

The GlobalChurch Project

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Lamin Sanneh

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: Lamin Sanneh, 27 minutes.
 - **Post-colonial theology.**
 - **Teaching the western church.**
 - **The church in context: multiple-faith and secular societies.**
2. Scripture reference: 1 Peter 1:1-9

Preliminary discussion

1. What were the major themes in Lamin Sanneh's responses?
2. Describe post-colonial theology. How has theology changed since the colonial era?
3. Discuss the difficulties of the content. What was difficult to understand? Was there anything you would like to clarify with the group?
4. How does Lamin explain the role of the church in various societies? How do the majority-world churches teach western churches? What terms does Lamin use to explain this?
5. What informs Lamin's theology and 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. **Personal theology:** How does Lamin draw on his personal background to write extensively about the relationship between Christianity and Islam? Discuss Lamin's conversion from Islam to

Christianity. In what ways do his teachings draw from his background? Describe what influences his theology.

2. **Post-colonial theology:** How does Lamin use the term: post-colonial theology? How is “post-colonialism” more than an ideological description? How does “post-colonial theology” refer to a historical marker?
3. **Post-colonial theology:** Describe the shift “from the global north to the global south”. What is Lamin referring to? What specific examples does he use?
4. **Post-colonial theology:** Lamin says, the colonial element “obstructs the mission of the church”. Discuss what he means. What does Lamin identify as “colonial elements” in the global church? How does the context of 1 Peter 1:1-9 enrich this discussion?
5. **Post-colonial theology:** Explain the “explosive growth of the church” in Africa. In what ways does Lamin describe this? What are the reasons for this “explosive growth”?
6. **Post-colonial theology:** Discuss the following: “There is an overlap between areas of high Christian impact and areas of the growth of the vernacular. Where people have lost the indigenous name of God, conversion has been minimal.” What, does Lamin suggest, is the significance of vernacular and cultural terminology?
7. **Post-colonial theology:** Discuss the “colonial impediment”. How is the impetus for the growth and expansion of Christianity derived from “indigenous agency coupled with the vernacular bible”?
8. **Teaching the western church:** Describe the decline of western churches, even though “the west is endowed with enormous resources”. What are the reasons for this decline, and how do majority-world churches contrast? Discuss Lamin’s reflections. How does he speak affectionately about majority-world churches?
9. **Teaching the western church:** What does Lamin mean by mission being “translational” and “universal”? Describe the significance of Peter’s words in 1 Peter 1:1-9 for encouraging the church. How can the words of 1 Peter 1:1-9 be translated for contextual audiences?
9. **Teaching the western church:** How does the majority-world church teach on “partnership and mutual respect between believers in the mission of God”? What are the practical ways that Lamin suggests majority- and minority-world churches can partner and collaborate?
11. **Teaching the western church:** How do misunderstandings of majority-world churches diminish the “prospect and potential of Western partnership and collaboration and the advancement of human rights”? How are majority-churches misunderstood as “conservative” or “liberal”? How does this affect partnerships?
12. **Teaching the western church:** How are majority-churches “living monuments”: testaments to Christian faith, in that they are believers across all cultures, races and classes? Discuss what Lamin means.
13. **Teaching the western church:** How do majority-world churches differ in how they accept “the church’s power to define society”? Why does the majority-church hope for neutrality? How does this contrast to the western church’s commitment to development?
14. **The church in context - multi-faith societies:** Why does Lamin recognize that interfaith relationships are a “theological challenge”? Describe this theological challenge for majority- and minority-world churches, according to Lamin. How does 1 Peter 1:1-9 encourage the church in diverse societies?
15. **The church in context - multi-faith societies:** How does Lamin describe the importance of Muslim and Christian dialogue and relationships? How does John 13:35 speak into this? What does Lamin describe as the challenges of interfaith dialogue?
16. **The church in context - multi-faith societies:** What does Lamin describe as the challenges for Islam? How does he situate the church in multi-faith contexts? What is the role of the church in the context of these challenges?

17. **The church in context - multi-faith societies:** Describe what it means to be missional in a western setting. How does Lamin describe mission and how does the church pursue that mission? How is mission bearing witness to Christ? Describe Lamin's hope for the church in: "overcoming the divisions of divisive religious identities and bringing generosity and hope". What informs and enriches his ecclesiology?
18. **The church in context - secularism and society:** How does Lamin describe secularism as a "neutral value": "without the norms and prescriptions on how to live one's life"? How can secularism "beg for faith in something bigger"? How is taking care of oneself in current society, "ultimately displeasing", and how does Lamin describe that faith is critical, even in secular values?
19. **The church in context - secularism and society:** How is the west "reluctant to abandon culture as a normative criterion of truth of the gospel"? How is 1 Peter 1:1-9 a relevant scripture to this discussion?
20. **The church in context - secularism and society:** How problematic is this view: "The more advanced, wealthy, lavish and educated we are, the more we can grasp the mind of God and the closer we are to the plan of God"? How has this view taken root in Western society?
21. **The church in context - secularism and society:** Describe the cultural divide of churches in the west. How does the view that "culture is the key to faithful Christian living" permeated through western churches? Discuss Lamin's examples. How does Jesus criticize this view?
22. **The church in context - secularism and society:** How has the church met Islam with economic and political measures, at the cost of addressing the challenges of religiosity? How does Lamin encourage the church to address the theological challenge of secularism?
23. **The church in context - secularism and society:** How does Lamin suggest that Christian leaders become more informed about the challenges of "the church in context"? What are his constructive responses?

