*Theology &*Episode 2: Theology & Politics

**Jeff Liou:** Hey, Emily.

**Emily Hill:** Hey Jeff. How's it going?

**Jeff Liou:** Pretty good. How are you?

**Emily Hill:** I'm good. I had a sunny weekend here in Cincinnati.

**Jeff Liou:** Oh, I can tell it's turning to the fall here in Southern California, when it hits 78 degrees.

**Emily Hill:** And you're enjoying your pumpkin spice lattes?

**Jeff Liou:** Maybe one of these days.

Well, hey, Emily. I have a question for you.

**Emily Hill:** Yes, Jeff.

**Jeff Liou:** When you think of politics, this week's episode, what do you think about?

**Emily Hill:** I suppose the most common reaction I would have is to think about voting. What about you?

**Jeff Liou:** I guess for me, it's political cartoons that make fun of the other people's position or the other people.

**Emily Hill:** Late night talk shows. Yeah, that would be...

**Jeff Liou:** Some of that. There's a lot of making fun of, I guess for me, it's like, there's a meanness to politics, which I know is a turnoff for a lot of people.

**Emily Hill:** So what would be another way of thinking about politics?

**Jeff Liou:** Well, I think we're going to hear that from today's guests, which we're going to introduce in just a second. They have a really different vision of politics and what it's worth to the world. So I'm really excited about that. But first, we want to tell you about InterVarsity Faculty Ministry. Because if you're listening to this podcast, you're hearing a lot of different faculty members from across the country and across the globe, too, talk about the things that they love in InterVarsity's faculty ministry, which we invite you to go to the intervarsity.org website and type in keyword faculty ministry. And you'll find some resources there and ways to connect.

We are appreciating the faculty ministry Four Loves. InterVarsity as a whole has its own four loves, but faculty ministry is trying to cultivate in faculty across the country. Number one, a love for God and one another. Number two, a love for your campus. Number three, a love for your academic discipline and number four, a love for our world.

**Emily Hill:** And it's really been great to hear how different faculty do that in these episodes. And today it's really exciting to hear particularly how our guests love their academic disciplines and their world, and really use that, especially to encourage their students to think in different ways.

**Jeff Liou:** So today we talked to Dr. Vincent Lloyd, who is Associate Professor of Christian Ethics and Theories and Methods of Culture, and the Director of the Africana Studies department at Villanova University. He is the author along with Joshua Dubler of a book called Break Every Yoke: Religion, Justice, and the Abolition of Prisons-- 2019 from Oxford University Press.

**Emily Hill:** And we also talked to Dr. Ned O'Gorman. Ned is a Professor of Communication at the University of Illinois. And he's the author of several books. His most recent book is Politics for Everybody: Reading Hannah Arendt in Uncertain Times.

**Jeff Liou:** It was a great conversation, but there were a couple points, which I thought it might be helpful for you and I to talk about real quick. One of the things that I heard Vincent say a number of times, he referred to natural law, which is the theology concept. And so Emily, I just thought, I'd ask you, how would you describe natural law? What is it and what, what should I listen know?

**Emily Hill:** Natural law, as you said, is rooted in theology, also in philosophy, and it's a theory that basically there are moral laws that can be found in nature and discerned using our reason and that they can provide an objective basis for morality. And these are moral laws or judgements that we can find separate, basically, from what God might reveal to us.

**Jeff Liou:** Ah, so not everything has to be a lightning bolt or the finger of God telling us exactly how to behave in the world, that we can use our reason to determine together what it means to live a moral life.

**Emily Hill:** That's right, yes.

**Jeff Liou:** A really interesting part of the conversation was about what we refer to in political philosophy as liberalism. We have another episode on this topic, but it might serve as a good reminder here. What are we talking about when we say liberalism? Because you know, if politics is what I think of is the meanness of right versus left-- what did they mean by liberalism?

**Emily Hill:** Liberalism is a classical political philosophy that basically is rooted in the idea that we have individual rights. They could be different rights, like property rights, but basically that we all have individual rights and that's basically the starting point for how we live together.

