

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Elaboration Phase for Selected
Micro-project Assignment**

A Paper Submitted to

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by

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Description of Elaboration Phase Activities

The doctoral candidate has reviewed over forty peer reviewed articles and selected ten to be used in this micro-project. The articles are presented in alphabetic order, based upon the author's last name. In each case, a short synopsis is provided, along with one Pro observation, as well as one Con observation.

Articles

Baker, Samuel. "Who's Shaping Whom? Digital Disruption in the Spiritual Lives of Post-Familial Emerging Adults," *Journal of Youth and Theology*, 16, no. 2 (2017): 117–43. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1163/24055093-01602003>.

The author addresses the significant changes in communication technology and how it is affecting early adults regarding their interpersonal relationships. Baker describes how increased use of communication technologies (smart phones, Facebook, etc.) are having impacts upon familial relationships and creating a state that is described in the article as "post-familial". This state describes how family members are alone together as they interact with each other and those outside the family with their smart devices. The author also describes how using different forms of technology for reading is disruptive for some to deeply consider material rather than the immersion that is proposed to happen when a person reads a printed book. Baker concludes that those seeking to influence others spiritually need to be aware of technology's influence to help early adults not be conformed to the world and adopt a "crowdsourced" view of God.

Pro

Baker introduces an interesting topic that is certainly having a significant impact upon how individuals interact with each other daily. He describes how these technologies degrade social interaction as it has happened in the past and suggests that people need to be aware of how it will change family discourse and engagement.

Con

Baker attempts to find a space between techno-utopians and those with a dystopian viewpoint of the impact of technologies upon our lives. Baker tended toward a dystopian viewpoint himself when he discussed users of displays for reading as opposed to using printed texts. That bias should give a reader pause that the data is still not complete on the full impact of technologies and a reader should remain open-minded until further research is available.

Bergler, Thomas E. "Generation Z and Spiritual Maturity," *Christian Education Journal*, 17, no. 1 (2020): 75–91. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/0739891320903058>.

This article considers the traits of Americans whose birth years would categorize them as "Generation Z" and how to develop appropriate strategies to aid these individuals toward

spiritual maturity. The author presents an explanation from Scripture of what traits a mature believer should exhibit, then presents his analysis of the challenges Generation Z individuals will present to those attempting to invest in them and aid them in understanding the pathway they will travel to spiritual maturity.

Pro

The author presents an excellent argument regarding the imperative in Scripture that encourages mature believers to help develop new believers and the need for new believers to pursue growth toward spiritual maturity. The author uses that argument to explain that a mature believer must also consider how to address the cultural influence a new believer has experienced and how to address specific misconceptions that they have been appropriated.

Con

The author references “The National Study of Youth and Religion” in this article but does not footnote the study nor reference the specific publication from which he asserts a statement based upon this study.

Kopiec, Piotr. “Consumer Society: Its Definitions and Its Christian Criticism,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 76, no. 3 (2020): e1–8. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.4102/hts.v76i3.5910>.

Kopiec engages the reader in a conversation regarding how culture and economies have evolved a state of consumptionism into individuals. He presents the argument that consumptionism has been created by the industrial revolution and urbanization. Kopiec decries the effects of consumptionism as he asserts it has reduced mankind’s values and reduces all relationships to transactions which feed further consumption. Kopiec advances the *Evangelii Gaudium* presented by Pope Francis in 2013, where the Pope discussed how the idolatry of money and consumption could be equated with the golden calf from Exo 32:1-35. Mankind’s increased reverence for the acquisition and consumption of products and experience overwhelms their desire for meaningful relationships with others or with God.

Pro

This article clearly defines the journey which modern man has pursued to seek personal comfort and satisfaction, as well as explaining how the existing governmental and economic environment has made consumptionism available to many people rather than just a few elites. The article also explains that many in the world are unable to access this lifestyle yet yearn to be like those who live such a lifestyle.

Con

The article’s title suggests that it will be a Christian criticism, yet it is predominantly a criticism made by the Catholic Church. Even though the thoughts proposed by Pope Francis will resonate with evangelical Christians, this article would be enhanced with more Christian voices being included in the argument.

Porter, Steven L. “Will/Heart/Spirit: Discipleship That Forms the Christian Character,” *Christian Education Journal*, 16, no. 1 (2019): 79–94. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/0739891318820334>.

Porter explains that a person’s will is a key driver to their development in spiritual formation. The author heavily relies upon the wisdom of Dallas Willard’s writings on spiritual formation. Porter raises the priority of the human will in spiritual formation by relating how Jesus spoke to His disciples about proper and improper prayer. In His examples, Jesus pointed out that a person who performed for others or who sought to manipulate God were misguided and only received benefits that their minds granted, rather than blessings from God. Being actively aware of their motivations and choosing to pursue a relationship with God requires an active of a person’s will. Porter describes the four stages of progression toward complete identification of a person’s will with God’s that Willard had expressed. The four stages (surrender, abandonment, contentment, and participation) will serve to align a person’s will with God’s and allow them to enjoy fellowship and directed purpose in the service of the kingdom of God.

