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Learning to Speak Faith Publicly: Theology and Culture in the Secular University

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Abstract

This article examines how theology can engage meaningfully with secular academic and cultural contexts, focusing on the *possibility of public theology* within the modern university. Emerging from societies where religion was long marginalized or privatized under communist regimes, the discussion highlights the renewed struggle to reintegrate theological discourse into public intellectual life. It argues that public theology must learn to "speak faith publicly"—that is, to express religious convictions in ways that contribute to shared intellectual and moral discourse without resorting to confessional exclusivity. By comparing *public theology* to *public philosophy*, the authors highlight both the similarities and tensions between the two. While both seek to address common human questions concerning truth, value, and meaning, public theology must navigate the added complexity of grounding its insights in faith traditions while remaining open to secular dialogue. The article argues that the Beatitudes and the concept of *middle axioms* provide complementary theological and methodological resources for communicating Christian faith within secular higher education, as illustrated by a qualitative case study conducted at a public university in Slovakia.

Keywords: public theology; academy; dialogue; beatitudes; secularism; middle axioms

1. Introduction

It is arguable that biblical theology is nothing if it is not public. The Bible speaks about all humankind and addresses all peoples, not merely isolated readers. It does not support some sort of private spirituality or academy-only theology. From its earliest narratives to its final prophecy, Scripture addresses publicly shared problems, forms shared identities and makes claims about the world that are meant to be heard by all humanity.

Also, its ethical and spiritual principles are quite obviously meant to be lived out in common life. A theology that does not aspire to address the public probably remains private, confined to personal insight or academic abstraction. Biblical theology necessarily engages public questions of meaning (as Kohelet does), justice (as the Old Testament prophets do), and truth (that Jesus represents). The Bible speaks (sometimes we may feel too openly) about conversations, disagreements, and transformations within the broader human community. If theology becomes detached from this public dimension, it ceases to be faithful to the character of the biblical text itself.

All of this is almost too obvious—so why do we talk about *public theology* as if something new appeared under the sun? The displacement of theology from the public square was not a sudden secular coup but the cumulative result of negative biblical criticism and

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the consolidation of a modern scientific worldview in the last three centuries. As Henning Graf Reventlow shows, the historical-critical method gradually eroded the Bible's status as a unified and authoritative source of public truth, relocating it to the realm of confessional or private belief rather than shared rational discourse.[1] Scripture came to be treated as a historically conditioned text, subject to the same skepticism as any other ancient document, weakening theology's claim to speak normatively beyond the church. At the same time, the rise of modern science offered alternative explanations of nature that no longer required theological grounding. As Peter Harrison and John H. Roberts argue in *Science without God?*, the sciences increasingly defined their methods and legitimacy independently of biblical and theological doctrines, reinforcing the marginalization of theology in public reasoning.[2] Together, biblical criticism and scientific autonomy reshaped the conditions of knowledge, pushing theology to the edges of modern intellectual life. Replacing the Bible/theology with competing philosophies, "...modern thought was born in a crisis of authority [and] took shape in flight from authority..." (Stout 1981, pp. 2–3).

It is hardly desirable to restore theology to the coercive authority it exercised in the medieval synthesis of church and polity, yet Richard John Neuhaus's warning about a "naked public square" remains compelling: a public realm purged of theological reasoning is not neutral—"[w]hat is called neutrality toward religion is an invitation for a substitute religion." (Neuhaus 1984, p. 102). Modern public theology thus faces a tension between withdrawal and domination. A constructive path can be found in the paradox articulated in the Gospel metaphors of Jesus' followers as both "salt of the earth" and a "city set on a hill" (Matthew 5:13–14). Salt works precisely by dissolving into what it preserves—exerting influence without visibility or force—while the city's visibility signals accountability and orientation rather than control. Public theology, on this view, neither seeks medieval authority nor privatized irrelevance, but a formative presence that shapes public imagination and offers a moral voice to the public conscience (Tracy 1981, p. 208ff; Ford 2007). In recent decades, public theology has emerged as a distinct field of theological inquiry concerned with the constructive engagement of Christian faith in pluralistic democratic societies. Rather than advocating either ecclesial withdrawal or political dominance, public theology seeks to contribute to the common good by participating in public reasoning while remaining rooted in the distinctive claims of the Christian tradition (Kim and Day 2017; Graham 2013). As Volf (2011) argues, Christian public witness should neither privatize faith nor impose it coercively, but should cultivate forms of civic engagement that are both confessionally faithful and publicly intelligible. Such a posture resonates with Augustinian realism about the saeculum and contemporary accounts of non-coercive Christian engagement in pluralist democracies.

It is useful to juxtapose public theology—promoting civil religion[3] with the aims of public philosophy—civility.[4] Both of these perspectives suggest that social cohesion depends on unifying symbols and beliefs, as Marty emphasizes, and also on the habits of civility that Lippmann argues must be actively practiced. Civil religion should supply a nation with moral orientation, and civility with a lived philosophy of daily interactions. We may need to re-examine the sharp distinction between public and private (Casanova 1994).

In that line, we understand public theology as the constructive engagement of Christian theology with the wider public sphere through forms of reasoning that remain faithful to the Christian tradition while being intelligible and open to dialogue within pluralistic societies (Kim and Day 2017; Graham 2013; Volf 2011). Rather than addressing only the church or political institutions, public theology seeks to contribute to public debate, education and the common good by translating theological insights into publicly accessible discourse.

In Czechoslovakia, after the Velvet Revolution of 1989, theology gradually re-entered the secular academy following decades of Marxist–Leninist repression. Within the newly

pluralistic academic environment, we face integration challenges to dialogue with philosophy, history, and the social sciences (the "salt-like" side of public theology engagement).[5] (Habermas 2006). The modern university represents one of the most important arenas in which theological reasoning encounters diverse intellectual traditions and competing worldviews. Such engagement requires theology to function not merely as an internal discourse of the church but also as a participant in civil society, capable of contributing to broader conversations concerning ethics, education, and the common good (Fergusson 2004a, 2004b). On the other hand, we aspire to influence debates on ethics, identity, and civil society towards truth and justice (the "city on the hill" function of public theology). Some of this effort is presented in our case study in the second part of this article.

Our core aim is to show how public theology can make a distinctive contribution to secular higher education when it is understood not merely as public advocacy or political engagement but as a form of intellectually responsible academic communication. The central thesis of the article is that the Beatitudes provide the ethical grammar for such communication, while the concept of *middle axioms* offers a methodological framework through which theological convictions can be translated into publicly accessible forms of reasoning. This argument is developed theoretically and then examined through a qualitative case study of two university courses taught at a secular public university in Slovakia. In doing so, the article contributes to contemporary discussions on public theology by demonstrating how theological reflection can be communicated constructively within a post-communist, religiously plural, and secular academic environment.

