The World Evangelical Alliance's Journal
of Theology and Contemporary Application

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

WEA
WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

Volume 46 • No. 4 • November 2022

Evangelical Review of Theology

A Global Forum

Volume 46 • Number 4 • November 2022

Published by

WEA
WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

WIPF *and* STOCK *Publishers*
199 West 8th Avenue • Eugene OR 97401
wipfandstock.com

All issues of ERT (now published in English and Spanish!)
are available on our website:
https://theology.worldea.org/evangelical-review-of-theology/
To order hard copies, contact orders@wipfandstock.com

ISSN: 0144-8153
ISBN: 978-1-6667-6434-5
Volume 46 • No. 4 • November 2022

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Printed by Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 West 8th Avenue, Eugene, OR 97401
wipfandstock.com

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Introduction: Remember the Persecuted

The New Testament warned us that 'everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' (2 Tim 3:12). Some Christians have it much worse than others. But thanks to global missions and rapid communication, we are all aware of how severely many of our brothers and sisters are suffering.

As WEA Secretary General Thomas Schirrmacher points out, if we are not suffering personally for our faith, we should be suffering vicariously with—and taking action on behalf of—those Christians who are under stress in other parts of the world. Indeed, this should be one of the global church's highest priorities.

In honor of the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP), organized by the WEA each November, we feature four articles on the topic. Along with Schirrmacher's IDOP message, we present two high-quality analyses of the condition of Christians in socialist nations: Nicaragua and Cuba. These articles describe Christians' responses to the situation in instructive and inspiring fashion. In addition, Dennis Petri of the International Institute for Religious Freedom examines and draws implications from three episodes in history when Christians resisted persecution—sometimes with unintended long-term consequences.

Recognizing IDOP does more than calling attention to the mistreatment of Christians. It also calls us away from individualism and reminds us of our joyful duty to serve the interests of the whole body of Christ.

IDOP takes place this year on November 6 and 13. But if you've already missed those dates when you read this, any day is a good day to highlight prayer and support for the persecuted church or to consider assisting the WEA's Religious Liberty Partnership.

Among the other articles in this issue, Schirrmacher and Martin Bucer Seminary professor Ron Kubsch offer a comprehensive historical and critical survey of Christian approaches to apologetics. Japanese missions professor Motoaki Shinohara discusses how evangelicals should respect diversity within their ranks. Daniel Weiss, a leading Christian voice on issues of sexuality, powerfully addresses a sadly overlooked problem in the church: the quiet, insidious impact of pornography. Distinguished Old Testament professor Paul Wegner takes a close look at how the afterlife is perceived in the OT, from Genesis to Daniel.

And we have one important hot-off-the-press essay. The annual G20 summit is happening this month in Indonesia. For the first time, G20 includes an 'R20' event on the role of religion in supporting global peace and prosperity. We are happy to share Thomas Schirrmacher's message delivered at R20 on 2 November.

We try to make every issue of *ERT* practically relevant, but this one in particular contains articles that call for prayerful reflection and meaningful action. Please be open to God's tug on your heart as you read them.

Happy reading!

— Bruce Barron, Executive Editor

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The Protestant Faith and Shared Civilizational Values

Thomas Schirrmacher

WEA Secretary General Thomas Schirrmacher delivered these words at the first-ever R20 event (see the previous page for an explanation of R20) in Bali, Indonesia on 2 November 2022.

It is a great privilege to bring warm greetings from the World Evangelical Alliance and the 600 million Christians in 143 nations whom we represent and connect! May God bless you and give you the wisdom needed for your responsibilities. Our team from the WEA met in Jakarta with a team from Nahdlatul Ulama three years ago to plan joint efforts to promote civilizational values, as Christians and Muslims working together. We are people of good will who do not want to use violence against each other, but who want instead to engage in rational discourse with each other and promote a free and just society in which we can all live.

I grew up in Germany at a time when our country was addressing problems and questions that now face our global society. We were not only dealing with our responsibility for the Nazi regime that had perpetrated the Holocaust and destroyed tens of millions of ordinary people. We were also painfully aware that in less than 40 years our people had tried and were trying several radically different ways of organizing society, at least three of which had strong ideological explanations underlying them. And all three of these ideological ways of organizing led to disaster.

We had been, until 1918, the German Empire, led by an extremely powerful Kaiser, and our empire used religion to get power inside the minds of people. During World War I, our imperial soldiers wore belt buckles with 'God with us' printed on them, and many soldiers honestly believed it. This organization of society, combining an empire with religious ideology, contributed to millions of deaths. The destruction was so extensive that some of those battlefields of a century ago are still off limits to anyone but scientists.

The ideology of National Socialism replaced the ideology of a German Christian Empire, but it was also a *religious* ideology. It was filled with religious symbols and rituals, while the party became a type of religious community. Some branches of the movement used Christian terminology to support Hitler. I wrote a PhD dissertation titled *Hitler's War Religion*. A dysfunctional religion became an imperial ideology. This memory should haunt us forever.

While we West Germans were dealing with our responsibility for two ideological empires, our East German cousins were under Communism. The Communists primarily had Christianity and Judaism in mind when they called religion 'the opiate of the people'. Communism was so anti-religious that it became a religion. Its ideology reminded many of us of Christian theology, but with several themes turned

upside down. The persecution of normal religious communities illustrated for us its rejection of normal humanity. Many people, including some of my current friends, fled from East Germany to West Germany, but few went in the opposite direction.

Our West German constitution and system of organizing society were designed to prevent such horrors in the future. But in an open, free society, it is not possible for state officials to proclaim what the people will believe and what values they will follow. That approach had failed; people will always develop their own convictions. But without an official ideology, how can a government claim to be legitimate?

One of our high court judges, Justice Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, summarized the issue well in what is known as 'Böckenförde's dilemma'. He declared, 'The liberal, secular state lives on the basis of presuppositions which it cannot itself guarantee.' What he meant is that a state can proclaim and enforce a law that says murder is wrong, but the non-ideological state has no morally binding basis for explaining why such a law is right. Many states murder people they do not like and exterminate groups of people seen as sub-human. A secular democracy has no obvious answer to that problem. Why should the state prohibit murder? Or why should the state not protect all forms of life, such as harmful bacteria and the COVID-19 virus?

In answer to this global issue, I will not offer an ideology to compete with National Socialism or Communism. You know that as Evangelicals, we always proclaim the 'evangel', our faith that in Christ, God is reconciling people to himself. We invite others to join in trusting this promise, but this is not a national ideology. We have great role models in our Protestant history that address these global issues, yet in a way that always invites people of other faiths, or of no defined faith, to join our humanitarian efforts. I have three examples.

At the inaugural conference of the WEA, in London in 1846, with over 800 delegates representing 52 Protestant denominations from the UK, Europe, the US, and Canada, one of our first hot topics was how to stop the horrendous evil of slavery. Many of our first leaders were also leaders in the anti-slavery movement; some were colleagues of William Wilberforce, the British member of Parliament who had led the abolitionist efforts. Perhaps the most surprising speaker at that event was Rev. Mollison Maddison Clark, black pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, DC, a church that was mostly made up of slaves. That's right—a black pastor from a church of slaves was a keynote speaker at a mostly white conference of Christian leaders in London in 1846. I see this as a precedent that invites imitation.

One of the WEA's first actions, in 1847, was to publish a 400-page volume about what we do; it included a section on international religious freedom. During the next century, the WEA sent delegations to dozens of countries on several continents to meet with heads of state and senior government officials, appealing for religious freedom for their inhabitants. The WEA advocated not only for Protestants, but also on behalf of other branches of Christianity, such as the Orthodox who were victims of the Armenian genocide in Turkey. That was because of our principled commitment to freedom of conscience for everyone, not only for us. In recent decades, we have invested countless hours visiting religious, political and intellectual leaders from around the globe, pursuing peaceful relationships with governments

and among religious bodies while writing dozens of books and journals. We invite others to do the same.

Ever since the 1840s, we have been concerned with child abuse. At that time, during the Industrial Revolution in Europe and the Americas, child labour was a terrible problem. Young children who should have been in school or at play were sent to work in dangerous conditions in factories or cleaning chimneys. Many died, and many others were disabled for life. From then until the early 20th century, our voices were joined with many others, leading to legal restrictions on child labour. In recent years, we have also spoken out against using boys as soldiers, sex slavery, and the abuse of girls and women. We hope your religious communities can do the same.

The Protestant faith is addressing the great questions I heard in school in Germany, questions that now face all of humanity, but not as one more ideology. Of course, we Evangelicals talk about knowing God by faith in Jesus, but what we say about people and society can be shared by those who have different convictions about the divine. That is why our WEA team has participated in the movement to promote shared civilizational values from its beginning in Jakarta, in 2019.

In our WEA history, we especially see three values or principles that merit a place in a global platform of civilizational values:

1. Humans have a unique God-given greatness, which includes dignity and creativity. That is why we seek to help and respect people, regardless of race, age or gender, while we may kill bacteria and viruses to do so.
2. Humans possess a unique fallibility. Nature can cause a hurricane, flood or earthquake. People can cause a Holocaust, senseless wars, genocide, sexual abuse, slavery, revenge and betrayal. The first account of murder in the Bible is Cain killing his brother Abel, illustrating how our most human activity, religion, can become dysfunctional and unleash our vast fallibility.
3. Helpless people need very practical love from others.

This is not a complete national ideology. But it is a substantial answer to Böckenförde's dilemma that is true to what I believe as a Christian.

Justice Böckenförde called our attention to a distinctive line in the preamble to our German constitution. Our post-war founders wrote that they were 'conscious of their responsibility before God and man'. This is not an atheist constitution, though some prominent Germans have been atheists. It is a constitution for people of multiple religions or no defined religion. It assumes there are civilizational moral values which we can identify and implement together. That is our task in the R20.

ERT (2022) 46:4, 296–306

Apologetics: Intellectually Bearing Testimony to the Christian Faith

Ron Kubsch and Thomas Schirrmacher

Every Christian should be an apologist, or a defender of the faith. But how? This article provides a sweeping historical overview of ways in which Christians have defended the gospel, along with key considerations affecting how we explain what we believe to others today.

Definition

Apologetics is the intellectual justification and defence of the Christian faith. The word is derived from the Greek *apologia* (defence, plea or speech for the defence of the accused [before a court]).

First Peter 3:15b–16 is usually referred to as the New Testament classic text, or *locus classicus*, of the discipline of defending Christianity. It states, 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.' In this passage as in others in the New Testament, the background is legal court cases. Hostility or imprisonment for the sake of confessing Christianity is usually anticipated. The Christian faith and its hopeful message are justified over against accusers and dissenters, and sometimes what starts out as a defence becomes a proclamation (see 2 Tim 4:16–17; also Acts 22:1ff; Phil 1:7). The apostle Paul saw himself as placed by God in the position of defending the gospel (Phil 1:16).

Apologetics is traditionally a sub-discipline within systematic theology and, since many teachings are anchored in past controversies, is often considered the 'mother of dogma'. Towards the end of the 18th century, apologetics was increasingly removed from dogmatics in Roman Catholic teaching, and since that time it has often been treated independently as fundamental theology (this term has of late been finding some use among evangelicals). Due to apologetics' missional leaning, and also because the addressees of apologetics are primarily outside the church, in Protestant circles apologetics is sometimes described as an aspect within evangelism.

Apologetics in the New Testament

We encounter apologetics frequently with respect to the gospel in the New Testament. Apologetics is directed towards (a) representatives of Judaism, (b) pagans and (c) false teachers on the fringes of the early church.

Thomas Schirrmacher is Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance. **Ron Kubsch** serves as vice chairman of Evangelium 21 and instructor of apologetics and historical theology at Martin Bucer Seminary.

Judaism. Large portions of sermons handed down to us in Mark's Gospel have a controversial character (e.g. Mk 2:1–12). Jesus counterattacks the Pharisees and scribes or attacks their notions (e.g. the parallel passages in Mk 7 and Mt 23). At the centre of the dispute is Jesus' divine mission (e.g. the parallel passages Mk 12:35–37; Lk 20:41–44). Jesus defends his messianic mission via Old Testament Scripture or by proving his divine authority (healing the sick, driving out evil spirits and forgiving sins; see Mk 2:5–12). The early church and apostolic leadership also made abundant use of proofs relating to biblical texts as well as signs, in particular with reference to Jesus' resurrection from the dead (e.g. Acts 2:22–36; 1 Cor 15).

Pagans. The transmission of the justification of the messianic faith experienced a qualitative development when it encountered the pagan world, and in particular in its encounter with Hellenism. The Gospel of John and Peter's letters showcase this. Paul emerges as an outstanding defender of the Christian message. He counters the self-glorifying wisdom (*sophia*) of the Greeks and the demand for signs by the Jews with the proclamation (*kerygma*) of the cross (1 Cor 2:1–16; cf. Col 2:8), which is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (1 Cor 1:23).

Whereas Paul largely bases his objections against the Jews on Scripture (e.g. Acts 13:26–41; Rom 2), in his missionary efforts to pagans he resorts to reason-based argumentation in which he borrows from the wisdom of the Greeks. He can appeal to the discernment of his hearers (1 Cor 10:15), to the ideas of the Stoics and Epicureans (Acts 17:16–34), to the Roman conception of God (Acts 14:8–18) or to conclusions derived from nature (Rom 1:18–32). Paul exploits the *sophia* of the Greeks, but he does not depend on it. The wisdom of the world cannot recognize God (1 Cor 1:21). It is corrupted by pride and sin. The basis and focus of the mission to the pagans remain the *kerygma* of the crucified and risen Christ.

When speaking in Athens, Paul defended the existence of the Creator by quoting Greek philosophers, without expressly reverting to the biblical testimony. The best analysis of the Areopagus address before the Greek philosophers in Acts 17:16–34 is by Heinz Külling,[1] who concluded that Paul's entire address is steeped in Old Testament thought and not in Greek thought. Additionally, while Paul does indeed use Greek formulations in part, they are supplemented by Old Testament formulations and elucidated in an Old Testament fashion. According to Külling, Paul does not intend to assure the Greeks that they have already recognized part of the truth and now need only to receive the completion of their knowledge. Rather, he seeks to make the opposite apparent. His main point, in fact, is that everything essential is 'unknown' to them and they are headed down the wrong path. Paul's address becomes the archetype of the missionary sermon par excellence. It has a lot to say to a present-day missionary, with regard to both its content and its method.

Heretics. In addition to the defence of the Christian message vis-à-vis the Jews and Gentiles, a third evident thrust of apologetic activity has to do with heretics who are already within the circle of or trying to infiltrate the ancient church. The matters at hand in these defensive efforts included Gnostic teachings (2 Tim 2:18; 1 Cor 15:12–14), false prophets (1 Jn 4:1), those inspired by the antichrist to deny Jesus'

1 Heinz Külling, *Geoffenbartes Geheimnis: Eine Auslegung von Apostelgeschichte 17,16–34. Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 79 (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1993).

sonship (1 Jn 2:20; 2 Jn 7ff.), preachers of works-righteousness (Gal 3:1; 5:12) and heresies having to do with the second coming of Christ (2 Thess 2:1–6).

Apologetics in church history

In the early church

The oldest extant apologetic writings outside the New Testament canon come from Quadratus and Aristides (both at the beginning of the 2nd century), have been preserved only in fragments, and are of only minor importance. The Greek and Latin authors of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, in contrast, have become known in church history as 'the apologists'.

One important apologist of this epoch was Tertullian, who composed his works in Latin. In spite of his adversarial stance towards philosophy and his leanings toward sectarianism, one recognizes in Tertullian a mild opening towards a philosophical teaching of God. This is found when he hints at an identification of the 'God of the philosophers' with the 'invisible, unapproachable and calm Father' (*Anti-Marcion* II 27:6).

In the case of Justin, from whom two apologies have been preserved, there is a distinctly identifiable turn towards the *sophia* of the Greeks. For him, Christianity is actually true philosophy, being its consummation rather than its termination. Justin's logos doctrine allowed him to also describe pre-Christian scholars who lived according to the *logos* (e.g. Socrates) as Christians (*First Apology*, ch. 46).

In addition to Tatian and his opponent, Irenaeus, most notably Athenagoras composed prominent apologies. He defended Christians against aggressive attacks (cannibalism, atheism and incest) and set the foundation for the church's later canonization of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Clement and Origen are among the Alexandrian theologians who should be mentioned in this context. Clement of Alexandria (150–215) further developed Justin's *logos* doctrine and demonstrated that the Greeks had articulated true philosophy. Their wisdom could not have come from the devil, as some of his contemporaries maintained. However, it was imperfect and remained a general teaching. The philosophers adhered to idol worship and saw truth only as a vision. Firm knowledge, Clement said, can be found only if the seeker goes beyond philosophy and allows himself to be taught by God. More energetically than apologists before him, he recognized the dangers that emanated from Gnostic teachings and accentuated the incarnation within the *logos* doctrine.

Origen (185–254) followed Clement's lead. Clement maintained that some of the Greek philosophers had recognized God. True scholarship, he said, can come only from the words and teachings of Christ and thus there is a reliance on revelation. This is because Christ is the truth. Origen therefore devised this rule: 'Only that truth is to be believed that does not oppose church and apostolic tradition' (*De principiis Praef.* 1f).

In the 4th century, the church found in Eusebius of Caesarea (260/265–339) an additional significant Greek apologist. Overall, however, apologetic efforts ebbed after the Council of Nicea in 325, which occurred in connection with the Constantinian turn. From what was previously the church of the diaspora came forth a state church.

A prominent place in the history of apologetics goes to Augustine (354–439), who thought through at the highest level the relationship between experience, reason and faith and understood what it means to systematize. His work *De civitate Dei* (*The City of God*) is a masterpiece of ancient church apologetics.

Augustine was neither a fideist nor a rationalist. He did not reject the 'liberal arts' of Gentile scholars (*De doctrina Christiana* XL.60.144.145), but he subordinated them to God's revelation and belief. His creed, 'I believe, in order that I might understand' (*credo, ut intelligam*) provides room for a doctrine of reason within a framework of belief.

The Middle Ages

The rediscovery of Aristotelian writings in the 13th century produced a surge in the effort to clarify the question of Christian doctrine's relationship to philosophy. Thomas Aquinas (1224/25–1274), to concentrate on just one example from the major theologians of the Middle Ages, aimed to create a synthesis between Aristotle and Christian theology and thereby set the course for Roman Catholic apologetics.

According to Aquinas, the knowledge of God that comes from the natural reason or intellect remains blurred, most notably being unable to lead mankind beyond himself. 'Hence it is impossible that it should comprehend God' (*Summa Theologica* I, Q 12 A 7). Created reason cannot positively describe God unless God intervenes (*Summa Theologica* I, Q 12 A 4). Just as in the first place grace presupposes nature, 'knowledge of faith made possible by grace presupposes the possibility of a natural knowledge of God.'[2]

Modern times

Although the Reformers emphasized the independence of faith over against the knowledge of philosophy, the apologetic from the time period of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation was redirected primarily to internal and later confessional controversies.

Scholarship's increasing separation from its Christian legacy during the 16th and 17th centuries provoked renewed efforts to give an account of the Christian faith. In the 17th century, the Christian faith encountered strong empirical and rational currents and was threatened by a variety of contrary tendencies, which took the form of both deism and atheism (Locke, Toland, Leibniz, Hume).

Blaise Pascal's work stands out as an example of extensive apologetic literature from this time period. Pascal, a French philosopher and mathematician, recognized the ambivalence between faith and modern scientific ideals. He called for the subjugation of reason to what he referred to as a type of logic of the heart in his fragmentary apologetic writings known as *Pensées* (Thoughts).[3]

In England, Joseph Butler's (1692–1752) apologetic for theism continued to have impact into the 20th century, in particular via his *Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature*, published in 1736.

In the 18th century, a notion initiated by German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) became widely accepted, according to which only those judgements an

2 Wilfried Joest, *Fundamentaltheologie* (Stuttgart, 1981), 77.

3 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Fragment 283.

enlightened person could make on his or her own, without reference to any historical authority, and on the basis of individual experience could claim unconditional validity. The established order between natural theology and revelational theology, which had been considered valid up to that time, was reversed. It was no longer possible, as with Augustine, to place reason within the realm of faith; rather, religion was to be placed within the bounds of mere reason.

Among the notable critics of the Enlightenment, one finds Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819), as well as the thinker Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788), who was strongly motivated by his pietist Christian convictions. Hamann, who knew Kant personally and corresponded with him, wrote a *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason* in 1800, soon after the publication of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. With much foresight and anticipation of linguistic criticism, Hamann, a Pietist, accused Kant of using the concept of pure reason for what was really pure abstraction, since reason is always tied to language and therefore to culture.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) expressed apologetic interests in his attempt to establish the Christian faith on a theologically experiential basis. His inclusivistic and anthropocentric approach was more or less adopted by numerous liberal theologians, such as Ritschl (1822–1889), Harnack (1851–1930) and Troeltsch (1865–1923).

For Schleiermacher, the 'feeling of absolute dependence'[4] was at the centre of his theology. In the place of the Holy Scriptures, he placed the experience of the believer. 'Man was the subject of his theology, God the predicate.'[5] Since there is a religious consciousness in every person, and also in believers of other religions, for Schleiermacher the traditional tension between Christianity and other belief systems no longer prevailed. Rather, religions mirror the necessary unfolding of the religious consciousness that in Christianity 'comes to its most mature fulfilment'.[6]

Although piety up until this time was understood as a subjective reaction to objective teaching, Schleiermacher reversed the order and began with the thinking subject. People, he said, understand the world in which they live more by imagination and intuition than by rational analysis and scientific methods. Doctrines of belief are not the source but rather the result of belief experiences.

In this period of upheaval, conservative apologetics also continued. Notable in this respect are A. Tholuck (1799–1877), who developed in Halle, Germany into a counterpart of Schleiermacher, as well as his student Martin Kähler (1835–1912).

After critiques by Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and Overbeck (1837–1905), Karl Barth (1886–1968) induced the end of liberal theology's heyday approximately one hundred years after Schleiermacher. Barth fought energetically against all attempts to defend the faith by means of natural reason. He represented an exclusive Christocentric understanding of revelation. Every attestation to Christ outside of Christ, he contended, is actually a projection: 'From the Scriptures we are neither

4 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Glaubenslehre* (The Christian Faith), 3–6.
5 Heinz Zahrnt, *Die Sache mit Gott*, 3rd ed. (Munich), 39.
6 Wilfried Joest, *Fundamentaltheologie*, 81.

called on nor authorised to look for a willingness on God's part towards mankind that is anything other than that found in the grace of word and spirit.'[7]

Although well-known theologians, especially Peter Althaus (1888–1966) and Emil Brunner (1889–1966), have countered Barth, the latter's critique continues to have significant influence on apologetics in Protestant circles today. Rudolf Bultmann's (1884–1976) apologetic venture to divest revelation of history, and to thereby surmount biblicism and liberalism and adapt the Christian faith to modern man, was also a failure. Paul Tillich's (1886–1965) theology is similarly marked by existential tendencies, according to which the questions asked by a rational person point beyond themselves but, for him, can find their answer only in the revelation of Christ.

The question as to whether speaking about God in the forum of modern science can be justified was raised anew by Wolfhart Pannenberg, who denied the crisis between general revelation and special revelation. Pannenberg acknowledged only indirect revelation, to wit, revelation as history. Revelation has similarities to *revelatio generalis*, because it is available to all people and because its acceptance is something natural. Revelation is a universal religio-historical process, which admittedly finds its completion in Christ. Therefore, according to Pannenberg, discourse about God can and must face the same verification procedures as other sciences.

Some theologians who feel deeply committed to the Reformed heritage published salient apologetic works in the 20th century. In the German-speaking realm, Karl Heim (1874–1958), who developed an interdisciplinary approach, especially falls into this category, along with Walter Künneth (1901–1997), who addressed primarily ethical and ideological issues.

One of the greatest English apologists of the 20th century was undoubtedly C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), whose *Mere Christianity* is the best-seller among all apologetic books. Anglo-Saxon evangelicalism has had numerous apologists, among whom Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987), Francis Schaeffer (1912–1984) and John Warwick Montgomery have had considerable impact. The most successful modern Christian philosopher of religion is arguably Alvin Plantinga, who was inspired by the ideas of Reformed Dutch theologians such as Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd and Herman Bavinck.

Current controversies in apologetics

As this historical review has indicated, the church has struggled unswervingly to find apologetic positions that give adequate testimony to the Bible, to confessions and to missionary concerns. Three controversies relevant to the present day will be briefly outlined herein.

Dialogue-based or confrontational apologetics?

How tolerant should apologetics be towards other truth claims? Are not the times in which arguments about 'grand narratives' (François Lyotard) took place over once and for all? Should not Christian apologetics be replaced by 'an apologetics of belief, an apologetics with a more charitable attitude'?[8]

7 Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* 2/1, 129.

8 Heinrich Ott, *Apologetik des Glaubens*, Darmstadt, ix.

Dialogue in the sense of a peaceful contention, with honest and patient listening and learning, is a Christian virtue. A dialogue between convinced Christians and adherents of other religions and world views is possible in the sense that Christians willingly speak peacefully with others about their faith ('give the reason for the hope … with gentleness and respect', 1 Pet 3:15), listen to others (Jam 1:19), learn from others' experiences in numerous areas of life (see the entire book of Proverbs) and are ready to always place themselves and their behaviour in question.

Dialogue in the sense of abandoning the Christian claims to truth or in the sense of abandoning the Great Commission is unthinkable without giving up Christianity itself. If one understands dialogue as requiring that the innermost truth claims of Christ (Jn 14:6), of the gospel (Rom 1:16–17) and of the Word of God (2 Tim 3:16–17; Heb 4:12–13; Jn 17:17) must be temporarily or principally suspended in discussions with adherents of other religions, and that the Christian revelation must be placed on the same level as that of other religions, then 'dialogue' in this sense cannot be reconciled with the Christian mission or with the essence of Christianity. The exclusive truth claims of the Christian faith are expressed above all in its teaching concerning the final judgement and eternal life. Hebrews 6:1–2 speaks of 'the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement' as two of the six most important principles of the faith. The church has held to these convictions throughout its history, as indicated in the Apostles' Creed: 'whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.'

An apologetic point of contact or listening to the Word of God?

