

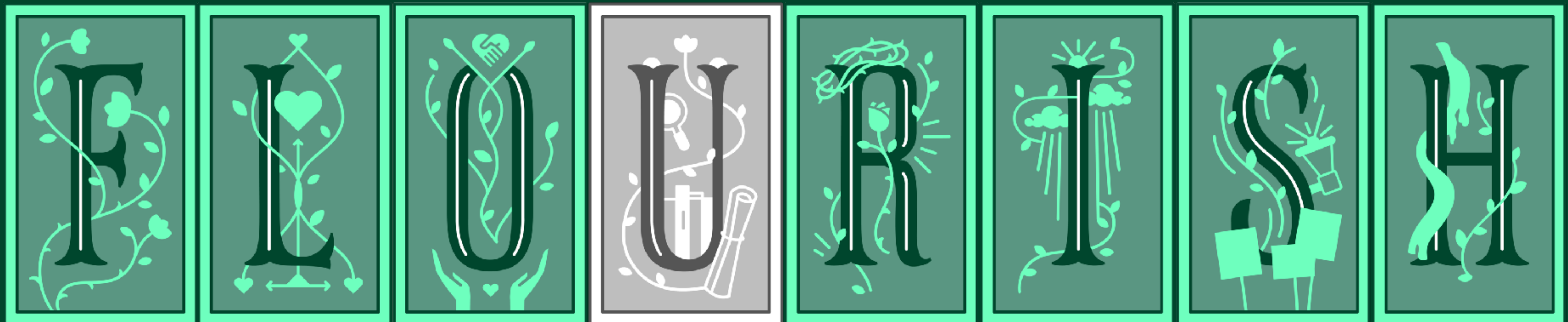
Understanding & Wisdom

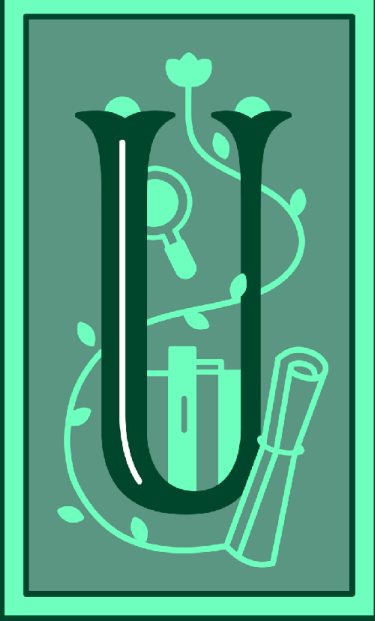
Faith & Flourishing in Politics - Christian Education Class

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig - Fall 2021

Our Garden Hedge:

1. **Listen Well** - We don't have all the answers so let's ask what others think, really try to hear each other out, and let others finish their thoughts.
2. **Speak with Brevity & Focus** - Let's leave space for others to participate and stay on track ("Keep to our hedge").
3. **Practice Gentle Courage** - Let's be bold and share our thoughts and ideas, point to what we believe the Scripture and wisdom says, and yet do so with a gentle and humble spirit.
4. **Keep Praying** - Let's pray in preparation, silently while we discuss, and to get the class started. We need the Holy Spirit!





Lord, please grant us wisdom today.

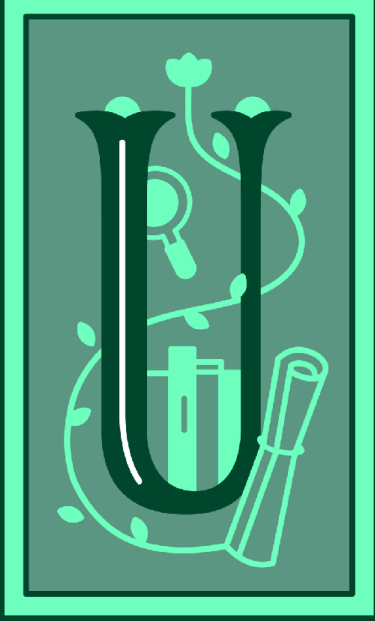
James 1:5 (ESV)

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.