2. PART I—The Salt and Light Metaphor

Given the unclear thematic boundaries among various disciplines that focus on engaging the public sphere with theology, establishing precise distinctions between them is essential for conceptual clarity. Although public theology overlaps with several related fields, it should be distinguished from them. Unlike political theology, which primarily examines the relationship between theological ideas and political power, public theology focuses on constructive participation in public discourse across a range of social institutions. It also differs from civil religion, which describes the religious dimensions of national identity and public ritual, and from public philosophy, whose foundations are philosophical rather than explicitly theological. Likewise, while Christian social ethics addresses the moral implications of Christian teaching for society, public theology is concerned more broadly with the public communication of theological reasoning within pluralistic contexts.

If public theology is to function as salt and light (Matthew 5:13–16)—preserving, illuminating, and shaping public life—it must be grounded in the dispositions that make such a witness possible. The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12) articulate these prerequisites: humility, deep seriousness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, willingness to endure marginalization, and a loving attachment to the person of Jesus. Without this formative vision of character and vocation, appeals to public influence risk becoming triumphalist or coercive rather than faithful, losing the very distinctiveness that enables theology to serve the common good.

The Beatitudes can be presented not merely as ethical ideals but as a psychologically coherent progression[6] of character formation. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3) names an epistemic posture: humility grounded in creaturely dependence and cognitive finitude. In public theology, such humility becomes methodological. Theology enters the public square acknowledging that it does not possess total knowledge and therefore resists overreach in contested domains such as theories of origins. Genesis 1, read humbly, bears theological rather than technical intent, disclosing God as creator without adjudicating cosmology or mechanisms. Evangelical scientists such as Francis S. Collins argue that

Christian faith is compatible with evolutionary biology and modern physics when Scripture is read according to its theological intent rather than as empirical description.[7] Epistemic humility enables public theology to affirm creation as a theological claim while taking into account scientific explanations of cosmic and biological origins. Such "poverty of spirit" is not intellectual retreat but disciplined restraint, allowing theology to speak credibly and responsibly amid plural forms of knowledge.

"Blessed are those who mourn" (Matthew 5:4). This disposition provides the theological basis for public dialogue because it rejects intellectual triumphalism. Public theology begins not with the assumption that it possesses unquestionable authority over others, but with the willingness to enter conversation as a learner as well as a witness. Humility therefore becomes the condition for genuine academic dialogue rather than merely a personal virtue.

This beatitude as applied in public theology names not a private emotion but a disciplined attentiveness to suffering and loss, a refusal to bypass pain through premature consolation or moral certainty. Mourning, in this sense, is a form of truthfulness: it faces the world as wounded rather than resolved. Israelites had to remember their suffering in Egypt.[8] Johann Baptist Metz argues that Christian faith must remain exposed to the *memoria passionis*, the memory of suffering that interrupts complacent reason and demands solidarity with the afflicted.[9] Public theology, therefore, must learn to listen before it argues, attending to personal trauma, social exclusion, and perceived losses on all sides of contested debates. In conflicts over sexuality, abortion, in vitro fertilization, or genetic engineering, moral outrage often functions as displaced grief, masking unacknowledged mourning over threatened identities and broken hopes. Theology that refuses to mourn speaks too quickly; even when logically correct, it sounds cruel. Deep suffering calls for the suspension of final theological judgment.[10] Public theology has to begin with seeing reality as it is.[11] To mourn, then, is not to surrender judgment, but to render it humane.

Public theology's appropriation of "the meek" (Matthew 5:5) applies the beatitude as a mode of nondominative presence rather than quietism. Meekness should not be understood as passivity but as disciplined strength exercised without domination. In the context of public theology, it enables theological arguments to be presented persuasively rather than coercively, respecting both academic freedom and the dignity of dialogue partners. Meekness names strength under discipline: a refusal to coerce, attack, or overpower, even when we possess rhetorical or institutional force. In the public square, this virtue appears not as withdrawal but as moral restraint—resisting the urge to win by intrigue, or by blackmail—refusing to follow the verbal aggression that governs polarized public discourse. This attitude enables theology to remain present in hostile or exclusionary environments without escalating conflict or abandoning conviction. This is grounded in the historical Christian experience that persuasion need not rely on political or physical conquest. Letty Russell's vision of "just hospitality" frames meekness as an active ethic that makes room for the other acting in the spirit of the gospel.[12] Meekness, then, functions as a self-restraining public practice that keeps theology both vulnerable and truthful, and ethically imaginative.

The beatitude blessing those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6) names not mere moral zeal but a disciplined longing for normative ethical clarity grounded in God's will. The pursuit of righteousness directs public theology beyond private spirituality toward concern for justice and the common good. At the same time, biblical righteousness remains rooted in God's purposes rather than being reduced to changing political agendas, preserving the theological distinctiveness of public engagement. Such desire presupposes the prior dispositions of humility, mourning, and meekness: in Christian theology, there are no intrinsically just persons—only sinners who are justified by

grace (Romans 3:10, 23–24). From this posture, public theology can speak clearly and firmly about justice—naming moral wrongs, challenging unjust structures, and proposing alternative visions of the good without collapsing into pharisaical moralism. Then it can show how secular reason is a "…disguised heterodoxy of various stripes…" (Milbank 2006, p. xiv), a form of distorted Christianity whose fully developed ideal is found in Christian theology.[13] The corrective offered by public theology's stance toward capitalism has to be balanced with insistence that "…social justice is not a program for the Leviathan state—more spending and more regulation—but the virtue of personal responsibility for the common good…" (Novak 2015, p. 196), a view that integrates personal virtue with institutional responsibility. Together, they suggest that authentic hunger for righteousness informed by diverse theologies yields both a critique and an orientation toward a more just society.

Grounded in the Beatitude "Blessed are the merciful" (Matthew 5:7), public theology interprets mercy not just as a private virtue but as a public theological disposition of interpretive generosity. Mercy shapes the manner in which disagreement is conducted. It encourages theological discourse that remains attentive to persons rather than merely defeating opposing arguments, thereby creating conditions for respectful dialogue even where profound differences remain. In this sense, mercy names a readiness to forgive and restore that translates, in public theology, into possible positive interpretation of opponents' motives, an intelligent distinction between persons and the positions they hold,[14] and a genuinely sincere openness to repentance and moral change. Christian legal and political traditions are deformed when justice is severed from mercy. Justice devoid of mercy turns theology into an instrument of accusation rather than restoration.[15] In contentious public debates, mercy thus prevents theology from becoming prosecutorial; it resists the logic of permanent moral enemies and refuses to reduce adversaries to abstract wrongdoers. Public theology sees to it that human rights discourse will remain attentive to the dignity of concrete persons that "…are not mere parts of the social whole, like cogs in a large machine." (Hollenbach 2004, p. 69). Although mercy must not negate moral judgment, it should steer public reasoning toward reconciliation with hope of renewed community.

