

Binding Up Our Nation's Wounds

Some mornings we wake up on empty to a day that's got nothing but need.^[i]

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As we continue to work through the new reality following one of this country's most vitriolic presidential campaigns and surprising political outcomes, we may find ourselves unearthing layers of personal, historical, and emotional debris. Some of us needed Hillary to win as the long awaited role model for women and young girls, while others needed Trump to win because he represented change in a system seen as rigged against them at worst and deaf to their voices at best. No matter the motivation, when our personal needs become intertwined with our ideas about social justice and political efficacy, communication becomes strained even between friends and family members.

Maybe you feel anger, fear, sadness and shock that a competent woman was not elected despite her considerable experience and support. Or perhaps you feel anger, fear, sadness and shock that you are now unfairly maligned as a racist, misogynist or homophobe, and misjudged as alt-right for supporting our elected president. Maybe you are overwhelmed by all that you don't understand but thought you knew. These and many other emotions poke through the dirt like sharp bone fragments calling for our attention, asking us to consider if we are ready to participate in binding up our nation's wounds.

Recently, a small group of concerned persons met to examine these challenges.^[ii] We considered an ethical framework to help us develop a nonjudgmental reference point for maintaining consciousness of our ethical preferences so that we don't become cynical towards differing ethical positions. Pope Francis emerged as a symbol of reconciliation based on principles he developed in his work between Catholics, Muslims, Jews, and evangelical communities in Argentina more than 40 years ago.

In suggesting that "unity prevails over conflict," Francis suggests that avoiding conflict actually undermines unity. He also makes the important point that it is possible to get lost in conflict, "become its prisoners," lose our bearings, and project our confusion and dissatisfaction outward making unity impossible.^[iii] Yikes. Pope Francis goes on to suggest that "realities are more important than ideas," not something you'd expect a Pope to say.

But what if we saw the realities right in front of us—the people hurting in our own families, workplaces and places of worship—as more important than our personal ideas and judgments? How might each of us begin to live into the post-election realities touching us now? If we truly believe (as Francis also suggests) that the "whole" of our country is "greater than its parts," would we begin to appeal to a broader base of Americans as Americans in order to "speak to the nation as a nation of citizens who are in this together?"^[iv]

This kind of reconciliation, however, requires that we deal with animosity. It tends to linger long after we've regrouped and seemingly moved on. We know how painful it is to be on the receiving end of it, and how we typically respond to it. But consider these arresting words:

As painful as it is to receive contempt from another, it is more debilitating by far to be filled with contempt for another. In this, too, I speak from painful experience. My own contempt for others is the most debilitating contempt of all, for when I am in the middle of it—when I'm seeing resentfully and disdainfully—I condemn myself to living in a disdainful and resentful world.^[v]

These authors go on to suggest that contempt is rooted in self-betrayal, and that having a "heart at war" is at the bottom of our tendency to "horribilize" others. For example, when I have a genuine impulse to extend a courtesy or kindness to someone on the "other" side, my heart is at peace; I am seeing the "other" as human and legitimate.

But if I don't act on this ethical premise, and betray my own sense of what is right, I must now justify why I didn't do what I could have done. It may not seem like very much, but over time, these psychological "set ups" can become patterns or boxes that inhibit future actions, making it difficult to open ourselves to others even when we want to.

In Pope Francis' spirit of reconciliation, here are a few questions to help us keep our hearts at peace and get us out of our boxes. Imagine that you are face to face with someone on the "other" side, maybe someone with whom you've recently had an unpleasant exchange. Now see if you can be genuinely curious about the following:

- What are this person's challenges, trials, burdens or pains?
- How am I (or some group of which I am a part) adding to these challenges, trials, burdens and pains?
- In what ways have I (or members of my group) neglected or mistreated this person (knowingly or unknowingly)?
- In what ways are my boxes preventing me from seeing the truth about this person and possibly interfering with potential solutions?
- What am I feeling I could do to support this person?^[vi]

As people of good will continue to rise above the pettiness and create soul-full alternatives to the rancor that still runs rampant, we need to find "out of the box" places where we can meet people in their full humanity. When we relate to others from that vantage point, we create more spaciousness for others as well as ourselves. When our hearts are at peace, we don't feel pressured to agree with every point of view, nor do we feel the need to defend one position exclusively; we are free to respond more authentically and with less fear.