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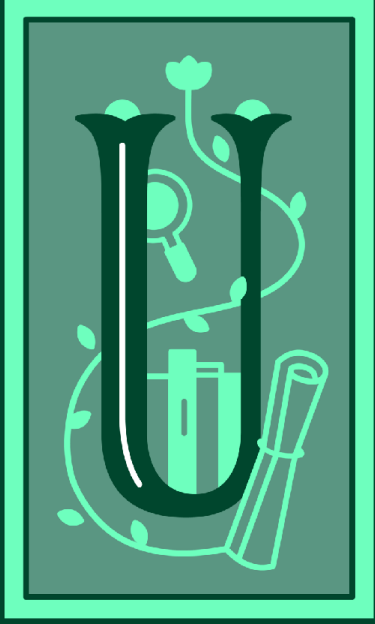
What's the role of the Bible in setting public policy?



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Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.



What's the role of the Bible in setting public policy?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

The Bible will give us essential principles as well as attitudes or dispositions to keep in our minds and hearts as we advocate for and implement particular public policies. But the exact nature of those public policies depends on a host of factors that are connected to the specific concrete historical situation at the time.

To implement the biblical principles relevant to public policy, therefore, requires a knowledge not only of the principles themselves, but also the situation at the moment the policies are being developed, as well as the people involved. The ability to apply the right principle in a way appropriate to a particular situation is what the Bible calls “wisdom.”

Tremper Longman, *The Bible and the Ballot: Using Scripture in Political Decisions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020) 66, Kindle.

James 3:13-18 (ESV)

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

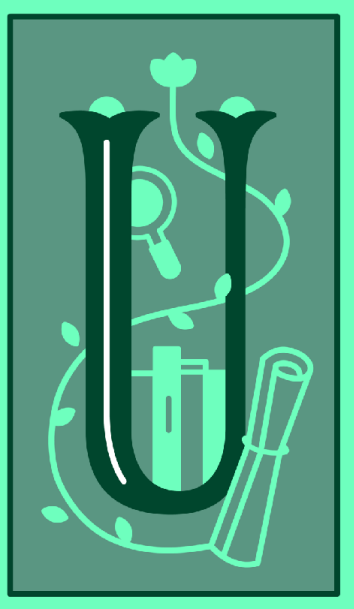
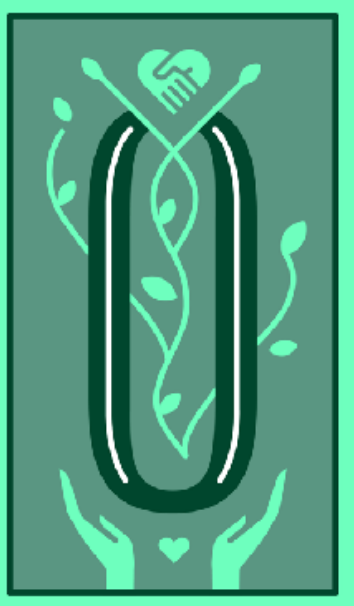
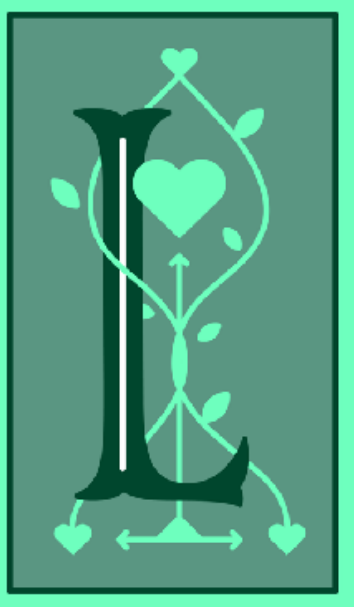
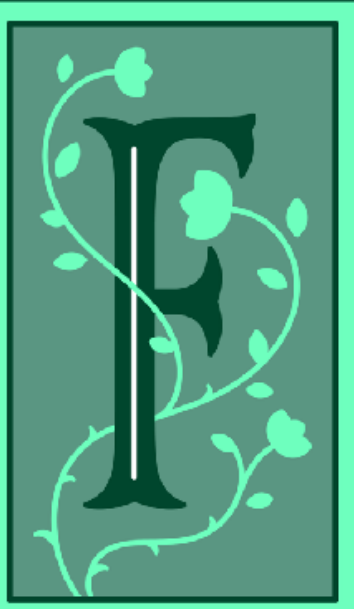




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What is wisdom and why does it matter for politics?