The Beatitude "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matthew 5:8) names not a withdrawal from the world but an integrity of vision—a singleness of purpose in which desire, speech, and action cohere.[16] Purity of heart refers to integrity of intention. Applied to public theology, it requires transparency regarding one's own theological commitments while avoiding manipulation or strategic ambiguity. Such integrity strengthens rather than weakens the credibility of theological participation within secular academic discourse. In public theology, such purity appears as consistency between professed convictions and lived practice, freedom from hidden alliances with power or prestige, and a refusal to instrumentalize faith for partisan gain. Credibility in public debate depends less on consensus than on this moral single-mindedness: differences can be forgiven even welcomed, but not so hypocrisy. Genuine truthfulness is the glory of theology. One way to see it is Hans Urs von Balthasar's account of glory that insists that truth persuades through form, not force. In culture and the arts, it binds beauty and goodness to truthful witness.[17] In pluralist democracies, faith-based actors gain legitimacy when their public engagement mirrors their commitments. Hauerwas frames this as communal character, a people formed to tell the truth by how they live.[18] Purity of heart thus can be understood as the ethical-aesthetic condition for faithful Christian witness across politics, culture, and imagination.

"The peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9) refers not to passive tranquility but to the arduous craft of creative reconciliation. Peacemaking is more than conflict avoidance. It actively seeks reconciliation through truthful communication and mutual understanding. Consequently, public theology contributes not by eliminating disagreement but by cultivating

forms of dialogue in which disagreement can remain constructive rather than destructive. God of peace (Romans 15:33) blesses those who undertake the active work of restoring right relation amid animosity, enmity, and hatred. In this sense, public theology does not merely adjudicate disputes; it reframes conflicts (moving away from adversarial thinking), strives to generate a shared moral grammar, and proposes practices and institutions that work for peace. Such work exemplifies conflict transformation rather than avoidance: public theology works as a bridgebuilder without dissolving substantive disagreement. Within the ethics of war, peace, and civic life, this vocation engages the tensions between just war reasoning, pacifism, and political responsibility. The just war tradition makes political power accountable to protect the innocent,[19] situating force within a framework of justice and responsibility. But a peace-making public theology also has to take the pacifist church tradition seriously[20] and probably settle on the unpopular decision to agree to disagree. If political ethics is grounded in inherent rights, and justice is the public form of love, then peace without justice is counterfeit. Biblical "...shalom is intertwined with justice." (Wolterstorff 1983, p. 69) Creative reconciliation in the spirit of this Beatitude makes an effort to integrate restraint, rights, and nonviolence: a public theology that both names injustice truthfully and cultivates ways of peace.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Matthew 5:10) is not only about passive suffering but points to a vocation of faithful resilience. As a beatitude, it means willingness to stand for what is right under misunderstanding and hostility. It is a mark of maturity, even blessedness, rather than failure. For public theology, this implies that truthful and peaceable witness will not guarantee reception; indeed, when theology unsettles reigning liturgies of power and desire, rejection is predictable.[21] Public life is shaped by rival loves; to speak critically is to disrupt those loves and risk marginalization. Public influence of believers can generate backlash as readily as persuasion. In digital environments, where amplification accelerates outrage, religious speech is often refracted through networked logics that intensify censure.[22] Persecution today is frequently psychological—ostracism, reputational harm, or "cancel culture".[23] A theologian doing public theology must remain open even when wounded. Such cruciform endurance keeps public theology from collapsing into silence on the one hand or bitterness on the other. The willingness to accept misunderstanding or marginalization without abandoning either conviction or respect for others demonstrates that the credibility of public theology depends not only on the content of its arguments but also on the character with which those arguments are communicated.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the ninth Beatitude stands apart in a striking and personal way. Unlike the earlier blessings that describe general qualities—such as meekness or mercy—Jesus Christ shifts to a direct address: "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (Matthew 5:11). The is relational and explicitly tied to loyalty to him.[24] "Jesus is not suggesting that these [the Beatitudes] are simply timeless truths about the way the world is, about human behaviour.... Jesus is saying that with his work it's starting to come true." (Wright 2004, p. 36). But many people feel more exposed and vulnerable when speaking about Jesus publicly.[25] Then substituting relational language about Jesus with abstract notions (e.g., "ultimate concern," "ground of being," or "the transcendent") means losing the interpersonal dimension at the heart of Christian faith. For public theology to communicate, it must translate theological terms into broader concepts—an act that need not be a betrayal. The early church itself interpreted Jesus through the philosophical categories available in the Greco-Roman world. The risk is not conceptual clarity, but conceptual replacement—when Christ becomes illustrative rather than constitutive. If theology "forgets" this personal

relationship with Jesus, it may still be ethical, spiritual, or religious—but it may cease being recognizably Christian.

2.1. Using Salt and Light

The attitudes derived from the Beatitudes and applied to public theology must be translated into action. In a plural and skeptical academic environment, this requires deliberate practices of communication grounded in three interrelated movements: understanding ideas, translating language, and creating platforms of contact. The first two movements especially are far from easy[26] but they must be accomplished. To bridge faith commitments and public reason, theology begins with serious intellectual listening (to secularism, postmodernism, critical theory, liberalism, etc.)—theology must understand before it speaks. To communicate intelligibly, it will use the so-called "middle axioms" first defined by J. H. Oldham (1874–1969)[27] and in predominantly German theological discipline *Theologische Sozialethik*.[28] German theological social ethics used it as "…ethical categories of a medium level of abstraction that emerge as desiderata from the social context of a given present time, thus constituting initial evaluations of its critical problem areas. They represent the ethical conceptual field within which the dialogue between meta-scientific foundational positions (e.g., theology) and the individual academic disciplines must be conducted and worked through with regard to the formation of values." (Schulze 1979, p. 134). These categories/notions must participate in both correlated dimensions. They depend a great deal on what Peter Berger called "plausibility structures." (Berger 1969, p. 45). They can be described as "…patterns of belief and practice accepted within a given society, which determine which beliefs are plausible to its members and which are not." (Newbigin 1989, p. 8). The use of middle axioms also corresponds to broader approaches in contemporary public theology, which emphasize practical reasoning over confessional assertion alone. Stackhouse (1991) argues that public theology must develop concepts capable of mediating between theological convictions and social institutions without abandoning either sphere. Likewise, practical theology increasingly understands public engagement as requiring truthful action embodied in institutions and educational practices rather than merely theoretical reflection (Forrester 2000).

In communicating with the secular using middle axioms it is imperative to adhere to the following procedure: (1) to rigorously define the differences between the theological and the philosophical-empirical understandings of ethical values; (2) to identify a middle axiom grounded on both sides of the interface, through which a correlation between theological and secular ethical values may be established; and (3) to articulate a reduced theological content in secular language. Schulze draws the following table (Table 1). (Schulze 1979, p. 115).