As noted above, Karl Barth strictly opposed all natural theology. Knowledge of God prior to and outside of Jesus Christ was something that Barth opposed in a heretofore unheard-of, radical way. For him, speaking about God does not find its point of contact at the level of the religious need of mankind. It is the 'annihilation of religion'.[9] This revelational monism was rejected by Emil Brunner and Paul Althaus. With reference to the Holy Scriptures, Althaus said that in addition to the revelation of the Word there is a 'primal revelation' (*Uroffenbarung*). He saw a theological need to teach this 'primal revelation' since 'the revelation of salvific history everywhere alludes to [it].'[10] Brunner also declared that Barth cannot appeal to the Bible or the Reformers. He stated that a theology that 'wants to be obedient to the biblical revelational witness' should never deny 'the reality of a creational revelation'.[11] Brunner added, 'All attempts to deny the Biblical testimony of such a revelation have to lead to arbitrariness and a rape of the Biblical word.'[12]

Althaus and Brunner appeal to those Bible texts that repeatedly are drawn upon to substantiate natural theology (Rom 1:18–20; 2:14–15; Acts 14:15–17; 17:23). They emphasize unceasingly that one must differentiate between 'primal revelation' or creational revelation and natural theology. Althaus distances himself sharply from the notion that a *theologia naturalis* could lead to a true knowledge of God: 'The

9 Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/2, 304.
10 Paul Althaus, *Grundriss der Dogmatik*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1951), 19.
11 Emil Brunner, *Dogmatik*, vol. 1, 137.
12 Brunner, *Dogmatik*, vol. 1, 137–38.

primal revelation is received by sinful man and misjudged and distorted. Only in the light of God's Biblical witness can it be clearly and purely recognised.'[13]

Brunner also clarifies that a *theologia naturalis* belittles the noetic consequences of sin:

> Whoever maintains there is a 'theologia naturalis' in the sense of a correct and valid knowledge, denies therewith the reality of sin, at least the effects of sin insofar as the knowledge of God is concerned. On the one hand there is the reality of a creational revelation that is to be acknowledged, while on the other hand the possibility for a correct and valid knowledge of God that has to be disputed.[14]

Althaus and Brunner's position, which comes close to the Orthodox and Reformed perspective on general revelation, allows for a 'point of contact' in human nature that enables us to seek the proclamation of the gospel. The call upon the theologian no longer consists only in oneself complacently pursuing dogmatics. Rather, it consists in taking an historical counterpart seriously by taking his questions seriously and recognizing the wounds and protective layers of opponents of the faith. That is apologetics.

Barth correctly points out God's uniqueness and the sufficiency of the revelation of Christ against liberal and cultural Protestantism, but in his battle against natural revelation he overshoots his target.[15]

Apologetics from the bottom up or the top down?

For years, particularly in the English-speaking realm, there has been a controversy about apologetic methodology. On one side are representatives of a strongly transcendental apologetics, to which above all Cornelius Van Til, Greg Bahnsen (1948–1995) and John Frame adhere. Their methodology, called 'presupposition-alism', could also be accurately translated as an apologetic approach that is deliberately cognizant of the epistemological assumptions of the participants in apologetic dialogue. The term is intended to point out that Christians basically operate out of different presuppositions from others. In an encounter with others, they take thinking and arguing from the top down as the right way to go. Similarly to Karl Barth, they deny that Christians and non-Christians stand on neutral ground when discussing the nature of truth or the meaning of the Christian faith. The world view of the Christian, they contend, is based on the presupposition that God created the world and has revealed himself in Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures, whereas the world view of a non-Christian is based on the assumption that mankind is part of nature and continually changing. There is no bridge that connects these two positions with each other. A system that begins with God can contain objective values and principles because a Creator guarantees their existence. In the case where

13 Paul Althaus, *Grundriss der Dogmatik* , vol. 1, p. 23.

14 Emil Brunner, *Dogmatik*, vol. 1, p. 138.

15 Nowadays we of course know how much Barth's 'no!' was co-determined by the battle within the church and by the National Socialists' claims regarding natural law. A condensed presentation on this point can be found in Hermann Fischer, *Systematische Theologie: Konzeptionen und Probleme im 20. Jahrhundert* (*Systematic Theology: Concepts and Problems in the 20th Century*, unavailable in English), Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne, 90–96.

everything is in a state of flux, there can be no standards that are authoritative or binding for everyone and everywhere. There are only 'values in the interim'.

Adherents of an apologetic of immanence maintain, on the other hand, that they can and should begin exactly at the points of common ground between the Christian and the non-Christian. Their apologetic approach is called evidentialism, classical apologetics or Thomistic apologetics. Outstanding representatives of this approach include C. S. Lewis, John Gerstner (1914–1996), Josh McDowell and, arguing more on the basis of legal theory, John Warwick Montgomery. Deductive arguments are preferred in presuppositional apologetics, where it is possible by the nature of the method of argumentation to make conclusive statements; an immanent or evidentialist apologetic prefers inductive argumentation. An apologist of the latter sort finds the main point of contact with the unbeliever in common experiences. Since the latter does not argue in a formal, deductive manner but rather primarily in an empirically inductive manner, the immanent method of apologetics does not achieve 'certainties' but rather probabilities (e.g. 'It is more probable that God exists than that God does not exist').

The immanent method of apologetics proceeds in argumentation from particulars to the general, or from the bottom to the top (demonstrating an affinity with Aristotelian thought). In contrast, apologists using a transcendental or presuppositional method begin with the general in order to explain the consequences for the particulars (demonstrating an affinity with Platonic thought). Van Til liked to say that there is no such thing as a 'brute fact'. What a flower is depends on the presuppositions with which one looks at the flower. There is no such thing as a *brute* flower. To justify knowledge, the apologist who argues transcendentally always has to start 'in the head' and tries to interpret facts from God's standpoint. The classical apologists, on the other hand, start methodologically at the other end. They begin with self-interpreting or evident facts (e.g. the fact of a flower), which impose certain conclusions on the interpreter (cf. Mt 6:28–30).

Francis Schaeffer combined an immanent and transcendental apologetic in his work. In a first step, he would show unbelievers that they could not live according to their presuppositions. In a second step, he would argue transcendentally to show that Christian presuppositions are more suitable for interpreting reality, which can in turn be empirically demonstrated.[16]

Transcendental apologetics alone is employable only in a limited manner, for establishing its own view of things (as a verifying apologetic). If a non-believer's change in belief from one view to another is justified only by presuppositions, this comes very close to a leap of faith. On the other hand, when an immanent apologetic maintains that facts speak for themselves, it misjudges the significance that our presuppositions occupy in our interpretive activity.[17] There are therefore reasons to expect that general revelation (nature, history, conscience) and God's special

16 See e.g. Francis Schaeffer, *Gott ist keine Illusion* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1974), 140–46.

17 It is noteworthy that Adam was reliant upon God's verbal instructions prior to the fall. Even at that point, he was unable to understand the things of the world fully by research. God pointed out to Adam that the fruits of the trees were meant to provide nourishment (Gen 1:29). At some point, Adam surely would have come to this awareness, but it could have ended in death. How much more are we, who live in a fallen world, dependent upon God's final interpretation. See John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), 22.

revelation (Jesus Christ and the Scriptures) indeed offer points of contact for meaningful apologetic discussions. This is a fact that presuppositionalists like to address by emphasizing prevenient grace.

Apologetics as a challenge for the church today

We should understand apologetics as a function of systematic theology. It gains its particular character in that it seizes upon the questions (and grievances) of non-believers and attempts to formally and comprehensibly answer them. By 'entering into' philosophical presuppositions, apologetics resists the danger of reconciling the contents of the Christian position with the flow of the spirit of the age. Rather, apologetics testifies to and justifies the truth of the gospel in the face of competing truth claims.

Defence of the faith begins in the heart of the apologist and, insofar as this is concerned, the apologist is presuppositionally aware. Apologetics can be appropriately pursued only if apologists sanctify, or set apart, God in themselves (1 Pet 3:15a) and bring all their thoughts into obedience to Christ (2 Cor 10:5).

Even if apologetics is an intellectual defence, it should correspond to a convincing lifestyle (1 Pet 3:16). Sceptics and critics should be able to recognize that Christians live according to their convictions (authenticity), even when doing so is not to their personal advantage (1 Pet 3:17). Apologetics does not occur in a manner that is self-righteous or aggressive but rather in one of 'gentleness and respect' (1 Pet 3:15c). Apologetics is a service of love. Understanding non-believers requires sincere interest and a lot of time. It also demands humility and a willingness to place oneself at the disposal of the other in dialogue.

Insofar as giving an account of the Christian faith is concerned, both style and our performance as role models play a part. Gentleness is not only a mandatory corollary to the fact that we proclaim a God of love and should therefore want to love our neighbour; it is also a consequence of the knowledge that we are ourselves pardoned sinners and that we are not God. Our counterpart needs to be reconciled with his Creator, not with us. For that reason, we can step back, admit our own limitedness and clearly refer to the fact that our only claim to authority has to do with proclaiming the good news in a way that is unblemished and understandable to our counterpart. This deference is a consequence of seeing people with God's eyes, which means seeing them as his creatures and as made in the image of God. This prohibits us from treating anyone as sub-human or intellectually deficient. Incidentally, our gentleness and our way of life, insofar as the latter is differentiated from that of our often immoral culture, afford us excellent opportunities to enter into conversations with Muslims.

A Christian does not have the answers to all questions, but he or she can bring God's message to human beings where God has revealed himself in his Word. Jesus and Paul kept God's commandments strictly separated from the commandments of men in respective religious traditions and cultures (e.g., Mk 7:1–15; 1 Cor 9:19–23). The apologist and the missionary cannot show up with the claim to have the truth about everything and to be in a position to opine on it. Rather, the apologist can speak of exclusive claims only where God has made them in his Word. For this

reason, there are many areas where an apologist can learn a lot from his or her counterpart, without making concessions on central issues of faith.

Apologetics is not a discipline for specialists. Christians are called to be ready to give an account of the faith on all sorts of occasions and to anyone. Therefore, academic discussion is not the only forum for apologetics. Rather, the entire range of church activity, including instruction on matters of faith, proclamation, pastoral care and counselling, and evangelization all present forums for apologetics.

Finally, one must recognize that apologetics, while it can uncover the weaknesses and errors of other systems of thought and can help dispel obstacles to accepting the Christian faith, cannot produce belief. Faith is a gift of God, and for this reason our apologetic efforts should be marked by a joyous equanimity.

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ERT (2022) 46:4, 307–313

Evangelical Diversity: Towards the Future Church

Motoaki Shinohara

This message, originally delivered at an Asia Theological Association conference, is an excellent, comprehensive statement on how evangelicals (and especially evangelical theological institutions) should live out unity in diversity amidst an era of transition from strong denominational to more horizontal partnerships among churches and organizations.

'In one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.'
—the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed

The church is diverse and has many different names. The term 'denomination' comes from the Latin word meaning 'to name'. Over time, we have produced many different such names. According to *The World Christian Encyclopedia*, as of 2001 there were 33,830 denominations, including independents, worldwide.[1] Protestants, Independents and Anglicans represent more than 90 percent of the total. In other words, Protestants have an exceedingly large number of siblings.

Until recently, denominational differences were of utmost importance. The idea of denominations, however, is being regarded negatively by young generations today. Millennials and more recent generations are natural inhabitants of a pluralistic society and tend to see denominationalism as an obstacle. However, this does not mean simply that younger generations are no longer interested in denominational differences and distinctives. Rather, they are valuing other things more highly. Young generations are more keen to 'oneness' and 'partnership' than to the differences. As generations change, so do priorities.

We are living in an era of transition with respect to denominationalism. The era of strong denominations is over, and now we have entered a new era of kingdom partnership and collaboration. In this essay, I explore how unity in diversity can be lived out in God's mission. Theologically, the essay reflects the catholicity of the church and asks how we can pursue the maturity of evangelical diversity through partnership and collaboration. The last section discusses the role of theological education in fostering unity and kingdom partnerships for the future church.

Motoaki Shinohara (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is professor of missiology at Tokyo Christian University. This paper is revised from his presentation to the 2019 Asia Theological Association Triennial General Assembly in Singapore, on the topic of 'The Future Church: A Theological Response'.

1 David B. Barrett, George Thomas Kurian and Todd M. Johnson, eds., *World Christian Encyclopedia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

The catholicity of the church

In *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (1929), H. Richard Niebuhr claimed that denominationalism represents 'the moral failure of Christianity'.[2] Niebuhr argued that the existence of so many denominations constituted an apostasy from the true vision of the church. This claim is difficult to refute because the Bible never mandates establishing denominations; instead, Jesus called us to establish the church. In the biblical sense, the church refers to only two kinds of entities: local churches and the universal church.

Should we then get rid of all doctrinal and denominational differences? Well, it is not so simple. What would happen if we all agreed to eliminate all the differences in denominations today? New denominations would spring up again, one by one. Denominations are not necessary, but they are inevitable. Just as all theologies are historically and culturally conditioned, all denominations have been shaped by historical and cultural circumstances.

We must recognize that any authentic developments of denominations are not arbitrary. They arose from efforts to search for a purer and truer form of Christianity within their specific historical and cultural settings. In most cases, the development of denominations results from renewal movements, and there have been always good reasons to develop a new denomination, such as a counter-cultural movement. Therefore, their development is best understood as part of an ecclesiological dialogue for the sake of truthfulness to the biblical teachings in each context.

However, if we seek maturity in evangelical diversity, we must recapture the catholicity of the church. We confess one holy, catholic church. Evangelicals tend to regard these concepts as almost exclusively spiritual and treat them as attributes of the invisible church, not of the visible church. However, it is undeniable that the church is called to be one. Jesus, the head of the church, prayed, 'May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me' (Jn 17:21). We must see the churches as Christ sees them. For Jesus, the church is one as the body of Christ in both visible and invisible senses. David Bosch notes, 'God's people is one; Christ's body is one. It is therefore, strictly speaking, an anomaly to refer to the "unity of *churches*"; one can only talk about "the unity of the *church*".'[3]

Our challenge today is to recommit ourselves to the unity and the oneness of the church because they are primarily intrinsic features of the church. This commitment is expressed in the Lausanne Covenant: 'We affirm the Church's visible unity in truth is God's purpose' (Article 7).

Unity in diversity

In 1 Corinthians, Paul teaches unity and diversity in the body of Christ: 'Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ' (1 Cor 12:12). The body of Christ is not made up of one part but of many parts. Here, Paul calls attention to the diverse and different gifts of God's people in

2 Richard H. Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1929), 25.

3 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 464.

the church. Paul goes on to teach that one cannot say to another, 'I don't need you!' (1 Cor 12:21). I believe that these teachings from Paul must be applied to our ecclesial or organizational differences.

What Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 12 is not uniformity. Jesus taught us to be one, but not to be the same. We tend to see differences as an obstacle and a stumbling block. However, God does not see differences in that way. When God created Eve as a helper suitable for Adam in Genesis 1:12–25, did God create Eve as a replica of Adam? No! God did not create another man. Rather, He created Eve differently as a woman so that she could be a perfect companion for Adam. Furthermore, God created Adam and Eve, a man and woman, to become one! They were meant to supplement each other.

G. K. Chesterton, the great 20th-century Christian apologist, was called 'the prince of paradox'. In his book *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton unpacks the importance of paradox in relation to Christian orthodoxy.[4] He argues that Christianity is true because it embraces paradox, and that Christian doctrine emphasizes and affirms two opposing points on a line. In other words, Christianity is 'both/and' instead of 'either/or'. Perhaps, this understanding of Christian doctrine is helpful to make sense of our differences.

In addition, it is important to recover the spirit and practice of *adiaphor*a. This Greek term refers to 'indifferent things', things that are neither right nor wrong. The concept of *adiaphora* helps us to discern essentials and non-essentials in our differences. Someone has said, 'Maturity is knowing more and more what is worth fighting for and what is not worth fighting for.' Jesus said, 'Whoever is not against us is for us' (Mark 9:40).

Yes, we will continue to have disagreements on a wider variety of issues. We read the same Bible, but often we come to different conclusions due to different interpretations and emphases. As David S. Dockery says, 'We must learn to disagree graciously over our differences.'[5] The unity of churches is possible only where we accept each other despite our differences. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:1–6:

> As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Unity and diversity are not in opposition. They constitute a delightful mystery and paradox of the church. They are also a dynamic power of the church. If we pursue the model of unity in diversity, our understanding of church and mission will indeed be qualitatively different from that in the age of denominationalism. The future church is depending on the maturity of unity in diversity.

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4 G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Open Road Media, 2015).

5 David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Future of Denominationalism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 28.

Kingdom partnership and collaboration

Now let us turn to the issue of kingdom partnership and collaboration in God's mission. The task of church missions cannot be said to be the responsibility of only particular churches or Christian groups. Rather, the mandate belongs to all of us in the body of Christ. The Lausanne Covenant states, 'World evangelization requires the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world' (Article 6). The whole church means all denominations, independent churches and Christian institutions. The whole world means every sphere of the world. The whole gospel means the comprehensive scope of the coming of God's kingdom. We must realize that God's mission cannot be done alone. Rather, we need 'different parts' to undertake the comprehensive scope of God's mission (1 Cor 12:15–20).

Kingdom partnership is not just a strategy. It is also our witness and testimony to the world. Kingdom partnership and collaboration are tangible demonstrations of unity in the body of Christ. The Lausanne Covenant states, 'Evangelism also summons us to unity, because our oneness strengthens our witness, just as our disunity undermines our gospel of reconciliation' (Article 7). The Cape Town Commitment elaborates on this point:

> Christian unity is the creation of God, based on our reconciliation with God and with one another. This double reconciliation has been accomplished through the cross. When we live in unity and work in partnership we demonstrate the supernatural, counter-cultural power of the cross. But when we demonstrate our disunity through failure to partner together, we demean our mission and message, and deny the power of the cross. (Section II.F)

Today, there seems to be a consensus that partnership in mission is vital for carrying out God's mission. In *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Mission*, William D. Taylor urges, 'Our church and mission leadership must take deliberate steps to commit to and enter into careful partnership.' Taylor continues, 'The possibilities are almost limitless, if we have the dedication to change the way we have done things.'[6]

Luis Bush offers a helpful and practical definition of partnership. It is 'an association of two or more autonomous bodies who have formed a trusting relationship, and fulfill agreed-upon expectations by sharing complementary strengths and resources, to reach their mutual goal.'[7] In other words, partnership involves serving each other for the sake of God's mission. It requires the fruit of the Spirit: 'love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness' (Gal 5:22). Without the fruit of the Spirit, it is impossible to overcome expected obstacles, such as the issues of cultural and theological differences, finance, power and control.

Partnership does not happen automatically. It requires individuals who can capture visions and ways to collaborate for the sake of enhancing God's mission in this world. Without such people, partnership and collaboration will not take place.

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6 William D. Taylor, ed., *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Mission* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1994), 238.

7 Luis Bush, *Partnering in Ministry: The Direction of World Evangelism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 46.

Sociopolitical changes in mission

The denominational divisions that exist now are very different from those that existed before. Today, the divisions are far less important. Great socio-political changes have occurred that affect the mission of the church. The glory days of denominations are over, and instead we have seen the emergence and development of many trans-denominational and special-purpose groups. We could characterize this change sociologically as the replacement of vertical structures by horizontal ones. The impact on the shape of evangelicalism today has been considerable. We have seen the development of many horizontal connecting groups in a wide variety of ministries. As generations change, different forms of cooperation will emerge.

Today's globalizing world is accelerating a new form of cooperation and partnership. Globalization is a fundamental reordering of time and space, leading to an increase in global interdependence, interconnectedness and fluidity. In this emerging context, nation-states, which have been the dominant political structures for the past centuries, are becoming less relevant. Likewise, vertical structures in other social sectors are losing relevance as well. Although believers have been inherently divided by physical and denominational boundaries in the past, now we see the emergence of a new paradigm, featuring fluid cooperation and partnership.

Is this new development a threat to traditional churches? Not at all! These horizontal organizations and special-purpose groups do not and should not compete with churches. They exist for the church and for its mission. We are living in a very complex world, and we need special-purpose groups focused on specific issues more than ever before. Such groups contribute greatly to the life and vitality of the church and of its mission.

In evangelical circles, the Lausanne Movement, formed by Billy Graham, John Stott and others in 1974, is a good example. It became a new force to pull evangelicals together and created a new way of relating to each other as a horizontal movement. The Asia Theological Association (ATA), in which I participate, is another fruit of this type of partnership and cooperation within evangelical circles. Indeed, ATA has exemplified and strongly promoted evangelical unity as a horizontal structure in Asia.

Theological education for fostering kingdom partnerships

Takanori Kobayashi, former ATA chairperson, who went to be with the Lord on 24 October 2017, often said, 'I believe in theological education.' The future church depends intrinsically on theological education, which has enormous potential to foster visible unity and kingdom partnerships. Those of us who lead and teach in theological institutions must acknowledge this vital role.

What can we say about fostering unity in diversity in theological education? First, this emphasis does not mean the complete demise of denominational identity. Rather, theological education should strengthen a healthy denominational identity. As we discussed above, each historical tradition has its own weight and provides a physical and historical identity. The word 'tradition' means 'to hand over' in Latin. Pastors and teachers must encourage younger generations to be wise stewards of what has been entrusted to them. However, when we teach and study our own tradition, we must approach it respectfully and critically. If we are comfortable with

the status quo of our own tradition, we are living in the past. Our spiritual forefathers did not pass the baton to us so that we could maintain the status quo; rather, they entrusted their batons to us so that we could move forward with them.

Second, theological education should introduce students to other church traditions and branches of Christianity, including the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. Knowing the wider horizon of the church is a first step towards fostering a sense of belonging to the broader church, which is diverse yet united. Theological education must serve not only to strengthen denominational identity but also to discover and enhance a sense of the catholicity of the church. Therefore, those of us who serve in theological education have a responsibility to the wider church as well. Theological education must eliminate stereotypes and prejudice towards one another. Rather, it should teach students to learn from one another and to acknowledge the richness of the different ecclesial traditions.

Third, theological schools should serve as hubs for connecting students to the different forms of ministries that exist within the church's mission. Theological education has a vital role to play in introducing and connecting students to existing and emerging ministries. It can also provide a platform for networking and collaboration among mission agencies. Moreover, theological institutions can link up with mission agencies to study and address specific issues related to the church's mission. In these and other creative ways, theological schools can become living examples of unity in diversity in the church and mission.

Concluding remarks

We are commanded to cherish and promote the spirit of unity and to celebrate and embrace our differences as different parts of Christ's body. I sense great hope and opportunity in front of us as we enter this new era after denominationalism. The spirit of partnership and cooperation is growing more and more in many areas of ministry, including theological education.

We must guard ourselves against any type of tribalism. Rather, we must see each other as partners carrying out God's mission together. Although, like siblings, we look different and have different personalities and preferences, we have the same calling—a missionary calling. We are diverse in many ways, but we are united in the mission of God, and that missionary calling must precede our differences.

I conclude with a story called 'Wesley's Dream.' It was said that John Wesley, a founder of Methodism, had a dream in which he changed his view regarding church divisions.

> Once upon a time, John Wesley had a dream. He dreamed that he died and came to the gate of heaven. He was anxious to know who had been admitted, so he questioned the gate keeper: 'Are there any Presbyterians here?'
>
> 'None', replied the keeper of the gate.
> Wesley was surprised. 'Have you any Anglicans?' he asked.
> 'No one!' was the reply.
> 'Surely, there must be many Baptists in heaven?'
> 'No, none', replied the keeper.
> Wesley grew pale. He was afraid to ask his next question:

'How many Methodists are there in heaven?'

'Not one', answered the keeper quickly.

Wesley's heart was filled with wonder. The angel at the gate then told Wesley that there were no earthly distinctions in heaven. 'All of us here in heaven are one in Christ. We are just an assembly who love the Lord.'

ERT (2022) 46:4, 314–321

Sign and Countersign: The Battle against Pornography in the Church

Daniel Weiss

Pornography is one of the greatest scourges of our age, yet churches and Christian ministries almost universally remain silent about it. This article gently reveals the nature and severity of the threat and thoughtfully inspires us to sensitive action.

The Creation story in Genesis contains some of the most beautiful language in the Bible. Modern scientific man might prefer textbooks on the inner workings of astrophysics, biodiversity and cellular functioning, but for me, poetry is the better way. Like all great poets, God's scarcity of words enhances the imagination, increasing our awe at the mystery of his creative process.

Within the poetic account of Genesis 1, one theme becomes obvious enough to draw our attention a bit closer. On each day of creation, God reveals and divides, brings forth and distinguishes one element of creation from another. Light from dark, land from water, distinct lights, diversity of vegetation, winged creatures from those that swim, and a host of discreet animals to fill the land. This description of creating and separating is a profoundly simple way of describing an extraordinarily complex universe crafted to work together in harmony for God's purposes.

Using this same pattern, God creates humankind in His image and likeness—male and female. We are like the other sex, but also unlike. Genesis 2 teases this out beautifully. First, God creates *adam* from the dust of the ground and the breath of the Spirit. *Adam* is fully alive, but not complete. He is without a helper. At this point, God causes *adam* to fall into *tardema*, a sleep deep enough for him to be unmade and remade into a more accurate reflection of God. He had been created; he is now also separated and reunited. As philosopher Peter Kreeft reflected, 'We fit the nature of things.'[1]

We can only imagine Adam's first gasp of joy as he beheld his new bride standing before him radiant and naked and pure: *At last, here is one for me*. Like the end of a great fireworks display, what happens in the creation finale almost overshadows all

Daniel Weiss is executive director of the Sexual Integrity Leadership Summit, a global community working to equip, support and collaborate with Christian leaders to promote gospel-centred sexuality in the Church. He is also co-author of *Treading Boldly through a Pornographic World: A Field Guide for Parents*. This essay is slightly modified from a version included in the new WEA World of Theology volume *The Decalogue Project: Disciples from Six Continents Engage God's Ten Commandments*. Contact: SexualIntegrityLeaders.com or dweiss@sexualintegrityleaders.com.

1 Ecce Films, 'The Destiny of Humanity: On the Meaning of Marriage', https://worldea.org/yourls/46401.

that came before. By God's grace we are able to see and understand the triune nature stamped into the division of the sexes and the life-giving, one-flesh union of marriage.

Would that our first parents had not fallen into sin!

Yet they did, and we see throughout the Scriptures how destructive our sinful nature is and has been. More than mere disobedience, sin unleashed a violent rupture between humanity and God and God's creation, including divisions between men and women and the inner disintegration of thought, desire and will in every human person. At once, we were separated from God, each other and the inner harmony of our God-designed selves.

This has been the case for every generation, but a relatively recent threat is widening these divisions at alarming rates: *digital pornography*.

The greatest threat

Some years ago, a prominent American ministry leader called pornography the 'greatest threat to the cause of Christ in the history of the world'.[2] While such a claim may seem absurd, at this very moment pornography has in its brutal grip hundreds of millions (perhaps billions) of people around the globe, a majority of whom are likely teenagers or younger. Perhaps this problem is worth a deeper exploration.

As temptations go, pornography is among the most cunning and spiritually lethal, yet it is rarely addressed in the church. One pastor told me he wouldn't talk about pornography because he preaches to the 90 percent of his congregation who are relatively healthy. Another pastor didn't discuss sexual issues because he was afraid that people would approach him for help, and he didn't know what to do.

While these and other Christian leaders remain silent, 41 percent of practicing Christian young men (age 13 to 24) and 13 percent of practicing Christian young women are worshipping pornographic idols at least monthly or more often. Concurrently, 23 percent of adult Christian men (age 25 and above) and 5 percent of adult Christian women are engaged in digital adultery at least monthly or more.[3] Pornography *is* in the church, and often at only slightly lower rates than in the general population.

Whether we want to or not, the church must openly address the impact of pornography if we hope to advance the gospel in a sexually explicit culture. Both within and outside our churches, men, women and children are losing themselves to an addictive neural drug that is disintegrating them spiritually, emotionally, relationally and sexually before our very eyes. The harms of pornography, as they say, are hidden in plain sight.

I am among those who believe that the church holds the primary antidote to this global sexual depredation. As a character in Bruce Marshall's book *The World, the*

2 Mark Martin, 'Alarming Epidemic: "Porn the Greatest Threat to the Cause of Christ"', CBNnews.com, 2016, https://worldea.org/yourls/46402.

