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Table of Contents

Introduction: A Happy Transition

In my seven years as editor of this journal, I have tried to define theology very broadly, consistent with Dutch prime minister and theologian Abraham Kuyper's famous line: 'There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, "Mine"!' Our November 2024 issue illustrates the broad relevance of theology by touching upon a wide range of sectors of human life.

Ruth Houser applies theology to medical ethics, explaining and evaluating in vitro fertilization. Thomas Paul Schirrmacher connects theology to culture in the context of the controversial mimicry of da Vinci's 'The Last Supper', performed at the Paris Olympics' opening ceremony.

Richard Howell draws on theologians from Irenaeus to Moltmann to emphasize our calling to advance human dignity and equality in all areas of society. Jonathan Corrado does theology in business terms, using the Six Sigma process improvement methodology to demonstrate the coherence and credibility of the biblical salvation message.

Joshua Yen offers a readable experience in theodicy—i.e. defending God despite the problem of evil. Finally, I offer a short application of theology to politics in the context of the US presidential election.

We also have contributions in pure theology (from Andrew Messmer on Spanish Reformation thinker Casiodoro de Reina) and in biblical studies (by Jim Reiher on how Acts and Galatians explain the relationship between Paul and Barnabas).

Before all that, we lead with Joseph Handley's penetrating analysis of key themes and events from the Lausanne Movement's 50th anniversary assembly on 22–28 September in Korea.

For the last seven years, I have sought to make the *Evangelical Review of Theology* a credible and relevant voice. I believe we have made great strides thanks to the World Evangelical Alliance's backing, the interest of our nearly 3,000 free "subscribers," and especially the quality contributions of authors from all over the world. I've been hoping to pass this role on to someone who is more fully integrated with evangelical theology globally. I'm happy to announce that we have found that person.

Jerry Hwang (PhD in Old Testament, Wheaton College) has been a theological educator at Singapore Bible College and Trinity Christian College (USA) for the last 15 years. Before that, he was a pastor and information technology professional, with a BA in computer science and an MDiv. Jerry has also worked with WEA Director of Global Theology Theresa Lua in the Asia Theological Association.

'My interests and publications lie at the intersection of Old Testament studies, missions and culture, and contextual theology', says Jerry. 'It's a thrill for me to draw these interests together to serve the international readership of ERT.'

I intend to support Jerry with article reviews and copyediting. I wish to thank everyone who has made this a wonderful experience for me.

Happy reading!

—Bruce Barron, Executive Editor

ERT (2024) 48:4, 293–301

Reflections on the Fourth Lausanne Congress

Joseph W. Handley, Jr.

The Fourth Lausanne Congress in Incheon, South Korea, was a celebratory moment for the global evangelical church. This gathering of more than 5,000 representatives from 202 nations, all dedicated to God's mission, will leave an indelible mark on the future of global evangelism.

This congress wasn't simply about convening people from every corner of the world; it was a vibrant embodiment of the church's commitment to both declaring and demonstrating the gospel in each unique context. The event embodied Lausanne's vision—polycentric mission that is increasingly decentralized, dynamic and interconnected across the globe— in a new and powerful way.

The spirit was magnified by the remarkable hospitality of our Korean hosts. The pageantry, beautiful choir and Korean band, and helpfulness of the volunteers were exceptional. I am grateful to my friend Pastor Jaehoon Lee and Onnuri Church for their remarkable generosity!

Reflecting on Lausanne's historical influence over the last five decades, I'm reminded of how each congress has shifted the global church's approach to mission. The first Lausanne Congress in 1974, with its call to reach unreached people groups and integral mission, has reverberated through evangelical efforts worldwide. Then Manila in 1989 brought cross-cultural ministry, charismatic expressions of Christianity and the 10/40 Window into sharper focus, while Cape Town in 2010 inspired a holistic approach, advocating for an inseparable link between evangelism and social action. Incheon in 2024 built on these foundational shifts, moving us forward to address the most urgent challenges of the 21st century with renewed vigor.

