”ABOVE ALL, LOVE EACH OTHER DEEPLY…”

Inspiration for dialogues on polarising issues among churches and Christian organisations.

SMC
FAITH IN DEVELOPMENT

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FOREWORD

There is a continuous need to overbridge divides and search for unity; to strive for respect and understanding between those who think and act differently in polarising matters. As followers of Christ, our search for unity is a response to Jesus' prayer in John 17:21 and to the encouragement in 1 Peter 4:8-10 from which this booklet gets its title. As we meet in conversations about sensitive issues, we can listen to the advice from 1 Peter to show hospitality without grumbling and to recognise, also in the other's perspective, a gift we have been given to serve each other as stewards of God's manifold grace.

The SMC – Faith in Development's (SMC) membership base consists of churches from all Christian church traditions and a wide range of faith-based organisations (FBOs). Their primary interests range from a wide set of development issues to evangelisation; all within the bigger call to live in God's mission. The extended SMC network contains local partners of our member organisations in more than 50 countries. It includes church families as well as interreligious and faith-based secular partnerships operating at all levels of society. We form a community gathered around a shared confession of the Christian faith, but we do not have a shared consensus on every matter of interest which might arise in the network. Each member organisation serves in the mission of God through the unique gifts and call to be stewards of God's grace, given to that member organisation as it has understood it. This diversity is a gift that continuously enriches and challenges us.

Throughout our more than hundred-year history, there have been plenty of opportunities for internal dialogues about disagreements. There will always be a need for Christlike conversations where the experience of the other is considered worth listening to. The temptation to avoid difficult conversations completely, or to have them but go separate ways whenever disagreements seem unresolvable, will always be there. Therefore, this booklet is written as much to us as to anyone else with an interest in overbridging polarised positions so that people's spiritual and physical needs can be met as we live and serve in God's mission to this world. I believe that conversations about sensitive topics, and polarising issues where we, even though we share the same faith, think differently within or between churches or in partnerships between churches and Christian FBOs, can help us move forward in our missions. Our prayerful wish is to contribute to this kind of constructive engagement.

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CONTENT

Introduction

For more than a decade we have seen how different human rights areas are positioned against each other and how freedom of religion or belief (FORB) often becomes weaponised by different sides in an increasingly polarised world. Different issues related to sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) often become the centre of attention in these debacles with abortion and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) rights as concrete examples of sensitive and highly contested issues. We have also seen how various issues concerning FORB, as well as the whole spectrum of SRHR (including SOGIE rights), are part of the realities that our member organisations, their local partners and their constituencies live with.

For this reason, the SMC has previously had internal conversations on how different Christian traditions look upon and deal with unwanted pregnancies and women's rights. During the last few years, we chose to learn more about the relationship between FORB and SOGIE rights. As part of this learning priority, we commissioned and received an external ***study*** to provide a factual and descriptive analysis of the relationship between these rights. The report covered perspectives of international human rights law, political developments at the UN level, and the approaches of some selected Christian development FBOs as they dealt with these issues.[1] We wanted to increase our knowledge and capacity to handle internal and external dialogues concerning both issues with maintained conflict sensitivity and religious literacy. We also wanted to increase the whole network's capacity to carry out more efficient and relevant international development cooperation and mission from a holistic perspective.

To process the complex and sensitive issues related to religious freedom and human sexuality from perspectives of human rights, mission theology and pastoral care we created a broad ecumenical reference group.[2] For one year this group met regularly to share viewpoints and experiences. Often our conversations within the reference group would become a careful listening for the "how's".

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FBO
Faith-based organisation

FORB
Freedom of Religion or Belief

SOGIE
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression

SRHR
Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights

SMC
SMC – Faith in development

1. Nazila Ghanea, Thiago Alves Pinto, and Gehan Gunatillike, 'The Relationship between FoRB and SOGIE Rights' (Stockholm: SMC - Faith in Development, 2022), https://www.smc.global/wp-content/uploads/documents/2023_05-rel-FORB-SOGIE-rights.pdf.
2. The reference group contained members from the Roman Catholic Church, the Swedish Pentecostal movement, the Uniting Church in Sweden, Interact, The Swedish Alliance Mission and the Church of Sweden. Thus convening representatives from churches with very different theological views on issues related to e.g. same-sex marriage. While the members in the reference group itself represented a broad range of viewpoints on these issues based on their different church traditions, the variation of views can be as strong within, as between, different churches and denominations, which some experiences from the reference group showed.

THE HOW'S

- How do we discuss sensitive issues containing disagreements based on different theological understandings and interpretations with maintained love, respect and care?

- How do we listen in a Christlike manner to each other, to others and to the Holy Spirit – across theological, cultural, geographical, inter- and intra-denominational and generational divides?

- How do we listen to those hurting, also when their life stories and/ or their interpretation of the Bible challenge our understanding of what it is to live in the will of God?

- How do we nurture relationships of hospitality and love for the other's experience without immediately trying to convert them to our own opinion?

- How do we encourage healing and recognition of everything good in God's creation, when we simultaneously carry our own, potentially very different fears, vulnerabilities and wounds, as individuals, churches and FBOs?

- How do we, together, tune in to God's Kairos, or timing, so that we act to preserve human dignity and become a prophetic voice in our age; also when we as churches or FBOs think differently in theology or doctrine?

- Can the meeting place that conversations and the sharing of experiences constitute become Holy ground, also when they contain different opinions and experiences?

- If meeting places that enable room for different opinions and experiences can become Holy ground, and in our reflective conversations the reference group strongly felt that this was a real possibility, then how do we prepare the way for such meeting places?

METHODOLOGY

The idea behind this booklet was born during these conversations about "how's" in the reference group. A methodology guide to share the experiences collected within the reference group and the process for the learning priority. Experiences that might be relevant not only to conversations about freedom of religion and human sexuality but also to many other topics where we as Christians disagree but remain called to serve together, through diaconia and witness, as part of God's mission to this world.[3] The material should focus more on advice and methods for conversations about sensitive issues, rather than taking sides in sensitive issues where Christians come to different conclusions.

Rather than draw on documents that primarily deal with issues on human sexuality from e.g. the ***World Council of Churches (WCC)*** or the ***Lausanne movement*** (gathering large parts of the world's Evangelical Christians), the net has here been thrown wider in search for common denominators concerning moral discernment on divisive issues among different church traditions. This search has been done through parallel readings of documents from the WCC[4] and the Lausanne movement.[5]

To ensure a sufficient Biblical rootedness a structured reading has also been made of the New Testament from Acts to Jude where relevant texts have been sorted along the sources for moral discernment presented on page 8. The selection of New Testament books was motivated by a desire to study how the young church dealt with moral discernment, ethical reasoning and conflict resolution after the ascension.[6] As pointed out in the foreword the title draws its inspiration from 1 Peter's encouragement to love each other deeply as love covers a multitude of sins. In other words, perseverance and patience in good works and respect for each other; expressing love in words and deeds as a restorative bridge whenever we fail (and we all do) to live in line with God's vision for this world.