What is wisdom? It's a capacity of mind that combines the fear of the Lord with the skill of living in God's created but fallen world in a way that yields justice, peace, and flourishing.

Jonathan Leeman & Andy Naselli, *How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?* (Church Questions) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022) 14, Kindle.

Correspondingly, Christian wisdom in one sense is that faith itself—an overarching interpretation of reality, a set of convictions, attitudes, and practices that direct people in living their lives well. Here “living well” means living as God created human beings to live, rather than living against the grain of their own true reality and the reality of the world. Wisdom in this sense is an integrated way of life that enables the flourishing of persons, communities, and all creation.

Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011) 101.

Political judgments depend on figuring out how to apply our biblical and ethical principles to the vast and complex set of circumstances that surround every political decision. They account for social dynamics, legal precedents, political feasibility, historical factors, economic projections, ethnic tensions, criminal-justice considerations, and so much more. People today often treat their votes as personal expressions of who they are. Yet we would encourage you to view votes less as matters of self-expression or tribal identification and more as strategic calculations concerning these kinds of non-biblical matters. Then recognize that different Christians will make different wisdom-based calculations.

Jonathan Leeman & Andy Naselli, *How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?* (Church Questions) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 202) 15-16, Kindle.



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How can wisdom help bridge the gap between biblical flourishing and public policy?

“In short, a whole-church issue depends on straight-line judgments, while a Christian-freedom issue depends on jagged line-judgments. By saying whole-church matters depend on straight-line judgments, we mean that there is a simple straight line between a theological or ethical principle found in the Bible and a political conviction.”

