Nominalism

User Guide

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Introduction

The Lausanne Global Classroom is designed to connect emerging evangelical leaders to key issues and ideas in global mission today. As these leaders grow into national, regional, and global influence, our hope is that they will be equipped and knowledgeable for the work of mission in their generation through this resource.

This Classroom episode is on Nominalism. Nominalism is a problem that is as old as Christianity itself. It means to be identified with a religion in name only. People may self-identify as a member of a religion or belief system, but not live out the tenets of that faith. This happens among Christians, and even among evangelicals. The features of nominalism clearly change in relation to the cultural and ecclesial context in which the church finds itself. The most basic point is that nominalism is more of a problem when Christianity finds itself in a dominant or majority situation, especially when Christian faith so shapes culture that there is a confusion about the nature of one’s identity. In post-Christendom situations nominals are much less likely to have any identification with the church and see themselves as Christians by association with a broadly Christian culture. This episode examines the impact and effect of nominality on the global church and on the individuals involved. It also examines the antidotes to nominality, helps fulfill the goal of engaging the church in various aspects of nominalism, and seeks to inspire young leaders, established leaders, churches, organizations, and movements to understand how to address nominality in their ministries.

Global Classroom episodes are short videos in documentary format totaling about 35-45 minutes, designed to give a broad introduction to the subject of the episode. The short video sections may be viewed all at once, or section-by-section at the discretion of the group leader or instructor. The Video Introduction page in the User Guide may help you to determine which section is most appropriate for your use and/or where to stop the video to facilitate reflection and discussion.

Additionally, each episode has a User Guide, which builds on the topics introduced in the video. The User Guide contains curriculum for four tracks: 1) small group settings, such as a ministry staff meeting or a mission-minded discussion group; 2) an academic unit as part of a course; 3) a semester-long academic course; and 4) an individual setting for those personally seeking missiological content that is current and globally representative. Sections of this User Guide are relevant to one of these four contexts indicated by the following icons:

- **Small group**
- **Academic unit**
- **Academic course**
- **Individual**

We hope you feel the freedom to use this resource in a way that makes sense for you and your group, class, or organization. We welcome any feedback you may have about this or future Classroom courses. Please send your feedback to the email address below.

Thank you for participating in Global Classroom: Nominalism.

Brent Burdick
Episode Introduction and Outline

This video is designed to give participants a broad introduction to the topic of Nominalism. The section videos in the episode progress through the outline below:

**Outline of Episode**

1. Introduction
2. Definition of Nominalism (and What Causes it)
3. Biblical Foundations of Nominalism
4. Theology of Nominalism
5. Global Statistics on Nominalism
6. Categories and Parameters of Faith
7. Controversies Concerning Nominality
8. The Church’s Role in Nominalism
9. Reaching Nominals and Anonymous Christians
10. Conclusion

Total time: 64 minutes, 24 seconds.
Small Group Facilitation Guide

Materials

Lausanne Global Classroom: Nominalism video episode

- YouTube Playlist
- HD file downloads

The episode can be watched in its entirety or by section. Each section is titled with a graphic. Feel free to pause for discussion (potential questions provided below). Also, in some contexts, you may only desire to use 1 or 2 sections of the video and cover the remaining information another way. Feel free to make these resources work for you and your context.

Leader Responsibilities Include:

- Tailor the use of these resources to the knowledge of your group. Is your group already familiar with Nominalism or will these concepts be new to the group?
- Determine the timeframe and format to discuss nominalism for your group.
- Determine which questions best fit the reflection and discussion process for your group.
- Decide on the activities listed below for the group to do. Decide on a timeline for presentation to the group for discussion of the results, if desired.

