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Deliberative Democratic Theological Education: A Proposal for Youth Ministry that Builds Peace

Abstract

Our current context of political division requires that we help students learn how to empathize with people from different perspectives, engage in conflict constructively, resist either/or thinking, overcome disempowerment, and understand the impact of beliefs on their actions. Young people are already leading movements to transform the violent cultures around them — most prominently, the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school, and the originators of both the Standing Rock protests and the Black Lives Matter movement—*but churches are notably absent in supporting and mentoring such leaders.* Yet, Christian tradition and practice has the depth of wisdom to equip young people to resist apathy and despair and become active in transforming violence and oppression as part of their Christian vocation. Young people can be peacebuilders—engaged citizens who address the root causes of hatred and abuse of power in order to build more just and peaceful communities. Drawing on research in deliberative pedagogy, this paper will develop in depth one piece of a larger project that envisions peace education as an essential component of youth ministry. The paper proposes a sacred pedagogy that engages theological concepts through deliberative, democratic discussion, teaching young people skills in engaging across difference as well as habits of deliberative theological thinking for a lifetime of spiritual growth. The specific example of engaging the problem of how we imagine Jesus will serve as an illustration of the potential for a series of curricular materials for use in congregational youth settings.

Introduction

As director of the Youth Theological Initiative (YTI) for the past twelve years, I have had the privilege of walking alongside hundreds of young people from a wide range of geographic, cultural, racial, gender, affectional, theological, political, and socio-economic experiences and identities. By bringing together a diverse group of young people and adult mentors to explore questions raised by Christian tradition, scripture, and experience, we have successfully cultivated an ethos of theological reflection that can, in the words of this year's call for proposals, "foster dialogue across deep religious, political, and other difference." However, my current research in the field of civic engagement and deliberative democracy has pushed me to develop the YTI approach beyond its current context. According to Peter Levine, the practice of deliberative democracy "gives individuals the chance to live (however briefly) and to experience (however artificially) the essential meaning of democracy: free and equal citizens with an equal opportunity to participate in a shared public life and to shape decisions that affect their lives."[1] Levine et al go on to outline ways civic groups can design deliberative democratic engagements in order to make informed decisions collaboratively. What if young people, as part of the process of developing a mature faith, could use some of these tools in order to make informed decisions about what to believe and how to act, based on deliberative discussion with each other, with their adult mentors, and with scripture and tradition? What if they could learn to empathize with people who hold different views, considering these views both appreciatively and critically without resorting to *ad hominem* attacks or suppressing legitimate concerns? What if they could arrive at their beliefs through a process that pushes them to make informed decisions about the impact their beliefs might have on their own behavior? What if they could be invited into a communal process of theological discourse that affirms questions and doubts—and yes, disagreement? By focusing on deliberative democratic practice, this proposed sacred pedagogy lifts up the deliberative character of the Christian tradition itself—following Jesus' own model, Christian theology questions, debates, negotiates, and questions anew the articulations and applications of doctrine and practice, based on new encounters with the world, each other, and God—and leverages the wisdom developed in civic renewal and social justice movements to *teach theology democratically, and democracy theologically*.

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[1] John Gastil and Peter Levine, eds., *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the Twenty-First Century* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2005), 30.

Deliberative Theology as Christian Discipleship

Our only canonical story about Jesus as a teenager comes from the Gospel of Luke, chapter two, the story of Jesus in the Temple. Though many of us who work with youth might wish that we had more stories of Jesus from this age, Luke sets this story up to underscore its importance, and the details give us much to consider. To set the context, recall that Luke gives the reader great detail about Jesus' birth and his childhood, more so than any other gospel. He then ends his account of Jesus' first phase of life with the phrase, "The child grew up and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him" (Lk 2:40).[2] Luke closes out the second phase of Jesus' life with similar words by stating, "Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people" (Lk 2:52). These two versus bracket the story in between them, highlighting Jesus' time in the Temple as a critical moment of his growth in wisdom and favor.