**Jeff Liou:** That's helpful. So that takes us away from right versus left and really helps us to think about what it means to have individual rights, freedoms, and to maximize those freedoms, and whether or not we should? And where we derive a sense of rights. So all that, super helpful. And I look forward to having this conversation with Dr. Vincent Lloyd and Dr. Ned.

Well, we're here with Dr. Ned O'Gorman and Dr. Vincent Lloyd. My name is Jeff Liou, and I'm here with my cohost Emily Hill. And we are here to have a conversation about politics. But before we do that, we want to ask the question that we ask all of our guests at the beginning, which is if you were at a dinner party how would you describe what you study? Someone walks up to you and they want to know what you do. How do you describe what you study and why do you love it? So there's a two-part question there. And I'm wondering if we could start with you Vincent.

**Vincent Lloyd:** Sure. And first, thanks so much for having me here and I'm looking forward to the conversation. Yeah. So I usually say I studied religion, race, and politics and see how fast people run away. Not topics that many people think are, are good for a dinner party conversation, but that's the conventional wisdom that it's kind of a joke, right? That people don't like to talk about religion and politics, but of course they actually do, right. People have a lot of things that they want to say, and they're often afraid that real conversation can't happen around those topics of religion politics, and race. So what I try and do in my work or how I try and talk about my work is offering new resources from religious traditions and from political theory to help us understand that connection between religion, race, and politics in ways that can keep it in conversations rather than stop conversations.

**Jeff Liou:** And how did you get into that? How did you get to where you are in the academy? I mean, maybe in the process of that, was there a love story between you and this topic? Or how does that evolve?

**Vincent Lloyd:** I started out as an undergraduate thinking I would be a kind of math or science type person. I ended up getting involved in the living wage campaign, working with the janitors and dining hall workers who were at my university and realizing that they were not being paid a living wage and were living in really difficult conditions and that their humanity was not being respected. And then as part of that, reaching out to religious communities, to see how we could find that language that would convince our community as a university, as students, as neighbors, to act more humanely, to believe in the bonds of our community and the richness of that community, by honoring the humanity of everyone involved including all of their workers.

Doing that I started out trying to use religious language, but then I realized being immersed in these, that religious worlds in the world of particularly Christian ideas and practices, it was something that I loved and wanted to think more about and was transformative, not just for the low paid workers for whom I was organizing, but also for myself and for our community and for our world. I changed from math and science to religion. And I've been doing that kind of thing ever since.

**Emily Hill:** Ned, how about you? If you were at a dinner party, how do you describe what you do and why you love it?

**Ned O'Gorman:** If I'm looking for quick out, I will say that I am a historian of the Cold War. That's what I'll say. A lot of my writing and my publications have been in around the Cold War. However, if I were to be a bit more comprehensive, I would say I'm interested in the Cold War because for me it represents the culmination of the project and modernity in so many ways, to use a little sort of higher academic language. I mean, I really got into what I got into because I'm engaged in this big thing in the academy that is often called modernity critique or the critique of the modern world. And for me, the Cold War is a pivot point in that history that's where I land.

**Emily Hill:** So what about that makes you come alive and why did you end up in that space?

**Ned O'Gorman:** Yeah. You know, in some ways it was an accident. I got into the academy at the graduate level. I actually started graduate school in English as a literature student. And when I was studying literature, I discovered this sort of sub field in literary studies called rhetoric studies or rhetorical studies. I was totally fascinated with it in part, I think, because so much of that particular area has to do with the ancient world. And as a Christian, I was reading the Bible a lot and it's an ancient text and it just felt like this resonates with the kind of things I already was somewhat familiar with as a Christian.

Um, but also because you know, these ancient texts were dealing with big questions around the nature of political life, the *Polis*, the *res publica*, empire, all kinds of big questions that had to do with our life together. And so that's how I kind of got into the academy and got into my field, so to speak. But it was 9/11 that really got me into the Cold War.

 I was in graduate school. I was in my first year of my PhD when 9/11 happened. The response to 9/11 more than the event itself is what got me asking ,questions about the world in which we live. And specifically questions about the national security state, and where did that come from? And that's what led me back to the Cold War. And so that's just kind of a chain. That's what I mean about the accidental character of it. It's like I didn't go into graduate school with, with this plan to focus so much on my energies, on the history of the Cold War, but 9/11 happened and it forced me to ask a bunch of questions that led me back there.

