million stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic human rights including education, healthcare, freedom of movement and employment.³ Another way to measure the enormity of this crisis is to reflect on the fact that nearly 34,000 people are forced to flee their homes on a daily basis.⁴ The recent Syrian refugee crisis is a perfect example of this and has raised the issue of refugees to the level of a global crisis.

The cause of migration is complex. In addition to people migrating to our nation in pursuit of a better life, an unprecedented number of people are being forced to flee their homelands due to political conflict, war, famine, genocide, terrorism, and ethnic cleansing. Others have been forced to enter our borders through the underground subterfuge of human trafficking. In addition to the data collected by the UNHCR, the International Labor Organization estimates that there are nearly “21 million people who are victims of forced labor (11.4 million women and girls and 9.5 million boys).”⁵ Nearly “19 million victims are exploited by private individuals or enterprises and over 2 million by the state or rebel groups.”⁶ Over the last several years, there have been high profile examples of Yazidi women and girls being captured, tortured, raped and sold into slavery

² “Figures at a Glance,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: The UN Refugee Agency, last modified October 31, 2016, first accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

³ UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency.

⁴ UNHCR, “Figures at a Glance.”

⁵ “International Labor Organization,” International Organization of Employees, last modified December 15, 2016, first accessed March 23, 2015, <http://www.ioe-emp.org/international-labour-organization/>.

⁶ IOE, “International Labor Organization.”

by the terrorist group ISIL. In Nigeria in 2014, Boko Haram notoriously captured 276 girls, many of whom, amongst numerous other atrocities, were forced to marry members of the terrorist organization. The ILO reports that of the “19 million victims who are exploited by individuals or enterprises, 4.5 million are victims of forced sexual exploitation.”⁷

There is an observable misalignment between individual and corporate expressions of faith and social action in response to the refugee crisis. The integration of refugees and immigrants into our communities highlights social, cultural and economic problems in the United States, including social inequalities and growing unemployment.⁸ Together, these issues can lead to a worldview of scarcity and fear mongering.

No matter on which side of the social or political debate an individual stands, the urgency and growing enormity of the challenge demands an engaged U.S. citizenry capable of making decisions about the issues which are in alignment with our beliefs. Christian values call for charity, especially in the face of adversity. As faith-based scholars and educators, there must be an emphasis on assessing not only how moral and ethics are being taught, but also how to provide students with the necessary tools for critical reasoning so that personal faith commitment is aligned with social action.

It is commonly held that for people of faith, decisions and points-of-view should both be informed and guided by the principles, values and morals underlying their individual faith commitment and which are drawn primarily from scripture and theological tradition. Thus, it is important to understand the factors that contribute to

⁷ IOE, “International Labor Organization.”

⁸ “The Employment Situation of Immigrants and Natives,” Center for Immigration Studies, last modified December 2016, first accessed May 23, 2015, <http://cis.org>.

moral development and one's decision-making process. However, preliminary observations related to the Christian response to the global refugee crisis for example, indicate that people with similar faith positions often find themselves diametrically opposed to one another. When faced with certain decisions, and under the influence of certain social or organizational pressures or conditions, Christians who are deeply committed to their faith appear to make decisions that are inconsistent with their moral positions and faith beliefs.

To examine this conundrum, Robert F. Card suggests that the explanation may be found in the fact that although human beings are assumed to be moral agents, in day-to-day decisions, they engage in what he calls an "agentic shift."⁹ Agentic shift occurs when in order to thrive or survive as individuals, or in order to remain competitive, individuals as moral agents shift from their presumed sense of moral agency when they join organizations or find themselves in situations in the public square or marketplace where survival or flourishing requires doing things that one cannot square with his or her personal morality. In effect, situations in organizational contexts and the marketplace become systematic and reliable predictors of the inconsistency of people's moral agency.¹⁰

There are historical examples to illustrate this. One can point to dark periods in the history of the world where otherwise morally upright people have, under considerable situational or organizational duress, made disastrous decisions that have created tragic consequences for humanity. Consider for example the following cases: Nanking, Nazi

⁹ Robert F. Card, "Individual Responsibility within Organizational Contexts," *Journal of Business Ethics* vol. 62, no. 4 (2005): 397–405, accessed March 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25123678>

¹⁰ Card, 397.

Germany and more recently, Abu Ghraib, all as historical examples which ended in horrific tragedies. Many firsthand accounts of people who played roles in perpetrating the horrors of Nazi Germany for example, have referenced their subordination to governmental, organizational and situational contexts that compelled them to behave the way they did. Additionally, Stanley Milgram's obedience study¹¹ demonstrates, with a frightening consistency, the proclivity of human beings to shift their moral agency by agreeing to do things that go against their conscience because of organizational and situational duress.

Using the global refugee crisis as an example of how diametrically opposed the varying positions are, this research will attempt to shed light on this issue. The following statements demonstrate the seemingly random stratification that exists regarding one's position on the refugee crisis. Consider the following observations: Christians both oppose and favor allowing refugees into the United States, white people both oppose and favor allowing refugees into the U.S., African Americans both oppose and favor allowing refugees into the U.S., and women both oppose and favor allowing refugees into the U.S. If the empirical observations above are incontrovertible, and there are many more similarly identified empirical observations that can be made along the same line of reasoning, then it would seem therefore that neither the religion, race, sex, and by extension, income, ethnicity or education, for example, are direct predictors of people's reaction and action towards the global refugee crisis. This reality compels the researcher to embark on this research project to answer these questions.

¹¹ B. K. Eckman, "Research: Stanley Milgram's 'Obedience' Studies, Etc.," *A Review of General Semantics* vol. 34, no. 1 (1977): 88-99, accessed March, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42575230>.

The Question of Morality and Christian Social Ethics

At the heart of Christianity is the idea that the human mind, heart and imagination can be radically transformed by and through an intimate relationship with God the creator. Theoretically, this should mean that each and every thought and action (private or public) should be predicated on the transformative power of Christ's love for humanity. In order to survive in a competitive economic market however, people are often forced to change and compromise the way they think and make decisions. In order to succeed in the established system, they often have to act contrarily to how they believe. Therefore, it can be said that decisions are often predicated by circumstances. Additionally, as an individual goes about her/ his daily lives, it is not always easy to think strategically about ethical and moral decisions which makes it even more difficult to act consistently with how one believes she/ he should act.

It is important to further examine the kind of social conditions or contexts which allow individuals, when confronted with moral dilemmas, to engage in ethical decision-making which subsequently sustains and operationalizes the beliefs that they hold. This is the work of Christian social ethics. Christian social ethics are also invariably and intricately connected with concepts and theories of moral development. Theories of morality are consistently interwoven together with theories of justice and a particular individual's inclination towards decision-making is marked by her or his beliefs about the two (morality and justice). It should be additionally noted that decision-making is also informed by conscious and sub-conscious theological suppositions and beliefs. For the purpose of this research, the researcher will first examine the classical understanding of moral development from the perspective of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. Next, this

research will explore non-violent atonement theology to examine how the concept of a violent God impacts those who are marginalized and oppressed. Finally, Stephan Bevan's taxonomy of contextual theology will be examined. In chapter 3, the researcher will, through the literature review examine Lawrence Kohlberg's theories of moral development, the political theories of Reinhold Niebuhr and Catholic Social Teaching to understand its connection to the values and practice theory of professional social work practice.

The Importance of the Project

This researcher, as a licensed clinical social worker and professor of social work at a Christian liberal arts university, is responsible to uphold the values and ethics of social work practice. Practitioners in the social work profession are required to work under nine professional competencies which have been nationally articulated and mandated to ensure ethical practice. Competency three states that social workers and by extension social work educators should: Advance human rights and social, economic and environmental justice.¹² Social workers understand that every person regardless of position in society has fundamental rights such as freedom, safety, privacy, an adequate standard of living, health care and education.¹³ Social workers understand the global interconnections of oppressions and human rights violations, and are knowledgeable about theories of human need and social justice and strategies to promote social and economic justice and human rights.¹⁴ Social workers understand strategies designed to

¹² "Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards," Council on Social Work Education, 3-7, modified 2015, accessed, March 23, 2015, <http://www.cswe.org/file.aspx?id=13780>.

¹³ CSWE, "Educational Policy."

¹⁴ CSWE, "Educational Policy."

eliminate oppressive structural barriers to ensure that social goods, rights, and responsibilities are distributed equitably and that civil, political, environmental, economic, social and cultural human rights are protected.¹⁵

If these are the tasks of a licensed professional social worker, it is essential that social work practitioners and social work educators understand how moral development occurs so that these tenets of social work practice can be upheld in spite of organizational or situational constructs. This research is first and foremost an exercise in developing an understanding about how complex decisions which impact issues of human rights and justice, are made.

The Importance of the Project to the Researcher as a Social Work Educator

Answering these questions will also provide significant insight into how students think and make decisions. It is essential as a social work educator to understand the barriers that face students who seek to practice social work and who might not be able to act consistently and in accordance with the dictates of their conscience. Are there environmental or sociocultural factors within the context of Bethel University which impact how students make important decisions related to justice? How might theological suppositions, moral development and beliefs about justice impact one's professional ability to stand for human rights, social, economic and environmental justice, ensuring the equitable distribution of social goods, rights and responsibilities and therefore ensuring a just and civil society?"¹⁶ Acquiring an understanding of the intersection of theology and moral development will inform the researcher regarding how to develop

¹⁵ CSWE, "Educational Policy."

¹⁶ CSWE, "Educational Policy."

curriculum which facilitates the ability of students to process through the complexity of this issue.

The Importance of the Project to the Faith-Based Community

The implications of this work extend to the broader faith community who should be deeply concerned with developing an inviolate capacity to make decisions that are in alignment with our stated beliefs. The faith community should be well positioned to understand the occurrence of moral development and the related implications for the pedagogy of faith formation.

Research Design

The researcher utilized random sampling for an exploratory cross-sectional qualitative survey of Bethel University undergraduate students. The research utilized two different survey instruments designed to better understand the causal relationship between moral development, theology, justice and social issues. The first survey instrument was developed by the researcher to examine respondents' views on faith and social justice. The second survey instrument, the Defining Issues Test (DIT-2), is a standardized test that was developed at the University of Minnesota to measure sequential moral development. The test is based on Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development. The researcher was able to look at results from both surveys to formulate some suppositions regarding students' moral development and its related application to theology, social justice and social policy.

CHAPTER TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Human Nature and the Agentic Shift

In responding to questions regarding his book, *“The Road to Character,”* David Brooks, distinguished between “résumé” values and “eulogy” values.¹ Brooks states that human beings often perform acts in order to impress others and look good in the eyes of the world. For example, throughout high school, students are urged to do service projects because that will improve their chances of getting into a good college which will then facilitate the acquisition of a high paying job which will then result in increased social mobility.² Resume values drive an individual to focus on things that the agency prioritizes rather than things that are valued by the individual and which are instead closely related to an individual’s moral and ethical values. This reflects the idea that the values upon which these decisions are based emerge from the heart of the agentic shift. Resume values are not what individuals value in their heart—they are rather based on what society urges them to do. This would seem to suggest that the society or group compels the individual to act, often against moral or ethical principles to become what is acceptable within the context of the group construct which invariably exists within a

¹ Brooks, David, “Should you live for your resume...or your eulogy?” Online Ted Talk, March 2014. http://www.ted.com/talks/david_brooks_should_you_live_for_your_resume_or_your_eulogy?language=en

² David Brooks, *The Road to Character* (New York: Random House 2015), 270.

racialized society.¹ Racialized society is defined by Brooks as “a society that allocated rewards – economic, social, political and psychological – unequally by race.”² Brooks states that, “well intentioned people and their values and their institutions actually recreate the racial division that they oppose.”³ This occurs in spite of good intentions and as a result of the agentic shift and the powerful influence of the group. Michael Emerson and Christian Smith state, “despite good intentions and much activity and energy, white evangelicalism does more to perpetuate the racial divide and the inequality that it does to reduce it.”⁴

Likewise Paul Kisselev asserts that there has occurred within evangelical America, a “juvenilization of American Christianity which,” as a result of agency, “has ultimately resulted in a self-centered, emotionally-driven and intellectually empty faith. ... A Christianized version of adolescent narcissism.”⁵ A modern church grounded on juvenile values would, when faced with ethical dilemmas and critical decisions (election, social policy decisions for example) is in no way prepared to make mature and reasoned moral decisions. Juvenilization is defined as “the process by which the religious beliefs, practices, and developmental characteristics of adolescents become accepted as appropriate for adults.”⁶ Bergler argues that this is a result of a variety of external factors

¹ Brooks, 270.

² Brooks, 270.

³ Brooks, 270.

⁴ Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, “Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religions and the Problem of Race in America” (lecture presented at the CCDA meeting, 2001).

⁵ Thomas E. Bergler, “When Are We Going to Grow Up?” *Christianity Today* vol. 56, no.6 (2012): 8.

⁶ Bergler, 2.

which were propagated as a necessary means to save the future of the church, ultimately resulting in an experience which appealed to the lowest common denominator of adolescent cognitive development.⁷ Consequently, multiple, significantly fundamental and foundational aspects of the church have been lost including, the capacity to become spiritually mature adults, capable of acting for the common good.

It is important to garner an understanding of how social conditions or contexts allow individuals, when confronted with moral dilemmas to engage in ethical decision-making which subsequently sustains and operationalizes the beliefs and values that they hold. Furthermore, it would seem that individuals, specifically within the context of groups, often hold to beliefs which allow them to rationalize unethical, sometimes even violent, and all too often, immoral decisions. Understanding why and how this occurs is the work of Christian social ethics. Christian social ethics are also invariably linked and intricately connected with concepts and theories of morality.

In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant writes that “if there is a supreme practical principle or, in respect of the human will, a categorical imperative, it must be one which, being drawn from the conception of that which is necessarily an end for everyone because it is an end in itself, constitutes an objective principle of will, and can therefore serve as a universal practical law. Accordingly, the practical imperative will be as follows: So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only.”⁸ Kant appeals that all actions be based on respecting the sacred nature of the human being. When human beings

⁷ Bergler, 7.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 6.

are treated as a means to an end rather than as an end, the potential for dehumanization is significantly amplified. Humankind is indeed, as Kant says, twisted and imperfect, and this crookedness is demonstrated in various manifestations of corporate greed, corrupt policy, and the largely ignored impact of capitalism, which paves the road to poverty and oppression on a global scale. Capitalism instead depends upon selfishness and greed and that “free market economists regard people as tunnel-visioned, self-seeing robots, totally selfish and selfish immoral agents.”⁹ It would seem that behavior predicated on this type of foundation views human beings merely as a means to an end. There is however, a call to a more developed sense of morality where one acts in accordance with the higher values that are intricately woven into the structure of the created being. This understanding is consistent with the idea that humans are called to a higher end and that all individuals have inalienable human rights and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. An understanding of how human beings acquire moral beliefs and values is essential to ensuring that acquired values and moral beliefs are promulgated and acted upon within a community or society. It is also of importance to understand why an individual’s actions are so often inconsistent with their acquired values and morals. There are multiple recent examples of “corporate turpitude, arrogance and betrayal gone amok. This phenomenon has deprived millions of citizens of their livelihood, their identify, and their self-respect. It constitutes an affront to our civic institutions whose role it is to assure equality, fairness and justice for everyone.”¹⁰

⁹ Christopher Snowdon, “Selfishness, Greed and Capitalism: Debunking Myths About the Free Market,” *Institute for Economic Affairs*, vol. vii, (January 1, 2014): iea.org.uk. accessed October 26, 2016.

¹⁰ Arthur Nikelly, “The Pathogenesis of Greed: Causes and Consequences,” *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* vol. 3, no.1 (March 2006): 65.

As stated in the introduction, at the heart of Christianity is the idea that the human mind, heart and imagination can be radically transformed by and through an intimate relationship with God the creator. Theoretically, this should mean that each and every thought and action, both private and public, should be predicated on and reflect the transformative power of God's love for humankind. Stephen J. Pope suggests that Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology regarded the Christian conscience to be in a "process of transformation or conversion."¹¹ Bonhoeffer was acutely aware of the necessity for transformation of the human heart and mind as he fully recognized the gap between what Christians say they believe and how they subsequently behave.¹² Bonhoeffer believed that true Christian discipleship, through its emphasis on community, corrects individualism. Bonhoeffer "came to regard God as a God of the oppressed, of the marginalized. God is not neutral with regard to people: God suffers with victims and other marginalized people. Moreover, God loves our enemies as much as our friends."¹³ Regarding systemic injustice, Bonhoeffer believed that it was incumbent upon human beings to do more than simply care for victims of injustice. It is rather, the moral responsibility of the individual to fight against and ultimately prevail against injustice.¹⁴ These concepts suggest that as human beings move increasingly toward moral agency, the heart and mind are subsequently and simultaneously transformed. It should also be noted that by contrast, Niebuhr asserted that individuals remained moral while society

¹¹ Stephen J. Pope, "Moral Formation as Transformation: The Contribution of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," (paper delivered during a panel discussion entitled "The Formation of the Religious Conscience after the Shoah: Bonhoeffer's Spirituality for Today," during the conference *Dietrich Bonhoeffer for Our Times: Jewish and Christian Perspectives*, September 17, 2006).

¹² Pope, 1.

¹³ Pope, 1.

¹⁴ Pope, 1.

itself acted upon the individual to become immoral. Bonhoeffer suggested that the emphasis on community would correct individualism.

In order to survive in a society with an infinite variety of constructs and within the competitive economic market, people are often forced to change and compromise the way they think and make decisions. The Catholic Church's catechism puts it this way: "Man is divided in himself. As a result, the whole life of men, both individual and social, shows itself to be a struggle, and a dramatic one, between good and evil, between light and darkness."¹⁵ Human beings living in a world fraught with political and structural violence, are often challenged, in spite of their good intentions, to live according to the dictates of their conscience. Moreover, in order to succeed in the established system, human beings are often called to act contrarily to how they believe. Therefore it could be said that the decisions that an individual makes are often predicated by circumstances or agency.

Classical Theological and Philosophical Taxonomies: Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas

Much has been written about how the individual becomes moral. In his *Nicomachean ethics*, Aristotle's philosophy that human beings become virtuous by doing virtuous acts is articulated.¹⁶ The Aristotelian concept of cultivating good habits is reflected in the idea that acquiring ethics and virtue is not passive. Aristotle uses the word *hexis*, a term which indicates an active condition, to indicate moral virtue.¹⁷ Moreover,

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1997).

¹⁶ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. D. P. Chase and William Kaufman (San Francisco: Dover Publications 2013), 1.

¹⁷ Joe Sachs, "Aristotle: Ethics," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed January 7, 2017, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/aris-eth/>.

ethical virtue is acquired through habituation.¹⁸ ‘Habituation’ for the purposes of this research, is defined as a principle of action,¹⁹ the repeated action of a particular behavior until it becomes an habit. In Walter Farrell’s companion to the Summa Theologica, he says of virtue, “our very first glance of virtue brings out the astounding truth that virtue is not at all extraordinary, not at all mysterious, but rather a prosaic thing without which we simply cannot get through even an ordinary uneventful day. In plain language, virtue is simply another name for a certain kind of habit, namely for a good habit ordained to facilitating operation.”²⁰

Aristotle believed that being a virtuous person was a good enough reason to act morally.²¹ Aristotle argues that substantial happiness and human flourishing can only be grasped through the virtues which ultimately assist in directing one towards her or his natural ends.²² According to Aristotle, the final end for human beings is happiness. And happiness is found in the virtuous life, found only by the “wise few” who pursue a contemplative life.²³

Thomas Aquinas articulated his perspective, which, similar to Aristotle’s proposes that humankind’s end is happiness. For Aquinas, however, human beings are said to have a two-fold end: a “natural end” and a “supernatural end” to which human

¹⁸ Sachs.

¹⁹ Walter P. Farrell, “Happiness” “Virtue,” *A Companion to the Summa: The Pursuit of Happiness, Vol. II* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1985), Ia-IIae q. 1-5 and Ia-IIae q. 55-58.

²⁰ Farrell, Ia-IIae q. 55-58.

²¹ Aristotle, 4.

²² Aristotle, 2.

²³ Aristotle, 4

beings are called through grace.²⁴ For Aquinas, human beings have a human nature and therefore a natural end that is proper to that human nature.²⁵ This “natural end” leads ultimately to imperfect happiness.²⁶ However, because the seed of eternal life has been given to Christians and through the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ, there also exists a “supernatural end.”²⁷ For Aquinas, seeking a virtuous life was a way to experience God in life.²⁸ In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas writes extensively on the concept of virtue and, just as Aristotle, suggests that we become more virtuous by practicing virtue.²⁹ To this concept, Aquinas distinguishes between acquired and infused virtues, which leads correspondingly to our natural and supernatural ends.³⁰ Individuals *acquire* and become more virtuous by practicing virtues – wisdom, understanding, justice, fortitude, and so on.³¹ Insofar as God instills, through the Holy Spirit, additional *infused* virtues, individuals are able to, through the grace of God, move towards their supernatural end.³² Thomas also goes on to relate law to the moral life insofar as law fosters virtue and fulfillment in that it appeals to the dictates of reason, is for the sake of the common good, is given by a competent authority and is promulgated.³³ However, the

²⁴ Aquinas, prima sec. 1

²⁵ Aquinas, prima sec. 1

²⁶ Aquinas, prima sec. 1

²⁷ Aquinas, prima sec. 55

²⁸ Aquinas, prima sec. 55

²⁹ Aquinas, prima sec. 55

³⁰ Aquinas, prima sec. 63

³¹ Aquinas, prima sec. 63

³² Aquinas, prima sec. 55

³³ Aquinas, prima sec. 90

existence of law does not necessarily ensure that justice is afforded to all members of the law-abiding community. Neither does the fact that it appeals to reason, is for the sake of the common good, is given by a competent authority and is widely promulgated, ensure that individuals will act upon its dictates.

It should also be noted that Nichomachean ethics and Thomistic theology provide nothing more than a framework to understand how an individual can, through practice, become virtuous and moral. It does not however, offer a response to the challenges of agentic shift which prevent moral individuals from acting morally in social constructs.

The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr

Relevant to this research, is a consideration of Reinhold Niebuhr's perspectives on moral man and the corresponding challenges that an individual faces when attempting to act according to the dictates of her/ his conscience when faced with operating in social constructs or society. It is also relevant to consider Niebuhr's theology where he articulates that, "from Jesus, we get the supreme ethical command: love. His ethical ideal is one of complete obedience to God's will. This is perfect love, which Jesus both embodies and commands."³⁴ Although Niebuhr simultaneously defines love as the "impossible possibility", he believes that Christian ethics must begin with love."³⁵ Niebuhr goes on to address God's character; "for God is a being infinitely lovely because he has infinite excellence and beauty."³⁶ It would seem reasonable therefore, to draw a parallel between Niebuhr and Aquinas's two-fold end and speculate that, in a fallen world, an individual or group's effort to act in accordance with the ethic of love is

³⁴ Lebacqz, 83.

³⁵ Lebacqz, 83.

³⁶ Niebuhr, 67.

reduced to an imperfect form as it is based on the “natural end” which is by its very nature imperfect.

For Niebuhr, sin is both religious and moral.³⁷ Regarding moral sin, Niebuhr states, “the ego which falsely makes itself the center of existence in its pride and will-to-power inevitably subordinates other life to its will. If perfect love is the sacrifice of self, sin is the assertion of self against others: sin is always trying to be strong at the expense of someone else.”³⁸ This is a critically important distinction. It implicates not only the individual who fails to act in accordance with his/ her sense of morality, but it suggests that society itself complicit in the oppression and subjugation of the poor and disenfranchised. And yet, Christians are called to demonstrate charity even in the face of adversity. Niebuhr states, “even when the religious sense of the absolute expresses itself, not in the sublimation of the will, but in the subjection of the individual will to the divine will, and in the judgment upon the will from the divine perspective, it may still offer perils to the highest and social moral life, even though it will produce some choice fruits of morality.”³⁹ It would seem therefore, that Niebuhr suggests that acting against the authority of agentic shift by exercising one’s moral autonomy can prove unfavorable to an individual’s position in the community. This however, is the habituation of virtue and by engaging in the practice or habituation of virtue, the fruits of morality become fully expressed. Niebuhr additionally submits that “the moral dimension of sin, therefore, is injustice – an unwillingness to value the claims of the other or to see one’s own claims as equal but not superior to the other’s. The root injustice is exploitation; exploiting,

³⁷ Lebacqz, 84.

³⁸ Lebacqz, 84.

³⁹ Niebuhr, 66-67.

enslaving, or taking advantage of another life.”⁴⁰ Understanding injustice as the moral dimension of sin has radical implications for the Christian faith community, in fact for all of humanity, in that it compels all who wish to be moral agents, to stand against injustice and oppression. It additionally requires a closer examination of how to shift the understanding of justice from being directed at the individual and the individual’s direct community to what is just and good for all of humanity. In the words of Emma Lazarus, “until we are all free, we are none of us free.”⁴¹

Non-Violent Atonement Theology

The Old and New Testaments are filled with images of a violent God who punishes, intimidates, disciplines and withholds his favor from the people whom he ostensibly loves. It is not hard to imagine that this divine dichotomy might prove confusing and difficult to understand. This dichotomy has paved the way for the rationalization of violence and the misuse of power. For example, countless wars have been fought and justified in the name of God. In his book *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence*, Charles Selengut acknowledges that the phrase “religion and violence” as “jarring,” asserting that “religion is thought to be opposed to violence and a force for peace and reconciliation.”⁴² He acknowledges, however, that “the history and scriptures of the world's religions tell stories of violence and war even as they speak of

⁴⁰ Lebacqz, 84-85.

⁴¹ “Life of Emma Lazarus,” *Princeton Weekly Bulletin* (January 8, 2007), accessed on October 29, 2016 from <https://www.princeton.edu/main/news/archive/S16/82/70M09/index.xml>

⁴² Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 1.

peace and love.”⁴³ Reconciling violence and love as coexisting characteristics of God is a monumental task.

Contemporary theologian Kimberly Vrudny provides a framework whereby one can consider an alternative reading of the scriptures and how they approach violence, from a difference lens. Through a series of interviews and lectures and a preliminary review of draft version of her book, *Beauty’s Vineyard: A Theological Aesthetic of Anguish and Anticipation*, the researcher explored Non-Violent Atonement Theology which offers an alternative theological interpretation for understanding the occurrence of violence. Vrudny bravely asserts that a theology of violence implicates the church for its complicity in the subordination and victimization of minority cultures and the perpetration of a racialized society, which oppresses the very people Christ calls followers to serve.⁴⁴ Vrudny refers to the violence that manifests itself both politically and domestically in places where Christianity is dominant, critiquing both cultural and religious colonialization which has created fertile ground for perpetuating systems of oppression and violence.⁴⁵ Vrudny states that “if we perceive God as violent, misogynistic, or xenophobic, for example – which are only a few among the characteristics we have divinized and worshipped, all with disastrous consequences. We will become violent, misogynistic and xenophobic.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Selengut, 1.

⁴⁴ Kimberly Vrudny, *Beauty’s Vineyard: A Theological Aesthetic of Anguish and Anticipation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 2016), 2. Most of Vrudny’s insights were obtained in a series of personal interviews with the researcher).

⁴⁵ Vrudny, personal interview

⁴⁶ Vrudny, *Beauty’s Vineyard*, 19.

It is vital at this point to examine how tenets of classical theology which embrace concepts of retributive justice might contribute to one's moral development. Vrudny proposes that a theology which paints God as a cruel and vindictive God, is completely contradictory to a theology which defines God as one who is Himself, the source of love and beauty, goodness and truth.⁴⁷ Understanding God as one who seeks to punish and who causes suffering and death is in itself a sort of trauma which can significantly impact victims of trauma, war, genocide, human trafficking and torture.⁴⁸ In fact, before the oppressive social structures can be dismantled and before individual and community risk factors can be addressed, social work practitioners who follow Christ, and all others who seek social justice, must first understand and address any theological inadequacies and deconstruct the deeply-held, pre-conceived notions which traditionally hold God to be a violent God whose sense of retributive justice seems, at least in the Old Testament, exceeds his capacity to love, so much so, that He willed the violent death of His only Son.⁴⁹ Vrudny references the example of South Africa's lessons about truth and forgiveness after Apartheid.⁵⁰ The South African people who had experienced so many traumas which devastated entire communities chose, instead of seeking vengeance and retribution, to forgive the brutality and injustice which was perpetrated upon them. "This provid[ed] a theoretical framework about forgiveness that ultimately transcends the country's political situation to provide insights into the deepest theological mysteries – insights into the nature of God, the nature of Jesus Christ, and the relevance of his

⁴⁷ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁴⁸ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁴⁹ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁵⁰ Vrudny, personal interview.

incarnation, and the drama that resulted in his death, for people of faith even still today.”⁵¹ It would seem therefore, that the choice to respond in this manner is consistent with a higher level of moral development. It could also be said that the response was more moral and virtuous insofar as the response was grounded in ethical principles and for the common good.

If Jesus Christ is the incarnation of Love, of the Good, of the True, of the Beautiful, one must invariably consider how to reconcile the co-existence of violence and death with the beauty and goodness of God. Understanding how an individual’s view of God impacts her/ his moral development and moral decision-making is also of central importance.

Before an alternative is offered, one must first understand the traditional punitive and retributive theories of atonement that demand blood sacrifice for the redemption of humankind. Traditional Evangelical teaching holds firmly to penal substitutionary atonement, the view that Christ’s death is necessary to ensure that God’s sense of justice is not offended and so He therefore willingly sends His only beloved son to be brutally beaten and crucified. If God’s nature is indeed one where justice prevails over love, He would in fact, be obliged to exercise His will in such a manner. In this model, Christ pays the ransom demanded by Satan (Ransom Theory)⁵² or that He died on the cross, according to the will of God to pay the price for our sin (Substitutionary Atonement). In the eleventh century, Anselm declares that human sin is that which offends God’s holiness and stirs up his wrath. Because we have sinned, we owe God and nothing other

⁵¹ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁵² “Satisfaction Theory of Atonement,” Theopedia, accessed October 30, 2016, http://www.theopedia.com/Satisfaction_theory_of_the_atonement

than a blood sacrifice will do in order to placate God's sense of justice. Anselm's view was fraught with intimations of medieval feudalism and the mandatory compensation owed to the king by those in his kingdom who had offended him.⁵³ Enter the notion of violence into God's heart. His plan to save us can only involve the death of His son.

J. Denny Weaver states that substitutionary atonement theology is a departure from an understanding that the death of Christ was instead an "act of resistance"⁵⁴ within the context of a politically and religiously charged environment where Jesus was perceived as a radical revolutionary who posed a threat to a system which perpetuated the interests of the wealthy while simultaneously oppressing the poor, the orphan and the widow. Jesus, the incarnation of Truth, rejected violence and stood rather on the side of those who were perpetually oppressed.⁵⁵ Jesus, the Incarnation of Truth, Beauty, Goodness and Love, universally rejects poverty and oppression, war and injustice. His very existence necessarily provoked opposition from those who were in political and religious power. And this is why He was killed.

Contrarily, the concepts of justice and wrath are key tenets of John Calvin's theology. Calvin believed in an "hereditary depravity," a condition in which we inherited our completely and totally depraved natures from Adam and Eve.⁵⁶ Calvin built on Anselm's theory that punishment was needed in order to meet the demands of God's divine justice.⁵⁷ Anselm imagined that God's honor had been violated and therefore

⁵³ Theopeida, "Satisfaction Theory of Atonement"

⁵⁴ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁵⁵ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁵⁶ "The Christian Concept of Atonement," Religious Tolerance, accessed October 29, 2016, http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_atone10.htm.

⁵⁷ Religious Tolerance, "Atonement."

required a debt payment.⁵⁸ Both Anselm and Calvin view the crucifixion as the moment of victory over sin which would be consistent with the idea of a vengeful and wrathful God. Non-violent Atonement Theology offers an alternative model which is theoretically more consistent with the nature of love, goodness, beauty and truth.

Vrudny suggests that retributive, substitution and penal atonement theories of atonement perpetuate cycles of violence and oppression.⁵⁹ Adopting this kind of theology would invariably impact the moral development of an individual. As a subscriber to this theory, individuals develop morals and rationalize actions based on what they believe to be true about the nature and character of God. By extension, groups who subscribe to a theology which embraces the violent nature of God might also accept the perpetration of violence as a justifiable means to an end. This would seem to suggest that theological constructs that embrace violence might substantially contribute to the agentic shift which occurs between an individual's or group's moral center and an individual's or group's related moral action. It is feasible that a different understanding and model of atonement which embraces the concept of restorative justice, (non-violent atonement theology), might potentially transform one's view of God and subsequent understanding of the social structures which allow for the cyclical perpetration of abuse and violence against those who are helpless against it. Vrudny suggests that the gospel has been twisted to rationalize and justify abusive and distorted notions of God's will lived out in countless situations of violence and oppression on a daily basis, in all corners of the world.⁶⁰ This

⁵⁸ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁵⁹ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁶⁰ Vrudny, personal interview.

is evidenced as the fights of women, minorities, the poor, the sick and the homeless, are increasingly marginalizes.

Within the context of the faith-based community, victims of abuse have been taught that God will not give them more than they can bear or perhaps, that it is their religious duty to stay in abusive relationships because God will bring good out of difficult situations. An additional iteration is that enduring violence is the will of God just as it was God's will for His only son whom He loved to be tortured and crucified. If God is viewed as a God who willfully designed the death of His only son to satisfy his sense of justice, and if, an individual or group determines to be like Him and imitate His ways, a rational conclusion might be the justification of torture and violence in any number of contexts including domestic violence, war and other crimes against society and humanity.

Non-violent atonement theology, which uses the restorative imagination rather than a retributive model, provides a way to reconcile the goodness, truth and beauty of God with Christ's death and resurrection.⁶¹ It is a fundamental rejection of Western concepts of jurisprudence, punishment and retribution.⁶² It allows for an understanding of the death of Christ without implicating God the Father in the brutal torture and death of His Son.⁶³ Rather than understanding His violent crucifixion and death as the moment of salvation and victory, non-violent atonement theology sees Christ's death as the tragic consequence of a politically charged situation and views instead the incarnation and resurrection as the moments of salvation and victory.⁶⁴ This reimagined theory of

⁶¹ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁶² Vrudny, personal interview.

