

SEVEN IFES VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF PASSION TALKS

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Thank you, Wendy, that was absolutely wonderful and inspiring. It is amazing the leadership that Wendy and Stanford and the students in Northern California have exercised. Not only in that region, but around the world. People have been talking in the IFES network about variations on the theme.

So let me give you seven quick variations on the theme, one minute each. These have been either tried elsewhere or are being thought about elsewhere. There are different levels of seriousness, assuming different levels of sophistication on the academic side, on the theological side.

Variation #1 - T-3 Events

T-3 events are held by the Australian movement the Simeon Network movement of engaging the university in Australia. It is called *Thinking Truth Together* - TTT - T-3 events. They have organized one-day events in major Australian cities like Sydney and Melbourne and Brisbane. The goal is to stimulate students to think 'Christianly' / scholars to think 'Christianly' about their scholarship. Each person only gets 5 or 10 minutes to make a very quick presentation about their discipline and some kind of faith connection. Then there is a little bit of follow-up discussion. So these are very quick, very sharp. Probably not as polished as what Wendy was describing. When they initially began doing it, they only permitted presenters to be at the meeting.

Variation #2 / 2b - T-3 Events Modified

But going forward with variation #2, they are not only inviting presenters, but also other people who want to be there as listeners. Variation #2b is that they are spending the first couple of days doing these T-3 presentations, but then they are going to move into writing workshops. I mentioned that briefly yesterday. Where they are going to have some people who are experts at academic writing actually help the people who wrote, write better. So again, sort of contributing to the academic and Christian scholarship.

Variation #3 - Lightning Talks

A third possibility is something that people have called *lightning talks*. I rather like that idea, lightning talks, because they are fast and maybe appropriate to people just getting going. They focus on such things as: this is what I am working on, these are the questions I have thought about, maybe here is a connection or two. What do you think? 5 minutes.

Variation #4 - Faculty Talks - Full Scale Papers

Faculty talks are next. At the University of Queensland, this actually began with students and faculty together. So advanced doctoral students, post-docs and so on and faculty. They presented essentially conference papers to each other. So these were twenty or thirty page papers. So this is a very expansive and very intensive effort on the part of the presenters. Ross McKenzie, the astrophysicist who organized it, told our IFES list-serve that it was very low-tech though as opposed to your big conference. He just sent out an email and said on Saturday the something or other of March we are going to hold a half-day session, do you want to present. Eight people said yes, they got topics abstracts and off they went. What was distinctive about this or a feature of this similar to what Wendy has been describing is that anybody in the university on any topic could speak. In some ways I think that that is a very good thing, because it compels me a specialist to be sure that I can convey my ideas to somebody who knows nothing about my field in a clear way. That is actually a good discipline for academia and for mission more generally.

Variation #5 - Young Scholars and a Step by Step Development Opportunity

We are talking about this with a group of very smart young faculty and doctoral students at the Australian National University in International Relations. There is just a cluster of young scholars. So we are currently planning a session whereby we will have a half-day or a one day conference next March or April. It will be to connect some part of our work on international organizations, international relations to the faith. But the first step is just to write a three page extended abstract of what we imagine could be an article. These people are all high intensity people, they have tremendous demands on them, the thought of going for papers right out front was too much for all of us in a way. So the compromise was a three page extended abstract. We would spend thirty minutes discussing each person's abstract. And then a follow-on from that might be the decision to write papers. And the potential follow-on to that is to contribute a symposium to a theological-academic review, of sort of short 15 or 20 page papers. So we will just do that step by step.

Variation #6 - Faculty Presentations on Current Interests / Puzzles

The sixth variation is something that was mentioned at the winter conference this year in Northern California. Inviting faculty, not exactly a passion talk, but sort of. Inviting faculty to come a present and asking them to present on the topic of 'What is exciting you right now?' 'What are you puzzling about right now?' 'What is something you are right in the middle of?' All of us who are seeking to be productive academics have such excitements and have such puzzles. So this is sort of tapping into the faculty person's energy and then sort of throwing it open and actually allowing students and post-docs to see what it is like to be struggling throughout one's career. No matter how senior you are, you are always struggling with issues if you are trying to push forward. To get a sense of what that feels like as a scholar, but also as a Christian.

Variation #7 - Graduate Chapter and Under-graduate Chapter Interaction

The 7th variation on the theme struck me in hearing some discussions yesterday. Wouldn't it be quite interesting if we thought about having passion talks on our campuses between the grad-chapters, like Wendy's Stanford Chapter, and undergrad chapters. Where grad-students come in a give sort of mini-passion talks to the undergrads, many of whom will be interested in topics to be thinking of going on to graduate school. So it becomes a way the grads and the undergrads can have a conversation together.

An additional thought

One further thought. You can see that geographically there is a variety here. So Stanford has just had Stanford only talks, Stanford seems to have had Northern Cal. talks. The Australians have had city wide events. Can we even imagine in a country like the US where we have so many educational institutions, having national passion talks events, but maybe focusing just on a given topic. On the biological sciences, or on the visual arts, or on medicine, or on law. So that people could get together for a day or two, perhaps around academic conferences that they might be going to.

So there you have seven variations on the theme. Now Wendy is going to open us up for discussion and comments.

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