Finally, the more practical advice in the last section has been drawn from the experiences shared within the SMC's ecumenical reference group, already mentioned, and from various resource materials shared during our joint process.

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3. The reference group also saw a need for a resource material that could bring some of the best advice on such "how's" from the different church families together under the "roof" of the SMC.
4. Faith and Order Commission, Moral Discernment in the Churches, Faith and Order Paper 215 (World Council of Churches Publications, 2013), https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/moral-discernment-in-the-churches.
5. 'The Lausanne Covenant: Complete Text with Study Guide' (The Lausanne Movement, 2009), lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Lausanne-Covenant---Pages.pdf; 'The Manila Manifesto' (The Lausanne Movement, 1989), https://lausanne.org/statement/the-manila-manifesto; 'The Capetown Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action' (The Lausanne Movement, 2010), lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/The-Cape-Town-Commitment---Pages-20-09-2021.pdf.
6. It might be argued that Revelations should have been included as well, but as the letter's interpretation remains highly contested throughout the worldwide church the decision was made to leave it aside for now.

WHO IS THIS BOOKLET FOR?

The primary target groups for this booklet are facilitators and process leaders within Churches and FBOs who want to be inspired or learn from the experience of others regarding the facilitation of dialogues on sensitive and polarising topics. It is written with facilitators who have a background within the Christian faith and some form of basic theological training in mind. Having said this, the methods can be used by anyone who wants to engage in helpful conversations on sensitive issues.

In the section "Methods for Conversations" it has been a conscious decision not to provide too many specific exercise instructions as context and relations play a huge part in how dialogues on sensitive and polarising issues can and should be designed. Our shared experiences can hopefully inspire other facilitators who have their own context-adapted toolboxes. Nothing would bring us more joy than to hear back from you if you found this material helpful and then develop your own contextually adapted exercises.

For those who want to browse through different facilitation toolboxes, a few examples are provided in the section on further reading and resources.

DISAGREEMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, THROUGHOUT CHURCH HISTORY AND NOW

Throughout church history, we have had disagreements on the nature of the Holy Trinity, communion, clergy, slavery, the position of women, the relationship between church and state, whether Christians should serve as soldiers or not, and various matters related to sexuality – among other things. Yet, Jesus's prayer is for us to become one (Joh 17:21) – and he must have known we needed the prayer!

If we read the New Testament and study church history, it becomes clear that the church has always faced sensitive issues that not only threatened to, but indeed did, polarise and divide. In Acts and the epistles, sacrificial food/drink and circumcision come up as such issues. In the first case, it is made clear that each believer's conscience is to guide dealings with sacrificial food/drink even if the goal is to be free in Christ (e.g. Romans 14:22-23). In the second case, it is made unquestionably clear that converts to Christianity did not need to be circumcised. However, such clarity only

came after the elders in Jerusalem had discussed the matter extensively (Acts 15:1-35).

In contrast to the elders in Jerusalem, Christianity today is a world-wide transnational fellowship of almost countless churches, FBOs and individual believers. It is no longer a group of a few thousand believers spread over a limited geographic area. We no longer have disciples who physically met and lived with Jesus in our midst, but rather a gap of about two millennia between the events and the texts that form the foundations of our faith. Regardless of tradition, this fact alone should humble us to the role that interpretation of Biblical texts necessarily plays in all our decision-making, including on difficult ethical issues.

Sources for moral discernment

Whether we are aware of it or not, we use different norms, values and methods when we make moral decisions. These often have specific sources that can be referred to as sources for moral discernment. They can be concrete and tangible such as sacred (or non-sacred) texts that are important to us or leaders we trust. They can also be more abstract in the form of traditions, norms and values that characterise our culture and society. Sources for moral discernment help us make ethical decisions about what is good and bad.

In 2013, the WCC's Faith and Order Commission published a ***report*** outlining 13 different sources for moral discernment used by its member churches, including both WCC members and the Catholic Church.[7] These sources are listed to the right. The report highlights that, although church traditions place varying levels of emphasis on these sources and use them in different ways, they all rely on the same core sources.[8] A structured reading of the ***core documents*** from the Lausanne movement makes it clear that the same sources are used among Evangelical Christians, even if they are not always explicitly mentioned.

SOURCES FOR MORAL DISCERNMENT

1. Guidence from the Holy Spirit
2. Scripture
3. Tradition (that which has been handed on)
4. Teaching authority
5. Spirituality
6. Church Culture
7. Moral reasoning
8. Natural law
9. Science
10. Conscience
11. Experience
12. Civil law and human rights
13. Culture

The first six sources in the list are based on expressions of the Christian Faith. The other are common sources for human ethical discernment that can be used regardless of our religion or belief, even if not everyone would utilise Natural law as a foundation for what they regard as justice.

7. Faith and Order Commission, Moral Discernment in the Churches.
8. In 2020 and 2021 the WCC's Faith and Order Commission published a follow-up report in three volumes; "Churches and Moral Discernment (I) Learning from Traditions", "Churches and Moral Discernment (II) Learning from History " and "Churches and moral discernment: Facilitating dialogue to reach Koinonia, (III)" which focuses on the various church traditions different usage of sources for moral discernment, on historical examples where churches have undergone moral discernment processes as they faced new challenging circumstances, all from a more academic perspective than what this booklet aims for. Links to all three volumes can be found in the section "further reading and resources".

COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The first five of the sources mentioned on the last page seem to be common to all churches even if the leadership of the Holy Spirit and the role of tradition is understood and experienced differently. Looking at the documents studied for this booklet, it is obvious that human rights also have made their mark as a guide for moral discernment, especially the human rights to non-discrimination and FORB. When humanity learns new things through science, all churches take this into account, directly or indirectly, as they make various moral decisions, even if there isn't always agreement on scientific results.

All churches have their own cultures, embedded within the larger cultures of the societies where they exist and operate. For this reason, you can find very different local cultures regarding such things as e.g. worship and decision-making even within the same denomination. The documents studied for this guide sometimes mention church culture, as well as culture in a more general sense, as direct sources of moral discernment. Other times, these two types of culture are referred to more indirectly as the documents themselves carry clear cultural traits which become visible in e.g. certain expressions and phrases used. Contextual theology is often pointed to as a necessity, at the same time as e.g. the Lausanne documents also emphasise the need to place culture under the authority of scripture.