⁶³ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁶⁴ Vrudny, personal interview.

atonement affirms all life as valuable and sacred, precious and beautiful.⁶⁵ This would include the life of Christ. If, according to God, all life is sacred, would that not also be true for Christ Himself?⁶⁶ Through the restorative imagination, forgiveness and redemption are offered to us through incarnation to all humankind.⁶⁷ This stands in stark contradiction to the oppressive and ominous theology of John Calvin where only an elect few will be saved – again so very incongruous with the nature of a God who is the essence of truth, beauty and goodness.

Non-violent atonement theology proposes that God did not send his son to be killed but instead to share the good news that he desires to be in relationship with humankind, His beloved creation and therefore all humankind is invited into the covenant of a loving relationship with Him.⁶⁸ His love for humankind and for all of creation overflows into His created order. God does not desire punishment. Instead, God desires community restoration, where we live as compassionate and wise, in communities abundant with loving kindness.⁶⁹ By laying down His own life, and compassionately refusing to harm another human being, Jesus demonstrates his preference for non-violence and stands against the power of the few which is used to subjugate the many. Christ's death is the climatic moment of resistance to the ways of the world – the ultimate act of resistance.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁶⁶ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁶⁷ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁶⁸ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁶⁹ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁷⁰ Vrudny, personal interview.

Vrudny's theology of non-violent atonement proposes three restorative moves all of which are grounded in a sacramental understanding of creation.⁷¹ "When the relationship between God and humankind is damaged by sin, the Trinitarian God responds to heal the relationship by establishing a covenant, by becoming incarnate, and finally by the sending of the Holy Spirit."⁷² This is imparted through the grace of God which is expressed as the Good the True and the Beautiful, revealed through justice, compassion and wisdom.

Wherever these are present in the created order, they point back to their divine source in God, the source of all that is good, beautiful, and true. They point back to the Divine Artist, who through Goodness, Beauty and Truth produces peacefulness, kindness and hopefulness. These originate in love and overflow in love, Grace draws us into God's holiness – a sanctification that is marked by increasing goodness, beauty and truth enacted in our lives in community, and present too in individual lives, empowering us to live nonviolently, compassionately, and graciously, embracing all of humankind and all life on the planet we share as a gift. Without insiders and outsiders, the entire community of humanity is God's beloved, developing as one in God's womb, nourished when one is celebrated, diminished when one is humiliated.⁷³

The Contextual Theology of Stephen Bevans

The examination of the concept of moral development from a theological lens is essential to the understanding of moral development in people of faith. Equally important is understanding the impact of cultural contexts from a theological perspective. In his book *Models of Contextual Theology*, Stephan Bevans contrasts a Redemption-centered theology with a Creation-centered model of theology. The former posits that grace cannot build on nature because human nature is inherently corrupt.⁷⁴ Instead grace completely

⁷¹ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁷² Vrudny, personal interview.

⁷³ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁷⁴ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 22.

supplants nature.⁷⁵ Because of its sinful state, the world cannot be an instrument of God's presence but can only rebel against Him.⁷⁶ Kierkegaard stated that "there exists an infinitely qualitative difference between God and humanity"⁷⁷ and because of this difference, God can only penetrate the world by breaking into the world. Humankind must say yes to God and no to the world. Creation itself is in need of redemption.⁷⁸ Both culture and human experience are in need of total redemption. Although not explicitly or intentionally connected, there are common threads which tie the tenets of Redemption-centered theology to penal substitution theory including the concept of total depravity and western notions of jurisprudence and blood sacrifice that is demanded for penance. The concepts of jurisprudence and the demand for penance is an example of a social construct which can heavily influence an individual's moral decision-making process.

Creation-centered theology on the other hand provides a foundation upon which grace can build upon nature.⁷⁹ Nature can be perfected by relationship with God.⁸⁰ All of God's creation is sacramental and is a place in which God reveals Himself throughout.⁸¹ Revelation does not happen in places that are set apart but rather in the ordinary-ness and extraordinary-ness of our existence, in the pain and in the beauty. This interpretation

⁷⁵ Bevans, 21.

⁷⁶ Bevans, 22.

⁷⁷ Ionut Birliba, "In Search for Forgiveness," review of Simon D. Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God Anatomy of the Abyss* (Bloomington, IN: 2011), *Meta Journal: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy* vol. 3, no. 2 (December 2011), 510-516, http://www.metajournal.org/articles_pdf/510-516-recenzie-ionut-barliba-meta-6-tehno.pdf.

⁷⁸ Vrudny, personal interview.

⁷⁹ Bevans, 21.

⁸⁰ Bevans, 22.

⁸¹ Bevans, 12.

leaves space for an individual to move to act in opposition to the demands of the groupthink construct or the agentic shift. Creation-centered theology lends itself more towards a God who created, loves and is in the world. In that creation, we encounter the good, the true and the beautiful under every rock and stone, in every tree, in every human being and living creature. Because His creation is filled with goodness, truth and beauty, one can make a logical assumption that his plan for the atonement and redemption of humankind would be one that was consistent with His nature rather than consistent with a strict moral code promulgated by the authorities. Again, although not explicitly or intentionally connected, there are common threads between Creation-centered theology and non-violent atonement theology, both of which seem more wholly connected and consistent with the being and nature of God.

In *Models of Contextual Theology*, Bevans identifies six models of contextual theology: the translation model, the anthropological model, the praxis model, the synthetic model, the transcendental model and the countercultural model.⁸² These models provide a methodology for thinking about how to integrate theological models with culture from the perspective of creating radical social change through morally and theologically appropriate constructs.⁸³ In order to be able to understand the potential for agentic shift to occur, one must be able to operate in the context of a specific culture. The Praxis Model offers one that is particularly relevant when considering how to conduct social work practice within certain social and cultural contexts. The Praxis Model is alternatively known as the situational model and relates to some of the

⁸² Bevans, 32.

⁸³ Bevans, 32.

philosophical tenets of liberation theology including the notion that God is actively at work in the world⁸⁴. The idea of social change is intricately interwoven into the model and in it “theology becomes more than just simply thinking clearly and meaningfully. It becomes a way of articulating one’s faith that are born out of one’s Christian commitments to a particular way of acting and sets the agenda for an even more thoughtful and committed plan of action in the future.”⁸⁵ In it, “theology finds its fulfillment not in mere ‘right thinking’ (ortho-doxo) but in ‘right acting’ (ortho-praxy).⁸⁶ This is suggestive of a continuum of moral development in which an individual through the pursuit of orthodoxy then understands how to engage in orthopraxis. True Christianity must work against oppressive structures not just by seeking to change certain features but by seeking to supplant them completely.”⁸⁷ This is orthopraxy. For Bevens, liberation and transformation are the only ways that we can fulfill our call to be genuine children of God. Bevens states that the highest knowledge is intelligent knowing and doing. It is a departure from traditional theological practice in which the end was understanding rather than informed action.⁸⁸

Catholic Social Teaching as a Model for Moral Orthopraxis

The modern concept of Catholic social teaching began with Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical entitled *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 and subsequently included the papal encyclicals, conciliar documents and other documents, which together, provided a

⁸⁴ Bevens, 72.

⁸⁵ Bevens, 72.

⁸⁶ Bevens, 72.

⁸⁷ Bevens, 72.

⁸⁸ Bevens, 73.

“systematic [and] normative theory relating faith to social conditions.”⁸⁹ Catholic Social Teaching is rooted in “three basic affirmations: (1) inviolable dignity of the human person, (2) the essentially social nature of human beings, and (3) the belief that the abundance of nature and of social living is given for all people.”⁹⁰ Human beings are created in the image of God, therefore, “the transcendental worth of persons is the foundations on which social structures must be built.”⁹¹ This is reflective of the Kantian imperative that the human being is the “end” rather than a means to an end.⁹²

Catholic Social Teaching also serves as a moral doctrine, which therefore lends itself to the practical application of moral behavior within various social constructs. “[Catholic] social teaching enunciates the social implications of Christian faith in a secular society [and] in this sense, teases out the implications of faith for social living.”⁹³ In fact, for Merkle, “it obliges the conscience of the Christian across the same spectrum of obligation as other moral teachings.”⁹⁴ Catholic Social Teaching “presents social teaching as more general moral principles to be applied in specific societal situations”⁹⁵ and therefore becomes a roadmap to social action which should invariably lead to a more just society.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Lebacqz, 67.

⁹⁰ Lebacqz, 67.

⁹¹ Lebacqz, 67.

⁹² Immanuel Kant and J.M.D.Meiklejohn, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Waiheke Island: Floating Press, 2009), xx.

⁹³ Judith A. Merkle, *From the Heart of the Church: The Catholic Social Tradition* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 242.

⁹⁴ Merkle, 242.

⁹⁵ Merkle, 243.

⁹⁶ Merkle, 243.

“Catholic Social teaching proclaims that a basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between the rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Matt. 25) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.”⁹⁷ Social work and Catholic Social Teaching collectively recognize the “inherent vulnerability associated with poverty and demand a revised schema in order to address issues of inequity as well as advance distributive justice.”⁹⁸ Hill and Capella assert that the “canons of distributive justice are complex, [but] they are a part of a larger philosophy known as social justice, which involves Christ’s self-imposed duty towards all of humankind.”⁹⁹ More precisely, “distributive justice recognizes the need to distribute in such a way that all can enjoy the minimum of goods necessary for a decent life.”¹⁰⁰ It should also be noted, despite vast and mounting global wealth, there continues to be an ever-increasing division between the rich and the poor.¹⁰¹ This has significant implications for moral decision-making within the context of the Christian community and calls for action which addresses the systemic failures of institutions, governments, communities and individuals to work towards social justice for all. In his pastoral letter, Pope Benedict XVI states that “every economic decision and institution must be judged in light of whether it protects or

⁹⁷ Catholic Charities Office for Social Justice, *Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching*. 60 Plato Blvd. #230, Saint Paul, MN 55107 www.cctwincities.org accessed October 12, 2016

⁹⁸ Ronald Paul Hill and Michael L. Capella, “Impoverished Consumers, Catholic Social Teaching, and Distributive Justice,” *Journal of Business Research* vol. 67, no.2 (2014): 32.

⁹⁹ C.E. Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics: Twentieth Century Approaches* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1982), xx.

¹⁰⁰ Hill and Capella, 32.

¹⁰¹ Hill and Capella, 32.

undermines the dignity of the human person.”¹⁰² In Catholic Social Teaching, there is a fundamental understanding that human beings are compelled to “love our neighbor and serve the common good, with a special emphasis given to the poor and vulnerable.”¹⁰³

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has identified seven specific themes that have emerged from the documents of Catholic Social Teaching:¹⁰⁴

1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person
2. Call to Family Community and Participation
3. Rights and Responsibilities
4. Options for the Poor and Vulnerable
5. Dignity and Rights of Workers
6. Solidarity
7. Care for God’s Creation

It is of significance to note the similarities between the thematic center of Catholic social teaching (CST) and the CSWE core competencies,¹⁰⁵ which are structured to work toward the support of human rights and social justice. In addition, one of the fundamental ethical principles in social work is to respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person,¹⁰⁶ while the articulated third competency is to “advance human rights and social,

¹⁰² Benedict XVI, “Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth): Encyclical letter of his Holiness Benedict XVI” (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009), accessed November 27, 2011. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html.

¹⁰³ Hill and Capella, 33.

¹⁰⁴ “Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed October 24, 2016, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm>.

¹⁰⁵ CSWE, “Educational Policy”

¹⁰⁶ CSWE, “Educational Policy”

economic and environmental justice.”¹⁰⁷ As such, the profession of social work’s guiding philosophy is one that is thematically linked with CST in that they both address the dignity and worth of the human person, community engagement to support the needs of individuals, families, groups and communities, social policy work to address the needs of the poor and vulnerable as well as to ensure the dignity and rights of workers and environment justice. Catholic Social Teaching “has been described as “action on behalf of justice [which] calls Christians and others of goodwill to uncover, confront and transform oppressive, impoverishing, and decidedly sinful economics, political and social structures by standing in solidarity with and making a preferential option for the poor and marginalized everywhere”¹⁰⁸ Patrick T. McCormick states that Catholic Social Teaching “[affirms] both the inviolable dignity and social character of human persons, as well as the social end of all created goods.”¹⁰⁹ This necessarily implicates the political and economic systems which grow increasingly tolerant of the ever-increasing divide between the rich and the poor which perpetuates cycles of marginalization and oppression for the poor.¹¹⁰ McCormick argues that real justice that represents the common good necessitates a movement towards the complete and integral development of individuals, families, persons and communities. McCormick cites Hollenbach who states that “action on behalf of justice [is] a constitutive dimension of the church’s mission in the world. It has also called Christians and others of goodwill to uncover, confront and transform

¹⁰⁷ CSWE, “Educational Policy”

¹⁰⁸ David Hollenbach, “*Modern Catholic Teachings Concerning Justice in the Faith that Does Justice: Examining the Christian Sources for Social Change*,” ed. John C. Haughey (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), xx.

¹⁰⁹ Hollenbach, page number needed.

¹¹⁰ McCormick, 8.

oppressive, impoverishing, and decidedly sinful economic, political and social structures by standing in solidarity with and making a preferential option for the poor and marginalized everywhere.”¹¹¹ Justice of this nature depends upon the recognition and protection of an expansive network of rights and responsibilities for all human beings.¹¹² McCormick goes on to say that these rights and responsibilities “include not merely those civil and political liberties traditionally defended in Libertarian and Kantian theories, but also a broad range of the social, cultural and economic goods needed for a full and fair participation in every social, political, economic and cultural structure.”¹¹³ Again, this is the task to which social work practitioners are called.

Although Catholic Social Teaching provides a pedagogical framework for working towards social justice, the “agentic shift” is monumentally obstructive in that it prevents morally good people from acting in such a way that the inviolable human rights of all human beings are honored. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “nobody’s free until we are all free.”

Virtue Ethics for Social Work Practice

In her article, “Virtue Ethics for Social Work: A New Pedagogy for Practical Reasoning,” Annie Pullen-Sansfacon proposes that “social work virtues can be developed through practical reasoning activities that materialized through Socratic dialogues between groups of students.”¹¹⁴ Virtue ethics which, from a classical perspective,

¹¹¹ McCormick, 12.

¹¹² McCormick, xx.

¹¹³ McCormick, xx.

¹¹⁴ Annie Pullen-Sansfacon, “Virtue Ethics for Social Work: A New Pedagogy for Practical Reasoning,” *Journal of Social Work Education* vol. 29, no. 4 (2010): 402.

originated with Plato and was further developed by Aristotle and Aquinas. For a virtue ethicist, “a good person will act in a good way not because of their principles or duty but because they are good.”¹¹⁵ A good person will not tell a lie “not because of some abstract principles stating ‘you shall not lie’ or because on this occasion telling the truth will produce a good result, but because they do not want to be the sort of person who tells lies.”¹¹⁶ As shall later be discussed, this particular example reflects Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development. In this instance, the individual’s decision not to lie is not based on utilitarian factors but instead something that represents an evolved sense of conscience moral development. Virtues can indeed be developed through habituation and applied to social work practice through reflective practice however, it is critical to note that even with a highly developed model of moral practice, the agentic shift still occurs. “When reflective practice is carried out in relation to managing ethical dilemmas, practitioners often allow the organizational context of the work to take precedence over their social work values, especially where their work setting is highly structured.”¹¹⁷

Understanding both how moral development occurs and how theology impacts moral development and related thinking is a daunting and critical task. This research attempts to unpack these issues in order to better understand how to teach and train social work students at in the Bethel University Campus.

¹¹⁵ Pullen-Sansfacon, 403.

¹¹⁶ Sarah Banks, “Ethics and Values in Social Work: Practical Social Work Series,” *Practical Social Work* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 55.

¹¹⁷ Banks, 405.

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The different attitudes in social views among Christians must be accounted for. For instance, some Christians believe in helping refugees while others believe in excluding them. If it is true that DNA and genetics are not the primary influencing factors to decision-making, then certain factors, in addition to faith, must impact the opinions and decision-making of Christians. Christians regularly make social decisions at critical junctures that are antithetical to the moral and ethical principles to which they are committed and which are quintessential to their articulated faith positions. This chapter looks at these other factors that influence decision-making.

There are historical examples that clearly illustrate this. One can point to dark periods in the history of the world where, very well-behaved and presumably morally upright people have, under considerable situational or organizational duress, made disastrous decisions that have created tragic consequences for humanity. Consider for example the following cases: Nanking, Nazi Germany and more recently, Abu Ghraib as historical constructs which ended in horrific tragedies. Many first-hand accounts of people who played roles in perpetuating the horrors of Nazi Germany for example, have referenced their subordination to governmental, organizational and situational contexts that compelled them to behave the way they did. Additionally, Stanley Milgram's

obedience study¹ demonstrates, with a frightening consistency, the proclivity of human beings to shift their moral agency by agreeing to do things that go against their conscience because of organizational and situational duress.

The insights from these past experiences that are relevant to the main research question are: does organizational and situational pressure compel people to take positions and behave towards others in ways that are inconsistent with their religious, moral and ethical beliefs? How does one's moral development impact decision-making? Do theological perspectives of justice impact one's ability to act consistently with their articulated faith-perspective? This research will attempt to shed light on this issue.

In order to better understand the implications of moral decision-making, this chapter will explore the theories of moral development of Lawrence Kohlberg and the Christian moral ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr. Robert F. Card's theory on agentic shift will also be reviewed.

Robert F. Card asserts that although human beings are assumed to be moral agents, in day-to-day decisions they engage in what he identifies as an "agentic shift."² Agentic shift occurs when, in order to thrive or survive as individuals or in order to remain competitive, individuals as moral agents shift from their presumed sense of moral agency.³ This occurs when individuals join organizations or find themselves in situations in the public square or marketplace where survival or flourishing requires doing things that one cannot square with his or her personal morality.⁴ In effect, situations in

¹ Eckman, 88–99.

² Card, 397.

³ Card, 398.

⁴ Card, 398.

organizational contexts and the marketplace become systematic and reliable predictors of the inconsistency of people's moral agency.⁵ This shift occurs in carrying forms depending on the social context. In the context of a university setting, students may experience organizational or social constructs, within the classroom, in the dorm, in student government, in social groups or on sports teams for example, which in directly require and mandate the acceptance and subsequent acting out of certain behaviors and actions in order to remain in the group. It is within this context that one can measure observable inconsistencies in individual moral beliefs and individual action. It is also of significant to note that for Card, "agentic shift identifies a central change within the person. ... The naturally compliant nature of human beings [give] rise to the extraordinary behavior observed. The agent cedes control to an authority, but we are still willing to hold subjects responsible."⁶ Therefore, in situational constructs individuals might make an agentic shift which would alter individual moral autonomy to reflect that of the group. However, it is inferred that the individuals are still capable of resisting the agency and acting in accordance with their moral reasoning and ethical standards.

Understanding how moral development occurs is the precursor to addressing the issue of how an individual acquires the capacity to act in accordance with her/ his articulated beliefs even when faced with situational constructs which compel them to do otherwise. Aristotle wrote prolifically on happiness and his contribution to moral philosophy is foundational. In his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas wrote exhaustively on virtue ethics and moral development. It is worth reflecting on the work of

⁵ Card, 399.

⁶ Card, 399.

Aristotle and Aquinas who offered philosophies that lent themselves to the praxis of morality. According to Aquinas, one becomes moral or good through the virtues which for him included for example, wisdom, understanding, knowledge, justice and fortitude.⁷ Virtues for Aquinas are either acquired or infused.⁸ The acquisition of virtues or moral behavior comes through repeated practice.⁹ Acquired virtues are also enhanced through the infusion of the Holy Spirit who also instills virtues into our hearts and minds.¹⁰ Human beings become wise by practicing wisdom. They become just by practicing justice as addressed more completely in Chapter Two.

Resolving moral and ethical dilemmas is an age-old problem and one can point to numerous classical examples of moral dilemmas in both literature and situational ethics. Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* is a classic study in ethics and morality exploring issues of social justice, values, duty, law and mercy.¹¹ In it, the main character Jean Valjean is sentenced to years of hard labor for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his sister and her starving children. Valjean breaks the law. However, his decision to act was based on a law that was presumably higher than the law of the land. His decision to break the law was for the purpose of alleviating the suffering of a child. For Hugo, becoming moral "is the march from evil to good, from injustice to justice, from the false to the true, from night to day, from appetite to conscience, from rottenness to life, from brutality to duty,

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Part i-ii (Pars Prima Secundae)* (Berlin, Germany: Benediction Classics, 2012), Q.1.

⁸ Aquinas, Q.63.2

⁹ Aquinas, Q.1.63.3

¹⁰ Aquinas, 1.65.4

¹¹ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (New York: Signet 2013, orig. 1862).

from Hell to Heaven, from nothingness to God.”¹² As is the case with Kohlberg, the researcher concludes that Hugo similarly outlines a sequential taxonomy demonstrating that morality develops along a continuum.

These examples again demonstrate the challenges that individuals face when attempting to make moral decisions within the context of the agency. Individuals might believe for example that the morally just thing to do would be to assist refugees however, the agentic construct, which may instead reject the idea that refugees should be allowed to enter into the country because it is believed to increase the chances of terrorism, will incite them to reject their individual moral autonomy and subscribe to the morality of the group.

Lawrence Kohlberg: Theory of Moral Development

In order to understand how moral development occurs, a closer look at some of the key thinkers is in order. In the first part of the 20th century, B.F. Skinner’s behaviorism and Freud’s psychoanalytical theory dictated much of the primary model and approach towards clinical practice and therapy. Both Skinner and Freud also addressed the question of moral development. The radical behaviorism of Skinner asserted that human free will was an illusion.¹³ His theory of operant conditioning asserted that all behavior is a consequence of the reinforcement within the context of environment.¹⁴ Skinner writes that philosophers and psychologists alike have eroded all our old assumptions of free will and moral responsibility. The sole reality, we have been taught to believe, lies in the physical order of things. We do not initiate action; we react

¹² Hugo, xii.

¹³ Burrhus F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. (Indianapolis: Cambridge 1971).

¹⁴ Skinner, 167.

to a series of external stimuli.”¹⁵ For Skinner, human beings do not have the capacity to choose moral action, instead, all actions are reactions. Thus, his theory of operant conditioning emerged. Likewise, Freud’s psychoanalytic theory proposes that personality and by extension moral development, was shaped by conflict between the id, ego and superego.¹⁶ In fact, Freud proposed that “civilized society acting through its agents, made the individual a moral being, a creature of conscience, by turning to its advantage antisocial drives that were part of an individual human being’s natural endowment.”¹⁷ For Freud, human beings become moral as a result of being acted upon by the forces of civilized society. Both theories limit individual autonomy and therefore the individual’s capacity to become increasingly moral.

Lawrence Kohlberg, a prominent American psychologist at the University of Chicago and subsequently at Harvard University, developed his stages of moral development to provide a framework for understanding how moral reasoning is developed and cultivated in human beings. Kohlberg’s theory offers a response to Skinner and Freud who theories were inadequate for Kohlberg. Kohlberg’s theory is considered foundational to understanding moral development and has far-reaching implications for social work educators and social work practitioners alike.

Kohlberg, a post Holocaust scholar, sought to understand the development of morality in human beings. “If values are relative, do we have the right to judge and condone [for example] Nazi atrocities? Are we all capable of being Nazis in the face of

¹⁵ Skinner, 167.

¹⁶ Tina Abbot, “Social and Personality Development,” Routledge 2001, 26.

¹⁷ John Deigh, *The Sources of Moral Agency: Essays in Moral Psychology and Freudian Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 67.

authority, as Stanley Milgram (1974) tried to suggest?”¹⁸ Kohlberg, “intrigued by the client’s quest for justice, and captivated by Piaget’s view of the child as a moral philosopher and the possibility of lawful ontogenetic variations in how moral knowledge is formulated, wondered if various forms of moral knowledge could be appraised along a continuum of adequacy.”¹⁹ Like Piaget, Kohlberg’s typology is similarly age-related.²⁰ Both typologies allow for age-related variations, for example, adults can function at a lower level of moral development, while some younger person might function at a higher level of moral development. This continuum of adequacy directly reflects Kohlberg’s continuum of moral development and the expansion of his sequential stages. According to Kohlberg, “moral development must properly describe a natural, long-term process of psychological growth with regard to the individual’s capacity to think about moral problems.”²¹ Kohlberg, whose seminal work on cognitive moral developmentalism continues to inform moral development theories, asserted that if social conditions were favorable, moral development occurs on a continuum and eventually evolves into an abstract, universal form which allows individuals to become functional moral beings who are capable of acting for the greater good.²² For Kohlberg, this is the pinnacle of moral development to which all individuals should ascribe. It has already been established that

¹⁸ Ruth Linn, “The Heart has its reason and the reason has its heart: The insight of Kohlberg and Gilligan in Moral Development and Counseling,” *Social Behavior and Personality* vol. 29, no. 6 (June 2001): 594.

¹⁹ Linn, 594.

²⁰ Bruce Maxwell, “Moral Development: Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan,” *Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy, Vol. 2*, ed. D. C. Phillips (Los Angeles: SAGE Reference, 2014), 334, accessed October 15, 2016, Gale Virtual Reference Library.

²¹ Maxwell, 334.

²² Maxwell, 334.

moral behavior is closely connected to virtuous behavior. Kohlberg also invokes the “Socratic claim that virtue is not many but one and its name is justice”²³ and, as did John Rawls, asserts that “justice is the first virtue in society.”²⁴

Kohlberg’s theory owed in “large part to Piagetian structural cognitivist’s gradual displacement in social and cognitive psychology by an array of competing heuristic, intuitionist, and personological models of social cognition [and] cognitive developmentalism.”²⁵ Moreover, Kohlberg’s theory “boldly asserts that moral psychology can mediate the complex, divisive, and often ideologically charged moral disputes over tired moral issues such as abortion, capital punishment and euthanasia.”²⁶ This suggests that as an individual moves along the moral continuum, she is more adequately prepared to assess ethical situations and moral dilemmas and make corresponding decisions which reflect universal interests and social justice.

The specific challenge relates to the difficulty in overcoming the agentic context and determining how to ascertain favorable conditions in which individuals are able to respond in a manner which serves the common good rather than serving the needs of the group. Again, Card asserts that human beings are capable of being moral agents in day-to-day decisions. It is the occurrence of agentic shift that becomes problematic.²⁷

Kohlberg’s sequential theory implies that individuals whose moral development is at a higher stage might perhaps be more significantly equipped to identify organizational and

²³ Maxwell, 334.

²⁴ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003), 3.

²⁵ Maxwell, 334.

²⁶ Maxwell, 334.

²⁷ Card, 397.

situational constructs which ultimately compromise an individual's capacity to act morally within the context of the group.

It is also important to note that Kohlberg's theory is phenomenological and philosophical²⁸ in nature and is not a methodology that provides a framework for how to become moral. His theory provides a sequential framework for understanding and assessing the stages of moral development. It is phenomenological in that it is Kohlberg's attempt to understand the conscious structural dimensions of moral development and provides a methodology for understanding moral development. It is philosophical in that it is the quest to understand the theoretical basis of moral development which again assists in understanding how moral development occurs.

In one of his preliminary studies, Kohlberg utilizes a fictional construct that contained a moral dilemma and analyzed the respondent's answers. This subsequently lead to the development of his to create a framework for understanding moral development. Kohlberg's construction is as follows:

Heinz's wife was dying from a particular type of cancer. Doctors said a new drug might save her. The drug had been discovered by a local chemist and Heinz tried desperately to buy some, but the chemist was charging ten times the money it cost to make the drug and it was much more than Heinz could afford. Heinz could only raise half the money, even after help from family and friends. He explained to the chemist that his wife was dying and asked if he could have the drug cheaper or pay the rest of the money later. The chemist refused, saying that he had discovered the drug and was going to make money from it. The husband was desperate to save his wife, so later that night, he broke into the chemist's and stole the drug.²⁹

²⁸ Linn, 594.

²⁹ Saul McLeod, "Kohlberg and Moral Development," *Simply Psychology*, last updated 2013, accessed October 15, 2016, <http://www.simplypsychology.org/kohlberg.html>.

Kohlberg then poses the following questions: Should Heinz have stolen the drug? Would it change if Heinz did not love his wife? What if the person dying was a stranger, would that make any difference? Should the police arrest the chemist for murder if the woman died?³⁰ The responses given correlate to the moral continuum that Kohlberg developed as shown in Table 3.1.

³⁰ McLeod.

Table 3.1 Typical Expressed Motives for Action in the Case of Heinz' Dilemma³¹

| | Should steal | Should not steal |
|----------------|---|---|
| Stage 1 | If you let your wife die, you will get in trouble. | You shouldn't steal the drug because you will be caught and sent to jail if you do. |
| Stage 2 | If you do happen to get caught, you could give the drug back and you wouldn't get much of a sentence. | If his wife dies, he shouldn't blame himself, it wasn't his fault she has cancer. |
| Stage 3 | If you let your wife die, you will never be able to look anyone in the face again. | After you steal it, you will feel bad thinking how you have brought dishonor on your family and yourself; you won't be able to face anyone again. |
| Stage 4 | You will always feel guilty that you caused her death if you don't do your duty to her. | You're desperate and you may not know what you are doing wrong when you steal the drug. |
| Stage 5 | If you let your wife die, it would be out of fear, not out of reasoning it. | You'd lose self-respect and respect in the community if you are carried away by emotion and forget the long-range point of view. |
| Stage 6 | If you let your wife die, you would always condemn yourself for it afterwards. | If you stole, you wouldn't be blamed by others but you'd condemn yourself because you wouldn't have lived up to your own conscience and standards of honesty. |

Already referenced is the idea that Kohlberg developed his theory of moral development in response to behaviorism and psychoanalysis, theoretical frameworks

³¹ Modified from Lawrence Kohlberg and Anne Colby, *The Measurement of Moral Judgment: Theoretical Foundation and Research Validation, Vol. I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 380-381.

which dominated the first half of the twentieth century. Unlike Skinner or Freud, Kohlberg's theory allows for individual growth, development and autonomy. Agentic autonomy, or the ability to function as free moral agents without undue influence from the agency, is essential to creating an environment where moral action can flourish. Kohlberg's theory of moral development, allows for the human being to evolve morally and act with an increased and intentional measure of morality: in essence moving along the continuum through Kohlberg's sequential steps. By contrast, Skinner's theories disaffirm the individual's capacity to be a moral agent as the ability to choose is limited by the social conditions.³² For Freud, moral development occurs only when one's selfish desires are repressed and replaced by the values of significant socializing agents."³³

Kohlberg's, theory of moral development includes three levels: preconventional morality, conventional morality and postconventional morality.³⁴ Each level has two associated steps.

"Preconventional morality" is individually-centered and has two distinct stages: "obedience/ punishment orientation" and "instrumental purpose and exchange

³² Skinner, 167.

³³ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 1962), xx.

³⁴ Ann Colby, Lawrence Kohlberg, Betsy Speicher, Alexandra Hewer, Daniel Candee, John Gobbs and Clark Power, *The Measure of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 537.

orientation.”³⁵ Stage one of the pre-conventional morality, known as the obedience and punishment orientation, “moral norms are to be obeyed out of blind obedience to authorities that establish them.”³⁶ This stage typically occurs between the ages of two to three years of age or can extend to up to the age of six.³⁷ At this stage, an important reason to obey moral norms is to avoid retribution from moral authority figures.³⁸ The obedience and punishment stage is where most children start and is where some adults stay. An individual decides to obey the rules in order to avoid punishment. The action is based primarily on self-preservation and has no moral overtones to it. For example, one might say, if the law requires that refugees are permitted into this country, I will accept it because I don’t want to get into trouble by protesting the legal entry of refugees or by demonstrating non-compliance to the established law. There could be a negative consequence or punishment. I don’t necessarily agree with it but I will abide by the law because I don’t want to suffer the consequences. In stage two, known as *instrumental purpose and exchange*, “an act is morally justified when it is warranted in an economy of instrumental exchange between equals.”³⁹ This stage typically occurs between the ages of five to age seven but can extend to age nine. Morality is like a marketplace in which acts that harm others’ interests deserve retribution and those that further individual interests generate a debt.”⁴⁰ At this stage, individuals will begin to ask, “what is in it for me?”

³⁵ Kohlberg and Colby, 537.

³⁶ Kohlberg and Colby, 537.

³⁷ Kohlberg and Colby, 537.

³⁸ Maxwell, 334.

³⁹ Kohlberg and Colby, 537.

⁴⁰ Maxwell, 334.

Returning to the example of the refugees, one might wonder, at this stage, if there is some kind of personal benefit for allowing refugees into the country: “Will my business stand to profit? Is there something in it for me”?

Kohlberg’s *Conventional morality*, is the second level of moral development, and shifts its focus from the individual to a “socially-centered conception of morality.”⁴¹ Conventional morality, also has two distinct stages: *peer/ personal relationship orientation* and *social system maintenance orientation*.⁴² In stage three, peer relationship orientation, “moral behavior is defined in terms of conformity to expectations or standards shared by a community of immediate peers or generated by social roles such as being a neighbor, a friend or a sibling.”⁴³ Stage three typically occurs between the ages of seven to twelve. What must I do to be seen as good and to live up to the social expectations that have been established in my community?⁴⁴ An individual in this stage might respond to the refugee crisis by saying that in order to be seen as a good person at my church, for example, I must live up to the social expectation that I help the refugees in my community. This type of thinking does not reflect highly evolved moral development as the response is focused on the perception of others. Stage four, which typically occurs somewhere between the ages of 10 and 15, is *social system maintenance orientation*, and is where “moral norms are understood as serving the purpose of upholding the social order. Moral justification typically appeals to the importance of keeping the community

⁴¹ Maxwell, 334.

⁴² Maxwell, 334.

⁴³ Kohlberg and Colby, 538.

⁴⁴ Kohlberg and Colby, 538.

functioning, serving society, and avoiding social tumult and instability.⁴⁵ Returning to the example of the refugees, one might make a determination to help the refugees and by so doing, act in accordance with what is consistent with the values of the individual's context. The individual at this point considers what is socially acceptable and what actions would garner the favor of a community of peers. Value is placed on how others view the action however moral action is not predicated on personal values or a higher moral law constructed on a sense of higher moral law or social justice.