The story of Jesus in the Temple can easily be told as a story of Jesus' precocity. Of course, as the Son of God, we should not be surprised that Jesus is wise beyond his years and amazing the people around him; indeed, this is a common trope for hero stories that Luke's readers would recognize. But, this story gives us more than a sneak peek into who Jesus will become when we meet him again after his baptism and temptation in the desert. It shows us a few things about what a teenager who seeks to follow Jesus can do *as a teenager*. First, when Jesus' parents find him in the Temple, they discover him "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and putting questions to them" (2:46). In other words, Jesus is *learning through deliberative discussion*. There is a give and take—he is asking questions and listening to what the others are saying. Second, he is doing this *with adults*. He is sitting among the most learned in his faith tradition and seeking to grow in wisdom through this process of give and take with those who are taking him seriously as an interlocutor. Third, he is doing this *in public*. The story suggests there are many around who overheard these conversations, and were paying close attention, since they were "amazed" by what they saw. Fourth, this was not just any public space, this was the Temple in Jerusalem, the *seat of power* for his religious community. Jesus the teenager makes a point of engaging in serious theological study, through dialogue, with adults, in public, in the center of power. He is *not* lecturing, or passively receiving a lecture, and he is not off in a separate room away from where the adults are studying. He is where the action is, and the action is doing theology through deliberation and dialogue.

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[2] All biblical quotations are from the Common English Bible.

In *How to Think Theologically*, Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke insist that doing theology is at the core of what it means to be a Christian, and doing deliberative theology is the responsibility of all conscientious Christians.[3] For them, every Christian, regardless of age or educational background, is a theologian—"there are no exceptions." When we claim the identity of Christian, we are proclaiming that our lives in some way reflect a set of beliefs. Of course, our actions often do not reflect what we aspire to when we say we want to follow Jesus, but our actions do reflect something—what Stone and Duke call an "embedded theology." Embedded theology is "the implicit theology that Christians live out in their daily lives." It includes "the theological messages intrinsic in and communicated by praying, preaching, hymn singing, personal conduct, liturgy, social action or inaction, and virtually everything else people say and do in the name of their Christian faith."[4] Because embedded theology is implicit, we are often not aware of how it shapes our actions, but it does. This is the theology we see most often when people argue with each other in social media about abortion, or LGBTQIA+ rights, or the death penalty, or what to do about refugees and immigrants. It is often the theology that informs how and whether we vote, how we engage our families and friends, and the decisions we make in our work and play. We learn it by seeing, hearing and doing from the moment we join a Christian community—in children's sermons and baptismal liturgies, in retreats and mission trips, in prayers and taking communion, by watching our pastors and the other congregants, by reading the Bible though the lens of our community.

Deliberative theological reflection is a process of asking critical questions about our embedded theological convictions, and it is a challenge for many Christians to undertake. Deliberative theologians examine what they have taken for granted, consider the widest possible range of alternative understandings, and seek to articulate the meaning of their faith, clearly and coherently, in light of what these new understandings lead them to conclude. It requires humility, for such theologians must be open to the possibility that they can learn from sources they might not have considered before. It requires curiosity, for such theologians must be eager to learn and explore. It requires trust, for such theologians trust that God is with them on this journey, even when doubts threaten to shatter deeply-held beliefs and complexity makes them grieve over a lost simplicity. And, it requires community, for such theologians cannot discover the full range of alternative understandings without dialogue partners from among the Christian tradition as well as supportive friends and mentors around them.

In our work at the Youth Theological Initiative, we encourage young people to join us in the practice of deliberative theological reflection. For many years, our tagline was, "Exploring Questions that Shape Us." In the application to our program, we ask youth to name any theological questions they would like to explore while participating in our program. There are a variety of answers, but the vast majority are questions that really smart, deeply faithful Christians have been wrestling with since the church began: Why is there suffering and injustice? What happens after we die? What does it mean to lead a good life? What is God's will for my life? Will my Muslim/Jewish/Hindu/Atheist friend go to hell? The joy of doing theology is the realization that once you embark on this deliberative process of asking the harder questions, you don't have to do it alone. As Stone and Duke note, "To engage in theological reflection is to join in an ongoing conversation with others that began long before we ever came along and will continue long after we have passed away."[5] Theology is a "perpetual conversation," and you—yes you, that young person with questions and doubts and frustrations with the surface level conversations happening around you—get to be part of it.

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[3] Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2013), 1-2, 20-21; 25.

[4] Stone and Duke, *Think Theologically*, 15.