Table 1. Middle Axioms.

Theological Foundations		Mediation		Ethical Outcomes
the Kingdom of God as a moral force Jesus as an ethical personality	→	vocation cultural work as the realization of the Kingdom of God the cultivation of meaning in the life of every human being	→	Love Freedom Tolerance Human rights

We can describe the columns with the words of Christian social ethicist Arthur Rich (in a different context but in an analogical argumentation). The first column "…lies beyond rational substantiation and is a matter of personal experience-certitude in the event of the Christian faith." The second column "also cannot be established rationally …though a certain degree of convincingness is appropriate [here] …and can become rationally effective in social-ethical argumentation." The third column contains "…practical

maxims that should make ethical judgments possible in concrete situations." (Rich 2006, pp. 167–68). The "middle axiom", then, is the second level/column that has a "certain degree of convincingness."

We will use one of the well-known ideas of the philosophy of existentialism as an example of a possible "middle axiom" to communicate the values of Christian faith and so make them publicly understandable. Although academic philosophy in the late twentieth century declared the waning of classical existentialism—eclipsed in universities by movements such as structuralism and postmodernism—its central impulse persists powerfully in popular consciousness. The existentialist insistence that individuals must create value through choice, responsibility, and authenticity continues to shape everyday decision-making, from career changes to personal ethics, even among those who have never read Jean-Paul Sartre or Albert Camus. Indeed, Sartre's famous formulation that "existence precedes essence"[29] encapsulates a belief that remains culturally intuitive: that we are not born with fixed purposes but must define ourselves through action. Philosophical paradigms may shift within the academy, yet their insights sediment into collective habits of thought. Existentialism, though no longer dominant as a technical school, has become "common sense," its once-radical vocabulary of freedom, angst, and authenticity absorbed into modern self-understanding, demonstrating how philosophical systems rarely vanish—they diffuse.

So how can public theology "translate" the experience of the Word of God using existentialist thought? For theology, the experience of the Word of God is the determining factor for thought.[30] For existentialist philosopher Heidegger, interpretation (*Auslegung*) has its precursor in understanding (*Verstehen*). This *Verstehen* is not a detached, purely objective analysis of a phenomenon. It is an active disclosure of meaning that emerges from our being-in-the-world. This interpretation always occurs from within a pre-existing horizon of understanding and, as Heidegger says, "…Dasein projects its Being upon possibilities." (Heidegger 2001, p. 188). Public theology can go beyond Heidegger's intentions (he is often described as a non-theist) and show how the "possibilities projected by Dasein" may include transcendence and faith. If scientific knowledge is instrumental and dominating, *meditative knowledge* is "…astonished, wondering and loving knowledge…" through which we "…desire to know in order to participate." (Moltmann 1993, p. 32). This type of relational knowledge leads not only to openness towards faith and spiritual curiosity but also to solidarity and ecological responsibility. In similar ways, Habermas' communicative action is oriented toward mutual understanding and dialogue, not control. (Habermas 1984, p. 285).

An Aristotelian virtue theory (another "middle axiom") as a shared conceptual level can allow fruitful communication between Christian and secular worldviews without collapsing into one another. On the side of theology there is Christian virtue; on the side of secularity there is a fulfilled life. Christian virtue is participation in God's transforming grace: growth in holiness, conformity to Christ, cultivation of the "fruit of the Spirit," and movement toward communion with God. It is teleological (oriented to an ultimate end), communal (formed within practices of worship) and virtue-shaped (faith, hope, love; humility, patience, etc.). In secular moral philosophy and psychology, a fulfilled life is often described in terms of flourishing[31] (eudaimonia), integrity and coherence of the self, meaningful participation in practices and relationships and excellence in character and activity.[32]

Aristotelian virtue theory can function as a communicative middle axiom by providing a shared teleological anthropology and account of character formation through practices, thereby translating the biblical notion of Christian virtue into a publicly accessible grammar of human flourishing, while leaving open—yet not evacuating—the theological specification of humanity's ultimate end.

For middle axioms, even when they align closely with the reigning plausibility structures, the shared assumptions and moral intuitions of a given culture are not always, and not for everyone, immediately convincing. Their force does not lie in claiming universal self-evidence, but in offering arguments that are publicly accessible and rationally defensible within a pluralistic society. In this way, middle axioms serve a dual purpose. On the one hand, they demonstrate that a theological position is not an arbitrary imposition of faith, but a reasonable and coherent stance that can enter into dialogue with secular moral frameworks. On the other hand, precisely because they translate faith-based convictions into broadly intelligible claims, they seek to shape social imagination and public policy toward justice and peace.[33]

2.2. When Salt and Light Are Not Welcome

As we have seen, the "salt and light attitudes" of the Beatitudes can be invoked in public theology as a mandate for humility, peace-making, and cultural engagement; yet when detached from their original grounding in systematic theology, they can subtly lead to a denial of the revealed authority. Framed merely as dispositions of civility or social beneficence, the Beatitudes of Jesus Christ risk being reduced to broadly acceptable moral sentiments. When combined with the method of "middle axioms," which seeks workable principles between biblical absolutes and policy specifics, public theology may begin to privilege pragmatic consensus over doctrinal clarity. In such a shift, original theological definitions—of justice, peace, righteousness, or even salvation—can be subtly warped to fit prevailing cultural narratives. The hermeneutical problem is analogous: sensitivity to the interpreter's context does not entail that a biblical text may legitimately be made to mean whatever its readers wish it to mean (Thiselton 2004) The ultimate ends of human life, ordered toward communion with God, are eclipsed by proximate political goals; the biblical hierarchy of values is overturned as effectiveness supplants faithfulness; and a biblical ontology grounded in divine revelation is sabotaged by functional philosophical monism. Thus what begins as a faithful posture of "salt and light" can, without careful theological discipline, beguile public theology into diminishing its own authority and forgetting the transcendent telos that gives its public witness coherence. It reminds us of the remark: "Christianity is always adapting itself into something which can be believed," which (half accusingly?) T.S. Eliot said. (Hick 1977, p. ix).

Does this torpedo the whole project of public theology? We do not think so. Christian systematic theology can defend the method by pointing out that Jesus is called Logos (John 1:1)[34] and that "...implies both 'reason' and 'language'..." (Lightfoot 2015, p. 88). "This vitalizing power, ...that gave permanency to the creation, was the light of men, i.e., the light for men." (Bultmann 1971, p. 40). This is the universal illumination that shines in the darkness and addresses humanity as such, not merely the ecclesial community. This Christological claim can be viewed as the public theology project: if the Logos is the light given to all, then theological speech is not an esoteric discourse, but a witness meant for the whole world, including the secular sphere. This need not mean a return to the natural theology rejected by Karl Barth in his famous "Nein!" to Emil Brunner (Barth 1934). Barth opposed Brunner's proposal of an *Anknüpfungspunkt*—a natural point of contact in human reason or culture that could ground revelation—arguing that revelation in Christ alone establishes its own possibility and reception: not because there is an autonomous human capacity that secures access to God, but because the incarnate Word addresses all people. Public theology, therefore, can proceed not from a confidence in (doubtful?) natural theology, but from confidence in the self-communicating light of Christ who encounters the world on his own initiative.