3 Barna Report and Josh McDowell Ministries, *The Porn Phenomenon* (2016), 32. The study can be ordered at https://worldea.org/yourls/46403. This research was conducted among 2,271 Americans in July and August 2015. This study is the most extensive one I have seen, although similar studies from around the globe indicate that young people's exposure to and use of pornography has been consistently high since the 2000s.

Flesh, and Father Smith says, 'The young man who rings the bell at the brothel is unconsciously looking for God.'[4]

This is strangely good news. The world's fascination with pornography shows us how hungry people are for love and meaning which can be found only in Christ. As my friend Christopher West likes to point out, if we saw a man eating out of a dumpster, we wouldn't yell at him. We would offer him healthy food that truly satisfies.

The world is sexually sick, with infections reaching into every Christian church. If we hope to help those in need, we need to better understand how pornography has taken a good gift of God and turned it against us.

Separation between God and man

In his *History of the Christian Church,* 19th-century scholar Philip Schaff explains:

> Idolatry or spiritual whoredom is almost inseparable from bodily pollution. In the case of Solomon polytheism and polygamy went hand in hand. Hence the author of the Apocalypse also closely connects the eating of meat offered to idols with fornication, and denounces them together. Paul had to struggle against this laxity in the Corinthian congregation and condemns all carnal uncleanness as a violation and profanation of the temple of God.[5]

Indeed, we see a similar pattern throughout the Scriptures. Sexual immorality does not just coexist with idolatry. It *is* idolatry, as Paul explains in Romans 1: 'They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator.'

With pornography, the idolatry is two-fold. First, the user becomes devoted to the sexual images and videos that entrance her.[6] Pioneering psychologist Patrick Carnes developed an addiction model that also reveals a certain ritualism to porn use. Initially, a person feels a prompt, such as a sexual ad or even something sexually innocuous: hunger, boredom or loneliness. This prompt leads to a time of preoccupation where the user plans when and how to view pornography. There may be actual rituals involved, such as waiting until roommates have gone to bed or fantasizing beforehand. Finally, there is the actual viewing, which can be seen as a form of worship involving devotion and ecstatic release. This is followed by post-porn pain, often manifesting as shame. Unhealed shame is simply waiting for a new prompt to trigger another turn of the addictive cycle.

The second element of idolatry reflects a worship of the self. *My* needs and desires trump everything else in life. I develop a sense of entitlement that is only strengthened by the ease with which it can be satisfied. Untethered from moral codes that might restrict my needs, I can now do what I want, to whom I want, when I want.

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4 Glenn Stanton, 'FactChecker: C. S. Lewis and G. K. Chesterton Quotes', The Gospel Coalition, 14 April 2013, https://worldea.org/yourls/46404.

5 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 348.

6 Some may be surprised by my use of the female pronoun here and elsewhere. Research amply demonstrates that pornography use is growing among women, especially younger women and girls. I believe the church makes a fatal mistake by considering pornography a 'man's problem'.

Unfortunately, this entitlement mentality isn't confined to merely viewing pornography, as research (along with countless broken hearts) attests. Untempered sexuality is responsible for many of the great evils in the world. The Christian sexual ethics of the New Testament and the moral law of the Old Testament have undoubtedly done much to restrain sexual appetites throughout the millennia, but there is much more to God's sexual restrictions than simply curbing abuse.

Paul compares the intimacy of a husband and wife to that of Christ's love for the church. The love of God is self-giving, nurturing, patient, faithful, total and free, all hallmarks of a healthy marriage as well. We were created to enjoy the intimate embrace of self-giving love and receptivity and all that proceeds from such a union.

So important is this earthly symbol of divine love that God chose to weave it through the whole fabric of Scripture. The Bible opens with the marriage of Adam and Eve and closes with the wedding feast of the Lamb and the Bride. The prophets often compared God's love to that of a jealous husband. Israel is the bride, the church is the bride, we are the bride. Christ alone is the groom, simultaneously initiating a loving relationship with us and making it possible for us to receive and return that love.

The New Testament writers also knew that sexual integrity is a proclamation that there is much more to life than chasing after sex, food or power. We are called to be set apart from the world so that one of the primary symbols of God's love can actually be seen and understood by those around us.

Our call to sexual wholeness is as radical today as it was in the promiscuous Roman culture into which the church was born. As pastor Matthew Rueger makes clear in *Sexual Morality in a Christless World*, the Christian sexual witness not only challenges the secular social order; it threatens to topple it.[7] The secular world opposes Christian sexual morality for this very reason.

While there is extraordinary power in the true sign of God's love, the countersign has a power of its own. By distorting the meaning of male and female and of sexual intimacy, pornography poises a dire threat to the health and continuing function of the *ecclesia*, attacking the cradle of faith: the family.

Division between men and women

According to the Barna research study cited above, 57 percent of young adults (age 18 to 23) and 37 percent of teens (age 13 to 17) in the US view porn monthly or even more frequently, compared with only 29 percent of all adults age 25 and older.[8] A similar study conducted in the United Kingdom in 2019 found that 80 percent of 16- and 17-year-olds had seen online pornography, with a sizeable portion of them having viewed such material on the day of the survey.[9] This means that those most susceptible to the harmful impact of pornography are also the ones most avidly consuming it. This is leading to dire consequences globally.

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7 Matthew Rueger, *Sexual Morality in a Christless World* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2016).

8 Barna Report, *The Porn Phenomenon*, 31.

9 Neil Thurman and Fabian Obster, 'The Regulation of Internet Pornography: What a Survey of Under-18s Tells Us about the Necessity for and Potential Efficacy of Emerging Legislative Approaches', *Policy & Internet*, 4 May 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46405.

A 2006 report found a long list of pornography's negative influences that directly impact relational health and family formation. These include but are not limited to:

- Diminished trust in intimate partners;
- Abandoning the goal of sexual exclusivity with a partner;
- Perceiving promiscuity as a normal state of interaction;
- Perceiving sexual inactivity as constituting a health risk;
- Developing cynical attitudes about love;
- Believing superior sexual satisfaction is attainable without having affection for one's partner;
- Believing marriage is sexually confining; and
- Believing that raising children and having a family is an unattractive prospect.[10]

Pornography is the antithesis of love. This diabolical scheme not only disrupts loving relationships; it prevents many from occurring at all. Who wants the confinement of marriage and the anchor of children, when he can make love to as many different women each night as he wants?

The other side of the breakdown is just as heartbreaking. Many young women are faced with the impossible choice of dating or marrying a porn-addicted (or at least porn-influenced) man or remaining single, possibly for life. Professor Gail Dines has been sounding the warning about this for years. In 2010 she wrote:

> Porn has become so violent and degrading that we ignore it at our peril. We are now bringing up a generation of boys on cruel, violent porn and given that images shape the way people think and behave, this is going to have a profound effect on their sexuality and on the culture as a whole.[11]

In the 12 years since her words were published, we've seen the former pornographic fringe enter the mainstream of intimate relationships. Young women find themselves in a thoroughly pornographic dating culture, where they are not only expected to be okay with their boyfriend's porn use; they are often forced to watch and act it out as well. One of the saddest stories I've ever read and which I'll only paint in the broadest strokes here involved British schoolgirls who are now permanently incontinent because their pornified boyfriends reenacted on them the violent sex they were viewing.

Although we find this shocking, we shouldn't. As researcher Judith Reisman has said many times, today's kids are doing exactly what they are supposed to be doing: imitating the adult culture around them. The world of adult pornography, which has now socialized several generations of kids, is cruel in ways most non-porn users would disbelieve.

In 2007, a university research team analyzed every scene in 50 of the previous year's highest-grossing pornography films and reported the following findings:

10 Jill C. Manning, 'The Impact of Internet Pornography on Marriage and the Family', *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 13 (2006): 131–65.

11 Gail Dines, 'How Porn Is Warping a Generation of Men', NYPost.com, 11 July 2010, https://worldea.org/yourls/46406.

> 88.2 percent contained physical aggression, principally spanking, gagging, and slapping, while 48.7 percent of scenes contained verbal aggression, primarily name-calling. Perpetrators of aggression were usually male, whereas targets of aggression were overwhelmingly female. Targets most often showed pleasure or responded neutrally to the aggression.[12]

Pope John Paul II wrote that the opposite of love is not hate but lust, the using of another for one's own pleasure.[13] Today's pornography is marked by both. It is a violent attack on women and a tragic sabotage of the servant love and leadership to which men are called. We're not only naked with shame, but fear and loathing as well.

The disintegration of the self

Augustine described our corrupt nature with the Latin phrase *incurvatus in se*, which means to be curved in on oneself. This is a helpful term for understanding why people get trapped in pornography and can't seem to get out.

The late Dr. Victor Cline, a clinical psychologist at the University of Utah and a sexual addiction specialist, described a four-stage progression that he observed in almost all the porn users he had treated: addiction, escalation, desensitization and acting out.[14]

More recent brain research illuminates the chemical process behind this addictive progression. When people become sexually aroused, a flood of neurochemicals is released throughout the brain and body. These include dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin and norepinephrine, among others. This process is an important element of God's ordered creation. Released during sexual intimacy, these chemicals bond spouses to one another, create feelings of intimacy and sexual exclusivity, and leave spouses feeling relaxed and euphoric.

These same neurochemicals are released when a person views pornography, often in superabundance. The brain is literally flooded with a powerful neuro-cocktail that provides a high, similar to that produced by drugs. However, our neural networks weren't designed to receive a never-ending tsunami of pleasure chemicals, so the brain begins shutting down neural receptors in an attempt to restore balance. As the brain shuts down, the addict no longer feels the same high and must work ever harder to stimulate a similar neurochemical release. This process leads many into addiction and to seeking out more deviant pornography or acting out in real life what they've conditioned themselves to in pornography. Simply put, a person can become addicted to his own neurochemicals.

In *The Brain That Changes Itself*, Dr. Norman Doidge found that although pornography can appease our sexual appetites for a time, sexual satisfaction is

12 Ana J. Bridges et al., 'Aggression and Sexual Behavior in Best-Selling Pornography Videos: A Content Analysis Update', *Violence against Women* 16, no. 10 (October 2010): 1065–85.

13 John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books, 2006).

14 Victor B. Cline, 'Pornography and Sexual Addictions', *Christian Counseling Today* 4, no. 4 (1996): 58.

managed by a separate pleasure center in the brain. This is pornography's big secret.[15] The pleasure one receives from pornography can never satisfy. Pornography users are desperately trying to drink from a dry well.

The church needs to understand this well. I've spoken with many women and men who have shared their porn struggles with church leaders and have been told to repent and read the Bible more. These are important elements of healing, but such advice fails to account for the literal brain changes and neurochemical addictions that make stopping so difficult. There are also layers upon layers of deeper spiritual, emotional and intellectual pain that drive the acting-out behavior. To expect a person to change without healing these deeper wounds is callous and cruel.

Become the body

I've worked on pornography-related issues for two decades, and during that time I have seen most churches do little or nothing to address this growing threat. There are myriad reasons for this, but all involve fear, insufficient training, naiveté or a combination of all three.

Jesus didn't shy away from sexual topics but addressed them with openness, conviction and grace. In John 8, the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman caught in adultery. They wanted him to condemn her, but Jesus gave them a powerful lesson instead. I'm not talking about showing grace to others or the realness of Christ's forgiveness, but something just as important.

When Jesus invited those without sin to throw the first stone, they walked away one by one until none remained. They came with judgement and left in isolation. None of them realized the profound gift Jesus had tried to show them: the power and beauty of a sinful community. If sin is to be curved in upon oneself, then freedom from sin means to be bent outward to the joy of loving God and others.

This can't happen in isolation, and it is unlikely to happen in a rigid atmosphere that emphasizes behavioral perfection, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

> The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everyone must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is that we *are* sinners![16]

It's a hard thing for people to hear, but every last one of us is a sexual sinner: the pastor, the pastor's wife, the young child confused about her identity, the old man who visited a brothel while in the military, the loving wife who slept around as a teenager, the happily married father of four who had an affair. These wounds live in every church, and many of them remain hidden, unforgiven and unhealed. We *know* this is true and still we hide.

Christian leaders need to understand that when we minimize or ignore the devastating impact of pornography and other sexual brokenness, we are keeping people

15 Daniel Weiss and Josh Glaser, *Treading Boldly Through a Pornography World: A Field Guide for Parents* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021), 141.

16 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper, 1954), 110.

locked in trauma and away from newness of life in Christ. It is Satan's tactic to keep sin hidden and sinners isolated; it should never be the church's choice to do so.

In his 2015 TED talk, journalist Johann Hari shared that the opposite of addiction is not sobriety but community.[17] Any renewal of the Christian sexual ethic needs to recognize and build upon the solidarity we all share in our brokenness. But this won't happen without compassionate intentionality. Christian leaders need to go where people are hiding in their sins. Again, Jesus shows us the way. When Jesus met the woman at the well in John 4, he was actually visiting her hiding place. Rather than getting water in the cool of the day, she was out at midday, presumably to avoid the town gossips. She had five husbands and was living with a new man. Lovingly, Jesus helped her to understand that he himself is the only bridegroom who could satisfy her heart.

It's not hard to go where sexual sinners are hiding. We encounter them in our weekly worship. This is where the body regularly comes together and is the first and most important place for us to normalize the sexual fallenness of the world and its impact on every human heart. Believers and visitors alike need to regularly hear and believe that God does not shy away from our misery but is drawn all the way into it. On the cross, Jesus not only bore our sins away; he suffered with us in the very moments of our sinning. The Good News we proclaim is that Jesus already knows us, loves us in our sin, and openly welcomes us into the freedom he purchased with his body and blood.

By normalizing the *fact* of our sinfulness, the reality of God's forgiving and healing love, and that *this* church is a place for people to receive it, we are also creating a culture in which the presence of Christ is proclaimed, received and shared with others freely. In a community such as this, people begin to feel safe enough to come out of the shadows and allow the love of Christ to heal the great divisions of the Fall. Men and women will find that they no longer need to hide from God but can rush toward him, empowered by the grace he has given them. Husbands and wives, dating couples and divorcees can humbly seek forgiveness and restoration. God's living water seeks to cleanse us at the core of our being, flowing into our wounded emotions, distorted thinking, and finally into our sinful actions. As we are healed from the inside out, we can begin to lean into the goodness of sexuality for which we were created.

In this life, we can never experience the original unity and purity of the Garden, but through Christ, we can still grow into the deeply satisfying community for which we were created. And as we enjoy the freedom of knowing others and being known by them without fear, we might also follow the footsteps of that sinful Samaritan woman at the well, who became that town's chief evangelist. Many there believed in Jesus because she proclaimed without fear, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?'

17 Johann Hari, 'Everything You Think You Know about Addiction Is Wrong', TEDGlobalLondon, June 2015, https://worldea.org/yourls/46407.

ERT (2022) 46:4, 322–339

The Afterlife in the Old Testament

Paul Wegner

The Bible's teaching on the afterlife began as a shadowy idea in the earlier writings of the Old Testament and took on a more definitive form as Old Testament times progressed. This article interprets, in their original context, the key Old Testament texts that refer (or appear to refer) to the afterlife and shows how they can be harmonized.

The search for immortality, or at least the concept of an afterlife, was a persistent human pursuit throughout the ancient Near East. The Pharaohs of ancient Egypt prepared for the afterlife via mummification and the construction of elaborate pyramids to store food, clothing, slaves and other belongings in hopes of making their future world more comfortable. The ancient Mesopotamians, in contrast, lacked a developed concept of the afterlife.[1]

In the Old Testament, death is frequently contrasted with life and is seen as part of the normal progression which occurs at the end of life (2 Sam 14:14). DeVaux describes the objects found in tombs during the Monarchical period:

> Some personal belongings and pottery were put beside the corpse. These funeral offerings, intended for the use of the dead, are not so numerous or rich as in the Canaanite period, and, at the end of the Israelite period, are confined to a few vases or lamps. Men's ideas on the fate of the dead had progressed, and their offerings had only symbolic value.[2]

However, by the sixth century BC and later, the number of items found in the tombs had increased significantly, as Matthews points out:

> Looking at the 6th century it is difficult to discern any changes in burial customs other than the grave goods left with the body. … The chief means of identifying a transition into the Persian period is the increased number of metal burial offerings. These include bowls, mirrors, strainers, and bracelets. Imported Egyptian cosmetic jars made of alabaster and black kohl (eye makeup) sticks are also found in these tombs.[3]

Paul D. Wegner (PhD, Kings College, University of London) is distinguished professor of Old Testament at Gateway Seminary (California, USA). He is the author of several books relating to the Old Testament and textual criticism and has been involved in writing notes for two English study Bibles (ESV and NET).

1 Wolfram von Soden, *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East,* trans. Donald G. Schley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 186–87.

2 Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 2nd ed., trans. John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965), 57.

3 Victor H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 178.

The increase in the number of objects buried with the corpses may suggest an increased development in the understanding of the afterlife and the perceived need for such goods.

In the Old Testament, an individual is said to have an 'honourable death' when he dies at a 'good old age' (Gen 15:15; 25:8; Judg 8:32; 1 Chr 29:28), satisfied with life and having sufficient children. But what happens then?

Essential to understanding the biblical concept of afterlife is the more general principle of progressive revelation to successive generations throughout the time period when the biblical books were written.[4] Rather than interpreting earlier passages in the light of later revelation, we should see the revelation in earlier passages as laying the groundwork for what is yet to come. This is certainly true of the afterlife, which was perceived in early Old Testament times as a vague concept of 'going to be with their fathers' upon death and is ultimately clarified in the New Testament teaching that non-believers, at death, go to the place of torment in Sheol that later will be cast into the lake of fire, while believers go to live with God forever.

The purpose of this article is to clarify some of the difficult issues related to the developing Old Testament understanding of the afterlife. We will review relevant passages from the earliest to the latest.

Pre–Monarchical Period (c. 2000–1000 BCE)[5]

The earliest perception of an afterlife among the Israelites is captured in the words 'going to be with their fathers' after death, a concept expressed in a variety of phrases.[6]

Phrase	Biblical reference
1. 'go to your fathers in peace'	Gen 15:15
2. 'when I rest with my fathers' or 'to sleep with their fathers'	Gen 47:30; cf. Deut 31:16[7]
3. 'to be gathered to my people'	Gen 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:29[8]

4 Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 602–3.

5 There has been much debate about the dating of the books of the Pentateuch, but a number of scholars believe that they are at least set against a second-millennium background even if they were written later: Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Chicago: InterVarsity, 1966), esp. 112–46; Kitchen, *The Bible in Its World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978); Roland K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 542-565; Gordon Wenham, 'The Date of Deuteronomy: Linch-Pin of Old Testament Criticism, Part One', *Themelios* 10, no. 3 (1985): 15–20.

6 Some of the phrases that emerged in this period continued to be used well into the next time period.

7 See also 2 Sam 7:12; 1 Kgs 1:21; 2:10; 11:21, 43; 14:20, 31; 15:8, 24; 16:6, 28; 22:40, 50; 2 Kgs 8:24; 10:35; 13:9, 13; 14:16, 22, 29; 15:7, 22, 38; 16:20; 20:21; 21:18; 24:6; 2 Chr 9:31; 12:16; 14:1; 16:13; 21:1; 26:2, 23; 27:9; 28:27; 32:33; 33:20.

8 See also 2 Kgs 22:20; 2 Chr 34:28.

4. 'be buried in the tomb of your fathers'	Gen 49:29, 33; Num 20:24; 27:13; 31:2; Deut 32:50[9]

We can assume that Israelites took these phrases quite literally, expecting to be buried in close proximity to their forefathers.[10] But the phrases 'go to your fathers in peace' and 'to be gathered to my people' may suggest even more, as Hamilton explains: 'That one is gathered to one's kin/fathers before being buried implies either a belief in a continued existence in the netherworld or that the spirit of the deceased joined the ancestors of the underworld, and that even in death family solidarity was not broken.'[11] For the Israelites, it was a state in which rest, sleep and peace were to be enjoyed.

Let's look at three important texts from this period that some scholars believe discuss the concept of afterlife.[12]

Job 14:13–14

> If only you would put me in Sheol and hide me [and] conceal me until your anger has returned! You could set an appointed time for me and remember me. If a

9 See also 1 Kgs 13:22; 14:31; 15:24; 16:6, 28; 22:50; 2 Kgs 8:24; 9:28; 14:20; 15:38; 2 Chr 21:1; 25:28; 35:24.

10 Kathleen Kenyon, *Excavations at Jericho* (London: British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, 1960–1965), 1:263; Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Netherworld in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 170; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (hereafter OTL), rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 262; G. Charles Aalders, *Genesis*, Bible Student's Commentary (hereafter BSC), trans. William Heynen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 2:74.

11 Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50,* New International Commentary of the Old Testament (hereafter NICOT) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 2:168.

12 Some of the Rabbinic literature states that Job lived during the patriarchal period (b. *Baba Bathra* 15b; *Sanhedrin* 106a; *Soṭah* 11a). The Babylonian Talmud even suggests that Moses wrote the book (b. *Baba Bathra* 14b). For further evidence supporting this early date, see Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes,* Anchor Bible (hereafter AB) 15 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), xxxii–xxxiv; R. Laird Harris, 'The Book of Job and Its Doctrine of God', *Grace Theological Journal* 13, no. 3 (1972): 3–33. However, most modern commentators date the book of Job much later: Pope, *Job*, xl; Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile,* trans. Moshe Greenberg (New York: Schocken, 1972), 338; Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 216–18; Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary,* Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (hereafter TOTC) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976), 61–64; Jimmy J. M. Roberts, 'Job and the Israelite Religious Tradition', *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89 (1977): 107–14; John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 17–20. Even if Job is dated later, as many modern scholars suggest, this will not affect our discussion of the Pre–Monarchical concept of the afterlife significantly. It would merely provide evidence for the concept's development in the Monarchical Period. However, Harold H. Rowley does concede that Job 19:25–27 is a step in this direction, saying, 'Though there is no full grasping of a belief in a worthwhile afterlife with God, this passage is a notable landmark in the process toward such a belief.' Rowley, *The Book of Job,* New Century Bible Commentary (hereafter NCBC) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 140.

> man dies, will he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait until my renewal comes.[13]

Just prior to these verses, Job laments that a tree has a better lot in life than man, for a tree has the prospect of coming back to life after it has been cut down, but not so a man (vv. 7–12).[14] It can be tempting to suggest that the phrase 'till the heavens are no more' in verse 12 hints at more—that there may be hope for Job to arise after the heavens disappear—but this involves importing subsequent revelation into Job's thoughts, and such an interpretation would go against what Job said earlier: if there was hope for man's resurrection after death, why would a tree be better off than a man?[15] Although verse 14 seems rather to express a longing for a restoration or renewal in this life after present difficulties have been resolved, Hartley suggests another possibility:

> Although he has just discounted the possibility of personal resurrection, Job's wish pulls his mind back to this possibility. He affirms that he would bear the days of his *service* (*ṣāḇā'*; cf. 72), his time of undeserved suffering, in hope until his *renewal* (*ḥ^alîp̱â*) would come. … Given this possibility, he could endure this present affliction sustained by the vision of the wonderful future that would be his. This possibility, though, is just as hypothetical as his being hidden in Sheol.[16]

However one understands this passage from Job, it highlights that Job's concept of the afterlife was significantly different from that presented much later in the New Testament.

Job 19:25–27

> And I myself know that my redeemer lives, and that afterwards he will stand upon the dust. And after my skin has been destroyed by this, then because of[17] my flesh I will behold God, whom I myself will behold, even my own eyes will see, and not a stranger's [eyes]. How my innermost being faints within me!

Job 19:25–27 has been used to argue that Job will see God after death, but there are several difficulties with this interpretation. First, it seems very unlikely that Job would change his mind so completely when only four chapters earlier he stated that man dies and that is his end. In verse 25, Job confidently asserts that he knows his 'redeemer' (*gō'ēl*) lives, bringing to mind the Israelite custom of a 'kinsman redeemer', whereby the nearest of kin was responsible for preserving a family member's life force by avenging his murder, redeeming him from captivity, paying his debts,

13 All the translations of the Hebrew are my own, but I point out when they differ significantly from other major translations.

14 Robert Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life: A Study of the Development of the Doctrine of the Resurrection in the Old Testament*, trans. John P. Smith (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), 179.

15 See also Job 10:20–22, where Job depicts the afterlife as darkness and gloom.

16 Hartley, *Job*, 236–37.

17 Cf. *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, rev. and expanded by John C. Beckman, 3rd ed. (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2007), §319 'causal'; for other options see: §320a 'by means of'; §320b 'agent (by).'

marrying his widow if he died childless, or protecting his honour.[18] Of this set of five functions of the kinsman redeemer, the last one best fits the context of Job, suggesting that Job believed someone (or possibly God) would step in to vindicate him.

But the first interpretive problem is encountered at this point: Who is this kinsman redeemer that Job longs for? Scholars offer at least three different suggestions as to the identity of this redeemer. First, traditionally it was thought to be God, but then the passage would imply that God is simultaneously Job's accuser and defender.[19] Second, some argue that Job 16:19–21 suggests a heavenly arbitrator separate from God, but it is more likely that the heavenly arbitrator is God himself.[20] Third, some have suggested that it must be the Messiah.[21] However, even though Job longs for such a heavenly advocate, there is no evidence to suggest that Job had any concept of a Messiah.

The traditional interpretation—that the advocate is God himself—seems to pose the fewest difficulties. Even though it seems contradictory for God to be Job's vindicator and accuser, this is precisely the dilemma Job faces. The one who knows the truth and should come to his aid, namely God, has remained largely silent or, even worse, may be causing the punishment.

A second interpretive problem centres on the phrase 'the end' (or 'afterwards' in my translation, v. 25). Some scholars have suggested that 'the end' refers to the end of time,[22] but in context it seems more likely to refer to the end of the difficulty. Hartley agrees:

> The phrase *in the end* (*ʾaḥᵃrôn*) often signals things that will take place at the end of the age. Job, however, is thinking not of that distant future, but of a day when God will vindicate him and bring his case to a close. In this context then 'the end' or 'the last' connotes that God will restore Job's honor before he dies. … This magnificent verse then means that Job is beseeching the God in whom he has faith to help him against the God who is punishing him. … Only by pure

18 Hartley, *Job,* 292; Robert L. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 88–89; Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 320–21; John A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 588; Robert L. Hubbard, 'The *gōʾēl* in Ancient Israel: The Theology of an Israelite Institution', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1 (1991): 3–19; Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner and Johann J. Stamm, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (*HALOT*), unabridged ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999–2000), 1:169.

19 Anderson, *Job,* 193–94; Hartley, *Job,* 295.

20 Sigmund Mowinckel, 'Hoibs *gōʾēl* und Zeuge im Himmel', in *Vom Alten Testament*, ed. Karl Budde (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1925), 208. This passage contains several translational problems. The phrase *məlîṣay rēʿāy* in Job 16:20 should probably be translated as 'the ones scoffing at me [are] my friends.' This would explain why Job is pouring out his tears to God—his friends are such poor intercessors. A few translations read this phrase as 'my intercessor is my friend' based on the Septuagint and a less common meaning of *lîṣ* (see Hartley, *Job,* 263). It is also more likely that Job 16:21 expresses a wish ('Oh that a man might plead with God as a man pleads with a neighbor!' NASB), rather than a statement ('On behalf of a man he [his intercessor] pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend', NIV).