**Emily Hill:** That's really interesting. Just how things happen in our lives, whether it's we engage with workers and that raises new questions or 9/11, and that raises new questions-- and all of the sudden those questions need answered and, or we need to engage in them in new ways, and that takes us a new directions in our lives.

**Jeff Liou:** And I was wondering if you could say a little bit more about the national security state for those of us who are uninitiated. Can you identify a feature of the national security state as you describe it that we would encounter, perhaps we don't know to think about the critique or the modern critique of something like that.

**Ned O'Gorman:** I mean, one of the things I like to say is that when we think about the Cold War, if we think about it at all, we tend to think about this ideological battle between the Soviet Union and the United States that reached across the globe. But I would say that the most significant feature of the Cold War was the United States creating a sort of state within the state. Okay. So if you can use it historical analogy here, many of us know that when Franklin Roosevelt was president during the Great Depression he created, what many people call in a positive sense the welfare state. Meaning--Social security, unemployment insurance, like a whole new state apparatus with all kinds of new offices and buildings and functions and budgets, et cetera, et cetera.

The same thing happened in the United States on even a bigger scale after World War II with the advent of the Cold War. And so, for example, the Central Intelligence Agency, CIA is a Cold War phenomenon. The Department of Defense itself, there was no Department of Defense. There was a war department, but there was no Pentagon, Department of Defense, unified national security sort of apparatus prior to World War II.

And it was a Cold War invention. And if we look at federal budgets, federal contracts, we look at U S global power. All of these are intimately and intricately wrapped up in this new state within the state, this, this national security state. So that's, that's what I'm talking about is sort of a history of that thing that we still very much live with and really dominates, practically speaking, our federal government.

**Emily Hill:** Ned, I know that you have this background in the Cold War research, and also you've mentioned this research in politics, and you have a book on Hannah Arendt and political engagement. So I'd love to hear about how those-- clearly they are related-- how your research on politics came about and how you would describe your research on politics and political engagement. Why you think that's important to the world and how that affects your own life in the world.

**Ned O'Gorman:** To me, I mean the Cold War work that I've done got me to Arendt who was one of the most prominent quote unquote public intellectuals in the United States during the Cold War. Um, and I also found her particular critiques of 20th century, Western society, some of the more cogent ones. And so at the basis of her thinking and what motivated me to write a book about her thinking is that the modern world has really come to sort of technologize and economize social life to the *nth* degree and has pushed out, wherever it can, distinctly forms of political life.

For her politics is a way of being with other people who are not like us. And it is the, the way that is most conducive to human freedom, but everywhere we look in the modern world in her view, we see people in positions of power, attempting to replace political forms of human relations with others with technological ones or economic ones. And so that's at the core I see of her critique and that's really why I wanted to spend some time writing about her is just articulate some of that in my book.

**Emily Hill:** Vincent, you talked a little bit about how you got into thinking about political theory and religion and Christianity. So could you tell us a little bit more about your specific research and that area and why you think it's important to the world?

**Vincent Lloyd:** And in some ways, what I have been studying recently has been complimentary to what Ned has been talking about and discussing in terms of the Cold War, and in terms of this really wonderful book on, uh, Hannah Arendt, just beautifully crafted sentences. I wish I could write beautiful sections as well. What I've been writing about recently is the rise of mass incarceration. Something that's on a lot of people's minds. It's often told as a secular story that something went wrong in terms of race in the U S that led to this prison explosion or something went wrong in terms of economics in the U S that led to there being economic incentives to build prisons or there's something with a political system that leads to the prison population in the U S it's floating and becoming an order of magnitude greater than every other countries that have this exponential growth from that from the 1970s to the early 2000s.

And my hunch with colleagues was that there might be something about religion or the religious imagination that we should be thinking about when we're exploring the roots of mass incarceration. My colleague, Josh Dubler, and I were tracking the way that religious ideas and particularly Christian ideas about justice, circulate, or don't circulate in the public square. How secularization of public discourse meant that really robust understandings of justice as a complicated three-dimensional kind of concept fall away and flatten out in public discourse so we get justice simply meaning the criminal system. We get justice simply meaning getting even without the sort of ways of theologically imagining justice as a world that's better than ours,. That's transformed in the direction of the good, that's ultimately guided by the divine. So that's one of the projects I've been working on recently.