Discussion Questions for Small Groups—based on the video episode:

Video Episode Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the meaning of nominalism? How would you define it? What causes it?
2. How does nominality happen in the life of believers? What is the source of it? What is the remedy?
3. Discuss the importance of conversion in preventing nominality. How will an emphasis on conversion strengthen faith in believers?
4. How does nominalism happen in a Christianized culture? What are the dangers and drawbacks to faith from living in such an environment?
5. Discuss the impact of secularization on Christian faith.
6. What is the connection between having a faith identity and the practice of faith?
7. How does nominality impact life issues such as marriage and sexuality?
9. How did Jesus prevent nominality in the disciples? How do you account for nominality in Judas Iscariot?
10. Discuss the differences between nominality, being a Christian, and Christian maturity.
11. How can a country be predominantly Christian, and yet nominality exists?
13. Do you know some nominal Christians? How might they be encouraged to grow in their faith and relationship to God?
14. What is the solution(s) for nominalism in the church?
15. What prayers might you pray for your nominal friends, community, and church?

Suggested Activities to Do in Your Community

1. Form a group that meets regularly to pray for nominal Christians in the community and in the church.
2. Show the Lausanne Global Classroom episode on Nominalism to people in your community. Have a discussion afterward using the video discussion questions above.
3. You may also review the assignments from the academic and individual sections below to choose from books to read and find additional activities to do.
Syllabus for an Academic Unit

Global Classroom: Nominalism

This syllabus can be used as a unit in a class on ministry, missions, global issues, etc. See the Syllabus for an Academic Course below for a full semester directed-study course.

Purpose

To introduce the concept of nominalism and lay a biblical and theological foundation for helping to address nominality. To help students taking the course to understand how nominalism impacts the global church and its witness to the world.

Outcomes

After viewing the Lausanne Global Classroom episode on nominalism and completing the accompanying readings, discussion, and assignments, students will be able to:

- Understand what constitutes nominalism and how it impacts the global church.
- Develop a biblical and theological understanding of nominalism.
- Understand the historical background and cultural influence of nominalism.
- Identify ways to address nominalism in the church, community, and personally.
- Understand the importance of addressing nominalism in the local church and community through emphasizing conversion, discipling, preaching, and teaching.

Faculty Responsibilities Include:

- Determine what part or parts of the Lausanne Global Classroom episode video on nominalism best fit your course purposes.
- Determine the timeframe to be used for implementing sections of the video or the whole video resource.
- Customize the use of these materials and assignments to best fit your purposes and course outcomes.
- Determine what other resources might be helpful for your students to learn about nominalism in their ministry context.
- Determine how you will grade or score the assignments and activities you choose.
Unit Materials

Lausanne Global Classroom: Nominalism video episode:

YouTube Playlist
HD file downloads

The episode can be watched in its entirety or by section. Each video segment is titled with a graphic. Feel free to pause for discussion (questions provided below). Make these resources work for your context.

Articles:


Suggested readings from the Bibliography (Appendix):


In-Class Discussion Questions (based on the video episode and articles):

Note: Some of the discussion questions below may be used as essay questions for a test.

A. Video Episode Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the meaning of nominalism? How would you define it? What causes it?
2. How does nominalism happen in the life of believers? What is the source of it? What is the remedy?
3. Discuss the importance of conversion in preventing nominalism. How will an emphasis on conversion strengthen faith in believers?
4. How does nominalism happen in a Christianized culture? What are the dangers and drawbacks to faith of living in such an environment?
5. Discuss the impact of secularization on Christian faith.
6. What is the connection between having a faith identity and the practice of faith?
7. How does nominality impact life issues such as marriage and sexuality?
9. How did Jesus prevent nominality in the disciples? How do you account for nominality in Judas Iscariot?
10. Discuss the differences between nominality, being a Christian, and Christian maturity.
11. How can a country be predominantly Christian, and yet nominality exists?
13. Do you know some nominal Christians? How might they be encouraged to grow in their faith and relationship to God?
14. What is the solution(s) for nominalism in the church?

B. Discussion Questions on Articles 1-4:

1. What are some of the differences between nominalism among Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants?
2. Discuss the biblical definition of ‘Christian’.
3. Discuss cultural and other factors which may serve as a roadblock or hindrance to biblical faith among Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox adherents. Outline some bridges or strategies to reach these people.
4. How have factors in the history of the church affected the rise of nominalism?
5. Where do you see nominalism occurring today? How might it be addressed by the church? By individual Christians?
6. What role does the church play in contributing to nominalism? Eliminating it?

Assignments

Choose from the assignments below.

