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Author(s): Tim Neufeld & Jessica Mast.

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Teaching U2: The Classroom as Theological Learning Space

TIM NEUFELD WITH JESSICA MAST

The intent of this article is to demonstrate the theological shift that happens in students when they critically examine the work and influence of U2 through the course Theology, Culture and U2. This article begins, as does the class, with a definition of theology as an ongoing, second-order, and contextual process of biblical interpretation. Next, a framework for interpreting text (and art of any form) is developed using Ricoeur's three "worlds" of "behind the text," "in the text," and "in front of the text" as a hermeneutical process to interpret and apply scripture. A third section documents the impact of scripture and theology on U2 and on Bono.

This article's final section samples student responses, showing that after studying the band's music and activism students are likely to experience a shift in their understanding of theology. Theology is no longer thought of as a cold and sterile discipline, but as a means to interpret scripture and engage the world, providing a more holistic approach to faith and life. In this way the classroom becomes a theological "learning space" where students can process issues via an unlikely Irish rock band.

...to study with a teacher who not only speaks but listens, who not only gives answers but asks questions and welcomes our insights, who provides information and theories that do not close doors but open new ones, who encourages students to help each other learn—to study with such a teacher is to know the power of a learning space.¹

A Working Definition of Theology

An essential task of the first class session is to provide a working definition of theology. John Franke in his text, *The Character of Theology*, writes:

Christian theology is an ongoing, second-order, contextual discipline that engages in the task of critical and constructive reflection on the

beliefs and practices of the Christian church for the purpose of assisting the community of Christ's followers in their missional vocation to live as the people of God in the particular social-historical context in which they are situated.²

According to Franke, first, theology is *ongoing*, alive and dynamic rather than creedal and foundational; not existing in a historical vacuum, but driven by cultural assumptions. As cultures change gospel interpretations and applications find new meaning and expression. "Theology emerges through an ongoing conversation involving both gospel and culture."³ One needs only to trace U2's live performances of songs like "Bullet the Blue Sky," "New Year's Day," or "Sunday, Bloody Sunday" to find basic theological themes adapted and recontextualized with new meaning, demonstrating an ongoing interaction between lyric and culture.

Second, theology and theological formulations are *second-order* and thus open to interpretation and revision. Scripture and the primary Christian story are first-order and lay the foundation for all theological discussion. Theology is interpretive and dependent on the interpreter's reflection and experiences as guided by the Holy Spirit. As a result, astute and gifted interpreters might infer very different understandings of the same passage. "The formulations of theologians and particular communities are the products of human reflection on the primary stories, teachings, symbols, and practices of the Christian church."⁴ U2 finds new theological themes in biblical material precisely because the band stands out as interpreters from different contexts and experiences. When Bono takes on the character of Judas and assumes a conversation with Jesus in "Until the End of the World," the listener is introduced to themes of grace, patience, and forgiveness in fresh and thought-provoking ways.

Third, theology is contextual in that it must be discussed and formulated in specific situations and contexts. As a culture changes, so do symbols and meanings. Theology is often in need of reflection and revision because it can only be derived in relationship with its host culture. There is no timeless foundational theology devoid of cultural influences. "Therefore, no matter how persuasive, beautiful, or successful past theologies or confessions of faith may have been, the church must always confess the faith in the context of the particular circumstances and

challenges in which it is situated.”⁵ This is, perhaps, one of U2’s strongest qualities—the ability to localize their message for a specific audience, as demonstrated in concerts around the globe. Whether it is paradoxically dedicating “Running to Stand Still” to the American military, bringing the actual mothers who inspired “Mothers of the Disappeared” onstage in Chile, or modifying the bridge in “Beautiful Day” to whatever city the band happens to be playing in, U2 validates that all theology is local.