Quite often in life, we face moral dilemmas where the norms and values or the sacred texts used for moral discernment contradict themselves. A classic example of such a dilemma is whether a lie is justified if it saves a life. Within the area of human sexuality, another classic example is whether abortion is acceptable, also for those generally against it, if the life of the mother is threatened. When we are faced with such dilemmas, we use our human reasoning to try and discern the wisest cause of action. In this process, we might draw on scientific evidence, listen to our conscience and consider our own and other people's experiences. We might also research what human rights and relevant national law say about a topic and consider what would be culturally acceptable.

Most likely we will either consciously or subconsciously also apply various methods for moral reasoning based on different types of normative ethics. Depending on what we think is most important we might try to find a solution that benefits as many as possible (utilitarian ethics), or

a solution which reaches specific goals even if it means that we, or others, must suffer (consequential ethics). We might also try to act in a way which always upholds what we perceive as duties or virtues regardless of the situation or the consequences for ourselves and others (virtue ethics). Another method for ethical reflection which was used by Jesus and remains strong in both Jewish and Christian traditions is to use stories (narrative ethics). Such stories do not always point to definite solutions to ethical problems. Instead, they open up for reflection about different perspectives while placing the experience of individuals or communities at the centre.

Quite often we change between these different methods for moral reasoning and their normative goals depending on what type of dilemma we face and how serious it is. In addition, different church traditions emphasise certain types of normative ethics above others. We might therefore also want to stay true to the ethical frameworks preferred by our tradition.

While not always explicitly mentioned in the various documents studied for this guide, different ethical foundations for moral reasoning are always present in one way or another (yes, also in this document – so if you want to practice your analysis of moral arguments you can start with this text). Human and moral reasoning is part of what it means to be a human faced with ethical dilemmas without absolute certainty regarding their best solutions. Therefore, human and moral reason also affects how we read and interpret scripture and tradition. Consequently, it is a good idea to reflect on how we reason about morality and ethics and to be curious about how those we meet reason when we meet to talk about moral issues where there are very different opinions, also if we share the same faith. What kind of a solution to ethical dilemmas are we and our conversational partner searching for? How do we best learn from each other to find a solution that communicates God's love to the world he has created?

FORB, RELIGIOUS LITERACY AND BILINGUALISM BETWEEN FAITH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In the SMC's experience, it is good to bring perspectives of FORB, non-discrimination, religious literacy and what we like to call bilingualism between the language of faith/theology and the language of human rights/professional development cooperation into our

conversations about sensitive ethical issues.

According to Article 18 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the human right to FORB gives us the right to practice our religion or belief in private and in public, alone or together with others. But it also bans coercion and allows the state to limit our practice if it threatens public safety, order, health, morals or the rights and freedoms of others.

In other words, FORB gives us the right to practice the first great commandment, to "love the Lord our God with all our hearts, all our souls and all our minds" (Matt 22:37-38) and express that love in private and in public, alone or together with others. Similarly, the rules for legitimate FORB limitations can be seen as the human rights version of the second great commandment – to love your neighbour as yourself. When we have conversations within the church on different ethical issues where we do not come to the same conclusion, the practice of granting each other the right to FORB, but also respecting and safeguarding legitimate limitations on FORB for the protection of others can be a concrete way to show love for one another.

Another concrete way to show love for one another is to strive for rights maximisation. Sensitive and polarising issues tend to bring human rights conflicts (or ethical conflicts if you prefer that language) and conflicts of interest to the surface. For example, different views on pacifism usually include a conflict between the interest to defend society against an armed aggressor or oppressor by bearing arms (often seen as necessary to protect the right to life and safety); and the right to freedom of conscience by refusing military service and opt for nonviolent defence or opposition strategies. The issue of abortion brings conflicts between the rights to health and life of the mother and the unborn child as well as attending hospital staff's potential[9] right to conscientious objection to the surface.

Rights maximisation means that one seeks solutions to conflicts between different rights (such as those described above) that respect and safeguard the human rights and interests of as many individuals and rights holders as possible. In the case of pacifism mentioned above, this could mean that one grants the right to conscientious objection to military service and recognises the value of nonviolent opposition.

RELIGIOUS LITERACY AND BILINGIALISM

RELIGIOUS LITERACY

1. The ability to understand the ways in which religion and belief influence a society and its development.

2. The ability to recognize religion and belief as explanatory factors without reducting or overstating their importance.

3. The ability to analyse the ways in which religion and belief interact with other factors in specific contexts.

BILINGUALISM

The ability to explain important values which protect human dignity by using both the language of human rights and language of Christian theology.

You can learn more about biliungualism and religious literacy by visiting the SMC's website.

9. Conscientious objection is the aspect of FORB with the weakest protection in international human rights law. International law only grants protection for conscientious objection to military service. All other forms of conscientious objection remain a matter for domestic legislation which is why medical staff's conscientious objection is described as a potential and not a definite right here.

In a liberal democratic society, it is the task of the lawmakers and the courts to ensure rights maximisation. Striving towards rights maximisation can, however, also be a useful tool for churches and FBOs when they try to find workable solutions to ethically complex situations where different interests and human rights conflict.

It is very common when Christian churches and FBOs meet, that they speak two different languages, the language of faith or theology and the language of human rights or professional development cooperation. This can also happen when separate parts of the same church or mission organisation meet. Whether an actor uses the language of faith or the language of human rights often has a lot to do with what they see as their basic purpose. It is not uncommon that misunderstandings between actors who naturally speak each of these different languages create problems already in cases that concern relatively simple matters. When the topic at hand relates to one or several ethically complex or sensitive issues, perhaps in themselves polarising, the risk becomes even bigger that the added value that a conversation might bring is lost in translation.

At the SMC, we recommend all Christian FBOs and churches to strive for bilingualism between the language of faith/theology and the language of human rights/development cooperation. We also emphasise the importance of having sufficient integrity to stand for the same values and ethical decisions regardless of whether one speaks with one's theological or human rights/developmental vocabulary. However, such integrity does not need to exclude a willingness to also listen to and evaluate other perspectives.

Knowing which language to use in which situation and context is part of what SMC refers to as practical religious literacy.[10] Religious literacy is something all professional actors who work with development issues need to have. It refers to an understanding of the role, and the power, that different worldviews, including their norms and values, have in social development processes. This includes the understanding that in any given context for ethical discussions, different religious interpretations can be presented by actors who have very different degrees of power. Such power differences can mean that religious actors are instrumentalised by other actors, including political interests, to promote the agendas of the stronger actors rather than their own.

10. SMC - Faith in Development, 'SMC's Policy for Religious Literacy', 2019, 3, https://www.smc.global/wp-content/uploads/documents/C5E3DBD5-FEC6-4856-A4AC-985549844232/document.pdf.