Eventually, we have to let go of our need to be right, which doesn't mean that we abandon our values or beliefs. To the contrary! If we make the needs of others as important as our own, we expand our capacity to be fully present while also being true to our faith and to who we are. How else can we truly open ourselves? Our collective healing may very well depend not only on accessing the beauty within us but also on our capacity to see the beauty around us in the very people who challenge us most. As poets and songwriters across faith traditions have echoed throughout the ages:

*Let the beauty—
we love come and fill us*

*Let the beauty—
all around get us through*

*Let the beauty—
inside be our compass*

*Let beauty now be
what we do, what we do.*^[vii]

[i] From "Let Beauty Now Be," *The Illumination Band in One Song* (2005). Philadelphia: Running Press, p. 83.

[ii] "Ethic of Inclusion: Getting Unstuck," *October 12th, 19th, and 26th*. Wisdom Ways, St. Paul, MN.

[iii] *Joy of the Gospel* (2013), paragraphs 227-228.

[iv] M. Lilla, "The End of Identity Liberalism," *New York Times*, November 20th, 2016.

[v] *The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict* (2006), Arbinger Institute, p. 96.

[vi] Adapted from *Anatomy of Peace* (2006), pp. 186-187.

[vii] From "Let Beauty Now Be," *The Illumination Band in One Song* (2005). Philadelphia: Running Press, p. 83.

This workshop grew out of a short piece published after last year's presidential election (Binding Up.pdf). It will begin with prayer and scripture to set context (Binding up, our nation.docx), and use the Ethic of Inclusion (2017.docx), as well as a PowerPoint presentation and other hand-outs distributed the day of.

Binding up our Nation's Wounds NACSW 2017 Conference

Before getting into our topic, I'd like to ask you to pray with me, as I read several scripture passages that will serve as a foundation for our time together:

Matthew 13 Purpose of Parables

The disciples approached him and said, "Why do you speak to them in parables? He said to them in reply: "Because knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted... This is why I speak to them in parables, because they look but do not see, and hear but not listen or understand... But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it...

Notice the significance Jesus gives to really SEEING and really HEARING – not as others typically see and hear. This is how I want to ground us for this topic today. By starting from the premise that we CAN and SHOULD be SEEING and HEARING differently as people of followers of Jesus. That we NEED to if we are going to participate in Binding Up Our Nation's wounds.

Would you continue to pray with me as I read a parable that shows up only in Luke's gospel--

Luke 10: 29-37

Because he wished to justify himself, [a man] said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped him and beat him and went off leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. **[Notice that they saw, but didn't SEE.]** But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him upon his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, "Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I will repay you on my way back."

Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim? He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Now, I know this isn't supposed to be a sermon, but I need to know before going on that you understand the significance that a Samaritan was the one who really SAW and responded with mercy—not the ones you might expect—a priest, a Levite—they both crossed over to the other side so as to avoid the situation altogether. In telling this parable, why do you think Jesus chose a Samaritan—a person of mixed race who Jews were not to touch or have dealings with? Remember the story of the Samaritan woman? And what about the 10 who were healed in another parable, but it was only the Samaritan, the one Jesus called a “foreigner” who came back to give thanks, and to whom Jesus said “Stand up and go. Your faith has saved you.” Why do you suppose *this* is the one who we are still talking about today as WE consider what it might mean to bind up our *nation's* wounds?

Who Was Beaten Up?

Our last presidential election left many people feeling beaten up and wounded. The wounds were such that even before the election, family members stopped talking to one another. And afterwards, well, let's just say that there were a lot of topics avoided at Thanksgiving dinner... right? Do you SEE? Avoiding difficult conversations because [you fill in the blank!] is just a modern way of moving to the other side of the street. We see what's coming, and we move to the other side of the street. Even those of us who consider ourselves faithful and loving.

And since the election, our country is still embroiled in deeply polarizing and unsettling rhetoric on lots of “hot” topics that Christians and Christian educators aren't sure we know how to deal with... How do we deal with our own reactivity when our buttons get pushed by those who really are wounded and need attention? How do we NOT become cynical or hard hearted to the many walking wounded out there who express points of view that seem to challenge or even belittle our faith? How can we sincerely and with good heart minister to *their* wounds?