Deliberative theological reflection is a process, and Jesus the teenager shows us how to do it. Duke and Stone describe deliberative theological reflection as a process that is,

> …linked by two common techniques: *listening* and *questioning*. Listening involves an active waiting that allows new information in, is prepared to be surprised and remains open to the illumination of the Spirit. Questioning is a corrective to complacency—the danger of becoming satisfied with old answers and preconceptions…The aim of listening is receptivity; the aim of questioning is honesty. (xiv)

When Jesus is sitting in the Temple, Luke describes him as "listening" and "putting questions" to the scholars around him. By both listening and questioning, Jesus the teenager models for us the deliberative posture Duke and Stone encourage conscientious Christians to adopt. By doing this while sitting among the teachers, Jesus the teenager shows us that deliberative theology is not to be done by ourselves, but with others who take us seriously as dialogue partners. By doing this in the Temple, Jesus the teenager shows us that this work is so important, it must be done at the very center of our institutions, in public, and where the action is.

Deliberative Pedagogy as an Approach to Theological Reflection and Faith Formation

While Duke and Stone describe their method of doing theology as deliberative, and suggest that the core of deliberation is listening and questioning, the field of deliberative pedagogy offers some further refinement of what the practice of deliberation can mean. *Deliberation* is distinct from both *discussion* and *debate*. According to the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service, "the goal of discussion is to learn more about a particular topic and strengthen interpersonal relationships," and involves "maintaining a cordial exchange of ideas…and accepting the views of others without questioning or confrontation." Because a central aim is to get to know each other and build community, discussion will always be an important part of youth fellowship, and is often the general process used in bible study and small groups in churches. Debate, on the other hand, focuses on "exploration of two different positions, characterized by searching for weaknesses in the other's position, defending your position, [and] valuing the solution to the problem as more important that the relationship between the debaters." The goal of debate is to have a clear winner and loser. In the church, we see this practice used most often when large numbers of members gather to make decisions about policy and church positions on social issues (e.g. conferences, assemblies, conventions). While it does have its value in making it fairly efficient to make a large number of decisions in a concentrated period of time, anyone who has attended a large church gathering where serious disagreement about church policy is present knows that relationships among members suffer greatly in the midst of this process. Deliberation, however, seeks to bring the best of discussion and debate together by "working together to make a decision," using a process that searches for "value in alternative views of the issue." This process enlarges or even changes participants' understanding of the issue, acknowledges "that many people have pieces of the answer and that together participants can develop a workable solution," listens "to understand the priorities and values of others," and weighs the drawbacks and benefits of the various approaches, thus arriving at a goal of finding common ground for action.[6] In other words, deliberation seeks to make significant decisions for action while attending to relationship and learning more about each other and about the topic at hand.

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[5] Stone and Duke, *Think Theologically*, 4.

Deliberative pedagogy is a specific set of teaching practices inspired by the goals of deliberation and deliberative democracy. [7] From middle school students discussing what to do about bullying, to high school students wrestling with public policy options for reducing greenhouse gasses in their environmental science class, to college students leading forums with their peers on the challenges of diversity on their campus, young people are participating in democratic experiments as part of their education. In *Deliberation in the Classroom: Fostering Critical Thinking, Community, and Citizenship in Schools*, Stacie Molnar-Main describes what it looks like to teach deliberation with students:

> In classrooms where public deliberation is practiced, learners engage in inquiry about complex issues and participate in deliberative discussions. During deliberative discussions, students consider different perspectives on a social problem, identify and work through tensions related to different approaches to addressing the problem, and attempt to arrive at reasoned judgment together. In contrast to processes that encourage consensus or compromise, the goal of deliberation is not to produce complete agreement among participants. The broad goals, among other curricular goals, are to promote improved understanding of the issue, awareness of the consequences of various responses, and recognition of commonly held values that can inform future action."[8]

Molnar-Main points out that*,* without intentional introduction of deliberative practices in the classroom, "it is quite possible that a child could grow up without experiencing an example of democratic politics in which people of different viewpoints work together for the common good." Unlike the toxic spaces on social media, on cable news, in the halls of government, and even in the gatherings of our denominations, the classroom—and perhaps, the youth group room—can become a space for diverse individuals to come together to identify common ground, and connect their learning to civic action.[9]

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[6] Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service, "The Three D's: Discussion, Debate, and Deliberation," cited in Stacie Molnar-Main, *Deliberation in the Classroom: Fostering Critical Thinking, Community, and Citizenship in Schools* (Ashland: Kettering Foundation, 2017), 62-63. Accessed September 10, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.