 I've also been thinking about the way that religious ideas circulate in racial justice movements, the civil rights movement, and more recently the Black Lives Matter movement. And here again, secularism poses a problem because of the secularism of public discourse, we tend to forget or carefully manage and selectively read or selectively listen to the religion that circulates in the civil rights movement. We forget that natural law was central to the civil rights movement. Instead we think about it just as the sort of amorphous conception of God working in protest or something like that. I've been really curious about those very specific kinds of religious traditions and modes of doing ethical reflection that were familiar in Black Christian communities, and then that visibility and the civil rights movement with concepts like natural law and more recently with dignity, a concept that has these really deep Christian origins, has indigenous or specifically Black twists on that Christian understanding of dignity, and that is central to the movement for Black lives. And so the first sentence of the Black Lives Matter platform is the belief in human dignity and black dignity.

**Ned O'Gorman:** Can I jump in on, I just want to-- Vincent -- on what you said there. I mean, I read some of your work as well and especially the stuff on natural laws. Just fascinating to me. So thank you for doing that work. It's very, very eye opening for me. I'm curious when you talk about religious discourse with respect to mass incarceration, for example, like your focus, that it seems to me that discourse is doing both kind of the work of challenging the status quo but also there's like an element of it that's doing the work of reinforcing the status quo. And I don't know, like how you, how you parse those, that those traditions out in those. To talk about religious discourse in the United States is not to talk about a monolithic thing. Right? But rather a very sort of diverse set of things that move in different directions.

**Vincent Lloyd:** No, that's a great point. And I think it's really what makes, uh, the academy so valuable... we have the time and space to, to dive into those complexities, right? To explore how religious discourse isn't a one thing and public discourse isn't one thing, right? It's operating at different levels differently across regions, differently in different racial, gender communities. There are all these sorts of levels of complexity that are crucial to sort out so we don't end up with religion is the conversation stopper. So on this particular issue of mass incarceration, in this book Break Every Yoke that my colleague Josh Dubler and I wrote, we try and sort out how different religious communities, Protestants, Catholics, different strands of evangelicals, different Jewish communities, sometimes echoing Christian community, sometimes drawing on their own resources changed their religious language in public over time. It's not that they're consistently saying the same thing-- it's not that Catholics have been saying this package of Catholic social thought, the same package over the last hundred years. Right? Similarly for other communities, we focus particularly on these years just before and after the exponential growth of the prison system begins.

And we look at public statements and internal conversations in different denominations. And notice how that process of secularism in public discourse is not just about not, not just taking place in secular discourse it's also happening in denominations. Denominations themselves start fearing to speak in public with the robustness of the resources, from their tradition and start using the sort of flatter languages of, of, of justice. Sometimes languages that grew out of quite problematic traditions, that segregationists who get excited about mass incarceration as a solution to their problem with integration. One doesn't want to be associated with those people and yet they're shaping the discourse, the public discourse, sometimes even the religious discourse on these issues. So it's just an example of how to start thinking about these issues.

**Jeff Liou:** Vincent. I'd love for you to walk us back a little bit. When you talk about the language that you're hearing from different denominations as an InterVarsity podcast, we have students and faculty that are coming to us from largely Protestant backgrounds. Can you give us a few examples of the kinds of things or maybe the kinds of language that folks would hear about-- conceptions of justice, for example, that you're really thinking about and where you would like to take those?

**Vincent Lloyd:** In 1960 Martin Luther King was on a televised debates against a Southern segregationist newspaper editor from Virginia. This fellow also presented himself as a Christian, but believed that Christianity and Christian conceptions of justice ought to be kept internally, right? They ought to be individual behavior, but not guide public policy. Martin Luther King was talking about lunch counter sit ins, Martin Luther King was trying to say we have to bring American law in line with God's law. Like we have to respect this divine justice and we have to find protests and forms of collective action and organizing that move us in that direction. To which his Christian interlocutor and opponent said, that's all well and good for your personal salvation, but when we're talking about the public, we need to protect private property, that's also a good, we respect the rights of business owners to let the people that they want into their businesses and not others. The striking thing about this debate was not so much that the contours, but the reaction. Many people thought that Martin Luther King lost the debate. Southern SNCC, the newly energetic group of young folks in the South who were leading the student protest, walked away from their television in disappointment.