The Secret is in the SEEing

We need to SEE our SEEING for what it is. Does it lead us to the kind of radical, compassionate responses that the Samaritan shows us? Come on now—look at what he did! He stopped what he was doing... His agenda didn't dictate his actions... Not only that! He took him (the wounded one) on HIS own animal, and took him to safety. Consider the implications of this for just a minute. What might be the modern day parallel? We aren't walking with animals these days! And, then, he came out of his pocket, not knowing how much it would cost, but making a down payment and promising to make good on the rest of whatever was need... Come on now! Does Jesus expect that sort of thing from us?

If this seems like it is too tall of an order, I want to suggest that we need to start with our own SEEING... Binding Up our Nation's Wounds requires that we develop an **Ethic of Inclusion (PP). This ethic has everything to do with SEEING, how we see, what we miss (don't see), and how we get stuck.**

It is based on an INTEGRAL way of SEEING ourselves AND others! Let's examine what I mean by this...

Ethic of Inclusion

Mari Ann Graham

A peaceful world will only be when we can see beyond the boundaries of “us” and “them” and me and you --to one self, and to *that* self be true. Who here would cut their own arm? Or starve their own child? Or let any part of themselves be harmed or defiled? We may still have a little while to fly our flags on this garden isle--as it pirouettes through the Milky Way. But maybe not, who can say?

--Kirtana

This song communicates a really big picture view of ethics—what I call an integral perspective. This community certainly has an integral ecological perspective – and the song reflects that as well. I don’t think I have to try and “convert” anyone here to that perspective, do I? But maintaining an integral view is not just believing in integral ecology, it is the willingness to hold a really big container for other issues as well— thorny political issues that pit “us” against “them,” how to see “beyond the boundaries” of whatever positions we hold most dear, so that we don’t have to demonize people who are on the other side. It’s a complicated view of the world and how things work. It’s NOT simple or easy, and yet it is a perspective that Pope Francis exemplifies from everything I can see. I thought he was an integral thinker when I read *Joy of the Gospel*, but his encyclical, *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si)*, released June (2015), confirmed this earlier suspicion as he applied his background as a chemist with theology and the social sciences to **take his integral thinking to the planetary level!** But before considering whether Francis is an integral thinker, let’s turn our attention to a brief overview of what I mean by an integral perspective.

Integral Ethics Perspective

Wilber’s integral paradigm (Wilber, 2006, 2001, 2000, 1997) used widely across disciplines and translated into more than 25 languages, articulates four simultaneous, inseparable and irreducible dimensions of reality. He uses a graph containing four quadrants, key words and arrows pointed in four directions to illustrate the interrelatedness, depth and complexity of each dimension. Simply put, human beings simultaneously have interior (subjective) and exterior (objective) perspectives/experiences as both individuals and as members of various groups; each dimension is also multi-layered and interrelated to the other three.[See Diagram.]

Applied specifically to ethical decision-making, this meta-paradigm expands the way we think about ethics offering us the opportunity to engage with others in a richer, more authentic and inclusive way. These four quadrants correspond to 4 schools of ethical thought: principle-based (deontological) and utilitarian (consequentialist) reasoning-- usually applied to how we make decisions as individuals. There are 2 other schools of ethical reasoning that have more communal contexts: virtue ethics and care ethics. In the context of any group or community, your own family of origin, for example, or the Sisters of St. Joseph, for another example, certain virtues (or character traits) are valued more than others. And using these virtues or character traits may be seen as more important than following certain rules or even obeying certain laws. I put this on the interior side of decision-making because often the process of how we learn these virtues or develop these character traits is more implicit (not even talked about much of the time) and yet the messages are internalized deeply and very personally. Care ethics is another form of ethical reasoning grounded in communities with particular emphasis on how we care for those who have less power, how power-differentials are often used to control people with less power. I’ve placed it on the exterior side of our diagram because this kind of ethical reasoning relies heavily on “objective data” or “evidence-based care” and consequences/outcomes likely to occur based on this data. Make sense? So, while virtue ethics with its focus on becoming the right kind of *person* (not just knowing the rules and following them), and care ethics on more objective, external standards, both of these are oriented to groups (or communities).