[7] The deliberative democracy movement comes out of a larger concern about civic engagement and renewal. Scholars such as Theda Skocpol have documented the decline of civic engagement by masses of people involved in membership associations that met regularly for social purposes but also became resources for political life. Calling this a "diminished democracy," Skocpol traces the trends away from membership towards management—the professionalization of policy making, including think tanks and lobbying groups, which no longer need to engage large numbers of citizens in order to shape legislation. See Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civil Life.* Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003. Peter Levine draws on this and other scholarship to develop a proposal for civic renewal based on gathering citizens together for public deliberation on issues facing their communities. See Peter Levine, *We are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: The Promise of Civic Renewal in America.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013.

[8] Molnar-Main, *Deliberation in the Classroom*, 14.

[9] Molnar-Main, *Deliberation in the Classroom*, 17.

In addition to the topic under consideration, participants in deliberation learn skills essential for citizens who want to overcome paralysis or complacency and transform the dynamics of violence around them. With practice, participants in deliberation learn to think more flexibly and interdependently, to make personal connections to the issues they discuss, to appreciate others' concerns and experiences, to argue for and evaluate different approaches to problems, to practice agreement and disagreement with others, to find common ground with those who have different views and experiences, and to maintain their own views about an issue, even if they hold views different from others around them.[10] As Molnar-Main notes, young people engaged in deliberative classroom practices "not only practice the skills of listening, speaking, and disagreeing respectfully, but they also learn an approach to problem solving that prepares them to find common ground amid differences."[11] They develop capacities for empathy that we often hope for in discussion and dialogue, while at the same time learning how to articulate and make reasoned arguments for the positions they take, what we hope for in encouraging debate. What's more, they can deliberate courses of action they can take to make positive change, expanding their idea of what it means to be a citizen in a democratic system.

Molnar-Main describes six key characteristics for good deliberative learning. First, the subject matter should be "an issue of significance to individuals and society," and, ideally, of significance to the students themselves. Second, the process of deliberation must be interactive and discussion based. This is different than presenting students with a range of perspectives in a lecture format. Third, the teachers and students should share responsibility for learning, with teachers remaining open to learning from the students during the deliberation process. Fourth, the work of deliberating is real work, not role play. It involves weighing options and making decisions about what to actually do or believe. While the group does not need to end up making the same decisions, everyone is pushed to make *a* decision, which encourages wrestling with the complexities and messiness of the real world. Fifth, multiple perspectives, including marginalized views, are given balanced consideration. This is the best way to ensure that every student has options to choose from that best connect to their own views, to prepare students for encountering different views in other contexts, and to overcome the silence imposed on view-takers who differ from the dominant viewpoint. Finally, students are treated as citizens or decision makers, often engaging in follow-up activities related to these roles. In other words, the decisions that come out of the process do not die in the classroom, but are taken seriously enough to be acted upon in the world.[12]

To aid in keeping the deliberation productive, the National Issues Forum suggests several ground rules. These include: 1) everyone is encouraged to participate; 2) no one or two individuals should dominate the conversation; 3) keep the discussion focused on the options under consideration; 4) consider all the major choices and positions; 5) maintain an atmosphere for discussion and analysis of alternatives; and 6) remember that listening is as important as talking.[13] Some teachers have created additional ground-rules to help students practice agreeing and disagreeing with each other in productive ways. One teacher, John-Mark Edwards at Phillips Academy, asks students to choose one of three ways to respond to what they hear someone else say. They can: 1) Agree with the person who just spoke and explain why they agree; 2) Respectfully disagree and give a reason for disagreeing; or 3) Add something to the conversation by building on what has been said. Over time, these practices become habits, and students can then find ways to combine them in more complex ways, such as respectfully disagreeing with one part of what someone says while being able to add something constructive to a piece that they do agree with.[14] By establishing these practices intentionally as part of what it means to consider messy topics in a diverse group, teachers are helping students enter a variety of contexts and contribute to decision making positively—even when the stakes are high and people disagree strongly.