This definition of theology helps us understand U2’s work as deeply theological, not simply because members talk about God, but because the band weaves a colorful tapestry of real-life issues using stories and symbols of scripture. As Beth Maynard points out in *Get Up Off Your Knees: Preaching the U2 Catalog*,

U2 is anything but a “Christian rock group.” They are simply artists who find it natural to draw on biblical imagery and raise religious issues in their work.... They wrestle with spiritual themes and set nuggets of scripture in the midst of their work, but they compete in the marketplace rather than preach to the choir.⁶

When asked in a 2005 *Rolling Stone* magazine interview what influence the Bible has had on U2’s lyrics, Bono answered, “It sustains me. As a belief. I don’t read it as a historical book. I don’t read it as, ‘Well, that’s good advice.’ I let it speak to me in other ways. They call it the *rhema*. It’s a hard word to translate from Greek, but it sort of means it changes in the moment you’re in. It seems to do that for me.”⁷ U2, and Bono in particular, knows the Bible provides important and meaningful truths that are always open to fresh and relevant interpretation.

A Hermeneutic of Scripture and Lyrics

Another anchoring concept presented in the first class session is from French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who proposed that language and action are inseparable. Narrative, story, and symbol lead to interpretive activity. From Ricoeur we get the three-step hermeneutic process characterized by the phrases “behind the text,” “in the text,” and “in front of the text.” These are the “worlds” Ricoeur asks every interpreter to consider. Any “text” (a piece of literature, music, or art) may be addressed from these three perspectives.

Reflecting on the world “behind the text” requires consideration of the terms, ideas, concepts, and symbols that influence any author. W. Randolph Tate

suggests, “A visit to the world behind the text is indispensable for the interpreter.... If the interpreters do not give serious attention to that world behind the text, whatever they say about the world within the text—the literary context—will be less than it should be.”⁸ Examining a work in this way gives the reader a window on the author’s world, exposing in part his or her historical, theological, or ideological agenda and context. While concern with the world behind the text is critical, danger might arise if one obsesses on the background without giving proper attention to the text itself. While suggesting artists could not be isolated from the context giving rise to their work, Ricoeur cautioned that the work’s background could never be fully known and should not dominate the interpretive process.

Being “in the text” means understanding a text as a distinct work within a larger whole, and recognizing the work’s genre, style, and connection to other works. The interpreter carefully considers the text’s assumptions, interactions, relationships, and details and asks why it is presented as it is. Interpretation requires examining a work as a complete unit and resisting the temptation to divide, compartmentalize, and proof-text. “...The interpretation of a text is exactly that—the interpretation of the whole and not just the stringing together of the interpretations of disjointed individual units.”⁹

Working “in front of the text” we affirm that all interpreters bring their own understandings and thus find different meanings and implications. “While some readers may share common areas of agreement, each reader has an individual imagination and as such fills out a text in individualistic ways.”¹⁰ In a sense, all literature is read and interpreted in an alien world; not the world in which it was created. A passage of scripture (or a painting, or a song) will have a different effect on different observers, and different meaning for the same interpreter at different times in his or her life. This is, perhaps, the most exciting phase of interpretation. Walter Brueggemann calls this a powerfully generative and imaginative stage of the hermeneutic process.

The “real-life possibility,” generated by the text itself, becomes the practical datum of theological reflection.... Thus the text intends not to describe, but to generate, and attentiveness to the text is the act of permitting the text to have its full, imaginative say.¹¹

In sum, Ricoeur's method necessitates fluid interpretation and dynamic application. It is an appropriate method for interpreting both biblical texts and U2 lyrics.

Using Franke and Ricoeur as a foundation, students are challenged to see theology as a creative process of discovery, recognizing what God is doing in everyday life and engaging with the ongoing revelation of God's nature, mission, and work. All readers of scripture are theologians, whether skilled or not. The goal of *Theology, Culture and U2* is to help students use U2 to connect theology to the culture in which they live, thus becoming better theologians.

Bono as Reluctant Theologian

U2's Bono is more than a lead singer. Born Paul Hewson, Bono has been a student of scripture since young adulthood and a relentless activist for global social justice for more than two decades. The flamboyant rock star has become a political lobbyist, economist, and advocate. Though he has always maintained that his first and foremost passion is writing and making music with U2, he has consistently studied and applied scripture, resulting in activism on behalf of the poor, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa.