They thought, no one cares about this natural law stuff anymore. It's language that just doesn't have a hold on on people's lives or their vision of the world or of life together. So regnant discourse, discourse that was ascendant and soon to be hegemonic in the U S was one of private property rights, one of individual religiosity and one of justice as flattened out to mean either something that is between you and your God or something that is protecting your rights.

That's one moment in those sorts of attentions. You know that continues on and on. Barry Goldwater, write this strange figure, a Jewish convert to Episcopalianism who becomes a Republican nominee picks up on this law and order language, pairs it with it, with a kind of Christian idiom, but a Christian idiom that sounds so different from Martin Luther King. We all remember Martin Luther King, but he lost, but he lost the struggle for ownership of religious language in public.

**Jeff Liou:** Okay. So a quick story, I was talking to somebody and saying some of the themes that you were just articulating about private property, individual rights, et cetera, in line with the Christian tradition and that person that I was talking to said, and that's all good. Right? So there's some confusion there. And so Ned, I want to turn to you because you are looking at Hannah Arendt politics as a vision of life together, which is part of what Vincent was just talking about. We read in your book, the beginnings, or a fully voiced critique of liberalism, that kind of package of ideas that involves private property and individual rights, et cetera.

Can you walk us into the critique of liberalism that you're articulating in your book?

**Ned O'Gorman:** I just want to step back for a second. And say as a Christian, um, and speak to my, my sort of Christian voice here, if there's such a such a thing as, as a non-Christian versus Christian voice, but the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The idea of private property as an absolute right, is, from a Christian perspective, a travesty, I mean, a heresy, you can, you can add a lot of other words. At best property is a relative, it's a relative good or relative, right that should always be held in this relative way. And so for Christians, as Vincent was describing, to make absolute this right to property, or even other forms of, of rights is to deny the fundamental claim of the Christian gospel, which is that Jesus is Lord and the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. So I just want to say that.

 Arendt is not coming at this question of kind of a radical version of individual or property rights from that theological perspective. Rather, she is coming at it from what I would describe as more phenomenological perspective or an attempt to actually describe the world the way it is. And so liberalism would tell us that we are autonomous individuals. That is to say that we, we not only are individuals, but we're individuals that sort of legislate for ourselves what is true, what is right, what is wrong. That's like the extreme version of liberalism. And that's just phenomenologically false it's experientially false. It's just, there is no such thing as an autonomous individual, we are all wrapped up in what she calls webs of relationships. And this is just the way the world is. This is the way human life is. And that's, that's her kind of entryway into this critique of liberalism. Is that it doesn't accurately describe the way we actually live our lives and the ways we actually moved through our lives. And so she is beginning there with the critique of liberalism and then trying to argue for a different vision of politics. One that is more in line with the way we actually live our lives in these webs of relationships.

**Vincent Lloyd:** If I could just-- with a reflection on this. Sometimes it seems as though the talk of human nature as essentially relational, our lives is always already immersed in webs of relationships with those around us would be intentioned with kind of a language of natural law or human dignity. That is also a deep part of the Christian tradition, and also seems phenomenologically true. As I've been reflecting on Black social movements and justice those claims that to natural law and to dignity are always social, right? Natural laws discerned collectively it's discerned in community. It's put into practice in community as a collective, right? If, if one is alone in one's office, trying to figure out what a natural law is only using reason one will go wrong. Right? One we'll get things, uh, that that's the kind of the road version of natural laws, secularized liberal version of natural law. Whereas if one is using one's whole being, affective... Dimensions, one's being as well, as reason, and doing that collectively, then that's when one will better discern natural law. So I don't think what Ned and I are saying are at all in tension but actually very complimentary. Yeah.

**Emily Hill:** I'm just wondering, Ned, if you could take what you were just describing and sort of fully articulate how does that difference in politics look compared to essentially like the kind of politics that we have now? I think, you know, most of us Americans are just like pretty steeped in liberalism. So I, I hear what you're saying and I'm like, yeah, that makes sense. Even if you're talking about Arendt describing the way technology and economics are sort of supplanting political life. What does her version of politics look like in contrast to ours? What hope does that offer?