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[10] Molnar-Main, *Deliberation in the Classroom*, 17.

[11] Molnar-Main, *Deliberation in the Classroom*, 20.

[12] Molnar-Main, *Deliberation in the Classroom*, 13.

[13] These guidelines are featured in a poster created by the National Issues Forum: https://www.nifi.org/sites/default/files/product-downloads/FORUM%20GROUND%20RULES%20POSTER.pdf The NIF website is filled with resources for hosting deliberative forums, in the community and in the classroom. https://www.nifi.org/en Accessed September 12, 2019.

Deliberative pedagogy teaches students to consider viewpoints different from their own, to critically engage their own views to consider what their views might leave out or give up, and move beyond either/or thinking to integrate a variety of perspectives and approaches into new approaches that do not accept an "us vs. them" position. This teaches skills in transforming conflict away from division and violence. And because this approach assumes that the students' opinions and decisions matter, that the teachers can change their minds as a result of deliberation alongside the students, that both student and teacher are working together to consider problems and develop solutions, this pedagogy helps young people to overcome despair and apathy. Can this technique enhance the deliberative tradition of theology and teach Christian youth skills in peacebuilding, while also helping them to mature in their faith?

Creating New Materials for Deliberative Theological Education: One Example

Inspired by the results teachers using deliberative pedagogy have observed, I have begun adapting deliberative pedagogical techniques to theological education, specifically by developing materials for use in deliberative forums focused on theological themes that have implications for violence and peacebuilding. In the booklet, "Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums," Brad Rourke outlines a process for preparing "issue guides," hand-outs or booklets that participants in a deliberative discussion use as the basis for their deliberations.[15] These issue guides serve as the primary source of information participants use for considering a wide variety of views and weighing options for decision-making. As such, the materials are most effective when they can provide accessible information that makes the best case for every perspective, and do not push the reader to favor one option over another. They level the playing field, by giving everyone who walks in the room the same information to consider. An issue guide is focused on one issue, generally one piece of one issue, to help deliberators focus on actionable decisions.

The two critical elements of an issue guide is "naming" and "framing." The issue guide features a heading that names the issues at stake in ways that do not suggest a single answer. It often starts with a broad theme and then develops an open-ended question based on that theme, that, if answered, would require citizen action. Essentially, when we name an issue, we ask, "what should we do?" The issue guide then goes on to the provide a framework for thinking about answering this big question. The framework lists the options or perspectives used to understand an issue or problem, as well as critical information, drawbacks, and trade-offs associated with different approaches. Ideally, the guide should feature three to four broad perspectives to be explored. Providing only two perspectives leads to debate and polarization, so having three or four allows for people to break out of the typical divisions we find in many of our political conversations today. The perspectives should use everyday language people use to talk about the issue. Ideally, the approaches would not align with partisan framings or the views of specific actors or groups, and major as well as marginalized perspectives should be included. The guides should include links to primary and secondary sources that represent different perspectives on the themes and allow participants to check sources and learn more on their own. Most important, the descriptions of the three to four approaches should include key information about each approach, sample actions of what those approaches involve, and some information about the strengths and limitations of each option, as well as the trade-offs that would have to be made if that approach were adopted. Essentially, when we frame an issue, we ask, "if we adopt this approach or action, what consequences should we take into account, and, given our understanding of both the advantages and trade-offs, are we willing to live with the trade-offs because the advantages outweigh them?"

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[14] Molnar-Main, *Deliberation in the Classroom*, 45.

[15] Brad Rourke, "Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums" (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 2014). The Kettering Foundation, a non-profit organization that supports research that "focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation" and is committed to finding ways to "identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should," has developed useful materials to help citizens host deliberative forums and teachers use deliberative pedagogy with students. For more information, see their website: https://www.kettering.org Rourke's guidebook can be downloaded here: https://www.kettering.org/catalog/product/developing-materials-deliberative-forums Accessed September 12, 2019.

