

The GlobalChurch Project

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René August

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: René August, 34 minutes.
 - **African Conversations; storytelling.**
 - **Culture, society and the church.**
 - **Lessons from the African church.**
2. Scripture reference: 1 Corinthians 12:1-31

Preliminary discussion

1. What were the major themes in René's responses?
2. How does René draw on African concepts for her theological perspectives? What terms did she use?
3. Discuss the difficulties of the content. What was difficult to understand? Was there anything you would like to clarify with the group?
4. Theological method: How is René's theology informed and shaped by her background and personal ministry? What approaches does she take in understanding God in the context of her context and ministry?

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. **African conversations:** Define the term and describe the concept of "Ubuntu". What is René's understanding of "Ubuntu" and how does she use the term to understand biblical truths?

2. **African conversations:** Discuss the difficulties of defining “Ubuntu”. How is this a useful theological term and truth, expounded in Scripture? How is “Ubuntu” an interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12:1-31?
3. **African conversations:** How does “Ubuntu” as a concept facilitate a more comprehensive picture of God? In what ways is “Ubuntu” a helpful theological lens?
4. **African conversations:** How did the African-initiated conversation Amahoro help to explore major modern contextual issues? How did viewing scripture through a different lens provide a fruitful and energizing experience for René?
5. **African conversations:** How did the discussed issues at Amahoro make way for various lenses of scripture? Refer to the following topics:
 - Climate change: reading Scripture through the lens of Christ, creation and community.
 - Conflict transformation: reading Scripture through the lens of reconciliation and pre-emptive peacemaking.
 - Power and politics: reading Scripture and framing questions as a way of engaging tribal stories.
 - Why is it that the blood of our tribe is thicker than the water of our baptism?: reading Scripture through the lens of tribal bonds.
 - Economics: reading Scripture through the lens of kingdom economics; land, labor and love as currencies of the kingdom.
6. **African conversations - storytelling:** How is Scripture the “story of God in relationship with God’s people”? How is the way God chose to reveal God’s heart to us through story? Why does this interest René?
7. **African conversations - storytelling:** How does René create spaces for conversations by drawing *connections with stories*?
8. **Culture, society and the church:** In what ways does René encourage leaders in the church to “lead in the manner that God has called them to lead”? What is she reflecting on? How does she encourage leaders?
9. **Culture, society and the church:** How should the church address the discrimination of women in congregations using theological language? How might gendered terms for God be problematic? How might they be patriarchal?
10. **Culture, society and the church:** How can God be referred to in functions as Creator, Sustainer and redeemer, without relying on gendered terminology? How does the masculine gendering of God give patriarchy superiority in subtle ways? What are the creative possibilities for language in the church, and how do they make way for deeper possibilities for relationship with God?
11. **Culture, society and the church:** “I challenge the church to tell and listen to more stories, to embrace holistic mission and to tackle race and gender discrimination in all its guises.” Describe René’s hope for the church. What aspects does she see as central to the church’s mission?
12. **Culture, society and the church:** What is the mission of the church, according to René? How does she suggest the church should pursue “integral mission”? What is the 4-fold framework she uses from Genesis 3 to explain integral, holistic faith in Christ?
13. **Culture, society and the church:** How does “injustice threaten justice everywhere”? How does this draw on the language of 1 Corinthians 12:1-31?
14. **Culture, society and the church:** How does Jesus’ resurrection “create life” and “enlarge the story to include others”? Describe René’s passion for Christ’s mission: “Dying for something is a

motivator and encourage me not to be afraid of things that will cost my life because these are the things that give meaning and direction, shape and frame, to my life.”

15. **Culture, society and the church:** How does René discuss the differences between formative Western-reliant theology and theology from her own context?
16. **Lessons from the African church:** Discuss the pros and cons of the “explosive growth” of the church in Africa, as described by René. What has influenced this growth, and how does René reflect on this?
17. **Lessons from the African church:** How has social media and the Internet enabled the import of culture into various African contexts? Discuss the examples René uses.
18. **Lessons from the African church:** How are relationships within the church intended to be “relational”, not “transactional”? What are “relational” rather than “transactional” ways of being with one another?
19. **Lessons from the African church:** How is *forgiveness* and *relationship* “two necessary things”? How does “Ubuntu” involve everyone, and assume no exclusion of any race or gender? How does this liberate the churches way of relating, and characterize majority-world churches, according to René?
20. **Lessons from the African church:** Describe the “fruitful ministry” of working in ecumenical circles. How does René reflect on the way different denominations and faiths enrich her theology?
21. **Lessons from the African church:** In what ways does René describe that African elders have shaped her way of life?
22. **Theology:** How do South African creativity, expressiveness and relationality inspire René’s theology? What are the various influences that inform René’s theological perspective?