Similarly, the third level, *postconventional morality*, has two stages, and represents a more abstract and universal and subsequently more evolved level of moral development.⁴⁶ In stage five known as *individual rights orientation*, morality serves the purpose of promoting an individual's rights, such as the right to life, the right to free association and the right to free religious belief and practice.⁴⁷ This stage can begin as early as age 12.⁴⁸ Existing laws, norms, and rules can do a better or a worse job of promoting or protecting rights and freedoms. Norms that are effective in promoting rights should be embraced. Norms that are ineffective in this regard should be rejected or revised."⁴⁹ The view towards refugees finally shifts in this stage towards the person who is suffering and their basic human rights and freedom. It is at this stage that a higher form of morality is exhibited. The sixth and final stage, known as *universal principles orientation* states that "moral requirements are understood in terms of abstract, universal

⁴⁵ Maxwell, 334.

⁴⁶ Kohlberg and Colby, 537.

⁴⁷ Kohlberg and Colby, 537.

⁴⁸ Kohlberg and Colby, 537.

⁴⁹ Maxwell, 334.

principles that may be expressed as general universal duties, such as the duty to be fair, to respect human dignity, to treat people always as ends rather than means. Social norms are to be assessed in terms of these principles. Only norms that are consistent with these principles are truly 'moral' norms. As rational beings, all humans have an obligation to respect moral norms."⁵⁰ At this stage, one understands the plight of the refugees as an issue that is important because all individuals should be treated with respect and dignity. This is the pinnacle of moral development, when one is able to understand the universal application within the moral dictate that all of humanity deserves justice. Kohlberg believed that the "best possible society would contain individuals who not only understand the need for social order but can entertain visions of universal principles, such as justice and liberty."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Maxwell, 334.

⁵¹ Kohlberg and Colby, 537.

Table 3.2 Kohlberg's Levels and Stages of Moral Development

| Level | Stage | What determines right and wrong? |
|---|--|---|
| Level 1: Preconventional | Punishment and obedience | How can I avoid punishment? Right and wrong defined by what one gets punished for. If you are punished for stealing then obviously stealing is wrong. |
| | Self-interest orientation | What's in it for me? Any concern for others is motivated by selfishness. |
| Level 2: Conventional Most adolescents and adults | Interpersonal accord and conformity | Being good is whatever pleases others and subscribes to social norms. The majority determines Right and wrong. |
| | Authority and social-order maintaining orientation | Law and order morality; maintain the social system |
| Level 3: Post-conventional: 0-15% of the over 20s | Social contract orientation | Right and wrong are now determined by personal values, although these can be overridden by democratically agreed upon laws. When laws infringe on our sense of justice, we can choose to ignore them. |
| | Universal ethical principle | Principled conscience. We now live in accordance with deeply held moral principles that are seen as more important than the law of the land. |

Kohlberg's Detractors

An important criticism of Kohlberg's theory was suggested by Carol Gilligan who pointed out that by conducting research focusing primarily on boys, the moral development of girls had been neglected. This, according to Gilligan, limits the universal applicability of the theory. "Clearly, one can observe striking sex differences in such morally relevant behavior as the incidence of violent crime, or note the sex differences in the composition of the prison population."⁵² As one considers the development of a taxonomy of moral development, there are some additional fundamental characteristics between the sexes deserving of consideration. "One also can notice the sex differences in such morally relevant behavior as taking care of young children. Yet the discussion of sex difference and moral development within the field of psychology often seems premised on the assumption that common knowledge about sex differences is misleading and sociological facts of sex difference are irrelevant to theories about moral reasoning or moral emotions, or psychological studies of moral development."⁵³ Gilligan goes on to say that "the very traits that have traditionally defined the goodness of women, their care for and sensitivity to the needs of others, are those that mark them as deficient in moral development."⁵⁴

⁵² Carol Gilligan and Jane Attanucci, "Much Ado About ... Knowing? Noting? Nothing? A Reply to Vasudey Concerning Sex Differences and Moral Development." *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* vol. 34, no.4 (1988): 451-56, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.bethel.edu/stable/23086345>.

⁵³ Gilligan, "In a Different Voice: Women's Conception of the Self and of Morality," *Harvard Educational Review* vol. 47, no.4 (January 1, 1977): 481-517.

⁵⁴ Gilligan, "In a Different Voice," 481.

Gilligan proposes an alternative model of moral development specific to women and which has been articulated as stages of the ethic of care.⁵⁵ Gilligan's stages are as follows: orientation toward individual survival, goodness as self-sacrifice and the morality of non-violence.⁵⁶ The first level, individual survival, is characterized by selfish and egocentric behavior.⁵⁷ During the second level, the individual begins to demonstrate care and responsibility for others by engaging in altruistic and self-sacrificing acts.⁵⁸ In the third level, the individual begins to understand how to demonstrate the capacity to balance care for self and others by recognizing and legitimizing the importance of one's own needs as well as the needs of others.⁵⁹ As is the case with Kohlberg's taxonomy, Gilligan's model demonstrates a clear progression through a sequential process.

Reinhold Niebuhr: The Morals and Ethics of the Protestant Imagination

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) is widely recognized as one of the most prominent theologians of the twentieth century. His influence reaches far beyond the theology of the church of his day and continues to impact the political philosophy and political theology of today. As a political commentator and ethicist, his political and theological ideology was heavily influenced by the social, political and economic conditions of his day. As a congregational pastor in Detroit from 1915 to 1928, Niebuhr witnessed firsthand the demoralizing effects which invariably accompanied industrialization (Henry Ford's

⁵⁵ Gilligan, "In a Different Voice," 481.

⁵⁶ Gilligan, "In a Different Voice," 481.

⁵⁷ Gilligan, "In a Different Voice," 481.

⁵⁸ Gilligan, "In a Different Voice," 481.

⁵⁹ Gilligan, "In a Different Voice," 481.

automobile industry prior to unionizing) and which significantly impacted and oppressed the working class.⁶⁰

Niebuhr states that one of the tragedies of the human spirit is “its inability to conform its collective life to its individual ideals.”⁶¹ Niebuhr seeks to understand how to “find political methods which will offer the most promise of achieving an ethical social goal for society.”⁶² Niebuhr’s theology of justice was also impacted by global wars and the threat of communist ideals which significantly influenced his Just War theory. In his seminal work, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Niebuhr addresses the fact that humankind’s “tendency to rationalize is especially pronounced in man’s ‘collective life.’”⁶³ Niebuhr states,

While it is possible for intelligence to increase the range of benevolent impulse, and thus prompt a human being to consider the needs and rights of other than those to whom he is bound by organic and physical relationship, there are definite limits in the capacity of ordinary mortals which makes it impossible for them to grant to others what they claim for themselves.⁶⁴

Berke explains Niebuhr’s thoughts here,

While individuals in their personal dealings often transcend self-interest (hence ‘moral man’) nations dealing with other nations, or social classes with other social classes, have little or no capacity for self-transcendence ([hence] ‘immoral society’). Nations and classes have limited understanding of the people they harm by their unjust self-assertion; they lack appreciation for the often complicated laws and institutions through which such injustice is perpetuated; and they are more inclined to embrace rationalizations of self-interest than prophetic

⁶⁰ June Bingham, *Courage to Change: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Reinold Neibuhr* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1993).

⁶¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: C. Scribner’s, 1932), 9.

⁶² Niebuhr, 3.

⁶³ Matthew Berke, Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932), First Things in Institute on Religion and Public Life, March 2000, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2000/03/reinhold-niebuhrmoral-man-and-immoral-society>, accessed October 12, 2016, 1.

⁶⁴ Niebuhr, xxiv.

denunciations. These facts, for Niebuhr, explain why dominant groups rarely yield their privileges except when put under pressure by some countervailing social force.⁶⁵

Niebuhr argues that Christians [are] obliged to work for justice, which [takes] into account the presence of sin and competing self-interests (particularly between groups), and provide[s] the best possible balance of those in a sinful world.⁶⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr also maintains that although rationality and religion play important roles in the development of morality between individuals, the influence does not extend in its efficacy when considering inter-group relations.⁶⁷ The limitations of the human mind and imagination, the inability of human beings to transcend their own interests sufficiently envisage the interests of their fellow human beings as clearly as they do their own makes force and inevitable part of the process of social cohesion. But the same force which guarantees peace also makes for injustice.”⁶⁸ Moreover, Niebuhr goes on to say,

But the same force which guarantees peace also makes for injustice...that individuals have a moral code which makes the actions of the collective man an outrage to their conscience. They therefore invent romantic and moral interpretations of the real facts, preferring to obscure than reveal the true character of their collective behavior.⁶⁹

It is within the space between the individual’s moral code and the collective activities of the human race that the agentic shift occurs. Niebuhr states that “one of the tragedies of the human spirit [is] its inability to confirm its collective life to its individual

⁶⁵ Berke, 1.

⁶⁶ Patrick T. McCormick, “Whose Justice: An Examination of Nine Models of Justice,” *Journal of Religion in the Social Services* vol. 22, no. 2-3 (2003): 12.

⁶⁷ Yonatan Brafman, “Neibuhr, Reinhold – Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics,” *Strong Reading* (June 10, 2010), last modified June 10, 2010, accessed October 14, 2016, <http://strongreading.bl.ogspot.com/2010/06/niebuhr-reinhold-moral-man-and-immoral.html>.

⁶⁸ Niebuhr, xxiv.

⁶⁹ Niebuhr, 9.

ideals. Individual[s] believe that they ought to love and serve each other and establish justice between each other. As racial, economic and national groups they take for themselves, whatever their power can command.”⁷⁰

Niebuhr is keenly aware however of the “limitations of the human mind and imagination, the inability of human beings to transcend their own interests sufficiently to envisage the interests of their fellow human beings as clearly as they do their own makes force an inevitable part of the process of social cohesion. But the same force that guarantees peace, also makes for injustice.”⁷¹ This is evidenced by the conviction that can be asserted again, that most Christians would individually agree that there is an ethical obligation to care for others (and by extension the refugees) however, there is a significant divergent view amongst Christians who are on opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to responding to the current refugee crisis. “Human beings may be motivated by the sentiments of benevolence and social goodwill to consider the needs of others, [yet] there is a limit to these capacities.”⁷² Limitations to moral actions are therefore heightened, both unintentionally and intentionally, and promulgated by the group.

“Moralists do not realize the limitations of rationality and religion to check the overwhelming egoism and self-interestedness of groups.”⁷³ Niebuhr argues that “men will never be wholly reasonable and the proportion of reason to impulse becomes increasingly

⁷⁰ Niebuhr, 9.

⁷¹ Niebuhr, 6.

⁷² Brafman.

⁷³ Brafman.

negative when we proceed from the life of individuals to that of social groups.”⁷⁴ This is reflective of Robert F. Card’s theory proposing the momentous organizational and situational influence which compels people to act in ways that diametrically oppose their religious, moral and ethical beliefs. Although reason does provide human beings with the capacity to think beyond their own selfish aspirations, humankind’s capacity to reason “lacks the ability to abolish social and political conflicts and may, in many cases, exacerbate them.”⁷⁵ Niebuhr states “the man of power, though human impulse may awaken in him, always remains something of the beast of prey. He may be generous within his family, and just within the confines of the group which shares his power and privilege. With only rare exceptions, his highest moral attitude toward members of other groups is one of warlike sportsmanship toward those who equal his power and challenge it, and one of philanthropic generosity to those who possess less power and privilege.”⁷⁶

Understanding Niebuhr’s position provides significant insight into this research as it addresses the question of how individuals who desire to act morally, often do otherwise. Returning to the example of refugees, Christians can agree that insofar as one’s faith commands that an individual act in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ, one should, in order to live a moral life, act according to the dictates of justice and mercy. By extension, in order to live a moral life, one should extend the wide embrace of mercy to refugees who are fleeing violence, oppression, starvation and many other such atrocities. However, once again, Robert Card’s agentic shift provides a helpful analogy to understand Niebuhr’s position. Human beings who wish to transcend their own

⁷⁴ Niebuhr, 35.

⁷⁵ Brafman, xx.

⁷⁶ Niebuhr, 13.

selfishness are instead principally influenced by the context of the group. This explains why there can be moral people while the larger society remains immoral and corrupt. In the same way, this researcher theorizes that those who are unable to circumvent the power of the group are, according to Kohlberg, caught in conventional morality, where morality and subsequent moral actions are predicated on conformity to the expectations or standards shared by a community of immediate peers or generated by social roles.

Niebuhr draws a clear distinction between the challenges faced by individuals and the challenges faced by groups when it comes to ethical and moral decision-making and subsequent actions. Niebuhr's theoretical assumptions regarding how moral individuals are subconsciously persuaded to think and act in the context of groups in society offer critical insight into our understanding of how moral individuals often cannot translate their moral and ethical intentions into action.

Niebuhr furthers his suppositions by theorizing that although reason can indeed amplify the collective group ego and move the group towards rational justifications regarding their specific positional statements, this creates conflict, rather than mutuality between other groups.⁷⁷ This is evidenced by the sharp contrast in moral positioning found within the Christian community and with regard to a multitude of moral and ethical issues. Within this context and through the intentional alignment with a specific group's interest, conflicts between groups increase. From the individual's perspective however, there is a certain sense of moral acuity as a result of the perceived alignment towards the larger group's moral positioning.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Brafman, xx.

⁷⁸ Brafman, xx.

For Niebuhr, equality is the highest standard of justice. Reason, says Niebuhr, has a quintessential role in the establishment of justice. However, reason alone cannot dictate the terms of justice. As is the human will, so is reason similarly influenced by human passions and interests and is therefore subsequently, fallen.⁷⁹ Because of sin, even the most rational beings are corrupt and therefore can do nothing other than proposition corrupt definitions of justice.⁸⁰ It is of significance to note that this is particularly true for the privileged classes who are unaware of their own biases and that “their presumed rational calculations are affected by their economic interests.”⁸¹ It is because of these “distortions of reason” that Niebuhr believes “there can be no ‘rational’ standards of justice.”⁸² Moreover, just as Niebuhr suggests that groups are prohibited from transcending their own self-interests, so does Card reference the agentic shift which significantly impacts the ability of individuals to make moral decisions based on their beliefs within the context of groups.

Niebuhr also holds that love is the highest principle of Christian ethics, but, because of the “pervasive presence of sin in the world, the ideal of sacrificial love embodied in the cross [is] impossible as the basis of a realistic social ethic.”⁸³ He goes on to say however, that “Christians cannot ignore love’s siren call, for every manifestation

⁷⁹ Karen Lebacqz, *Six Theories of Justice: Perspectives From Philosophical and Theological Ethics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 84.

⁸⁰ Lebacqz, 84.

⁸¹ Lebacqz, 85.

⁸² Lebacqz, 85.

⁸³ McCormick, 12.

or rule of justice is judged and called to perfection by the self-sacrificing love of Christ.”⁸⁴

Niebuhr’s principle of love as the “impossible possibility” also enters into the equation. When individuals are invariably faced with the difficult truth that, in this fallen world, love fails to translate itself into a form of moral action, it becomes both theologically and philosophically difficult to navigate. Because, in this world, love does not address injustice, oppression, suffering and all the other myriad of anguish that humankind endures, Niebuhr suggests a compromise that leaves love dependent on, but critically distant from, justice, seeing the two as complementary while at the same time totally irreducible to one another.”⁸⁵

Reinhold Niebuhr’s prophetic Christian realism addresses the problem of responding to societal oppression and injustice⁸⁶ and by so doing, explores the complexities of navigating the Christian life and the moral life. For Niebuhr, Christian Realism offers a viable social ethic⁸⁷ which informs how Christians can think about moral action. Prophetic Christian realism allows for the belief that “love [can] play an ongoing role in the thinking of any agent attempting to follow a just course of action. It is love, for example, that justifies coercion through violence but only if the one who uses violence remains as impressed by its foreseeably ugly consequences as he is persuaded

⁸⁴ McCormick, 12.

⁸⁵ Andrew Flesher, “Love and Justice in Reinhold Niebuhr’s Prophetic Christian Realism and Emmanuel Levinas’s Ethics of Responsibility: Trading Between Pacifism and Just-War Theory,” *The Journal of Religion* vol. 80, no.1 (2000): 63-64.

⁸⁶ Flesher, 61.

⁸⁷ Flesher, 63.

by its necessity.”⁸⁸ Niebuhr suggests that the “coercive agent, in order to be just, must remain the loving agent full of self-reproach. This is how love functions to keep justice oriented toward love.”⁸⁹

Niebuhr’s path of Christian realism is indeed one that would be challenging to navigate and would require an individual to operate from an advanced place of moral reasoning. In the sixth and final stage of post-conventional morality, Kohlberg’s hypothesizes that individuals operate under a “universal principles orientation, where moral requirements are understood in terms of abstract universal principles that may be expressed as general universal duties, such as the duty to be fair, to respect human dignity, and to treat people always as an ends rather than a means.”⁹⁰ For this researcher, it is critically important to understand how to influence the moral development of social work students who are required to uphold social work values which according to the CSWE “advance human rights and social and economic justice [by] understand[ing] the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination; advocating for human rights and social and economic justice; and engag[ing] in practices that advance social and economic justice.”⁹¹

Niebuhr believed that non-violence was not an option and that the “fight for justice would always be a fight [because] the whole of society is constantly involved in

⁸⁸ Flesher, 66.

⁸⁹ Flesher, 66.

⁹⁰ Bruce Maxwell, “Moral Development: Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan,” accessed October 10, 2016, https://www.academic.edu/7829090/Moral_Development_Lawrence_Kohlberg_and_Carol_Gilligan, 4

⁹¹ CSWE, “Educational Policy.”

both coercion and violence.”⁹² Ultimately, there can be no “absolute rules for justice, since any approximation always stands under the possibility of correction.”⁹³

Implications for Social Work

Within the context of the university campus, for example, agentic shift would, according to Card’s theory, occur so that individual students, in order to remain competitive within the context of the institution, are disposed to discarding their own apparent sense of morality and subsequent moral autonomy for the agentic state in which their own specific moral position is rejected. This is problematical in that decisions are not therefore a reflection of an individual’s evolved sense of morality which tends to reflect an emphasis on the dignity and worth of human beings but rather instead, grounded on a construct which is counter-Kantian in that it views human beings as a means to an end rather than the end itself.

From the perspective of a social work educator or a clinical social work practitioner, it is critical to have a framework for moral development which informs practice with individuals and families, groups and communities. In order to engage in effective practice, understanding the strengths and limitations of a client’s moral perspective and development is central to successful outcomes.

As social work educators, particularly in the context of a faith-based institution, it is essential to understand how students think about and process moral problems. There is an expectation and hope that as students develop along this moral continuum and that they become increasingly equipped to act in accordance with the dictates of their moral

⁹² Lebacqz, 87.

⁹³ Lebacqz, 87.

conscience with the end being that they are fully capable of becoming fully operative moral beings, capable of acting as autonomous moral agent, even within an organizational construct.

Moreover, the CSWE requires that in order to be a professionally licensed social worker, a student has the capacity to wrestle with moral and ethical dilemmas and make decisions and actions that are consistent with the greater good of both the individual and the larger society.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Overview of Research Methodology

Prior to embarking on the field research, the researcher examined the goals of the research study to determine the most appropriate and functional manner to acquire relevant data. The research study was exploratory in nature. The researcher speculated that examining moral development while simultaneously exploring opinions regarding social justice, theology and social policy issues would provide insight into the research problem. The research attempts to further understand the disconnect between moral development and theology as applied to contemporary social issues. After consulting with various research experts, it was determined that a valid and reliable method of determining moral development would be to use the Defining Issues Test (DIT-2), a standardized tool that is employed to measure moral development based on the theories of Lawrence Kohlberg. This provided the researcher with an excellent opportunity to align the field research with the literature review which focused heavily on the theory of moral development as formulated by Lawrence Kohlberg. Because the DIT-2 did not simultaneously collect data on student views related to their beliefs regarding policy issues, justice and theology, the researcher developed a second survey instrument which was used to collect additional and informative data about the topic being researched.

Research Design

Setting

For the purposes of this research, the research utilized random sampling for an exploratory cross-sectional survey of Bethel University undergraduate students located in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

The study consisted of two separate questionnaires which included: (1) Qualtrics Survey designed to explore students' opinions on theology, justice and social issues. The first survey instrument "Understanding Faith and Moral Development" was developed by the researcher to explore and gain insight into the relationship between theology, moral development and justice as it applies to contemporary issues for Christians. (2) The Defining Issues Test (DIT-2), a standardized test that was developed at the University of Minnesota by James Rest and Darcia Narvaez and was designed to measure sequential moral development. The test is based on Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development. The first survey was analyzed and interpreted by the researcher. Two separate analyses were performed on the DIT-2. First the researcher developed a methodology to perform a preliminary analysis on the data which shall be discussed later in chapter 4. Additionally, the results were entered and analyzed through the SPSS scoring system at the University of Alabama's Center of the Study of Ethical Development.

These data were processed through the Qualtrics survey tools for both surveys. Separate analyses were done for each of the tools. The researcher then formulated observations based on the findings.

Instrumentation

Qualtrics Survey

The first instrument, the Qualtrics Survey, developed by the researcher, was not a standardized instrument. While developing the instrument, the researcher consulted with professional colleagues who have conducted scholarly research to review the questions. Additionally, the researcher did a preliminary distribution of the survey on a trial basis to acquire feedback and to make appropriate adjustments to the instrument based on the feedback.

The Defining Issues Test

The second survey, the Defining Issues Test or DIT-2 survey is a standardized survey that is administered either on-line or by paper and pencil. One of the ways in which the DIT-2 statistical analysis scores norms is by education level. Generally speaking, DIT scores for college students are in the 40s. Standardized testing also indicates that DIT scores are ‘significantly correlated with developmental capacity measures of moral comprehension, recall and reconstruction of high stage arguments, and other measure of cognitive development.’¹ The DIT-2 Guide also states that, although to a lesser extent, “DIT scores are correlated with IQ, general intelligence, achievement, and GPA.”² It is of significance to note that DIT scores correlate with attitudes toward public policy.³ “DIT scores predict to controversial public policy issues (e.g. abortion, euthanasia, religion in public schools, women’s roles, free speech issues, rights of the

¹ Muriel J. Bebeau and Stephen J. Thoma, *Guide to DIT-2: A Guide for Using the Defining Issues Test, Version 2 (DIT-2) and the Scoring Service of the Center for Study of Ethical Development*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2003), 8.

² Bebeau and Thoma, 8.

³ Bebeau and Thoma, 9.

accused and rights of LGBTQ.)”⁴ This is particularly relevant in that it provides significant insight into how Bethel University undergraduate students perceive justice-related issues within the context of their moral development. As a standardized tool, the DIT-2 sufficiently addresses reliability and validity. The test is based on the moral development scheme of Lawrence Kohlberg. It is possible that someone might choose to reject the results in varying degrees if they were interpreted as being skewed towards liberal values. However, the test is a standardized one and it can be presumed that efforts have been made to avoid either conservative or liberal values.

Although the SPSS results provide opportunities to further analyze DIT-2 data, the researcher focused primarily on the following results: developmental indices (including “personal interest schema scores”, “maintaining norms schema scores” and “postconventional schema scores”), measurable differences between male and female respondents, and sequential moral development by level of education at the undergraduate level.

The DIT-2 poses the following five case scenarios to respondents for analysis. For reference, the specific cases have been summarized for review as follows:

Case Scenario One: Famine. A man who lives with his family live in a small famine-stricken village in northern India is faced with starvation. A rich man is hoarding food and waiting for the prices to go up in order to maximize his profits. In his desperation, he considers stealing food to feed his family.⁵

⁴ Bebeau and Thoma, 9.

⁵ James Rest & Darcia Narvaez, *Defining Issues Test DIT-2*, University of Minnesota, University of Alabama, Center for the Study of Ethical Development, Version 3.1

Case Scenario Two: Reporter. A reporter has discovered that a candidate for public office had been arrested for shoplifting 20 years earlier. No charges were ever filed against him. The candidate has subsequently distinguished himself through his work as a public servant and has made many positive and constructive contributions to the community. The reporter believes that the candidate is the best one for office and that he could have a long and effective career that positively impacts the community. The reporter worries that if she writes the story, it will negatively impact his chances of winning.⁶

Case Scenario Three: School Board. Because of financial constraints, the chairman elect of a school board must navigate the closing of a high school, an issue around which there is bitter division in the community. As part of his election platform and to encourage transparency, the newly elected chairman promised a series of open meetings to ensure the voices of community members could be heard. His plan backfired and the meeting was disastrous. Passions were stirred and violence was threatened. Subsequent to the meeting, school board members received threatening calls. The chairman considers canceling the next open meeting.⁷

Case Scenario Four: Cancer. A 62-year old woman is in the last phases of cancer and is suffering greatly. She asks her physician if he will prescribe more painkiller medication that is beyond the maximum safe dosage. The doctor is aware that the administration of a higher dose will most likely hasten her death. The woman is aware of

⁶ James Rest & Darcia Narvaez, *Defining Issues Test DIT-2*, University of Minnesota, University of Alabama, Center for the Study of Ethical Development, Version 3.1

⁷ James Rest & Darcia Narvaez, *Defining Issues Test DIT-2*, University of Minnesota, University of Alabama, Center for the Study of Ethical Development, Version 3.1

the consequences but wishes to proceed, as her suffering is too great to bear. Should the physician comply with her request for an increased dosage of pain medicine?⁸

Case Scenario Five: Demonstration. Due to widespread suspicion that the U.S. President is being pressed upon to protect the interests of multinational oil supply companies who are causing political and economic instability in a South American country, students at universities around the U.S.A are demonstrating and protesting. There is widespread suspicion that big oil multinational companies are pressuring the President to safeguard a cheap oil supply even if it means loss of life. Students are demonstrating in the streets and stopping traffic and impacting businesses. The president of one university demanded that the students cease their illegal demonstrations. The students responded by taking over the administration building and the university is unable to proceed with its regular activities. Do students have a right to demonstrate this way?⁹

Respondents reviewed all five case scenarios and responded to a series of 12 questions through which sequential moral development was measured. It should be noted that two separate analyses were conducted on the DIT-2. First the research did a preliminary analysis based on the raw Qualtrics data. The research created a method of analysis which assigned each of the 12 questions in each of the five case scenarios (72 questions) to each of Kohlberg's three levels of moral development. Chapter five provides an overview of how the questions for each case scenario were assigned according to Kohlberg's schema. This facilitated the researcher's analysis and allowed

⁸ James Rest & Darcia Narvaez, *Defining Issues Test DIT-2*, University of Minnesota, University of Alabama, Center for the Study of Ethical Development, Version 3.1

⁹ James Rest & Darcia Narvaez, *Defining Issues Test DIT-2*, University of Minnesota, University of Alabama, Center for the Study of Ethical Development, Version 3.1

for some preliminary observations about the results that were important to the overall findings.

Both instruments, the participant selection process and an overview of the research project, were submitted to Bethel University Internal Review Board (IRB) for review and approval.

Sampling and Recruitment Procedure

In an effort to recruit participants, three separate emails were sent out to students. The first was sent out by the Social Work Department's email inviting social work students to participate. The effort to specifically recruit social work students was centered on the fact that the study will ultimately yield important pedagogical implications for social work practice and teaching. Therefore acquiring social work student input was critically important. Additionally, Bethel University's Office of the Registrar emailed the surveys to 500 randomly selected students across all majors. Because the response rate was marginal, a second email reminder was sent out one week later through the registrar's office. It should also be noted that the registrar's office routinely sends out research questions to students and does so in a manner that is consistent with the institution's policy on research on undergraduate students.

Eligibility

Eligibility criteria for participation in the study were: enrollment as full-time student in Bethel University and standing as freshman, sophomore, junior or senior.

The following exclusion criterion was applied: undergraduate students enrolled in Bethel University's College of Adult Professional Studies (CAPS) were not eligible for participation in the study. The data for Post Secondary Enrollment Options or PSEO

students who responded were included in the table results for clarification but were not considered in the final analysis. PSEO is a program through which students are able to receive high school credit while simultaneously receiving college credit.¹⁰

Data Collection and Response Rate

Online survey results indicate 96 respondents for the Qualtrics study and 73 respondents for the DIT2. After closer analysis of the data, only 80 respondents fully completed the Qualtrics study while only 66 respondents completed the DIT-2. Only completed survey data has been included in the results. The convenience sample data for the Qualtrics Survey (n=80) and the DIT-2 (n=66) represents enrolled undergraduate (freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior) students at Bethel University. It should also be noted that approximately 28 students completed a pencil and paper copy of the survey. The data from those surveys were manually entered into the Qualtrics system and assimilated with the online data.

¹⁰ “Minnesota State University,” <https://www.mnsu.edu/pseo>. Accessed January 25, 2017

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In order to further explore the topic, the researcher engaged in a research design methodology that was quantitative in nature. Two surveys were administered to undergraduate students at Bethel University. The survey tools were exploratory and employed Qualtrics survey methodology in order to further understand the relationship between theology and moral development as they relate to social justice issues. The first survey tool was a Qualtrics tool designed by the researcher to gather some demographic data, explore theological beliefs about justice and to gather information about how students positioned themselves regarding particular social justice issues which included such topics as refugees, healthcare, undocumented workers, same-sex marriage and rights of business owners to refuse to provide services. The second tool, the Defining Issues Test or DIT-2, a standardized test, was also administered to students to gauge moral development on a standardized scale based on Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of Moral Development.

It should be noted that for the purposes of interpreting the data, the researcher collapsed the response categories as follows: "strongly disagree", "disagree" and "somewhat disagree" were collapsed together and reported as "disagree". Likewise, "strongly agree", "agree" and "somewhat agree" were collapsed together and reported as "agree". This facilitated analysis and reporting. Additionally, Q. represents the question number.

Survey One: Theology and Social Justice

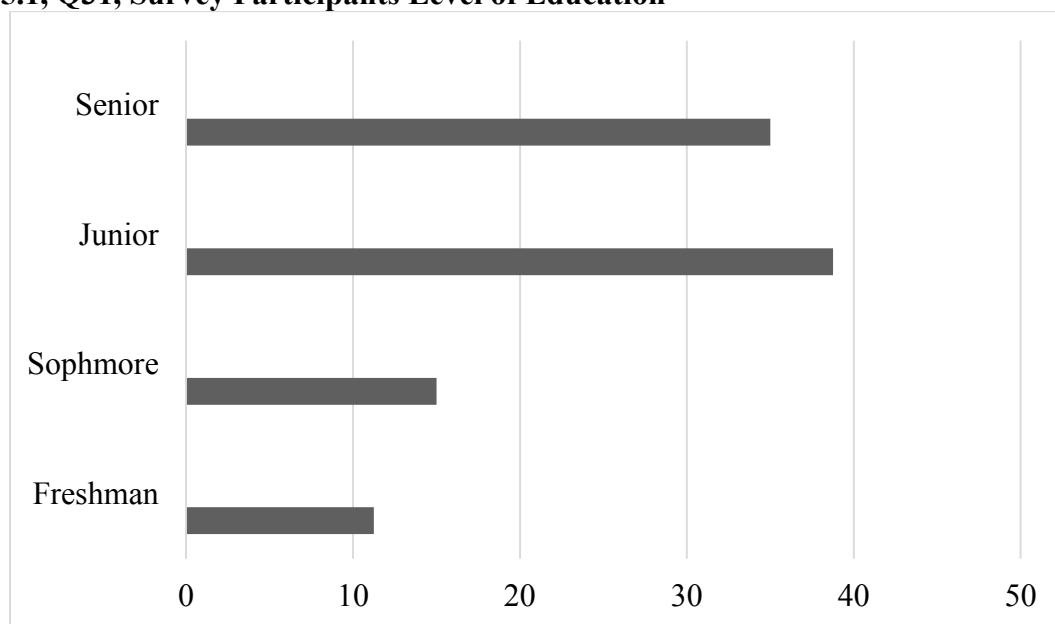
Findings

Survey One asked several questions to discover the correlation between theology and the participants' views towards social justice. Each of the following graphs describes the results from the data that was collected.

Educational Level

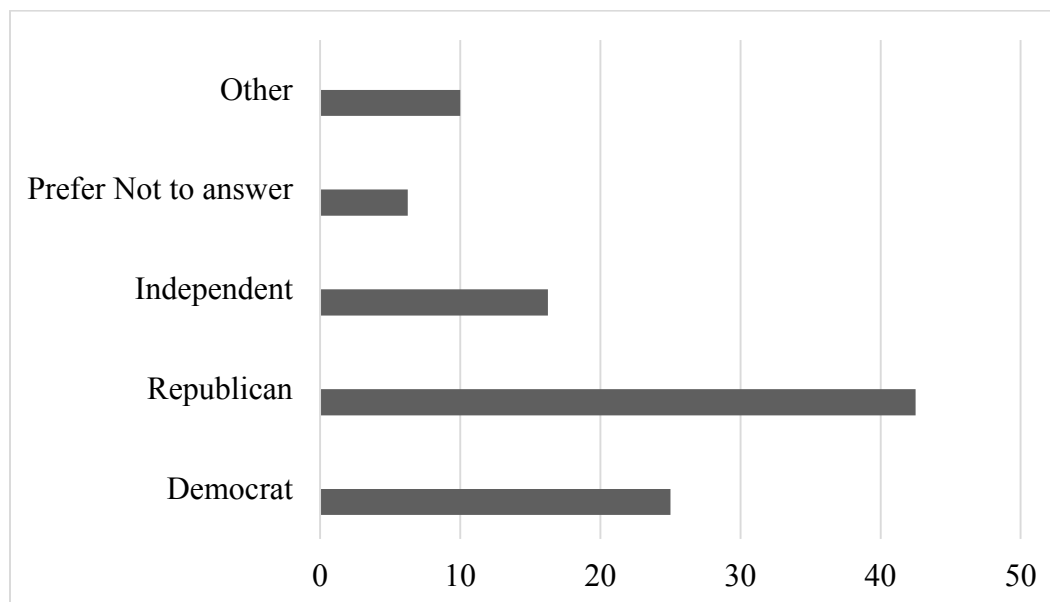
Of the 80 respondents, all of whom were college level undergraduate students, 11.25 percent were freshmen, 15 percent were sophomores, 38.75 percent were juniors, and 35 percent were seniors.