Pro

Porter makes a compelling argument as he advances these concepts to aid the reader in understanding the process of spiritual formation and how vital the will is in determining the individual’s progress in their formation. His conclusion states how a disciple who is learning to do all that Jesus commanded (i.e., the Great Commission) needs understanding of this concept to establish a basis of care.

Con

Porter concentrates on expressing his thoughts and those of Dallas Willard. His other citations are relegated to definition support and not significantly adding to the conversation in a meaningful way.

Spickard, James V. “The Dark Side of Religious Individualism: A Marcusean Exploration,” *Critical Research on Religion*, 7, no. 2 (2019): 130–46. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/2050303219848066>.

Spickard presents an article that examines the concept of religious individualism through the lens of Herbert Marcuse, who was a scholar with the Institute of Social Research and wrote series of books from 1940 to 1972. Marcuse presented the idea that individuals submit, without realizing it, to the established order. Spickard and others have built their premises upon this thought and Spickard focuses on discussing how a person’s choice for religious individualism will lead them to submit to the “status quo” of the existing culture. Spickard’s article argues that religious individualism has resulted in organized religion losing its voice and being dismissed by the culture. Spickard points out how the sexual scandals in the Catholic church have had a significant impact upon the credibility of all organized churches in the American culture. He explains that individuals are defining religion for themselves and believe that God requires little, and church is a helpful community filled with nice people.

Pro

Spickard's discussion provides a credible argument of how the seeker sensitive movement in churches can lead to individualistic behavior in the realm of religious thought. His description of people seeking a comfortable happiness is well stated.

Con

Spickard's article attempts to describe how religious individualism is not equipped to become meaningful in providing meaningful action in culture, which does not seem an appropriate conclusion considering what we presented. The conclusion that would make more sense was that religious individualism tends toward narcissism rather than providing a meaningful impact to society.

Sutton, Lodewyk. "An Appropriation of Psalm 82 against the Background of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The Christian Church as a Change Agent in the Fourth Industrial Revolution," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 76, no. 2 (2020): e1–9. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.4102/hts.v76i2.6126>.

Sutton explains that the Fourth Industrial Revolution began around the year 2000 and was initiated by the advancements in computers, networks, advances on the internet, nanotechnology, and robotics. This revolution aided a change in individual's perceptions and moved people in America toward an individualistic society rather than a group-oriented society. This individualism results in people be self-important and self-absorbed. These individuals do not rely upon groups for their answers of truth but are more likely to define truths for themselves and expect others to do so as well.

Sutton continues by referencing Psalm 82 and providing the perspective that God is the sole provider for truth and can be relied upon for that truth. The author argues that the church needs to recognize the thoughts of the current audience of individuals and act as a change agent that is active in interpreting how to respond to the changes around society. He argues that rather than teaching them to be group-oriented, the church should attempt to point individuals to seek God for truth and direction as the appropriate authority.

Pro

Sutton speaks clearly of the individualistic nature of Americans and offers an interesting perspective that allows a believer to approach an individual in a manner that has a greater chance of being received well, given their worldview.

Con

Sutton makes his argument that authority lies solely with God, which is accurate; however, his proposed solution does not do much beyond providing an individualistic person a starting point to appropriating a biblical lifestyle as proposed by Jesus and the Apostles.

Tobias, Brandner. "The Church as Family," *Theology today* (Ephrata, Pa.), 76, no. 3 (2019): 217–23. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/0040573619859018>.

Brandner discusses the importance that family relationships have upon the Chinese churches and the leadership structures within them. He describes how traditional Confucianism aligns well with defining the need for strong, supportive families, which the Christian church in China can promote as well to the believers in the churches. Brandner explains the efforts that the central government has exerted over the decades to erode familial relationships and to transfer the reliance of individuals to the government for support and approval. Brandner points out that the efforts have had a significant negative impact upon families, but people do not find the government to be a good substitute for the family relationships, thus creating fertile ground for the church to provide a community for relational support. Brandner asserts that the Chinese government sees the churches as challengers to their influence and will continue to encroach upon that influence.

Pro

The article provides a glimpse into one aspect of what has been the most successful evangelical outreach in the modern age and how familial closeness can withstand intense outside pressure. The fact that people seek out the church for a "sense of belonging" speaks to the inherent need of people to have that connection with each other, especially within the family of God.

Con

The article does not explain how familial closeness was developed within these churches among members who were not blood related family. The author simply asserts that the churches view themselves as family in general, without providing context of what behavior and thoughts support such a view.