One example where such power imbalances become clear is mentioned by the WCC's Church and Order Commission in a 2021 follow-up ***report*** on moral discernment.[11] The example concerns the development and demise of support to apartheid within the South African reformed church.[12]

APARTHEID AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN REFORMED CHURCH

In 1857, South African society was divided by race but not yet by formal apartheid laws and regulations. Being aware that racial separation during the celebration of communion was against the teachings of the Bible, the Dutch reformed Synod nevertheless allowed a local church to practice such separation. Otherwise, one feared that some white church members might withdraw their support for the church's mission work.

With time, the reason for the decision was forgotten. Instead, a theology and ideology of apartheid backed up by the South African reformed church was develop very much in line with the interests of the political, economic and social power structures of apartheid regime. From 1948, when the official apartheid was introduced in South Africa, to the demise of apartheid in first half of 1990s, the policies and practices were regarded as biblical, ethical and moral by the South African reformed church which primarily had members from South Africa's white population. A common claim used to justify apartheid policies was that the Bible does not say anything about politics. For a long period, this undermined all authority of biblical and theological claims made by other churches (black reformed churches, independent churches, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches, the Anglican Church as well as the Roman Catholic Church) involved in the struggle against apartheid. Even when the synod of the South African reformed church started to advocate for change, the public white leaders of the apartheid system were for a long period seen as authoritative in their interpretation of what was biblical. Both by ordinary church members as well as by parts of clergy.

There were many different factors combined that finally brought an end to apartheid. One pivotal moment which changed how apartheid theology – and thereby also ideology – was legitimised was when the Dutch reformed church and the International Alliance of Reformed churches both adopted statements of confession speaking out against apartheid in 1982. This was later followed by the influential Kairos document produced by the South African Institute for Contextual Theology in 1985.

Source: "On The Role of Authority in Churches' Moral Discernment during Apartheid" by Dirk J Smit in CHURCHES AND MORAL DISCERNMENT Volume2: Learning from History (2021)

11. Myriam Wijlens, Vladimir Shmaliy, and Simone Sinn, eds., CHURCHES AND MORAL DISCERNMENT Volume 2: Learning from History, 2 vols, Churches and Moral Discernment, Faith and Order Paper No. 229 (WCC Publications, 2021), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Churches_Moral_Discernment_Vol2_Web.pdf.
12. Dirk J. Smit, 'On the Role of Authority in Churches' Moral Discernment during Apartheid', in CHURCHES AND MORAL DISCERNMENT Volume 2: Learning from History, ed. Myriam Wijlens, Vladimir Shmaliy, and Simone Sinn, 2 vols, Faith and Order Paper No. 229 (WCC Publications, 2021), 125–26, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Churches_Moral_Discernment_Vol2_Web.pdf.

Within the development sector, back-donors unfortunately tend to instrumentalise religious actors for their own agendas.[13] This makes many FBOs very sensitive to attempts to change their doctrines, norms or values due to pressure from the outside. When we meet to discuss difficult ethical issues, we therefore need to be religiously literate. We also need to be mindful that we strive towards genuine conversations where we meet everyone as equals with maintained integrity, respect, curiosity and compassion, rather than attempting, through means of power, to convince our conversation partners to change into our own position. As we endeavour to ensure such equality, we also prepare the ground for our conversations to become holy meeting places.

SOURCES FOR MORAL DISCERNMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Reading through Acts and the Epistles it becomes clear that regardless of what source of moral discernment the New Testament refers to (guidance from the holy Spirit, scripture, tradition, or moral reasoning), there seem to be five ultimate, but interlinked, goals towards which moral discernment repeatedly aims.[14]

The first goal focuses on love; living and growing in the love of God/Christ, loving one another and doing good both towards one another as Christians and the surrounding community. This also seems to be the goal which appears most often throughout the New Testament texts. Here we find the well-known text of 1 Cor 13 which encourages us to seek love above all else, but also 1 Cor 8:1 which places love above knowledge, a position which also echoes through 1 Tim 1:5-7 concerning those who want to be teachers. 1 Peter 4:8 asks us to above all else love each other and throughout the whole of the Johannine corpus echoes the commandment "Love one another as I have loved you" (Joh 13:35-35). The most common Greek word used for love in the New Testament[15] is ἀγάπη (agapé) which rather than being a love based on emotions is an act of will; being committed to the well-being of others in line with what God prefers.[16] When faced with an ethical dilemma it might however sometimes seem unclear what course of action God would prefer.

13. Séverine Deneulin, Religion in Development: Rewriting the Secular Script (London & New York: Zed Books, 2009); Jörg Haustein and Emma Tomalin, 'Religion and Development in Africa and Asia', in Routledge Handbook of Africa-Asia Relations, ed. Pedro Amakasu Raposo, David Arase, and Scarlett Cornelissen, Routledge Handbooks (London: Routledge, 2017), 76–93; Erin. K. Wilson, '"Power Differences" and "the Power of Difference": The Dominance of Secularism as Ontological Injustice', Globalizations 14, 2017, no. 7 (2017): 1076–93, https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2017.1308062.
14. As these goals crystalised themselves throughout the systematic reading of the New Testament texts they also aligned very well with Paul G Hiebert's idea of centred sets where belonging is determined through relations to a defining centre. For Christians, the purpose of moral discernment would then be a gradual move toward these five interlinked goals. For more on Paul Hiebert's definition on centred sets and how he relates them to the church, mission and contextual theology see Paul G Hiebert "Anthropological Reflections on Missiological issues" (1994), pp.123-136
15. Stong's Greek concordance lists 116 occurrences of agape and 143 occurrences of agapao compared to an occurrence of phileo (referring to love or friendship stemming more out of emotion than will) of only 25.
16. James Strong, '25. Agapaó', in Stong's Lexicon, accessed 19 December 2024, https://biblehub.com/greek/25.htm.

When Jesus was asked the same question, what it is that God above all else prefers, by a pharisee in Math 22:34-40 his response does not seem to give much more guidance than pointing us back to the importance of love as he says:

"'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (NIV)

In Luke 10:27 the very same commandments are instead uttered by the pharisee who then asks Jesus who this neighbour is that he should love as himself. Jesus responds by telling the parable of the good Samaritan, a story about care and mercy to uphold human dignity across ethnic, religious and political divides. A clear example of narrative ethics if any!

The second goal focuses on ethical discernment aimed at building the Christian fellowship in faith, love and unity. Ephesians for example tells us that it is through Christ that the whole body of the Church is built up in love (Eph 4:15-16).

The third goal concerns moral discernment for the sake of the Gospel. Philippians 1:27 asks God's people, its leaders and deacons to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ whatever the situation. Among texts that relate to this goal, we also find those that deal with freedom in Christ from the laws of the Old Testament concerning circumcision and sacrificial food (Gal 1:6-10, Col 2:6-8, 2:14-23).