Table 5.1, Q31, Survey Participants Level of Education



Political Affiliation

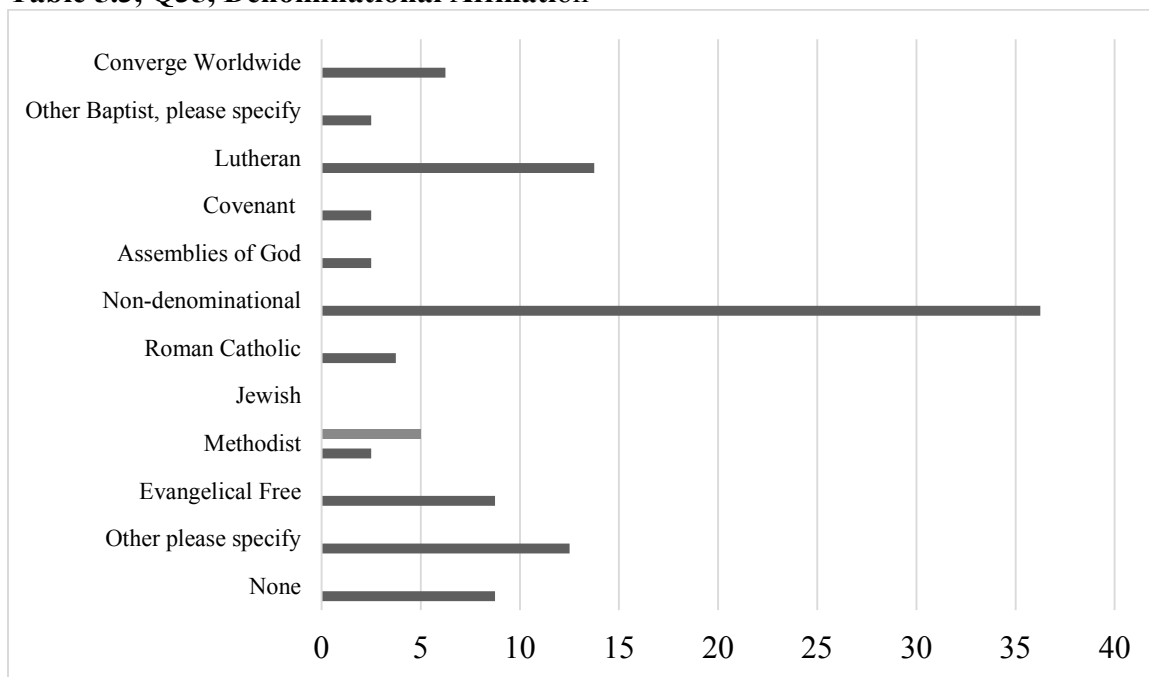
Politically, 42.5 percent of students reported being Republican while 25 percent reported being Democrats, 16.25 percent reported being independent while 10 percent indicated their political affiliation to be “other.” 6.25 percent preferred not to answer.

Table 5.2, Q32, Do you consider yourself to be a (Political Affiliation)**Denominational Affiliation**

58.75 percent of students identified with denominations generally considered evangelical and which for the purposes of this research included Converge Worldwide, Other Baptist, Assemblies of God, Non-Denominational (most often adhere to Evangelicalism)¹, Evangelical Free and Covenant. 41.25 percent reported their religious affiliation to be other than evangelical and which include Lutherans, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Methodist and other.

¹ Randall Balmer, *The Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, pages 196-197.

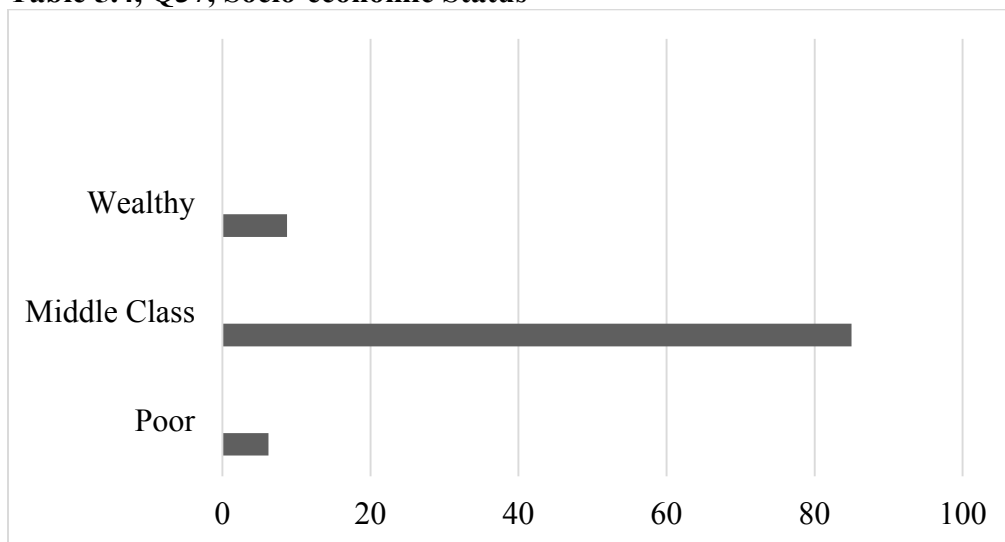
Table 5.3, Q35, Denominational Affiliation



Socio-economic Status

Socio-economically, 6.25 percent indicated that they were poor, 85 percent identified as middle class while 8.75 percent identified as wealthy.

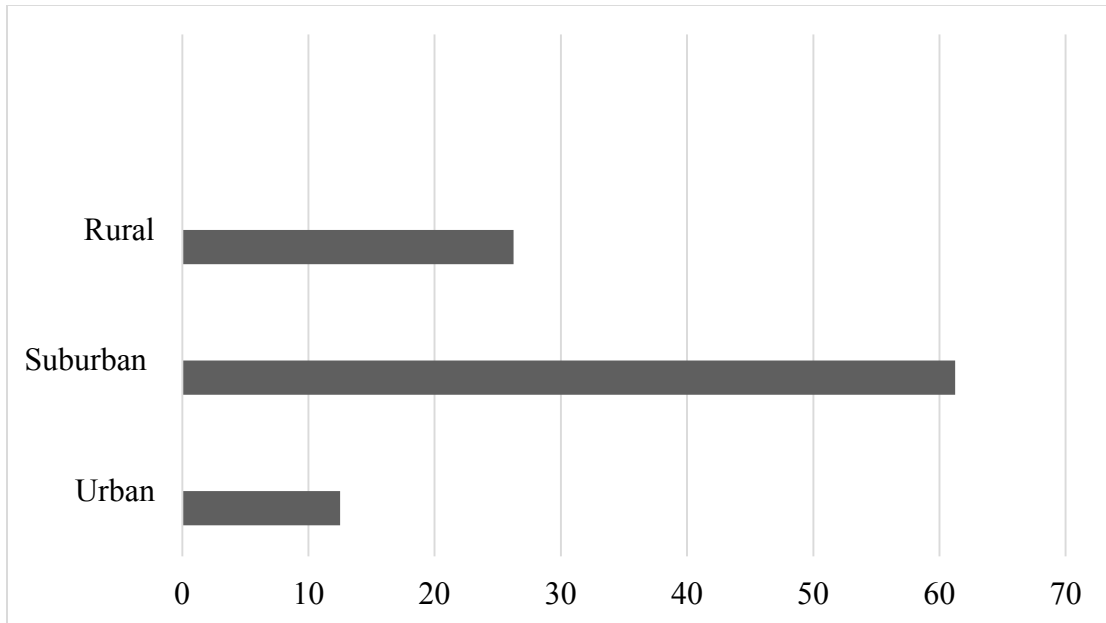
Table 5.4, Q37, Socio-economic Status



Rural, Urban or Suburban

12.5 percent of respondents indicated that they grew up in an urban context while 26.25 indicated that they grew up in rural areas. 61.25% reported growing up in a suburban context.

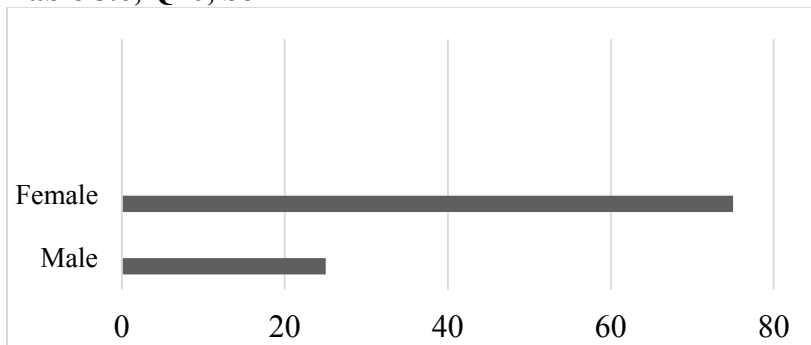
Table 5.5, Q38, Rural, Urban or Suburban



Sex

75 percent of respondents were female while 25 percent were male.

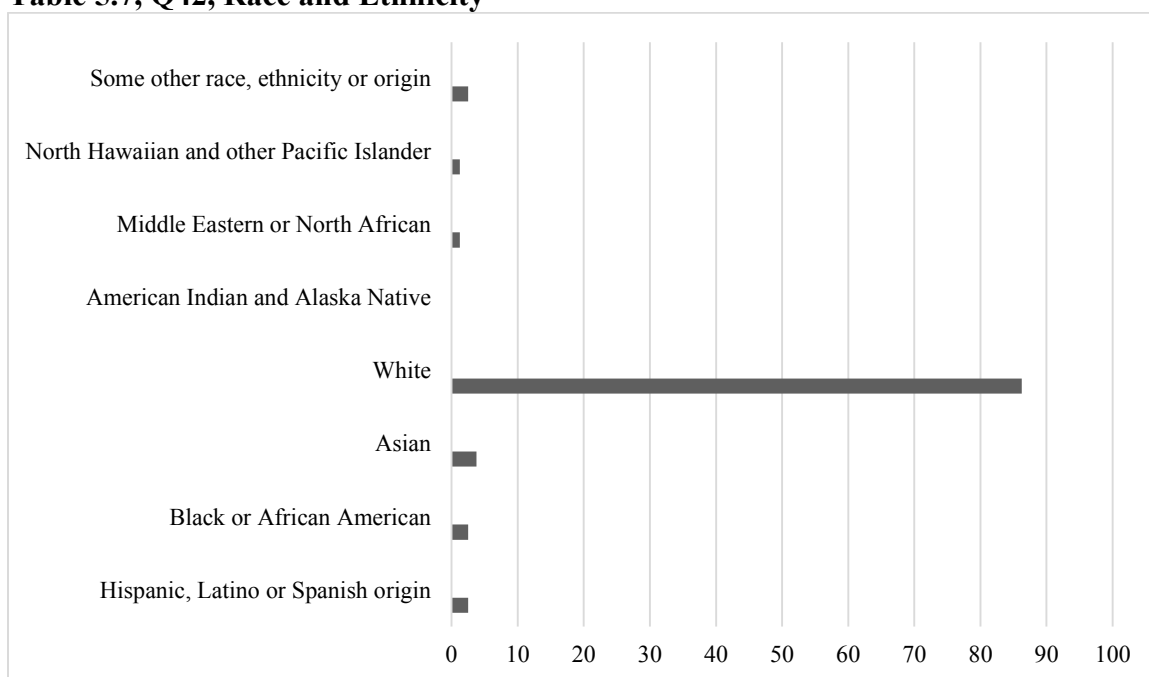
Table 5.6, Q40, Sex



Race and Ethnicity

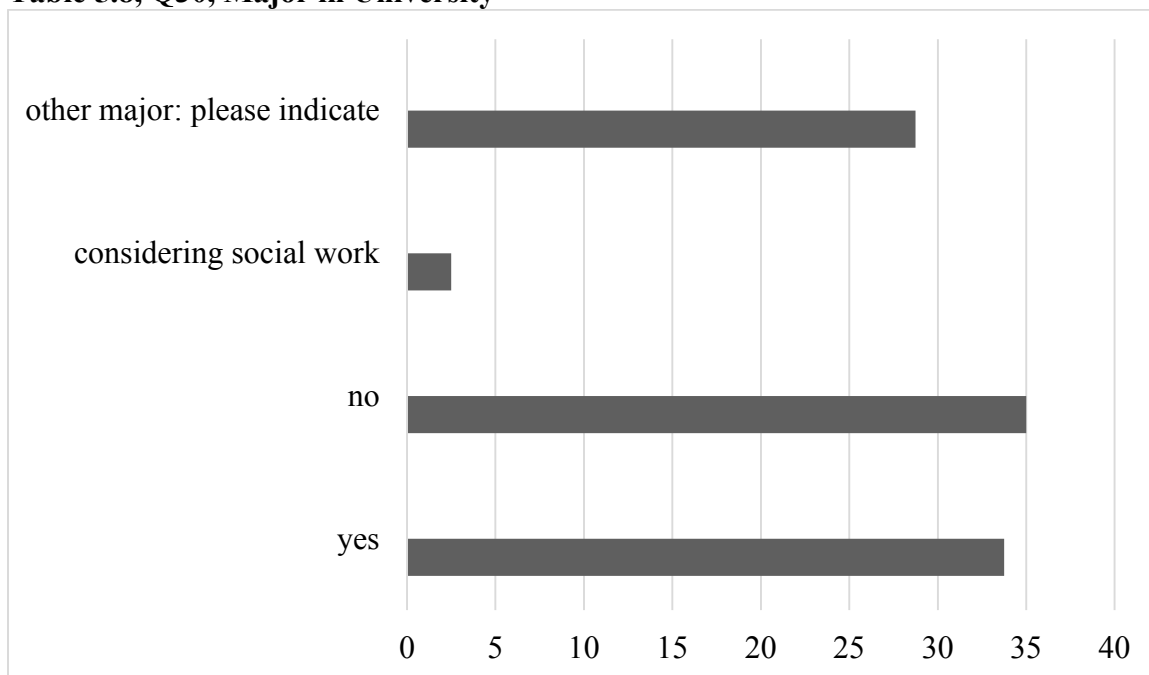
86.25 percent of respondents reported to be Caucasian. 2.5 percent were Hispanic, Latino or Spanish, 2.5 percent were Black or African American, 3.75 percent were Asian, 1.25 percent Middle Eastern or North African, 1.25 percent were North Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, while 2.5 percent reported as some other race, ethnicity or origin.

Table 5.7, Q42, Race and Ethnicity

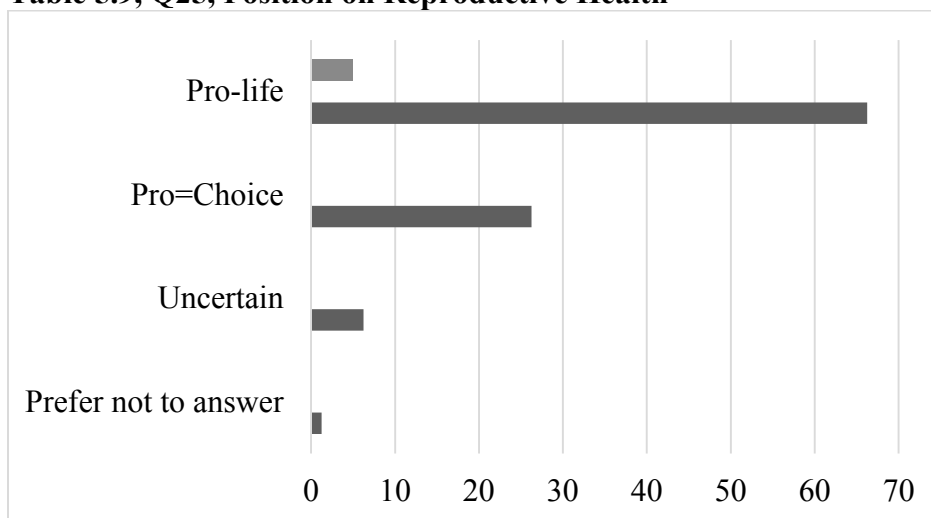


Major in University

33.75 percent of respondents reported being social work majors while the remainder reported other majors including: nursing, psychology, environmental science, business, biochemistry, art, theater arts, finance, chemistry, sociology, mathematics, relational/ organizational communications, education and biblical-theological studies. It should be noted that students in the social work department received an email invitation to and direct link from the Social Work Department inviting them to participate. This explains the large number of social work students who responded to the survey.

Table 5.8, Q30, Major in University**Position on Reproductive Health**

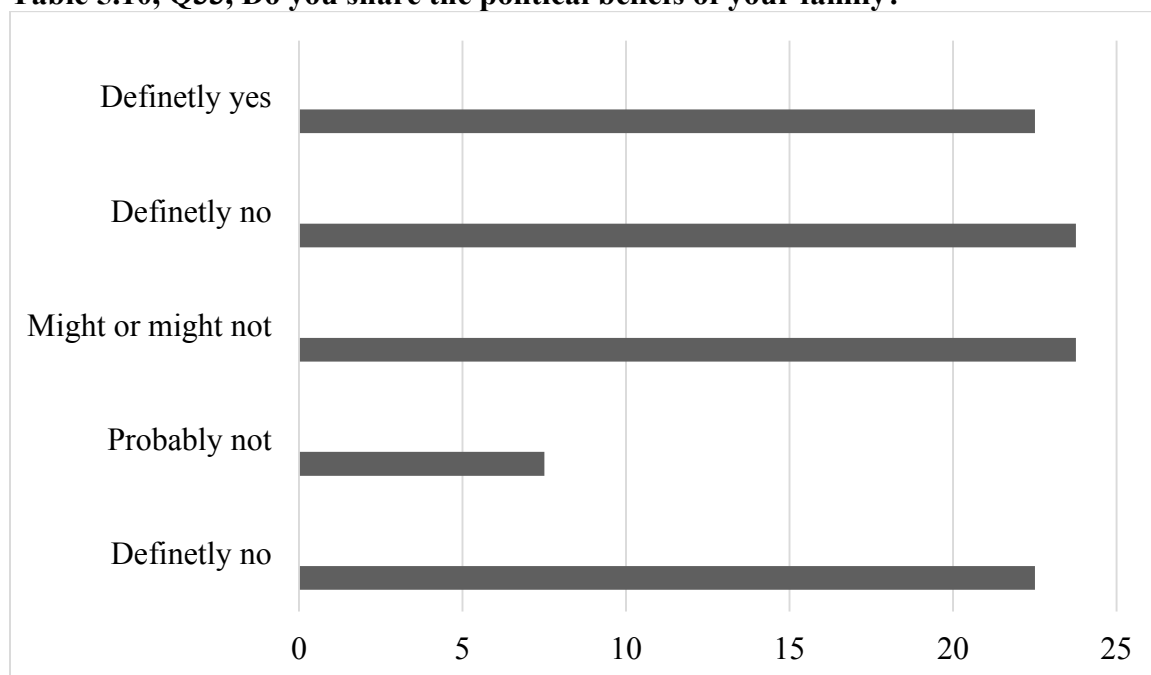
66.35 percent of respondents reported being pro-life while 26.25 percent indicated that they are pro-choice. 6.25 percent were uncertain, 1.25 percent provided no answer.

Table 5.9, Q25, Position on Reproductive Health

Influence of Family on Political Beliefs

46.25 percent of respondents indicated that they share the same political beliefs as their family while 30 percent indicated that they did not share the political beliefs of their families. 23.75 percent of respondents indicated that they were uncertain.

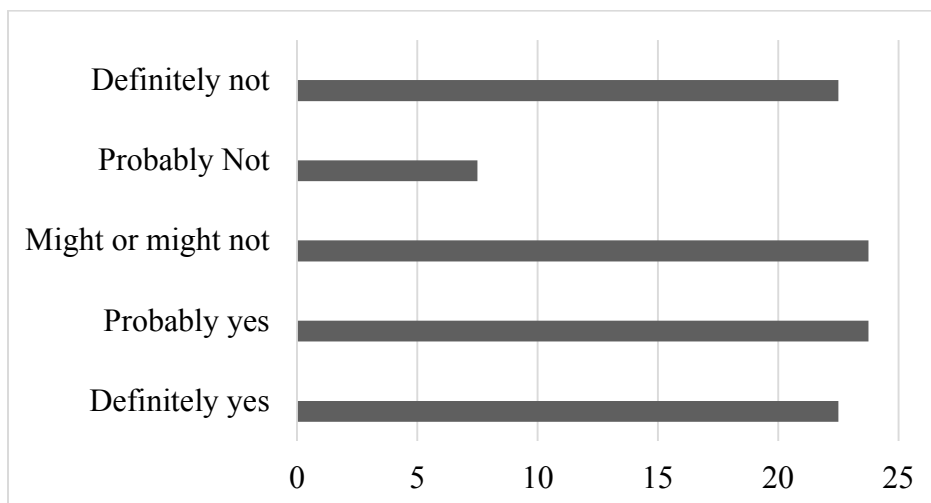
Table 5.10, Q33, Do you share the political beliefs of your family?



Changing Belief

61.25 percent of respondents indicated that their beliefs were changing while 23.75 percent reported that their beliefs were not changing. 15 percent indicated uncertainty regarding whether or not their belief systems were changing. The data suggests that there is a relationship between those who share the beliefs of their families and those whose beliefs are either not changing or who are uncertain about whether or not their views are changing.

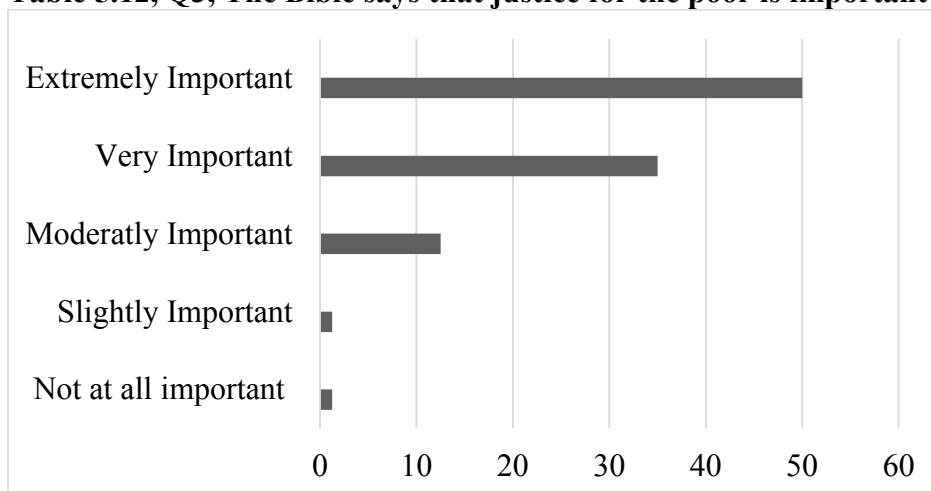
Table 5.11, Q36, My theological beliefs are gradually changing.



Justice for the Poor

85 percent of respondents indicated that from a biblical perspective, justice for the poor is extremely or very important. 12.5 percent indicated that justice for the poor is moderately important while only 2.5 percent indicated that justice for the poor is not important at all.

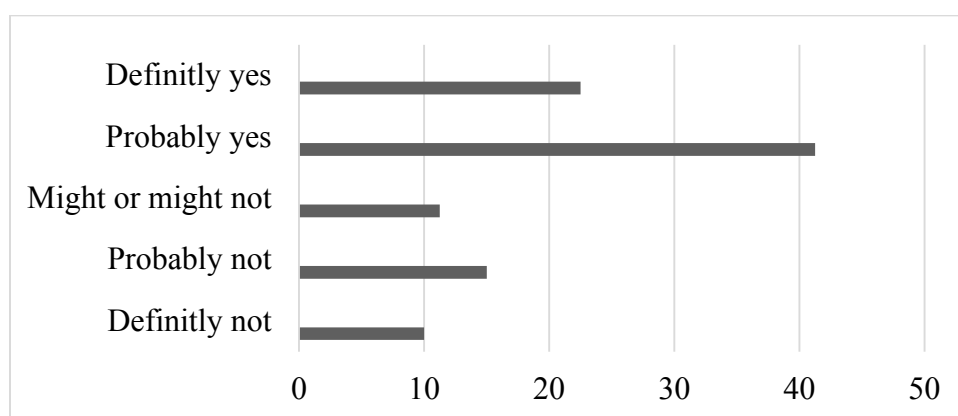
Table 5.12, Q3, The Bible says that justice for the poor is important for Christians.



God's Justice and Social Justice

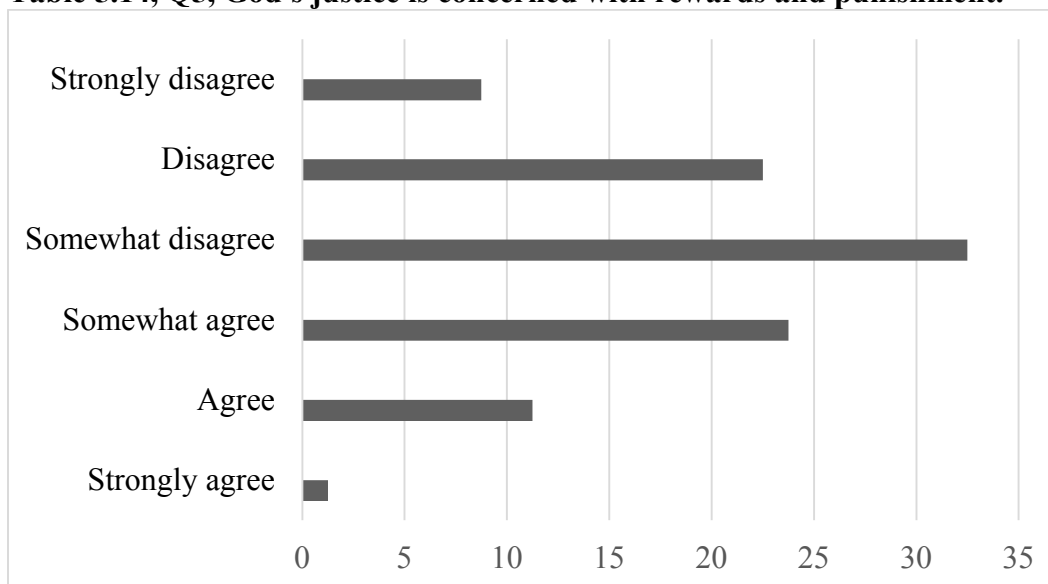
63.75 percent of respondents indicated that there is definitely or probably a difference between God's justice and social justice. 11.25 percent of respondents indicated uncertainty about any identifiable difference between the two while 35 percent stated that there was probably or definitely no difference between social justice and God's justice. It is interesting that 63.75 percent of respondents indicated that social justice is manifestly unlike God's justice. The data set is limited and does not give further insight into this variation but is worth further exploration.

Table 5.13, Q4, Is there a difference between God's justice and social justice?



Concepts of Rewards and Punishment

36.25 percent of respondents believe that God's justice is concerned primarily with rewards and punishment while 63.75 percent of respondents disagreed.

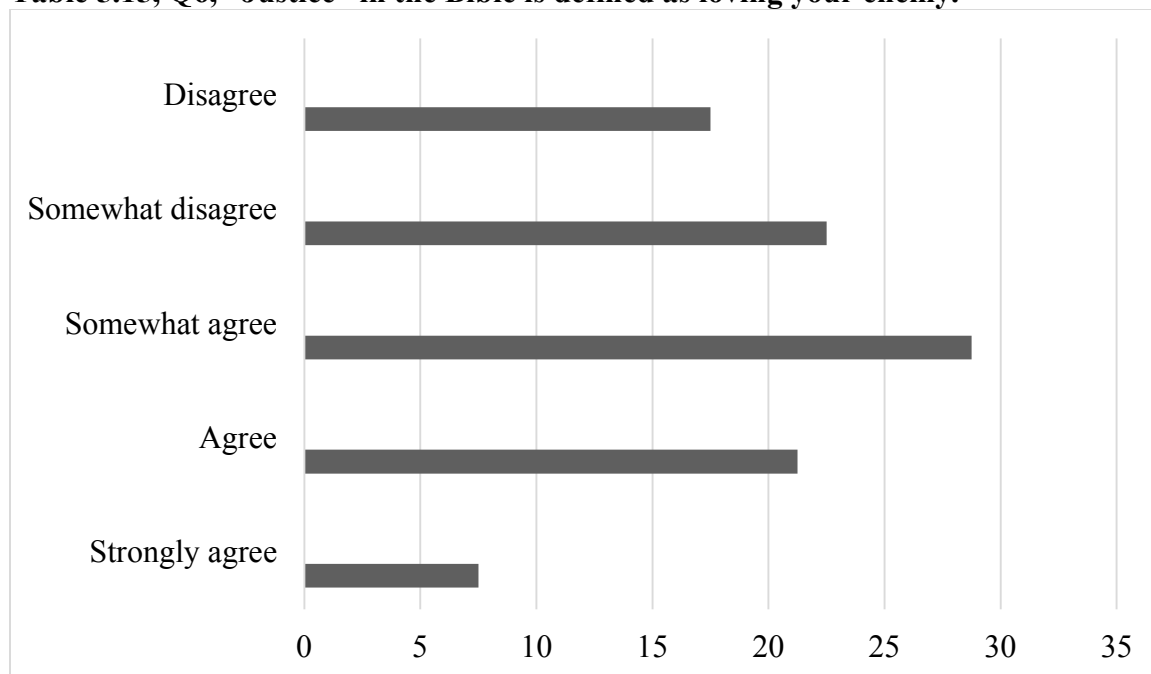
Table 5.14, Q5, God's justice is concerned with rewards and punishment.

Justice and Loving Our Enemies

57.5 percent of respondents indicate belief in the idea that the biblical definition of justice requires that one loves one's enemies while 42.5 percent disagreed. It is of interest to compare the data in Table 5.12, Q3 (justice for the poor is an important consideration for Christians) which indicates that 85 percent of respondents indicate that justice is an essential consideration for Christians while 42.5 percent disagreed that the biblical definition of justice requires that one love's ones enemies. There is a significant disparity here that reveals the lack of agreement and understanding that exists in the faith community around definitions related to justice. While the large majority (85 percent) agrees that justice should be an essential consideration, there is significant disagreement about the practical implementation of justice. That 42.5 percent of respondents expressed that biblical justice does not require one to love one's enemies is alarming and raises questions around how exactly justice should be carried out. If love is not infused with justice, it can be inferred that within certain constructs, Christians would condone violence. Moreover, if 85 percent agree that justice is important and only 57.5 percent

agree that the bible mandates love towards the enemy, it presupposes a significant disagreement that is fundamental to how beliefs are operationalized.

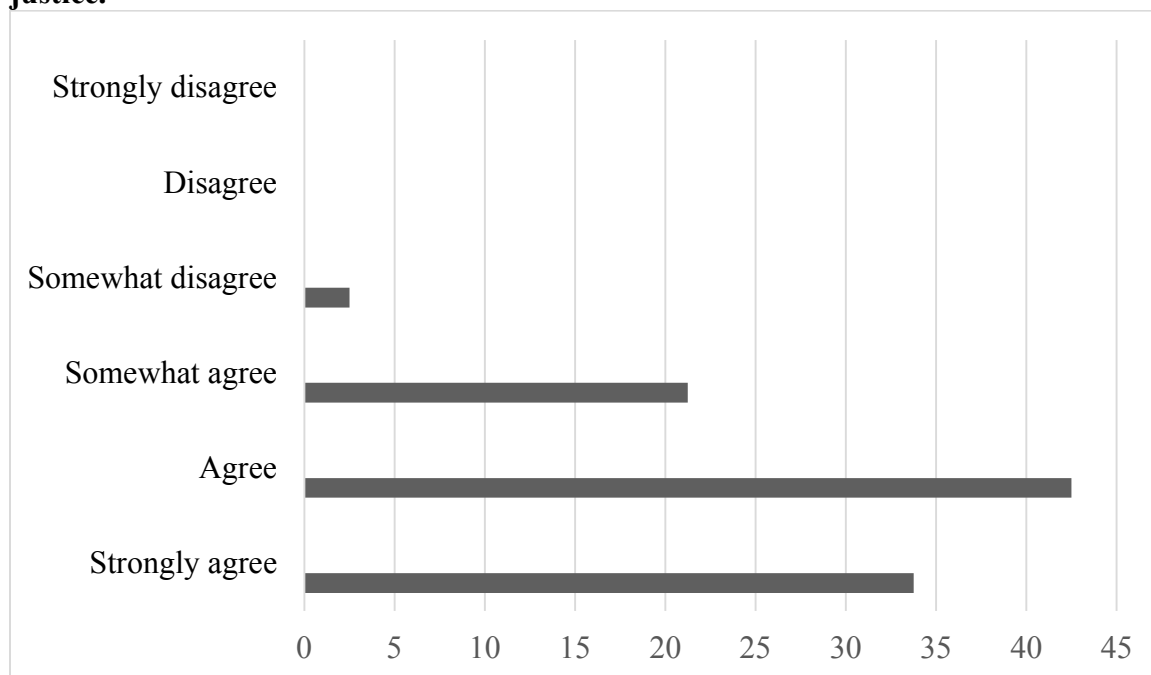
Table 5.15, Q6, “Justice” in the Bible is defined as loving your enemy.



Biblical Themes and Justice

97.5 percent of those surveyed agreed that there is a connection between major biblical themes and justice while only 2.5 percent of respondents disagreed. Based on the responses to this data set and previous data (Table 5.14 and Table 5.15), it can be further demonstrated that although 97.5 percent of respondents agree that there is a connection between biblical themes and justice, there is no clear agreement regarding social justice and how Christians are supposed to respond to various social issues from a social justice perspective.

Table 5.16, Q7, There is a connection between the major themes in the Bible and justice.