Bono's interest in theology and global issues can be traced to the early days of U2. In 1981, Bono, Edge (born David Evans), and Larry Mullen Jr., the three professing Christians of the four-member group, spoke at a gathering of Christian musicians in Worcester, England.¹² At twenty years old Bono was referencing John the Baptist and Jeremiah and quoting Psalms and Isaiah. A recording of the conference documents his concern for maintaining Christian integrity within the secular music industry, even while many Christians were pressuring the band to record and perform exclusively in the Christian market.¹³ The three Christian members of the band saw their mission within the world. Bono referenced Isaiah 40:3-5 (NIV) as the band's mission statement:

3 A voice of one calling:

“In the desert prepare

the way for the Lord;

make straight in the wilderness

a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.
5 And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all mankind together will see it.
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Bono, Edge, and Larry felt it was their mission to be surrounded by non-Christians. Bono reiterated, “Jesus said that we should be the salt of the earth.” They weren’t content to sing praise music in the Christian subculture and to perform for “people who already know what you’re talking about.” The band’s interpretation of scripture led them to an engagement, not isolation. “We are separating ourselves.... We don’t particularly want to be involved with [the Christian subculture].”¹⁴

U2 did not want to attract Christians to their concerts and they didn’t want people to follow them simply because they were believers. Theirs was a much more holistic undertaking. At this young age the group was concerned with global issues and referenced the killing fields of Kampuchea (Cambodia) and the Troubles in Ireland as they spoke to the other Christian musicians. Their hermeneutic fused scripture and social justice, faith and action. Bono declared, “We are three Christians who believe we are doing the Lord’s work.”¹⁵

In those early days Bono, Edge, and Larry belonged to the Shalom Christian community. This experiment in communal living, worship, and Bible study had a deep impact on these young men seeking to integrate music, faith, and life. Bono recalls:

At the time [1981] ...I was very strict on myself. I was reading people like Watchman Nee. He was a Chinese Christian philosopher, very concerned about communal responsibility, the death of the self and surface, and no possessions. At that time I lived that way. I lived with no possessions. We were part of a community. Everyone helped each other out sharing what little money we had. I wasn’t earning very much. What I had, I’d passed on. It was like a church that was really committed to changing the world,

really. Not in a gigantic way, en masse, but in small ways: individual by individual.¹⁶

The three members of U2 were consumed with deeper issues and continued to look for ways their music could address concerns typical Christianity seemed to ignore. Shalom was where they began to test a combined music and theology.

[Shalom] was a very well-thought-out and finally flawed attempt to wrestle the world to the ground and try to deal with some of its ails and its evils. I nearly became a full-time instead of part-time activist at that point. At that point, we were angry. We were agitated by the inequalities in the world and the lack of a spiritual life. It's not only me, Edge is like that.¹⁷

Ultimately, Bono, Edge, and Larry left the community. Though grateful for the biblical teaching, they found themselves having to choose between remaining in the commune and leaving to pursue their careers as Christians in a secular context. Bono would later reflect, “[The teaching] demanded a kind or rejection of the world. And I think even then we understood that you can't escape the world. [Interviewer: you wanted to go engage the world.] Yeah... definitely with Edge and myself we felt, what more could you do with your life than to try and change the world, make it a better place.”¹⁸

Now known for activism on behalf of impoverished Africans, Bono's first venture there was a 1985 tour of Ethiopia with World Vision, a Christian relief agency. He and his wife, Ali, later returned to live and volunteer in a refugee camp for six weeks. Bono experienced poverty, disease, and death in ways that would shape his career:

The camp was about feeding, but myself and Ali were in charge of the orphanage. We slept in a tent. In the morning, as the mist would lift, we would see thousands of people walking in lines toward the camp, people who had been walking for great distances through the night—men, women, children, families who'd lost everything.... Some, as they got to the camp would collapse. Some would leave their children at the gates, and some would leave dead children at the fences to be buried. There was barbed wire all around the camp.... I thought the place looked like a concentration camp.¹⁹

This experience became the seed that germinated into many other causes. Bono has been founder, partner, or spokesperson for projects including Jubilee 2000, Drop the Debt, DATA, EDUN, the ONE Campaign, and Product Red.²⁰ Whether helping refugees in war-torn countries, organizing benefit concerts, admonishing heads of state, reading an economic treatise, or hosting Mikhail Gorbachev for dinner in his home, Bono has been driven by a theology of engagement.