The fourth and fifth goals focus on acting in specific ways because it either honours God or signifies a holy community (e.g. 1 Thess 4:1-3, Hebrews 12:14-17).

Throughout these New Testament texts, we find explicit or implicit references to all 13 sources of moral reasoning mentioned above.
It might however be worthwhile to say something about science specifically. Science, as we understand it today, is perhaps not explicitly mentioned in the Bible as a source for moral discernment. The Bible is however full of observations regarding everyday life which at the most basic scientific level links to empiricism and ethical discernment, often in contexts where moral reason is applied. The wisdom literature in

the Old Testament and many of Jesus's parables provide examples of this. Throughout the last two millennia, Christians motivated by their faith have also played a fundamental role in scientific research and development. Consequently, we have every reason to continue to see scientific research results as an important source for moral discernment. But we also need to allow the above-mentioned Biblical goals for ethical discernment to direct our ethical reflection on scientific development.

MORAL DECISION-MAKING AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The book of Acts tells the story of the emerging church. It does so without hiding different conflicts concerning the interpretation of the Old Testament's laws and various practices in the church's surrounding society in light of the Christian community's experience of the resurrected Christ and the outlet of the Holy Spirit. Reading Acts 11, 15, and Galatians 1-2 it is apparent there were conflicts within the leadership of the young church. Conflict management is also a recurring theme in all the letters of the New Testament written from the apostles to local churches. It is therefore worthwhile to study how the early church managed its conflicts. We have already been given some direction in the overview of the five goals to which the New Testament orientates moral decision-making.

In the already mentioned conflicts in Acts and Galatians, the issue that threatened to divide the church concerned whether the gospel was for both Jews and Gentiles. If the gospel was for everyone, then the question was whether Gentiles should follow all rules from the Old Testament or only some? In the resolution of these conflicts the apostles

1) Allowed room for the Holy Spirit to reveal if a new order was in place by examining their own experiences of what God was doing.
2) Sought counsel from each other.
3) Listened to each other as they discussed these issues at length.
4) Strove to not burden the community with more rules than absolutely necessary, but acknowledged God's grace as the ultimate saving factor and,
5) Decided on a new direction to which they also kept each other accountable.

As one reads through the rest of the New Testament and how it deals with conflict management and ethical discernment two other things can be noted.

First, when the New Testament talks about spirituality, it links it not primarily to prayers, hymns or liturgy or to battles between spiritual forces of good and evil. These things are mentioned, but the emphasis is repeatedly placed on links between spirituality and discipleship, love and the other fruits of the spirit; joy (over God's salvation[17]), peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). To be spiritual is to show signs of all of this; echoing Jesus's words "by their fruits you shall know them" (Matt 7:15-20).

Second, the fellowship of believers, which today also includes us, is not left alone to deal with conflicts. God is with us as we do so. In 1 Corinthians 1:10, which concerns a situation of conflict, Paul pleads to the Corinthians that they all by the name of Christ "speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." The Greek word that has been translated with "joined" in this text, κατηρτισμένοι (katērtismenoi), can also be translated as mended or perfected. Often in the New Testament, the word is used to describe how something is made whole and restored to its original and intended state. It is used in this sense about both the reparation of fishing nets and that of relations.[18] An image of God, who in times of conflict and division, mends the church back into his intended state where it can participate fully in his mission to reach and restore a broken world, is not far away. Rather than imposing straight jacket unity from above, this image brings to mind the process of a skilled fisherman who mends his nets back to functionality, allowing for the twists and turns of the process, as well as the fluidity and flexibility between different joints that is needed for a functional net to sustain pressure.

For the young church of the New Testament, their transformative experience was very much an organic process. It developed throughout their lifetime and was as based on their experiences as on their communal heritages. It drew extensively from the Jewish background of Jesus and the disciples, but increasingly it also incorporated experiences from non-Jewish believers. What happens if we two millennia later could rest in the trust that God continues to mend and re-knit his church together through gradual processes that recognise our different backgrounds and experiences of what the spirit is doing in our times?

17. James Strong, '5479. Chara', in Strong's Lexicon, 19 December 2024, https://biblehub.com/greek/5479.htm.
18. James Strong, '2675. Katartizó', in Https://Biblehub.Com/Greek, accessed 19 December 2024, https://biblehub.com/greek/2675.htm.

THE HOW TO – METHODS FOR CONVERSATION

BE CLEAR ON THE "WHYS"

As Christian FBOs and churches, we might have different detailed visions and areas of expertise. A church might have a different type of mandate than a faith-based agency. When we work within frameworks of Mission our emphasis might be on testimony or diaconia – or both. Within these broader categories, we might also have distinct and more detailed mandates. At a personal level, we will also have different experiences which motivate if, when, and why we want to talk about a sensitive ethical issue with someone who we know might not agree with us. All of this will constitute and affect our "why" even before we get involved in conversations about a sensitive topic. If we want conversations about sensitive ethical issues to be genuine and equal, we need to pay attention to both our professional and our personal "whys". We then also need to listen to the "whys" of our conversational partners. All these "whys" are likely to differ, at least to certain extents. Hopefully, Christian FBOs, churches and those of us who are part of them will at the end of the day still want to be part of God's mission to reach and restore this world.

However, clarity on the following three Cs will help us as we navigate through different conversations on sensitive topics:

- Clarity on our "whys";
- Clarity about our most basic purpose as we do our part in God's mission;
- Curiosity about how those we meet see their "whys" and their most basic purposes.

An important insight from ecumenical dialogues is that when everyone involved in the conversation shows respect for different positions, without immediate demands that others change their opinions, this helps to facilitate a common meeting space. In this meeting space, a different kind of in-depth listening to the other is enabled. When we can trust that the primary goal of our conversation partners is not to change us and our convictions, but to listen we also lower our defences and feel safer. In the end, it is up to us to decide if what we hear means that we also want to change.

Based on the above, one important question to answer as we try to clarify our "whys" is whether it is necessary to reach a consensus with our conversation partners in everything? Perhaps it is enough for us to move forward together if we can agree on the most central aspects of our faith? Perhaps we can agree to disagree on certain issues but cooperate on those where our interests overlap? Hopefully, we can all stand behind human dignity and human rights. However, if we conclude that to protect human dignity and the safety and security of others we have to object to the views of our conversational partner, can we still do so in a way that does not vilify them but rather creates a space to expand a common understanding of what we mean by human dignity and human rights?

HUMBLE CURIOSITY

As Christians, we are simultaneously called to receive and sent to be part of God's restorative mission to a world that is suffering the consequences of sin. Therefore, we are both part of this world's turning away from God, with the potential to harm and in need of restorative grace; and part of his solution to bring salvation and restoration to the world. We need to consider the meaning of this very carefully as we talk about and act on sensitive and polarising issues, especially in cultural contexts which are not our own. As we do so, it is useful to reflect on what sources for moral discernment we use in our own tradition; at the same time as we adapt an approach of curious and appreciative examination of the sources for moral discernment in the Christian tradition that we find ourselves in conversation with. Above all, we need to be humbly aware that none of us with full clarity can know everything God has intended for this world.

RECEPTIVE ECUMENISM

Knowing and being curious about your own and other's "whys" and adopting a humble attitude relate to specific aspects of receptive ecumenism. Receptive ecumenism as a method for dialogue focuses more on finding conversational spaces where you dare to learn from other church traditions while also being open and honest about your own tradition's weaknesses. Rather than creating meeting spaces where everyone can show off their finest Sunday best; receptive ecumenism seeks to form meeting spaces where everyone feels safe enough to be vulnerable, to learn, and hopefully perhaps also heal and be renewed through the ministry of others. This also includes an openness for the reception of new insights, an understanding of the gospel and the

works of the spirit through one's conversational partners.[19] Rather than asking what my church can teach the other, the focus is on what my church can learn from the other?[20] Receptive ecumenism is also highly characterised by a trust that God has gifted the churches with diversity as part of his Mission and that God's spirit, in its time, renews the global church through joint learning – not only on issues concerning doctrine but on very practical issues such as pastoral care and organisational development.[21]

HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

Hopefully, meeting to converse on sensitive and polarising issues will lead to changed minds and hearts, healing and reconciliation. Healing for those who have experienced stigma and oppression, but also for healed and changed relations enabling liberation. Reconciliation and increased understanding for those who previously have stood on opposite sides and perhaps even have been prepared to harm each other due to this. Ultimately healing and reconciliation is the work of the Holy Spirit. But as we go into conversational processes on sensitive issues, we can prepare the ground for the spirit to work. Therefore, do not underestimate God's movement and involvement, his mending of the church back to its intended purpose in his mission, throughout these processes. Rather be open-minded and curious about what the spirit is doing, also when the process demands that you acknowledge wounds and vulnerabilities.

CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

Different churches have different approaches and emphases on contextual theology. Some form of acceptance of the need to not only read and directly apply biblical texts to today's circumstances but also, through exegesis and hermeneutics, discern how the message is to be understood in today's situation is standard within most church traditions today. Often it might indeed be the different ways this is done which give rise to very different conclusions on ethically complex issues among, and within, churches in the first place.

Contextual theology is all about recognising both the experience of humans mentioned in or behind the writing of the Biblical texts; and the experiences of humans living today as experiences through which

19. Stockholm University College, 'FIFTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE on Receptive Ecumenism/ The Key Principles and Core Values of Receptive Ecumenism', Organisationssida, June 2022, https://ehs.se/receptive-ecumenism-conference/tkey-principles-and-core-values/.
20. Gerard Kelly, 'An Introduction to Receptive Ecumenism' (Ecumenical Consultation on Receptive Ecumenism, Treacy Centre, Parkville, Melbourne, 2011), https://www.cam1.org.au/Portals/66/Gerard%20Kelly%20-%20Receptive%20Ecumenism%20Melbourne%20110819.pdf.
21. Kelly; Stockholm University College, 'FIFTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE on Receptive Ecumenism/ The Key Principles and Core Values of Receptive Ecumenism'.

God acts to complete his restorative and liberating mission. In this way contextual theology is closely linked to traditions of narrative ethics.

If the experiences of God's actions as witnessed by people in the Bible do not echo into our own lives, they become irrelevant. However, if these experiences can transcend the span of time and we can see our own situation in the same light as the Bible's narratives, theology becomes both relevant and potent with transformation. With due regard to how various models for contextual theology are perceived in the church setting you work or live in, it can be a powerful tool to explore different sensitive issues from the perspective of liberation.

As there are different models of contextual theology which emphasise slightly different perspectives, it goes outside the scope of this booklet to delve too deeply into these. However, a simplified instruction for contextual Bible studies could, however, be to

a) Select a suitable number of Biblical texts relevant to themes of human dignity, justice and the theme of your conversation. If possible, choose texts which provide a few different perspectives.
b) Allow time for both silent reflection and sharing on the following questions: what does the text say that God is doing? How do different persons in the text act? How do they perceive what God is doing? What are the power relations between different actors? What are the consequences of what God is doing for the different actors? What in the text can teach us something about a Christlike way of realising God's love?
c) Are there similar situations or power relations present in today's situation or how we perceive the issue we are discussing? Can our understanding of what God does in the Biblical text help to shed new light on what God would want to do in today's situation? What in the text can inspire us for Christlike encounters today as we approach the issue under deliberation?

SAFE(R) SPACES

Conversations on sensitive issues are best dealt with in places where people feel safe to share their experiences. Sharing our own experiences and listening to the experiences of others in a safe environment helps us to see beyond our stereotypes and preconceptions. It also provides groups with a place to process their thoughts and values in a way that

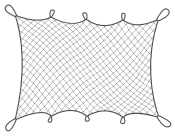
CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY SUMMED UP

To summarise Stephen Bevans, one of contextual theology's main contributors, our present human experience is what ultimately validates the Biblical experience of the past and makes it relevant to us. This happens as we simultaneously interpret the Bible and allow our own situation to be interpreted in light of the Biblical text and our doctrinal tradition. While the gospel is eternal, or perhaps precisely because it is eternal, it also needs to be reborn and re-incarnated into each age and culture otherwise it will lose its revitalising power. Summed up extremely briefly this is what contextual theology is all about.

increases ownership once decisions are taken. One conclusion from the SMC's reference group on FORB and SOGIE rights was that processes and conversations that touch upon stigma for various groups and individuals within, or close to the church, cannot remain superficial. It is not enough to talk along the lines of "Yes, it would be good to have a dialogue about this" and then move on with decisions without actually ever processing the issue perceived as sensitive. Rather, before decisions are reached concerning such topics one must dare to lean into and through the process while trying to include as many perspectives and people as possible in an as equal manner as possible, including those directly concerned. To say that having such a process is easy would be to lie, but it genuinely enables decisions that are owned, understood and respected by as many as possible.

Breaking the silence about a sensitive topic through conversation is often the first step to increased knowledge, understanding and reduction of stereotypes and stigmatisation – on all sides. The word process is key in this context as a safe(r) place here not only concerns the physical or psychological space we meet in or create but also the space in time for that meeting. To ensure that a meeting place is safe, there also needs to be sufficient time to build relationships and trust among those who are to share their experiences and thoughts on sensitive issues. How much time or how long the journey will be to create a safe(r) space will depend on the issue to be discussed, previous relations as well as external pressure and security concerns.

Regretfully, in many contexts, the creation of safe(r) places regarding polarising issues means taking into account real risks for both human and institutional safety, security and liberty, even when it is Christian brothers and sisters who meet between themselves. When we know that people have suffered, or there is a risk that people will suffer as such conversations take place, we need to recognise that while it sometimes might be impossible to create entirely safe spaces, we can at least create safe(r) spaces through the usage of certain methods and tools before, during and after our conversation process.



BEFORE

- Count on 90% of the success of a conversational process on a sensitive issue as coming from the preparations. This includes everything from having pre-meeting conversations with relevant parties to doing risk analysis, fact-finding research on an issue, the selection of facilitators, choosing venues etc.

- Clarify your expectations on the process/dialogue's outcomes both for yourself and for the participants. Do you aim to come to common conclusions and agreement or is the goal just to learn more about each other's thoughts, experiences and positions? What is to be documented and shared publicly, if anything?

- Decide on suitable rules of confidentiality for meetings and make sure all participants understand and sign off on these before conversations take place.

- If external pressure and security concerns can impact the real or perceived safety of either organisations or individual participants, do a thorough risk assessment and risk management plan and adopt a Do No Harm approach. This includes everything from how to avoid physical and psychological violence in and outside the family/church/society to the handling of paper traces and online footprints, and when and how to arrange for meetings.

- It can sometimes be helpful to start with the bigger general picture rather than the most contended detailed issues. Other times it is more constructive to be very clear with the boundaries of the conversation from the start. Which approach will be most constructive in your case when you design the conversation process?

- Plan for and encourage informal relationship-building as part of the dialogue process. Numerous difficult issues have been solved around informal cups of tea, rather than around formal meeting tables.

- Pray. Prayer can take many different forms and expressions in different Christian traditions. The main purpose prayer is listed as part of preparations is not to dictate any specific form of prayer. It is just a reminder that in this work we can seek God's guidance, strength and fellowship.

DURING

- Once you meet, encourage each person to talk based on their own experience and to speak on their own behalf. In the conflict that is described in Acts 11:1-18, Peter is continuously telling the other elders about his own experience and expressing himself through the first personal pronoun. In Acts 15, the same thing happens, Peter and the Apostles first focus on their own experience of what God is doing before they together decide how to move on. In Acts 11, Peter must have known that what he was going to share would potentially be very upsetting to the others. Yet, he dared to take the risk of being vulnerable and share his own experience as he had seen the grace of God at work reaching out in love to the Gentiles.

- Acknowledge that people with experiences outside the norm are welcome to share their experiences and strive to create a conversational climate where they feel safe to do so by avoiding talk in terms of “we” and “them”.

- Similarly, acknowledge that people can carry multiple identities. All of us can therefore regularly experience that we move between being in the margin or the mainstream of what is normatively accepted depending on the context and situation we are in.

- Clarify that it is okay to agree to disagree and encourage everyone to accept each other as Christ has accepted us all, even if we are all far from perfect. If the context where the conversation is taking place is one where agreeing to disagree is not common or culturally acceptable (e.g. due to the risk of losing face or hierarchical structures) then make space and time in the process to normalise this through games, drama and story-telling or other suitable culturally sensitive tools.

- Do not assume that those who do not think like you disregard the sources for moral discernment (e.g. the Bible or the guidance of the Holy Spirit) used by yourself and your peers. Allow others to explain how they think about the issue under discussion based on these sources.

- Be aware and attentive to master suppression techniques in conversations and teach participants how to constructively meet such techniques. As stated in the beginning of this guide, religious norms and values can also be used in ways that attempt to establish power relations. Unfortunately, part of our fallen nature means that we as Christians sometimes use religious language

and spiritual practices as suppression techniques to silence perspectives or experiences that we might not like or agree with (see next page for a fact box on suppression techniques).

- Actively plan for and include prayer and devotion in different forms throughout the process. We cannot command God, but we can invite and create space for the Holy Spirit to move in different ways.

- Do not be afraid of unplanned silences or extended exchanges. If conversations become too intense or emotional, allow for breaks so participants can process on their own. Invite the Holy Spirit to work throughout the process.

- Allow for relevant fact-finding and scientific research to shed light on issues under discussion.

- Evaluate toward the end of the process, did you achieve what you set out to do? Did all participants feel safe? Were foreseen risks managed?

AFTER

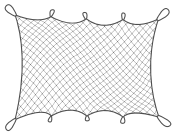
- Is the process finished in the sense that it achieved intended outcomes or is there a need to continue conversations or follow up in some other way?

- If the issue dealt with was very sensitive, it is important to evaluate whether foreseen risks did or did not play out after everyone returned home. It is also important to check in with participants to see that they are ok with process outcomes once they are back in their everyday realities.

- If action points were decided on, follow up on these.

- Produce and share any documentation agreed upon.

- Continue to pray that the process will bear fruit as God wills it.



MASTER SUPPRESSION TECHNIQUES

The concept of Master Suppression or domination techniques was first coined by Norwegian sociologist Berit Aas in the 1970s. The term refers to conscious or unconscious techniques, actions or behaviour used to disrespect, ridicule or suppress others during conversations or social interaction. Aas identified five master suppression techniques which all have their separate counterstrategies which can be used either by victims of suppression or their allies.

1. **Making invisible** e.g. by ignoring or excluding a person or a group of people, even when they are present.
   Counter strategy: Name the behaviour when it happens or support victims by making them visible.

2. **Ridiculing** e.g. by making fun of someone else's otherwise valid argument and undermining it by showing that it is of no real importance. Often involves belittling the person or group targeted for suppression.
   Counter strategy: Do not go along with the joke or legitimise the arguments for belittling victims.

3. **Withholding information** e.g., sharing information informally without telling everyone concerned.
   Counter strategy: Expose unequal access to information or ask questions for clarification.

4. **No way to win** e.g., placing people in a situation where they can be found at fault whatever they do.
   Counter strategy: Make underlaying values visible or demand the right to say no.

5. **Heaping blame and putting to shame** e.g., by making the victims of oppression take the responsibility for their situation upon themselves by shaming them.
   Counter strategy: Assign responsibility to the right places and persons, uphold a culture of accountability.

Source: "Training Guide to Master Suppression Techniques and Counter strategies", Mellomkirkelig samverke Act!onaid.

Conclusion

There is a continuous need to overbridge divides and search for unity; to strive for respect and understanding between those who think and act differently in polarising matters. With this resource material we have made our humble contribution to remind and further our joint call to express and act in love and unity as world wide church also when we meet to discuss polarising and sensitive issues. To knit the church together is ultimately God's job, but we are invited to be his co-workers and co-creators also in this. We hope and pray that this booklet has provided food for thought, a chance to reflect on both your own tradition and the traditions of those who you converse with, but also as hands-on tools as we possibly can offer without knowing your exact context or situation. As we said in the beginning, nothing would bring us more joy than to hear back from you if you found this material helpful and then developed your own contextually adapted exercises and solutions!

Further reading

"Churches and Moral Discernment (I); Learning from Traditions", Edited by Myriam Wijlens and Vladimir Shmaliy, Faith and Order Paper No. 228, 2021

"Churches and Moral Discernment (II); Learning from History" Edited by Edited by Myriam Wijlens, Vladimir Shmaliy, and Simone Sinn, Faith and Order Paper No. 229, 2021

"Churches and moral discernment: Facilitating dialogue to reach Koinonia, (III)", Faith and Order Paper No. 235, 2021

"Conversations on the Pilgrim Way; Invitation to Journey Together on Matters of Human Sexuality A Resource for Reflection and Action Received by WCC Central Committee at a meeting held 9-15 February 2022 by video conference", WCC Publications 2022

FORB Learning Platform

"Leadership and Ethical Responsibility: The Three Aspects of every Decision" Thomas Schirrmacher, The WEA Global Issues Series Volume 13, Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft Culture and Science Publ., 2013

Paul G Hiebert ***"Anthropological Reflections on Missiological issues"***, Baker Books, 1994

"The Relationship between FoRB and SOGIE Rights", Nazila Ghanea, Thiago Alves Pinto and Gehan Gunatillike, SMC - Faith in Development, 2022

"Training Guide to Master Suppression Techniques and Counter strategies", Mellomkirkelig samverke Act!onaid

"Handout Overview Of Ten Master Suppression Techniques, Counter Strategies And Validation Techniques" Mellomkirkelig samverke Act!onaid

ACCOUNT FOR STRUCTURED READING OF NEW TESTAMENT

On the following pages, you will find a list accounting for how the passages in the New Testament were sorted in relation to the different sources for moral discernment. Where relevant for the categorisation of how these verses point to the overall goals identified on pages 14-16, see the different coloured dots according to the legend.

- LOVE
- BUILDNING THE CHURCH
- TO HONOR/PRAISE GOD
- TO BE HOLY/SET APART
- FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL

Guidance of the Holy spirit
Acts 11:5-18, 15:8-10;28
1 Cor 4:19-20
Gal 5:16-18
Eph 1:15-18a, 5:17-20
1 Thess 5:19-22
1 Tim 4:1-5
1 Joh implicitly throughout the letter with 4:2 and 4:13 as key verses

Scripture (including NT references to the gospel)
Acts 15:15-19;21
1 Cor 4:6, 9:8-10
2 Cor 6:16-18 (citations and echoes of Isaiah 49:8 16, Lev 26:12; Jer. 32:38; Ezek 37:27 17, Isaiah 52:11; Ezek 20:34,41)
Gal 1:6-10, 5:1
Eph 2:8-10, 2:20, 4:1-6, 4:17-32, 4:25-27, 5:29-31, 6:2-3
Phil 1:27, 2:1-16
Col 3:1-14
1 Tim 1:8-11, 2:11-14, 3:16-17, 6:1-3
Tit 3:3-7
Philem. the whole letter with 1:16 as key verse.
Heb chapters 1-4 with 4:12 as a key verse, 13:29, 13:1-6 1, 13:16 echoing Isaiah 1:11-17, 10:19-24
James 1:22-25, 2:8-13, 4:11-12, 2:1-13
1 Pet 1:14-15, 1:22
Jude 1:5-16
2 Joh 1:5-6

Tradition
Acts 15:21

Teaching authority
Acts 15:22-31, 21:25-25
1 Cor 4:17-21
Eph 4:11-16
Phil 3:17
Col 2:6-8
1 Thes 4:1-12, 5:12-22
2 Thes 2:15, 3:6-15
1 Tim 1:5-6
2 Tim 2:14-16
Tit 1:5-9, 2:1

Spirituality
Acts 11:5-15,
Rom 2
1 Cor 1-4; 8:2
Gal 5:6, 5:13-26,
Eph 2:8-10, 2:20-22, 3:14-21, 4:31-5:5, 6:10-18
Phil. 1:9-10, 1:27-2:8
Col 1:9b-10, 2:14-23
1 Thes 3:12-13
2 Tim 2:24-26
James 2:14-26, 3:13-18, 4:1-3, 4:11-12
1 Pet 4:7-11, 5:1-7
2 Pet 1:5-9,
1 Joh 2:3-17, 2:28-29, 3:11-24, 4-5:4, 5:16-17
2 Joh 1:5-6
3 Joh 1:11
Jude 1:20-22

Human Reason
Characteristic trait in all of Romans

Natural law
Characteristic trait in all of Romans

Church culture (Customs, Habits, Identity)

Acts 21:23-24;26
- 1 Cor 5:6-13
- Eph 4:1-6
- Col 3:16
- 2 Tim 9:15-23, 10:32-33
- 1 Pet 2:12-17

Science

Not directly referred to or applied as a source for moral discernment based on how we understand science today. However, in the gospels Jesus in his parables repeatedly refers to everyday empirical knowledge as it was known to the people he lived among. This could be seen as a referral to science in his narrative ethical teachings.

Experience

Rom 11:5-15, 15:7-11
2 Cor 12:2-6 (?)
- Gal 1:11-2:13
- 2 Thess 2:7-10
- Joh 1:1-4

Moral reasoning

Acts 15:4-11
Rom characteristic trait of the whole letter
- 1 Cor 6:12-20
- Eph 5:3-20
- Phil 3:2-9
- Col 3:18-4:1
- 1 Tim 3:1-14, 5:4-8, 6:4b-12

Tit 1:11
- Heb 12:14-17

Conscience

Rom 14:22-23
2 Cor 13:05

Civil law and human rights

NA as an applied source for moral discernment as we understand it today. That does not however mean that Christians during NT times did not refer to or use civil law, e.g. in Romans 13:1-7 Paul argues for a just trial referring to Roman law.

- **Culture and Cultural artifacts incl language**

In many NT texts moral arguments are often generally construed with the goal that actions taken should not cause ill-reputation for the gospel and Christians in the eyes of surrounding society/culture. In both the letters to Timothy and the letter to Titus there seems to be an emphasis on unity in order to prevent conflict with surrounding society. Keeping in mind that the recipient Christians were a small religious minority in a contemporary context with many security concerns this is not surprising. However, this does not mean that internal unity, at the cost of love and freedom should be normative in all situations. If that was the case then other teachings from Paul on freedom in relation to one's own conscience would seem contradictory and loose their foundations.

1 Tim 5:9-16
Tit 2:5b, 2:6b, 2:9b, 3:8-10

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