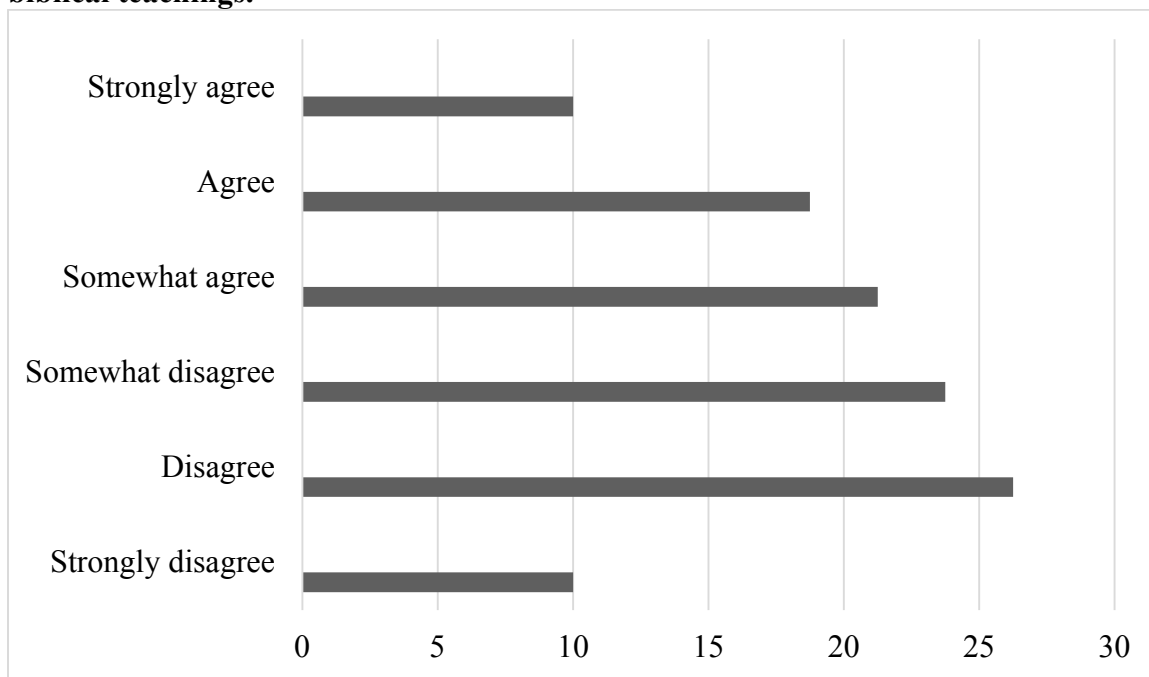


Justice as a Biblical Priority

40 percent of respondents believe that too much focus on justice ignores other important biblical teaching, while 60 percent disagreed. This data set reveals another significant disconnect. A comparison of Table 5.16 which represents respondents' views on whether or not there is a connection between major themes in the bible and justice and Table 5.17 which reflects that 40 percent believe that focusing on justice comes at the expense of neglecting other important biblical truths demonstrates again that there is a significant discrepancy. The fact that 98 percent of respondents believe that there is a connection between major themes in the bible and justice while 40 percent believe that focusing on justice will in fact result in the neglect of other important things, demonstrates that respondents clearly do not understand how to think about "other important things" within the context of justice. If all important themes relate back to

justice, then focusing on justice should necessarily encompass other “important things” to which people of faith are called.

Table 5.17, Q8, Too much focus on justice results in ignoring other important biblical teachings.

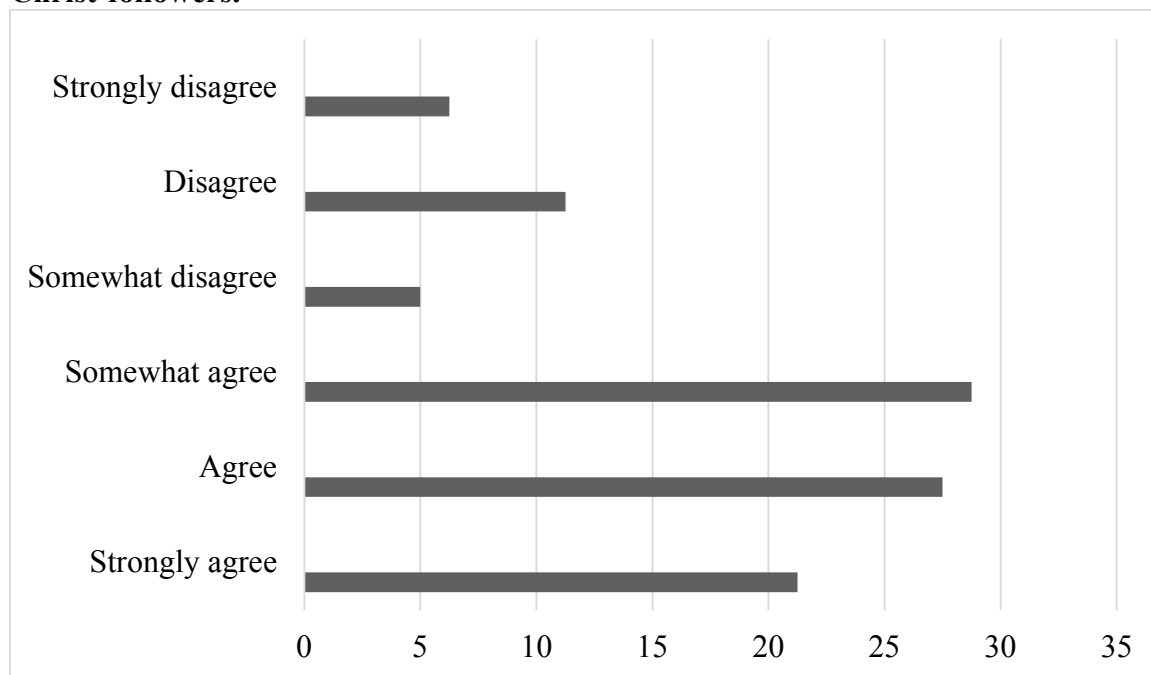


Most Important Responsibility for Christians

The responses to Q11 (Table 5.18, leading people to Christ is the most important responsibility for Christians) in the survey might possibly infer that the “other important biblical teachings” referenced in Q8 (Table 5.17) are related to “leading people to Christ.” 77.5 percent of respondents indicated that “leading people to Christ is the most important responsibility for Christ-followers.” One possible explanatory offering is that respondents might possibly consider witnessing as an act of social justice but further exploration would be required to establish whether this is the case. This discrepancy further demonstrates the lack of agreement around not only the definition of social justice but also the enactment of social justice within varying constructs and regarding multiple

social issues. The data does not indicate whether or not the act of leading someone to Christ takes precedence over justice or if the two are mutually exclusive or compatible.

Table 5.18, Q11, Leading people to Christ is the most important responsibility for Christ-followers.



Justice in God's Own Time

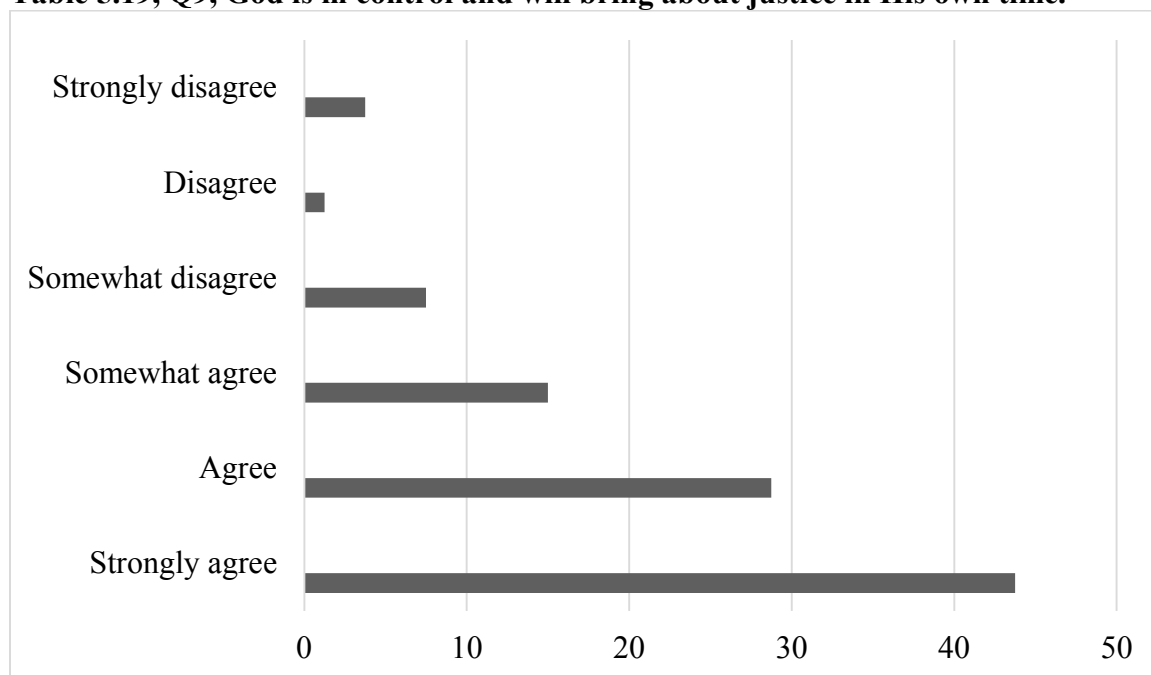
87.5 percent of respondents believe that God is in control and will bring about justice in His own time while 12.5 percent disagreed. The frequency distribution in this data set was similar to the frequency distribution in Q4 (Table 5.13), which explores whether or not there is a perceived difference between God's justice and social justice. The data set, which corresponds to Q11 (Table 5.18) suggests that the majority (87.5 percent) of respondents believe that God's ultimate justice will come to pass while 90% of respondents indicated that social justice is a part of their faith practice (Q16). This might suggest a rather nominal investment in social justice advocacy if the large majority of respondents believe that ultimately, God will bring about justice in His time. This

would suggest that there exists substantial room for interpretation regarding how the work of social justice is done. If it is the work of God, then social justice from a human being's perspective could easily be trivialized, minimized or negated completely.

Similarly, 63.5 percent of respondents believe that there is an identifiable difference between God's justice and social justice (Q4, Table 5.13), which might suggest that a significant majority of respondents believe that God's justice is different and that He will bring about His own justice in His own time. If indeed this is the case, minimization of the responsibility to seek social justice might readily occur given that humankind's pursuit of justice can only pale in comparison to God's enactment of social justice.

Although 85 percent of respondents indicated that justice is important for Christians, the data does not distinguish whether the belief that God is in control and will bring about justice in His own time offers a reprieve for individuals from working towards social justice.

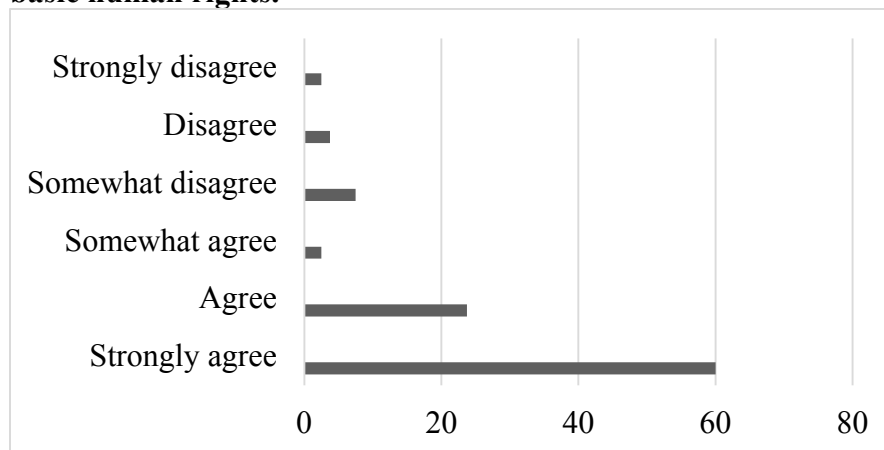
Table 5.19, Q9, God is in control and will bring about justice in His own time.



Everyone Entitled to the Same Human Rights

Eighty percent of respondents indicated that the Bible upholds the idea that everyone is entitled to the same human rights, while 13.75 percent disagreed with the statement.

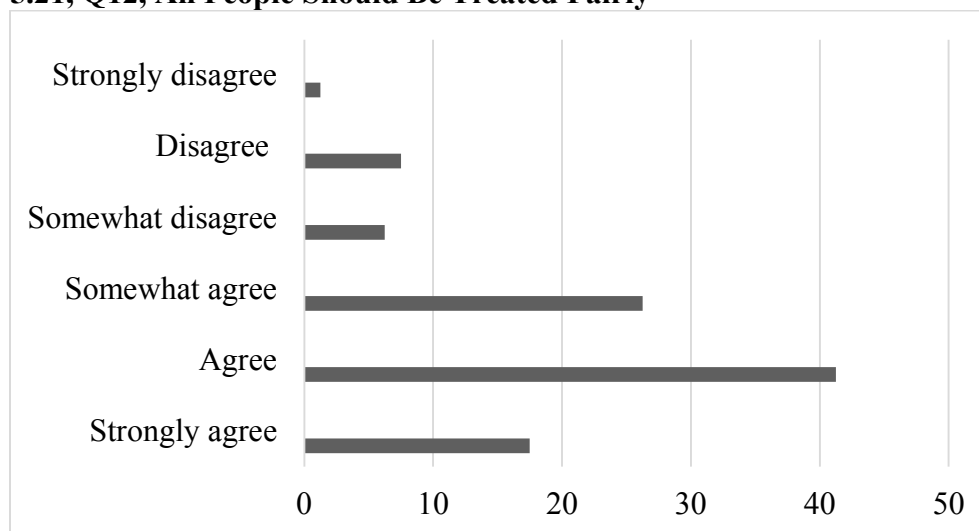
Table 5.20, Q10, The Bible upholds the ideas that everyone is entitled to the same basic human rights.



Fair Treatment

Similarly, 85 percent agreed that all people are treated fairly while 15 percent disagreed.

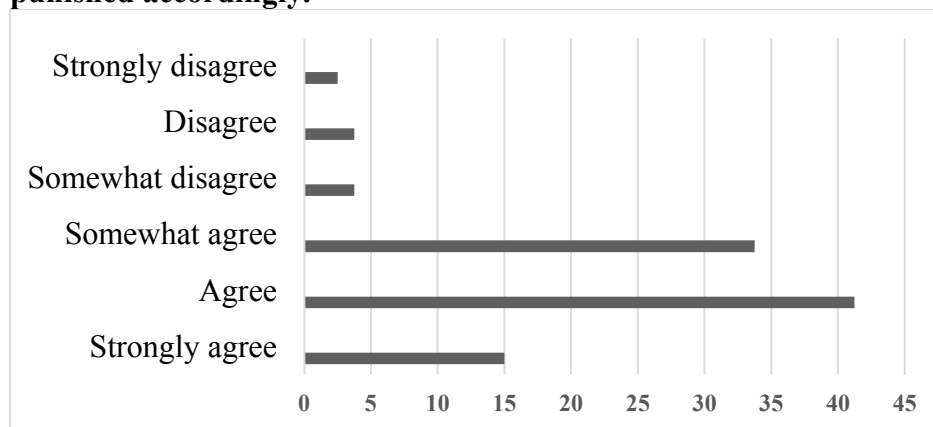
5.21, Q12, All People Should Be Treated Fairly



Law and Punishment

90 percent of those surveyed believe that justice means that if someone breaks the law, they should be punished accordingly. 10 percent of respondents disagreed with this statement.

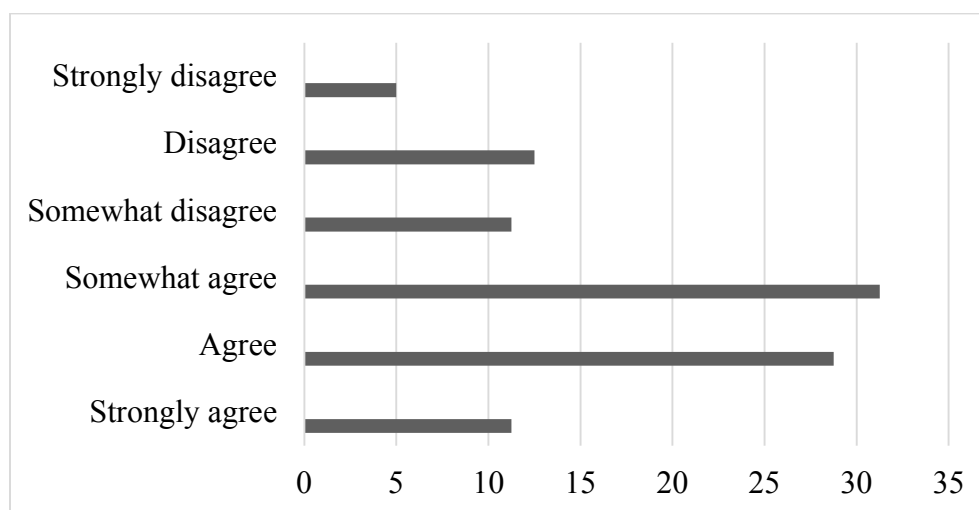
Table 5.22, Q13, Justice means that when someone breaks the law, they are punished accordingly.



Care for the Poor is the Government's Responsibility

Regarding care for the poor, 71.25 percent of respondents believe that it is the responsibility of the state while 28.75 percent disagree that the state should not be involved in caring for the poor.

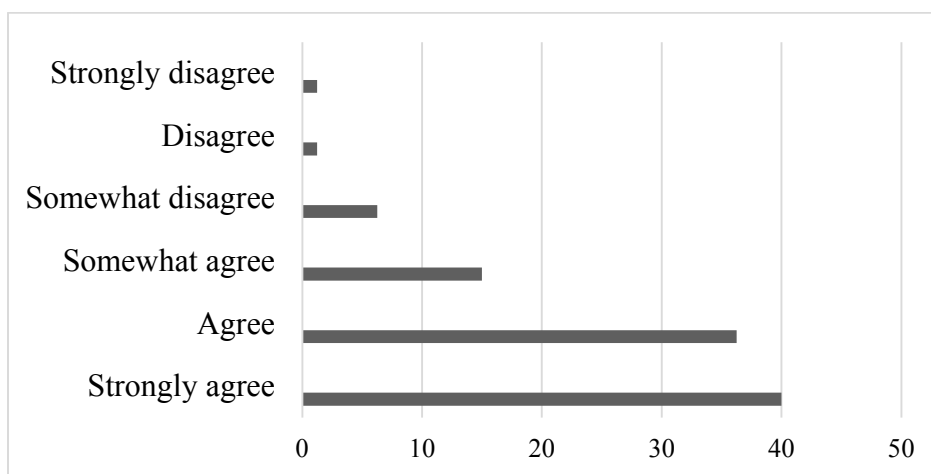
Table 5.23, Q14, Caring for the needs of the poor is the responsibility of state.



Care for the Poor is the Church's Responsibility

91.25 percent of respondents believe that caring for the poor should be the responsibility of the church while only 8.75 percent disagree. It is not clear from the data whether or not the respondents believed that both the church and the state should share responsibility for caring for the poor. The data suggest that at least 20 percent of the respondents believe the responsibility should be shared.

Table 5.24, Q15, Caring for the needs of the poor is the responsibility of the church.

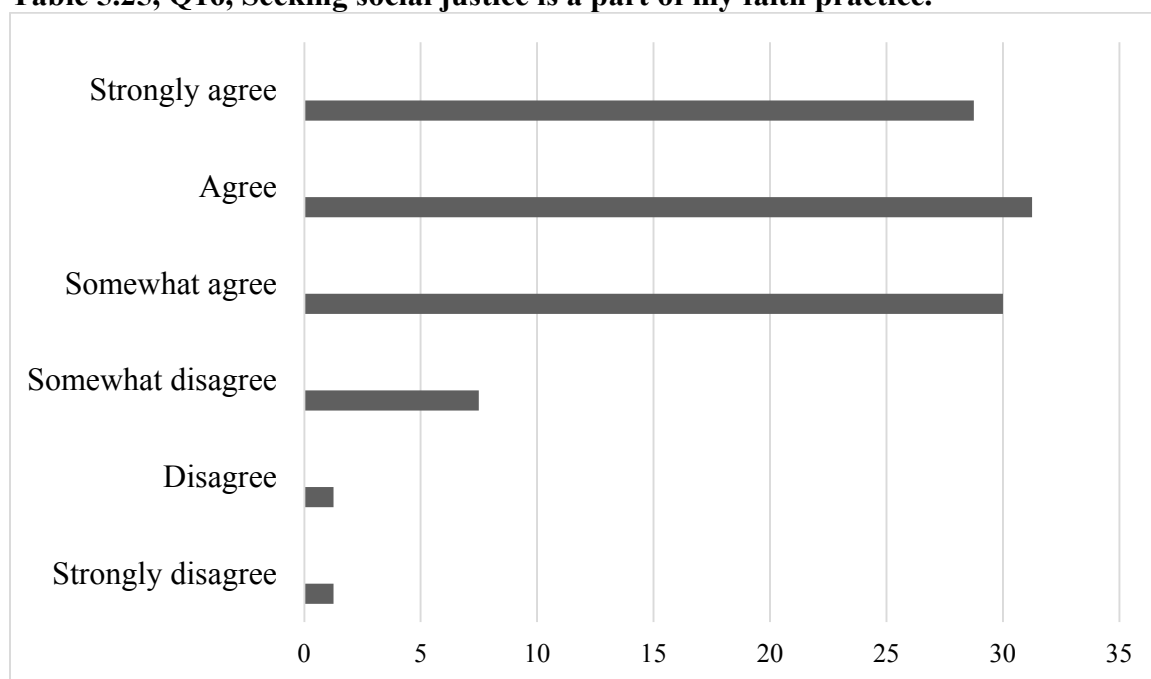


Social Justice as Part of Faith Practice

90 percent of respondents indicated that social justice is a part of their faith practice. It is of interest to note that although 28.75 percent strongly agree, 31.25 percent agree and 30 percent somewhat agree, 10 percent of respondents reported that seeking social justice was not an integral part of their faith practice. It is significant to note the discrepancies in the findings as they relate to practical applications of social justice. Again, 90 percent indicate that they integrate social justice into their practice but the data suggest that there is disagreement on the definition of social justice as well as the

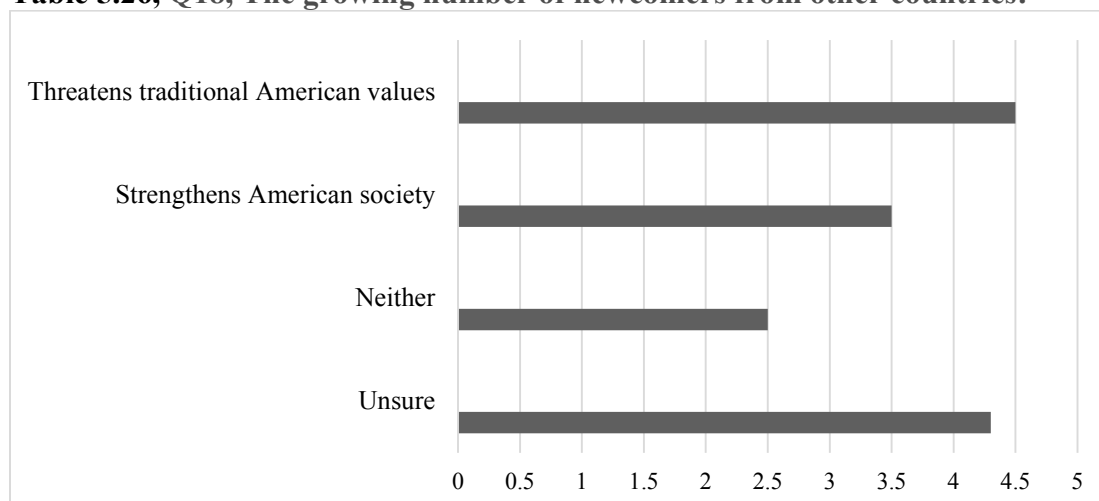
practical application of social justice. Further research could investigate these issues to expand knowledge around student definitions of social justice as well as exploratory research to determine how the 90% of respondents who indicate that social justice is a part of their faith practice realistically integrate and implement social justice into their faith practice.

Table 5.25, Q16, Seeking social justice is a part of my faith practice.



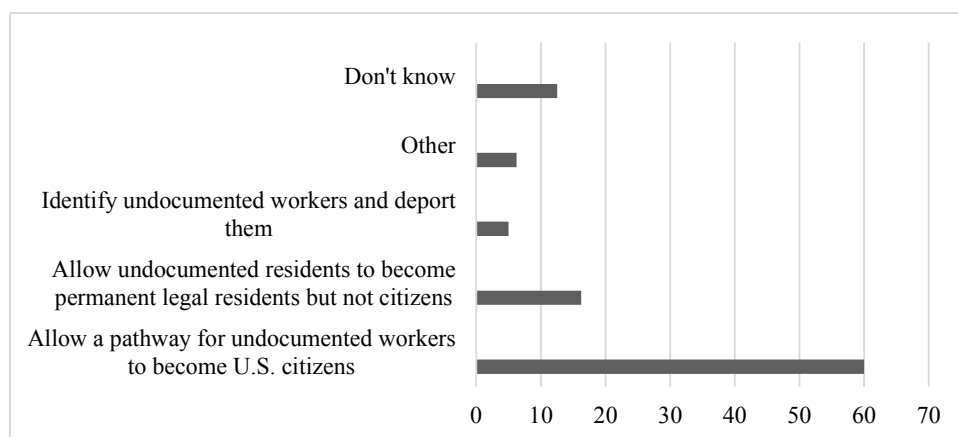
Impact of Refugees

Regarding the recent influx of refugees, 10 percent of respondents indicated that the growing number of newcomers from other countries threaten traditional American values. 53.75 percent of respondents indicate that the refugees strengthen American society. 17.5 percent indicated that the influx of refugees neither threatens nor strengthens American society, while 18.75 percent indicated uncertainty about the issue.

Table 5.26, Q18, The growing number of newcomers from other countries:

Pathway to Citizenship

60 percent indicated that there should be a pathway to citizenship for refugees while 16.25 percent indicated that refugees should be permitted to reside in the U.S. but should be denied citizenship. 5 percent indicated that they should be deported. 6.25 percent had other ideas while 12.5 percent indicated uncertainty about how to deal with the issue.

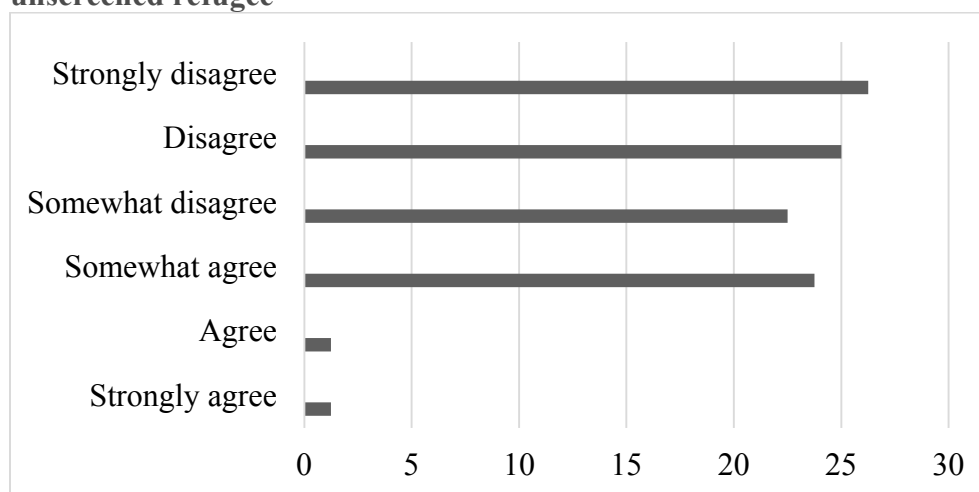
Table 5.27, Q19, Which statement comes closest to your view on how the U.S. should deal with undocumented residents

Fear of Refugees

Twenty-six percent of respondents agreed in varying degree (strongly agree, agree, somewhat) that they are fearful that they will be a victim of a terrorist attack by an undocumented refugee.

Similarly, 30 percent of those surveyed believe that the most important reason to ban refugees is because they pose a threat to national security. 15 percent indicated that refugees place an undue burden on the economy while 3.75 percent indicate that the difference in values is the primary reason the refugees should not be permitted into the country. 22.5 percent of individuals indicated that they did not know what reason was most important while 28.5 percent indicated “other.”

Graph 5.28, Q21, I am afraid that I will be a victim of a terrorist attack by an unscreened refugee



Social Justice for LGBTQ

Regarding other relevant social justice issues, 31.25 percent of respondents believed that small business owners should be permitted to refuse services to members of the LGBTQ community; 68.25 percent of those surveyed disagreed, while 35 percent strongly disagreed. Thirty-four percent of respondents believed that same sex marriage

should be repealed while 66.25 percent of respondents disagreed, while 38.75 percent strongly disagreed.

Table 5.29, Q23, Small businesses should be allowed to refuse services to LGBTQ

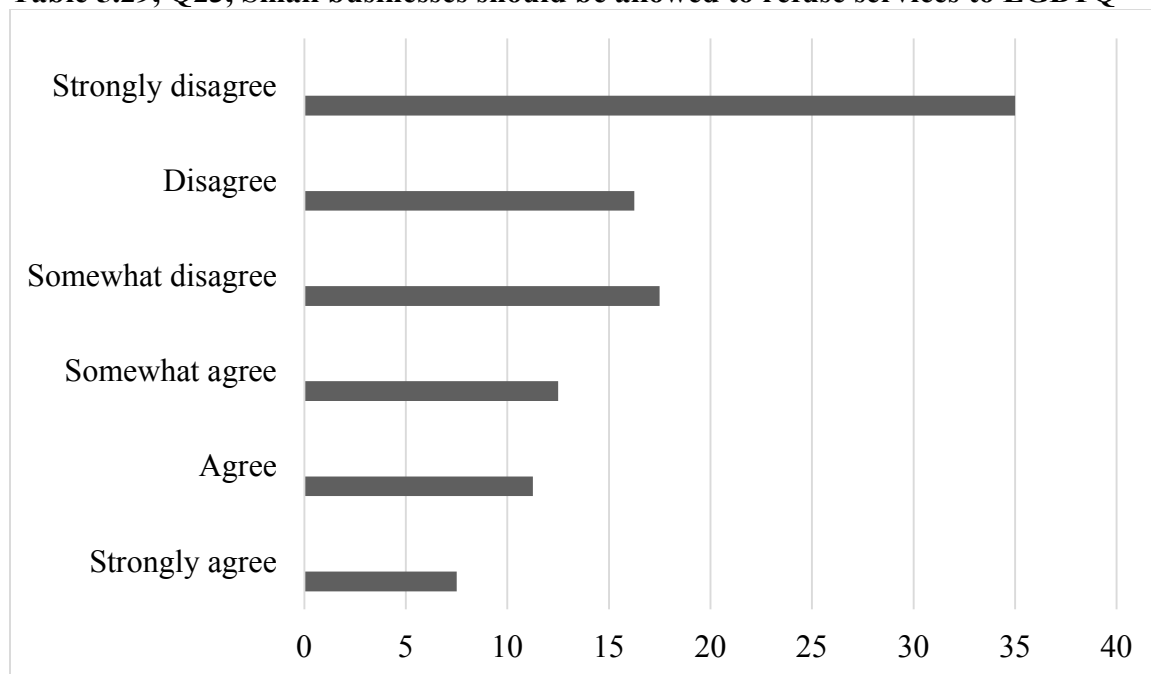
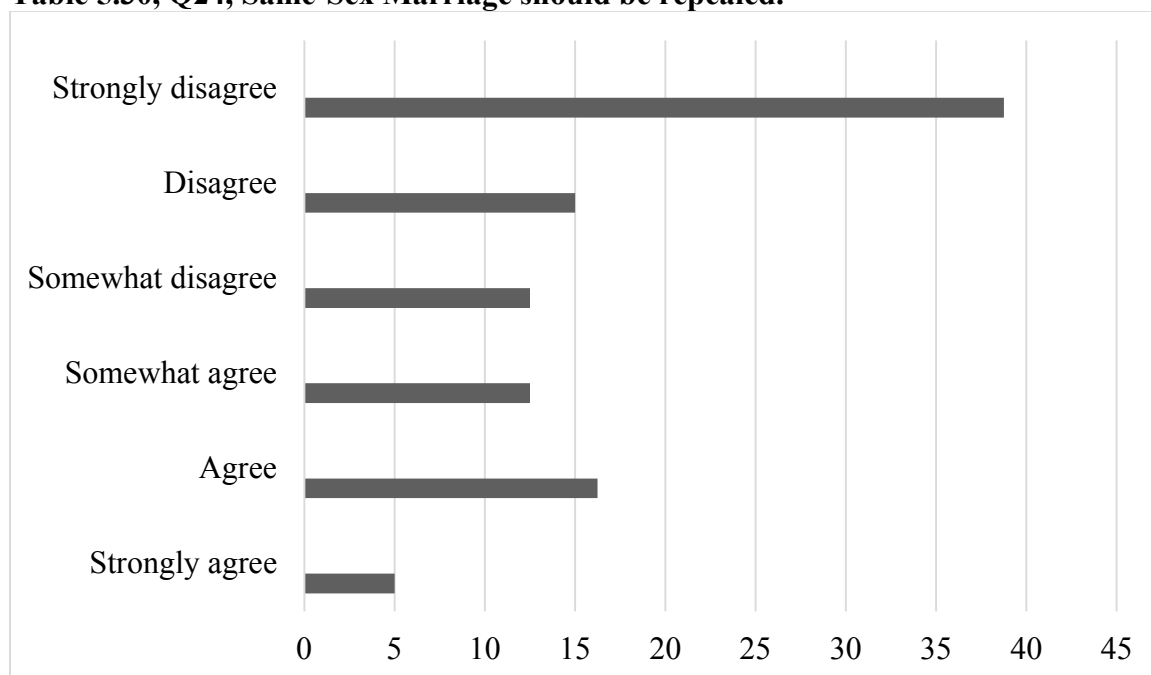


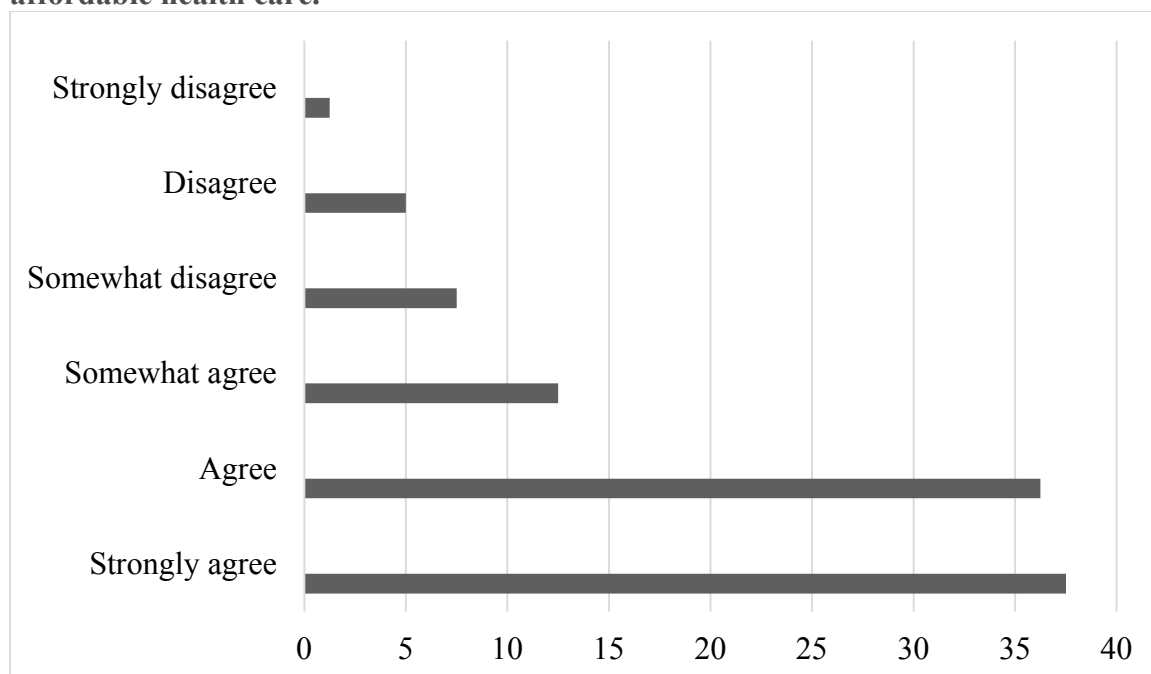
Table 5.30, Q24, Same-Sex Marriage should be repealed.