Remember: in an integral frame, all four ways of ethical reasoning are inseparable, irreducible and interconnected; they are not understood in mutually-exclusive terms. We are always individuals (having individual principles, emotions and interior lives,) and we are always individuals who are keenly aware of consequences to ourselves and others. All of this becomes the basis for how we make a decision about ANYTHING – all of that is going on inside all of us as individuals! AND, not only that! We also have internalized a lot of values and developed enduring qualities (habits) based on groups that have contributed to our development of our character—this is always going on with each of us, all the time. AND, we are also members of communities that have educated us with certain “facts” and we want to make decisions considering them as well! All four of these concurrent dimensions of human experience are relevant to us in various decision-making contexts and throughout our own development as persons. Do you see how complicated it is? How natural it is to develop preferences for using one dimension more than the others (like being right or left-handed, even though we have BOTH all the time)? How we even move from quadrant to quadrant based on where we are in our development? How are orientation can change as we collect more individual experiences and experiences in groups? And, do you see how we can get “stuck” or simply defend a point of view based on one quadrant— and not consider how things look from other perspectives? It’s just so complicated! And most of us want to believe that we are doing the right thing...

Example.*

Identifying my dominant hand.*

Why/How This is Important

We are certainly aware that as humans we each have individual experiences (both internal and external experiences as the unique individuals that we are), AND that we also have experiences as members of many different groups (families, religious groups, social groups, political groups, work groups), and that they have both interior as well as exterior dimensions – that is, their own internal processes that aren’t necessarily open to the external world as well as outcomes that are observable to the external world.

We are also aware of how important it is to pay attention to both *individual* and *collective* experiences, as well as *interior* processes and *external* results. So, Ken Wilber’s integral paradigm is really not new information for us. And yet, we still get embroiled in some of the nastiest arguments about who is right or most ethical when it comes to lots of issues-- gay marriage, abortion, who you are supporting for president -- fill in the blank!

What this meta-ethical framework allows us to do **is to see** the multiple, simultaneous and interrelated dimensions of *any* ethical dilemma. In any ethical dilemma there are individually-oriented outcomes as well as individual principles and/or motivations to consider. And, there are also collectively-oriented outcomes as well as collectively-oriented principles to consider because social work educators (and students!) are also members of groups that have similar and sometimes conflicting external standards of care and collectively defined virtues. And every one of us has all of these dimensions going on all the time! We often have conflicting loyalties as members of our particular families, churches we attend, political affiliations and lots of other social groups we are a part of. As *individuals*, we forge our identities *within* these groups, and at the same time we are always moving *between* these groups—all of which provide us with aspects of our identity, validate us in important ways and/or provide us with a sense of community and belonging. In each and every context we receive internal as well as external validation for different kinds of decisions and behaviors, and somehow it’s up to us to hold all this complexity! Is it any wonder we choose to simplify the complexity by focusing on one particular way of reasoning?

Once *seen* in this more complicated and nuanced way, ethical decision-making immediately becomes a more dynamic (less mechanical) process. To understand our own decisions more fully as well as the decisions of others, we need to move from quadrant to quadrant, depending on the issue and the particular context we are in. The integral paradigm helps us see where we get stuck, and also gives us insight into how and where others may also be getting stuck. And, it can offer us ideas about how we can keep *moving*, and still be true to ourselves (not just fake it). As we develop our capacity to see our

preferences for certain quadrants, we can also see how others have developed certain preferences too, and how many of our conflicts aren't necessarily with the people involved, but are how we are actually experiencing the world quite differently than others are.

And here's the really good news-- when we get a glimpse of the whole (and how complicated everything is), we have options that didn't have before! It's like being reminded that we can actually breathe out of our mouths when our nose is stopped up. What a relief! **We actually create more space for ourselves to respond to all of the complexities authentically and with less fear. We don't feel pressured to agree with every point of view, nor do we feel pressured to defend one particular position exclusively because we can actually *see* a more complicated, interconnected reality.**

Even as we continue to work through our own conflicts and become more fully integrated ourselves (a continuous, developmental process to be sure!), **this perspective provides us with a nonjudgmental reference point for maintaining consciousness of our own development instead of becoming cynical or hard-hearted towards others who are reasoning differently because of where they are in *theirs*.** Most importantly, without suggesting that everything is relative or that "anything goes," this framework **doesn't privilege one worldview while marginalizing others.** It is a framework for holding all the parts together, and valuing it all, while honoring where we are at any point in time on any particular issue.

Clearly, we will not always agree or even come to a consensus on many issues facing us today, but learning to see in this more complicated, nuanced way **frees us to authentically engage in difficult conversations without needing to hide any dimension of who we each are.**

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