21 Wilhelm Vischer, 'The Witness of Job to Jesus Christ' (trans. A. Ellison), *The Churchman* 6 (1934): 52–53.

22 Anderson, *Job*, 194.

> faith can a person believe in God's justice amidst suffering, assured within his heart that out of his sorrow God will restore his honor.[23]

This interpretation is in line with the rest of the verse, which states that this 'redeemer' will take his stand 'upon the dust' (*ʿal-ʿāpār*), a phrase Job uses more than any other book (8x). There are three common interpretations of this phrase in this passage: (1) it refers to the 'dust' in which he is clothed (Job 7:5), (2) 'dust' signifies his affliction (Job 42:6), or (3) 'dust' refers to the earth (Job 41:25). While all of them are possible in context, this last interpretation appears most likely since the phrase 'to stand upon the dust' (*ʿal-ʿāpār yāqûm,* Job 19:25) appears to be the opposite of 'to go down into the dust' (*ʿal-ʿāpār nāḥat,* Job 17:16), 'to lie down in the dust' (*ʿal-ʿāpār tiškāb,* Job 20:11; 21:26), and 'to return to the dust' (*ʿal-ʿāpār yāšûb,* Job 34:15), all of which signify death. On several occasions, Job puts dust and ashes upon his head as a sign of mourning (Job 2:12; 42:6), but that will soon be forgotten when his redeemer comes.

The third interpretive problem, found in verse 26, has been described by Pope as follows:

> This verse is notoriously difficult. The ancient versions all differ and no reliance can be placed in any of them. Various emendations have been proposed, but they are scarcely worth discussing. Many Christian interpreters since Origen have tried to read here an affirmation of immortality or resurrection, but without success; Chrysostom quite correctly refuted this interpretation with the citation of 14:12ff.[24]

The Hebrew word *mibbəśārî* can mean 'apart from my flesh',[25] 'without my flesh',[26] 'because of my flesh',[27] or 'by means of my flesh';[28] the last two options coincide with verse 27, which stresses that Job will see God 'with his own eyes'.[29]

Another issue adding to the complexity of this passage is that the meaning of *niqqəpû* in verse 26a is unclear. If the root means 'to strip off',[30] then the verse may mean that Job will see God with a resurrected body. But if it means 'to become shriveled up or marred beyond recognition',[31] then it favours Job's weak and emaciated body; in this sense, the verse would express the hope that before his death, Job will see God, who will vindicate him. Most scholars suggest that the Piel form of *nqp* means 'cutting' of some kind, but this does not demand that Job will see God after death, since Job talks about his skin 'cracking and running' (7:5), which suggests that his skin has cuts and running sores. It is even possible that this verb may mean 'after my skin has gone through this', since in Job 1:6 the same word in

23 Hartley, *Job,* 294–95.
24 Pope, *Job*, 147.
25 Williams' *Hebrew Syntax* §315 (separative usage).
26 Williams' *Hebrew Syntax* §321 (privative usage).
27 Williams' *Hebrew Syntax* §319 (causal usage).
28 Williams' *Hebrew Syntax,* §320a, b (instrumental, agent usage).
29 Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 204.
30 Pope, *Job*, 139, 147; *HALOT* 2:722. This word occurs in the Piel stem in only one other passage, Isaiah 10:34, where it means to cut down (the thickets of a forest).
31 Hartley, *Job*, 297.

the hiphil form indicates the 'completion' of the days of feasting.[32] This interpretation is also suggested by the Septuagint, which reads, 'For I know that he is eternal who is about to deliver me, [and] shall stand upon the earth [after] my skin has suffered (*avatlwn*) these things.' The passage would then mean that after Job's skin had finished going through the pain or 'completed the punishment', he would see God. No matter what the exact interpretation of these verses is, they do not necessitate a reference to the afterlife.[33]

Deuteronomy 32:39[34]

> See now that I myself am he! There is no God besides me. I myself put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I myself will heal, and no one can deliver from my hand.

This verse clearly expresses the full range of God's might, for in his hands is the power of both life and death. His ability to bring forth life has already been demonstrated in creation and in giving children to those whose wombs were thought to be dead (Gen 21:2; 25:21; 30:22). However, there is no clear suggestion of an afterlife.[35]

To summarize, in this early period there are expectations of going to be with one's fathers at death in a somewhat restful state, but little more. Job appears to have a longing for more, with no real expectation that there exists anything beyond this life; he even believes that a tree is better off than a man, for a tree will sometimes sprout back to life. But these passages can take on further significance when the concept of an afterlife becomes further developed.

The Monarchical Period (1000–600 BCE)

The term 'Sheol' (used as early as Gen 37:35) and the phrases expressing 'going to be with their fathers' carry over from the Pre-Monarchical period into the Monarchical period. However, it appears that at some time during the latter period the word 'Sheol' began to take on the idea of a separate place and was no longer merely synonymous with the grave or death.[36] The word 'Sheol' is common in the Old Testament, occurring 65 times,[37] but is not found in any cognate languages.[38] The

32 *HALOT* 2:722.

33 Edmund F. Sutcliffe, *The Old Testament and the Future Life* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1947), 131–37. Cf. John F. A. Sawyer, 'Hebrew Words for the Resurrection of the Dead', *Vetus Testamentum* 23 (1973): 218–34.

34 Even though there is much debate over the dating of Deuteronomy, its date will not affect the basic conclusions of this article. Some will merely prefer to place this verse in the Monarchical Period for this discussion.

35 Aubrey R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1964), 108–9; Andrew D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy,* NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 392.

36 Eugene H. Merrill states that 'the most elaborate OT descriptions of the netherworld appear in Isaiah and Ezekiel' (Willem VanGemeren, ed. 'sheol' (#8626) in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (hereafter *NIDOTTE*) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:7.

37 Possibly 66 if Isaiah 7:11, which is commonly repointed as 'Sheol', is included.

38 Theodore J. Lewis, 'Dead, Abode of the', *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (hereafter *ABD*), 2:101. Cf. Lewis' excellent discussion of the history of interpretation of the word 'Sheol' (*ABD* 2:101–2); Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, 37–47.

concept of Sheol as explained in the biblical texts encompasses the following:[39]

SHEOL

1. **The Underworld**
   a. Referred to as being downward (1 Sam 2:6; 1 Kgs 2:6, 9; Job 7:9; 11:8; Ps 30:4; 55:16; Prov 15:24; Isa 14:9; Amos 9:2)
   b. Sometimes parallel with 'death' or 'the grave' (Gen 42:38; 44:29, 31; 1 Sam 2:6; 1 Kgs 2:6, 9; Job 7:9; 14:13; 17:13, 16; 21:13; 24:19; Ps 6:5; 31:17; 49:15, 16; 88:4; 89:49; 139:8; 141:7; Prov 1:12; 5:5; 7:27; 30:16; Isa 14:11; 28:15; 38:10, 18; Ezek 31:15; Hos 13:14)
   c. Place of sorrows (2 Sam 22:6; Ps 18:6; 116:3)
   d. Possibly with chambers or levels (Deut 32:22; Ps 86:13; Prov 7:27; 9:18)
2. **A place for both the righteous and the wicked**[40]
   a. Righteous: Samuel (1 Sam 28:13–15); Job 14:13; Ps 6:5; 16:10; 30:4; 49:14–15; 86:13; Isa 38:18
   b. Wicked: Job 24:19; Ps 9:18; 31:17; 49:14; 55:16

The picture of Sheol from this period is that of a downward place, often parallel with death, where both the righteous and wicked go. The idea of levels or chambers is vague but is suggested in several passages (Deut 32:22; Ps 86:13; Prov 7:27; 9:18). Martin-Achard provides a good description of Sheol:

> Sheol is not in fact a place of punishment reserved for the impious, the abode of the perished is not identical with Gehenna; all the departed are in it, and if in their existence in that place there is nothing of comfort, the evil-doer does not suffer eternal punishment there.
>
> It will not be until the period when the last of the Old Testament documents are appearing that the Jews, or at least some of them, will modify their ideas about the Beyond: Sheol will sometimes become a temporary abode where the dead are waiting for resurrection and judgment; to ensure separation of the good and the evil, it will even be divided into several sections, of which one will be a place of bliss for the righteous, and another a place of suffering for the sinful.[41]

Apparently, a righteous person could be brought up from Sheol, as seen in 1 Samuel 28:8–20 when the witch of Endor brings back Samuel to speak with King Saul. The passage mentions several times that Samuel 'was brought up' from his

39 My thanks to John H. Walton for some of the information in this section on Sheol.

40 Ruth Rosenberg's distinction that Sheol and the pit are the abode of the 'wicked dead' who suffer untimely or unnatural deaths, in contrast to the righteous who 'go to be with their fathers' at death, is unconvincing (*The Concept of Biblical Sheol within the Context of Ancient Near Eastern Beliefs* [PhD dissesrtation, Harvard University, 1981], 174–93). Her interpretation fails to deal adequately with the following: (1) Kings such as Jeroboam (1 Kgs 14:20; cf. 1 Kgs 13:33–34), Joram (2 Kgs 8:24; cf. 2 Kgs 8:18), Jehu (2 Kgs 10:35; cf. 2 Kgs 10:31), Jehoahaz (2 Kgs 13:9; cf. 2 Kgs 13:2), Jehoash (2 Kgs 13:10; cf. 2 Kgs 13:11) and others are said to 'go to rest with their fathers' even though they are characterized as unrighteous. (2) Jacob is said to go to Sheol; however, the biblical text does not suggest that he was either wicked or suffered an untimely death (Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31).

41 Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, 39–40.

abode (vv. 8, 11, 13-15), and in Samuel's question to Saul he expresses his irritation over having been disturbed from his place of rest (v. 15).

Other passages thought to be dated to the Monarchical Period have been used to suggest that the nation of Israel believed in an afterlife. I will discuss a series of these texts in roughly chronological order.[42]

1 Samuel 2:6[43]

> The LORD brings death and makes alive;
> he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

This portion of Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving to God for the birth of Samuel contains a merismus emphasizing that God has total authority over life and death.[44] Perhaps Hannah was expressing her belief that God can raise people up from death (as Elijah in 1 Kings 17:21–22 and Elisha in 2 Kings 4:34–35 had done), or possibly she meant that God could deliver them so that they did not see death (similar to how the word *ʿālâ*, 'to go up', is used in Jon 2:6; Ps 30:3; 40:2; 71:20). Either way, the concept is similar to Deuteronomy 32:39 where God's supreme power to either end life or deliver from death is emphasized. There is no clear reference to an afterlife.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 (cf. Eccl 3:21)[45]

> And the dust returns unto the earth according to where it came from and the breath returns to the God who gave it.

This verse is a clear reference to Genesis 2:7 and 3:19; the former confirms that God breathed the breath of life into Adam, while the latter states that at death the body returns to dust.[46] Whybray comments:

> There is no question of an entity called 'the spirit' which survives death: the two components of all living creatures, the body, which was fundamentally only dust, and the breath, which God had breathed into it giving it life, part company and cease to have separate identities.[47]

The text indicates a separation of these two parts after death, but it is silent on any continuation of life with God after death. Readers in the Pre-Monarchical and Monarchical Periods appear to have understood that at death both parts of a body

42 The exception is the psalms, which will be dealt with in order of their occurrence in the Psalter. Because of the difficulty of dating individual psalms, we will place them in the Monarchical Period; at least some of them were likely written during this period, though the Psalter as a collection was not established until later.

43 Once again, the date of this passage is greatly debated; some may prefer to include it in the period after the exile.

44 David T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel,* NICOT (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2007), 146.

45 Traditionally, authorship of Ecclesiastes has been attributed to King Solomon, but modern scholarship has called this dating into question. Cf. Choon L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* AB 18C (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 36–38; R. Norman Whybray, *Ecclesiastes,* NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 3–4. However, the dating does not significantly affect our conclusions.

46 Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 367–68; Whybray, *Ecclesiastes,* 168.

47 Whybray, *Ecclesiastes,* 168.

return from whence they came. Longman says, 'This is not an optimistic allusion to some kind of consciousness after death, but simply a return to a prelife situation. God temporarily united body and spirit, and now the process is undone.'[48]

Hosea 6:1–2

> Come, let us return to the LORD for he himself has torn [us], but he will heal us; he has struck [us], but he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.

Some scholars argue that the plural pronouns on the verbs *hāyâ* ('revived') and *qûm* ('raised up') refer to a national resurrection after a national 'death'.[49] However, Mays is more likely correct in his assessment that they are not portrayed as dead: 'Rather they are sorely wounded and Yahweh is expected to revive them by restoring their vitality and so saving them from death. There is no notion of a national resurrection as in Ezek. 37.'[50] Furthermore, the nation must still be in existence and functioning if there is a choice to turn to God and circumvent the danger of death. Either way, the passage is not speaking about individual resurrection and thus does not add to our understanding of the concept of afterlife for an individual. The expectation that they would be raised up after only two or three days implies that their deliverance will happen very quickly once they return to God.

Isaiah 26:19

> Your dead will live, my [or their] body will arise. The ones dwelling in the dust wake up and shout [for joy] for your dew is like the dew of lights [or morning] and the earth will give birth to [the] dead.

In this passage, the author draws a contrast between the nations that had ruled over Israel but now are no longer in existence (v. 14) and Israel, which will not pass away (v. 19). The author uses parallel terminology to make this contrast even stronger; the people of former nations are 'now dead', 'they live no more', and 'their departed spirits will not rise', but Israel's 'dead will live', 'their bodies will arise', and they will 'awake.' The overall context demands that there be a national resurrection for God's people, for otherwise their outcome would be the same as that of the nations God had punished.[51] It is somewhat similar to the 'resurrection of the dry bones' of

48 Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes,* NICOT (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 273.

49 Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life,* 81; Francis I. Anderson and David N. Freedman, *Hosea. A New Translation, with Introduction and Commentary,* AB 24 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1989), 420.

50 James L. Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary,* OTL (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1969), 95. See also: Hans W. Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, trans. Gary Stansell, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1974), 119; Thomas E. McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 1:88.

51 Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah*, 2 vols. (Dublin: Brown and Nolan, 1960), 1:289; Georg Fohrer, 'Das Deschick des Menschen nach dem Tode im Alten Testament', *Kerygma und Dogma* 12 (1968): 249–62; Ernst Haenchen, 'Auferstehung im Alten Testament', *Die Bibel und Wir.*

Ezekiel 37 in which the nation of Israel is resuscitated, yet this does not imply individual resurrection.[52]

Isaiah 53:11

> Out of the suffering of his soul, he will see and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he himself will bear their iniquities.

This verse contains several interpretive uncertainties and is important for our discussion only if the reading from the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint is preferred: 'he will see the light and be satisfied.' Furthermore, one must interpret this light as 'the light [of life]', as the NIV has done. However, I see no clear statement of resurrection in the Masoretic Text's reading, 'Out of the suffering of his soul, he will see and be satisfied', even though it is clear that the servant will suffer and even die (vv. 7–11). For this reason, Whybray and Westermann argue that the verse merely refers to relief from great suffering and the resumption of a normal, happy life.[53] I agree with Martin-Achard's assessment that the author appears to believe that the Servant will escape from death, even though he cannot explain how:

> If the prophet's contemporaries had been in the habit of speaking about life after death, it is probable that Deutero-Isaiah would have made explicit reference to the resurrection in this passage; but on the contrary we have the impression that he is feeling his way; he senses that the Servant ought to escape death; so he asserts it without being able to explain the modality of an event that is beyond his understanding. Deutero-Isaiah is sure of Yahweh's miraculous intervention on behalf of His Chosen; he cannot say more; he is unaware of how and in what form the Living God is going to rescue him from the dominion of death.[54]

This servant is uniquely special in that his death will be for the atonement of the nation, yet the author of the passage seems unclear as to how his deliverance will occur.

Gesammelte Aufsätze (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1968), 73–90; Ronald E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39,* NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 216–17; Harold H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* (London: SCM, 1956), 116–17; Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27: A Commentary,* trans. Thomas H. Trapp, Continental Commentary (hereafter CC), (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 567–68.

52 *Contra*: John Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah Chapters 1–39,* Cambridge Bible Commentary (hereafter CBC) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 210; J. Mauchline, *Isaiah 1–39 Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 193; Arthur S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah Chapters 1–39,* CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 156; Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39: A Commentary,* OTL (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1974), 215–23; J. Alex Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 218–20.

53 R. Norman Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 180; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary,* OTL (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1969), 267.

54 Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, 116; cf. John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah. Introduction, Translation, and Notes,* AB 20 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 135–36; Christopher R. North, *Second Isaiah*, 242–46.

Ezekiel 37:1–14

As noted above in the discussion of Isaiah 26:19, this passage refers to a national resurrection. Israel, who was exiled and scattered among various nations, is now being reassembled by the power of God and restored to the land.[55]

Psalm 1:5

> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement,
> nor sinners in [the] assembly of the righteous.

It is unclear exactly what *bammišpāṭ* ('in the judgement') refers to in this verse. Some suggest that it is the final judgement when the wicked are punished, as described in the book of Revelation;[56] however, the parallel phrase that follows helps to clarify its meaning and states that the wicked will not stand when the righteous assemble together.[57] The righteous ones would most likely assemble together at certain times in the lifetime of the nation, to (1) render decisions for the nation, (2) announce judgement against certain wicked persons, or (3) worship. Longman states, 'In its Old Testament context, it may simply refer to the moment in this life when God brings the consequences on people for their wicked actions. After all, the full-blown teaching on afterlife comes only with the clarity of the New Testament.'[58] Longman goes on to point out that the congregation is the proper context for worship—the same context that is assumed in the Psalms—and thus it seems likely that the wicked will not be among the righteous as they worship.[59] The reason for their absence is not mentioned and may be for any number of causes.

Psalm 11:7

> For the LORD is righteous, he loves righteous [actions];
> upright ones will see his face.

Exactly when 'the upright will behold his [God's] face' is not made clear in this verse. Some, looking at verse 6 which warns of fire-and-brimstone punishment, argue that the passage depicts ultimate punishment in the 'lake of fire' and is therefore a reference to the afterlife. However, it is more likely that the psalmist had in mind Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24), whose punishment from God was destruction by brimstone and fire. Thus, there is a strong contrast between the wicked who were punished in verse 6 and the upright who will experience God's favour in verse 7. Dahood translated the last phrase in verse 7 as 'Our face shall gaze upon the Upright

55 Moshe Greenburg, *Ezekiel 21–37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* AB 22A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 747.

56 Michael Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* AB 16 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 4–5; Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72,* TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 65.

57 Arnold A. Anderson, *Psalms (1–72),* NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 62; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50,* Word Biblical Commentary (hereafter WBC) 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 61; Hans–J. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary*, CC, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1988), 119–20.

58 Tremper Longman III, *Psalms,* TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 58. Cf. Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol* (Downers Grove, IL, and Leicester: InterVarsity, 2002), 227–28.

59 Longman, *Psalms,* 58.

One' and argued that the psalmist believed in an afterlife where the righteous would behold God's face,[60] but the order of the Hebrew text makes this translation unlikely. I agree with Anderson and others who say that even if this is the correct rendering, it need not suggest an afterlife but rather a mere change in one's fortunes here on earth.[61] Thus the wicked will be punished and die, but the upright will continue to live and see God's blessing.

Psalm 16:9–11

> Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices;
> surely my flesh will rest securely,
> because you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
> nor will you let your holy one see a grave.
> You have made known to me the path of life;
> you will fill [me] with joys in your presence,
> pleasures [are] at your right hand forever.

In this psalm of trust, the psalmist expresses his strong assurance of God's protection: 'my flesh will rest securely' (v. 9) and God 'will not abandon my soul to Sheol' nor let him 'see a grave'. Anderson identifies synonymous parallelism here, indicating the psalmist's conviction that he will be delivered from mortal perils until he dies at a good old age.[62] Moreover, God will make known to the psalmist the 'paths of life' or the 'paths that lead to life', a reference to physical life in contrast to death in the previous verse.[63] Verse 11 ends with two parallel phrases that state that there are joy and pleasures forever in God's presence, but the verse does not actually say that the psalmist will experience those joys forever. The word *nēṣaḥ* can mean 'forever', but there are times when it is also limited, referring instead to a long period of time.[64] Because of the flexibility of the word, this verse can appear to continue into the future and could give the impression that the psalmist would be enjoying the pleasures of God in the afterlife. Longman understands this verse as follows: 'Even in its Old Testament context, the idea of not seeing decay and enjoying eternal pleasures in God's presence seems to point to something beyond the grave.' However, when Peter cited Psalm 16:8–11 in his Pentecost sermon, he seemed to suggest that this could not apply to David and thus must apply to Christ.

There appear to be at least three ways to understand Psalm 16:8–11: (1) the psalmist is speaking about himself, and he is assured that in the present, dire situation God will not allow him to die; (2) he believed that he (i.e., the psalmist) would enjoy God's presence forever, suggesting that the psalmist would live in God's presence forever; (3) the psalmist believed that another person about whom he was speaking would enjoy God's presence forever and was not referring to David who

60 Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50*, 68.

61 Anderson, *Psalms (1–72),* 123; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50,* 134; Kraus, *Psalms 1–59,* 204.

62 Anderson, *Psalms (1–72),* 146.

63 John Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41,* Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 233.

64 Anderson, *Psalms (1–72),* 146; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50,* 158; Kraus, *Psalms 1–59,* 241. Cf. Lam 5:20 where it is parallel to 'length of days'; in Ps 77:9 it is parallel 'to generations and generations' (*lədōr wādōr*); and in Job 36:7 kings are said to sit on the throne 'forever' (*lāneṣaḥ*).

died, but rather the Messiah, as Peter argued. I believe that the first option fits best with the rest of the Old Testament, but when the concept of the afterlife developed, these verses could be seen to have helped develop this concept. After all, Peter cited these verses and claimed that they were more completely fulfilled by Jesus who did not remain in Sheol (Acts 2:25-28; 13:35).

Psalm 17:15

> In righteousness I myself will behold your face;
> I will be satisfied (with seeing) your likeness when I awake.

Dahood translates the phrase 'when I awake' as 'at the resurrection'.[65] However, the psalmist's earlier reference to a visit by God in the night (v. 3) suggests instead that he awakes from sleep.[66] The wicked who gather up all the pleasures of this world only to leave them to their children (v. 14) are contrasted with the psalmist, who is satisfied with God's righteous gaze upon his life as opposed to the things of this world. In the context, the psalmist implies that he will be satisfied with beholding or coming into God's presence when he awakes from sleep.

Psalm 18:17–20

> He reached out from on high and took hold of me;
> he drew me out of many waters.
> He rescued me from my powerful enemy,
> from the ones hating me, for they were too strong for me.
> They confronted me in the day of my disaster,
> but the LORD was my support.
> He brought me forth into the spacious place;
> he rescued me because he delighted in me.

Even though the theme here is clearly deliverance, there is no reason to think that this calamity ended in death. In fact, the passage suggests just the opposite—God delivered the psalmist from his enemies even though they were too strong for him. Some have suggested that the 'spacious place' may be Sheol, but in the context, the phrase is more likely a metaphor meant to draw a contrast with the 'many waters' closing in around the psalmist, whom God delivers into an open and safe place. Anderson correlates 'deliverance' with a metaphorical 'broad place':

> In the Hebrew idiom 'distress' is a condition of being hemmed in by trouble, while 'deliverance' is to be brought out of affliction, out of the stranglehold of distress, into a broad place, to be set at liberty (cf. 4:1). Dahood … argues that 'the broad place' (*merḥāḇ*) is a poetic name for the underworld, and he adduces a number of references which describe the vastness of the abode of the dead. His description of Sheol is, of course, right, but it is not certain that 'the broad place' must be the netherworld.[67]

65 Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50,* 99.
66 Anderson, *Psalms (1–72),* 152–53; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50,* 165; Kraus, *Psalms 1–59,* 250.
67 Anderson, *Psalms (1–72),* 160; cf. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 262.

Psalm 30:4

> O LORD, you have brought my soul up from Sheol;
> You have kept me alive from among those going down to the pit.

Hebrew parallelism helps to clarify what this verse means, since the second phrase makes it clear that the psalmist did not die like the others who went to the 'pit' (another name for Sheol). Longman agrees: 'The reasons for his praise quickly follow, indicating that he was motivated by being spared from the grave. He must have been seriously ill, with "one foot in the grave", as we say, but God *lifted him out of the depths* as a bucket is lifted out of a well.'[68]

Psalm 49:15–16

> Like sheep they are destined for Sheol, and death will feed on them.
> The upright will rule over them in the morning. *Selah.*
> But their forms will be for Sheol to consume, (away from) their lofty residence.
> Surely God will redeem my life from the hand of Sheol for he will receive me.

Longman summarizes this section as follows: 'God leads his sheep through "the darkest valley" (including death; Ps. 23:4); death leads its sheep to the slaughter and ultimately to Sheol, the underworld.'[69] Verses 13 and 14 indicate that the foolish are headed for Sheol and will not prosper, whereas the outcome of the righteous is to rule over the wicked 'in the morning'. The question is when—after the troubles are over or after death? The psalmist makes it clear that one can neither live forever (vv. 5–8) nor redeem a soul from death (vv. 7–8). It is therefore impossible to escape Sheol or to live on eternally (v. 9). Both Anderson and Longman believe these verses suggest that the psalmist believes that he will be spared from going to Sheol.[70] Anderson argues:

> If Sheol were the ultimate goal for both the righteous and the wicked, then the latter would be better off than the former, and the whole argument of the Psalm would be very feeble (cf. Lk 16:25). Therefore it seems that either the Psalmist believed that he would not see Sheol (or death) at all (cf. Enoch and Elijah, in Gen 5:24 and 2 Kgs 2:11 respectively), or he hoped that, having died, he would be raised to life again to enjoy the fellowship with God (cf. Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2).[71]

Anderson may be correct, and this passage may be a glimpse into the psalmist's hopes for an afterlife with God, but there is another option also, namely that the psalmist believes that God would spare him from the hand of Sheol at the present moment—not his ultimate destiny. Verse 14 states that the righteous will have victory over the wicked 'in the morning'; the only question is whether morning dawns in this life or in an afterlife. From what we have seen thus far in the psalms, it appears that the righteous have victory over the wicked during this lifetime.

The last phrase of verse 14 may even suggest that the psalmist believes the wicked will be tormented (i.e. 'consumed') in Sheol, but that the righteous are saved from

68 Longman, *Psalms,* 158.
69 Longman, *Psalms,* 214–15.
70 Longman, *Psalms,* 215.
71 Anderson, *Psalms (1–72),* 379.

this torment. If this latter suggestion is correct, then some Israelites may have understood Sheol to be a place of torment, as later depicted in Luke 16:24–25.[72] Craigie views the purpose of these verses somewhat differently:

> The wisdom teacher in Psalm 49 eliminates two possible kinds of human fear: the fear of foes in times of trial (v. 6) and the fear that the wealthy have some kind of advantage in the face of death (v. 17). The teacher eliminates those fears, without explicitly stating a more positive message; yet the positive message is clear in the whole tradition to which he belongs, that wisdom provides the meaning and purpose of living; that wisdom may be found in the fear, or reverence, of the Lord. That wisdom provides also acceptance and calm in the face of dying. And though the psalm, in keeping with the Psalter as a whole, has no explicit theology and hope of life after death, there is nevertheless a confidence in his instruction. For it is important that death be faced without delusions, without the false confidence that may arise from a life judged to be successful by human standards.[73]

Although some have cited the psalms examined here to suggest that Israelites had some kind of hope for a meaningful future in the afterlife, and although some psalms may use terminology that is sufficiently open-ended to allow for the development of such concepts, it seems more likely that these passages refer to deliverance before death. Still, it is possible that some of these psalms were part of the early signs of Israel's developing concept of the afterlife.