In the example described below, I chose an issue that goes to the core of what Christians must wrestle with if they want to move from embedded theology to deliberative theology: *Who is Jesus?* Rourke notes that "if the materials are to support public deliberation, they must begin where the public does." Effective materials must "take into account citizens' various starting points and chief concerns," and writers of these materials cannot skip the step of actually going out and talking to citizens to find out what really concerns them about a given topic.[16] In order to emulate this process, I created an online group of youth workers, young adults, and youth, from a range of perspectives across denomination, life experience, socio-economic and racial backgrounds, and gender identities—playfully called "The Conclave." I asked members of The Conclave questions based on Rourke's template:

- When you think about what you have been taught about who Jesus is, what concerns you? What bothers you most, personally?
- What concerns do you hear friends, family members, or others talking about when it comes to what they've been taught about who Jesus is?

Conclave members gave me a range of responses. Some were concerned that the image of Jesus taught to them was one of an exclusive personal savior, which made it difficult for them to connect Jesus to public action and hard to know what to do about friends and family who were not Christian. Others were concerned that they saw too many people around them using Jesus' teachings in ways that marginalized others. Several noted that the image of Jesus as a white male made it difficult for them to develop a relationship with him, either because they were themselves men and had barriers to developing intimate relationships with other men, or because they found it difficult to relate to a savior who looked like their oppressor. Still others expressed concerns that Jesus was simply not talked about enough by their friends and family, limiting the impact of Jesus' salvific power to fewer and fewer people.

Noting some of the underlying concerns Conclave members expressed—fears that images of Jesus created barriers to people developing a personal relationship with him, portrayed him as so personal and private people could not make connections between their relationship with Jesus and their calling to act in the world as followers of Jesus, had been misused to exclude or harm people, and made him too perfect or too abstract for anyone to follow—I used Rourke's template to create an issue guide.[17] Rourke notes that an issue guide usually contains five elements. The first is a *title* that reflects the major tension inherent in the issue and conveys that there is a difficult question or problem that must be faced. I titled my issue guide, "Our Images of Jesus," with a subheading that asks the question, "How do we think of Jesus in ways that transform our lives *and* the world?" My intent was to note the tension I observed between images of Jesus that youth found personally transformative and images that encouraged them to practice a social ethic inspired by Jesus' earthly ministry.

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[16] Rourke, "Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums,"11.

The second element is an *introduction* that explains what the issue is and why something must be done about it. I begin by noting the multiplicity of images of Jesus in the Bible and Christian tradition, and that these images have been both a help and a hindrance for faith. I then frame the problem as follows:

> When we pray to or think about Jesus, we have an image in our minds of who he is, what he looks like, and how he relates to us and to other people. The problem that must be faced is that we all have images of Jesus we have developed through our life experiences and what we've learned, and these images impact not only our faith, but our actions in the world. The images most dear to us might actually do harm to other people. The images most dear to others might do harm to us. While we might want to say that Jesus is a universal figure, because Jesus was fully human and came to earth in a specific time and place, images of Jesus are particular and cannot remain vague. Jesus was a *particular human being* in a *particular body*, and that has implications, particularly if we claim that this particular human was also God. This particularity of Jesus on earth is part of why we have such a rich tradition of artistic depictions of Jesus, through paintings, statues, music lyrics, and illustrations in our Vacation Bible School and Sunday School materials. But these images shape our imaginations of who Jesus is, and this has consequences.

I then suggest that a decision of import must be made:

> As maturing Christians, we must deliberatively choose an image of Jesus Christ as the focus of our faith and model for our spiritual growth. How we image Jesus matters: it influences how we understand what it means to follow Jesus, it influences how we treat others who believe differently from us, it influences whether we really believe Jesus loves us and others…As maturing Christians, it is our challenge to enter into this conversation and make our own thoughtful, prayerful decisions about what to do.

The main body of the issue advisory then features four choices to consider related to how to image Jesus, following Rourke's recommendation to include descriptions of each *option* for dealing with the issue, and two *subsections* under these options which feature examples of *actions* or *benefits* that follow from choosing that option and examples of *drawbacks* or *trade-offs* inherent in each action. In my adaptation, I changed the subsection language of "benefits" and "drawbacks" to "life-giving" and "challenging," and tied it to the action of maturing as a Christian (that is, spiritual growth). The four options for deliberation I included were to focus on

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[17] This issue guide, as well as others I have developed, will be shared in its full form during the RIG presentation.