1. Write an essay or essays answering selected discussion questions from above based on the video.
2. Write an essay or essays answering selected discussion questions from above based on the articles.
3. Show the Lausanne Global Classroom episode on Nominalism to a group in your church, school, or community. The student should lead a discussion afterward using the video discussion questions above.
4. Write a 5-page response paper to each of the books suggested in the materials section above. In your paper(s), discuss how each book is significant for you and for a biblical and theological understanding of nominalism. Outline how the book changes the way you think about nominalism. What will change in your life and ministry after reading this book?
5. Design a short survey that includes questions on involvement in the Christian life, faith, and church. Interview several people who you think might be nominal Christians using the survey. (Do not discuss their being nominal with them). Determine from the answers if you think they are nominal. Write a 3-page descriptive reflection report discussing your
experience and observations. Suggest ways from your research and readings to address the nominality in those you interviewed.

Syllabus for an Academic Course

Global Classroom: Nominalism

This syllabus can be used for a semester-long directed study course on Nominalism. The student(s) should meet with the instructor for three-to-four 1-hour sessions during the course to discuss the readings, assignments, and projects. See the Syllabus for an Academic Unit for a shorter unit-length version.

Purpose

To introduce the concept of nominalism and lay a biblical and theological foundation for helping to address nominality. To help students taking the course to understand how nominalism impacts the global church and its witness to the world.

Outcomes

After viewing the Lausanne Global Classroom episode on nominalism and completing the accompanying readings, discussion, and assignments, students will be able to:

- Understand what constitutes nominalism and how it is an issue that impacts the global church.
- Develop a biblical and theological understanding of nominalism.
- Understand the historical background and cultural influence of nominalism.
- Identify ways to address nominalism in the church, community, and personally.
• Understand the importance of addressing nominalism in the local church and community through emphasizing conversion, discipling, preaching, and teaching.

Faculty Responsibilities Include:

• Determine what part or parts of the video best fit your course purposes.
• Determine the timeframe to be used for implementing sections of the video or the whole video resource.
• Customize the use of these materials and assignments to best fit your purposes and course outcomes.
• Determine what other resources might be helpful for your students to learn about nominalism in their ministry context.
• Determine how you will grade or score the assignments and activities you choose.

Course Materials

Lausanne Global Classroom: Nominalism episode

YouTube Playlist
HD file downloads

Articles

1. *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics (Lausanne Occasional Paper 10).*
2. *Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among the Orthodox (Lausanne Occasional Paper 19).*
4. *Statement to the Churches on Nominality (1998).*

Required Reading from the Bibliography (Appendix):


Assignments:
Choose from the assignments below.

I. Discuss the questions below with your course leader or professor:

A. Video Episode and Articles Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the meaning of nominalism? How would you define it? What causes it?
2. How does nominality happen in the life of believers? What is the source of it? What is the remedy?
3. Discuss the importance of conversion in preventing nominality. How will an emphasis on conversion strengthen faith in believers?
4. How does nominalism happen in a Christianized culture? What are the dangers and drawbacks to faith of living in such an environment?
5. Discuss the impact of secularization on Christian faith.
6. What is the connection between having a faith identity and the practice of faith?
7. How does nominality impact life issues such as marriage and sexuality?
9. How did Jesus prevent nominality in the disciples? How do you account for nominality in Judas Iscariot?
10. Discuss the differences between nominality, being a Christian, and Christian maturity.
11. How can a country be predominantly Christian, and yet nominality exists?
13. Do you know some nominal Christians? How might they be encouraged to grow in their faith and relationship to God?
14. What is the solution(s) for nominalism in the church?

B. Discussion Questions on Articles 1-4:

1. What are some of the differences between nominalism among Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants?
2. Discuss the biblical definition of ‘Christian’.
3. Discuss cultural and other factors which may serve as a roadblock or hindrance to biblical faith among Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox adherents. Outline some bridges or strategies to reach these people.
4. How have factors in the history of the church affected the rise of nominalism?
5. Where do you see nominalism occurring today? How might it be addressed by the church? By individual Christians?
6. What role does the church play in contributing to nominalism? Eliminating it?