Proverbs 14:32

> The wicked are brought down in his (their) calamity,
> but even in one's death the righteous have a refuge.

The last part of this verse suggests that the author may have had some concept of help from God in the afterlife. Whybray points out that 'a great majority of commentators' accept the emendation found in the Revised Standard Version,[74] namely a metathesis between the last two consonants so that the word *bəmôtô* ('in his death') reads as *bətummô* ('in his integrity'), a reading also suggested by the Septuagint's *tē heautou hosiotēti* ('in his holiness'). His argument for the emendation is as follows: 'The Hebrew has *bᵉmôtô* "in his death"; this makes sense only if it is taken as an expression of a belief in personal immortality, which, despite the arguments of Dahood and others, is extremely improbable in Proverbs.'[75] Even Kidner, who takes a position opposite to Whybray, says that 'Job and the Psalms show occasional glimpses, such as this, of what lies normally beyond their view; in any case (as Delitzsch points out) the righteous man commits himself to God in death (Ps 31:5), whatever the state of his knowledge. Whichever reading is adopted,

72 Kraus makes a similar argument: 'Luke 16:19ff. provides the great illumination of the essential content of Psalm 49. Determinative is Luke 16:25. There the rich man is told, "Remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish." This great "reversal" appears already in Psalm 49' (*Psalms 1–59,* 485).

73 Craigie, *Psalms 1–50,* 361.

74 R. Norman Whybray, *Proverbs,* NCBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 223.

75 Whybray, *Proverbs,* 223.

finds refuge (RSV) should be "seeks refuge"; cf. AV, RV, *hath hope*.'[76] If Kidner is correct in this comment, the rest of his argument is a moot point, since the psalmist is merely saying that in death the righteous turn to God for refuge, similar to Psalm 31:5. Once again, it is not clear whether this verse speaks of a refuge after death or merely in the face of imminent death. The contrast between the wicked and the righteous suggests the latter interpretation.

To summarize, during the Monarchical Period several passages speak clearly of a national resurrection or of physical deliverance in this life. While some passages may allow for a developing understanding of what happens in the afterlife, none unambiguously make reference to an individual, physical resurrection. However, this pattern will change beginning around the time of the exile.

After the exile (539 BCE)

At some time during this period, the concept of individual resurrection emerged, though some still maintain that the relevant passages are merely metaphorical. Collins is correct in his disagreement:

> Resurrection language is certainly used metaphorically in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Ezek 37; Hos 6:2), but there is virtually unanimous agreement among modern scholars that Daniel is referring to the actual resurrection of individuals from the dead, because of the explicit language of everlasting life. This is, in fact, the only generally accepted reference to resurrection in the Hebrew Bible.[77]

Daniel 12:2

> And many who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake:
> these to everlasting life and those to shame and everlasting contempt.

Some argue that Daniel 12:2 does not state that 'all who sleep in the dust will arise' (universal resurrection), but rather limits resurrection to *rabbîm* ('many, multitudes'). DiLella reads this in an inclusive sense that indicates all the Jews.[78] However, it is also possible to read the phrase as 'multitudes who sleep in the dust will awake', which is not as limited, but saying that there are a lot of them. Still, it appears that there are only two groups: those who are resurrected ('these') experience 'everlasting life', in contrast to the rest of the resurrected ('those') who awake to disgrace and everlasting contempt. We see that by Daniel's time there is a further progression in the concept of afterlife: all will be resurrected,[79] but the righteous will experience everlasting life and the wicked everlasting contempt.

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76 Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary,* TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1964), 111.

77 John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel,* Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg/Fortress, 1993), 391–92 (cf. his 'Excursus on Resurrection' on 394–97).

78 Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. DiLella, *The Book of Daniel: A New Translation and Commentary,* AB 23 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 307; cf. *HALOT* 3:1171; Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary,* TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978), 204. John E. Goldingay believes *rabbîm* refers only to those Jews who died a martyr's death; see his *Daniel,* WBC 30 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989), 307.

79 Collins, *Daniel,* 393.

While Daniel 12:13 ('But as for you, go [on your way] to the end [of your life] and you will rest; then you will arise for your allotted portion at the end of the days') relates specifically to the prophet Daniel, it also pictures the afterlife. After Daniel reaches the end of his life, he will enter into rest (i.e. the place for the righteous in Sheol) and then will rise again at the end of the age (i.e. the Messiah's death and resurrection marked the beginning of the end of the age).[80]

Conclusion

The progressive development of the concept of afterlife in the Old Testament began as a vague understanding of going to be with their fathers upon death; then Sheol is introduced as the place where both the righteous and the wicked went. Some of the Psalms appear to use open-ended language to allow for a developing concept of the afterlife, even though in their initial context they likely did not mean this. Once the idea of a meaningful afterlife with God emerged, these psalms took on further significance. One of the major developments is found in Daniel 12:2, which clearly indicates a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

While the doctrine of a resurrection is made clear only near the end of the Old Testament time period, it does not contradict what came before but, as Lane notes:

> If God has assumed the task of protecting the patriarchs from misfortune during the course of their life, but fails to deliver them from the supreme misfortune which marks the definitive and absolute check upon their hopes, his protection is of little value. But it is inconceivable that God would provide for the patriarchs some partial tokens of deliverance and leave the final word to death. … If the death of the patriarchs is the last word of their history, there has been a breach of the promises of God guaranteed by the covenant, and of which the formula 'the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob' is the symbol.[81]

Thus, the Old Testament builds a natural foundation and the New Testament concept of individual resurrection flows naturally from the hints given in the text. At the time of Christ's death and resurrection, one thief on the cross could be told he would go immediately into God's presence ('Today you will be with me in Paradise', Lk 23:43), and Paul makes it clear that for believers 'to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23–24). The concept of afterlife is fully developed in the New Testament in the expression of our sure hope that we will be in God's presence after we die, something that the righteous of the Old Testament could only long for. As the author of the book of Hebrews wrote:

> All these people died according to faith without receiving the things promised, but having seen them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were strangers and sojourning upon the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking another homeland. ... But now they long for a better country—that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed himself to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Heb 11:13–16)

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80 Collins, *Daniel,* 402.

81 William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark,* New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 430.

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No Neutral Bystanders When Christians Are Suffering

Thomas Schirrmacher

This message was prepared by WEA Secretary General Thomas Schirrmacher for the 2022 International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. His Scripture text is Hebrews 10:32–35:

> Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

In verse 32, the author of the letter to the Hebrews starts with the words, 'Remember those earlier days.' He seeks to embolden his readers in times of suffering, reminding them of how God helped them in previous times of suffering. This is as true on a small scale, in private and family life, as it is in all of church history: God carries his Church forward in the midst of suffering.

What is truly interesting in this text, however, is that the letter to the Hebrews designates all readers as those who have 'endured in the great contest in the face of suffering', independent of whether this occurred through suffering or through vicarious association with suffering!

This description of all Christians as either suffering or caring deeply for those who suffer precisely reflects the objective of the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP), started by the World Evangelical Alliance long ago and shared by a large number of churches, partners, networks and organizations. Christians who suffer and Christians who stand side by side with those suffering seek to build a community of suffering in prayer. Prayer occurs simultaneously in countries where there is persecution of Christians and where there is no persecution of Christians, and any shade in between.

If we do this—if we stand together—then, whether we are hard hit by persecution or not, all of us together 'do not throw away our confidence', and it is this *shared* confidence, according to verse 35, that 'will be richly rewarded'.

A Christian never lives without experiencing the persecution of Christians! Either he is persecuted or he suffers with the fate of those who are persecuted. And whoever suffers, suffers at the same time with others who, perhaps, are suffering even more! Often, the suffering of Christians takes so many different forms that people might pray for a specific suffering church in one place while that church is praying for those suffering in a different area.

The possibility that someone would simply ignore the suffering of another individual or church and just enjoy the fact that things are going well for him, without this turning into thankful and compassionate involvement for the sake of others, is totally foreign to the mind of the writer of Hebrews!

Christians suffering while other Christians do not suffer side by side with them? Unthinkable to Holy Scripture! Christians who look away while others suffer? Inconceivable!

And yet this is precisely the behaviour of the large majority of Christians around the globe, something we would like to change with the Bible, including this passage from Hebrews, in our hands!

IDOP is a good opportunity to end the uneven situation here and now, to inform yourself about the global situation of the body of Christ, and at least through prayer to have fellowship with those who suffer.

Once a Chinese government official told me that China fears being prayed out of office, much as happened to the regime in East Germany at the end of the Soviet empire. And yes, prayer and peaceful actions in many churches played a major role in the fall of the Berlin Wall and other parts of the Soviet empire. But too many Christians relaxed after 1990 and had the impression that the age of persecution of Christians was over. They overlooked the worsening situations in large countries such as Iran and Pakistan, forgot that communism in China did not end, and forgot that not only atheists but also fundamentalist wings in Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism discriminate against and persecute Christians and others. As a result, the religious freedom specialists of the World Evangelical Alliance decided to begin calling publicly for prayer on the largest possible scale. One Sunday a year for the persecuted church—that should be possible for every local congregation!

Even though there are still too many churches and Christians who never think about their suffering sisters and brothers in Christ, thousands and thousands of churches have started to pray once a year. What have the results been? I see three fruits of a quarter-century of IDOP.

1. To suffer with the suffering is no longer something for specialized agencies or special interest groups in congregations, but more and more it has become an ongoing interest for every Christian, just as it should be according to the New Testament. IDOP probably more than anything else has established awareness that persecution is not a rare or local thing that happens from time to time here and there, but is a permanent companion of preaching the gospel, planting churches and helping the needy.

2. IDOP has had a uniting effect. When people suffer or even die for Christ, it is not the time to discuss our differences. United in prayer, evangelicals, including all their friends such as Baptists or Pentecostals, along with Christians of other traditions, realized that we all live and die for the same Saviour Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, the 'ecumenism of martyrs' has helped to correct ecumenism where it tends to be built on the lowest common denominator.

3. There also is a heavy political fruit and influence of IDOP. The German Evangelical Alliance started a German version of IDOP from the beginning and installed the Sunday into the church calendar of Germany. Some days before the recognition of IDOP, the largest German newspaper quoted me on its cover. The

reaction in the political world was immense. Shortly after that, our federal parliament discussed the persecution of Christians. We had planned only to pray, but God had planned much more.

IDOP has become the largest regular religious freedom event worldwide. Beyond praying for Christians, IDOP has made the situation of other religions and of adherents of non-religious worldviews in countries of concern more widely known to an audience of millions than any other tool. So even though it is a Christian worship service, the effects have benefitted many other people of good will as well. Several governments have taken up the topic of religious freedom for all after years of IDOP in their country, as they know that this topic will come up regularly, again and again.

Hopefully we are like Esther, who did what the letter of Hebrews speaks about centuries before it was written. She was not neutral and selfishly looking out for her own future. She was willing to offer her life to become active on behalf of the endangered people of God. And she organized the people of God to pray on a large scale.

Then God chose to change the situation by himself: 'In that night the king could not sleep' (Esther 6:1). God changed everything without Esther or anyone else in one night. But after that, Esther was needed again. She went back to the king, told the missing part of the story and helped to save God's people. And once again, she called for a large-scale day of prayer by all of God's people.

God can change everything without us. We cannot change anything without God. But God wants us to ask him, in community with all God's people, and then, when he changes things, he graciously makes us a part of his initiatives.

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How the Church Got Rid of Persecution: A Critical Analysis of Famous Cases

Dennis P. Petri

We talk a lot about how to oppose religious persecution; we don't talk as much about the possible unintended consequences of our efforts. This article analyses three well-known episodes where Christians worked to end persecution, along with the sometimes complicated long-term results of those apparent successes.

Persecution has been a major theme throughout church history. Individual Christians and entire Christian civilizations have been subject to great tribulations at different moments in time. But history is also filled with important victories for the church and for religious freedom. Indeed, there are episodes in which the church successfully got rid of persecution, or at the very least achieved substantial religious freedom.

We need to know the great periods of persecution, but we also need to celebrate religious freedom in church history. These positive examples show very clearly that cultures can move toward a greater respect for religious freedom. What does it take to achieve greater religious freedom, and at what price? Is it really worth having? In this essay, I critically assess three historical examples of successful struggles: Constantine's embrace of Christianity, the struggle for religious rights in the West and Mexico's fight with anticlericalism.

Constantine's embrace of Christianity

The Roman persecution was one of the most violent in church history. However, it ended not with the total or partial annihilation of the church, as with the Mongol or Muslim persecutions,[1] but with Christianity becoming the state religion, after the emperor Constantine allegedly became a Christian himself and transformed his empire into a religious state. This remarkable turnaround meant that after intense persecution, Christianity began to thrive.

With Constantine's turnaround, suddenly the church went from a small, marginal, persecuted sect to 'owning' the state. But was it really that sudden? In the

Dennis P. Petri (PhD, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) is International Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom and Professor in International Relations and Head of the Chair of Humanities of the Latin American University of Science and Technology (Costa Rica). Email: dpetri@iirf.global.

1 See Ronald Boyd-MacMillan, 'Does Persecution Always Bring Growth? Global Persecutions Suggest Otherwise!' *International Journal for Religious Freedom* 12, no. 1/2 (2019): 181–92.

fourth century, the church wasn't a marginal sect anymore. And did the church really end up taking over the state, or was it more the other way around? Was it really an improvement in terms of religious freedom? Let's first look at how this groundbreaking event happened before evaluating its legacy.

The exact reasons for Constantine's embrace of Christianity remain a mystery to historians. Some, using arguments rooted in political economy, assert that Constantine's decision to recognize the Christian religion was motivated mainly by political pragmatism. Under this interpretation, seeing that the persecution of Christians was not working and that Christians were growing in numbers, Constantine adopted the 'if you can't beat them, join them' approach. Some believe that Constantine needed the Christians for a wide variety of reasons, such as to pay taxes to fund his civil service, to serve as civil servants themselves (because they happened to be more literate than others, having learned to read the Bible), or because of their exemplary submission to authority. Constantine is also believed to have wanted Roman society to develop and move away from archaic pagan customs.

Besides factors of power politics, it is very possible that Constantine did experience a genuine conversion. The historian Eusebius records that on a military march, Constantine looked up at the sun and saw a cross of light, which he later understood to be a sign from God. Some believe he converted because his mother, Helena, did (and sometimes women do have a lot of influence on powerful men!), while others think he never converted at all or only on his deathbed.

At any rate, we can trust that the God of history accomplishes His will through historical events. Whether Constantine's conversion was genuine is not of much interest here. What matters is that for some (supernatural?) reason, Constantine became convinced that religious rights should be granted to Christians. Our concern is to try to understand what brought about this major political shift, along with its legacy.

Constantine's embrace of Christianity could not just have happened out of the blue. There must have been a sequence of events that led to this result; otherwise Constantine would never have considered making Christianity the imperial religion, nor would it have been accepted by Roman society. Moreover, there must have been substantial support for the decision, since Constantine's successors decided to continue his policy.

Let's go back in time a few centuries. Ever since the church's founding, many Christians bore witness to their faith and were persecuted for it. This ongoing process must have gradually raised awareness in Roman society about the positive message of Christianity. After all, Paul had taught the church, 'Let your gentleness be evident to all' (Phil 4:5). If Christians stood apart from others as honest and hard-working citizens, this must eventually have had some impact. By consistently displaying good behaviour and showing their service to society, Christians may gradually have debunked the widely believed lie that they were a dangerous sect that worshipped a donkey head and sacrificed children.

Some Christians may even have undertaken what today we would call lobbying efforts. We know that Paul requested to be taken to 'Caesar', one of Constantine's historical predecessors. Paul did not witness only to the emperor. Along the way, he had the opportunity to testify at different levels of government (Governor Felix, his

successor Porcius Festus, and various others on his long journey to Rome). Paul must have repeated the same advocacy message over and over to his audience: 'We Christians are not dangerous, we are good people. You have nothing to worry about and you should respect our rights.' For example, to Felix, 'Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come' (Acts 24:25). He was trained to make this argument compellingly, based on his extensive knowledge of Roman law.

Paul wasn't the only early advocate for religious freedom. Peter and other apostles attempted the same thing. Maybe the influential people who converted, such as the Roman centurion in Luke 7 whose faith impressed Jesus, Cornelius (to whom Peter ministered in Acts 10) and Paul and Silas' jailer in Acts 16, also became advocates for the religious rights of Christians. Much later, Constantine's mother could have been not only a witness of Christ but also a particularly effective advocate for religious rights.

Although Paul, Peter and others exercised their ministries centuries before Constantine and ended up being crucified, their pleas, together with the positive testimony of the growing number of Christians, likely had a lasting impact on the imperial institution. At some point, the Romans must have realized that Christianity was no threat to their political power. (Or perhaps they realized that it was such a powerful force that they had to get control over it.)

There is no way to know for sure how much influence such Christian advocacy efforts had, but we know that Christianity started growing rapidly in numbers. As it did so, it also evolved. Christianity in the fourth century looked very different from what it was in the first and second centuries. By the second century, Christianity became established as an independent religion from Judaism, a process that continued through the next century. The gradual emergence of an 'orthodoxy' led Christianity to become a more homogeneous faith, organized around a uniform body of doctrines with centralized leadership structures.[2]

As Christianity's internal organization started to improve, so did its internal solidarity networks. More than the numerical growth of Christianity, this probably worried the Roman rulers most, as they perceived it as a threat to the reigning social order. But although persecution intensified during the third century, the church remained more united, better organized and generally more resilient. So resilient, in fact, that the Romans ultimately failed to crush Christianity.

One important question Christians needed to figure out in this period was their relation with the authority of the state. A theology of government started to emerge. One aspect that Constantine may have liked was the inclusion of the Old Testament in the biblical canon, with its stories about King David and the other kings of Israel, which he would later try to embody, conveniently using theology to consolidate his power and geographically expand his empire.

We can already see the contours of a political deal in the making. In exchange for their recognition of Constantine's political authority, the Christian bishops obtained not only the legalization of their religion, but also state funding to run their institutions. Constantine's power was strengthened, but he also took upon himself

2 Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, *Jewish Insights into Scripture* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017).

the duty to help the church define and maintain orthodoxy. He sponsored high-level meetings such as the Council of Nicea to solve theological disputes. He also aggressively set out to persecute other religions and other Christians who were viewed as heretics, such as Gnostic Christians.

To summarize, two parallel sets of interpretations exist for the victory of Christianity over persecution. The first is spiritual. This interpretation argues that the consistent witness and pleas of Christians convinced Roman society that Christians were not a threat but a force for good. The second is political, emphasizing how Christianity's growth and organization led it to become a political force that could force a deal with the emperor. Both interpretations have their place.

Constantine will forever be known as the Roman emperor who put an end to the persecution of Christians. But was his legacy really positive? Constantine effectively renounced his godly imperial status in favor of Jesus, but at the same time he took control of the religion and definitely held a very strong hand in pushing for the adoption of a set of doctrines that were not always generally accepted at the time.

With Constantine's turnaround, the most intense persecution of the church stopped. The crucifixions and the throwing of Christians to the lions were halted. The political expansion of Constantine's empire also allowed an expansion of the gospel that would otherwise have happened much more slowly. State funding became available for the reproduction of Bibles on a larger scale and for the building of ambitious basilicas. And Western culture as a whole became thoroughly Christian, diffusing its influence through institutions and traditions.

Meanwhile, it cannot be considered positive that Constantine's political system perpetuated the early church's obsession with 'orthodoxy', as it violently eradicated dissenting voices and perspectives. Paradoxically, what brought a halt to the persecution of the church rapidly became an instrument of persecution. Indeed, Constantine started immediately by outlawing any religion other than Christianity, and the empire became very sectarian in its view of heresy.

Things did not end there. The political dominance of the Vatican that started to emerge after Constantine's turnaround allowed very dark episodes in church history, including the Inquisition, the practice of obscurantism, and later the European wars of religion. It installed a system in which either the state controlled the church or the church controlled the state, always imposing its version of the truth. No room was left for any form of pluralism, and it would remain that way for centuries.

Constantine's turnaround also initiated a complex, intricate relationship between the church and the state that was comprehensively addressed only much later in history. At times, the state had the upper hand and at other times the church had it, but this symbiosis between church and state became a defining element of the post-Roman period and the Middle Ages, which can hardly be viewed positively. It allowed despotism to thrive, because monarchs could claim they had received their sovereignty directly from God while conveniently forgetting the biblical command to use their power to pursue social justice.

The struggle for religious rights in the West

During the Middle Ages, there was no religious freedom in Europe. The European nations were ruled by theocratic regimes, government systems that based their legitimacy upon divine sovereignty but were in reality autocratic and despotic in nature. Flowing out of humanism (not to be confused with the modern-day pseudo-religious group), an intellectual movement called the Enlightenment began denouncing the injustices to which European societies were subjected. In time, these denunciations inspired popular uprisings all over Europe, of which the French Revolution was the most visible expression.

Parallel to the Enlightenment, and in many respects as a precursor to it, the Reformation started in Germany under the leadership of Martin Luther (1517), followed by John Calvin in France and Switzerland and others such as Huldrych Zwingli and John Knox. Martin Luther's points of argument were theological and doctrinal in nature, but he also denounced the abuse of power in the church. As the Reformation took off, more and more people, mainly in northern Europe, declared themselves Protestants and abandoned the Catholic Church.

At this point, religious freedom became a major social and political issue. The growth of Protestantism led to bloody European wars of religion that would last throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. Eventually, religious freedom found its way into various Enlightenment manifestos, including article 10 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen[3] and the works of influential philosophers such as Voltaire and John Locke. The American Revolution crystallized the notion of religious freedom even further.

An important historical milestone was the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which put an end to the wars of religion and started to disenfranchise politics from the influence of the Vatican. This did not mean there was religious freedom, especially for religious minorities, because national rulers were allowed to impose an official religion on their citizens, but it did start a process in which states were no longer subordinate to religious institutions. Europe continued to be embroiled in various wars, which required a definitive settlement. The Congress of Vienna in 1815 provided some matter of stability and peace in Europe until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, and it explicitly recognized the critical importance of religious toleration for peace and stability. Although many challenges regarding respect for religious rights remained, the Congress of Vienna marked the beginning of a gradual acceptance and enforcement of religious freedom in the West.

The timid recognition of religious toleration in the early 19th century was the culmination of a political and intellectual process that started with the Reformation and was included in the Enlightenment's agenda. Protestants and other religious minorities started to adopt the language of the Enlightenment philosophers to formulate their claims for religious freedom. Some religious minorities, including the Jewish community, even sent 'lobbyists' to the Congress of Vienna to advocate for their rights.

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3 Article 10 stated, 'No one may be disquieted for his opinions, even religious ones, provided that their manifestation does not trouble the public order established by the law.'

Complementary explanations for the gradual acceptance of religious freedom can be mentioned. It was also motivated by political pragmatism, because it became obvious that this was the only way to accommodate the deeply entrenched religious cleavages in European nations. Furthermore, the American Revolution and some smaller-scale, albeit imperfect, experiments in Transylvania and the Netherlands had already demonstrated that the acceptance of religious pluralism could work to defuse social tensions. The development of travel literature also accounts for an increased acceptance of religious differences, because it allowed ordinary Europeans to become acquainted with other religious practices.

The movement leading to the political acceptance of religious toleration, which later expanded to religious freedom, is generally considered an important democratic advance and part of a broader movement towards respect for civil and political rights. Although it was still very imperfectly applied at the turn of the 19th century, it created the necessary conditions for many (though not all) Christian and non-Christian groups to worship freely, develop training facilities and implement missionary programs. It also gradually reduced the state's interference in the internal affairs of religious communities. Finally, it ended the greater part of religious violence in Europe, although it could not prevent anti-semitism from developing as it did. Yet its legacy is impressive. The international order established after World War II included religious freedom as a human right, and religious freedom is now an integral part of the foreign policy of many democratic nations.

These improvements are extremely valuable and should be celebrated. On a global scale, the new respect for religious freedom meant that Christianity could spread and grow considerably. At the same time, some aspects of the Enlightenment's legacy in terms of religious freedom may not have been so positive. I will highlight four negative aspects of this legacy.

1. **The Holocaust and religious repression in European colonies**. Of course, the Enlightenment did not cause the Holocaust; on the contrary, the Holocaust very clearly contradicted essential Enlightenment ideals. But this is the most glaring evidence that religious violence in Europe did not end in 1815. Furthermore, in the overseas colonies of European nations, there were several serious incidents of religious repression.

2. **Beyond the separation between church and state.** The Enlightenment promoted the institutionalization of the principle of separation between church and state, implying that the church should not interfere in government and the state should not meddle in the internal affairs of religious institutions.[4] Although this correction of the unhealthy symbiotic relation between church and state that had developed since Constantine's embrace of Christianity was a good thing, some Enlightenment actors went further. In France, an extreme form of church-state separation, known as *laïcité*, was adopted in 1903. In practice, *laïcité* is anti-religious, outlawing any form of religious expression in the public sphere. Even though other European nations have milder models of separation, a growing discomfort with public expressions of religion has been observed throughout the 20th and the early

4 Rowan Williams refers to this as 'procedural secularism'. See Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2012).

21st centuries.[5] More and more often, the principle of separation between church and state is mistakenly understood to mean a separation between faith and politics. As a result, it is becoming increasingly less acceptable in modern society to base one's political positions on religious convictions.[6]

3. **A door to secularization?** The opening up of the religious market as a result of the Enlightenment allowed many persecuted religious groups to worship freely, but it also opened the door to a steady process of secularization, with ever larger numbers of people abandoning Christianity altogether.[7] Of course, secularization is a complex sociological phenomenon that deserves a more thorough analysis,[8] but it is certainly true that the regime of religious toleration created the legal possibility for people to abandon the church.[9] The Dutch historian and legal scholar Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer goes even further in his seminal collection of lectures, *Unbelief and Revolution* (1847). There he argues that the Enlightenment did not *lead* to secularization; rather, in his view, this revolutionary wave was itself the result of the presence of unbelief in society.[10]

This item is controversial, because, of course, we cannot force people to believe in God. But the end result of the Enlightenment process is that Christianity in the West is now much smaller than it used to be. Does this mean that more religious freedom ultimately weakens religion?

4. **A door to secular intolerance?** In Groen van Prinsterer's line of thought, there are a number of core fallacies in the Enlightenment's program, to which he refers as 'Revolution'. One of them is that divine sovereignty as a foundation of government was replaced by popular sovereignty. Although Groen van Prinsterer does not approve the despotism of the monarchs of earlier times who based their authority on their claim of divine sovereignty, he asserts that popular sovereignty is equally problematic. This is because, in his view, political sovereignty does not belong to the people; it belongs to God alone.

Groen van Prinsterer's analysis does not imply that we should reject democratic governments in favor of autocratic rulers, but we should heed his warning that the language of rights promoted through the 'Revolution', although it seems positive on

5 Rowan Williams calls this 'programmatic secularism'.

6 In *Unbelief and Revolution* (1847), Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer compellingly argues how absurd this is. Everyone bases their political positions on something, whether it's an ideology or a set of religious beliefs. Neutrality in politics and in life in general is impossible. Moreover, a correct understanding of Christianity implies responding to the biblical call to reform culture.