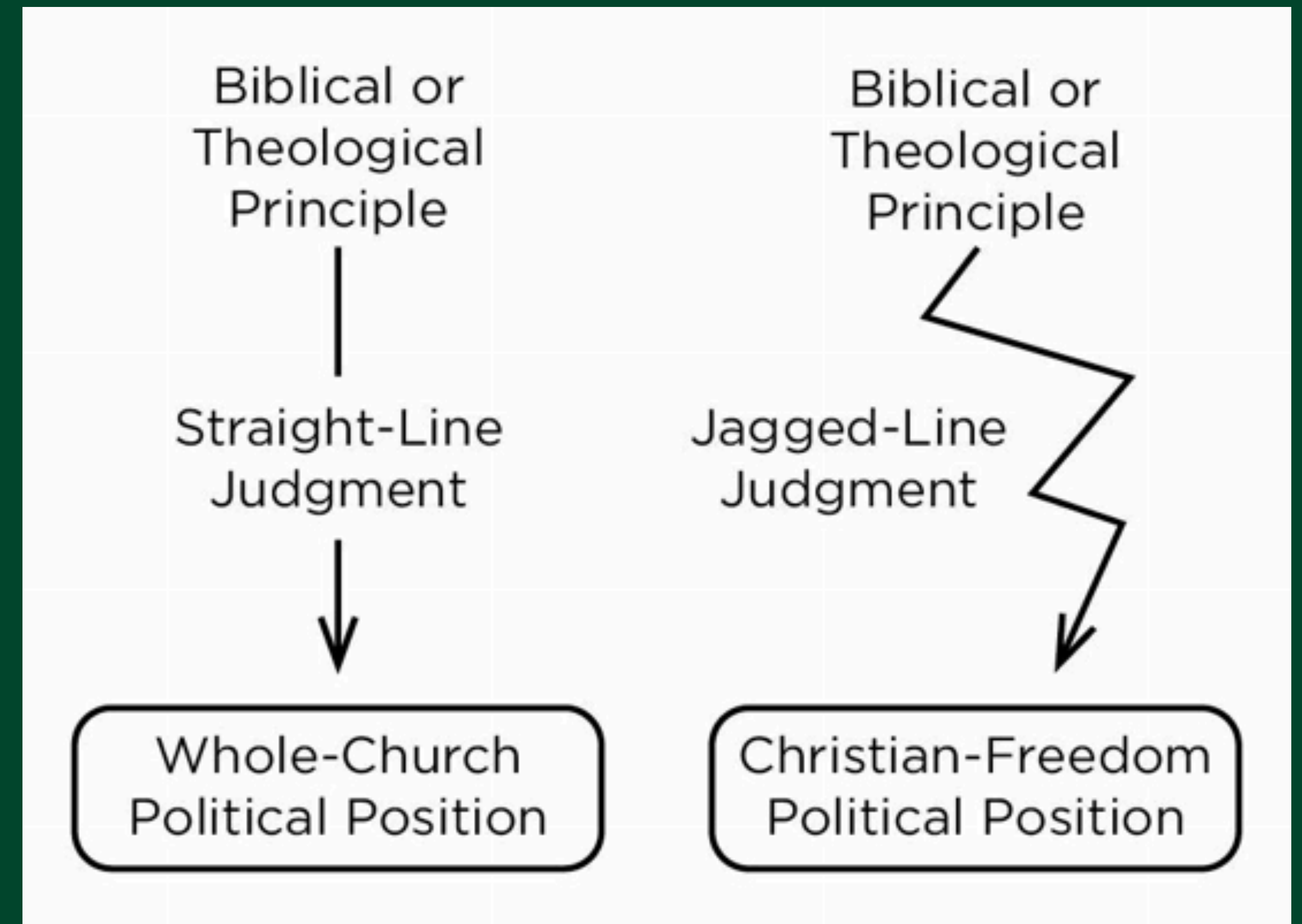


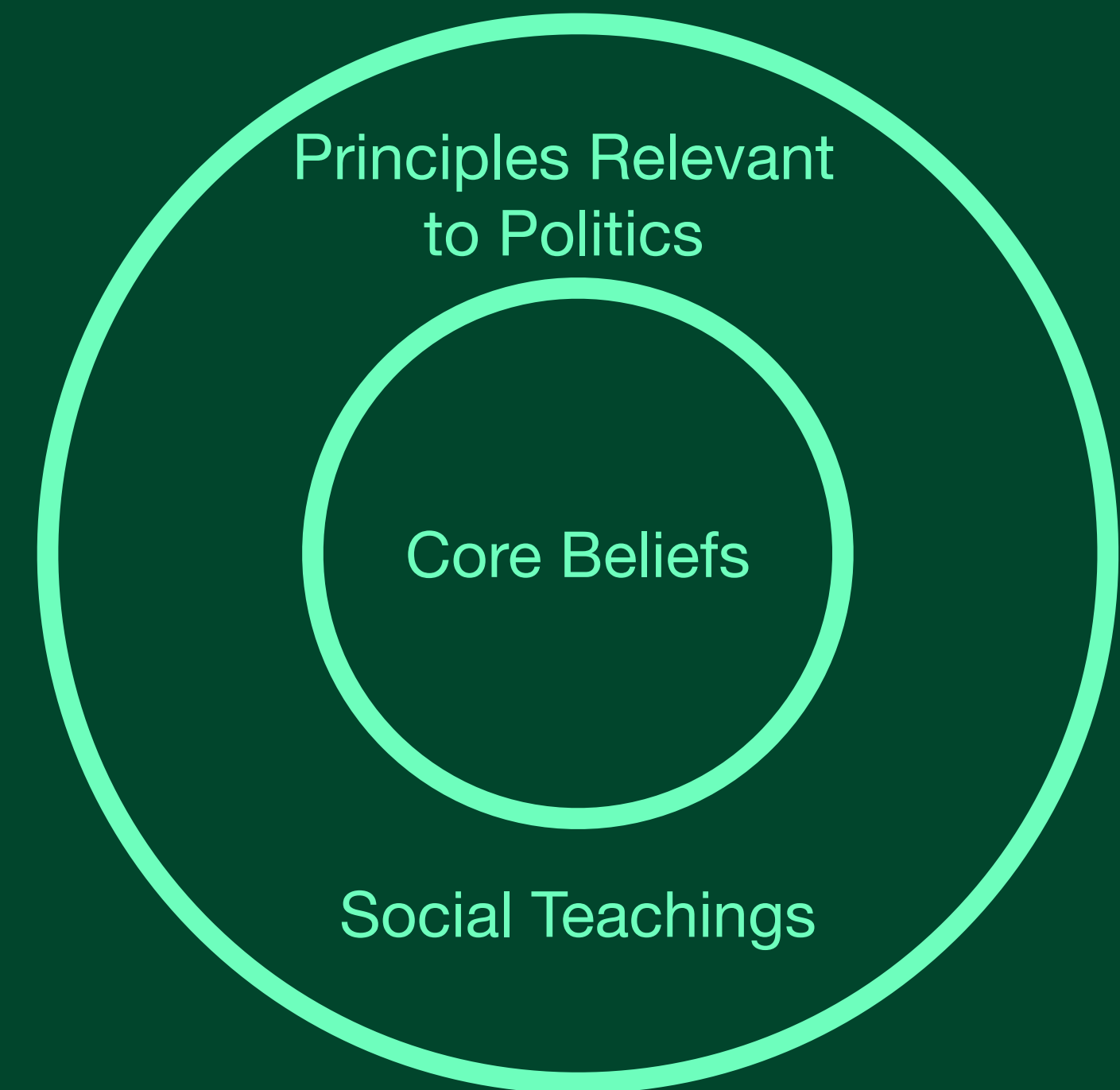
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Question: What political positions do you think are more straight-line or jagged line?

