F THE ISMS

FROM LABELS TO LEVEL GROUND

A field guide to human dignity, faith, fairness, and active participation in a divided world

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PoeTech Global | Inspired by Bush Integrated Health



POETECH GLOBAL

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"An ism begins when a shortcut becomes a sentence, when we stop seeing a person and start judging a category."

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated, on behalf of the Poe Family Office, to every person who has ever been reduced to a label before being allowed to demonstrate their character, contribution, or calling. It is offered especially to the builders, healers, teachers, veterans, caregivers, believers, seekers, workers, innovators, elders, young people, and neighbors who keep showing up even when the world sees the category before it sees the person.

Inspired by Bush Integrated Health and its reminder that whole-person care requires us to see the whole person.

Dedicated to all defenders of God's people, wheresoever dispersed.

A LETTER TO THE READER

The title is intentionally confrontational. The "F" means what you think it means, because some habits of dehumanization deserve a blunt refusal. But the F also stands for Freedom, Fairness, Faith, Fellowship, and Forward. This book is not a demand that everybody agree on everything. It is a demand that disagreement never become permission to strip another human being of dignity.

An ism is often a shortcut. It lets us make a decision before the evidence arrives. Sometimes the shortcut is personal prejudice. Sometimes it is embedded in an institution, policy, custom, joke, algorithm, hiring practice, neighborhood pattern, medical assumption, or social expectation. The result is the same: an individual is forced to carry a story that someone else wrote about a group.

The alternative is not pretending differences do not exist. The alternative is disciplined seeing. See the person. Name the pattern. Test the impact. Correct the structure. Build belonging. That is the framework of this book.

My Christian faith tells me that people bear the image of God. My Masonic journey has repeatedly returned me to public principles of integrity, respect, service, brotherly love, relief, and truth. My work in technology, business, education, public service, and veteran communities has taught me that people are most powerful when they are treated as active participants rather than problems to be managed.

So this is a field guide. Read it with a Bible nearby if you wish. Read it with your team. Read it with your family. Argue with it. Mark it up. Then use it. Because an ism that is only discussed remains an ism. An ism that is identified, interrupted, and redesigned can become a doorway.

THE LEVEL GROUND FRAMEWORK

Five moves for interrupting an ism without replacing it with another one.

1. SEE THE PERSON	Refuse to let a category become a conclusion. Ask what is true about this person, in this moment, with this evidence.
2. NAME THE PATTERN	Call the bias accurately. Do not invent labels for rhetorical effect. If the problem is racism, say racism. If it is anti-veteran bias, say that.
3. TEST THE IMPACT	Intent matters, but impact tells you whether a rule, habit, or norm repeatedly burdens one group more than another.
4. CORRECT THE STRUCTURE	Move from guilt to engineering. Change the policy, access point, incentive, language, measurement, or decision process that keeps reproducing the problem.
5. BUILD BELONGING	Do more than remove barriers. Make room for people to contribute, lead, create, serve, teach, learn, and be seen as full participants.

The Ism Test

Before accepting a rule, assumption, joke, hiring habit, medical shortcut, policy, tradition, or algorithm, ask: Does it reduce a person to a category? Does it apply a double standard? Does it create a barrier unrelated to the actual task? Does it make an individual carry guilt, fear, or expectation produced by a group stereotype? Does it ignore evidence that should matter more?

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