

The GlobalChurch Project

www.theglobalchurchproject.com



Miroslav Volf

College and University Class Resource

This resource is designed to help your classroom discussion. It has specific application questions appropriate to local church ministry contexts. Questions are organized in themes. They are ideal for paired discussions, group-forum style discussions, and personal reflective responses. Consider using a discussion method most suitable to your classroom setting. Select questions most appropriate to your group. Consider isolating particular themes.

Materials:

1. Video: Miroslav Volf, 34 minutes.

- The theological response of **exclusion and embrace**
- The **Trinitarian nature of Christian community**
- Christianity as a **public faith**. (Witness to the common good, pluralism, and a Christian response to Islam).

2. Scripture reference: 1 John 4:13-21

Preliminary discussion

1. Discuss the major themes in Miroslav's responses.
2. How do you understand Miroslav Volf's ecclesiology as reflected in his responses?
3. Discuss the difficulties of the issues raised in the video. What was difficult to understand? What requires further clarification? What would you like to discuss further?
4. Theological method: How does Miroslav Volf "make sense" of the Christian faith? What approaches does he take, as he shapes his theology?

Explore and analyze

Consider isolating a particular theme of interest for your classroom discussion. You might allocate topics to particular groups or pairs. Or, raise particular questions in a forum style for group responses.

1. **Exclusion and embrace:** How do you understand the issues Miroslav raised? Why do we form feelings of hatred and indifference towards the "other"? How is this reflected in your own contexts?

1. **Exclusion and embrace:** How does Miroslav describe that people remain distinct, even in community? What does it mean to embrace and respect the integrity of persons?
2. **Trinitarian Christian community:** Discuss the reconciliatory metaphor of salvation. What does salvation represent for the possibilities of human interaction?
3. **Trinitarian Christian community:** How does 1 John 4:13-21 explore important aspects of 1. The character of God, and 2. The nature of love? Miroslav says that an act of God's love forms us as human beings. How does this affect the way we understand ourselves?
4. **Trinitarian Christian community:** What's difficult to understand in Miroslav's concept of memory?
5. **Public faith - witness to the common good:** Miroslav says that there are challenges for the church when it seeks a public faith. These include 1. Imposing their views and 2. Retreating to privatization. How do we impose our views, or retreat to privatization? Why might the church impose its views, or retreat to privatization?
6. **Public faith - witness to the common good:** Think through the implications of the church ceasing to engage the world. What happens when the church does this?
7. **Public faith - witness to the common good:** How does faith animate life?
8. **Public faith - witness to the common good:** How do you respond to these ideas: Christ is the key to human existence? Christ is not limited to what we hear in the Bible? Can you consider Christ's wisdom as broader than the text of the gospels in your own theology?
9. **Public faith - pluralism:** What is pluralism? How should the church engage in a pluralistic society? Discuss some of the challenges of pluralism (as discussed by Miroslav).
10. **Public faith - pluralism:** How do you understand Miroslav's concept of "new pluralism"? How does he say that it "contends particular universalisms"? In contrast to a cheap pluralism where anything goes, Miroslav proposes a contentious pluralism. A contentious pluralism mutually respects other's views, while contending for truth. Miroslav calls the church to embrace pluralism as a project (while contending pluralism). What are the challenges of this?
11. **Public faith - a response to Islam:** Is the difference between a Trinitarian and a Unitarian understanding of God important? Does Miroslav's suggestion that there are important similarities (notwithstanding differences) suggest ways for you to reconcile the faith traditions of Christianity and Islam? What are the difficulties of holding this view?
12. **Theological method:** What are some important scriptural truths that inform your perspective on pluralism?

Application

Discuss the various ways in which the content of the video influences life and ministry.

1. **Exclusion and embrace:** Miroslav says freedom from hatred and indifference towards others comes by engaging them. They're persons created in God's image. They're persons for whom Christ has died. They're persons who have been called and destined for future glory. How might you "situate the other person in the grand narrative of scripture" to embrace the other? What might this look like in your own interactions? What does it look like within your local church community?
2. **Exclusion and embrace:** What does it mean to embrace the other while also respecting their distinctiveness? How might you recognize this in your interactions with others?
3. **Trinitarian Christian community:** When Miroslav discussed the metaphor of salvation, he said the cross is a symbol of overcoming enmity. The cross is a symbol of coming to fellowship with those who have been estranged. He argued that the image of embrace "fills out" the reconciled existence. What are some of the difficulties of opening oneself up to the other in a posture of embrace?
4. **Trinitarian Christian community:** How might the notion of "meta-memory" (that is, the memory of the cross and resurrection) be useful in your pastoral interactions?

5. **Trinitarian Christian community:** What are some of the challenges of teaching communities to "remember rightly"? How might it be liberating to recognize that people are not what they have done or suffered, but rather who God sees them to be.
6. **Public faith witness to the common good:** Miroslav suggests that people are hungry for meaningful existence. Does this resonate with your interactions with others?
7. **Public faith - pluralism:** Miroslav outlines challenges faced by the church as it engages in a pluralistic society. Do you see these in your own church context?
8. **Public faith - pluralism:** How does Christ call us to witness in our pluralist contexts?
9. **Public faith - a response to Islam:** Is Miroslav's suggestion of respecting differences (while holding truths) a helpful framework for you and your ministry? Does this offer a possibility for you to engage with Muslims?
10. **Theology:** How is Jesus Christ central to your theology? How is he central to your personal and communal relationship with God?

Classroom ministry

Facilitate an opportunity for students to respond to the video in light of the classroom discussion. Consider inviting students to write their responses to the following questions.

1. What is God encouraging our class and me, to do?
2. In response to the issues raised in the video, what are areas I want to ask God for forgiveness in?
3. How do I need God to minister to me and my community for us to better engage with these issues.

Prayer

Spend time in prayer over what you've learnt. You may encourage your class to pray for one another. Or, in light of your discussion, you may choose to pray over your class.

Links

Website: www.theglobalchurchproject.com

Book: Graham Hill, *GlobalChurch: Reshaping Our Conversations, Renewing Our Mission, Revitalizing Our Churches* (IVP Academic, 2015)