

The GlobalChurch Project

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## Miroslav Volf

### Local Church Small Group Resource

This resource is designed to help your small group discussion. It's shaped to inspire you to consider new ways for understanding the mission of the church. Questions are organized in themes. Consider choosing the themes appropriate to your small group context. You don't need to cover all the questions. Allow for a time of response.

Small Group Preparation:

- Video: Miroslav Volf, 34 minutes.
- Scripture: 1 John 4:13-21
- Participants are encouraged to bring their own journals or writing materials.

Themes explored in the video:

- 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).

## Beginning the conversation

Consider the questions suggested below to start the conversation for your small group. They'll consolidate the content of the video, after you've viewed it.

1. What were the major themes in Miroslav's responses? How would you describe Miroslav's understanding of the church?
2. Discuss the difficulties of content. What was difficult to understand? Was there anything you would like to clarify with the group?
3. Theological method: How does Miroslav Volf "make sense" of the Christian faith? What approaches does he take, as he shapes his theology?

## Going deeper

Explore the major themes raised in the video. Critically engage with Miroslav's theology of the church. Consider the questions that respond to the issues raised in your preliminary discussion.

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 (not withstanding 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?

## Informing theology

Ensure the discussion is specifically drawing on your local setting. Make sure the discussion is relevant to the lives of faith for your small group. Encourage relevant and thoughtful examples from each participant.

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 that 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?

## Informing community

Facilitate the space for your group to respond to the discussion. You might consider this section as a personal time of written journal responses to the following questions.

1. What is God encouraging me, our small group and our community, to do?
2. In responses to the issues raised in the video, what are areas I want to ask for God’s 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.

Invite the ministry of the Holy Spirit to clarify, heal, and inspire change for your participants and communities.

## Links

**Website:** [www.theglobalchurchproject.com](http://www.theglobalchurchproject.com)

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