**Ned O'Gorman:** I think it's a great question and I will attempt to answer it. I do want to say that it's, it's a very difficult question to answer. In part, because what her version of politics would look like depends on what people do with it. I mean, like I can't, it's not a program, right? It's not, it's not a policy, platform. One of the key concepts in Arendt's thinking that she actually gets from the Gospels is this concept of natality or new beginning. And for her, for people to lean into ways to live politically together, always carries with it like a high degree of unpredictability or contingency in terms of what that's gonna look like. But that contingency or unpredictability is, is rooted in the way in which politics, when people begin to relate politically to each other, that they give birth to new things, things that we could not have foreseen or predicted.

That is one thing that liberalism, in the way that we're talking about it today at least, really tries to foreclose. I mean, liberalism is about the attempt to create order through forms of control and regulation. Arendt's view of politics has been called anarchic by some, I don't think that that's quite the right label, but there is an element of it that is anarchic for sure. And unpredictable. And for her there's great value and richness in letting ourselves experience that form of life together.

Let me give you a practical application, so to speak here. This is a real thing in my community here in Champaign, Illinois. This last few weeks, we have two major high schools in Champagne, the city of champagne, both big high schools, public high schools.

There was a gun incident at one of them last week. And then just yesterday, there was a threat to the school on social media. What has the school district done in response to these two incidences? They have promised to install more security cameras. They have promised to supply more security staff and they have encouraged every student and parent to download an app in which they can report any kind of security concerns. Okay. That is technology and economy at work right there. Right.

What would a political response to this look like? How about, how about a meeting? How about the school board calls a meeting? How about every time something happens the school board calls a meeting and invites people to come and talk about? What would happen if people in this community starts showing up in response to these situations collectively, right? I'm not promising utopia here. There no doubt would be a ton of conflict. But I would suggest that it would be a different way of responding to these incidences in our community than more security cameras and apps and this sort of thing. And it would be a different way of living together. Right?

That's like a very practical or simple example. But it's like, it's like almost at a gut level, like how do we, how do people in positions of authority and leadership, respondent to these incidences? So often we default to the technological solutions of surveillance or whatever it might be, incarceration, rather than think creatively about more community oriented and what Arendt would call political ways of addressing these problems together. So that's a practical example.

**Jeff Liou:** And Vincent, I'm curious to hear you say more about that because I was reading in one of your articles on Black dignity, I'm tracking here, and perhaps mapping that some of this conversation about liberalism and the technology state, it has something to do with what you called domination or the *libido dominandi*. The way that communities can variously shape us either for, or with relation to the will to power and domination. Do you have a practical prescription or anything like that for how to live in a world differently? Especially if we are in this liberal environment or politically kind of in the political liberalist tradition, what would you say to us listening about living in this world given what we see?

**Vincent Lloyd:** Another privilege of the academy is have a distance from practical questions and solutions. So it may not be the best person for this kind of approach, but to reflect it, but on what Ned was saying, which is so important and really resonates with me this way of naming liberalism as a problem, I think is really powerful, right? To name the contours of liberalism, something that's sort of water in which we swim. Liberalism is something that's distinct from a political party or something that we read about in the newspaper in terms of electoral politics, but rather a way of organizing life together, and one that's deeply problematic and deeply at odds with deep theological commitments that many Americans hold.

And I think we're seeing that more and more the right political, right, but also on the political left, not only at the fringes, but also in the center of political conversation that is seeing anxieties around liberalism, right? Recognizing the specificity of liberalism and saying you have to think otherwise. And in the left, that can mean imagining a world, otherwise match the new forms of social justice that weren't on their horizon before, whether it's discussions of prison abolition, or reparations, or other forms of transformative racial justice practice. This is a conversation that's moving in really good directions in terms of challenging liberalism.

What does that look like, practically? Well, I mean, I think from the Arendtian perspective this form of gathering together discussing, allowing for the unpredictability of collective life to run its course is really powerful. I think from the, more liberationist perspective, there's a slightly different twist on that where new possibilities and this transformative new visions of the world come about through organizing against the domination, rather than just coming together. It's coming together for a purpose. And that purpose is to identify where are these forces in the world that are stifling our humanity? How are they organized? How can we challenge them?