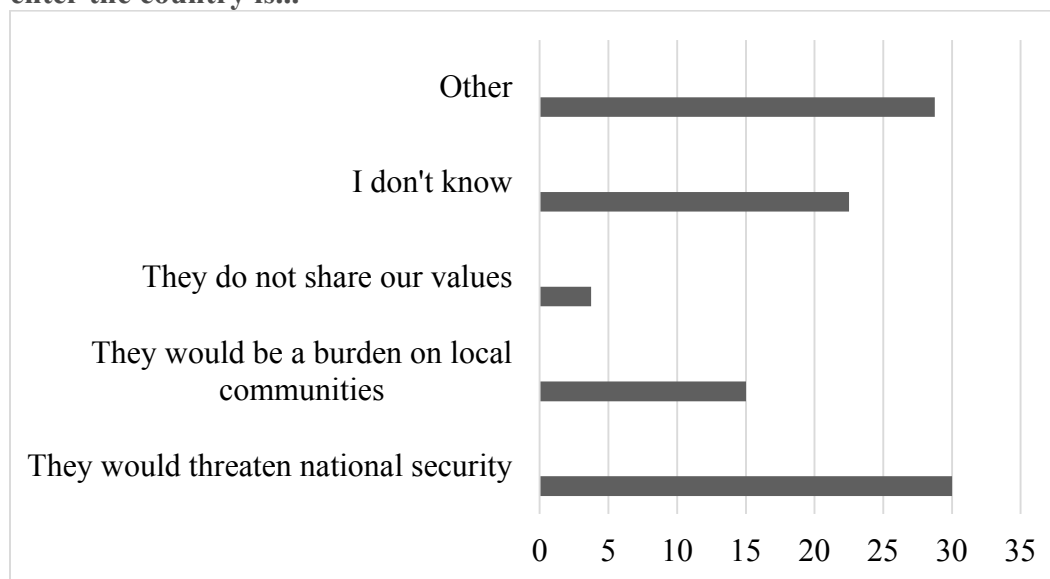
Health Care and Government

Eighty-six percent of respondents indicated that the government should ensure that all people have the right to access affordable healthcare while 13.75 percent disagreed. This data set is consistent with Q3, which measured respondents' belief that justice for the poor is an important consideration for Christians. While 85 percent reported this to be accurate, similarly, 86.25 percent of respondents indicated that access to affordable healthcare is an important consideration. The data does not indicate whether or not respondents believe it falls upon them to advocate for the healthcare needs of all human beings. There is agreement that all people should have affordable healthcare however, it is not clear whether or not there is an understanding amongst those surveyed that access to healthcare is a social justice issue about which they should be concerned.

Table 5.31, Q28, The government should ensure that all people have the right to affordable health care.



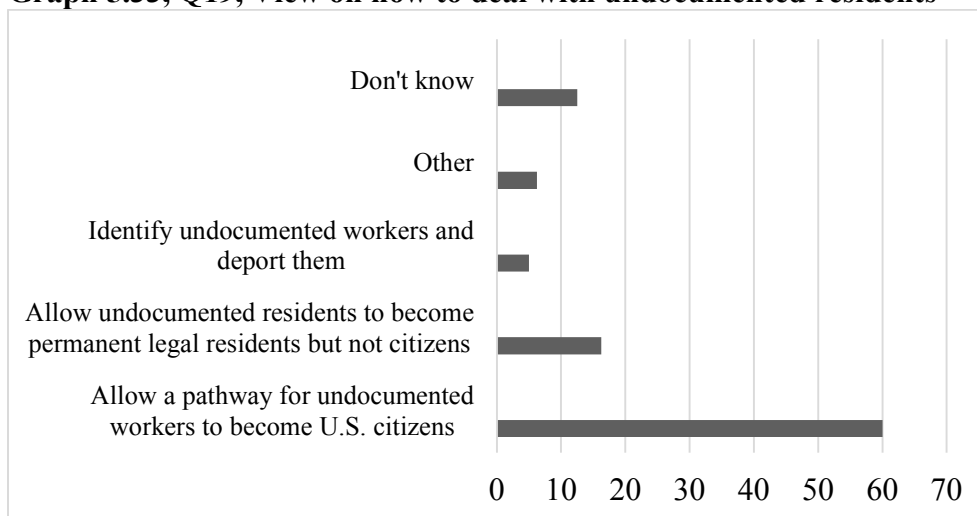
Graph 5.32, Q22, The most important reason the U.S. should not allow refugees to enter the country is...



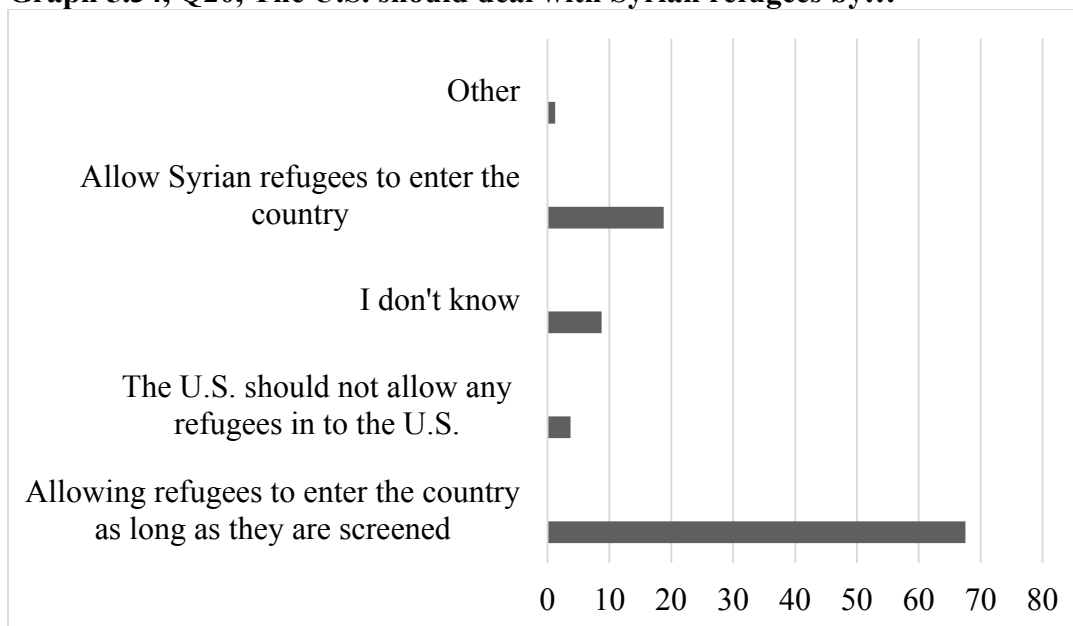
These results indicate a disconnect between the expressed support for human rights and social justice and an individual's practice of those beliefs. The data also suggests an additional divergence in stated beliefs and practices in that 90 percent of respondents indicated that seeking social justice is a part of their faith practice.

It is of significance to note that fear has the capacity to shape beliefs and the potential to impede action. The data indicates that 26.25 percent of the respondents fear a terrorist attack from an undocumented refugee as indicated by Table 5.28.

However, as Table 5.27 indicates, fear does not seem to impact the views of how undocumented workers should be treated. 60 percent of respondents believe in a pathway to citizenship while 16.25 percent believe that refugees should be allowed to become residents. Despite the identified fear, only 5 percent of respondents believed that undocumented workers should be deported.

Graph 5.33, Q19, View on how to deal with undocumented residents

Despite the concerns (threat to national security, burden on local communities) expressed in Table 5.34, the 86 percent of respondents stated that Syrian refugees should be allowed to enter the country while only 3.75 percent stated that refugees should not be allowed into the country.

Graph 5.34, Q20, The U.S. should deal with Syrian refugees by...

Observations on Survey One: Theology and Social Justice

Overall, much of the data from the first survey was consistent with what the researcher speculated would be found given the contextual setting of the research. Not surprisingly, the large majority of respondents (85 percent) indicated that justice for the poor is important while 90 percent reported that seeking social justice is a part of their faith practice. An additional 97.5 percent of those surveyed acknowledged the connection between major biblical themes and justice. Eighty-seven percent of respondents believed that God will bring about justice in His own time. 77.5% of those surveyed believed that leading people to Christ is the most important function as a Christian.

After a review of the frequency distributions, some inconsistencies were readily apparent. Graph 5.21 reflects the respondents' strong agreement that the Bible teaches that everyone is entitled to the same basic human rights. Eighty-six percent of respondents agreed to varying Only 13.75 percent of respondents had some measurable disagreement with the statement that "everyone is entitled to basic human rights."

Similarly, 85 percent of respondents agreed that "justice means people are treated fairly." while only 15 expressed a contrary opinion.

It is interesting to note that when respondents were subsequently asked about specific human rights issues, the responses were inconsistent. This is a significant finding in that it demonstrates that there is no general agreement amongst respondents regarding either the definition or the operationalization of social justice. Table 5.29 reflects the responses given to Question 23 regarding whether or not small businesses should be permitted to refuse service to individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ). Table 5.30 reflects the responses to Question 24

regarding the repealing of same sex marriage. 85.6 percent of respondents (the mean of Q10 and Q12) expressed that all human beings are entitled to human rights and should be treated fairly. Subsequent responses contradict those statements in that 31.25 percent of respondents in Q23 indicated that businesses should be able to refuse services to individuals based on their sexual identity which is widely considered to be a violation of human rights. The apparent discrepancy suggests that although students state that they agree that human rights are important, the stated agreement remains theoretical rather than operational. There is an apparent randomization of applied social justice demonstrated by the fact that respondents were willing to withhold the application of social justice based on the perceived morality of the persons or groups of persons upon which social justice is being applied. This is further demonstrated by the fact that 33.75 percent of respondents agreed that same-sex marriage should be repealed. Therefore, it can be inferred that certain students, arguably those who hold the belief systems of their parents and who do not see that their beliefs are changing or have the capacity to change, would justify the withholding of basic human rights from those who are LGBTQ.

Regarding the opening of U.S. borders to refugees, 30 percent expressed concern about a threat to national security, while percent indicated that the refugees placed a burden on local communities.

Further clarification would be helpful in that 63.75 percent of respondents indicated that they believed there to be a difference between God's justice and social justice. This would be a very important follow-up research question. Additional clarification should be sought regarding specific definitions of the concept of rewards and

punishment as well as added information on the 42.5 percent of respondents who did not believe they were required to love their enemies.

An additional significant finding was that 61.25 percent of respondents indicated that their theological beliefs are changing while 46.25 percent indicated that they share the same beliefs as their families. It would be of significance to seek a broader understandings regarding how and why respondents' beliefs are changing. It would also add value to understand more about how students carry in the beliefs of their families.

Survey Two: Defining Issues Test 2

Findings Related to Case Scenarios

The following data sets have been extracted from the DIT-2 Qualtrics survey that was administered to undergraduate students. To assist with the interpretation of these findings, an overview of Lawrence Kohlberg's Level of Moral Developmental stages which include pre-conventional morality, conventional morality and post-conventional morality is provided below in Table 5.35.

Table 5.35 Kohlberg's Levels of Moral Development²

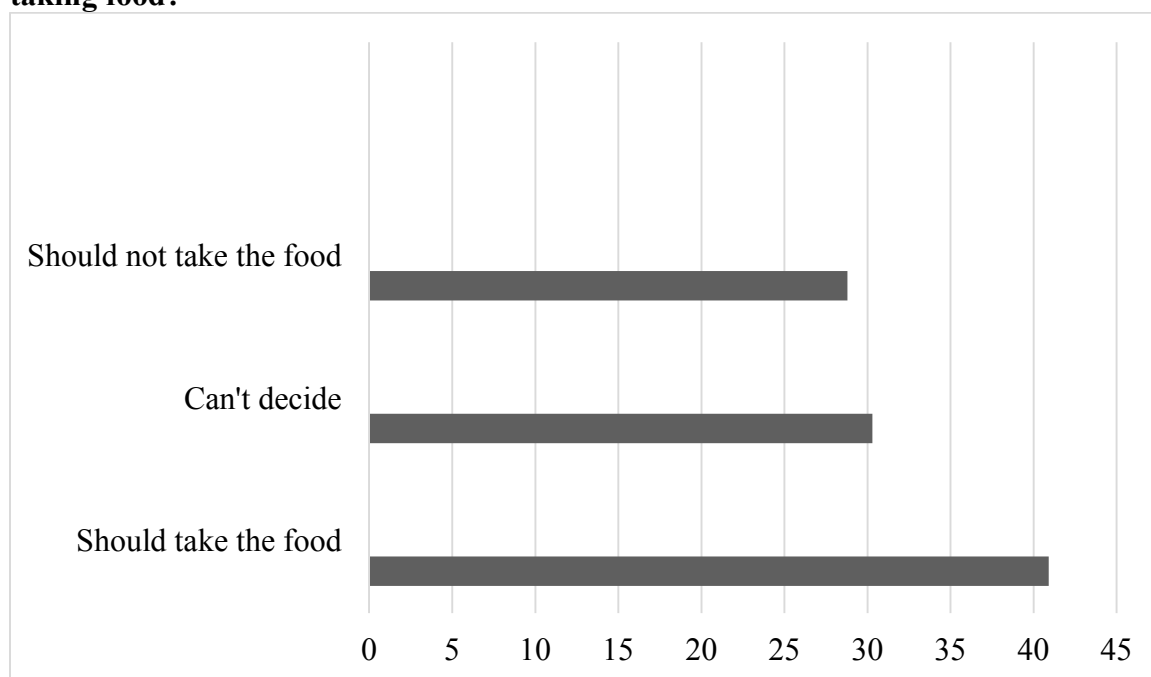
| Level | Stage | What determines right and wrong? |
|---|--|---|
| Level 1: Preconventional | Punishment and obedience | How can I avoid punishment? Right and wrong defined by what one gets punished for. If you are punished for stealing then obviously stealing is wrong. |
| | Self-interest orientation | What's in it for me? Any concern for others is motivated by selfishness. |
| Level 2: Conventional Most adolescents and adults | Interpersonal accord and conformity | Being good is whatever pleases others and subscribes to social norms. The majority determines Right and wrong. |
| | Authority and social-order maintaining orientation | Law and order morality; maintain the social system |
| Level 3: Post-conventional: 0-15% of the over 20s | Social contract orientation | Right and wrong are now determined by personal values, although these can be overridden by democratically agreed upon laws. When laws infringe on our sense of justice, we can choose to ignore them. |
| | Universal ethical principle | Principled conscience. We now live in accordance with deeply held moral principles, which are seen, as more important than the law of the land. |

² <http://www.simplypsychology.org/kohlberg.html> , accessed November 10, 2016

Respondents read five different ethical case scenarios and responded to 12 questions for scenarios entitled: (1) Famine, (2) Reporter, (3) School Board, (4) Cancer, (5) Demonstration. The amount of data collected was significant and therefore the researcher chose to report on the most significant findings in the categories that were of most importance to the research problem and which would demonstrate a stratification of results reflective of Kohlberg's schema.

Interpretation and Findings for Case Scenario One: Famine

Graph 5.36, DIT-2 Q3 What would Mustaq Singh do? Do you favor the action of taking food?



Overall results indicated that 40.91 percent of respondents indicated that Mustaq Singh should take the food while 30.3 percent indicated that they were uncertain and could not decide which is indicative of possible transition between stages and levels of lower moral thinking and development to a higher level or stage of moral thinking. Twenty-nine percent indicated that Mustaq Singh should not take the food. Using

Kohlberg's taxonomy of sequential moral development, it could be stated that those respondents who indicated that the food should be taken were acting from the post-conventional stage where right and wrong are no longer determined by social contract or by personal values but rather instead by deeply held moral principles which are seen as more important than the law of the land. This is what Lawrence Kohlberg referred to when he identified the concept of universal ethical principles where individuals act in accordance with deeply held moral principles. The fact that 30 percent of those surveyed could not decide is suggestive of the fact that moral development is occurring and that individuals may be in a transitional stage where they are moving from pre-conventional to conventional or from conventional to post-conventional thinking. It should be noted that although there may be exceptions, individuals do not typically regress in moral development. The "cannot decide" suggests transition and conflict between existing moral beliefs and practices and the call to higher moral code. The 29 percent who indicated that Mustaq Singh should not take the food are either in the pre-conventional or conventional stage. Those who based their decision on the concept of reward and punishment demonstrate pre-conventional thinking (avoiding punishment) while those whose decision was based on upholding the laws and other social contracts would be in the conventional stage (authority and social order.) The preliminary analysis could not differentiate between the two levels.

To further support that interpretation, 69 percent of respondents indicated that existing laws were significantly impeding access to the most basic claim that a member of a community should have, in this case, food. These data points suggest post-conventional thinking as respondents indicate their consideration for the basic human

rights. This is demonstrated through the expression that the community laws which represent authority and social order are in and of themselves impeding access to basic human rights. Yet fifty-nine percent of respondents indicated that upholding community laws as a priority was worthy of important consideration. Only forty-one percent of individuals indicated a willingness to break the law to subscribe to a higher law. Fifty-one percent of respondents questioned the right of the wealthy man to store food when people were starving. This indicates that respondents are conflicted about the presenting ethical dilemma. The findings indicate how complex the issues are and that the application of moral thinking and action is complex within the context of ethical situations.

To assist in the interpretation of the findings, the following standardized questions were considered: Is Mustaq Singh courageous enough to risk getting caught for stealing? Isn't it only natural for a loving father to care so much for his family? Shouldn't the community's laws be upheld? Does Mustaq Singh know a good recipe for preparing soup from tree bark? Does the rich man have any right to store food when people are starving? Is the motive of Mustaq Singh to steal for himself or steal for his family? What values are going to be the basis for social cooperation? Is the epitome of eating reconcilable with the culpability of stealing? Does the rich man deserve to be robbed for being so greedy? Isn't private property an institution to enable the rich to exploit the poor? Would stealing bring about more total good for everybody concerned? Are laws getting in the way of the most basic claim of any member of the community?

The researcher conducted a preliminary analysis of the data in order to determine the findings based on Kohlberg's moral schema. Each of the standardized questions was assigned to Kohlberg's levels of moral development as follows:

Table 5.37, Kohlberg on Case One

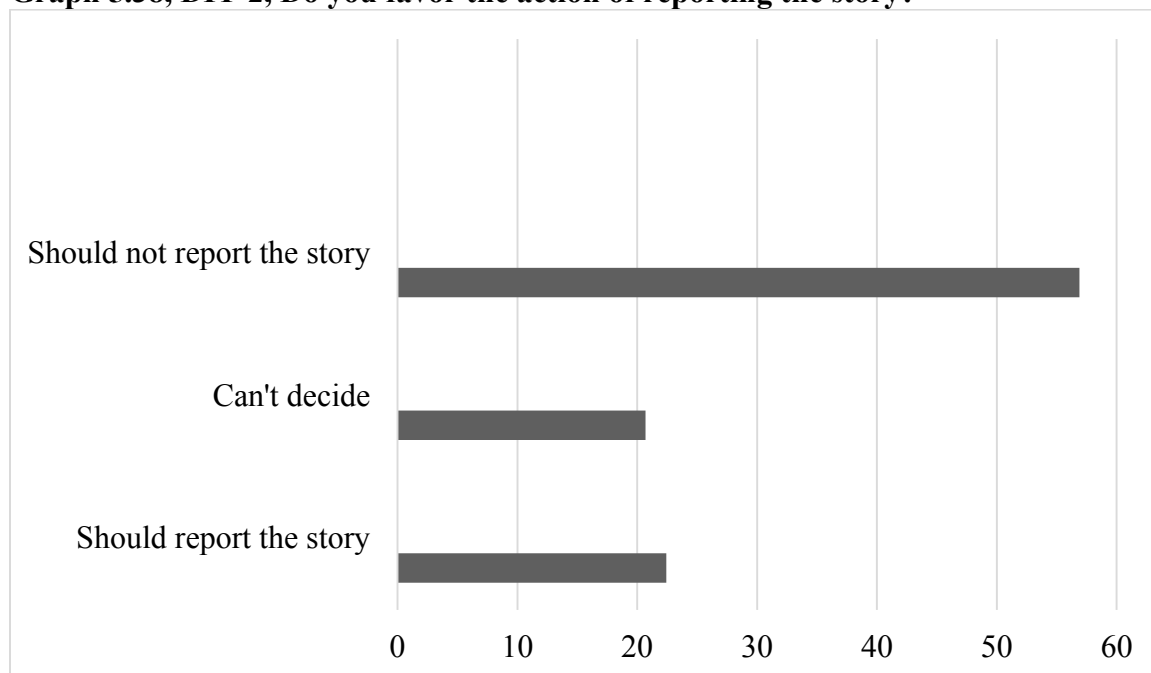
| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Pre-conventional punishment/ obedience, self- interest orientation</p> | <p>Isn't private property an institution to enable the rich to exploit the poor?</p> <p>Does Mustaq Singh know a good recipe for preparing soup from tree bark?</p> <p>Does the rich man deserve to be robbed for being so greedy?</p> |
| <p>Conventional Interpersonal accord and conformity, authority and social-order maintaining orientation</p> | <p>Shouldn't the communities' laws be upheld?</p> <p>Does the rich man have any legal right to store food when other people are starving?</p> <p>Is the motive of Mustaq Singh to steal for himself or steal for his family?</p> <p>Is the epitome of eating reconcilable with the culpability of stealing?</p> |
| <p>Post-conventional Social contract orientation, universal ethical principles</p> | <p>Would stealing bring about more total good for everybody concerned?</p> <p>Are laws getting in the way of the most basic claim of any member of the community?</p> <p>What values are going to be the basis for social cooperation?</p> <p>Is Mustaq Singh courageous enough to risk getting caught for stealing?</p> <p>Isn't it only natural for a loving father to care so much for his family?</p> |

Seventy percent of respondents, the greatest majority, indicated that the question “are the laws getting in the way of the most basic claim of any member of a society?” was of most significance. This indicates that 70 percent of respondents demonstrated post-conventional moral analysis to discern critical factors in this case scenario. 62 percent of respondents indicated that the question “would stealing bring about more total good for everybody concerned or wouldn't it?” was of “great” or “much” importance which also demonstrates post-conventional moral thinking. Conversely, 59 percent of respondents gave significant consideration and indicated the importance of “shouldn't the

community's laws be upheld?" which, from a Kohlberg perspective, indicates conventional moral thinking.

Interpretation and Findings for Case Scenario Two: Reporter

Graph 5.38, DIT-2, Do you favor the action of reporting the story?



Twenty-two percent of respondents expressed that the story should be reported while 21 percent were not sure whether the story should or should not be reported. 56 percent of respondents said that the story should not be reported. Applying Kohlberg's moral schema, it could be stated 56 percent of respondents applied post-conventional moral thinking by indicating the story should not be reported. 21 percent were uncertain which suggests transition from pre-conventional morality to conventional morality or from conventional morality to post-conventional morality. 22 percent of respondents indicated that the story should be reported.

To assist in the interpretation of the findings, the following standardized questions were considered: Doesn't the public have the right to know all the facts about all the

candidates for office? Would publishing the story help Reporter Dayton's reputation for investigative reporting? If Dayton does not publish the story wouldn't another reporter get the story anyway and get the credit for investigative reporting? Since voting is such a joke anyway, does it make any difference what reporter Dayton does? Hasn't Thompson shown in the past 20 years that he is a better person than his earlier days as a shoplifter? What would best service society? If the story is true, how can it be wrong to report it? How could reporter Dayton be so cruel and heartless as to report the damaging story about candidate Thompson? Does the right of "habeas corpus" apply in this case? Would the election process be fairer with or without reporting the story should reporter Dayton treat all candidates for office in the same way by reporting everything she learns about them, good and bad? Isn't it a reporter's duty to report all the news regardless of the circumstances?

As was the case with the famine case scenario, the researcher conducted a preliminary analysis of the data in order to determine the findings based on Kohlberg's moral schema. Each of the standardized questions was assigned to Kohlberg's levels of moral development as follows:

Table 5.39, Kohlberg on Case Two

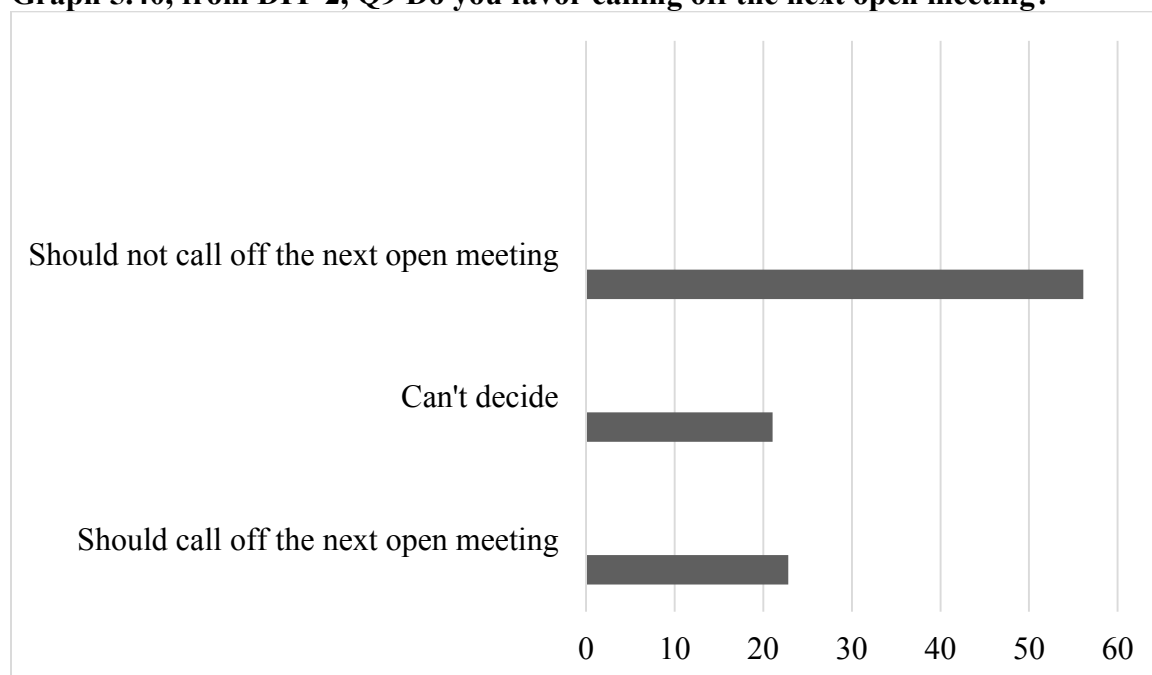
| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Pre-conventional punishment/ obedience, self- interest orientation</p> | <p>If Dayton doesn't publish the story wouldn't another reporter get the story anyway and get credit for the investigative reporting?</p> <p>Since voting is a joke anyway, does it make any difference what reporter Dayton does?</p> <p>Would publishing the story help Reporter Dayton's reputation for investigative reporting?</p> <p>Isn't it a reporter's duty to report all the news regardless of the circumstances?</p> |
| <p>Conventional Interpersonal accord and conformity, authority and social-order maintaining orientation</p> | <p>If the story is true, how can it be wrong to report it?</p> <p>Doesn't the public have a right to know all the facts about the candidates for office?</p> <p>How could reporter Dayton be so cruel and heartless as to report the damaging story about candidate Thompson?</p> <p>Does the right of "habeas corpus" apply in this case?</p> <p>Should Reporter Dayton treat all candidates for office in the same way by reporting everything she learns about them, good and bad?</p> |
| <p>Post-conventional Social contract orientation, universal ethical principles</p> | <p>What would best service society?</p> <p>Hasn't Thompson shown in the past 20 years that he is a better person than his earlier days as a shoplifter?</p> <p>Would the election process be fairer with or without reporting the story?</p> |

Further exploration of the data showed that 81 percent believed it to be important that candidate had, over the past 20 years, demonstrated behavior indicating that he had become a better person than in his shop-lifting days, an example of post-conventional thinking. 79 percent of respondents thought, while deciding whether to report or not to report, it was important to consider what would best serve society, a second indicator of post-conventional thinking. 79 percent of respondents indicated that the reporter should treat all candidates the same and report everything including the good and the bad, which demonstrates conventional thinking. Nearly 60 percent indicated that the job of a reporter

was to report everything regardless of circumstances (conventional) while nearly 60 percent indicated that the public has the right to know all of the facts (conventional). Initial analysis indicates that of the 56 percent of individuals who believed the story should not be reported, a significant number of those individuals continued to wrestle with issues relevant to the community's right to have access to information related to people who are running for public office. A post-conventional position would have to consider the rights of the individual while simultaneously considering the greater good. In this case, if the individual has, as the case study states, provided exemplary service to the community, it would perhaps be in the greater good of the community to withhold the story. The subjective nature of measuring moral development is complex.

Interpretations and Findings for Case Scenario Three: School Board

Graph 5.40, from DIT-2, Q9 Do you favor calling off the next open meeting?



Twenty-three percent of respondents indicated that the next meeting should be called off while 21 percent could not decide what to do. 56 percent of respondents

believed that the meeting should not be called off. Applying Kohlberg's schema indicates that 56 percent of respondents operated from a position of post-conventional morality while 21 percent were undecided, which is suggestive of transition between stages. The 23 percent of respondents who were in favor of calling off the meeting were operating from pre-conventional or conventional thinking.

To assist in the interpretation of the findings, the following standardized questions were considered: Is Mr. Grant required by law to have Open Meetings on major school board decisions? Would Mr. Grant be breaking his election campaign promises to the community by discontinuing the Open Meetings? Would the community be even angrier with Mr. Grant if he stopped the Open Meetings? Would the change in plans prevent scientific assessment? If the school board is threatened, does the chairman have the legal authority to protect the Board by making decisions in closed meetings? Would the community regard Mr. Grant as a coward if he stopped the open meetings? Does Mr. Grant have another procedure in mind for ensuring that divergent views are heard? Does Mr. Grant have the authority to expel troublemakers from the meeting or prevent them? Are some people deliberately undermining the school board process by playing some sort of power game? What effect would stopping the discussion have on the community's ability to handle controversial issues in the future? Is the trouble coming from only a few hotheads, and is the community in general really fair-minded and democratic? What is the likelihood that a good decision could be made without open discussion from the community?