“Those [core theological] beliefs are the common ground for all Christians, and provide their crucial identity. They point to ultimate truth for believers, and serious Christians stake their lives upon that belief. Moreover, those central convictions do not change radically over time, though their articulation and interpretation must be re-done for every new generation. They are the treasure of the church, whose main mission it is to proclaim and teach them to the world.”



“They are principles derived from the core that are addressed to challenges before the church. As the church faces challenges through time a body of social teaching is built up. . . . For example, the social teaching on abortion is long-lived and extensive. Catholic consciences are to be formed by the social teachings of the church. Other churches have developed social teachings, but rarely as authoritative or as persuasive as those of the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic Church's teachings do change over time, but very slowly.”



“Most Christians have at their disposal the "theory of just war" that has been in the Christian tradition since St. Augustine. They use that theory as a common starting point, assuming that it is consistent with the core commitments of the faith. However, while many theological ethicists come to the conclusion that the Iraq War was not justified by that theory, others claim it was....The movement from core to public policy, even when it draws upon common teaching such as the just war theory, does not move clearly to one public policy position. Room must be allowed for Christians of good will and intelligence to disagree.”



“The final circle is concrete public policy itself, which is the product for the most part of the executive and legislative branches of government. Good public policy is notoriously difficult to craft, because it often has unintended results that can produce just the opposite effects than what was intended. Public policy is also the product of much give and take, much compromise. Sometimes there are so many interests involved in the formation of the policy that it lacks coherence.”



Question: How do the layers between “core beliefs” and “public policy” help shape your thinking on the role of wisdom in politics?



