Practical Inquiry and Reflection:
An Application Exercise

Transformation: *Praxis* is the vehicle of transformation:
Cycle of __*observing*__ (seeing, hearing, and experiencing a lived reality, examining data of a situation), __*judging and grieving*__ (social analysis and moral/theological reflection, reassessment, remorse, denunciation, resolution), and __*acting*__ (planning and carrying out actions aimed at transforming the social structures that contribute to suffering and injustice).

Step 4: Strategic Response
Strategic response is the intentional implementation of the outcomes of the inquiry-reflection process (*praxis*) that proceeds an analytical process. Through a process of analysis and interrogation, practical concerns surface in the form of "problems to be solved, decisions to be made, crises to be overcome, needs to be met, inconsistencies to be corrected, wrongs to be righted, questions to be answered, dilemmas to be resolved, and discrepancies to be clarified" (Kinast: 69). In short, in the process of asking, "what is going" on moral issues were identified. The step of strategic response is a formal recognition of what has been taking place all along in the process through inquiry and reflection, but, more, it completes the cycle of social description, historical interrogation, and normative fusion by drawing upon the practical skills and activities of the society to name and enact the response. But beyond this, the steps leading up to the strategic response can highlight existing discontent or create discontent with the status quo.

Discontent, moral indignation, and anger about a wrong are all important emotions needed to overcome the inertia of habit and contentment with the status quo. These emotions can be used as leverages to "unfreeze" a situation by creating a sense that the current situation is intolerable, that change is preferred, that the changed situation offers greater good (harmony, well-being, reduction of destructive conflict) and less harm than the existing situation (Lyle E. Schaller 1972: 86-90). This discontent opens up the possibility to consider an alternative, more ideal situation. So, as seen above in this model, not only are the defects of the existing situation revealed, but a possible alternative reality is envisioned. Plans may now be developed to create the ideal situation; these plans may be vetted, weighed, and critiqued in light of practical and normative considerations; and then, finally, action may be taken.

Strategic response addresses four questions: How do we understand the concrete situation in which we must act? What should be our action in this situation? How do we critically defend the norms of our action in this situation? And, what means, strategies and rhetoric should we use in this situation? In considering the context where this plan will be implemented, we ought to be guided by a "field force analysis" (Kurt Lewin 1952). This model may indicate where an intervention to change power relationships needs to take place. Lewin's "field-force analysis" involves several steps:

   (1) stating the current situation or the confronting problem;
   (2) describing the ideal situation—imagining and articulating the vision;
   (3) identifying where the current situation will go if no action is taken;
   (4) listing all the forces driving change toward the ideal situation, calculating the costs and outcomes anticipated;
   (5) identifying potential allies and ways to increase their allegiance, number and strength (power);
   (6) listing all the forces resisting change toward the ideal situation;
   (7) prioritizing the positive and negative forces having the greatest impact;
   (9) listing possible unforeseen "wild-card" interventions (but what if...) and identifying those likely to be negatively affected by the action or change, noting their likely response and their capacity to obstruct or undermine the effort;

(10) allocating a score to each of the forces using a numerical scale, e.g., (1) extremely weak to (10) extremely strong, and using this information as a guide for future action (i.e., relationship and coalition building, discrediting);

(11) calculating the costs (time, energy, loyalties, money, skills) to implement the strategy of change against the cost of the consequences of change to the status quo;

(12) identifying the source capable of giving legitimacy (stamp of approval) to the change that is sought and securing that legitimacy (prestigious person or group, moral principle, scripture, slogan, argument, symbol).

Yet needed: This model does not tell us about the importance of creating a support team of loyal, trusted colleagues who are willing to study, dialogue, and struggle in creating the conditions for change and then working to form other alliances and coalitions to bring about the change. Individuals usually are unable to bring about lasting change. For that, a community of people is necessary. The support team must have loyalty to each other and, very importantly, loyalty to the common goal.

Influencing Field-Force Outcomes:
The viability of the change program can be improved by decreasing the strength of the restraining forces and by increasing the strength of the driving forces. Care needs to be exercised when increasing "driving forces" as this can create new, unforeseen reactive forces, or increase the strength of existing restraining forces.
Actions to be taken are:
- Chart the forces by listing (to strength scale) the driving forces on the left and restraining forces on the right. The chart allows one to visualize the forces at work and to determine whether change is viable and progress can occur.
- Identify the measures of success or failure at critical junctures in the change process.

Mahatma Gandhi, engaged in struggles for national independence, offered us such advice as this:
- As the means so the end. There is **no wall of separation between means and end**. Realization of the goal is in exact proposition to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits of no exception. (Gene Sharp 1979, *Gandhi as a Political Strategist*, p. 290)
- In so far as possible, we ought to honor and respect the opposition. Listen to and take seriously their concerns, ethical arguments, and fears. Be open to what truth may exist in the opponent's position; assume that no one's position represents the complete truth of a situation. (Joan V. Bondurant 1971, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*, p. 33-34)
- Protect the opponent from insult and attack. Harbor no anger toward the opponent. (39).
- Identify our own core values—why we are engaged in the struggle, why it matters, what good it will bring to us and the opposition. In this we ought to try to include the opposition in our sense of "us," seeking the common good.
- Persist in searching for avenues of cooperation with the opponent on honorable terms. Try to achieve an agreement with rather than a triumph over the opponent (39).
- Identify our goals—what changes are sought, what kind of difference our goals will make and for whom.
- Compromise is possible as a means of accommodating to differing positions at a point before conflict becomes explicit and if basic principles are not at stake (197).
- Refuse to surrender essentials in negotiation; refuse to compromise basic principles or essential portions of valid objectives (39).
- Outline your goals, plans, and objectives for change and communicate these to those who might support them as well as those who might oppose them. The opposition needs to know what is at stake, what exactly is being asked of them, what sacrifices or losses they are asked to accept. Their risk needs to be identified. People fear the unknown. Fear is a powerful force. Let it not be used against us.

As the above indicates, **Gandhi operated from a strong relational position, a love and desire for the well-being for his opponent**. Of course, truth as a goal was his ultimate objective and motivating force. He insisted upon and persisted in truth. He fought against oppression because it violated the truth of the human relationship. This ethic was reflected in all of his struggles against injustice.

Gandhi advises us not to deviate from or to escalate the objectives, especially as the change-objectives come to be realized. We need to have a bottom line for the changes we seek and hold to it. We ought to not take advantage of the opposition as the force-dynamics begin to move in our direction. In this, **we ought to create a relationship of trust—that our word can be trusted**. Once we have achieved our goals, Gandhi and Kurt Lewin insist, we need to "re-freeze" the situation. We need to try to create a stable situation in the context of the change, to create a new status quo (Bondurant: 98-99). Both Gandhi and Lewin suggest we allow time for the changed situation to be felt as the "way we now do things around here." Habits need to be formed, procedures need to be routinized. This requires time. The social sciences and lessons of history tell us that people, in general, do not tolerate instability, un-clear norms, or constantly fluctuating standards. The old way of doing things is preferred to instabil-ity. People require the security of stability and order. This is why we "re-freeze" at the ideal order now realized. This is why we hold the line on "demands."