From this follows that even in *public* theology Jesus Christ cannot be treated merely as the doctrinal content Christians privately believe and later translate into secular categories. If he is the self-communicating light, then he is the active subject of revelation and he must be a constant participant in the conversation. The theologian's role is secondary and responsive—echoing, clarifying, discerning where and how Christ's word is breaking into public realities. Public theology therefore resists reducing God to an abstract principle—whether moral, metaphysical, or political. He is not just a "regulative idea"[35] useful for structuring moral reasoning but not necessarily encountered as a living reality: God speaks, addresses, commands, comforts, and judges. In this mode, God's presence may be irritating, disturbing, or even upsetting precisely because it calls human beings to listen and act, not merely to reflect philosophically or theologically on the problems of the world.

This, of course, contradicts what the secularist demands from believers: "When the liberal citizen exits the private realm and enters the public square, he or she is supposed to leave religious commitments behind and function as a stripped-down entity, as an abstract-not-full personage, who makes political decisions not as a Jew or a Christian or a Muslim. . ." (Fish 2010). But public theology, to remain a theology worth its name, cannot let itself be tamed by the secular and accommodated completely to political purposes. It is open not only to a dialogue with the secular public but (as a matter of course!?) toward God's action.

The second half of each Beatitude names God's decisive response and this divine response is the very ground of blessedness.[36] If public theology is to be "salt" and "light", it must be open to analogical divine action. The attitudes of the "blessed" by themselves do not produce the metaphorical salt and light. It is a theological truism that it is impossible for humans to orchestrate or to govern how God speaks to or intervenes in human affairs.[37] Providence works through ordinary events, human decisions (even flawed ones), and through suffering and even apparent silence. It takes faith and patience to wait on God as the Psalms repeatedly speak of it. And it takes even more faith and caution to discern God in victory, success or suffering. While public theology may witness to divine involvement in concrete crises, such testimony can rarely, if ever, compel broad public consent. It is to be expected therefore that a plurality of secular interpretations is always possible.

Here we come to a break in the train of thought. The Beatitudes find their foundation in three rigorous themes: an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, the eschatological kingdom of God, and the necessity of individual moral renewal. And these themes may not be welcome in the secular environment public theology is trying to reach.

The first theme is the literary climax of the Beatitudes (verse 11), and it marks a decisive shift: "Blessed are you when people revile you. . . on my account." The addition of "on my account" (ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ) reframes the entire series Christologically. The virtues named in the Beatitudes mirror Jesus' own life, and they culminate in a Christological claim: true blessedness is determined by relationship to Jesus.

The second theme is related to the larger context of the gospel. In Matthew's theology, the promises contained in the Beatitudes are both temporal (present/ongoing in history) and eschatological (future, consummated in the age to come). Thus, the Beatitudes articulate an "already–not yet" kingdom theology.[38] Blessedness is ultimately realized in the consummated eschatological reign of God.

The third theme, demanding personal moral change, may be the most irritating of all. The Beatitudes are frequently read as a charter for social justice, highlighting God's concern for the poor, the persecuted, and the marginalized. Though this dimension is vital, it can inadvertently confine the Beatitudes to the sociopolitical realm, oversimplifying their profound moral reach. The moral vision that unfolds here is comprehensive and

interiorized. The Beatitudes thus serve as the character sketch of those who belong to the kingdom—a character that must be embodied by all disciples, not merely advocated as a program of reform. They claim the whole person—attitudes, desires, loyalties—and thereby confront every human being with the demand of personal moral transformation.

This may explain why theology, even in its "public edition", may be unwelcome in public debates. Confessing Jesus introduces particularity, authority and challenges the modern separation between "private belief" and "public reason." The perspective of eschatology relativizes all political systems and implies that history has a divine telos. The link to personal moral transformation confronts individual autonomy and the modern notion of freedom as entitlement to create private values.[39] Yet these three motifs cannot be discarded if public theology is not to lose theological identity. What does this mean for conversation in a secular university? In practice, it requires transparency (clearly stating one's confessional standpoint), translatability (offering arguments that others can engage without sharing that standpoint), accountability (submitting theological arguments to academic critique) and non-coerciveness (not demanding assent based on authority alone).

3. PART II—Public Theology in Practice: Two University Courses as a Case Study

3.1. From Theoretical Framework to Educational Practice

The transition from the theoretical reflections of Part I to the educational case study presented in Part II is intentional rather than incidental. If public theology is to demonstrate its relevance within secular academic institutions, it must move beyond conceptual argument toward observable educational practice. The university classroom provides an appropriate setting in which theological claims about dialogue, public reasoning, and civic engagement can be tested under conditions of intellectual pluralism.

The two university courses examined in this study were therefore designed not merely to transmit theological knowledge but to create a public space in which students with different religious commitments—or none at all—could engage questions of science, ethics, culture, and faith through respectful academic dialogue. In this sense, the classroom became a practical laboratory of public theology. Rather than asking whether theology should participate in the public university, the courses explored how such participation might actually function in everyday academic life.

Several principles developed in Part I directly informed the pedagogical design. First, the Beatitudinal virtues of humility, mercy, meekness, and peacemaking shaped the style of interaction between lecturers, invited guests, and students. Second, the concept of middle axioms provided a methodological framework for discussing theological convictions through concepts that remain publicly intelligible—such as truth, dignity, justice, freedom, responsibility, and human flourishing. Finally, the commitment to transparency without coercion required that the Christian identity of the organizers remain explicit while allowing participants complete freedom to disagree, question, or reinterpret the issues under discussion.

Consequently, the empirical findings presented below should not be understood simply as a course evaluation. Rather, they serve as an exploratory examination of whether the theoretical assumptions of public theology can be translated into educational practice within a secular university and whether such an approach is perceived by students as intellectually credible, dialogically open, and personally meaningful.

In that vein, this section examines how a theology department (Department of Theology and Christian Education, from now on KTK) can *stage* public-facing dialogue inside a secular university and what kinds of learning outcomes such staging yields. We ask: (1) Which formats and settings best lower barriers for cross-confessional participation?

(2) Do students perceive cognitive gains (e.g., in critical thinking) and/or existential impact (e.g., deeper belief)? (3) How do these observations confirm or challenge the theoretical claims of Part I regarding Beatitudinal dispositions and middle axioms as vehicles of public theology?

Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica operates as a public, secular university within a plural academic environment of a post-communist society. Located in central Slovakia, our university draws a significant portion of our student body from regions that remain comparatively more religious than highly urbanized and more secularized contexts such as Bratislava. The Department of Theology and Christian Education (KTK) is explicitly evangelical in orientation and is committed to the theological formation of pastors, teachers, and church workers serving smaller evangelical churches not only in Slovakia but also in wider Central and Eastern European contexts. Its educational model combines confessional identity with openness to interdisciplinary and public-facing dialogue. Theology is thus cultivated not as an inward-looking ecclesial discipline but as a reflective partner in broader conversations. Within the framework of UMB, KTK provides an institutional setting for public theology that remains confessionally grounded while being intelligible and accountable in secular academic discourse.

To signal accessibility, these two courses were held at the University Pastoral Center—a space that bears university in its name and serves students yet is operated by the Roman Catholic Church—thereby enacting cooperation across confessional lines (our KTK is explicitly Protestant/evangelical). The symbolic "middle" location a few meters from the largest dormitory lowered psychological distance and invited attendance from students who might never enter a church building. The format modelled dialogue: six sessions per semester split between three lectures with open Q&A and three live interviews with high-profile guests (scientists of faith; a media figure, a former prime minister, and a Jewish rabbi). The aim was not to erase disagreement but to perform civil contestation in real time.

This design operationalizes Part I's claim that public theology should avoid both privatized irrelevance and coercive ambition by embodying "salt and light"—formative presence without domination—and by working with shared mid-level concepts (truth, value, dignity, freedom, and justice) that are discussable in plural publics.

3.2. Research Design, Participants, Data Collection, and Ethics

This study employed an exploratory qualitative case study design to examine how principles of public theology were implemented in two courses taught at a secular public university in Slovakia: *Science and Faith* and *Society and Faith*. The case study approach was selected because the research focused on a context-specific educational practice and on students' perceptions of the possibilities and limitations of discussing theological questions within a secular academic environment. The study did not seek to test a predetermined hypothesis or to establish causal relationships. Instead, it was guided by the following research question: How can pedagogical practices informed by public theology foster critical reflection, constructive dialogue, and respectful engagement among students with diverse religious and non-religious perspectives?

The participants were students enrolled in the two courses during the 2025 summer and winter semesters. A total of 172 students attended the courses, of whom 166 completed the evaluation (more details in Table 2). Participation in the evaluation was part of routine course evaluation and as these elective courses were assessed solely on a pass/fail basis, without any further grading, and as all questionnaire responses were anonymized prior to analysis, students' feedback could not influence their course assessment in any way.

Table 2. Condensed Comparative Metrics (selected items).

Metric	Science & Faith	Society & Faith
Evaluations returned	56	110
Gender (F/M)	71%/29%	75%/25%
Study level (Bc/Mgr-Ing)	71%/29%	52%/48%
Belief profile (believe or rather believe/undecided/do not believe)	66%/9%/25%	75%/14%/11%
Helped critical thinking (Yes)	73%	64%
Helped deeper belief (Yes)	38%	32%
Would enroll again (Yes)	80%	92%
Venue appropriate (Yes)	86%	81%

Data were collected during the final four weeks of the summer semester of 2024/2025 and the winter semester 2005/2026. The evaluation was administered online after the completion of the principal teaching activities. Among other questions, students responded to the following questions:

"Why did you choose this course?"

"How fitting was the facility?"

"Did the course help you to think more clearly?"

"Did the course help you to believe more deeply?"

"Would you sign up again for a similar course?"

Open-ended questions invited students to reflect on changes in their understanding of faith and science/society and the educational environment. Responses to closed-ended questions were summarized using descriptive statistics, while answers to open-ended questions were examined qualitatively.

According to the institutional regulations applicable at the time of data collection, formal ethics committee approval was not required because the evaluation formed part of routine educational quality assurance, the data were anonymous and analysed retrospectively in aggregated form.

The authors reviewed all responses and organized them according to the principal areas addressed by the evaluation questions. Responses to the open-ended questions were examined for recurring themes related to public theology. These themes were subsequently interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework of the study, particularly the Beatitudinal dispositions and the use of *middle axioms*. Given the exploratory and context-specific character of the study, the findings are interpreted as evidence of the educational potential of this approach rather than as statistically generalizable conclusions.

Science & Faith enrolled 61 students, with 56 returned evaluations (71% women/29% men; 71% bachelor/29% master level). Belief self-identification was as follows: 66% believe or rather believe, 9% undecided, 25% do not or rather do not believe (see Table 2).

Society & Faith enrolled 111 students and collected 110 evaluations (75% women/25% men; 52% bachelor/48% master level). The belief profile is as follows: 75% believe or rather believe, 14% undecided, 11% do not believe. Instruments were end-of-course evaluation forms combining multiple-choice items with short free-text comments (see Table 2).

The facilitation team made its confessional standpoint explicit while refusing coercive appeal to authority. Hosting in a church-operated venue—paired with cross-tradition collaboration and open questioning—was intended to maximize transparency, translata-

bility, and accountability, the very criteria Part I names for theology's public speech in secular institutions.

3.3. Results: Descriptive Patterns

Cognitive impact. Perceived gains in critical thinking were robust: 73% in *Science & Faith* and 64% in *Society & Faith* agreed the course helped them "think more critically/clearly."

Existential impact. Effects on belief were expectedly heterogeneous: 38% (*Science & Faith*) and 32% (*Society & Faith*) reported "believing more deeply," while many indicated no change, sometimes noting they already "believed enough."

Return intention and venue fit. In total, 80% (*Science & Faith*) and 92% (*Society & Faith*) would enroll again; 86% and 81% respectively found the venue appropriate—evidence that a confessional space can function as a public forum when proximate, hospitable, and dialogically framed.

3.4. Subgroup Analysis: Non-Believers and the "Safe Space" Effect

Within *Science & Faith*, a non-believing/agnostic subgroup (n = 19) reported particularly strong cognitive gains: 15 said the course helped them think better; only 3 disagreed. Seventeen praised the environment as "safe," "open," and "friendly," and 6 even reported some growth in belief. Most (17) had no church affiliation. Both return intention and venue fit were comparably high in this subgroup. This suggests that procedural hospitality—clear rules for dialogue, interviewer-led modeling of disagreement, and proximity to student life—can lower defensiveness and enhance receptivity, even when students do not share the facilitators' faith commitments.

The selection of guests in *Science & Faith* clearly communicated an ecumenical openness and a respectful engagement with diverse forms of spiritual practice across traditions and academic fields—from a lifelong medical doctor and medical-school educator, to a professor of geography, to a classical philologist with research experience at some of the world's leading universities.

The guest mix in Society & Faith—including a Jewish rabbi, a very popular media professional, and a former prime minister of the Slovak Republic —exposed students to public reasoning beyond church walls, signaling that theological discourse can encounter non-Christian and non-religious frames without loss of identity.