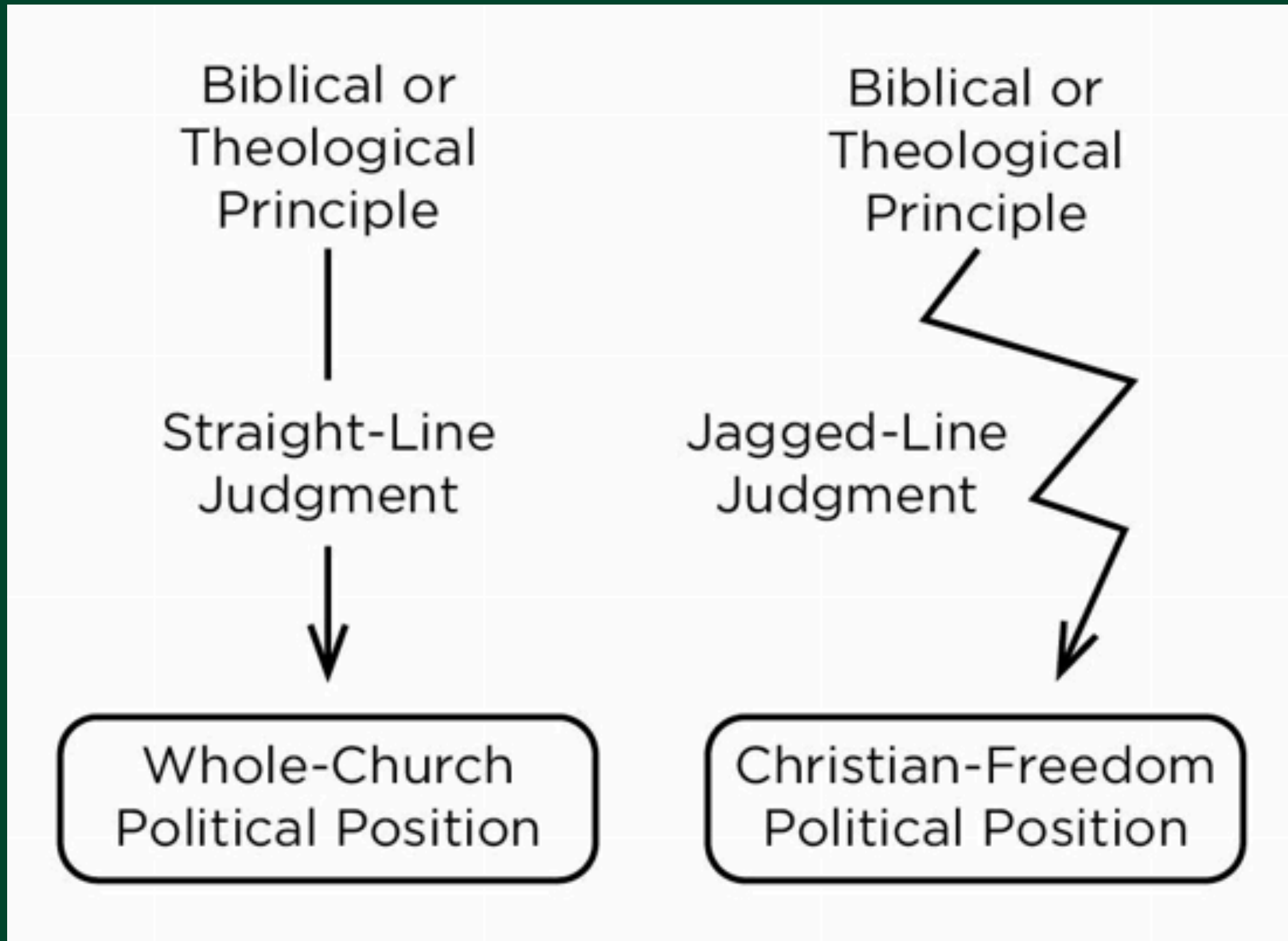


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What are the strengths and weaknesses of these models as we think about Christians engaging in politics? What do you find helpful or unhelpful?