And naming those forms of domination, organizing against them will lead to new forms of life together that will open the door for human flourishing and bring humans in more in the direction of the good. What this looks like practically, again like Ned was saying saying varies a lot, depending on the particular form of domination that one is organizing against, or identifying, but we see it as skills, large and small, whether it's around anti-racist politics, around indigenous sovereignty, around prison industrial complex. These are all sites where there's something religious going on, that opening to the theological, and opening to the radically otherwise that moves toward the divine. It is organized by the divine even the political representation of these movements often is quite secular and doesn't speak in that language and actually makes them more in line with the liberal project.

**Emily Hill:** I'd love to ask you both as we're sort of nearing the end of our time, I feel like you're both sort of pushing up against some problems that feel impossible. Like, for example, mass incarceration, you write about being like what is often described in very totalizing terms. Something that we can never break through. And politics being, uh, an issue that people are just like, you know what, I just don't want to touch this anymore-- what's the point? This is just such a mess. So you have these very transformative visions, and with different ideas. How do you motivate your students? As you're teaching or as you're, as you're writing, how would you motivate listeners to move past what feels like a brick wall to engage?

**Ned O'Gorman:** You know, I am skeptical of motivation. I think motivation wears off. And so my focus as a teacher is really on two things. One is on thinking. Teaching my students are modeling for my students or giving my students the opportunity to think. To not react, simply react, or replicate cliches, be they academically clichés-- and trust me, this is a major battle for me and my graduate students is overcoming academic cliches. Um, thinking is something I can do as a teacher. That is to say, I can, I can help people learn how to think better. So that's one thing I really focus on. And the other is imagination. But if you look at history, you will see that over and over again. Quote unquote impossible things have happened. Be it through history, be it through fictional stories, through anecdotes, cultivating kind of an imagination or for again, not a, not a program or a policy, but just for the possibility of things being other than they are, is a big part of what I try to do as a teacher. Those are the two things I focus on.

**Vincent Lloyd:** I love that, Ned. And I would just second, everything you said that the classroom has a space to think slowly, think carefully. To read slowly, to read carefully, to build, imagine ways that are motivated by that, that careful and slow thinking and reading that's beautiful and, and seems entirely right to me. It does feel like religious spaces, we have a sort of advantage that secular discussions of politics don't in the following sense: when we encounter something that seems impossible and also necessary like the transformations in the direction of justice, that doesn't mean we put our hands up and walk away. Uh, that's what religion is all about right? That's what faith is all about. Students in the classroom and others who can draw on their own journeys and experiences and reflect on that as they come to think about political issues that seem crucially important, also seem impossibly difficult. That can provide guidance that others needs and find if they're they're working from a purely secular framework.

I teach at Villanova. I'm not Catholic, but it's a Catholic institution in the Augustinian tradition. And I do find that Augustine is a really helpful figure for motivating a kind of slow thinking, slow reading and introspection that motivates action in the world, and that motivates engagement with the world. *The Confessions* that all of our first-year students have to very carefully read through here at Villanova is a text is all all about figuring out how worldly forces of domination have contaminated my life, my thinking, my. How I, and those around me can collectively transform the way that we see the world and the way that we think in the direction of the good to be more in line with plans of God, more in line with the biblical narrative. Seems like there are really rich resources like that in religious traditions that seem like they're at a small scale just about my life by introspection, but when we think about politics at all these different scales from the personal to the social, to the global, the same dynamics are at work. Those dynamics at all those levels are enriched when our faith commitments and journeys are brought to the table.

**Jeff Liou:** Well, that's encouraging. The idea that at all these different levels, that faith, that engages what seems impossible and yet necessarily. There are resources for us and thank the both of you, Dr. Ned O' Gorman and Dr. Vincent Lloyd for bringing some of those resources to light in both political theology and the study of politics. We're really grateful and blessed to have you as people who are working in these fields. And we want to express our gratitude for joining us on this conversation.

**Vincent Lloyd:** So much for having us.

**Ned O'Gorman:** Thank you.