As was the case with the famine and reporter case scenarios, the researcher conducted a preliminary analysis of the data in order to determine the findings based on

Kohlberg's moral schema. Each of the standardized questions was assigned to Kohlberg's levels of moral development as follows:

Table 5.41, Kohlberg on Case Three

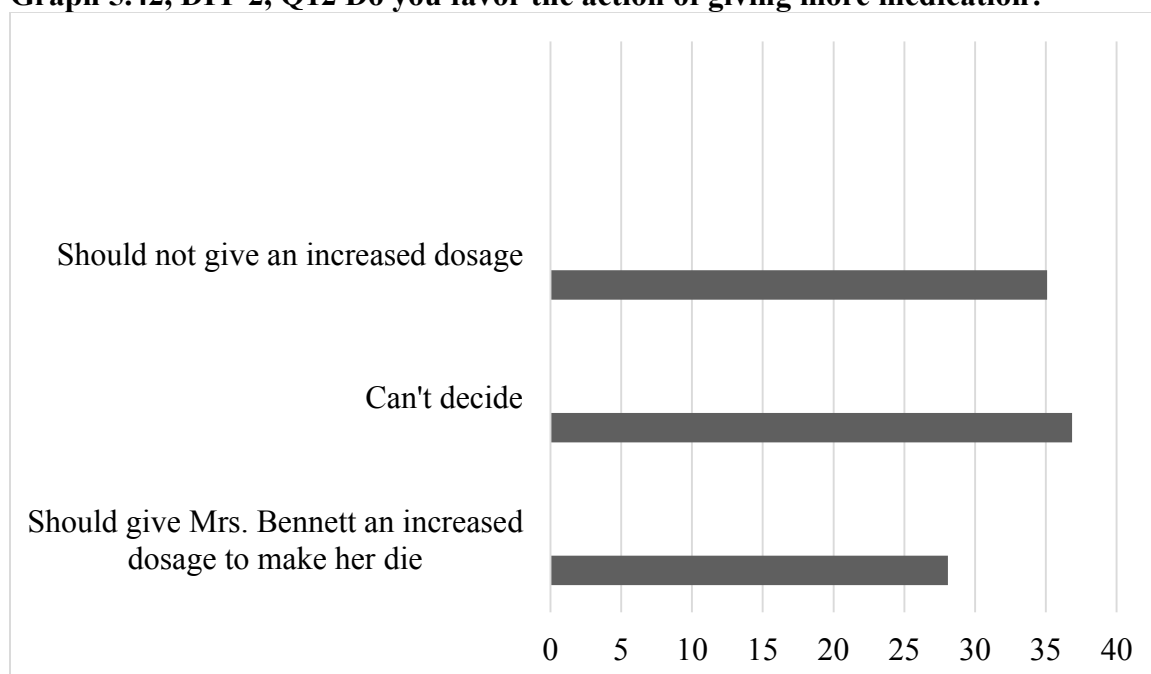
| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Pre-conventional punishment/obedience, self-interest orientation</p> | <p>Would the community be even angrier with Mr. Grant if he stopped the Open Meetings?</p> <p>Would the community regard Mr. Grant as a coward if he stopped the open meetings?</p> <p>Are some people deliberately undermining the school board process by playing some sort of power game?</p> |
| <p>Conventional Interpersonal accord and conformity, authority and social-order maintaining orientation</p> | <p>Is Mr. Grant required by law to have Open Meetings on major school board decisions?</p> <p>Would the change in plans prevent scientific assessment?</p> <p>If the school board is threatened, does the chairman have the legal authority to protect the Board by making decisions in closed meetings?</p> <p>Does Mr. Grant have the authority to expel troublemakers from the meeting or prevent them?</p> <p>Is the trouble coming from only a few hotheads, and is the community in general really fair-minded and democratic?</p> |
| <p>Post-conventional Social contract orientation, universal ethical principles</p> | <p>Would Mr. Grant be breaking his election campaign promises to the community by discontinuing the Open Meetings?</p> <p>Does Mr. Grant have another procedure in mind for ensuring that divergent views are heard?</p> <p>What effect would stopping the discussion have on the community's ability to handle controversial issues in the future?</p> <p>What is the likelihood that a good decision could be made without open discussion from the community?</p> |

A deeper analysis of the data shows that 78 percent of respondents demonstrated post-conventional thinking in that they indicated the possibility that Mr. Grant had another procedure in mind to ensure divergent views were heard. This reflects post-conventional thinking as the respondents are considering the greater good and voice of a

cross-section of divergent community views. Conventional thinking was demonstrated by 74 percent of respondents who asserted that community members were generally fair minded and democratic and that there were a few hotheads who were causing the trouble. Pre-conventional thinking was demonstrated by 44 percent of respondents who speculated that perhaps the community would be even angrier with Mr. Grant if he chose not to hold another meeting.

Interpretation and Findings for Case Scenario Four: Cancer

Graph 5.42, DIT-2, Q12 Do you favor the action of giving more medication?



Twenty-eight percent of respondents believed that the physician should give an increased dosage to ease Mrs. Bennett's pain which would simultaneously hasten her death. Thirty-seven percent could not decide while 35 percent indicated that the physician should not exceed the prescribed dosage. This case scenario is particularly challenging when it comes to doing a non-statistical analysis. If one believes that the universal ethical principles and a higher morality is demonstrated by allowing individuals to choose when

they wish to die, then it could be said that 28 percent of respondents operated from a post-conventional position. If however, one subscribes, as most Christians do, to the idea that only God has the right to give and take life, it could be said that 35 percent of individuals operated from a post-conventional position. Applying Kohlberg's moral schema indicates that 28 percent of respondents operated from a post-conventional position. That 37 percent of respondents could not decide indicates the challenges around studying and measuring the application of moral and ethical values. Moreover, respondents indicating that they are unable to decide are most likely in transition from one stage to another, for example, from pre-conventional to conventional or from conventional to post-conventional.

To assist in the interpretation of the findings, the following standardized questions were considered: Isn't the doctor obligated by the same laws as everybody else if giving an overdose would be the same as killing her? Wouldn't society be better off without so many laws about what doctors can and cannot do? If Mrs. Bennett dies, would the doctor be legally responsible for malpractice? Does the family of Mrs. Bennett agree that she should get more painkiller medicine? What kind of painkiller is the drug? Does the state have the right to force continued existence of those who don't want to live? Is helping to end another's life ever a responsible act of cooperation? Would the doctor show more sympathy for Mrs. Bennett by giving the medicine or not? Wouldn't the doctor feel guilty from giving Mrs. Bennett so much drug that she died? Should only God decide when a person's life should end? Shouldn't society protect everyone against being killed? Where should society draw the line between protecting lie and allowing someone to die if the person wants to?

As was the case with the famine, reporter and school board case scenarios, the researcher conducted a preliminary analysis of the data in order to determine the findings based on Kohlberg's moral schema. Each of the standardized questions was assigned to Kohlberg's levels of moral development as follows:

Table 5.43, Kohlberg on Case Four

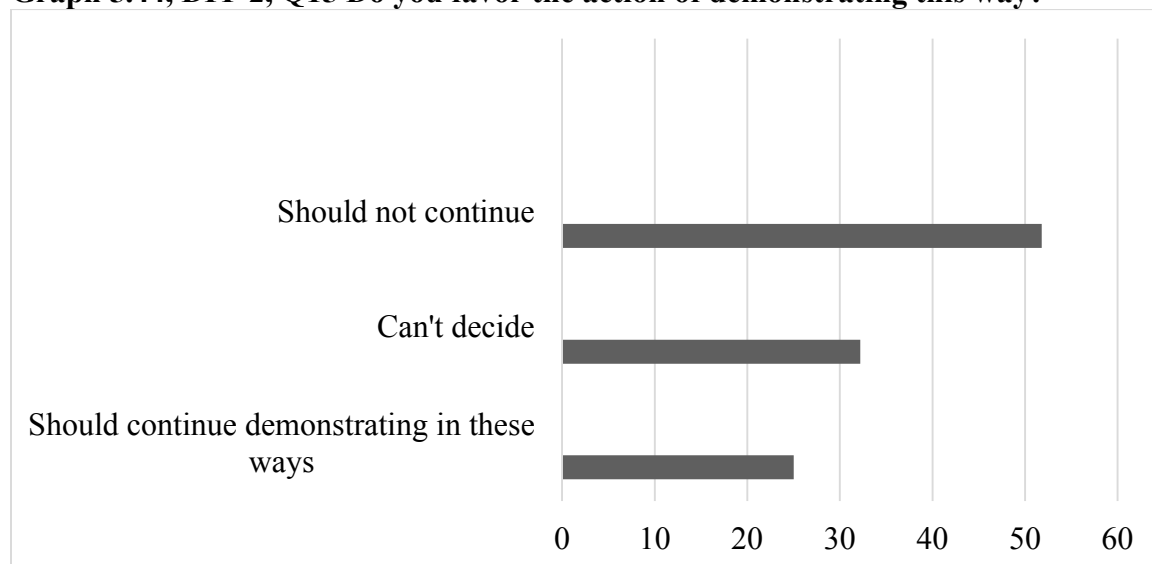
| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Pre-conventional punishment/ obedience, self-interest orientation</p> | <p>What kind of painkiller is the drug? Wouldn't the doctor feel guilty from giving Mrs. Bennett so much drug that she died? Isn't the doctor obligated by the same laws as everybody else if giving an overdose would be the same as killing her?</p> |
| <p>Conventional Interpersonal accord and conformity, authority and social-order maintaining orientation</p> | <p>If Mrs. Bennett dies, would the doctor be legally responsible for malpractice? Does the state have the right to force continued existence of those who don't want to live? Does the family of Mrs. Bennett agree that she should get more painkiller medicine? Shouldn't society protect everyone against being killed? Wouldn't society be better off without so many laws about what doctors can and cannot do?</p> |
| <p>Post-conventional Social contract orientation, universal ethical principles</p> | <p>Would the doctor show more sympathy for Mrs. Bennett by giving the medicine or not? Is helping to end another's life ever a responsible act of cooperation? Should only God decide when a person's life should end? Where should society draw the line between protecting life and allowing someone to die if the person wants to?</p> |

Conventional moral thinking was demonstrated by 72 percent of respondents who considered the physician's legal culpability if the patient died. The doctor would be violating the social order by breaking the law to give more medication than prescribed. Post-conventional thinking was demonstrated by 69 percent of the respondents as they

considered whether or not helping end another's life could ever be an act of cooperation. Although 69 percent considered this to be an important factor, still 35 percent of students would not support the increased dose while 37 percent could not decide. An interesting comparison would be to use this particular case scenario on undergraduate students at a secular institution to identify any significant variations in responses. 79 percent of respondents considered the question "where should society draw the line between protecting life and allowing someone to die if the person wants to?" which indicated post-conventional thinking was involved in the decision-making process. If post-conventional thinking informed decision-making, evidence of universal ethical principles could be applied to both the decision to administer medications additional medications or the decision to withhold the administration of additional medications. It is not the consensus that that is key but rather the various of levels and stages of sequential moral thinking that is applied in order to reach a conclusion.

Interpretation and Findings for Case Scenario Five: Demonstration

Graph 5.44, DIT-2, Q15 Do you favor the action of demonstrating this way?



25 percent of respondents agreed that demonstrations should continue in this manner while 23 percent could not decide. 52 percent of respondents believed that demonstrations should not continue in this manner.

To assist in the interpretation of the findings, the following standardized questions were considered: Do students have any right to take over property that does not belong to them? Do the students realize that they might be arrested and fined, and even expelled from school? Are the students serious about their cause or are they doing it just for fun? If the university president is soft on students this time, will it lead to more disorder? Will the public blame all students for the actions of a few student demonstrators? Are the authorities to blame for giving in to the greed of the multinational oil companies? Why should a few people like Presidents and business leaders have more power than ordinary people? Does this student demonstration bring about more or less good in the long run to all people? Can the students justify their civil disobedience? Shouldn't students respect the authorities? Is taking over a building consistent with principles of justice? Isn't it everyone's duty to obey the law, whether one likes it or not?

As was the case with the famine, reporter, school board and cancer case scenarios, the researcher conducted a preliminary analysis of the data in order to determine the findings based on Kohlberg's moral schema. Each of the standardized questions was assigned to Kohlberg's levels of moral development as follows:

Table 5.45, Kohlberg on Case Five

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Pre-conventional Punishment/ obedience, self- interest orientation</p> | <p>Are the students serious about their cause or are they doing it just for fun?</p> <p>If the university president is soft on students this time, will it lead to more disorder?</p> <p>Can the students justify their civil disobedience?</p> <p>Shouldn't the authorities be respected by students?</p> |
| <p>Conventional Interpersonal accord and conformity, authority and social-order maintaining orientation</p> | <p>Do students have any right to take over property that doesn't belong to them?</p> <p>Do the students realize that they might be arrested and fined, and even expelled from school?</p> <p>Will the public blame all students for the actions of a few student demonstrators?</p> <p>Isn't it everyone's duty to obey the law, whether one likes it or not?</p> |
| <p>Post-conventional Social contract orientation, universal ethical principles</p> | <p>Are the authorities to blame for giving in to the greed of the multinational oil companies?</p> <p>Does this student demonstration bring about more or less good in the long run to all people?</p> <p>Why should a few people like Presidents and business leaders have more power than ordinary people?</p> <p>Is taking over a building consistent with principles of justice?</p> |

68 percent of students demonstrated some post-conventional thinking in that they considered whether or not the demonstrations would bring about more or less good to the broader community. 58 percent of respondents demonstrated consideration for law and order by considering whether or not everyone has an obligation to obey the law whether they like it or not. This is conventional thinking as it focuses on law and social contract without thinking beyond to consider the universal needs in the creation of a more just society. 68 percent of respondents also demonstrated conventional thinking around whether or not students had the right to take over property that did not belong to them.

Similarly, conventional thinking was demonstrated as 66 percent wondered if students would be able to justify their civil disobedience. The results to this question demonstrated a broader distribution of responses. It is of significance to note that the largest single data point in this data set indicated that 46.43 percent of respondents indicated that authorities should be respected by students. This data point alone is significant in that it reflects the agentic shift which occurs in organizational constructs and which has the impact to influence moral decision-making.

SPSS Statistical Analysis

In addition to the preliminary analysis that was performed on the data from the DIT-2, a statistical analysis was performed. The DIT-2 is a standardized test that is administrated by the Center for the Study of Ethical Development at the University of Alabama. The results of the DIT-2 that were gathered through the Qualtrics survey were submitted to the Center for the Study of Ethical Development for analysis. The following results were worth noting.

Summary of Sample Characteristics

As previously referenced in this chapter, the data used in this analysis was collected from the undergraduate students at Bethel University. Sixty-six participants fully completed the survey, of which 73 percent were female, and 27 percent male, an insignificant difference from the first survey were 75 percent were female and 25 percent male. Respondents ranged in age from 18-25 with an average age of 20 years of age. 22 percent of the respondents were underclassmen while 78 percent, an overwhelming majority, were upper classmen. The political demographic measured political orientation slightly differently from the first survey with 42 percent of students reporting “liberal”,

13 percent “moderate” and 46 percent conservative. In the first survey, only 25 percent of the respondents reported to be a “democrat.” The most likely reason for this is that the DIT-2 offered a “moderate” category which was not offered in the first survey. The first survey offered instead categories which included independent, prefer not to answer, and other. It is of interest to note that the researcher was able to determine political orientation by gender as follows:

Table 5.46 DIT-2 Political Persuasion

| | Male | Female |
|--------------|---------|----------|
| Liberal | (5) 33% | 18 (45%) |
| Moderate | 2 (13%) | 5 (13%) |
| Conservative | 8 (53%) | 17 (43%) |

For the purposes of this interpretation, it should be noted that the developmental indices are aligned as represented in the following Table, 5.47.

Table 5.47, Kohlberg’s Moral Development

| Kohlberg’s Level of Moral Development | Interpretation | DIT-2 Developmental Indices |
|---------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Level 1 Pre-conventional | Punishment and obedience orientation/ Self-interest orientation | Personal Interest |
| Level 2 Conventional | Interpersonal accord and conformity orientation/ Authority and social-order maintaining orientation | Maintaining Norms |
| Post-conventional | Social contract orientation/ Universal ethical principle | Post-conventional |

The DIT-2 statistical results measuring the developmental indices for Bethel undergraduate students are as follows:

Table 5.48, DIT-2 Statistical Results for Bethel Undergraduates

| Variable | Description | Coding | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Personal Interest (Level 1) | Proportion of items that cluster around stage one (considerations that focus on the direct advantages to the actor) and stage two (considerations that focus on the fairness of reciprocity of favors) of DIT-2` | Count of items: 0-100 | 23.17 | 12.65 |
| Maintaining Norms (Level 2) | Proportion of items in stage three (considerations that focus on interpersonal accord and conformity) and four (considerations that focus on authority and social-order maintaining) of DIT-2 | Count of items: 0-74 | 32.74 | 14.16 |
| Post-conventional (Level 3) | Proportion of items that cluster around stage five (considerations that focus on social contract and consensus-producing procedures) and stage six (universal ethical principles which represent principled conscience and which transcend the law of the land) | Count of items: 0-74 | 39.13 | 15.24 |

Examination of personal interests across gender suggest that there is some difference in level of personal interest among male and female students. To further explicate, personal interest is Level One of Kohlberg's schema and formulates that at this level, moral decision-making is constructed based on decisions which solely benefit the individual and where no consideration is paid to social order or inter-personal conformity. The majority of male students in the sample scored low on the personal interest scale (47 percent) while most female students scored moderately on the personal interest scale (see Table 5.49). The chi-square reveals however, that these results cannot be generalized beyond the sample from which the data was collected. It is also interesting to note Table 5.50 which shows the statistical difference of the Level of Maintenance of

Order for males and females. Male students (40 percent) scored higher on the level of maintenance of order than women (15 percent). This is interesting because it suggests that men are still more advantaged than women in the United States and are therefore more supportive of the status quo and subsequently resistant to change.

Table 5.49, Level of Personal Interest by Gender

| Personal Interest | Male | Female |
|-------------------------------------|---------|----------|
| Low level of personal interest | 7 (47%) | 14 (35%) |
| Moderate level of personal interest | 5 (33%) | 18 (45%) |
| High level of personal interest | 3 (20%) | 8 (20%) |

P>.05 (.781)

Table 5.50, Level of Maintenance by Gender

| Maintenance | Male | Female |
|-------------------------------|---------|----------|
| Low level of maintenance | 6 (40%) | 12 (30%) |
| Moderate level of maintenance | 2 (20%) | 22 (55%) |
| High level of maintenance | 5 (40%) | 6 (15%) |

P<.05 (.041)

Table 5.51, Level of Post-Convention by Gender

| Post-convention | Male | Female |
|-----------------------------------|---------|----------|
| Low level of post-convention | 3 (20%) | 9 (23%) |
| Moderate level of post-convention | 7 (47%) | 18 (45%) |
| High level of post-convention | 5 (33%) | 13 (33%) |

P>.05 (.980)

An analysis based on the level of education, allowed the researcher to measure the moral development of Bethel undergraduate students according to Kohlberg's sequential continuum. Additionally, it allowed the researcher to compare the results of Bethel students to national averages.

Table 5.52, Level of Personal Interest by Education for Bethel Students

| Personal Interest | PSEO | Freshmen | Soph. | Junior | Senior |
|-------------------------------------|----------|----------|---------|---------|----------|
| Low level of personal interest | 1 (100%) | 2 (50%) | 4 (57%) | 8 (36%) | 6 (29%) |
| Moderate level of personal interest | 0 (0%) | 1 (25%) | 2 (29%) | 8 (36%) | 12 (57%) |
| High level of personal interest | 0 (0%) | 1 (25%) | 1 (14%) | 2 (27%) | 3 (14%) |

P>.05 (.654)

Table 5.53, Level of Maintenance by Education for Bethel Students

| Maintenance | PSEO | Freshmen | Soph. | Junior | Senior |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------|---------|---------|----------|
| Low level of maintenance | 0 (100%) | 2 (50%) | 2 (29%) | 7 (32%) | 7 (33%) |
| Moderate level of maintenance | 1 (100%) | 2 (50%) | 3 (43%) | 9 (41%) | 10 (48%) |
| High level of maintenance | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (29%) | 6 (27%) | 4 (19%) |

P>.05 (.929)

Table 5.54, Level of Post-convention by Education for Bethel Students

| Post-convention | PSEO | Freshmen | Soph. | Junior | Senior |
|-----------------------------------|----------|----------|---------|---------|----------|
| Low level of post-convention | 0 (0%) | 1 (25%) | 1 (14%) | 8 (36%) | 2 (10%) |
| Moderate level of post-convention | 1 (100%) | 1 (25%) | 6 (86%) | 8 (36%) | 9 (43%) |
| High level of post-convention | 0 (0%) | 2 (50%) | 0 (0%) | 6 (27%) | 10 (48%) |

P>.05 (.128)

Table 5.55, DIT 2, Means and Standard Deviations for Schema Scores by Educational Level for Respondents Who Indicated Their Educational Level in One of the Following Categories

| Edu. Level | Personal Interest | | | Maintaining Norms | | | Post-conventional | | |
|------------|-------------------|-----------|------|-------------------|-----------|------|-------------------|-----------|------|
| | Mean | Stan Dev. | N | Mean | Stan Dev. | N | Mean | Stan Dev. | N |
| Fresh. | 28.53 | 12.32 | 2096 | 33.57 | 12.96 | 2096 | 32.32 | 13.92 | 2096 |
| Soph. | 29.27 | 12.35 | 1028 | 32.36 | 13.62 | 1028 | 32.62 | 14.77 | 1028 |
| Junior | 27.36 | 12.77 | 1333 | 32.40 | 13.59 | 1333 | 32.40 | 15.57 | 1333 |
| Senior | 24.80 | 12.53 | 2441 | 32.64 | 14.01 | 2441 | 32.64 | 15.44 | 2441 |

Table 5.55 summarizes the results that were provided in the Guide to the DIT-2 and the data collected on Bethel University students. This data reflects comparisons in the three levels of moral development as identified by Kohlberg and indicates where Bethel University students are compared with the national averages.

Table 5.56 Summative Comparative Data on Personal Interest, Maintaining Norms and Post-Conventional

| Level of Personal Interest (Pre-conventional) | | Maintaining Norms (Conventional) | | Post-conventional (Post-conventional) | |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| BU student | National average mean | BU student | National average mean | BU student | National average mean |
| All 23.17 | Fr. 28.53 | All 32.74 | Fr. 33.57 | All 39.13 | Fr. 32.32 |
| | Soph. 29.27 | | Soph. 33.36 | | Soph. 32.62 |
| | Jr. 27.36 | | Jr. 32.40 | | Jr. 32.40 |
| | Sr. 24.80 | | Sr. 32.64 | | Sr. 32.64 |
| | | | | | |

It should first be noted that the national data measured students at freshman, sophomore, junior and senior levels. The data collected by the researcher has not been analyzed as such but instead has only one score for each of Kohlberg' level of thinking. The data is still comparable. The Personal Interest score for Bethel students (23.7) indicates that fewer students at Bethel are thinking at the pre-conventional level, as compared with the national average for students (28.53, 29.27, 27.36 and 24.80). The comparative statistical variance for pre-conventional thinking ranged between 1.1 and 5.57. It is still evident however, that there is a noteworthy difference in the pre-conventional scores. The Maintaining Norms score for Bethel students (32.74) was closer to the national averages for all levels of students (33.57, 32.36, 32.40 and 32.64). This indicates that, although the scores were closer, fewer Bethel students applied conventional thinking than did students at the national average. Moreover, the fact the

scores for Maintaining Norms for Bethel University students is comparable to national averages indicates that Bethel students who are at this level, consistently apply conventional thinking which includes considerations of interpersonal accord and social conformity. The comparative statistical variance for conventional thinking ranged between 0.38 – 0.83. It should also be noted that the researcher speculates that students at the pre-conventional and conventional levels are most vulnerable to agentic shift. The post-conventional data showed the most significant variation. Bethel students scored 39.13 which is significantly higher than the national averages across freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors (32.32, 32.62, 32.40 and 32.64). The comparative statistical variance for post-conventional thinking ranged from 6.51-6.81. These data sets demonstrate that Bethel University students applied a significantly higher level of post-conventional thinking than other students across the nation. Post-conventional thinking indicates that decision-makers are considering consensus-producing procedures and ultimately universal ethical principles which denote principled conscience and which can often transcend the law of the land.

Summarily, the findings indicate that BU students apply a more sequentially advanced level of moral thinking to the analysis of ethical dilemmas. Despite the fact that this is so, there still exists a significant gap in the understanding and application of related concepts of morality, theology and social justice which are worthy of further exploration.

Assimilation of Findings between Survey One, Theology and Social Justice and Survey Two, DIT-2

Upon consideration and review of both of the survey instruments employed to gain further insight into the intersections of social justice, moral development and theology, several noteworthy findings were readily apparent.

First, it can be concluded that higher moral development does not necessarily correlate to a sound sense of social justice and how to implement that in a practical context. The DIT-2 data results suggest that although Bethel students scored higher (in post-conventional) than students measured across the nation in post-conventional thinking, there was significant disagreement and variation in how to navigate the cancer scenario in the DIT-2, how to ensure human rights for all people including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer persons (survey 1) and how to respond to the current refugee crisis (survey 1). For example, a respondent might score high in the post-conventional range on the DIT-2 and yet agree that, individuals have the right to withhold services from LGBTQ people. Therefore, what makes someone highly morally developed according to Kohlberg, does not necessarily ensure that they will practice of social justice in a way that is consistent with the highest level of morality. If respecting and ensuring the basic human rights and dignity of all persons is considered to be at the pinnacle of moral development, a percentage of those who measured high in moral development simultaneously indicated that they would support those who wished to deny services to individuals based on their sexual identity, which is by nature, a denial of basic human rights. Notwithstanding, if someone disagrees with the LGBTQ lifestyle, it remains immoral to withhold services. It is always moral to safeguard human rights without discrimination. From this it can be concluded that morality is very different from social justice. It would seem however, that students are not able to understand and discern this distinction. It can be concluded that some students who scored high on the moral scale are confused about social justice and what it means.

This disconnect between moral development and the understanding of social justice has significant implications for social work practice and for social justice work. It additionally has significant offerings for pedagogy in the field of social work education as well as for the broader institution. Bethel University articulates that one of its core values is to develop and equip students to become world-changers and reconcilers.³ If the university wishes to create a student experience whereby students gain knowledge that moves beyond theoretical frameworks, thereby equipping graduates to create change on a global level, it will require that more expert intention be devoted to the implementation of curriculum specifically designed to address the intersectionalities of moral development, spiritual development and social justice. Changing and reconciling the world will require Bethel graduates to have a specific set of skills and training which will empower them to courageously and skillfully address poverty, injustice, racism, sexism, xenophobia, structural and institutional racism, human rights and environmental justice, without discrimination. Simply being a moral person will lend itself to the desire to do good but it will not provide the necessary skills to create and sustain social change in multiple and complex contexts. The research supports this claim and demonstrates that moral development does not ensure understanding of what social justice is and how to implement it. The two are separate and are all too often assumed to correlate to one another.

Second, it can be concluded that moral development, even within the context of a faith-based institution, is subjective. This is evidenced by the fact that although the data demonstrated that Bethel students had high levels of post-conventional morality, there was still disagreement around the concepts of social justice. Someone who values life as

³ <https://www.bethel.edu/about/mission-vision>

a sacred gift and whose theology might lend towards the idea that as beings created in the image of God, we have no right to kill what God has created. Therefore, those students might, through the process of reasoning, concur that under no circumstances should a doctor, administer pain meds beyond what should be subscribed to ease the pain of the patient which would ultimately kill her. Other respondents who similarly scored in the post-conventional on the DIT-2, would disagree and argue the rights of the patient who was suffering beyond her ability to bear, were of paramount importance and that, refusing her the right to die and perpetuating her suffering was inhumane, immoral and a violation of human rights. This supports the claim that in varying instances, moral development is subjective and challenging to measure.

A third additional consideration as the two data sets are compared, is the question about whether or one's assessed level of moral development equips an individual to stand against the forces of agency (Robert Card) and an immoral society (Reinhold Niebuhr). The data suggest that as individuals move along the moral continuum and advance to the Post-conventional Level, they are well equipped for the theoretical consideration of how to act justly, how to stand against the concept of agentic shift and an immoral society. However, if one takes into consideration that having a high level of morality does not always translate into just action, further exploration is needed. This introduces the issue of action into the equation. An individual or group of individuals can be in the post-conventional stage of moral development however, if there is lack of agreement around how people of faith are to act, social justice remains a mere philosophical or academic statement and exists only in a theoretical and abstract form.

A Theological Analysis of Survey One and Survey Two

In order to more effectively examine and therefore understand the intersections between moral development and theology, it is beneficial to compare Kohlberg's sequential moral schema to French theologian Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange's sequential stages which he proposed, lead to Christian perfection. Garrigou-Lagrange, a neo-Thomist, characterized three stages of the spiritual life. Like Kohlberg, Garrigou Lagrange's model similarly outlines a sequential formula for spiritual development. Conducting a simultaneous and comparative analysis of Kohlberg and Garrigou-Lagrange allows for a better understanding of the progression towards higher stages of morality and a similar progression towards spiritual/ Christian perfection.

Garrigou-Lagrange identifies the following three stages of the spiritual life: beginner/ purgative, proficient/ illuminative, and perfect/ unitive. Table 5.57 provides an overview of the characteristics of each stage of Garrigou-Lagrange's progression.

Table 5.57 Garrigou-Lagrange Three Ages of the Interior Life⁴

| Purgative Way | Illuminative Way | Unitive Life |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| 1 st level of charity | 2 nd level of charity | 3 rd level of charity |
| Self-love | Self-love decreasing | Heroic virtue |
| Gifts of holy spirit are latent | Knowledge and piety (gifts of the spirit) begin to appear | Gifts of holy spirit dominate; wisdom, understanding, fortitude, counsel |
| Beginning | Proficient | Perfect |
| Overcoming vice and sin | Understanding begins | Union of contemplative soul with God |

⁴ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life: Prelude of Eternal Life* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1947), 226.

According to Garrigou-Lagrange, those in the beginning or purgative stage are filled with self-love (first degree of charity) and are in need of purification. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are latent as they struggle with overcoming vice and sin which dominate the individual. The second sequential stage, the illuminative stage, is where individuals become more proficient in their spiritual lives and development of their moral beings. It is an intermediate stage in which self-love begins to diminish (second degree of charity), while knowledge and piety, gifts infused by the Holy Spirit, begin. The third and final sequential stage, or the unitive stage is where perfection occurs as observed by the ability to transcend self-love by demonstrating heroic virtue (3rd degree of charity), and demonstrating a sort of mastery of the virtues, gifts infused by the Holy Spirit (understanding, wisdom, fortitude and counsel.)⁵

Similarly, and has already been reviewed, Lawrence Kohlberg's sequential models identifies three levels of moral development. Table 5.58 provides a review of Kohlberg's model.

Table 5.58 Lawrence Kohlberg's Sequential Stages of Moral Development

| Pre-conventional | Conventional | Post-conventional |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| Punishment/ Obedience | Interpersonal accord Conformity | Social contract |
| Self-interest/ What's in it for me? | Authority and social order | Universal ethical principles |
| How can I avoid punishment? | Being good is what pleases other and is determined by majority. Law and order | Right and wrong determined by personal values and a principled conscience |

A comparative analysis of both models allow for the creation of an original assimilated model which include both Garrigou-Lagrange and Lawrence Kohlberg. This

⁵ Garrigou-Lagrange, 226.

integrated model, which blends Kohlberg's moral development with Garrigou-Lagrange's spiritual development, is outlined in Table 5.59.

Table 5.59 Comparative Analysis: Garrigou-Lagrange Three Ages of the Interior Life and Lawrence's Kohlberg's Sequential Moral Development

| | |
|--|--|
| Sequence One Pre-Conventional (Lawrence Kohlberg) & Purgative/ Beginner (Garrigou-Lagrange) | Gifts of the Holy Spirit are latent and moral development has not yet occurred. Self-love and self-interest are pervasive. Moral development and subsequent action is based on self-interest and ensuring that punishment is avoided and ensuring that one's own needs are met. |
| Sequence Two Conventional (Lawrence Kohlberg) & Illuminative/ Proficient | Understanding begins. Self-love is decreasing and moral development is active. Increasing virtues create individual capacity to make increasingly moral decisions. Knowledge and piety (gifts of the spirit) develop and facilitate increasing morality based on adhering to moral standards and maintaining social order. |
| Sequence Three Post-Conventional (Lawrence Kohlberg) & Unitive/ Perfect (Garrigou-Lagrange) | Individuals have progressed to the highest level of moral development where third degree of charity is present and individuals are capable of heroic virtue. Universal ethical principles guide moral decision-making in order to serve the higher good of humankind. |

In summary, the comparison between Kohlberg and Garrigou-Lagrange provides a new model for examining and considering both surveys, which measured moral development and theology respectively. In conclusion, as individuals move along the sequential continuums, they possess increasing capacity to understand and conceptualize a higher form of morality which could, when suitably applied, benefit the greater good. It should again be noted however, that education and training around social justice are needed to supplement moral development and theological understanding.

CHAPTER SIX

Introduction

The problem this thesis project addressed was the presenting disconnect between moral development and theology as applied to contemporary social issues within a Christian context. Understanding the causal relationship between theology and moral development as it applies to contemporary issues is particularly important as it has practice implications not only for social workers and social work educators but also general implications for all of Christendom. The researcher examined Catholic Social Teaching, Non-Violent Atonement theology as well Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development and Reinhold Niebuhr's political theology. The research provided theoretical insight into the moral development and theological perspectives of respondents with regard to public policy and social justice issues. The research offers implications for social professional practice and pedagogy.

The researcher examined the fundamentals of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas to gain an understanding of the theological foundations for understanding how moral development occurs. Furthermore, the researcher examined non-violent atonement theology to gain insight and perspective on how one's perspective on violence manifests itself both politically and culturally and potentially perpetrates systems of oppression and violence. The researcher additionally briefly reviewed Stephan Bevan's contextual theology, which emphasizes the importance of understanding context while

Simultaneously understanding how western constructs of jurisprudence influence moral decision-making. Finally, the researcher surveyed Catholic Social Teaching, a moral doctrine which provides a practical taxonomy for social action which theoretically and practically leads to a more just society.

Discoveries from Theological Reflection and Literature Reviews

Chapter Two: Theological Reflection

Conclusions of Chapter Two

Chapter Two examines specific theological perspectives which shed light onto how beliefs or orthodoxy should shape and inform practice or orthopraxy. The underlying tenet of the chapter is that there exists a primary disconnect between theology and praxis which perpetuates a disengagement in social policy issues and which propagates systems of oppression and violence towards the poor and marginalized people of God's kingdom. A continued failure to understand the political nature of sin and subsequently stand against it implies complicity. A review of non-violent atonement theology calls for an examination of traditionally held beliefs and practices, some of which are rooted in ideas and subsequent structures which enact violence and oppression on the "very least of these." 86 percent of those in the research survey reported being Caucasian. 61 percent grew up in the suburbs while 94 percent reported being middle class or wealthy. These demographics are strongly suggestive of privilege which oftentimes lends itself to a sort of blindness to the struggles of those who are marginalized, poor and oppressed. Examining various interpretations of theology provides insight into how theology and the practice of social justice can be more intricately interwoven.

Discoveries of Chapter Two, Theological Reflection

In an effort to further understand the existing disconnect between moral development, and theology as applied to social policy and related decision-making, the researcher reviewed theological concepts which address challenges related to systematic oppression and marginalization. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was acutely aware of gap between what Christians say they believe and how they subsequently act. Bonhoeffer asserted that Christians need not only care for people who suffer, they are additionally morally obligated to fight and prevail against injustice.¹ The researcher first turned to classical philosophers and theologians, Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas to further explore the concept and gain a foundation of understanding regarding moral development.

The researcher then focused on the political theology of Reinhold Niebuhr who asserted that Christian ethics must begin with love. For Niebuhr, sin exists in both the religious and moral dimensions. He asserted that the moral dimension of sin occurs as injustice. Failure to act in the face of injustice is sin, and for Niebuhr, sin is the assertion of self against others.² Niebuhr also suggests that failure to act in accordance with the dictates of our moral conscience makes human beings complicit with the oppression and subjugation of the poor and oppressed. This is a powerful indictment and call to action. As one becomes increasingly aware of her/ his own moral agency and becomes increasingly morally responsible, the call to action becomes progressively aware of the inevitability of acting against systemic oppression, structural violence and the subjugation of the poor.