7 Debilitating the significance of secularization theory, Philip Jenkins argues that the penetration of Christianity in Europe during the Middle Ages was not as deep as we may think. See Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

8 See the various articles included in the 2020 special issue of the *International Journal for Religious Freedom* on 'Responding to secularism' (edited by Janet Epp Buckingham, available at https://worldea.org/yourls/46408).

9 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

10 We could debate whether Groen van Prinsterer's interpretation of the origins of the Enlightenment is correct. Maybe the Enlightenment really did start off on good principles, such as the biblical understanding of the dignity of all human beings that flowed out of the Reformation. After all, many Enlightenment thinkers were committed Christians. On the other hand, arguably at some point the Enlightenment was 'hijacked' by progressive thinkers with an anti-Christian agenda.

paper, carries within it the germ of great injustices.[11] In the same vein, one could argue that the non-discrimination and hate speech legislation being adopted in the West, although it may seem positive on paper, constitutes limitations of freedom of religious expression. When Enlightenment ideals are taken to an extreme, they can actually become a source of persecution.

Mexico's fight with anti-clericalism

During colonial times, Catholicism was the hegemonic religion in Mexico, but the Church was under the domination of the political rulers through a figure called the *patronato*. Resulting regulations on church life implied severe limitations on church autonomy. After the country gained its independence in 1810, the rights of the *patronato* were initially transferred to the new Mexican Republic, much to the dislike of the Vatican.

Because of the social influence of the Catholic clergy and the potential of Catholicism to establish a single cultural identity in the early years of the struggling Mexican nation, the post-independence rulers agreed to give the Catholic Church a hegemonic status. Catholicism became the state religion, and the Church was granted vast privileges. (Similar arrangements occurred in other Latin American countries.) Restrictions were also placed on the first Protestant missionary movements in the middle of the 19th century.

Throughout the 19th century, anti-clericalism gradually became stronger. During a phase in Mexico's political history known as *La Reforma* (1855–1876), anti-clericalism was paramount and led to the elimination of church privileges, seizures of church property and other violent attacks on the church. The Mexican revolution (1910–1920), inspired by the French revolution, gave the reform laws (*Leyes Reformas*) constitutional status and even expanded them.[12]

As was chronicled by Graham Greene in *The Lawless Roads* (1939), persecution of Catholic Christians (there were hardly any Protestants in Mexico until halfway through the 20th century) was severe during that time. With the proclamation of an anti-clerical Constitution in 1917, acts of religious worship were outlawed, churches were desecrated and confiscated, and priests were pursued, with many of them being killed. As a reaction to these anti-clerical policies, which increased even further in 1924, a civil war between Catholic rebels and the anti-clerical Mexican government broke out, known as the Cristero War (1926–1929). The persecution had a devastating effect on the church. According to one count, the total number of priests dropped from 4,500 in 1926 to 334 in 1934.

After 1934, the most violent forms of oppression diminished, but repression of the church continued. Only in 1940 did the persecution decrease when the newly elected president, Manuel Ávila Camacho, agreed to relax some of the anti-clerical provisions in exchange for the church's support for peace.

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11 Groen van Prinsterer has later been credited for having foreseen the rise of totalitarian governments during the 20th century, such as Nazism and fascism, which were rooted in legality but justified atrocious crimes.

12 Anthony Gill, *Rendering unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

This strict secularism instituted after the Mexican revolution was (and is) atypical for the region, as Mexico is by far the most extreme case of state control over religion. From the 1917 Constitution onwards, the state exercised more regulatory power over religion than ever. Catholics were officially outlawed, but since all religious organizations were denied the right to exist, Protestants suffered as well. Over the years, religious regulations were relaxed somewhat but still hung above the country's religious groups like a sword of Damocles.

A major turning point occurred in 1992, when the most anti-clerical articles of the Constitution were amended. The political weakening of the hegemonic PRI political party had already started, and the increasing social activism of Catholic organizations, encouraged by two historic visits by Pope John Paul II to Mexico in 1979 and 1990, accelerated the momentum for a constitutional revision. Among the changes, religious organizations were finally legally recognized, registered religions were granted equal protection before the law, and clergy were given full citizenship rights. Religious organizations gained the right to own property, access to public broadcasts of religious groups, and permission to hold religious services in public.[13]

The new situation created in 1992 benefitted Protestant churches as much as it benefitted Catholics, and it was an historical milestone for the country's Protestant community. Under the radar, Protestants had increased in numbers since the first Protestant missionaries arrived in the 1910s, in spite of restrictions on visas, evangelism and Bible distribution. Cirilo Cruz, president of the Confraternidad Evangélica de México (Evangelical Confraternity of Mexico), commented, 'When the 1992 changes were implemented and all Protestant denominations registered, we found out for the first time how many we were.'[14]

How did Mexican Catholics manage to recover their religious rights? Let's look at two possible explanations. The first is offered by Anthony Gill in *The Political Origins of Religious Liberty* (2008). Gill argues that political interests explain the regulation of religion to a considerable extent. Under his model, politicians expand religious freedom only if this serves their interests—maintaining power, maximizing government revenue to promote economic growth, minimizing civil unrest and minimizing the cost of ruling. The degree of religious freedom is thus determined by the feasibility of restricting or not restricting the rights of religious groups. His analysis of the Mexican case study shows that religious freedom was expanded for the Catholic Church only once the revolutionary actors felt confident enough that their political power would not be threatened.[15]

An alternative explanation for the successful removal of anti-clerical policies could be that the persecution simply failed, in a very similar way to the Roman persecution. Indeed, the Mexican revolutionaries were unable to legislate the church out of existence, nor did they manage it through violent oppressive tactics. For some reason, a majority of Mexicans had sufficient resilience, possibly thanks to their

13 Anthony Gill, *The Political Origins of Religious Liberty* (New York: Cambridge University Press: 2008).

14 Dennis P. Petri, *The Specific Vulnerability of Religious Minorities* (PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2020).

15 Marcelo Bartolini, 'Toward the Effective Protection of Religious Freedom in Mexico', *International Journal for Religious Freedom* 12, no. 1/2 (2019): 165–80.

international connections with the Vatican and other governments, to endure the persecution just long enough.

Was enduring anti-clericalism worth it? That question is hard to answer at this stage, and in fact the fight may not be quite over. The Catholic Church did suffer some very important blows during the 20th century from which it has not yet recovered. Although most of the historic anti-clerical provisions are no longer in force, some elements of Mexico's anti-clerical heritage can still be observed. In many respects, Mexico's religious regime remains more extreme than even France's *laïcité*. Christians continue to have restricted access to the media, confessional education still faces restrictions, and religious ministers are forbidden from making any political statements.[16]

More importantly, an important legacy of Mexico's religious history is that its society is characterized by a very strong suspicion of and discomfort with anything religious, including ministry activity or faith-based social work.[17] Although the Mexican population is majority-Christian, both religious observance and religious literacy are at a very low level, and religious actors have little moral authority to express and promote Christian values, particularly in relation to organized crime.[18]

President Lázaro Cárdenas (who served from 1934 to 1940) famously said, 'I am tired of closing churches and finding them full. Now I am going to open the churches and educate the people and in ten years I shall find them empty.' This strategy may have worked better than persecution!

Moreover, many challenges for religious freedom remain in Mexico, particularly in rural and indigenous territories and in areas with a strong presence of organized crime.[19] In addition, a new persecution engine is increasingly making itself felt: secular intolerance, which draws on the old anti-clericalism in combination with a growing intolerance of conservative Christian views on the sanctity of life and marriage.[20]

Concluding remarks

In this article, I have reviewed three historic examples of how the church successfully got rid of persecution. I selected these cases because I happen to be quite familiar with them, but it would be very interesting to analyse similar cases from other geographical areas and time frames.

I have tried to demonstrate two things. First, it is possible to get rid of persecution, and the church has been quite successful at it on some occasions. The

16 Bartolini, 'Toward the Effective Protection'.

17 Dennis P. Petri (ed.), 'Perceptions on Self-Censorship: Confirming and Understanding the "Chilling Effect", Case Studies on France, Germany, Colombia and Mexico' (Vienna: OIDAC/OLIRE/IIRF, 2022), https://worldea.org/yourls/46409.

18 Dennis P. Petri and Marlies Glasius, 'Vulnerability and Active Religious Behavior: Christians and Crime Syndicates in Mexico', *Human Rights Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2022): 514–36; Dennis P. Petri, 'The Regulation of Religion by Organized Crime: Conceptualization of an Underexplored Phenomenon Through a Case Study in Northeast Mexico', *International Journal for Religious Freedom* 14, no. 1/2 (2021): 123–41.

19 Petri and Glasius, 'Vulnerability and Active Religious Behaviour'; Petri, 'The Regulation of Religion by Organized Crime'.

20 Petri, 'Perceptions on Self-Censorship'.

specific tactics used in the cases I reviewed, but also in other cases, can serve as encouragement and inspiration for Christians who are currently undergoing persecution. They also provide templates of possible responses to persecution that could be replicated in other contexts. In particular, they highlight the importance of resilience and the role of political advocacy.

At the same time, I have also indicated that persecution, even when it is overcome, can have a lasting effect on the church. Constantine's embrace of Christianity allowed the growth of Christianity but also entangled it with political power. The implementation of the ideals of the Enlightenment introduced the notion of religious toleration but also paved the way for the twin processes of secularization and secularism. Mexico's historic anti-clericalism, although it has weakened recently, has created a culture of suspicion toward public expressions of religions, especially Christianity.

ERT (2022) 46:4, 354–364

Political Repression of Religious Leaders' Manifestations of Faith in Nicaragua

Rossana Muga and Teresa Flores

This article on the current struggles of Christians in Nicaragua not only describes their situation to the world but also exemplifies the high-quality research activity of Christian organizations dedicated to improving conditions for Christians under threat.

Since the 2018 social crisis in Nicaragua, the tension between the state and the church has been escalating, especially as religious leaders have demonstrated their disagreement with the authoritarian and repressive tendency of the government.

After the November 2021 elections, which consolidated the Sandinista dictatorship in power and therefore also the abuses against opposition voices, the church has found itself exposed to various types of harassment because its position—in accordance with its religious principles—contradicts the guidelines of the Sandinista party.

For this reason, we will analyse how both the right to freedom of religion and freedom of expression have been violated at the same time. We will then present various scenarios to illustrate how religious expression has motivated political reprisals. The information has been obtained from research done by both the World Watch Research Unit (WWR) of Open Doors International and the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America (OLIRE).

The role of religious leaders since the 2018 social outburst

A series of civil society claims against the pension system back in April 2018 culminated in anti-government protests demanding the president's resignation. The manifestations of citizen dissatisfaction were and still are violently repressed by the authorities. Along the way, various actors have been involved, either on the government's side, justifying the regime's violent reactions, or as part of the so-called 'opposition' calling for respect for democracy and human rights. Among the latter, we can include the Catholic Church, one of the last institutions that enjoy credibility and legitimacy in the country, and which has suffered all kinds of hostilities that have affected the viability of its projects and activities, the integrity of its churches, and the human security of its members.

Rossana Muga Gonzales is Americas Coordinator for the World Watch Research Unit of Open Doors International. Email: rossanar@mailnet.info. **Teresa Flores Chiscul** is Director of the Observatory for Religious Freedom in Latin America (OLIRE). Email: tflores@olire.org; website: www.olire.org.

To understand the reason behind these reprisals, we must understand the role the church has played during the social crisis[1] and how it has been perceived by the Ortega-Murillo regime. From our point of view, the church, especially the Catholic Church, has fulfilled three roles.

Mediator and witness

From the beginning of the crisis, the Catholic Church participated in attempts at dialogue convened by various civil society organizations, political and business coalitions. However, since the beginning of the negotiations, the government's refusal to comply with the demands of these groups was evident. Among the demands were respect for the rule of law, new elections, the return to democracy and the separation of powers to achieve peace and national reconciliation, as well as the release of political prisoners and the abandonment of the use of paramilitaries as agents of repression.

In addition, given the continuation of violent repression against protesters and any dissident voices, the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua made known in March 2019 its decision not to accept the invitation to participate in a new dialogue process. It instead chose to focus on accompanying the people by exercising its pastoral mission. The Apostolic Nuncio Waldemar Stanislaw Sommertag, representing the Vatican, remained as the only witness on behalf of the Catholic Church at the Dialogue Table, which was definitively suspended in 2019.

Shelter and agent of humanitarian assistance

In this aspect, a distinction must be made. In the case of the Catholic Church, most leaders directed their efforts towards assisting the people not only with material but also with spiritual care. Bishops and priests mingled with the demonstrators to help the injured or to prevent police or paramilitary groups from continuing the violent attacks. From the churches, the priests rang bells as a form of warning, so that the people would be protected from the violence of the police, paramilitary and regime sympathizers. They also acted as intercessors in the liberation of missionaries and students stationed in sanctuaries besieged by paramilitaries. As a result, the Catholic Church was accused of not really being a mediator, but of being committed to supporting the coup plotters.[2]

With respect to other Christian denominations, such as Protestants and evangelicals, the relationship with the government is far from homogeneous. Some have been wrongly labelled as party sympathizers due to the regime's attempt to create a false image of its close relationship with them. Some evangelical church leaders pointed out that, due to this misconception, many of the participants in the 2018 protests felt afraid to come to them and accept their help. Unlike the Catholic Church, their church buildings did not serve as shelters because in many cases these denominations do not have permanent staff, which did not allow them to open their

1 In Nicaragua, the relationship between the government and the various religious groups has undergone changes over time. In this article, we will focus on the political tension that has influenced the church-state relationship since the social crisis of 2018.

2 Carlos Salinas Maldonado, 'Ortega Attacks the Church and Calls the Bishops of Nicaragua Coup Plotters', *El País*, 21 July 2018, https://worldea.org/yourls/46410.

buildings during the most critical moments of the protests. In many cases, young people attending evangelical churches went to the homes of friends who were members or leaders of the church. In these instances, help was provided on an interpersonal level rather than an institutional one.[3]

During the 2018 crisis, members of the evangelical church also were accused by paramilitaries of collaborating with enemies of the government. Even the young volunteers distributing food were harassed and accused of participating in the protests. Some evangelical groups also faced challenges due to the government's repression, although the extent of their vulnerability is not clear due to their uneven structure and lack of information. Clearly, the religious sector has expressed opposition and has therefore suffered reprisals. It is threatened with losing its status to operate legally in the country, as is the case with other civil society organizations.

In both cases, any work of care for the needy and material and/or spiritual attention that the church provided to the demonstrators and their families was interpreted by the government as a challenge to its authority and a declaration of opposition to its political interests, so that religious leaders (mostly Catholics) were labelled and dealt with as if they were coup plotters, terrorists and/or enemies.

Defender of human rights and critic of the government

The Catholic Church—through the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua (CEN) and the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace of the Archdiocese of Managua, as well as through the voices of many other bishops and priests—has directly and openly called for peace and justice and has severely questioned the undermining of state institutions and democracy, the multiple violations of human rights (including the limitations on the social, civil and political rights of citizens), and the violent repression against anyone perceived as a dissident or opponent.[4] Even during the presidential electoral process of November 2021, members of the Catholic clergy warned about the lack of conditions for democratic elections; on the other hand, they also encouraged the people to fulfil their civic duties while following their conscience and tried to discourage non-participation.[5]

As described in this section, during the 2018 social outburst, the church (both Catholic and some evangelical groups) supported the protesters and endorsed their petitions, urged the government to stop the unbridled violence and denounced human rights violations. Nonetheless, due to the increasingly critical stance of church authorities, since June 2018 and especially after Daniel Ortega's questioned electoral victory in November 2021, pressure and attacks on sanctuaries and clergy, especially of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, have increased.

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3 Open Doors International World Watch Research Unit, 'Nicaragua: Full Country Dossier' (2022), https://worldea.org/yourls/46411 (password: freedom).

4 Christian Alvarenga, 'Nicaragua: Church Advocates "Respect for Human Rights"', *Exaudi Catholic News*, 8 July 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46412; Diario Las Américas, 'Nicaragua: Catholic Church Calls for the Release of Political Prisoners', 22 December 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46413.

5 Swiss Info, 'In Nicaragua There Are No Conditions for Democratic Elections, Says the Diocese', 10 August 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46414; El Diario AR, 'The Church of Nicaragua Leaves "to the Conscience of Each Citizen" to Vote or Not in the Elections', 22 October 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46415.

Along the way, the Catholic Church became the institution with the greatest support and legitimacy in the country, which is why the government began a campaign to weaken the feeling of unity against the regime, delegitimize the civil fight and, above all, intimidate the Church.[6] In general, repressive actions against religious groups, although mainly targeting leaders and ministers of worship, also reach committed lay people and parishioners who publicly defend them.

Politically motivated religious freedom violations

We will now reflect on the tensions between the protection of the right to freedom of expression and the right to religious freedom in Nicaragua, taking into consideration the interconnection between both rights and how reprisals against speech, expressions or manifestations of faith, especially when they are not in line with the interests of the government, become politically motivated forms of violation of religious freedom.

At the national level, among the constitutional provisions that protect freedom of conscience, thought and religion in Nicaragua are Articles 14, 29, 49, 69 and 124. The Constitution establishes that the state has no official religion, and it recognizes that Christian values are principles of the Nicaraguan nation, but also socialist ideals. It indicates that everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, thought and religion, but it also states that no one can evade observing the laws or prevent others from exercising their rights and fulfilling their duties by invoking religious beliefs. In most cases, the national interest is thereby placed above the observance of the right to religious freedom under the terms of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Article 18 of the UDHR, Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and General Comment 22 on Article 18 of the ICCPR illustrate the multidimensional nature of the right to religious freedom. The full exercise of this right to practise and express one's faith also involves the exercise of other rights, such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, and the right to education, among others.

On the other hand, Article 19 of the UDHR states that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of borders. According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, freedom of expression has a three-part function in any democratic system: (1) it is an individual right without which the right to think for oneself and to share one's thoughts with others would be denied; (2) it strengthens the functioning of pluralistic and deliberative democratic systems through the protection and promotion of the free flow of information, ideas and expressions of

6 Álvaro Augusto Espinoza Rizo, 'The Churches in the Face of State Violence in the Protests against the Sandinista Government in Nicaragua (from April 2018 to the Present)', in *Latin America and Peace? Proposals to Think about and Face the Crisis of Violence*, edited by Christine Hatzky, Sebastián Martínez Fernández, Joachim Michael and Heike Wagner (Buenos Aires: Teseo, 2021), 351–94.

all kinds; and (3) it is a key tool for the exercise of other fundamental rights.[7]

In this sense, it is legitimate to make use of free forms of opinion and expression to manifest one's faith. Under the concept of interdependence and multidimensionality of human rights, in this way both the right to freedom of expression and the right to religious freedom are exercised.

Moreover, the possibility for religious leaders to express their opinions regarding public affairs, including political affairs, cannot be considered a violation of the principle of separation of church and state. Rather, given the important role of religious communities in democratic societies and in the construction of the common good, especially in scenarios that include a humanitarian crisis, such opinions are recognized to encourage discussion and dialogue, in order to contribute to the restoration of peace. These expressions must be not only respected but guaranteed, even more so if one considers that in the case of religious leaders, the possibility of denouncing injustices and acting in favor of those most in need is a duty inspired by their religious doctrine.

However, in Nicaragua, the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression based on one's religious principles by religious leaders, especially the Catholic clergy, has been constantly limited, resulting also in limitations of the multiple dimensions of the right to religious freedom. In recent years, the church has become one of the institutions most critical of abuses of power, human rights violations, and the lack of democratic guarantees. For this reason, with the strengthening of the Ortega regime in its fifth term in power, there has been an increase not only in threats against the church, but also in the materialization of harassment against its religious leaders, its church buildings and its affiliated institutions or organizations. The regime's objective is to establish a culture of terror in which censorship and intimidation take effect not only among religious leaders, but also among their followers. The level of politically motivated religious freedom violations has worsened over time.

Based on a review of the WWR weblog 'The Analytical', the Violent Incident Database (VID), and the OLIRE database, we will present a summary of the various scenarios identified in which this right has been limited from October 2021 to August 2022.[8] As of the publication date of this article, it is most likely that the cases have increased, given the context of repression in the country.

Arrests

According to the Mechanism for the Recognition of Political Prisoners, since April 2018, there are approximately 200 political prisoners of the regime. Since the beginning of the crisis, opponents have been subjected to arbitrary imprisonment.[9]

7 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, 'Inter-American Legal Framework on the Right to Freedom of Expression' (2010), https://worldea.org/yourls/46416.

8 To obtain more detailed information about the incidents mentioned in this section, visit the following links: https://worldea.org/yourls/46411 (password: freedom) and https://worldea.org/yourls/46417.

9 Mechanism for the Recognition of Political Prisoners, 'List of Political Prisoners: Nicaragua', https://worldea.org/yourls/46418.

Through the National Assembly, reform of the criminal code has been promoted to toughen the penalties for the crimes of 'treason against the fatherland' and "undermining national integrity'. As a first step to finalize this reform, the Justice and Legal Affairs Commission submitted to the Assembly a report on the 'Analysis of the Legal Norms Applicable to People Who Commit Crimes That Undermine National Integrity—Hate Crimes, among Others'. The reform proposal bases its justification on the need to have measures to 'generate trust and hope for the people's demands for justice'. In the working document presented, the 'contributions' to the reform proposal are detailed, among which there is talk of a consultation carried out with the 'victims of the coup'.[10]

Among these alleged victims are deputies of the National Assembly, members of the Sandinista party, and police agents who claim to have been injured and even tortured in one case by coup leaders. Religious leaders, priests and other defenders of human rights have been designated as coup participants.

The victims who participated in the consultation conducted by the commission stated that the penalties should be more severe for the religious leaders and directors of human rights organizations who were involved in the coup attempt as leaders. Through this proposal, the regime makes the representatives of the Catholic Church an explicit object of its measures of repression and censorship. In this sense, the exercise of the right to freedom of expression has become a reason for arrest, not only of leaders in civil society, but also of representatives of the Catholic Church, especially those most critical of the government.

From May to August 2022, about 12 priests and 12 parishioners were arrested by the National Police. Among them, the case of Monsignor Rolando Álvarez is perhaps the most emblematic since the security forces, after more than 15 days of besieging the Episcopal Curia, entered the building by force to arrest him. As of this writing, he is under house arrest, while the rest of the priests and parishioners are still in the 'El Chipote' centre, which is known for the constant abuse and violation of the civil and political rights of detainees, especially political and/or Christian prisoners known or perceived to be opponents of the regime. In most cases, arrested priests and parishioners are not afforded any of the guarantees of due process.[11]

Restrictions on freedom of the press

Freedom of expression and freedom of the press are fundamental components of the exercise of democracy. In a democratic society, the press has the right to freely inform the public and criticize the government, just as the people have the right to

10 National Assembly of Nicaragua, 'Report on the Analysis of the Legal Norms Applicable to People Who Commit Crimes That Undermine National Integrity—Hate Crimes, among Others', 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/46419.

11 CNN, 'Police Put Catholic Bishop under House Arrest after Raid on Diocese in Nicaragua', 19 August 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/46420; Nathali Vidal, 'Oscar Benavidez, a Priest Detained on 14 August, Was Transferred to a Torture Center', *Punto de Corte*, 16 August 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/46421; 100% Noticias, 'Police Monitor the Town in Sébaco with Drones, Father Uriel Vallejos Is Kidnapped by the Regime', 2 August 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/46422.

be informed of what is happening in the community.[12] Expressions, information and opinions relating to matters of public interest, including all matters concerning the state and its institutions and its officials, including denunciations of human rights violations, have a special level of protection under the American Convention.

According to the organization Nicaraguan Independent Journalists and Communicators (PCIN), between April and June 2022 alone, 48 complaints of attacks on journalists and independent media in Nicaragua were registered.[13] During 2021, the organization registered 205 complaints, which translated into 1,520 attacks on press freedom.[14] Reporters Without Borders indicated that, with the re-election of President Ortega in November 2021, independent media continue to be censored, harassed and threatened. Journalists are constantly stigmatized and subjected to harassment campaigns, arbitrary arrests and death threats, which is why many journalists have had to flee the country.[15] These and other measures, including arrests of journalists and closures, raids or confiscations of media facilities, limit the right to freedom of expression. In Nicaragua, the state makes use of criminal law, the most severe and restrictive resource, to punish protected forms of expression, since legislative reforms have been implemented that seek to 'legalize' the repressive enforcement actions.[16]

Among the media sources that are not pro-government, Catholic radio and television outlets have been sanctioned for broadcasting events concerning the Catholic Church in the country, especially when they refer to the regime's attacks against it, or have been reprimanded in retaliation against the religious leaders who manage them.[17] Thus, it has become common practice for the Nicaraguan Institute of Telecommunications and Postal Services (TELCOR), the regulator of telecommunications and postal services in Nicaragua, to shut down Catholic radio stations, as well as to order cable companies to stop transmitting Catholic channels. The government agency usually bases the order on a series of alleged irregularities that disqualify them from operating. Even reporters who have covered stories on cases of violence, raids or any situation that involves denouncing acts against the church by

12 Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Caso Ivcher Bronstein vs. Peru,* judgement of 6 February 2001, clause 143.

13 Nicaraguan Independent Journalists and Communicators Organization, 'Report of the Observatory of Aggressions against the Independent Press of Nicaragua' (April–June 2022), https://worldea.org/yourls/46423.

14 Nicaraguan Independent Journalists and Communicators Organization, 'Report of the Observatory of Aggressions against the Independent Press of Nicaragua', 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46424.

15 Reporters Without Borders, 'World Press Freedom Index: A New Era of Polarisation: Nicaragua', https://worldea.org/yourls/46425.

16 As part of the persecution of independent media, dissident journalists or journalists perceived as opponents have faced difficulties due to the Foreign Agents Regulation Law that aims to prevent 'crimes against the security of the state' and obliges any person or entity that receives funds from abroad (including journalists working for the international media) to register as a 'foreign agent' with the Ministry of the Interior. The Cyber Crimes Law (Law 1042 of 2020) includes four types of crimes in relation to damage to systems and data and seeks to sanction certain actions carried out on the internet or through electronic means, affecting freedom of expression.

17 Artículo 66, 'The Ortega Regime Harasses the Nicaraguan Catholic Press', 22 August 2018, https://worldea.org/yourls/46426.

the government have been detained. For various religious denominations, the use of social networks and independent media that have not yet been shut down is the only means by which they can share and receive truthful and timely information.

From November 2021 to August 2022, the police, by order of TELCOR, have seized and closed around seven Catholic radio stations, most of them managed by Monsignor Rolando Álvarez. Similarly, the official channel of the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua was removed from cable television programming, in addition to other two Catholic channels, the latter also administered by Monsignor Álvarez. We should further note the cancellation and suspension of the frequency of one non-Catholic Christian channel directed by the former presidential candidate Pastor Guillermo Osorno.

Refusal of visas, impediments to enter the country, forced displacement and exile

As a result of the social and political crisis, around 200,000 people have chosen to flee the country.[18] In many cases, the repression has led to the exile of politicians, young protesters, journalists, or directors and members of civil society organizations, among others. In recent months, this phenomenon has also affected the Nicaraguan church. Similarly, impediments to the entry of religious leaders have been verified.

Considering the role they play, not only through their ministry in their respective congregations but also through the social work they carry out, the exile of religious leaders or their inability to enter the country also implies a direct impact on the social welfare of entire communities. Beyond this, the removal of a religious leader from a diocese or specific territory also constitutes a practical limitation of the right to congregate in connection with a faith or the right of each religious group to choose its own religious leaders.