Bono has been transparent and vocal about this confluence of belief and action. In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* titled “Music and his mission are one,” he states: “I genuinely believe that second only to personal redemption, the most important thing in the Scriptures — 2,103 passages in all — refers to taking care of the world’s poor.”²¹ His keynote address at the 54th National Prayer Breakfast in Washington was more sermon than speech. Before an audience including President George W. Bush and Jordan’s King Abdullah II, Bono cited the Old Testament concept of Jubilee, the call to forgive all debts every 50th year, quoting from Leviticus 25, “If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself... you shall maintain him... You shall not lend him your money at interest, not give him your food for profit.” He continued his call to action:

God is in the slums, in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house... God is in the silence of a mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives... God is in the cries heard under the rubble of war... God is in the debris of wasted opportunity and lives, and God is with us if we are with them. “If you remove the yolk from your midst, the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, and if you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom will become like midday and the Lord will continually guide you and satisfy your desire in scorched places.”²²

Near the end of his speech he summarized the issues: “These goals—clean water for all; school for every child; medicine for the afflicted, an end to extreme and senseless poverty—these are not just any goals; they are the

Millennium Development goals, which this country supports. And they are more than that. They are the Beatitudes for a Globalised World.”²³

A year later he delivered a truncated version of the Prayer Breakfast speech while accepting the NAACP’s 2007 Chairman’s Award. “It was the poetry and the righteous anger of the black church that was such an inspiration to me, a very white, almost pink, Irish man growing up in Dublin. This is true religion; true religion will not let us fall asleep in the comfort of our freedom. ‘Love thy neighbor’ is not a piece of advice, it’s a command!”²⁴

In interviews from 2005 published as *Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas*, Bono recalled a Christmas past. Sitting in a cathedral on Christmas Eve in Dublin he had an epiphany regarding the narrative of Jesus’ birth and the need for love to manifest itself in physical form.

The idea that God, if there is a force of Love and Logic in the universe, that it would seek to explain itself is amazing enough. That it would seek to explain itself and describe itself by becoming a child born in straw poverty, in shit and straw... a child... I just thought: “Wow!” Just the poetry. Unknowable love, unknowable power, describes itself as the most vulnerable. There it was. I was sitting there, and... tears came down my face, and I saw the genius of this, utter genius of picking a particular point in time and deciding to turn on this. Because that’s exactly what we were talking about earlier: love needs to find form, intimacy needs to be whispered. Love has to become an action or something concrete. There must be incarnation. Love must be made flesh.²⁵

At the Willow Creek Association’s Annual Leadership Summit via pre-recorded video, Bono challenged 80,000 church leaders:

What I would say is [Pastor Bill Hybels] has convinced me of the importance of the church in creating the moral as well as the practical infrastructure to deal with some of the biggest problems facing the world. People say there’s no clinics where they can get AIDS drugs to people. Well, I say open the doors of your churches and make them clinics. I would say those of you who are in the United States and in Europe, I would say please make your congregation aware of the ONE Campaign.²⁶

From the early 1980s, Bono and U2 have let scripture infuse and influence their music. The result has been a blending of faith and life, theory and praxis, art and action. Bono, while purporting to be neither theologian nor example, has helped listeners integrate theology and culture. The outcome of biblical interpretation must be real-world application. “I tell you,” says Bono, “God is not looking for alms; God is looking for action.”²⁷

The Transformation of Students’ Understandings of Theology

Kyle, a student in the Theology, Culture and U2, expressed how the course expanded his understanding of theology:

Before taking this class my idea of theology would have been the systematic study of the Bible and all of its principles. I would have described theology as taking each passage of scripture in the Bible and defining the clear, distinct truth or command God is expressing to his followers. If you were to ask me how one can better understand theology I would have told you to start a Bible study, listen to a sermon, or talk with a Bible scholar. U2 has changed all of that. Through studying the music of U2 I have been faced with a new reality: theology isn’t knowledge, its practice!²⁸

Nearly all students echo Kyle. After establishing a definition of theology and creating a hermeneutical framework for interpreting scripture and song, students begin to understand theology as an ongoing process of engaging the world. U2 becomes a connecting force, a gathering space, a medium through which the interpreter can recognize theology as dynamic, infused with life, not just known but practiced. From stories of immigration raids in California, to the struggle for survival in rural Burkina Faso, to the tensions in students’ own souls as they process ways to put convictions into action, the classroom becomes a theological learning space and U2 the catalyst for reflection. Many students begin to integrate faith and life for the first time. Here are samples of their responses:

Benny and his family came to California’s Central Valley illegally when he was small and lived in constant fear of being deported. In one assignment he admitted he had never even heard the word “theology” before, but Benny discovered a rich theological world through U2. One particular song caused him to

reflect on immigration:

“Sunday Bloody Sunday” made me think of the borders that we have all around the world and how blessed I have been to enjoy the life I have when others around the world are not drinking clean water or cannot go out on their doorstep because they can be persecuted or blown up. Growing up my mother had always told me to be careful and not tell anyone where I was from; I did not get it because I was Mexican but so were many others around me, I learned what she was talking about when I grew up.

These past four years have been tough for immigrants because immigration and Minutemen have hatred toward them. My high school coach had left to coach in San Diego and he gave me a call telling me that it was bad down there. He told me about a riot that Minutemen were doing, Minutemen are families that have volunteered to help Immigration and they patrol the border shooting anyone they see crossing. The swap meet in my home town has recently been raided by Immigration; they went in and took many individuals without asking questions. Immigration left the kids behind, they must have forgotten that they were also human. I wonder what God’s law is for that type of behavior. “How long must we sing this song, ‘Sunday Bloody Sunday.’”²⁹

Luke spent a summer in rural Burkina Faso living with a Muslim family and volunteering with Mennonite Central Committee, a global relief agency. “Where the Streets Have No Name” was just a song on his iPod until he went to Africa. There it found new meaning.

As I realized that I was in a place where the streets literally had no name, the song began to embody a new significance. Even more so after studying it a bit in class. This song makes a lot of sense to me if I imagine it sung by a person who is witnessing social injustice done towards those who are oblivious to it. The first verse states the singer’s personal need to “reach out” to these areas. Then in the chorus: “Where the streets have no name... We’re still building then burning down love... And when I go there, I go there with you, It’s all I can do.”

Building and burning down love: I think this really illustrates empty charity. African countries have massive amounts of debt which are accumulating interest.

Other countries give money that pays off the interest in an effort of charity, but the debt is still there. We are trying to show love by giving perhaps, but it does not take care of the problem. So we are essentially burning or wasting our love/charity. I think Bono is saying that when he goes to these places, that he wants to take us; he wants us to see the place ourselves.

The second verse is referring to those of us who ignore the injustice by staying in our own world. He responds to us saying, "I'll show you a place... where the streets have no name."

Despite his study of the political history of Ireland, it took a U2 video for Kyle to recognize his own disconnection with global injustice.

As we learned of U2's background and the devastation of their native Ireland during a drawn out war between Catholic and Protestants, I was introduced to the song "Please" off the *Pop* album. Here U2 pleads with the so-called "religious" members of Irish society to "get up off [their] knees" and take action to end the inhumane war raging beside them which was supposedly fought in the name of religion. When I first heard this song, I understood it in the context of Ireland and thought nothing more of it. A week later however, the call to "please get up off your knees" hit me like a sack of potatoes.

As I sat in chapel listening to a member of Compassion International speak on the plight of impoverished children in our world today, I began to think, "Boy, that's sad, I should fulfill my religious duty to pray for the poor." A moment later images from the "Please" music video flashed into my head and Bono's plea reached my ears. Suddenly U2 was challenging me to stop settling for prayer and start making a true difference in the lives of these kids. I went home that day and began sponsoring a young African girl named Suzana. I never knew that it would take Irish rockers to get me to put my faith into action."³⁰

One class session discusses the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:25-37. In this passage the man who asks, "Who is my neighbor?" is identified as "an expert in religious law" (NLT), "an expert in the law" (NIV), and "a religion scholar" (The Message). Jesus answers with the story of a Samaritan who helps a ravaged

Jewish man. The Samaritan is a powerful metaphor for the enemy, the half-breed, and the person least likely to be a helper, but the story can be read from a different perspective. The focus of the story shifts if one inquires, “Did this ‘expert’ who asked the question play the same role in his religious community that I play in mine?” If a church leader, pastor, or professor of biblical studies were to ask Jesus today—“Who is my neighbor?”— what character would Jesus use to shock us as much as the Samaritan would a Jew?