3.5. Interpreting the Findings: Beatitudes and Middle Axioms in Action

Part I argued that public theology's credibility depends less on rhetorical victory than on character—humility, mourning, meekness, hunger for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, resilience—virtues that make speech persuasive by integrity rather than force. Our courses operationalized these dispositions procedurally: interview over debate (meekness), open Q&A (mercy as interpretive generosity), cross-tradition venue (peacemaking), clear acknowledgment of limits (humility). The resulting trust climate likely underpins the high critical-thinking scores and positive reception among non-affiliated students.

Concurrently, classroom discourse repeatedly converged on middle axioms—"truth," "value," "dignity," "freedom," "justice"—which allowed theological claims to be examined in a publicly intelligible register without evacuating their origin in revelation. This aligns with the Part I account of plausibility structures and mediating categories as the working grammar for faith–reason dialogue in plural publics.

The findings of this case study gain sharper contours when read against the post-communist Slovak context described by Michal Valčo. Public theology, he argues, remains deeply ambivalent in such settings, perceived as suspect not only by secular institutions

but often within churches themselves, due to historical trauma, enforced privatization of faith, and unresolved burdens of the past (Valčo 2012, esp. pp. 185–88, 212–13, 225–30). This background helps explain why the courses' emphasis on transparency, dialogical restraint, and non-coercive presence proved decisive, especially for students without explicit religious affiliation.

In this sense, the pedagogical ethos of the courses closely corresponds to the framework articulated in Part I. What Valčo describes as "careful listening as the first act of love" and as a prerequisite for credible public witness (Valčo 2012, p. 211) is operationalized here through procedural humility, hospitality, and symbolic "middle spaces," resonating with the Beatitudinal dispositions (meekness, mercy, peace-making) outlined earlier. At the same time, the sustained focus on shared moral concepts—truth, dignity, freedom, justice—confirms Valčo's claim that Christian education can function as an "arm of public theology" when it translates confessional convictions into publicly intelligible registers without surrendering theological depth (Valčo 2012, pp. 209, 243–46).

3.6. Limitations and Threats to Validity

First, self-selection may inflate positivity: students who sign up for such courses may already be inclined toward dialogue. Second, self-report measures capture perceived, not demonstrated, gains; future studies should incorporate pre/post-tasks (e.g., structured argument analysis) and qualitative coding of reflection essays. Third, the venue effect is context-dependent; what worked in our city's pastoral center may require adaptation elsewhere. Nevertheless, the consistent patterns across two cohorts, and the distinctive response of the non-believing subgroup, support the claim that format and ethos—not only content—drive outcomes.

3.7. Practical Guidelines for Replication

- Choose symbolically "middle" spaces (near dorms/libraries; recognizable as university-serving even if church-run).
- Model dialogical virtues drawn from the Beatitudes in facilitation norms (humble framing, patient listening, non-aggression, peace-making moves).
- Program a mixed format (input + interview) to *perform* public reasoning across differences.
- Name and work with middle axioms (dignity, justice, freedom) to keep discourse shared and testable.
- Monitor both cognitive and existential indicators; disaggregate results for non-believers/"nones" to gauge inclusivity.

4. Conclusions

This study contributes to contemporary public theology by demonstrating that the Beatitudes can be understood not only as principles of Christian discipleship but also as an ethical framework for public theological communication within secular higher education. By combining the theological concept of the Beatitudes with the methodological notion of *middle axioms*, the article proposes a model for communicating Christian faith in ways that remain both theologically faithful and publicly accessible. The qualitative case study suggests that this approach can foster critical reflection, respectful dialogue, and meaningful engagement among students with diverse religious and non-religious worldviews.

The findings should, however, be interpreted in light of several limitations. The study is based on two university courses conducted at a single public university in Slovakia and therefore does not claim statistical generalizability. Rather, it offers an exploratory account of one educational context within a post-communist and increasingly secular society. Future research could examine similar pedagogical approaches in other universities,

cultural settings, and religious traditions, as well as investigate their long-term educational impact through comparative or longitudinal studies.

Part I argued that theology's renewed public credibility in post-communist contexts depends on a posture patterned on "salt and light": a non-coercive formative presence shaped by Beatitudinal dispositions and articulated through shared middle axioms that render theological claims publicly discussable. It proposed a path between privatized irrelevance and nostalgic dominance, insisting that public theology must be both confessionally grounded and culturally intelligible if it is to contribute meaningfully within secular institutions.

Part II tested these claims in the concrete setting of Matej Bel University, a public secular university in central Slovakia, where theology is taught within an evangelical framework yet remains embedded in a plural academic environment. The two elective courses examined here—strategically located in a symbolically "middle" space, structured to perform dialogue rather than ideological contestation, and evaluated through mixed measures—produced consistently strong cognitive gains, modest but non-negligible existential impact, and exceptionally high willingness to re-enroll. Particularly noteworthy was the positive response of non-believing students, suggesting that procedural hospitality, transparency of confessional stance, and dialogical restraint can lower defensiveness without diluting theological identity.

These findings underscore the importance of historical consciousness, careful listening, and educational mediation in rebuilding trust between church, academy, and wider society. The data support the claim that Christian engagement in education functions as a crucial arm of public theology, not primarily through institutional pronouncements but through the formation of individuals capable of translating faith-informed moral reasoning into publicly intelligible registers. In this sense, the observed convergence on middle axioms such as dignity, freedom, justice, and truth confirms their role as mediating categories through which confessional theology can engage plural publics responsibly.

We conclude that public theology can indeed be both confessional and common: confessional in remaining Christologically accountable and theologically coherent, yet common in its dialogical posture, its use of shared moral grammar, and its commitment to civic friendship within secular academic space. For public universities—particularly in post-communist societies—the implication is practical and pedagogical: when structured with care, theological courses can contribute to critical reasoning, moral imagination, and social trust, which are goods that secular education rightly seeks but cannot generate in isolation.

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Informed Consent Statement: As all questionnaires were conducted anonymously and no personal data of the respondents were collected or processed, neither informed consent nor approval from the Ethics Committee of Matej Bel University was required for this research. This was confirmed by the General Secretary of the Union of Evangelical Churches of the Slovak Republic.