Application

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

1. **Post-colonial theology:** "The growth of Christianity happened to coincide with the end of the era of colonial rule." How helpful is Lamin's terminology, categorizations and descriptions? How does Lamin's use of the term "post-colonialism" inform theological perspectives? Is this a helpful term?
2. **Post-colonial theology:** Where do you recognize the shift "from the global north to the global south" in your class' various contexts? Does this reflect your understanding and experience of global Christianity?
3. **Post-colonial theology:** Where have you seen colonial elements "obstructing" the mission of the church in various church contexts? How has colonialism shaped faith, and is this important to overcome? How can the church minister in the context and with the theology of post-colonialism?
4. **Post-colonial theology:** How does Lamin's historical understanding "post-colonial theology" model an approach to the historical aspect of theology?
5. **Post-colonial theology:** "Where the indigenous name for God has been kept and the scriptures are in the vernacular, in the mother tongue, there we see the impact of Christianity." What is the significance of having the ability to communicate with God in one's own language? How can churches begin to encourage this?
6. **Teaching the western church:** How does the life, mission and growth of majority-world churches encourage you in your faith? How does Lamin's study of majority-world churches recognize God at work in the global project and mission of the church? How is 1 Peter 1:1-9 an encouragement to this?

7. **Teaching the western church:** “The impetus of majority-churches could help the west to recover theistic faith. Adjusting to secularism became cooped into western cultural values. Partnership can help the west retrieve and recover this ancient heritage that has meant so much to the world.” How can the western church recover theistic faith? What is the value of partnerships?
8. **Teaching the western church:** “The energy and surge of confidence in the gospel in the west seems to lack.” How is this pertinent in your class’ various ministries? How can the church work to overcome this?
9. **Teaching the western church:** How should faithfulness to the gospel take precedence over ethnicity, race and nationality in Christian community? How is this reflected in various church contexts?
10. **Teaching the western church:** How have the misunderstandings of majority-churches been prevalent in western society and culture? What has been harmful? What are you inspired and challenged by in Lamin’s appraisal and recognition of majority-world churches and their growth and life?
11. **The church in context - multi-faith societies:** “The struggle for Islam is that of understanding how to be religious without demanding a role for government and the state in advancing religious claims. For Islam, the political challenge is to avoid the danger of the Islamization of the state and the production of a radical ideology of hatred and intolerance and of mistrust.” How are churches ministering in the context of Islamic faith and religious challenge?
12. **The church in context - multi-faith societies:** “For Christians, we believe in a God who is involved in historical breakthrough, of reconciliation, who saves, redeems and forgives. To pursue the mission of this God requires Christians to be in faithful and positive engagement with Muslims across the interfaith divide.” How are churches involved in this aspect of mission? In what ways can the church become more involved?
13. **The church in context - multi-faith societies:** How does the encounter of radical Islam with extremists and violence in the Muslim world present a “wake up call to the west that the theological underpinning and the value system of the world remains under explored and unappreciated by a secular west”? Discuss: “We ignore this challenge at our peril.”
14. **The church in context - multi-faith societies:** How does the church “stand in the identity and credibility of the church as a divine institution”? What are the implications for this in Christian mission? How can we love and serve our Muslim brothers and sisters in Christ, as the church of Christ? How does 1 Peter 1:1-9 encourage this?
15. **The church in context - secularism and society:** How are modernized churches “culturally captive to the west”?
16. **The church in context - secularism and society:** “I do a lot of work trying to interpret the mind of the Muslim world to the west and visa versa. But in recent years, I have been a little concerned and jostled by the lack of sense of urgency in the west by the religious nature of the challenge.” How does this resonate with Christian experience?
17. **The church in context - secularism and society:** Discuss this statement: “The best way to understand the Muslim mind in my view is to be absolutely certain and clear about the core values of the gospel, respect for life and women, education, orphan, sick, the outcast and stranger. We have a lot to contribute. You don’t have to give up who you are to be our friends. You’re asking us to give up something that is dear to us - that is false solidarity. We don’t want that.” How does this encourage the global 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 change in? How do I ask that God would be at work in altering about our perspectives and attitudes, our theology and love for Christ?
3. How do I need God to minister to me and my community, for us to better engage with multi-faith, secular and diverse societies? How do I ask that God would be at work in the global church to be a light and lamp?

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)