Many North American readers of the gospels have put themselves in the place of the Samaritan and asked, “Who should I help?” The answer is, obviously, the enemy, the ostracized, the unlikable. But an alternate question would be, “Who is my Good Samaritan? Who will surprise me, show the *agape* of Christ, and provide a model of the incarnation that could never be found in my own religious community?” This Samaritan would probably have to be someone outside of the reader’s own context; someone who could help the hearer better understand the culture he or she inhabits. The Good Samaritan might be a homeless person, a child, a homosexual, or even, a rock band from Ireland.

Karen wrote of the tension that accompanies this reading of the Good Samaritan: “I have seen more Samaritans. There are more now than ever before in my life and it’s annoying. These Samaritans are my coworkers, drivers on the road, little brothers, Muslim friends who have shown me more of the face of God. It’s been frustratingly beautiful.” Tom spoke of not being afraid to be the man lying on the side of the road and humbly accepting the aid of an unthinkable helper. U2 speaks into the culture, makes the road we lie on visible, and offers a helping hand for the listening spirit.³¹

Caitlin aptly identified Bono as an unlikely theologian in that he has never claimed to be God’s messenger, yet he and the band convey scriptural themes in ways traditional Christian voices cannot.

U2 can function as a Good Samaritan to us Christians living in America by being the people we would least expect to see God’s love poured out from. Bono is a man who does not claim to be a prophet, or a spokesman for God. In fact, he never even claims to be a good person doing good things. He is an individual who uses harsh language and does “ungodly” things like drinking and, heaven forbid,

playing loud music on big stages. We would not expect him to be the person to teach us something about our own spirituality and relationship with our Creator. U2 is comprised of musicians, not theologians. We must keep in mind, though, that they are the ones who feel safe to praise the Father in their concerts and speak his name for all to hear. They are able to act for justice and promote love and equality for our brothers and sisters around the world. They are the unlikely ones who show us how we as Christians should be living.

This interpretation of the Good Samaritan has struck Jessica (the co-author of this essay) powerfully. The challenge has been to open up to a Good Samaritan—the unexpected and unwelcome rescuer:

I have shared this understanding [of the Good Samaritan] with family, friends, strangers, children at camp, and anybody who would embrace the invitation to be loved by the unlovable. The challenge has been ever-present, to open ourselves up to a Good Samaritan; someone unexpected, unwelcome, even embarrassing to be our rescue in time of need. As North American Christians we so easily forget that we still have much to learn, and that wisdom can come from those conspicuously engrossed in the “secular world”—Irish rock stars who with their voice from the margins speak a message that helps lift us off the road that we become so accustomed to.

Recently I was dramatically impacted by a Good Samaritan. A dead gang member was the unlikely helper that made me more keenly aware of my religiosity. This gangbanger lay lifeless just a few houses down and I might never have recognized him as my Samaritan without the help of U2. Like Abel, this man’s blood cried out and shook up my world and reminded me that violence in many different forms still has a strong hold on our cities. When in Boston on the Elevation Tour Bono twice screams, “War is over we don’t need your help, America’s making war on itself.” He helps connect the rage and pain of “Bullet the Blue Sky” to my world. When I hear a person shot and killed just outside my window, that connection is complete. Lonnie Graham, the gang member killed by police officers on my street, has spoken to me with a voice as strong as U2’s, calling for me to get up off my road of religiosity, self-pity and pretentiousness, and follow the call to work for a different world and a new kingdom.

I pray that the call to keep listening for voices of the Good Samaritan, to get up off our road of religiosity, and to work our theology out in the real world, is one that only grows stronger in the coming years. It seems that my generation is hearing this call more clearly, perhaps because we are a culture that listens well, or perhaps we are a culture that listens to U2. Continually, U2 speak into the lives of those who experience them, creating a space to integrate the familiar and the unfamiliar, theology and culture, what we hold in our hearts and what we witness on our streets. They have transformation to offer if only we will listen; and it seems that a growing generation of us may be learning how.

Conclusion

We have been making a case for the classroom as a theological learning space and for theology as not merely an academic discipline, but a process of seeing, reflecting, and engaging the world. This essay has demonstrated the theological shift toward a more integrative and holistic approach to faith students take when they study the music and influence of U2. While their interpretations of specific songs might not be traditional or common, their work in front of the text is inspiring and thoughtful. These students, this second generation of U2 fans and followers, have the gift of listening, and they are listening to U2.