From November 2021 through August 2022, three priests were transferred from their parishes for security reasons, 18 nuns and the Apostolic Nuncio Waldemar Stanislaw Sommertag have been expelled from the country, and one priest was prevented from leaving the country. Meanwhile, two pastors were prevented from entering the country, while another two sought refuge in Costa Rica.

Closure and/or confiscation of institutions, confessional civil society organizations or those related to ministers

In recent months, many civil society organizations have been shut down. Although it is difficult to determine an exact number, various national and international sources indicate that approximately 900 organizations have been prevented from operating since 2018.[19] Some report more than 1,500 closures.

Catholic institutions and civil society organizations continue to be monitored and watched, especially through the legislation passed to harass and prevent any kind of opposition voice. The legal framework aims to attack these organizations through legal complaints regarding actions against the sovereignty of the state or alleged coups. In recent years, the executive branch enacted laws that would oblige

18 UN Refugee Agency. 'Displacement in Central America', https://worldea.org/yourls/46427.
19 Human Rights Watch, 'Nicaragua: Government Dismantles Civil Society', 19 July 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/46428.

all natural or legal persons to declare to the government the economic funds they receive from abroad and would exclude them from participating in the political life of the country if they are part of or related to the opposition. The legislation seeks to sanction those who receive financing from international cooperation. This has put at risk not only the finances of many organizations, but also the legality of their operations in the country. The restrictive regulatory framework means that civil associations—the main legal status adopted by non-Catholic religious groups—with members linked to the opposition face heavy registration procedures, permits or authorizations.

On the other hand, those associations related to the Catholic Church have faced discrimination and challenges that have hindered their functioning. Christian non-profits and NGOs are generally not seen as fit to work with the government or are unable to freely provide aid to the most vulnerable or show support for protesters.

The government is imposing different oversight, through the Ministry of the Interior, on evangelical, Catholic, civil society and even humanitarian organizations. The legal scrutiny can include requesting account statements, transaction histories and details on collaborative alliances with other organizations. In the end, the suspension of the organization's license is determined, with the consequence of preventing them from providing their services. It is apparently a common practice that the assets and shares belonging to associations should become state property. The serious limitations on the right of association, the right to property, non-discrimination and equal treatment before the law, among others, are evident.

From December 2021 to February 2022, the cancellation of the registration and legal status of eight organizations has been reported, including universities, technical institutes, an association of parochial schools, cultural centers, associations that promote educational programs, justice and peace commissions, and seminars. Other forms of pressure have included the defunding of the Jesuit-run Central American University and the expropriation of assets donated to the church.

Police siege inside and outside church buildings

Other common reports describe the monitoring, by officials, paramilitaries and party sympathizers, of religious leaders and of the activities carried out at worship sites. This includes the surveillance and monitoring of people in attendance. Some of these situations have hindered liturgical celebrations, as parishioners are prevented from entering the churches.

From October 2021 to May 2022, various situations have been reported involving regime sympathizers, the national police and other shock groups monitoring and guarding the surroundings of Catholic churches, and undercover agents inside houses of worship listening attentively to sermons or identifying attendees. Sometimes this surveillance has also led to physical attacks and threats (in the context of the last presidential elections) against priests and laity. This type of hostility is difficult to document because it is a permanent strategy of the government.

Smear campaigns

There are also official media in the country, in charge of reporting everything that coincides with the political interests of the regime. These media outlets are financed by Daniel Ortega and his closest circle.[20] Since the April 2018 crisis, the construction of a communication strategy in support of the president and to justify the government's repressive actions has intensified. During the most recent election, according to the organization Urnas Abiertas, only the official media were accredited to cover the voting process.[21]

In general, the content transmitted by the media aligned with the Sandinista National Liberation Front party aims not only to exalt the regime but also to manipulate the facts, delegitimizing the information presented by the opposition and launching defamation campaigns against opponents of the government and their integrity.

In this scenario, due to its firmness in denouncing the injustices committed by the regime, one of the most recurrent targets of the official media is the Catholic Church, represented by priests and bishops, especially the most critical ones. Since the April 2018 protests, government discourse has frequently referred to such church leaders as 'coup plotters', 'demons' and 'terrorists', describing them as agents who seek to destabilize the government and as enemies of peace.[22] Also, lay people close to Catholic leaders have been depicted as subversive and undesirable, with the aim of presenting them as responsible for the country's crisis. On the other hand, journalists have also been pressured and sanctioned when they have not agreed to contribute to smear campaigns or accusations against religious leaders.[23] During the arrests or trials of detained priests, the pro-government media always portray these individuals as conspirators and/or terrorists.

Among the aggravating circumstances of these actions, we must note the criminal nature of the attributed conduct, which generates greater social devaluation, along with the use of mass media such as radio and television to cause great damage to the image of religious leaders and of the church as an institution.

Conclusion

The relationship between the right to religious freedom and the right to freedom of expression is unique in the Nicaraguan case, as Christian believers' attempts to exercise freedom of expression have led to infringements of their religious freedom. Thus, the legitimate exercise of expressions of faith has become a risk for religious leaders and for the church as an institution, if they contradict the political interests of the Nicaraguan dictatorship. Politically motivated violations of both religious freedom and freedom of expression are the regime's response when manifestations

20 Nicaragua Investiga, 'More Money Allocated to Official Media for "Communication Strategies"', 4 October 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46429.

21 Urnas Abiertas, 'Ninth Report: Study of an Electoral Farce', 1 November 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46430.

22 Despacho 505, 'Rosario Murillo: "Killing, Besieging and Kidnapping Are Not for Christians"', 4 December 2019, https://worldea.org/yourls/46431.

23 Nicaragua Investiga 'Journalist Denounces That They Searched for Him to Falsely Accuse Monsignor Álvarez', 17 August 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/46432.

of faith take the form of political statements. If dissident positions are expressed, they become the trigger of repressive actions from the government.

Nevertheless, we find that despite the substantial adversities they have faced and the hostile treatment received from both state and non-state agents, religious communities (1) are not losing hope, still believing that a better future is yet to come; (2) have not renounced their faith; and (3) are continuing to accompany the most vulnerable and persecuted populations in the country, even though they themselves are a target under permanent siege.

We encourage religious communities and invite other civil society actors, not just Christian ones, to make known the violations to which they are exposed, including situations that affect them directly or that affect other denominations. Not everyone has the same opportunity, means or confidence to share their concerns or challenges; it is the task of the entire community to protect the fundamental rights of their peers, whether they share the same religious beliefs or not.

Even when it seems that documentation, denunciation and advocacy actions are not effective in generating international concern about the human rights situation affecting faith communities in Nicaragua, especially the right to religious freedom, these efforts must not stop. On the contrary, this situation demands a firm stand and dedication from those concerned about it. Our calling is not to abandon the Nicaraguan church but to trust and accompany it spiritually and materially as it courageously resists the Sandinista dictatorship in unarmed fashion.

Finally, it is essential for the international community, including academics, human rights defence organizations and the global church, to recognize the real vulnerability of religious leaders in these circumstances. The Nicaraguan church's leaders and members deserve the same guarantees of and respect for their fundamental rights as any other citizens, and even more so when the risks they are facing result from actions motivated by their faith.

ERT (2022) 46:4, 365–373

The 11 July Protests and the Cuban Evangelical Community

Yoe Suárez

On 11 July 2021, Cuba saw the largest public protests since the socialist takeover of 1959. Many Christians were involved. This moving article by a Cuban journalist captures the exemplary actions, courage and spiritual expressions of prominent evangelical participants in a hostile environment.

Marcos Évora's camera shuttered. Skinny arms, full of tattoos, were held high in front of a row of policemen. Again it clicked. A military man in a black beret raised a baton in front of unarmed people. *Click.* Hundreds of Cubans, mostly young men, walked in front of the Capitol. That day, 11 July 2021 (11J), was now in the young man's Canon, the same camera with which he launched his private business and captured activities at his Baptist church.

'I didn't hear it, they didn't tell me, I didn't see it on the Internet', he recounted. 'I was there, together with many brothers, marching and seeing, for the first time, a hope for my Cuba. I was surprised at how everyone walked with their hands up in a sign of peace, shouting "*Libertad!*" and saying out loud what for many years they couldn't shout freely for fear.'[1]

As he found himself in the middle of the crowd, a friend called him on his cell phone. The friend advised Marcos to leave the demonstration, saying that many 'civilians' were arriving with sticks. These were state security officers, political police and socialist sympathizers. Marcos confirmed this when 'it was already too late.'

In Máximo Gómez Park, in Old Havana, he and the rest of the demonstrators were surrounded 'by police from the special forces with batons and pistols', and also by the civilians his friend alerted him to. They were clutching sticks in their hands.

Marcos says he wasn't able to take photos of them for fear that they would break his camera. The Cubans who marched had in their hands only cell phones and a few bottles of water. The plainclothes officers advanced on the demonstrators. Marcos recalled that 'they were hitting and beating, and the special forces supported them by threatening anyone who came to help.'

'With God's help and unique mercy, I was able to get out of there with my two friends, who protected me while I was taking pictures', he said. The companions

Yoe Suárez is an independent Cuban journalist. He has worked with non-state media outlets in Cuba since 2014 and has written extensively about human rights and freedom of religion or belief issues. As a result, he and his family have been regularly targeted by authorities. He recently left the country. A longer version of this article appeared on the Religion Unplugged website on 12 July 2022 (https://worldea.org/yourls/46433).

1 Marcos Évora, Facebook post, 11 July 2011, https://worldea.org/yourls/46434.

were the audiovisual producer C. J. Martínez and the young musician Nesty Theproducer, both members of the Evangelical League of Cuba (LEC, for its initials in Spanish). That day, the three lived through the largest protests seen in Cuba in 62 years, since the socialist revolution.

It is virtually impossible to calculate the number of believers, both Protestants and people of other traditions, who were involved in the demonstrations. But the images captured by Marcos went viral. Media outlets, human rights organizations, and social media took care of that. Marcos did not earn a cent for it, and whoever asked to use the images received permission.

He defines himself as 'a photographer who madly loves his country and wants the best for it'. He later said, 'It hurts me to think that one day I will have to live outside of the country because of people who don't know how to do things.' A few months later, Marcos settled in Madrid.

The Garridos: two sister victims

At the same time as Marcos and his friends were protesting in the crowded streets of the capital, the Garrido sisters were in Quivicán, a small town in Mayabeque province. Maria Cristina alternated between adjusting her face mask and shouts of '*Libertad!*' as she urged several people walking next to her to exercise their right to public protest. In a Facebook Live video she shared, a group can be seen advancing peacefully along the dusty sidewalks of the town, towards the central park.

There, Interior Ministry forces were waiting for them, said María Cristina shortly before the end of her Facebook Live transmission. According to independent press reports, a concentration of militants and sympathizers of the socialist tyranny, guarded by members of the political police (in plainclothes) and the National Revolutionary Police (PNR), was present. Maria Cristina and her sister Angélica were arrested.

The sisters belong to an independent evangelical community in Quivicán. Jennifer Reyes Garrido, one of María Cristina's two daughters, explained that they—her mother and aunt—do not belong to a denomination listed in the government's Registry of Associations. 'I can't tell you the name of the pastor', she said—not for safety reasons, but because they don't have one. 'We are all pastors. The New Testament does not give much importance to exalted persons; instead, the church is brothers and sisters in Christ assembled', she added.

In early January 2022, Michael Valladares, María Cristina's husband, reported that the prison authorities had prohibited the two young women from meeting with their families at the same time. According to him, the regime seeks to separate the family and force them to travel twice a week to the prison, far from their place of origin. The host of a forum called Prisoners of Castro, Claudio Fuentes, added that this placed greater economic strain on the family, a considerable burden in the midst of the nation's gravest economic crisis of the 21st century.

On 18 January, the Cuban writer Amir Valle, also an evangelical and exiled in Germany, published a collection of poems by María Cristina titled 'Of Poetic Excellence'. Valle reminded readers that on 20 January the young woman would go on trial for demonstrating, and that 'they are asking for a long sentence.'

'Thanks to the poets Manuel Mérida and Rafael Vilches, who knew of her work, we have been able to publish this beautiful collection of poems, which we recommend to everyone', said Valle. 'We have decided that the proceeds from the sales of this book will go entirely to this writer.'

María Cristina had been recognized previously in some local poetry contests, and she was active, alongside the ex-prisoner and author Armando Valladares, in the opposition to the socialist regime.

Amir wrote of her, 'She has stood up for many of her fellow writers and intellectuals on the island who remain silent. Let's not leave her alone!'

On 19 January, the U.S. Embassy in Havana in a tweet denounced the arbitrariness of the process against the Garrido sisters and condemned their physical and psychological mistreatment in prison.

Luis Rodríguez, Angélica's husband, told *Martí Noticias* that in the last visit before the trial at Women's Prison of the West, in Guatao, Havana, she was 'firm in her ideals, in her faith in the Lord', although 'she was somewhat anxious about what may happen to her.'

'We know that a team of prosecutors met every day', Rodríguez stated, 'on all the cases of the 11J [prisoners]. In these meetings they decided which ones to release or not release.'

On Thursday, 20 January, the trial against her, her sister and 22 other participants in the 11J protests in the province opened. In March, Valladares reported that María Cristina had received a seven-year prison sentence and Angélica a three-year term for the alleged crimes of contempt, attempted assault and public disorder.[2]

More believers speak out

After 11J, other Cuban believers took advantage of their visibility on social media to speak in favor of the peaceful demonstrators and against the police violence committed by the Communist Party. YouTuber Ivan Daniel Calas, who directs the 'Voz de Verdad' channel, highlighted in a July 2021 video several pastors advocating for their imprisoned members.

Christian rapper Danay Suárez, nominated for the Grammy awards multiple times and winner of the Gaviota de Plata award, said, 'Cubans are protesting spontaneously, tired of the toxic government-people relationship.' She added, 'The authoritarian party in its constant monologue does not listen, does not protect, does not love, and does not liberate. … Cuba's solution is not to get out of a bad marriage to enter into another one. Those who give combat orders to armed children against their unarmed siblings should not talk about the "Family Code".' Suárez was referring to the controversial draft legislation that limits the right of parents to choose the education of their children in a preferential manner and introduces gender ideology.[3]

2 See 'Un tribunal cubano condena a 7 años de prisión a la escritora María Cristina Garrido' (A Cuban tribunal condemns the writer Maria Cristina Garrido to seven years in prison), *14ymedio*, 10 March 2022, https://worldea.org/yourls/46435, translated at https://worldea.org/yourls/46436.

3 See Danay Suárez's Facebook post at https://worldea.org/yourls/46437.

Reggaeton artist Yomil, singer Leoni Torres, and actor Yuliet Cruz also raised their voice against the repression. But they were exceptions among the best-known Cuban artists.

'The truth unites us, but it also divides when, indoctrinated in fear, it clouds the reasons for courage', Danay wrote in another place. 'The truth cannot be defended with emotions; emotions are the battlefield where the enemy defeats us.'

Danay further reported on her Facebook profile page, 'At the work centres they ordered the workers to congregate and march in a public act of repudiation of the demonstrations that occurred spontaneously; it will surely be in the so-called anti-imperialist tribune to be televised worldwide. … Why should the working people attend out of fear of losing their jobs and not voluntarily?'

What Danay describes is not something new in Cuba. Since the state is the largest employer, it is easy for unions (unified under the command of the official Workers' Central Office since the 1960s) and organizations such as the Party and the Union of Youth to pressure the citizenry to attend mobilizations 'of revolutionary reaffirmation'. Those who do not attend may be denied bonuses.

Meanwhile, the most important Christian troubadour of the moment, Eric Méndez, shared another song through social media. On 31 July, the young Havana native appeared in the living room of his apartment, standing in front of the camera, with a sofa in the background, accompanied only by his guitar.

> I dream of a country that is multicolor,
> where there is room for all of us.
> A nation where we care about the pain
> of him who thinks like me and him who doesn't.
> Where you don't hate me because I believe in God,
> and I don't hate you because you don't.
> Where you can rise up and say 'Yes'
> without having to veto me for saying 'No'.[4]

Weeks after the demonstrations, in August, there was talk of nothing else in the independent media and among Cubans, no matter their political persuasion. That was when the PNR summoned Yuri Pérez Osorio to threaten him with fines and jail. The crime? He had hung on the front window of his house a sign with a verse from the book of Isaiah.

'Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey, and robbing the fatherless!' it read, with a call for repentance in the second part. Within the context of 11J, those words had a clear meaning.

Pérez was summoned to the police station without a stated reason, as reported by his friend Yunier Enriquez on Facebook. One could guess the likely cause, but no explicit reference to the verse was made. In his post, he explained that those who participated in the nationwide protests were being summoned by the police, but on 11J Pérez was in a hospital after his mother contracted COVID-19.

4 Eric Méndez, video of 31 July 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46438.

'I still don't know what is happening or how they are treating him, nor do I know if they will let him return home, but if he does not retract, I very much doubt that they will let him go free. Only God can work such a miracle in the midst of this lamentable reality in Cuba', said Enríquez amidst the uncertainty. As we will see below, others were called in for supposed police interviews but were instead imprisoned.

Enríquez shared an update later about Pérez: they allowed him to return home, but he had 72 hours to take the sign down or he would be detained.

'Yuri was able to preach to all the officers there and only responded with the word of God', Enríquez said. 'This further agitated the officers, who, powerless, could do nothing but threaten him. He remains firm in his conviction to keep the sign. We continue to pray.'

Church leaders in the diaspora respond

While the tension inside Cuba was still palpable, on 13 July 2021, pastors, priests, leaders, lay people and members of the Cuban church in the diaspora launched an open letter stating, 'We do not forget our people in Cuba. We feel the responsibility to raise our voices.' The letter continued:

> During all these years of 'Revolution' the church has been subject to persecution, being prevented from exercising its religious freedom, having its buildings closed, its ministers sent to prison or forced to leave the country. The church in Cuba has been persecuted.
>
> We declare our support for the people, a people suffering from hunger, needs, spiritual and material shortages. In recent days and with the desire to perpetuate itself in power, the regime has called for violence that has generated unprecedented repression against the growing demands of a people tired of so much suffering and who see no hope in the face of their reality.
>
> We also call on the different conventions, ministries and churches inside the island to be clear and transparent about the current situation of the Cuban people, to be on the side of justice and not on the side of the oppressor.
>
> We invite leaders and pastors to be the prophetic voice of God crying out in the desert through which our country is passing today, to keep on crying out and praying fervently, but not to forget God's words to Moses: 'Why do you cry out to me? Tell the children of Israel to march.'
>
> We also call on the international community and ask that it not turn its face away from the Cuban reality, to not continue in its complicit silence, and to join in an international intervention which in the Cuban situation can no longer be delayed. We believe in the God of history, but in the God who moves history through our actions. Silence is not an option now.

Also from abroad, Christian organizations such as Outreach Aid for the Americas sent food and supplies to the families of 11J prisoners.

Many duly registered Protestant institutions in Cuba did not remain silent, at the risk of various reprisals, such as losing their legal status. The largest denominations, for example, issued clear public statements in support of the

individual liberties repressed by the socialist system. At the same time, they did not forget their role as peacemakers and called for an end to violence.

On 13 July, Moisés de Prada, Superintendent of the Assemblies of God, the largest Protestant denomination on the island, released a video on social media calling for the 'cessation of repression' and 'hostilities'. 'We call the authorities and the people to sanity', he wrote. 'Violence begets violence and the results are dire. Afterwards we will not be able to look each other in the face.'

That same day, the Evangelical League of Cuba (LEC) issued a statement defending the right to peaceful demonstration.[5] It called on Cuban authorities to 'listen to the voice of the people and offer solutions based on justice and peace. … We call upon the members of our institution to act according to biblical principles. Love God above all things. Love others as ourselves. Forgive regardless of the offense. Love our enemies. … Pray for those who persecute us and do evil.'

Some evangelicals who had participated in the demonstrations, like many other Cubans, left the island for fear of being identified in the many videos that were circulating online and facing trials and prison sentences of up to 20 years. Lorenzo Perdomo, one of the young members of the LEC facing that predicament, arrived in the United States with his wife, after having demonstrated in the streets of central Havana. He kept his videos unpublished until he obtained refugee status.

On 17 July, the Board of Directors of the Methodist Church in Cuba, one of the three largest Protestant denominations on the island, issued a statement stating that it has been called to stand by the people and rejecting 'the repressive manner used against the demonstrating population'.[6]

The statement continued, 'Confrontation and violence only generate death, pain, mourning, and insecurity. To refuse to listen to the voice of those who peacefully protest is to close the only window for understanding and living in peace.' It added that Cuba must be a free and sovereign country 'where all of its children are respected, those who are in agreement with the revolution as well as those who do not sympathize with the socio-political system'.

Havana-based Baptist pastor Daniel González García stated in an audiovisual address on Facebook, 'A genuine Christian faith will never allow a believer to coerce, impede, intimidate, and, much less, repress another person for expressing his or her beliefs.'[7]

González García opposed the regime's request that workers form brigades to repress those who demonstrate. He pointed out that recruiting people to beat or impede the exercise of individual liberties by other Cubans is not a new practice of the dictatorship; in the 1990s, when he was studying electrical engineering at a university in Havana, he himself was pressured, in vain, to engage in similar acts.

In another video shared on social media, the historian of the Western Baptist Convention, Carlos Sebastián Hernández Armas, recalled that on 11 July, in the midst of 'the current economic and health crisis, the repression against political

5 Liga Evangélica de Cuba, *Imágene*, 13 July 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46439.
6 Iglesia Metodista en Cuba, *Publicaciones*, 17 July 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46440.
7 Daniel González García, 'Cristianismo vs. Represión' (video), 17 July 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46441.

dissidents and the impact of social media on young people has been the straw that broke the camel's back of years and years of hardship for the Cuban people."[8]

From his small office in the parsonage of the Baptist Church of El Cotorro, with a Cuban flag and his bookcase in the background, Armas called for the 'cessation of government and police harassment and discrediting of Cuban citizens who dissent from the positions of the government'. Armas also stressed his support for the right to peaceful demonstration, observing that 'the rulers are public servants who owe service to the people and not the people to them.'

Regarding his pastoral and personal position on whether Christians and the church should participate in the nation's political and social life, Armas pointed out that Baptists maintain the separation of church and state as one of the 'most influential principles in the world', but also asserted that 'in none of its forms does this principle prevent the Church from participating and expressing its opinion in defence of human and social rights, as well as on the social and political freedoms of a nation. The church can and should raise its voice and do what it can to bless the nation in which it exists and where its faithful live.'

With respect to the biblical teaching on obedience to civil authorities, he said this also has its limits, pointing, for example, to an excerpt from the Declaration of Faith and Baptist Principles of the Western Baptist Convention which affirms that any state that 'pretends to usurp divine authority cannot count on the support and obedience of the true believer in that particular case'.

He explained further, 'I believe this is our current situation. The Cuban government has tried to remove God from his throne and play the role of God to exercise tyrannical control, over everything, but without the love and justice of God.'

Towards the end of his speech, Armas appealed to his brothers and sisters in the faith: 'I believe and teach that every believer can participate in the political and social life of his country and cannot abide by the authority of a government that goes outside of its sphere assigned by God' to 'dominate also the spheres in which God did not give it authority: the conscience of each individual, the family, work, the church, and the social sphere.'

To the regime he said, 'Hear the words of the people; do not be ignorant of the cry of the people whom you claim to love and serve. Do not continue to use violence against and try to discredit them, for they will turn against you. Have the dignity to renounce the futile power of force and intimidation. If you are not capable or brave enough to do so, then give up your position of power and give way to those who do have it, because dignity has the force of a hurricane and you will be uprooted anyway.'

Finally, Armas reminded his viewers that 'if a government abrogates or believes it has the right to expel God from the nation and rewrite what is good and what is bad, calling the bad good and the good bad, we have the right and the divine obligation to dissent.'

Evangelical producer Sandy Cancino spoke out about the misrepresentation of the protests by the official media. 'Watching the midday news', he said, 'I was left astonished, hearing Cuban diplomats in Spain saying that in Cuba the police and the

8 Carlos Sebastian Hernández Armas, 'Mis cinco declaraciones' (My Five Declarations), video, https://worldea.org/yourls/46442.

army don't suppress the people. How do they dare ignore what the same news channel has confirmed? What complicity with the system! If there are mercenaries in Cuba, it is those in the mass media, who justify all that is wrong and still get thousands of pesos, awards and promotions.'[9]

Cancino continued, 'Currently the political system has lost its mask of justice. They are capable of publishing in the newspaper things such as "In Cuba no one is punished for their way of thinking." That is a lie. … Lying doesn't end up well and today the way the official government media work is more clear than ever.'

Cancino won an award from the International Radio and TV Festival in 2017 for his project to develop a children's television program with Christian values, but it has been censored by the Cuban institute that oversees radio and television in that country.

'They understand that the end justifies the means, and with that premise they feed the minds of the "revolutionaries". It must be so hard for the confused revolutionaries! A new term is needed for those who have awakened to the reality of the system, those whom, without a doubt, they will try to convince again', Cancino continued.

Cancino and Armas had a prior reputation as evangelical leaders willing, on occasion, to confront state authorities. But after the 11 July protests, many others raised their voices.

Pastor and LEC leader Abdiel Nieto lamented seeing the streets in Havana 'totally militarized' with the presence of 'police, military men, special troops, state security agents dressed as civilians and others who were called to stop any peaceful manifestation'.[10]

His youngest son, Alejandro Nieto Selles, commented on the fact that the government press said 'all is peaceful', asking, 'What are you so afraid of that you bring so much repressive power into the streets?'

Unusual and risky outreach opportunities

In late July 2021, Abdiel Nieto's older brother and co-pastor, Noel, parked the church car outside Valle Grande Prison in the Havana suburbs. A member of the congregation had asked him for a ride there to pick up one of his best friends, who was going to be released after having been detained since 11 July.

When they arrived on the plains where the penitentiary is located and were waiting for their friend to appear, they saw other men coming out of the prison, all going towards the highway, with the hope that something would drive them to their houses. Such a hope was not viable, as the regime had discontinued public transportation during the worst months of the pandemic. The roads were deserted.

When Noel and the other believer identified the man they were looking for, it was late in the day and other men were still waiting. Noel invited the others into the car and drove them where they wanted to go. During that time, he listened to their

9 Sandy Cancino, 'La verdad está en las imágenes, no en el discurso' (Truth Is in the Photos, Not in the Statements), 16 July 2021, Facebook, https://worldea.org/yourls/46443.

10 Abdiel Nieto, Facebook post of 16 July 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46444.

stories of their time in the jail and was able to share the gospel and offer support to them.

We have also seen the church come together in previously unnoticed ways. After I published an essay on the protests for the independent magazine *La Hora de Cuba*, the iconic Catholic writer Rafael Almaza wrote a comment in response: 'I am proud of my Protestant brothers. Only one Christ, only one homeland for Christ. Amen.'

Help also came from the Christian community in exile. Family members of those arrested on 11 July welcomed the support of pastors from outside Cuba who counselled and prayed with them online, including Baptist pastor Mario Felix Lleonart and Adventist Alexander Pérez Rodríguez.

In addition, other pastors 'in the field', such as Carlos Macias and Enrique de Jesús Fundora, have held similar sessions. The former, a leader of the Jovellanos Methodist Church, has maintained contact with and paid frequent visits to families of well-known opponents, participants in the 11 July protest in Matanzas province, prominent protester Sissi Abascal, and Felix Navarro, one of the 75 who were unjustly sentenced in a 2003 crackdown on dissidents.