Uecker, Jeremy E, and Paul Froese. "Religious Individualism and Moral Progressivism: How Source of Religious Authority Is Related to Attitudes About Abortion, Same-Sex Marriage, Divorce, and Premarital Sex," *Politics and Religion*, 12, no. 2 (2019): 283–316. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1017/S1755048318000792>.

The authors report upon their survey and calculations that sought to determine if a person's adherence to religious individualism correlated to their moral progressivism. Their questions sought to segment people into categories based upon their reliance upon religious organizations and religious authorities for their positions on a set of contentious matters (abortion, same-sex marriage, divorce, premarital sex) or their preference to determine their positions on those issues based upon other cultural authorities in their lives. In almost every case, those who identified that they placed high reliance on religious organizations and the leadership of those organizations, were more conservative in their viewpoints on the contentious matters. Those who placed a higher reliance on other cultural authorities more likely to be described as morally progressive. In their sample, they identified that 51% of the individuals were a form of non-religious individualists, 31% were religious intuitionists, and 18% were religious individualists. They concluded that those with individualistic sources of religious authority have a robust association with progressive attitudes. Not surprisingly, the secularists

discounted religious authority, but religious individualists appeared to be moving away from religious conventions of the past.

Pro

The methodology used for analyzing this sample appeared well constructed and adhered to prior studies which had been peer viewed and accepted as valid. The authors pointed out that the topic of abortion did not align with their conclusions on the other contentious items and that more research would be appropriate on that topic.

Con

The authors pointed out that their methodology did not discern the amount of importance a person placed upon making moral decisions based upon religious principles, which could have skewed the number of people who were reported as being religious individualists rather than properly identified as expressive individualists or utilitarian individualist.

Westhuizen, Henco van der. "The Spirit and the Law," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 40, no. 1 (2019).
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.4102/ve.v40i1.1933>.

Westhuizen has written a very interesting article where he explains how theologian Michael Welker has analyzed the fundamental purposes of law and how those principles relate to God's law that was presented in the Old Testament. Welker continued by considering how the Holy Spirit's influence moves to empower that law to become more than a guide to moral living, but to something "beyond morality." Westhuizen explains that the law provides a "security of expectations", which aids a person to know proper boundaries that they can count upon. Welker had described three codes: the legal code, the mercy code, and the cultic code. The legal code in God's law aids a believer to understand God's character. The mercy code enables a believer to relate to those who do not yet know God as it reminds them of their own need for mercy from God. The cultic code in the law highlights the fact that God is accessible to man. Westhuizen points out to the reader that Welker's work reminds mankind that God's law is meant to aid them, not simply result in condemnation. The article points out that mankind tends to twist and redefine morality and God's law establishes a plumbline that can be referenced to determine true morality.

Pro

Westhuizen explained Welker's thoughts clearly and provided a convincing dialogue of the theologian's arguments. His explanation's help a reader understand that it is a work of the Spirit to transform law from a punishing framework to a revelatory framework of God's character and love for mankind.

Con

Westhuizen often quoted Welker in German but did not clearly identify if he was directly translating those statements. In some instances, German was used in quotes and there was no subsequent translation. Since this article was published in English, it seems reasonable to have expected all German quotes to be translated.

Zaas, Peter. "Symposium on the Shema," *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 48, no. 3 (2018): 133–47. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/0146107918781280>.

Zaas has compiled three presentations made during the Symposium on the Shema that occurred in 2017. Three scholars who represented Islam, Judaism, and Messianic Judaism were asked to give their reflections upon the Shema. Roberta Sabbath, representing Islam, explained why the Shema was important to Muslims and how it had been slightly transformed to highlight there was only one singular God. Interestingly, she described how this passage was etched onto the outer walls of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and how it was also written on the interior of the Dome. The interior message has a more specific refutation of Jesus as being in any way divine. Kenneth Hanson described how there was a move of reformation within the Messianic Judaism community to explain that Jesus was a Jew and would not have elevated Himself to the level of the divine as He quoted the Shema. Hanson does describe this is a splinter movement and not the opinion of most Messianic Jews, who would be more easily understood to be Christians who are Jews. The final scholar was Zev Garber, who represented Judaism. He spoke of the Jewish belief that there is only one God and no others. He argued that Deut 13:1 describes a commandment to not add to what God has stated nor diminish it. His argument is that there is no room for adding two more members to the Godhead according to Scripture.

Pro

This article is very useful to gain perspective on how other major religions consider this passage and the arguments those who represent those religions would make against a Christian interpretation of the Shema.

Con

The article did not include a Christian viewpoint that was not associated with the Jewish community. It would have been useful to have a Christian scholar presenting a well-reasoned argument from that viewpoint to be included in this dialogue of scholars.