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Notes

1 For the influential philosopher John Locke, religion is "a completely private affair." (Reventlow 1984, p. 279).
2 Especially "...discoveries in the life sciences and in geology particularly spurred people to ask about the early times in life history..." (Ruse 2019, p. 136).
3 "Civil religion...is an overarching, undergirding, institutionalized ideology, a broadly limned faith for a whole national society." (Marty 1981, p. 103).
4 "...there is such a thing as the public philosophy of civility." (Lippmann 1955, p. 101).
5 Jesus likened the influence on his followers to salt and light in Matthew 5:13–16. We believe this serves as a powerful model for how public theology can function within a secular environment.
6 Augustine in *Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount* calls the Beatitudes "...the things that bring perfection..." (Schaff 1979, p. 6).
7 He insists that "...the opening words of Genesis ...are entirely compatible with the Big Bang." (Collins 2006, p. 83).
8 Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 24:17–18, 24:19–22.
9 "It offers inspiration for a new form of solidarity, of responsibility towards those most distant from us, inasmuch as the history of suffering unites all men like a 'second nature'." (Metz 1980, p. 105).
10 "I cannot fit it all together by saying, 'He [God] did it,' but neither can I do so by saying, 'There was nothing he could do about it.' I cannot fit it together at all. I can only, with Job, endure." (Wolterstorff 1987, p. 67).
11 Bonhoeffer insists that "[i]t is Christ's gift to the Christian that he should be reconciled with the world as it is." (Bonhoeffer 1968, p. 129).
12 In Mark 7 je shows how "Jesus' mind is changed by a woman who is an outsider, who asks him to realize a new perspective on chosenness and exclusion." (Russell 2009, p. 41).
13 We need not completely agree with all tenets of radical orthodoxy (to whose theses this statement belongs) to sympathize with its uncompromising vision of a church in opposition to secularized capitalist society.
14 Hannah Arendt reminds us not to repeat the zeal of the French revolutionaries who in "...the passion for unmasking society ... had torn away the mask of the *persona* as well." (Arendt 1973, p. 104).
15 In Lutheran political theory "...political authority was divine in origin but earthly in operation. It expressed God's harsh judgment against sin but also his tender mercy for sinners." (Witte 2006, p. 19).
16 As Kierkegaard has it: "Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing." (Kierkegaard 1993, p. 24).
17 "...goodness must stand between truth and beauty, the perfection of both and their crown." (von Balthasar 1984, p. 44).
18 "...the truth of Christian convictions cannot be divorced from the kind of community the church is and should be." (Hauerwas 1983, p. 1).
19 "Augustine had argued that it is the Christian's duty, in love, to protect the innocent when they are menaced unjustly. This is the only warrant he finds in Christian doctrine for a Christian ever to use violence..." (Johnson 1981, p. 197).
20 Anabaptist theologian John Howard Yoder contends that the church's primary political witness is nonviolent community, a social ethic that embodies the cross as an alternative to coercion. The refusal to collaborate in war violence is not a withdrawal from society but "...a major negative intervention within the process of social change." (Yoder 1994, p. 154).
21 The conflict is fundamentally between worldviews, as Immanuel Kant pointed out in his in many ways dated but still interesting *The Conflict of the Faculties*. (Kant 1979). Also, the "...split between the spiritual and material is fired by the desire to sustain peace and harmony." (Budde and Wright 2004, p. 97).

[22] "Online users. . . 'embubbled' . . .consume content and interact with communities only when in accordance with their previous beliefs." (Figà Talamanca and Arfini 2022, p. 2).

[23] Cancel culture is often considered immoral, but it also can be used as ". . .a tool to redistribute attention." (Janssens 2022, p. 91).

[24] Liturgical and catechetical traditions using Beatitudes often follow the eightfold pattern, but several modern exegetes and commentators explicitly speak of nine Beatitudes. (e.g., Luz 1989, p. 226).

[25] David Wilkerson asks: "How many respected secular college presidents openly acknowledge the name and power of Jesus without fear?" (Wilkerson 1973, p. 92).

[26] "Every discussion on the subject of *speech acts* (relations between acts of language and truth, acts of language and intention, 'serious' and 'non-serious,' 'fictive' and 'nonfictive,' 'normal' and 'parasitic' language, philosophy and literature, linguistics and psychoanalysis, etc.) has politico-institutional stakes that we should no longer hide from ourselves." (Derrida 1992, p. 25).

[27] ". . .middle axioms are the forms in which at a given period and in given circumstances the Christian law of love can find most appropriate expression, is an urgent need at the present time." (Visser 't Hooft and Oldham 1937, p. 238).

[28] As a scientific discipline, it has a task and methods similar to those of English and American Public Theology.

[29] ". . .existence precedes essence; or, if you prefer, that subjectivity must be our point of departure." (Sartre 2007, p. 20).

[30] "If knowledge of God's Word can become possible for men, this must mean that they can have experience of God's Word, that they can be what they are as determined by God's Word." (Barth 1975, p. 198).

[31] ". . .happiness could be analyzed into three different elements that we choose for their own sakes: positive emotion, engagement, and meaning." (Seligman 2011, p. 11).

[32] "Core dimensions of well-being: fully functioning person (Rogers), maturity (Allport), executive processes of personality (Neugarten), self-actualization (Maslow), individuation (Jung), mental health (Jahoda), aging mental health (Birren), basic life tendencies (Bühler), personal development (Erikson)." (Ryff 1995, p. 100).

[33] The author of the expression "middle axiom" says: ". . .the teaching of Christ has to do with the principles of life in a new, redeemed order. It does not profess to tell men how to solve their difficulties while their purposes remain unchanged. There are many situations in which there is no Christian solution because the aims that are being pursued are fundamentally wrong. The principles of the Kingdom of God cannot be translated into axioms for the guidance of a worldly-minded society without being transformed into something different." (Oldham 1940, pp. 24–25).

[34] Whether the word has a pre-gnostic origin and Logos is "Creator and Revealer" (Bultmann 1971, p. 31), or the name Logos is "embracing also Wisdom and Torah" (Keener 2003, p. 363), or as Origen has it ". . .as wisdom he is called the beginning." (Origen 1989, p. 56), the idea of communicated knowledge is common here.

[35] For Kant God is one of the "transcendental ideas" that ". . .have an excellent and indispensably necessary regulative use, namely that of directing the understanding to a certain goal respecting which the lines of direction of all its rules converge at one point, which, although it is only an idea (*focus imaginarius*)—i.e., a point from which the concepts of the understanding do not really proceed, since it lies entirely outside the bounds of possible experience. . ." (Kant 1998, p. 591).

[36] "While the promises in vv. 4–9 do not specifically mention God as subject, the implication of the passive verbs is that it is God who will comfort, give the inheritance, satisfy, show mercy, and call them his children." (France 2007, p. 159).

[37] ". . .man's talk about God on the basis of God's own direction, which fundamentally transcends all human causation, which cannot, then, be put on a human basis, but which simply takes place, and has to be acknowledged, as a fact." (Barth 1975, p. 90).

[38] "The tension between "already" and "not yet," characteristic of all New Testament redemptive history. . ." (Cullmann 1962, p. xx).

[39] Modern feeling is well expressed in the words of Nietzsche: "we ourselves, we free spirits, already constitute a 'revaluation of all values', a living declaration of war on and victory over all old concepts of 'true' and 'untrue'." (Nietzsche 2007, p. 11).

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