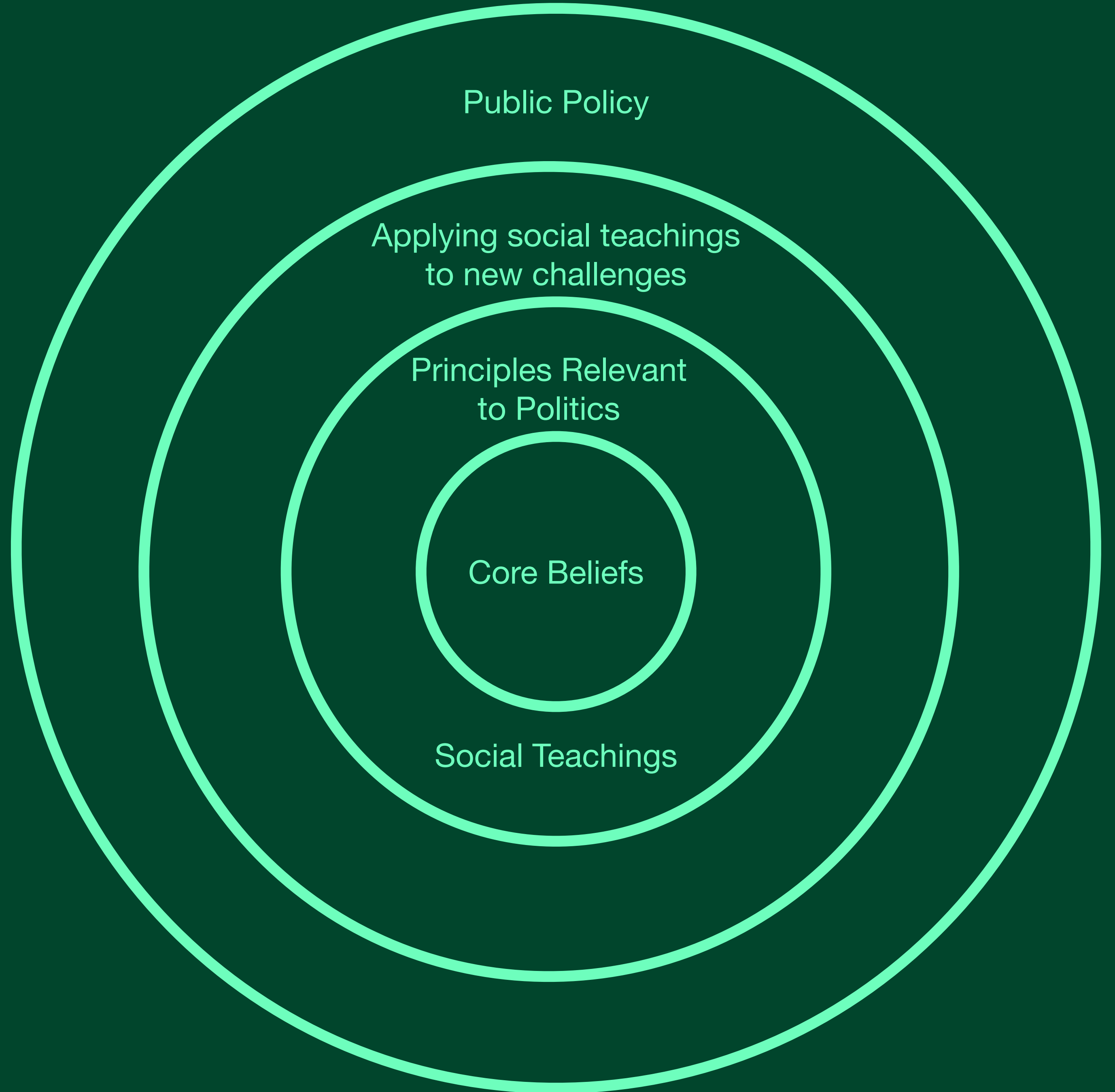




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What level of wisdom (or not) should we expect of our non-Christian leaders?

The nation benefits from having leaders who are characterized by the kind of virtues highlighted by the book of Proverbs: humility, temperate speech and emotional expression, a desire for justice and fairness, an openness to listen to advice from wise advisors, a desire to protect the vulnerable, and more....

... My point is that America is not a theocracy. While it was important for Israel to have a pious king (Deut. 17:14–20), Christians should not base their vote on whether a candidate has faith. But they should look for people who have practical and ethical wisdom that would enable them to put into place just and fair public policies that help their communities.

Tremper Longman, *The Bible and the Ballot: Using Scripture in Political Decisions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020) 71-72, Kindle.



Image by Jonathan Romig.

What does Jesus have to do with wisdom?