¹ Pope, 2.

² Niebuhr, 67.

The research focus then shifted to an examination of Kimberly Vrudny's interpretation of non-violent atonement theology. Vrudny proposes that classical theology, which holds at the center, a God who is both loving and vengeful, is responsible for perpetuating a theology of violence. Insofar as the church embraces a violent God and therefore a theology of violence, so is the church complicit in the subordination and victimization of minority cultures and the poor. Vrudny's critiques both cultural and religious colonialization which continues to perpetrate oppressive cycles. If, she argues, Jesus Christ is the incarnation of love, the good, the true and the beautiful, Christians must consider how to reconcile the co-existence of violence and death with the beauty and goodness of God. It is certainly worthwhile to consider how the rationalization of violence has subversively woven its way into the Christian imagination in such a way that there may be an unconscious or even subconscious acceptance of beliefs and practices that are fundamentally inconsistent with the moral development and the work of social justice. Of even greater significance would be to examine whether or not our theological beliefs are consistent with the teachings of Jesus Christ which should be the foundation upon which we formulate our actions.

The researcher reviewed the six models of contextual theology of Stephan Bevans which include: the translation model, the anthropological model, the praxis model, the synthetic model, the transcendental model and the countercultural model. This research focused on the praxis model as it articulates a model of theology which transcends orthodoxy or right-thinking to provide a model for orthopraxy or right-doing. Bevans' position is that true Christianity must work against oppressive structures and seek to supplant them in their entirety.

Finally, the researcher reviewed the theology of Catholic Social Teaching which promotes tenets that are strikingly consistent with both the fundamental constructs of social justice and with guiding structures of social work practice. Catholic social teaching is rooted in three fundamental declarations: the inviolable dignity of the human person, the essentially social nature of human beings and the belief that the abundance of nature and of social living is given for all people. Similarly, social work's core values are centered around the dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships and social justice. These tenets and values cannot be disseminated and practiced without a highly developed sense of morality and ethics. It is essential to understand that agentic shift can surreptitiously undermine even the best of intentions of an individual or a group. Detecting and dismantling theological concepts and ideas that are ill-informed or which have been promulgated by the agency and which perpetuate cycles of violence and oppression is essential to becoming a morally informed individual fully capable of integrating orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Chapter Three Literature Review

Conclusions of Chapter Three

The findings from the literature review as presented in chapter 2 assisted the researcher in further understanding the presenting disconnect between moral development and theology as applied to contemporary social issues within a Christian context. Chapter 2 provides a framework for understanding the progression of moral development and how, at the hands of social and/ or political constructs, instruments of varying and oftentimes extreme power and influence, apparently moral individuals often act contrarily to their avowed beliefs. In order for an individual or a group to maximize

moral potential and subsequent moral action, it is of considerable importance to understand theories of how moral development occurs and how virtues and morality cannot only be increased but also acted upon.

Discoveries of Chapter Three

In an effort to more effectively understand the existing disconnect between moral development and theology as applied to social policy and related decision-making, the researcher first examined Robert Card's concept of agentic shift. Card suggested that individuals are significantly impacted by situational constructs which have the power to influence an individual's system of beliefs and which can cause a fundamental shift in one's own sense of moral agency. Although individuals have the capacity to act according to the dictates of their conscience, the degree to which an individual can do so is profoundly impacted by the degree to which one's moral and ethical sensibilities have been developed. The researcher reviewed some tenets of classical thought and 20th century psychology to better understand the theories of how virtue and moral development occur.

Thomas Aquinas identified virtues such as wisdom, understanding, knowledge, justice and fortitude and differentiated between acquired and infused virtues. Acquired virtues are increased in an individual through habituation. Infused virtues are those which are given by the Holy Spirit through grace. Aquinas suggested that through the practice of virtues, a human being could become more virtuous.

In the first part of the 20th century, B.F. Skinner and Sigmund Freud addressed the question of moral development. Freud's psychoanalytical theory suggested that human beings become moral as a result of being acted upon by the forces of civilized society.

The capacity of the individual to become moral is significantly reduced from a Freudian perspective. Similarly, Skinner's radical behaviorism and theory of operant conditioning held that all behavior is a consequence of social conditioning. Human beings do not initiate action, but instead react to a series of external stimuli. Both theories, those of Skinner and Freud, negate individual autonomy and human being's capacity to become increasingly moral individuals.

Lawrence Kohlberg suggested that moral development occurs most effectively under favorable social conditions and transpires through a sequential continuum. Kohlberg's theory of moral development proposed three levels, which he identified as pre-conventional, conventional and post conventional. Pre-conventional morality includes two stages: punishment/ obedience orientation and self-interest orientation. Pre-conventional morality includes two stages: interpersonal accord/ conformity and authority/ social order. Post-conventional morality includes two stages: social contract and universal ethical principles. Carol Gilligan criticized Kohlberg's theory and suggested the application of the theory to be limited as Kohlberg's research focused solely on boys and failed to consider the significant differences between the observed behavior and moral decision making of boys and girls.

The political theology of Reinhold, birthed in the shadows of early twentieth century Detroit's industrialist complex, reflected the limitations of human beings to transcend their own interests and to act in ways that moved forward the agenda of social justice. Like Robert Card, Niebuhr believed that in spite of an individual's desire to promulgate social goodwill, the capacity to do so was significantly influenced by group dynamics or as Card suggests, agentic shift. Niebuhr additionally suggests that one can

act benevolently when one's power and/ or position are not threatened however, one's ability to act morally shifts when power differentials change. Niebuhr weaves morality into the fabric of Christian social justice however recognizes the presence of sin and competing self-interests which invariably interfere with humankind's capacity to work towards justice. This is the precise reason that it is essential to understand how moral development occurs and to work towards it as an end. Human beings, left to their own devices, lack the capacity to transcend their own self-interests and act for the common and greater good. Of particular importance is Niebuhr's understanding of the interconnectedness between love and justice. Niebuhr recognizes that it can be extremely challenging to navigate, both theologically and philosophically, the apparent failure of love to transform itself into moral action which could have significant impact on injustice, oppression and suffering. Niebuhr suggests that love, as it appears in this world, is necessarily dependent on justice. They are for Niebuhr both complementary and irreducible.

The findings of this chapter have significant implications for not only social workers but for the body of Christ. Under certain conditions and social constructs, morally good people can act in ways that are inconsistent with their morals and values. It is critical that individuals have a sense of how moral development occurs and a subsequent understanding that it does not occur passively but rather through habituation. Virtue, as Aquinas says, is a two-fold end. It is both infused by the Holy Spirit and acquired through habituation. Human beings must actively pursue becoming morally good and therefore virtuous which, according to Kohlberg's taxonomy can occur in sequential stages. Justice is realized at the hands of morally good people who choose,

often times against agency, to act. Niebuhr's reflection on the inextricably intertwined nature of love and justice provides the foundations of praxis model for social justice. Love cannot be fully realized in this world without acts of justice. Justice cannot occur in the absence of love.

Discoveries of Field Research

The field research provided the researcher an opportunity to gather data which illuminated undergraduate students' perspectives on justice, theology and morality. This addressed the fundamental problem the researcher was attempting to address which was understanding the disconnect between moral development and theology as applied to contemporary social, moral and political issues.

Two surveys were distributed to undergraduate students via Qualtrics. The first survey was developed by the researcher, while the second survey, the DIT-2 is a standardized test developed at the University of Minnesota and administered through the Center for Study of Ethical Development at the University of Alabama. Each of the surveys provided separate quantitative data streams that assisted in the understanding of moral development and theology as applied to contemporary social issues within a Christian context. Numerous findings in the first survey revealed a significant gap in how the concept of justice is understood and applied. There was general agreement that there is a connection between justice and biblical themes. It is of consequence to note that beyond that there were varying degrees of general divergence concerning most other topics. 64% of respondents indicated that there was most likely a difference between God's justice and social justice with 36 percent of respondents indicating their position that God's justice is concerned primarily with rewards and punishment. There was a

significant split on opinions regarding whether or not one is required to love one's enemy. 40 percent of respondents indicated that there is too much focus on justice to the exclusion of other important biblical teaching. Seventy-eight percent of respondents believe that leading people to Christ is the most important responsibility for Christians which implies that the work of social justice is not as important. Eighty-eight percent of respondents believed that God will bring about justice in His own time which creates a space to avoid taking responsibility for the work to which this researcher asserts that we are called. 85 percent of respondents agreed that all people are entitled to the same human rights while 31 percent of respondents agreed that business owners should be allowed to deny services to individuals based on their sexual identity and 34 percent believed that same-sex marriage should be repealed. This data set suggests that the number of people who agreed that among the 85 percent of individuals who agreed that all human beings are entitled to the same rights, there are some who believe there are exceptions to that rule. It is of interest to note that the data suggests that respondents demonstrated an increased willingness to extend the same human rights to refugees rather than individuals who are LGBTQ. This statement is true even though 26 percent of respondents indicated some level of fear that they would be the victim of violence by an undocumented refugee. Yet, respondents were more willing to demonstrate extended human rights to this demographic than to the LGBTQ group.

The Defining Issues Test (DIT-2) provided additional general insight into respondents' views on five ethical case scenarios. Each scenario had 12 accompanying questions. For the purposes of preliminary analysis, the researcher assigned each of the questions to one of Kohlberg's levels of moral development which included pre-

conventional, conventional and post-conventional. The researcher used the raw data as well as the newly developed schema to interpret the data.

Discoveries from Survey One: Theology and Social Justice

It was interesting to note that 64 percent of students articulated a belief that social justice is different from God's justice while 35 percent indicated that there was no difference. This finding demonstrates a significant divergence in how justice is understood by undergraduate students at a faith-based institution. This has significant implications in that if individuals cannot agree on the definition of justice, it would be safe to assume that there is not a shared view of how justice should be carried out by individuals or by the community. This difference in how justice is defined is also made apparent as 36 percent of students believed that God's justice concerns itself primarily with rewards and punishment while 64 percent disagreed. There was disagreement about whether or not justice mandates that we love our enemy as nearly 56 percent of respondents agreed that we should love our neighbor while nearly 43 percent disagreed. There was general consensus (97.5 percent of respondents agreed) that there is a connection between major biblical themes and justice however the data is clear that there is not a consensus regarding the definition of justice or how justice should occur. 77.5 percent of respondents believe that leading people to Christ is the most important responsibility that a Christian has which conceivably implies that for the large majority of those surveyed, evangelism takes precedence over the work of justice. More research would be required to determine this. The response to the statement, "God is in control and will bring about justice in His own time" is imaginably suggestive of the idea that justice is God's responsibility which might potentially provide some absolution of

responsibility for individuals from seeking justice. Further research would also be necessary to verify this theory.

It is of significance to note that the data reflects that 90 percent of respondents reported that social justice is a part of their faith practice however, the research did not point to what the specifics or tangible aspects of what the respondents social justice practice actually is. Further research would be needed to investigate this. Given that there is a significant divergence in the understanding of what social justice is, it is conceivable that this data point, if further evaluated, could potentially yield results that would provide significant insight into the space between what an individual believes and how that individual subsequently chooses to act.

An additional observation of interest is as follows: 90 percent of respondents indicated that social justice is a part of their faith practice. 86 percent of respondents reported that all people are entitled to the same human rights while 85% indicated that from a biblical perspective justice for the poor is important. However, 31 percent of respondents believed that businesses should be permitted to refuse service to individuals based on their sexual identity. Similarly 33 percent of respondents agreed that same-sex marriage should be repealed. These data points demonstrate the variances in defining human rights and social justice.

It is also of interest to note that 26 percent of respondents expressed varying levels of fear about being victimized by a terrorist attack by an undocumented refugee. However, only 5 percent believed that undocumented workers should be deported. Additionally, 60 percent of respondents believe that there should be a pathway to

citizenship while an additional 16 percent believe that refugees should be allowed to become residents.

The data infers that despite the significant differences in the characterizations of what social justice is and how it should be operationalized, there were additional identified differences in terms of how open respondents were to considering the rights for refugees (5 percent indicated to deport) versus the rights of the LGBTQ community (31 percent reported right to refuse service, 33 percent supported repealing same sex marriage).

The findings demonstrate that there is significant work to be done in terms of defining social justice and understanding how applied social justice is operationalized. It is clear that respondents disagree on whether or not it is the primary function of people of faith or if God will ultimately take care of justice and it is therefore of lesser importance to an individual's day-to-day life. The data supports that the presenting problem of the thesis, the disconnect between moral development and theology as applied to contemporary social issues within a Christian context, is indeed a complex matter and worthy of further addressing in order to understand how to most effectively address the issue across contexts.

Discoveries from Survey Two: Defining Issues Test (DIT-2)

The DIT-2 underwent two types of analysis. First, a preliminary analysis and interpretation of the raw data from the Qualtrics survey was performed by the researcher. The researcher developed a method of analysis whereby each of the 12 questions in each of the five ethical case scenario categories (72 questions) were assigned to Kohlberg's three levels of moral development. This allowed the researcher to make some

observations about the results that were important to the overall findings. Second, because the DIT-2 is a standardized test which was developed at the University of Minnesota and is administered through the Center for the Study of Ethical Development at the University of Alabama, the researcher was able to run an SPSS statistical analysis on the data. This second mode of analysis proved to be challenging. The specifics of the challenges will be explicated later in this chapter.

The preliminary analysis of the data indicated fairly straightforward results for ethical case scenarios one, two and three. The data for ethical case scenario #1 regarding the famine indicated that 41 percent of respondents demonstrated post-conventional decision-making by indicating that Mustaq Singh should steal the food and that stealing the food represented the application of higher universal ethical principles and a principled conscience. It was determined by the researcher that those who could not decide were in a transitional stage of morality, transitioning either from pre-conventional morality to conventional morality or from conventional morality to post-conventional morality. This is consistent with Kohlberg's sequential schema of moral development. Twenty-nine percent of respondents indicated that Mustaq Singh should not steal the food, which according to Kohlberg's schema and the researcher's analytical methodology, indicated pre-conventional or conventional morality. Choosing not to steal the food for fear of punishment demonstrates pre-conventional morality. Choosing not to steal the food because it would be against the law demonstrates conventional morality.

Similarly, in the ethical Case Scenario Two regarding the reporter, 56 percent of respondents demonstrated post-conventional morality while, 21 percent were in transition. 22 percent demonstrated either pro-conventional or conventional morality.

Accessing the statistical data would provide additional insight into the actual delineations between levels one and two. In case scenario three regarding the school board, similar results were found. 56 percent of respondents demonstrated post-conventional, 21 percent were transitioning between levels and 23 percent were pre-conventional or conventional. Ethical Case Scenario Four regarding the administration of medication, which would hasten the death of a woman who was suffering, proved to be more challenging to navigate for respondents. It was additionally challenging to interpret the preliminary results based on the researcher's method of analyzing the data. A significant challenge to interpreting this data based on the researcher's method and design to interpret data, was the inability of the researcher to establish neutrality regarding case scenario four specifically. It should be noted that the researcher attempted to ensure that the design and assignment of research questions to Kohlberg's moral schema that were used for preliminary data assessment were consistent with the researcher's interpretation of the other ethical case scenarios. As such, the results for ethical case study four stood out in that only 28 percent of students ascribed to post-conventional morality which for the purposes of this measurement tool indicated that they would advocate for the administration of excess medication to lessen the suffering of the women while simultaneously hastening her death, while 37 percent were undecided. 35 percent indicated that they would not support the administration of the medication outside the prescribed dosage.

It is worth noting that the findings in ethical Case Study Four were similar to the findings related to the rights of LGBTQ issues in Survey One, in that students appeared to take exception to their application of social justice as it has been defined from a

sociological perspective. One feasible explanation for the variance is the fact that those surveyed is that 75 percent of respondents reported that they are definitely or probably evangelical while 66 percent reported that they are pro-life. This data indicates that evangelicals hold closely to the sanctity of human life. By extension, one can conclude that the sanctity of life also extends to people who are suffering from sickness and that for evangelicals, only God has the right to give and take life.

The field research yielded significant findings which have important implications and offerings not only for social work practitioners and educators but also for faith-based institutions of higher learning. The research showed clearly that there is a lack of agreement on what social justice is and how God directs His people regarding justice. If respondents cannot agree on what social justice is and who is responsible for it, there is a significant challenge in terms of understanding how to teach it, understand it and ultimately practice it.

Emergent intersections of the analysis of non-violent atonement theology and Kohlberg's sequential stages are also noteworthy. Adopting a theology of violence can be and has been viewed as a means to an end. Violence is tolerated, overlooked or condoned in many situations and constructs because it produces a desired result. Kohlberg would view this kind of thinking as pre-conventional or at best conventional thinking. Justifying violence to reach an end could be analyzed as advancing self-interests. Perpetrating a violent punishment might also be rationalized as means to obtain compliance and obedience. Kohlberg would categorize each of these as pre-conventional. If iterations of violence were justified in order to comply with authority or to maintain social order, one would be operating at the conventional stage of morality. In contrast, the response to

Apartheid that was referenced in the discussion of non-violent atonement theology, demonstrated a post-conventional response as forgiveness, as opposed to retribution, expresses a higher level of moral development, grounded in universal principles that uphold the common good of all of humanity.

In review, an analysis of data from both data streams demonstrate significant findings which offer essential discoveries that are relevant to social work practitioners, social work educators and educators in faith-based institutions. The data clearly demonstrates that high moral development does not specifically correlate to a sound understanding of social justice or applied social justice in political, practical or personal contexts. Additionally, the subjectivity of moral development create challenges for educators and practitioners alike as both attempt to navigate moral and ethical complexities. Furthermore, assessed levels of high moral development do not necessarily equip individuals to stand against forces of agency or immoral society. This is precisely why additional work is needed in order to understand how to effectively educate people of faith to become morally and theologically proficient so that they are prepared to do work towards social justice for all of humankind.

Conclusions

The problem this research addressed was the presenting disconnect between moral development and theology as applied to contemporary social issues within a Christian context. The researcher examined Catholic Social Teaching, Non-violent Atonement Theology as well as Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development and Reinhold Niebuhr's political theology in order to better understand how moral development occurs

and how it impacts personal moral and theological perspectives with regard to social policy issues.

First, the researcher concluded that according to Kohlberg's theory of moral development, Bethel University's undergraduate students demonstrated a higher level of moral development as compared to those who have taken the test (n=6898).

Second, findings indicated that there was a lack of agreement in many areas. Consider the following: while a significant majority (80 percent) agree that justice for the poor is important, there was no agreement on how the concepts such as rewards/punishment, and loving one's enemy should influence the operationalization of justice. 97.5% agree that there is a connection between biblical themes and justice, 77.5 percent agreed that evangelism was the primary responsibility of Christians while 87.5 percent believed that justice will ultimately be brought about by God. Furthermore, 86.25 percent believed that everyone is entitled to the same human rights. There were however, significant variances in terms of how the construct of "human rights" was interpreted given that there was significant variance in the allocation of justice depending on who was on the receiving end of justice – refugees or LGTQ for example.

Third, the DIT-2 data revealed that ethical scenario that presented the greatest challenge for respondents was the "Cancer" scenario in which students had to wrestle with an issue that deals with the sanctity of life. While 66.25 percent of respondents indicated in the Qualtrics survey that they were pro-life, only 35.09 percent of respondents indicated that the medicine should be withheld. If the results of those who could not decide were collapsed with the results for those who indicated that the medicine should be withheld, the result would be 71.93 percent who were either uncertain or who

would not support the administration of the medication. This number is somewhat consistent across surveys.

Fourth, it is of significance to note that, as only general agreement exists in terms of the importance of social justice and that it should be applied, more attention should be given to how moral development occurs, is taught and the specifics of what it is and how it is applied in undergraduate settings. It seems to be assumed that as faith-based institutions, there is an understanding of how to integrate the two and that subsequently, students are well-versed at understanding applied social justice. This research demonstrates that this is not the case.

Fifth, as a result of researching non-violent atonement theology and Reinhold Niebuhr's political theology, further consideration must be given to understand how political and theological constructs of violence perpetuate systems of violence and oppression which subjugate the poor and suffering people of this world.

Finally, it is of significance to note that there has been a vast amount of classical and contemporary literature written about moral and ethical development. It is too often overlooked or taught in such a way that it has little or no impact on the actual moral development of the individual. Determining how to educate people of all faiths, but particularly Christian people, in such a way that there occurs an awakening of the practice of moral development which informs applied social justice could have significant impact on people who suffer and are oppressed.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths of the Research

The research focused on undergraduate students in a faith-based institution to which the researcher had ready access. The research also focused on a practical life-application issue regarding the application of morality and theology as they apply to issues related to social justice. These considerations are important in the research context and provided offerings that are potentially valuable to the researcher as a social work practitioner, and as a social work educator. There are additional findings that could be of significance to the institution as it seeks to become a place of higher learning which effectively integrates social justice into its mission.

The used of a standardized test provided the researcher with a method of identifying the moral development of respondents through an established baseline of measuring morality and which was in alignment with the identified literature.

The use of the additional survey provided the researcher with an opportunity to examine general attitudes and beliefs of the respondents. The survey tool created by the researcher was accessible and straight-forward for research participants. The data yielded interesting results and generated new questions which could inform future research. Additionally, as a full-time faculty member, the researcher had access to students which facilitated data collection and allowed the researcher to walk away with tangible next steps.

Weaknesses of the Research

The research project had some identified weaknesses and limitations. First, the research was conducted at Bethel University and therefore the data collected was limited

to Bethel undergraduate students. Although this allowed the researcher to make some discoveries about this population, additional data would have provided better outcomes and more generalizable findings. The sample size was relatively small. Even though the researcher sent out emails to 500 students, the response rate was only about 20 percent. Some of the data that was collected had to be excluded because it was incomplete. An improved response rate might have been received if the researcher had offered an incentive. The surveys were also disseminated at the end of the semester and just before the Christmas break. Students were tired and facing finals and were reluctant to take on additional work. Survey One which was created by the researcher was very straightforward and easy to take. Survey Two, the DIT-2 was very time consuming and complicated and numerous students became frustrated with the survey and did not complete it. The majority of students surveyed were social work and sociology students who tend to have more contact with and exposure to social justice issues. Additional respondents indicated their majors to be as follows: psychology (5), nursing (3), communications (2), elementary education (2), Bible and theology (2), art (1), theater arts (1), chemistry (1), finance (1), math (1), sociology (1), Spanish (1), biochemistry (1), business (1), and environmental science (1). It would be interesting to examine differences in views on social justice and moral development between majors and a larger sample would be necessary to measure any significant findings. It would also be interesting to examine differences between faith-based institutions and secular institutions.

Some additional weaknesses in the research include the inability to gather qualitative data through open-ended survey questions. For example, results indicated that

respondents believed that 64 percent of respondents believe that there is a difference between God's justice and social justice. The research provides no data on what those differences are. This would be critical information for this research and could have been gathered through focus groups or individual interviews. Additionally, 42.5 percent of respondents indicated that they believe that, according to the bible, they do not have to love their enemies. Again, the research is limited and does not provide any insight into this question which could potentially have significant theological implications with regard to the role that violence plays in theology. The research falls short of identifying what respondents believe when they state that God is in control and will bring about justice in His own time. It would be important to assess whether or not this is interpreted as a way to circumvent the call to social justice and action.

The most difficult challenge and weakness of the research was the statistical analysis of the DIT-2 survey. The researcher acquired the DIT-2 manual from the University of Alabama however it did not include a code book which made it difficult to complete the statistical analysis of the data. The DIT-2 was significantly more complicated to interpret than the researcher realized however, that was not discovered until the test had been administered, the raw data submitted to the University of Alabama and the results returned. The researcher spent a significant amount of time learning how to interpret the data. It should be noted that principle investigators who has not worked with a specific instrument prior to the research, should perhaps avoid doing so.

The research design had numerous issues which presented challenges. During test runs of the DIT-2, it was noted that both the online and paper versions of the DIT-2 were confusing and that sufficient direction on how to take the test was not provided. Study

participants corroborated this preliminary analysis. Prior to dissemination of the surveys, the researcher contacted the Center for the Study of Ethical Development who is responsible for test administration and analysis to inquire about specific directions. The researcher was informed that further directions are not provided to study participants. Given that study participants reported this, it is highly probably that the incompleteness rate is tied directly with the complexity of the DIT-2.

Ideally, outcomes and findings would have been improved had the data from the two surveys been linked together so that more variables examined and relationships identified. However, this was difficult to do in that one survey was a standardized test while the other one was an original tool. Finally, because the goal of the research was to understand the interrelatedness of moral development, theology and social justice and finding a way to assimilate the data, would have provided data which measured the connections more effectively. To remedy this, the researcher established a comparative method to analyze data based on Kohlberg's stages and the questions in the DIT-2 test. Additionally, the researcher conducted an analysis to compare both surveys and identify significant findings.

CHAPTER 7: REFLECTIONS

Acts of Justice as Reflections of Beauty

In *She Who Imagines: Feminist Theological Ethics*, the authors reference Dorothy Day who, through her work, intentionally connects justice with beauty. Dorothy Day believed she had a “duty to see beauty” and a simultaneous “determination not to be blind to the beauty around her.”¹ In fact, Dorothy Day believed in the power of images of good and beautiful things to counter the troubles and bitterness of the world.² Day’s concept of beauty was that it was “deeply relational and oriented toward loving union with God and, perhaps more important, with persons she made it her duty to know and love.”³ Dorothy Day’s work took her deep into the heart of suffering and sickness, of poverty and despair. It was there, in the darkness that she saw and understood the sacred connection between suffering and beauty and how the two simultaneously revealed the very nature of God Himself. This connection between the beautiful and the just is a critical one. Performing acts of social justice always moves us closer to that which is good, true and beautiful, both in ourselves, in others and in our communities.

For the majority of my life, I have been blessed to work with people who suffer and who are sick, those who struggle with mental illness or homelessness, people who are

¹ Laurie Cassidy and Maureen H. O’Connell, eds., *She Who Imagines: Feminist Theological Aesthetics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 163.

² Cassidy and O’Connell, 164.

³ Cassidy and O’Connell, 163.

abused, abandoned and afraid. And yet, it is in those unexpected places and spaces that I have encountered the sacred presence of God in ways that are very real and beautiful and which are, almost inexpressible.

Kimberly Vrudny's understanding is that Beauty is a name for God, an idea that is Platonic in its origin and which was further introduced and advanced in Christianity by Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. Vrudny states that as Trinitarians, "it is appropriate still to think of the True, Good, and Beautiful as names for the Being of God, with the true revealed by the Holy Spirit, expressed through wisdom, and studied by logic; with the good revealed by the Creator, expressed through justice, studied by ethics; and with the beautiful revealed by Christ, expressed through compassion, literally meaning, "suffering with," and studied by aesthetics.¹

This is a lovely construct. Truth is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. We apply our sense of intellect and logic and we increase in wisdom. Beauty is revealed to us through Christ himself, expressed in compassion, through suffering. And we come to understand it more through the study of aesthetics. Of specific interest to this research project is the idea of the "Good which is expressed through justice and studied by ethics." If indeed the True, Good and Beautiful are all names for God, the inference is that the very nature of God is expressed through justice and ethics. Justice as an expression of the beautiful is not something that has ever occurred to me. And in order to express justice most effectively here on earth, we must seek to understand how to become people who practice social justice as expressions of our faith. By extension, we are also compelled to understand how to become moral human beings, capable of working towards justice,

¹ Vrudny, "Conforming Beauty: Amnesty International's Campaign Against Child Soldiers Society for the Arts," *Religious and Theological Studies* vol. 22, no. 2 (2010): 8.

bringing heaven down to earth. According to Vrudny, seeking to understand the good, which is justice, is done through the study of ethics.

As I reflected on this research process, I recalled St. John of Damascus's *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*. In it he argues that dismissing the inclusion of icons as central to spiritual practice on account of pagan abuse would seriously "threaten something central to the whole fabric of Christian theology."² And I would argue that, for Christians, dismissing or ignoring the practice of social justice similarly threatens the fabric of Christianity and the work to which we are called, by Christ to do.

As I further reflected on the concept of beauty as justice, I could not help but think about great works of art, of nature, of poetry and music. Paul Tillich states that it is indeed possible to look at various works of art and to experience an "immediate revelation of an absolute reality in the relative things; the depth content of the world, experienced in the artist's religious ecstasy [which] shines through things [and] have become sacred objects."³ This has been true for me, as I look at nature, listen to music, read a poem, I have, in inexpressible ways, experienced God. The great poet, William Wordsworth hints at this idea in his poem *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* that is deeply transcendental in nature. Wordsworth says, "To me the meanest flower that blows can give thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."⁴ "Too deep for tears" implies something that is sacred and that speaks to us in the very depths of our beings. If as Paul Tillich asserts, God is in present in the subatomic structures of life,

² St. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 10.

³ Paul Tillich, *On Art and Architecture* (Crossroad, New York, 1989), xix.

⁴ William Wordsworth, "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," *Bartleby.com: Great Books Online*, accessed March, 2017, <http://www.bartleby.com/145/ww331.html>

so too is he present in the acts that we do and in the people of God's kingdom. For Tillich, great works of art contained within them the transcendent, things which point beyond themselves, to the sacred and the divine. And likewise, so should social justice reflect that which is beyond itself, pointing to God Himself who calls us to these acts of justice, mercy and love. We do not do acts of justice for the sake of doing acts of justice. And these acts of justice are not in and of themselves an end, but rather a means to an end. And that end is God, the Good, the True and the Beautiful.

This research project went through multiple iterations before I finally arrived on the study of this particular topic. Long have I wondered how all of these things (morality, virtue, theology and social justice) fit together. The research study does not directly address the concept of beauty but for me, the quest for better knowing God, the True, the Good and the Beautiful, undergirds all that I do. This idea of the relationship between justice and beauty only occurred to me as a result of the act of reflection. Beauty is intertwined with suffering. I have seen this in the homeless shelter. I have experienced it in countries plagued by famine and draught. I have seen it on the streets. I have seen it in the eyes of people. I have heard it in their song. Addressing suffering is at the heart of social justice. When we act justly, it points beyond us to the Creator of all things. Just as we should view sacred images with caution, so should we approach the art of becoming morally good and virtuous and the work of social justice: with caution, lest we fail to see beyond the thing itself.

It is not a far stretch to consider that acts of justice are synonymous with that which is good. And those things that we do for others, when we stand for those who are oppressed, even when we disagree with them, when we love because we choose, those

good acts are beautiful. And when we do good, we reflect the truths that were taught to us by the incarnate Christ, the Word made flesh. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus says “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recover of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.” (Lk4:18-19) He calls us to love our neighbors and our enemies. (Matthew 5:44) Jesus says to those who follow His commands, “Come you blessed of my Father, for I was hungry and you fed me...when you did it to the lowliest of my brothers and sisters, you did it unto me.” (Matthew 25:31-46.)

“Just as Dorothy Day believed in the power of images of good and beautiful things to counter the troubles of the world and bitterness of the world,”⁵ perhaps the same can be said of good acts of justice. I have seen the ugliness of poverty reveal the beauty of God. And I know that God calls us to action. We should also understand that becoming virtuous can have an impact on moral society and can contribute to the creation of a more just and beautiful society. And a more just society can have the power to influence the individual. It has the potential to be a beautiful upward spiral that ultimately creates goodness and beauty in the individual and in society. Instead of the agentic shift (to which Robert Card refers) having the power to influence otherwise morally good individuals to make immoral decisions, or decisions which are inconsistent with their beliefs, it instead evolves into an agency that promulgates that which is good, true and beautiful.

God, justice, beauty and ethics are inextricably intertwined. And it was the study of the intersections of justice, ethics and morality that this research attempted to

⁵ Cassidy and O’Connell, 163.

understand. Plato speaks to the notion and power of beauty to bring to forth virtue and a beautiful reality.

But what if man had eyes to see the true beauty – the divine beauty, I mean, pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colors and vanities of human life – thither looking, and holding converse with the true beauty divine and simple, and bringing into being and educating true creations of virtue and not idols only? Do you not see that in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty but realities; for he has hold not of any image but of a reality, and bringing forth and educating true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if moral men may, would that be an ignoble life?⁶

What Next?

As has already been discussed, there is a significant amount of follow-up research, most likely to be done qualitatively (open-ended questions, focus groups) to gather additional information about the questions that were not answered. I am very interested in becoming more of an expert on how to engage students to become passionate about moral and ethical development and how that is connected to social justice. I am interested in further exploring and writing about justice as beauty and as a reflection of God Himself. I hope to integrate all of this into my curriculum in the Social Work program which already addresses these issues. What I have learned here will allow me to create course content and trainings that are specifically related to this research. I would additionally like to apply for an Edgren Scholarship at Bethel University to do more research about this topic.

What I Would Have Done Differently?

Had I known then what I know now, the survey that I developed would have had different questions and the research would have included focus groups and open-ended

⁶ Plato, 33-34.

questions. Additional questions would have been added to gain an understanding about student perceptions of theology and violence. I would have attempted to link the two survey instruments together to acquire more accurate comparative data. analysis. I would have received some training and feedback about the DIT-2 prior to implementing it with the subjects. In retrospect, I would have looked at different materials that I subsequently came across, both in the theological reflection and the literature review. Some of the material would have been the same, but I would have included additions and excluded others. There is so much to cover and this is only a start!

A Final Thought

On a final note, these past days have been tumultuous to say the least. The Russian parliament voted 380-3 to decriminalize domestic violence while on the same day, an executive order was issued from the office of the president placing a temporary ban on nearly 218 million people worldwide. Just hours ago, Israel announced that for the first time in over a decade it would begin construction on a new settlement in the West Bank. Hate and fear move easily amongst us and fear reaches out to swallow us up. I am reminded of William Butler Yeats prophetic poem, *The Second Coming* where he writes,

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.
 Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
 The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
 When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it

Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?⁷

Yet, it is in this dark hour, that I call upon Beauty itself, on Truth and Goodness, to whisper to me. And it is that voice of God that compels me to resist succumbing to fear, that calls me to move beyond it, knowing that I will find the Good, the True and the Beautiful not only in the most ordinary of places, but in the darkest and loneliest of places. His eye is on the sparrow. And that is the greatest of consolations.

⁷ William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming," (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008) 188-201.

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