Application

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

1. **African conversations:** How does the term “Ubuntu” translate in the various contexts represented in your classroom? Discuss the possibilities for translating “Ubuntu” in various contexts of the church. Is this a relevant and helpful term?
2. **African conversations:** “I am because you are. We need each other. I can only be me when you are fully you.” Discuss the responsibility of “both sides to be fully present”. How ought communities be “looking for the goodness in one another”? How valuable and encouraging is in your class’ ministries?
3. **African conversations:** “The source of injustice is that we forget that we belong to one another.” How does “Ubuntu” facilitate relational healing and being?
4. **African conversations:** How does reading 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 with the concept of “Ubuntu” resonate with your experiences of being apart of the body of Christ?
5. **African conversations:** How do local and particular interpretations of the text of Scripture provide “opportunities for conversation” in church communities? How do various interpretations of Scripture lead to local churches exploring the significance of God’s word in their own local contexts? How do alternate perspectives refresh churches and individuals?
6. **African conversations - storytelling:** “Story-telling is a very African way of sharing faith and living out spirituality”. How central is storytelling to your ministry? How does it provide a common language and in what ways can the church assist people with the language to “tell their stories”?
7. **Culture, society and the church:** In what ways should the church encourage their leadership? How should the church encourage a culture of faithful leadership and faithful leaders?

8. **Culture, society and the church:** How should the church address injustices? What are the various injustices of your class' ministry contexts and how are they engaging and serving in these struggles?
9. **Culture, society and the church:** "Something as simple as changing the gendered language for God would go a long way in to helping people think about God in a different way, so then seek for different expressions of God which invite women into the story." Describe the possibilities of language. How should the church be changing their theological language? What is the significance of this?
10. **Culture, society and the church:** Explain this statement: "Sometimes it means men being quiet and getting out of the way!" Why does René encourage men to create opportunities for women to participate? What are the challenges for women in churches, and how can churches better address discrimination?
11. **Culture, society and the church:** "It becomes obvious that we need women to create a more comprehensive picture of who God is." How does René suggest that addressing discrimination enriches theologies and doctrines? How does this perspective encourage you?
12. **Culture, society and the church:** What is the mission of the church and how is the church's mission outworked in the various ministry contexts of your class?
13. **Culture, society and the church:** How do Martin Luther's words encourage René in her faith and practice? "Unless you have something to die for, you have nothing to live for." What is the encouragement in this?
14. **Lessons from the African church:** Describe your experiences of "relational" and "transactional" ways of being with one another. What should the church aim to emulate? How does Scripture example God's relationality and how is this reinforced and reflected in 1 Corinthians 12:1-31?
15. **Lessons from the African church:** "So much of the theology that is fed to us comes from a minority world-view and works in particular contexts. In some ways, this has been problematic. We need to enlarge the conversation and create opportunities to see beyond what is being seen at the moment." Describe the possibilities of "seeing beyond" in the process of forming your theology. What are the minority and particular perspectives that inform your faith, and how does the African church model indigenous modes of theology?
16. **Lessons from the African church:** How does community life forge an "agreed level of dependency on one another"? How does community life bring "shalom" in creative ways and illustrate community?
17. **Lessons from the African church:** "My understanding about "calling" is that it is not just a calling from God about me, but a calling *to* someone or to a group. I can't expect that my calling is unique in a particular way that doesn't require you." How does René understand the call of God differently to the western perspective? How does African culture resist individualistic and egocentric understandings through dependency, and how can this encourage the western church?
18. **Lessons from the African church:** How does René call us into the privilege of suffering in the context of human relationships? How does René's life and faith involve and require others?
19. **Theology:** How do aspects of South African Christianity offer creative possibilities for the church?

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 responses to the issues raised in the video, what are areas I want to ask for God's correction, forgiveness and grace in.
3. How do I need God to minister to me and my community, for us to be in prayer for the African church and engage with the issues of our culture?
4. How can I gain a better understanding of God through one another's perspectives? What do we ask that God would do in our hearts, for greater responsiveness and more understanding and love?

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)