Jesus: 1) as our friend; 2) as martyr who died for us; 3) as teacher and healer; or 4) as God's Son, the second person of the Trinity. For each option, I began with a scriptural passage that illustrated the option, placing them all as equally valid, and equally biblical, options.[18] I then included a short paragraph that connects the biblical passage with the overall image of Jesus proposed, and then listed several reasons why each image can be "life-giving for maturing Christians" and several reasons why this image can also be "challenging for maturing Christians." These points of benefits/drawbacks are informed by theological scholarship, as well as by insights gleaned from The Conclave and from conversations with youth at YTI. I end each option description with a set of questions for the group to consider, designed to encourage appreciation of the image and of those fellow Christians who prefer this image, raise critical questions about the image, and push participants to weigh the trade-offs that come with this option, all while encouraging perspective-taking and awareness of the diversity of Christian beliefs and practices:

- What is appealing about this image of Jesus? What do you imagine is appealing about this image for other Christians?
- What concerns you about this image of Jesus? What concerns do you imagine other Christians might have about this image?
- If you made this the primary image of Jesus to focus on for your spiritual growth, what would you be giving up? What concerns would you be ignoring?

In the final section of the issue advisory, I list several questions for group reflection designed to encourage consideration of shared values within the group, deliberation about what is gained and lost with each choice, and moving towards a group decision:

- Can we identify any shared values among some or all of these different images of Jesus Christ?
- Can we identify any shared values among our own group? What do we value most in how we think about Jesus Christ?
- Can we identify any trade-offs or downsides that some or all of us are willing (or not willing) to make when we think about our images of Jesus Christ?
- Is there one image of Jesus Christ we would like to lift up as most important to our faith journey at this moment in the life of our group? Why?

Although a decision to choose only one image of Jesus to focus on is not mandatory, the push to make at least a provisional decision to focus in a particular direction through a group process of weighing the consequences of each choice is what makes this exercise truly deliberative. Within a youth group setting, making a choice might then inform what images of Jesus to use when decorating the youth room, where to focus their next Bible study, how to approach prayer—or how youth will show what image of Jesus they are following by how they treat others or interpret current events.

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[18] I also added scripture in order to address some of the Biblical and theological illiteracy that is common among Christian youth, as noted in Christian Smith with Melissa Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 131-137.

Reimagining Confirmation and Sunday School?

In her essay, "Deep Democracy: The Inner Practice of Civic Engagement," Patricia A. Wilson notes, "at its essence, deep democracy is the inner experience of interconnectedness." Democracy is "deep" when the individual experiences the "enfranchisement of self at the level of mind, heart, and spirit: the realization that 'I count.'" One realizes that one "counts" upon discovering that one is a member of a larger whole, and accepts "responsibility for that whole, and the desire to act for the good of the whole: the realization that 'I care.'" Individuals and community come together in a creative tension "held in place by the transformation of self through greater understanding of, compassion for, and relationship with an expanding circle of others."[19] In his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul describes communion with Jesus Christ and his followers as a body with many diverse parts, inextricably interconnected and necessary to the functioning of the body—Christians, as members of the Body of Christ, both "count" as individual members and "care" about every other member, knowing that "God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the part with less honor so that there won't be division in the body and so the parts might have mutual concern for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it" (1 Cor 12:24-26). Can some of the insights from teaching deliberative democracy help us learn what it means to be parts of Christ's Body?

As a method of teaching, deliberative pedagogy can be used to teach a wide range of content, and has been used to teach social science, science and humanities courses. Presumably, then, it can also be used to teach theology. In my example above, I have attempted to create one way of using deliberative pedagogy to encourage young people to think critically and compassionately about what is at stake in how we image Jesus, but such materials can be created for considering different understandings of the Atonement, life after death, Jesus' ethnic and gender identity, our relationship to God's Creation, how to relate to other religions, and many other "big questions" that young people already wonder about but rarely find the space and permission to explore deliberatively.

What if confirmation classes, Bible Study, or Sunday School meetings were like this? This might be a way of growing in maturity and wisdom the way Jesus did – deliberatively, with adults taking them seriously, in public, and in the center of their religious community.

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[19] Patricia A. Wilson, "Deep Democracy: The Inner Practice of Civic Engagement," in *Fieldnotes: A Newsletter of the Shambala Institute*. Feb 2004, Iss 3.

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