II. Write a 5-page integrative response paper on each of the books listed above. Do not summarize the contents, but reflect on how the book touches, inspires, challenges, or convicts you
regarding nominalism. What do you agree with; not agree with, and why? How is your understanding of nominalism challenged or changed? What biblical and theological reflections are noteworthy? Why is the book important, or not, to your understanding of nominalism? Explain.

III. Show the Lausanne Global Classroom video episode on nominalism to a group in your church or school. Use the discussion questions in the small group guide above to engage the viewers in conversation about nominalism. Write a 3-page report describing your experience. Outline the responses of the group and share plans or goals set by the participant viewers.

IV. Design a short survey that includes questions on involvement in Christian life, faith, and church. Interview several people who you think might be nominal Christians using the survey. (Do not discuss their being nominal with them). Determine from the answers if you think they are nominal. Write a 3-page descriptive reflection report discussing your experience and observations. Suggest ways from your research and readings to address the nominality in those you interviewed.

V. Write a 12-page research paper outlining a biblical and theological understanding of nominalism. Suggest ways you can lead your church to address the problem of nominalism. Summarize, integrate, and apply your research to your present or future ministry or life of faith.

Suggestions for Individual Study

Materials

Lausanne Global Classroom: Nominalism video episode.

YouTube Playlist
HD file downloads

Articles


Suggested Reading from the Bibliography (Appendix):


**Reflection Questions for Journaling (based on the video episode and articles):**

**A. Video Episode Questions to reflect on in your journal:**

1. Discuss the meaning of nominalism? How would you define it? What causes it?
2. How does nominality happen in the life of believers? What is the source of it? What is the remedy?
3. Discuss the importance of conversion in preventing nominality. How will an emphasis on conversion strengthen faith in believers?
4. How does nominalism happen in a Christianized culture? What are the dangers and drawbacks to faith of living in such an environment?
5. Discuss the impact of secularization on Christian faith.
6. What is the connection between having a faith identity and the practice of faith?
7. How does nominality impact life issues such as marriage and sexuality?
9. How did Jesus prevent nominality in the disciples? How do you account for nominality in Judas Iscariot?
10. Discuss the differences between nominality, being a Christian, and Christian maturity.
11. How can a country be predominantly Christian, and yet nominality exists?
13. Do you know some nominal Christians? How might they be encouraged to grow in their faith and relationship to God?
14. What is the solution(s) for nominalism in the church?

**B. Journal Questions on Articles to reflect on in your journal:**

1. What are some of the differences between nominalism among Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants?
2. Discuss the biblical definition of ‘Christian’.
3. Discuss cultural and other factors which may serve as a roadblock or hindrance to biblical faith among Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox adherents. Outline some bridges or strategies to reach these people.
4. How have factors in the history of the church affected the rise of nominalism?
5. Where do you see nominalism occurring today? How might it be addressed by the church? By individual Christians?
6. What role does the church play in contributing to nominalism? Eliminating it?
Suggested Activities to Do in Your Community

1. Form a group that meets regularly to pray for nominal Christians in the community and in the church.
2. Show the Lausanne Global Classroom episode on Nominalism to people in your church or community. Have a discussion afterward using the video discussion questions above.
3. You may also review the assignments from the academic and individual sections below to choose from books to read and find additional activities to do.
Appendix

Suggested Bibliography of Resources on Nominalism

Books:


———. ‘*When “Nominal” Christians Want Only the Label.*’ Interview by Ronald Keener, Church Executive, November 2006, p. 69-71.


Articles and Internet Resources:

Brierley, Peter. ‘Where is the Church Going?’ Series of articles published on his website: http://www.brierleyconsultancy.com/where-is-the-church-going/ Especially Section 17.2 ‘Nominal Christians’. 


Guyot, Leopold. Sans Église, article published on pasteurweb.org. 


LCWE, Christian witness to Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics (Lausanne Occasional Paper 10).

______. Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among the Orthodox (Lausanne Occasional Paper 19).

______. Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among Protestants (Lausanne Occasional Paper 23)

______. Statement to the Churches on Nominality (1998).


Sherwood, Harriet. ‘Nearly 50% are of no religion – but has UK hit ‘peak secular’?’ The Observer, 14 May 2017.