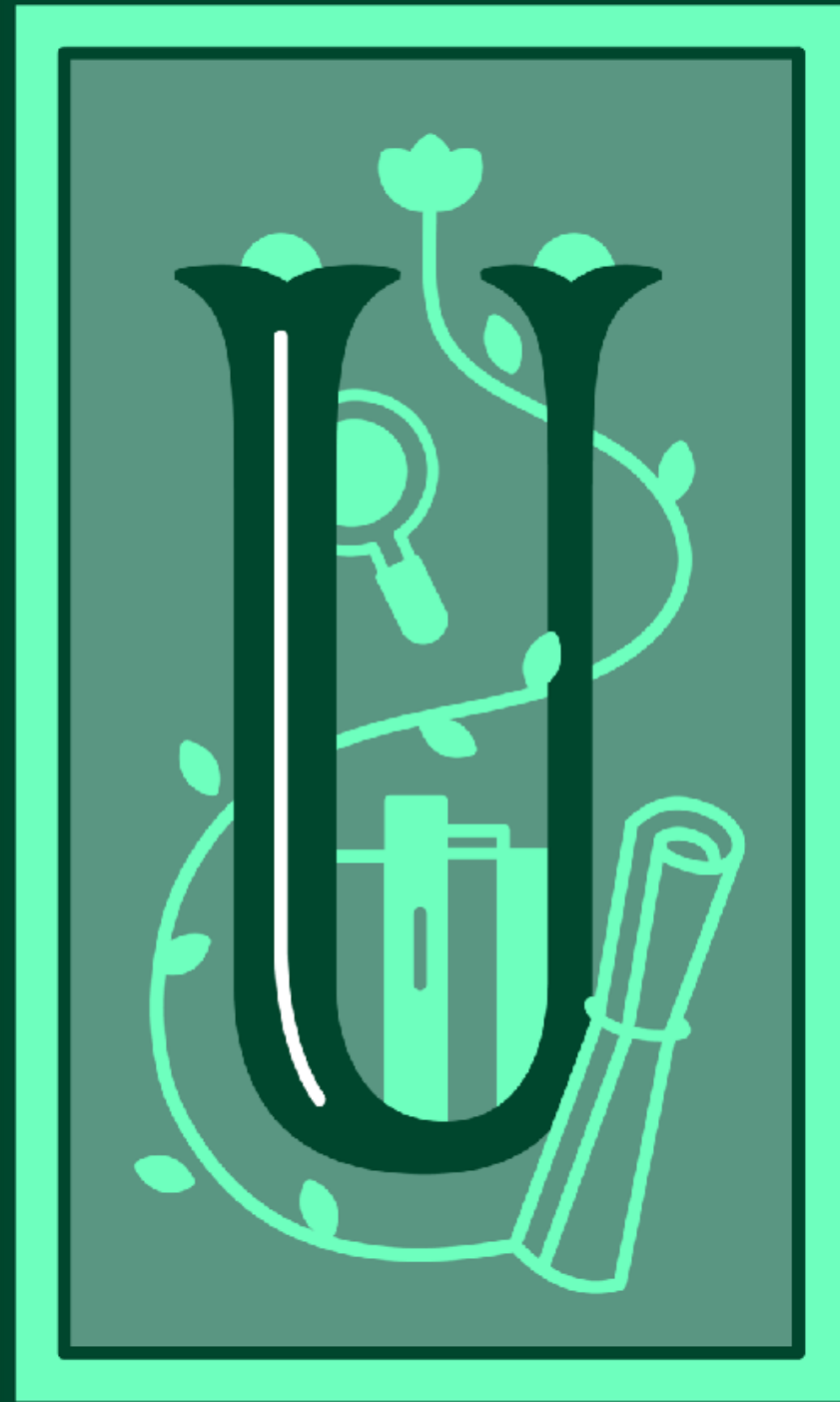
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I Corinthians 1:30 (ESV)

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

To reject wisdom as a way of life, or Christ as the embodiment of wisdom, is not like leaving the dessert untouched after a good meal; rather, it is like refusing the very nourishment without which human beings cannot truly flourish.

Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011) 102-103.



Let's close by asking for wisdom for ourselves and for our city, state, and nation's leaders.

James 1:5 (ESV)

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

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