Macias also accompanied, on prison visits, others whose children, grandchildren or nephews and nieces remained imprisoned for political reasons. In some cases, state security agents coerced these persons into refusing further assistance from the pastor.

Fundora, one of the religious leaders of the Apostolic Movement in Mayabeque province, experienced intimidation in a direct way because of his pastoral work with relatives of the 11J prisoners.[11] On 9 November, he received an official summons requiring him to appear for questioning the following day, which resulted in a fine and warning.

Fundora noted that the captain who 'interviewed' him was visibly annoyed by his messages calling for non-violence in the Civic March for Change, then scheduled to take place on 15 November 2021 in several cities on the island.

'That is why the state security in Cuba focuses on intimidating the pastors, men of God, leaders', Fundora contended, 'because in Cuba they are not after crime itself, in Cuba they are after ideals. But for this moment God has brought us here, for the freedom of our people.

'Through this medium I make an appeal for love among Cubans', Fundora continued. 'For unity, for prayer, for claiming [rights and freedom], and for the church of Christ to not stop, no matter how much intimidation comes to us pastors, the public faces of the church.

'We will not stop carrying out our social work. As a church and as pastors we don't take sides with political parties, but we do take our position on the side of justice.'

11 Yoe Suárez, '"No se persiguen delitos, en Cuba se persiguen ideales": pastor Enrique Fundora tras amenazas del régimen' ('They Don't Prosecute Crimes Here, They Prosecute Ideals': Pastor Enrique Fundora on the Regime's Threats), *La Hora de Cuba*, 10 November 2021, https://worldea.org/yourls/46445.

ERT (2022) 46:4, 374–384

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On the Road with Saint Augustine: A Real-World Spirituality for Restless Hearts
James K. A. Smith

Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019
Pb., xiv + 240 pp., index

Reviewed by Francis Jr. S. Samdao, ThD Candidate, Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary; assistant editor, Evangelical Review of Theology; Teaching Fellow, Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines

Many laypeople think of Augustine (354–430) as a great church father whose works are intended for academics only. This book defies that inference. Smith clarifies that this book espouses the 'travelogue of the heart' (xi), since the people of God are resident aliens of the 'earthly city' and sojourners on a narrow road. Smith resolves to travel this journey with Saint Augustine as a guide.

The book retains the travel metaphor as its first part orients us to the condition of the road, the second part covers ten topics that act as detours and stopovers along the journey, and the third part discusses the culmination of the tour.

Smith argues that Augustine is the epitome of those who are hungry for home—the saint of the restless pilgrims. Hence, he invites readers to understand Augustine's own journey in light of our postmodern existential struggles. Chapter 1 describes Augustine's expedition from Carthage to Italy to Milan to *Home*. His crossroads present different answers to the longings of the heart: happiness, pleasures, wealth, meaning or the home. Smith writes, 'The reason Augustine tells *his* story is that he

thinks it is simply an example of the *human story*—that we are all prodigals—and he wants us to ask ourselves a question: "What if I went home?"' (11).

In chapters 2 and 3, Smith connects Augustine to Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and contemporary readers. For example, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger's exposition of the 'self' is captured by the word *Dasein*, meaning 'being there'. Such is an embodiment of the self to be imitated in light of the search for 'authenticity'. Smith explains that Sartre was highly influenced by Augustine via Heidegger. Similarly, Camus studied Augustine in his dissertation on Christian metaphysics and neo-Platonism. Smith observes that Camus and Augustine both acknowledge the reality of 'alienation', as Camus lived 'in between' France and Algeria as a 'stranger' while Augustine's family background and travels also caused him to live in multiple, conflicting cultures. For Smith, what makes Augustine a better guide than Camus is his acknowledgement of the reality of alienation and the quest for home sustained by the hope of finding rest—a refugee spirituality.

The second part discusses some issues (freedom, fame, sex, mother's love, friendship, character, justice, father and coping with death) related to Augustine's earthly sojourn by way of commentary on Augustine's *Confessions*. Smith not only elaborates on Augustine's struggles but also demonstrates the importance of companions on the road. For instance, Monica and Ambrose provided him with a new horizon in perceiving the Christian faith amidst his frustration concerning the Manicheans.

In the last chapter, Smith highlights the importance of heading back home. What Augustine had perceived to be his destination (Milan) or the fulfilment of his hunger turns out to be a disappointment. The very definition of success in Milan made his heart more unsatisfied and restless. In short, travelers need *Someone* (God) who is a trusted companion leading the way home.

Postmodern people breathe Augustinian air in the sense that they too are seeking authenticity, freedom and rest. For Smith, Augustine provides an authentic and relatable spirituality for a restless wanderer. Having Augustine as a comrade on the road teaches us that the glories of this world do not provide the solution to our disordered love and desires.

There is much to commend in this book. First, it is exceptional because of Smith's ability to expound on some major parts of Augustine's *Confessions* and interlace them with other academic works of literature and novels in a contemporary way. Second, although Smith openly declares that this book is not about Augustine, it can also serve as an enlightening companion to the *Confessions*.

The greatest strength of the book is how Smith interprets and illustrates Augustine's deep issues in life, his theology, and his pilgrimage in a manner that is relevant to today's readers. The book is an erudite exposition of Augustine's journey that pushes us to consider our perspective of the good life (*eudaimonia*).

My only critique of this well-written book is Smith's assumption that his readers are familiar with the philosophical thoughts of Derrida, Sartre, Heidegger, Marcel and Camus. Perhaps it would have been better had Smith removed some of his expositions on other philosophers' thoughts and kept the focus on Augustine's relation to postmodern concerns. Readers will benefit more from the book if they have a philosophical background or walk the extra mile by reading the extended explanations found in the endnotes.

There is a dialectic method in the trajectory of Smith's thought in this book. Augustine's struggles are ancient but identical to the angst of postmodern people; for scholars in the academy as for all of us in the church, the *road* is inevitable, but it is not the *home.* Smith speaks of the intrepid explorers on the highway, but more so of God who oversees the way.

The Apocalyptic Paul: Retrospect and Prospect
Jamie Davies

Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2022
Pb, 208 pp., bibliog.

Reviewed by Benjamin Marx, Lecturer of Bible and Theology, Instituto Bíblico Sinodal Arequipa, Peru

The apostle Paul has received considerable attention from a lengthy and distinguished set of New Testament scholars. This book helps us understand where the conversation about the 'apocalyptic Paul' started ('Retrospect') and where the discussion is headed ('Prospect'). Davies does so in an interdisciplinary manner, engaging not only with studies of Paul but also with scholarship on apocalyptic literature and systematic theology (especially Barthian theology).

Anyone who has had the privilege of listening to Davies in seminars or presentations will know that he is a very good fit for such an endeavour. He not only enriches the discussion with fair representations of the various scholars but also demonstrates that some of the conflicting views stem from misunderstandings or varying emphases, though differences do remain. Davies surveys, critiques and constructively proposes new ways forward. This indeed is a tremendously insightful and helpful work.

Davies begins the 'Retrospect' part of the book by introducing the scholars covered and their respective works: Johannes Weiss, Albert Schweitzer, Rudolf Bultmann, Ernst Käsemann, J. Christiaan Beker, J. Louis Martyn, Martinus de Boer, Leander Keck, Alexandra Brown, Beverly Gaventa, Douglas Campbell, Susan Eastman, Lisa Bowens, Walter Lowe, Nathan Kerr, Philip Ziegler and Douglas Harink. As this list shows, Davies examines the idea of the 'apocalyptic Paul' from its early proponents to the present, as well as involving systematic theologians in the conversation. He leads his reader on an impressive and insightful tour with clear and precise formulations.

Käsemann called apocalyptic 'the mother of all Christian theology'. Indeed, a thoroughly apocalyptic framework shapes Paul's writings. Yet Davies acknowledges some confusion as to what 'apocalyptic' truly means. He proposes to understand the term using both its literary and its theological connotations. Davies notes three main areas of interest: epistemology, eschatology and soteriology—which means that he is not willing to accept a purely eschatological understanding of 'apocalyptic'.

In the last chapter (before the conclusion), Davies spells out his own understanding. Yet he carefully states that his examination of the issues involved should serve as a conversation starter rather than a set of definitive answers.

Davies' constructive contributions to the apocalyptic Paul occur via a three-way conversation with scholarship on apocalyptic literature and systematic theology. He discusses the apocalyptic understanding of 'two ages' and then explores 1 Corinthians 2 and Galatians 4 as case studies. He shows that the 'two ages' need to be seen more in terms of qualitative than time-oriented differences. 'It is not the temporal advance of a timeline that best describes Paul's distinctive eschatology, but an emphasis on the *qualitative* distinction between the two "ages"' (124; emphasis in original). 'God's kind of time' has embraced the present age via the Christ-event. 'This … is the Christological heart of Paul's distinctive reworking of apocalyptic eschatology' (130).

In terms of epistemology, revelation and wisdom interact and cannot always be nicely separated. Again, we see a Christologically shaped epistemology which differentiates Paul from Jewish apocalyptic. Mysteries that were hidden are now revealed: Christ himself is that 'revealed wisdom'. Furthermore, the knower too has been changed: 'It is only in union with Christ that the human mind may know the mind of God, for it is in him that the two are joined' (142). Lastly, when Paul contrasts the 'present Jerusalem' and the 'Jerusalem from above' (instead of the 'Jerusalem to come') in Galatians 4, Davies sees the latter as 'an apocalyptic discontinuity in that it is the divine word of promise that breaks into human history from above.' Yet there is continuity in the sense that 'it has extension through salvation history in the word of promise, which has always been the proper locus for the perdurance of the people of God' (160). Davies is leading us towards a more nuanced account of the apocalyptic Paul.

The book is part of the Cascade Library of Pauline Studies series, which seeks 'to advance Pauline theology by publishing monographs that make original proposals in conversation with existing scholarly debates, and which have the potential to shape future trajectories in research'. Davies has certainly accomplished that aim. As John Barclay writes in the preface, 'Both for the newcomer to this field and for the seasoned expert, this book is a highly welcome resource and a vital contribution to scholarship' (xiii–xiv). If one desires to deepen his or her understanding of Paul's gospel—the significance of Jesus Christ—Davies' book is a must-have. As the author emphasizes, 'What matters, of course, is not the apocalyptic Paul but Paul, and his account of the gospel of Jesus Christ' (162).

Such a Mind as This: A Biblical-Theological Study of Thinking in the Old Testament

Richard L. Smith

Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021
418 pp., bibliog., index, illus.

Reviewed by John L. Marshall, retired instructor in Christian studies, Eastern University, St. Davids, PA, USA

C. S. Lewis observed that thinking is hard work. Few people know this better than those who make their living by using their minds constantly, such as doctors, lawyers, professors and teachers. However, all of us are always thinking, whether or

not we work in a 'learned' profession. When we deal with emotional loss, try to strengthen our marriage or our parenting skills, or struggle with family budgets, our minds are chewing on issues that are important to us.

Richard L. Smith is concerned about one sphere of thinking that should be important to every serious evangelical Christian but is all too often overlooked or ignored altogether: God himself. Of course, every Christian thinks of God on some level. Often, on Sunday mornings, we look forward to hearing sermons that will help us feel good about ourselves, but not cause us to have to work to grapple with the text being presented to us. (As Smith points out, insipid sermons don't help.) As for the rest of the week, we are often too preoccupied with the daily grind of life to focus our mental energy on the One who made us, saved us and sustains us.

Rather than trying to motivate us through guilt into using our minds more, Smith nudges us to consider a better motive: love. Jesus commands us to love God not only with all our heart and soul, but also with our mind. If God who made and sustains us sacrificed his only Son to enfold us to himself forever, then our love for him should draw our mental energies to enfold God as the one who should direct what and how we think about him and about everything else.

Thinking is not the unique property of intellectuals. Many evangelicals might be put off by the word *intellect*, suspecting an underlying attitude of snobbery. But as Smith (a senior advisor with Global Scholars) points out, the Old Testament 'overflows with intellectuality. It contains a vast vocabulary and numerous idioms associated with thought and argumentation' (xxiii). He adds that 'the Old Testament calls us repeatedly to what we could call intellectual piety—loving God with our minds, not just our emotions' (xxiii).

Smith endeavours to show how extensively the Old Testament teaches that 'we will not honor God with our minds or reflect his glory if we lack knowledge and discernment. … Indeed, the Old Testament shows that we are *designed* for thinking' (xxi).

Smith breaks his study down into four categories. First, how did Adam think before the fall? He calls this the Edenic mindset. After the fall and humanity's expulsion from Eden, a new way of thinking set in, which he calls exilic—involving foolishness, pride, and a quest for knowledge and understanding that is ultimately disruptive and destructive. This latter stage results in punitive epistemology, or a 'permanent inability to understand revelation as a form of divine judgment' (xxv).

Finally, into this bleak scenario the author inserts the mindset he calls redemptive, which includes 'a heart to understand' (Deut 29:4) and the fear of the Lord (Prov 1:7). This redemptive epistemology is embodied fully in God's covenant with Israel. It shows us not only how to think correctly about God and his creation but also how to engage with the exilic mindset that remains very much with us in this fallen world.

Most of the chapters focus on a single book, with detailed analysis of Job, Ecclesiastes, Jeremiah and Daniel, for example. One book the author finds especially valuable is Deuteronomy. He calls it 'the Rosetta stone of redemptive epistemology. It situates human beings as epistemological agents. It provides an infrastructure of knowledge for the individual, community, and culture' (p. 219). Smith treats this

book as a kind of epistemological Global Positioning System that keeps Israel on the right path amidst the challenges of idolatry from other nations.

Smith includes a helpful postscript suggesting ways in which believers can use their minds in learning communities that he calls 'community gardens', focusing on repentance, learning, service and stewardship.

Although Smith's work features exhaustive exegesis of relevant Old Testament passages, he also references many New Testament passages, giving us tantalizing hints of an even greater fulness yet to come and of how to think about it. One might wish that he will think (!) about producing a companion volume that will add to the insights of this one.

The Oxford Annotated Mishnah: A New Translation of the Mishnah with Introductions and Notes
Shaye J. D. Cohen, Robert Goldenberg and Hayim Lapin (eds.)

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, £495
Hb., 3 vols., 2,517 pp., appendix, glossary, indices

Reviewed by Andrew Messmer, Academic Dean, Seville Theological Seminary (Spain)*; Associated Professor, Facultad Internacional de Teología IBSTE* (Spain); *Affiliated Researcher, Evangelical Theological Faculty* (Belgium)

In their three-volume work, the editors of *The Oxford Annotated Mishnah* (*OAM*) have produced a very helpful resource for anyone interested in the Mishnah. It is an academically informed yet highly accessible new translation of the Mishnah, with accompanying introductions for each tractate and annotations throughout the text. Much of the concluding material has been adapted from Danby's 1933 translation, although the subject index is new. *OAM* comprises a brief introduction followed by 63 chapters, one for each tractate of the Mishnah, and an appendix, glossary and two helpful indices.

Although the work's length may lead some to think of *OAM* as a technical work reserved for specialists, this is not so. The opening chapter by Cohen and Lapin gently introduces the non-specialist to the Mishnah, tractate introductions orient readers to key issues, section headings have been added to divide each tractate into smaller units and show the logical divisions and progression of thought, textual variants and alternative translations are kept to a minimum and are easy to understand, and the accompanying commentary (annotations) clarifies ambiguities that trip up many novices. As for the commentary, the 51 contributors should be commended for refraining from filling their footnotes with references to academic publications; on the contrary, their notes are clear and concise, which again will be much appreciated by non-specialists. The print quality, spacing and overall page layout make for easy reading. *OAM* facilitates self-study, and the beginner will be able to advance in understanding with relatively little supervision.

The significance of *OAM* lies in the fact that it will serve for many years as the best introduction to reading and understanding the Mishnah. In fact, the explanatory apparatus is so helpful that *OAM* will remain helpful for intermediate students and will greatly assist professors in their teaching. A large and diverse

audience will find this publication useful. Beneficiaries will include those seeking to understand the foundational text of rabbinic Judaism, students of the Old Testament who wish to see how one group of Jews received and transmitted certain teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures, students of the New Testament who want more background information on the Old Testament, and historians of law, philosophy and religion who seek to understand the worldview of post–Second Temple Jews. The book's price will place it out of reach for many individuals, but any institution dedicated to the study of Scripture should not have this work absent from its shelves.

It is difficult to find fault with this publication, but perhaps the translation will prove to generate the most complaints. The editors themselves lament their failure 'to maintain consistency in the translation of technical terms and rhetorical patterns', yet to the extent that the Mishnah's redactor(s) published a unified text with specific words chosen to transmit certain ideas and make inter-textual connections, any variation in the translation will weaken its potential. However, since most people who interact with this work will likely be relative beginners, any inconsistencies will happily go unnoticed.

Kwame Bediako: African Theology for a World Christianity
Tim Hartman

Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2021
Pb., 166 pp., bibliography, index

Reviewed by Dallas Pitts, Assistant Professor of Religion, Baptist Health Sciences University, USA

African Christian identity, gospel translatability, and African history and culture are the key themes of Kwame Bediako's writings which Tim Hartman brings to light. The Ghanaian Bediako (1945–2008) was arguably the most influential African theologian of the last 40 years.

Hartman, a professor at Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia, USA, spent his sabbatical researching this book on Bediako, gaining information not only from his published works but also from people who knew him. The main text is just 141 pages, but Hartman effectively shows why Western Christians should be interested in Bediako and his theology. He largely allows Bediako to speak for himself on the main themes covered, so that readers feel they are hearing more from Bediako than from Hartman. Critics of Bediako's theology are given a voice as well, providing needed context on the theological issues facing Africa and the varied and contrasting approaches others have taken. The result is a fair-minded examination of Bediako's theology that allows the reader to assess the strengths, weaknesses and context of his thought.

One highlighted theological category is translatability, or how the gospel can be offered to the world in a way that transcends cultural 'wrapping paper' and can be readily understood in each culture. Bediako emphasized that those hearing the gospel must not be caused to feel they have to convert to the missionaries' culture to be truly Christian. Bediako's critique of Western Christianity is at its strongest on this point. Hartman explains Bediako's view that African Christianity has suffered

due to Westerners' too-close alignment of their own culture with Christianity. He describes Bediako's efforts to revitalize a distinctly African Christianity that can be beneficial not only for Africa but for the West.

In the chapter on history, Hartman presents Christianity as a 'non-Western religion', featuring Bediako's effort to connect African Christianity to its precolonial past instead of seeing African Christianity as a recent thing. For Bediako, to be African is to be Christian. Hartman examines *Theology and Identity*, the book in which Bediako aimed to bring African theology out from under the cloud of Western Christian thought and demonstrate the genuine African contributions to Christianity. Bediako saw Christianity as readily situated within African history, partly due to the nature of primal religions in Africa that embraced the transcendent and a supernatural worldview like the one contained in the Bible. This relationship between the spiritual nature of Africans and the spiritual worldview of the Bible sidesteps the limitations and doubts of the Western Enlightenment. Hartman depicts Bediako's understanding of Christianity as actually indigenous to Africa, not something brought from outside.

The remaining chapters focus on Scripture, contextual theology, the remaking of Christian theology, and politics. Bediako sees the gospel, not culture, as what ultimately defines humanity. Hartman presents a more appreciative assessment of colonial missionary activity in Africa here, with its emphasis on translating Scripture into various African languages. Bediako believed that Africans' opportunity to read the Bible in their own language, more than the European form of Christianity that missionaries brought to Africa, had the greatest impact.

Hartman elucidates a point of struggle for Bediako in the chapter on contextual theology. Bediako saw his whole theology as a struggle with culture. Hartman helps the reader uncover Bediako's Christology in this chapter as a way of understanding the Bible's message in an African context. Bediako offered Christ as the 'Supreme Ancestor', rejecting the Christological terms and definitions of Nicea and Chalcedon in favour of a more African way of communicating about Jesus. This approach has its critics, who see Bediako as aligning too much with the surrounding culture. However, Bediako clarified his position by explaining that in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the ancestors are revealed as what they really are—'demonic terrors'—and Jesus is Lord over them all.

In the final chapters, Hartman presents Bediako's suggestions concerning how theology should and will change as Christianity grows in the Majority World. Bediako believed that an active partnership with the West would help the Western churches reclaim what had been lost and would also help to reclaim Christianity as a non-Western religion. He hoped that Africa could lead the way in this regard, especially in theological education, as new theologies emerge in response to contemporary questions.

Western readers in particular should find this solid introduction to Bediako's theology thought-provoking and a gateway to further study in African Christian thought.

Predictive Factors for Transformative Learning within ACTEA-Related Theological Institutions in Ethiopia
Alemseged K. Alemu

Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Monographs, 2022
Pb., xvii + 195 pp., appendices, bibliography

Reviewed by Danait N. Assefa, master's program coordinator, International Leadership University, Ethiopia

Alemseged K. Alemu, head of graduate studies at the Evangelical Theological College, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, states that the aim of theological education should be to produce transformed individuals who will ultimately transform their society and churches. Accordingly, Alemu used qualitative and quantitative data, focus group discussions, and classroom observation to analyse whether and how five Ethiopian institutions connected to the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA) contribute to students' experience of transformation.

Alemu's theoretical framework incorporates Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory and other fundamental adult learning theories. The framework includes two key elements: first, transformative learning as a cyclical process, which is a concept derived from the combination of David Kolb's experiential learning cycle, Mezirow's phases of transformative learning, and Muriel and Duane Elmer's learning cycle; and second, transformative learning as a holistic process that integrates the cognitive, affective and behavioural domains throughout the learning process.

Alemu states that theological education should transform people into what God intends them to be, as bearers of God's image to enhance the church's mission. He further asserts that it should not merely transform learners but should also help them grow into a similar role in equipping others. Alemu sees transformative learning as a biblical imperative. One biblical example he cites is the Samaritan woman in John 4, whose encounter with Jesus enlightened and transformed her worldview and action. Hence, the book stresses that transformative learning should be evident in students.

Alemu reports two main findings. First, where students experienced transformative learning, the relevant factors occurred at varying stages in their educational journey. Second, instructional strategies and interpersonal relationships with teachers are essential factors in transformative learning. Students experienced transformation in situations where they could integrate their learning with their lives and ministries. Interpersonal relationships between students and influential peers inside and outside of classrooms also contribute to transformative learning. Moreover, a teacher who demonstrates cooperation and concern for students according to their needs and who creates a sense of community is essential. Teachers' exemplary lives influence students' perceived transformative learning experience.

Based on the findings from five evangelical theology institutions, Alemu offers these recommendations: (1) Institutions need to be clear about their purpose. They should carefully screen both student candidates and the teachers they recruit. (2) Teachers and administrative staff should help students integrate into their life what they have learned. (3) Teachers must be willing to instruct in a way that engages

students for a transformative learning process. (4) Teachers need to understand students' different backgrounds and needs regarding the course content and the learning process and should prepare accordingly. (5) Teachers should work diligently to design transformative learning experiences, using various instructional strategies and interventions. They should combine multiple instructional strategies (e.g. lecture, class discussion, small-group discussion and case studies) with ways to engage students in independent learning, such as personal reflection, research papers and individual presentations. (6) Teachers need to consider the significance of their personal interactions with students outside the classroom.

This research challenges theological institutions and their faculty to discover and redefine the purpose of their existence in light of biblical foundations and the transformative learning process. It can be useful to all who want to make a difference in the future of theological education.

The Holy Spirit as Person and Power: Charismatic Renewal and Its Implications for Theology
Rob Yule

Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020
xxi + 170 pp., appendices, bibliog., indices

Reviewed by Bruce Barron, ERT executive editor

In 1979, Rob Yule became pastor of a Presbyterian church in New Zealand. During the next two years, he saw parishioners leave in two different directions—both Pentecostals and anti-Pentecostals. While seeking to hold the church together, Yule had his own charismatic experience in 1981, after which he led his congregation into flourishing renewal.

Now in retirement, Yule has drawn on 40 years of reading, reflection and practice to compose a fascinating work that combines common defences of charismatic spirituality with significant original contributions. The work's richness derives from his interaction with many Christian streams.

Yule's first two chapters, on Pentecostal-charismatic history, recount the movement's classic turning points, presenting it as a modern-day fulfilment of the prophecy in Joel 2 because it has featured the 'worldwide outpouring of God's Holy Spirit' (2) that Joel anticipated. His evaluation of charismatic renewal is quite rosy, mainly because he leaves the problematic independent extremists out of his story. But since his goal is to encourage vibrant, Spirit-infused, theologically sound Christian practice, that omission is understandable.

The next nine chapters build a case for the authentic nature of charismatic Christianity through biblical and theological interpretation spiced with pertinent real-life illustrations. Yule's Old Testament survey highlights the Spirit's artistic creativity (seen in Bezalel and Oholiab, the two tabernacle craftsmen, and David the musician). He then pairs this observation with discussion of numerous flowerings of artistic expression in contemporary charismatic renewal.

Yule is perhaps most controversial when arguing that Jesus *received* the Spirit when baptized by John. He follows 19th-century precursor Edward Irving in

contending that Jesus divested himself of his divine prerogatives and performed his miracles 'as a human being endowed with the Holy Spirit' (50)—which implies that Spirit-endowed believers today can expect similar experiences. Even more boldly, Yule suggests that 'Jesus' experience at the Jordan must have been decisive for his *awareness* of divine sonship and of being the unique bearer of the Spirit' (58, emphasis mine).

On the frequently debated question of whether Christians need 'baptism in the Spirit' subsequent to salvation, Yule argues interestingly that Spirit-baptism 'is a conscious experience that is distinct from a person's conversion or experience of salvation, though ideally and with proper counsel, it should accompany conversion' (90). He thus departs from the traditional Pentecostal expectation of a 'second blessing' experience, while recognizing that in practice the Spirit touches people in a diversity of ways.

Indeed, for Yule, differentiation is one of the Spirit's specialties: 'The Son is the basis of the church's unity. The Spirit is the source of its rich variety' (169). Accordingly, each believer receives a unique set of spiritual gifts. However, Yule cautions against some spiritual gift inventories that ignore the distinction between charismatic, service-oriented, and vocational gifts. He also warns that since God bestows spiritual gifts on all believers, their exercise is not necessarily a sign of maturity.

Of Yule's many useful illustrations, the most memorable one sheepishly recalls his own experience of receiving a prophetic word—and then failing to deliver it. A speaker at a church service prayed in tongues and asked if there was an interpretation. Yule sensed a sentence in his mind but said nothing. Later on, in her message, the speaker reached a key point in her story and stated precisely the same sentence!

Yule has a penchant for constructing complementary dichotomies, as illustrated by three tables in the book, each with two columns. Jesus, he says, came to do a twofold work: to take away sin (the evangelical aspect of the gospel) and to baptize with Holy Spirit (the Pentecostal aspect). Similarly, Christian experience should encompass both the new birth and Spirit-baptism, and the church should embrace both the historical stability of being rooted in Christ and the dynamism of openness to spiritual renewal.

Despite a few provocative stances, Yule effectively embodies how charismatic renewal can inspire the whole body of Christ without triumphalism or implied superiority. This highly readable work is suitable for people who don't know the charismatic movement well, but also, by its calm but theologically informed presentation, it presents a healthy, vigorous challenge to skeptics of all things charismatic.