In conclusion are the responses of two students when asked on a final exam, “How has your understanding of theology changed in this class?” From Karen:

Before taking this class, I thought theology was simply the study of God. I can understand now that theology is yes, based on orthodoxy, but also orthopraxy. The music of U2 has freed my soul in a way. Ha, I’m now more annoying to others—telling them what Jesus is doing in the world and throwing a few U2 facts and lyrics in as well. But more than just learning to “act out” my faith more, or even speak up more... things and life and faith become more primal. More sensory-oriented. Let’s taste our faith, feel our faith, smell it, hear it, let’s touch it. But together, please.³²

And Luke:

Theology is the study of God's word. That's what I thought. I don't just say that because it's what you, Tim Neufeld, just said it isn't, but because I actually thought that. Over the past semester I've started to see how rich the term "theology" is. It's not just the study of the word, but how it all applies to life. And when cultures are different, they look at theology different.

Many well-educated Americans probably think that theology is the in-depth study of text, and applying logic, and their own intellectual views to it. And maybe it is. But on the streets, in the real world, it's different. In African villages, you can't spend too much time chewing on the meaning of scriptures when your time is consumed with keeping your family alive. Theology must be *lived out*.³³

NOTES

¹. Parker Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993), 71.

². John R. Franke, *(Gand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005)*, 44.

³. *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴. *Ibid.*, 104.

⁵. *Ibid.*, 116.

⁶. Raewynne J. Whiteley and Beth Maynard, *Get Up Off Your Knees: Preaching the U2 Catalog* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2003), 167.

⁷. Bono, audio interview by Jann S. Wenner, October, 2005, available at <http://www.rollingstone.com/bonovox>.

⁸. Randolph W. Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1997) 61.

⁹. *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁰. *Ibid.*, 183.

¹¹. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 58.

¹². Adam Clayton, the fourth member of U2, did not share the others' interest in Christianity until years later.

¹³. Bono, Edge, and Larry Mullen Jr., a presentation given at the Ghetout Music Event, Worcester, England, January 1981. The recording was available on CD briefly in 2006 through internet distribution. For more information see: Scott Calhoun, "Rare Recording Featuring Three-fourths of U2 for Sale," @U2, July 3, 2006, <http://www.atu2.com/news/rare-recording-featuring-three-fourths-of-U2-for-sale.html>.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Michka Assayas, *Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 145-146.

¹⁷ Ibid., 121

¹⁸ Bono, audio interview by Jann S. Wenner, October, 2005, available at <http://www.rollingstone.com/bonovox>.

¹⁹ Assayas, 223.

²⁰ Jubilee 2000 was a movement that called for debt cancellation of third world countries by the year 2000. Drop the Debt was the successor to Jubilee 2000 in Britain. DATA is an acronym for Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa, and was co-founded by Bono to research and document issues of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. EDUN is a clothing company founded by Bono and his wife, Ali Hewson, which seeks to employ Africans and model fair trade practices. The ONE Campaign is a non-profit organization that lobbies political leaders and promotes policy changes related to issues of global poverty. Product Red is a brand that generates revenue for the benefit of people suffering the effects of poverty in Africa.

²¹ Robert Hilburn, "Music and His Mission are One," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 2005, <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/apr/04/entertainment/et-bono4>.

²² Isaiah 58: 9-10

²³ "Bono's Remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast," @U2, February 2, 2006, <http://www.atu2.com/news/bonos-remarks-at-the-national-prayer-breakfast.html>.

²⁴ Bono, speech given when accepting the Chairman's Award at the 2007 NAACP Awards, March 2, 2007. While there is no formally published transcript of Bono's acceptance speech, one only needs to search the internet for unauthorized video recordings of the event.

²⁵ Assayas, 125.

²⁶ Bono, video interview by Bill Hybels, August 11, 2006.

²⁷ Jenny Eaton and Kate Etue, eds., *The aWAKE Project: Uniting Against the African AIDS Crisis* (Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 2002), 85.

²⁸ Student Comments, "Min 38B Theology, Culture and U2," 2006-2007

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid