Scriptural Reasoning Practice

Framing

Scriptural Reasoning is a method for studying Scriptures across the borders of any tradition. It began with the Abrahamic traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, studying their sacred texts of the Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur’an side by side.  The guiding principle is hospitality—studying these texts side by side with people from those traditions, so that we have the experience of being a guest welcomed into another’s text as well as being the host inviting others into our text. That said, we never presume to represent or speak for all of our tradition, or that anyone else speaks for the whole of their tradition, either. That’s why we might say, “As a Christian, I believe...” or “As a Jew, I read this as saying”  rather than “Christians believe,” or “Jews believe.”

Instruction

We take each text in turn: first, reading it for the “plain sense,” what it seems to be saying at the level of what we can read on the page. Then, we may move to “reasoning,” what interpretation, insights, and perspectives we find in it.

While we are studying three texts of a similar theme, the goal is not to compare and contrast texts. Rather, the intention is to “feast” on each text in its own right, in its turn. As Peter Ochs, who has developed Scriptural Reasoning in its modern practice, writes,

“The goal for each individual is to study all the texts with comparable intensity and for their own sake–to understand, to question and inquire, to consider; the goal for group dialogue is to allow the tests to be illumined by all participants’ reading and questions; to allow each verse to illumine each other verse within a given canon and across canons; to allow the flow of verses to all up the readers’ deeper recognitions and concerns; to leave time and space for a flow of dialogue to emerge and, through the dialogue, various lines of reasoning–about the meanings and implications of givenverses or relations among verses; about the textual, social, ethical, or theological issues that may be raised by the reading.”

Why do we do it, what does it have to do with building community and bridging divides?  Scriptural Reasoning unlike Textual Reasoning or other more familiar forms of study, is predicated on:

* Community (you can’t do Scriptural Reasoning alone!);
* Difference (Scriptural Reasoning is predicated on engaging multiple traditions)
* Openness, respect, and curiosity (We are not looking for consensus, agreement, or one answer/shared “truth”),
* Particularity (owning and naming individual insights, perspective, where you are rooted);
* Contextual (no generic SR–always unique to and shaped by the community that engages in it);
* “Internal libraries” –not focused on commentaries, research, but on the “internal library” of individual experiences, insights, traditions, etc.
* Benefits from sustained practice by the same people over time.
* Reparative Scriptural Reasoning: Peter Ochs “the ‘pragmatism’ of SR: that it understands reading beyond the plain sense most often to be reading for the sake of repair.” (want to spend some more time reading/thinking about how we talk about this piece)

Facilitation

1. Start by asking for a volunteer to read the Hebrew Bible text aloud for the group. Each volunteer should also read the accompanying introduction. If any can, have a second reader read it in the original language.
2. Give 30 seconds for everyone to pause, think, and reflect. Then ask:
3. what jumped out at you?
4. What questions might you ask of the text?
5. Is there one word or phrase that is sticking in your mind?
6. Go around the group and each share one word, question, or phrase that intrigued them.
7. Once everyone has shared, open the space for dialogue, reminding folks to speak from their own experiences and understanding and asking questions of each other.
8. Be mindful of what curiosity, respect, and hospitality mean in this context.  Remind if necessary, not “Christians/Jews/Muslims believe” but “As a Christian/Jew/Muslim, I believe…” –no one speaks for the whole or as authoritative but as an individual footed in a tradition.
9. Keep track of time. **Allow 30 minutes\*** for each text. Start with Jewish, then Christian, then Muslim (chronological historical development

Finally,

* *Consider offering a time of open reflection on what it felt like to engage in the practice and/or a time to journal in silence is another possible option.*

* *Remember to thank your folks for their participation.*

* *Close the session in a way that is appropriate for your context (a prayer, poem or other benediction.*