Lausanne remains unmatched in assembling such a diverse gathering of Christians, and each person contributes to its lasting impact. Many conversations with colleagues, both new and familiar, left me enriched and even more hopeful for the future of mission. If I could highlight one moment for those who weren't able to attend, it would be Sarah Breuel's address. It wasn't just a message; it was a call to transformation that resonated deeply with everyone in the convention hall. She inspired us with a call to boldness in sharing our faith and a longing for revival across the nations, one that must begin with a heart of repentance for those things that grieve the Holy Spirit.

Joseph W. Handley, Jr. (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is the president and CEO of A3, a global network that accelerates church and marketplace leaders for mission movements. He serves as a global catalyst for leadership with the Lausanne Movement and as faculty for Fuller Seminary and the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. He is the author of *Polycentric Mission Leadership* (Regnum, 2022) and editor of *Leading Well in Times of Disruption* (Langham, 2024). Email: jhandley@A3.email.

Lausanne CEO Michael Oh's words still ring clear in my mind: 'The four most dangerous words in the global church today are "I don't need you."' The congress emphasized that we need each other more than ever, as we face a future of complex, interconnected challenges. Lausanne's work is not a closed chapter; it's an open book inviting leaders everywhere to join in writing the next pages of gospel-centred collaboration.

The rise of polycentric leadership: Mission from everywhere to everywhere

One of the most pivotal shifts emphasized at the congress was the rise of polycentric mission, where mission flows from everywhere to everywhere. This isn't just a concept; it was palpable in the interactions, testimonies and collaborative dialogues that filled our time in Incheon. The age where mission was primarily driven from the West has passed. Today, the Global South and East are leading and sending as integral parts of the gospel mission, shaping and driving its future. Given my own research on polycentric mission leadership, it heartened me to see these shifts sprinkled throughout the congress.[1] In fact, a publisher is asking a few of us to propose a new book on the topic.

I was deeply encouraged by connections with leaders from Africa, Asia and Latin America who are at the forefront of this new mission era. Churches in São Paulo, Nairobi, Seoul and Chennai are fully engaged in the task of spreading the gospel, each bringing fresh insights, creativity and energy to the work of evangelism and discipleship. Of particular note, especially for me and my colleagues serving in Asia, were friends from China who were not able to participate in significant numbers at previous congresses. Seeing global Pentecostalism more present on stage with a keen focus on the role of the Holy Spirit was also refreshing. These streams added flavour and depth to the work of polycentrism in mission today.

This shift from mission as a Western export to a global effort compels us to navigate the complexities of shared leadership, cross-cultural partnerships and deep collaboration. Polycentric mission demands more than recognizing global involvement; it requires sustained and intentional partnerships that transcend national, cultural and denominational divides. The church must embrace this dynamic with humility, recognizing that only through collaborative mission—grounded in mutual respect and shared purpose—will we fulfil our calling. As Lausanne continues to inspire and guide, let us rise to the challenge of a truly interconnected mission for the glory of God and the advancement of his kingdom.

Collaboration: The heart of polycentric mission

Collaboration lies at the core of polycentric mission. As the global church engages in mission from everywhere to everywhere, the necessity for deep, intentional partnerships becomes even more pressing. The Fourth Lausanne Congress offered an incredible reminder of the power of collaborative mission while also shedding light on some of the challenges we must address to fully realize this vision.

1 Joseph Handley, *Polycentric Mission Leadership* (Oxford: Regnum, 2022).

A significant milestone of the congress was the signing of the Collaborative Action Commitment (CAC), a document crafted to call the global church into a more unified, purposeful partnership.[2] The CAC encourages us to tear down the silos and barriers that so often impede our effectiveness, mobilize the next generation of leaders, and foster unity as we tackle critical missional gaps. The document outlines action areas such as reaching younger generations, engaging with the complexities of artificial intelligence and stewarding creation responsibly. These are issues we cannot address alone—they demand a united, Spirit-led response across denominations, cultures and regions.

True collaboration in mission is more than just coordinating efforts; it's an embrace of interdependence, grounded in humility and the recognition that we need each other. In place of the 'I don't need you' mentality, Michael Oh called for a posture of 'I need you'. This attitude was exemplified as a Korean and a Japanese pastor led our closing communion together, symbolizing reconciliation between two nations with a complex and painful history.

To succeed in polycentric mission, we must deeply listen to one another, welcoming the wisdom and perspectives from our brothers and sisters worldwide. Polycentric mission is, in many ways, the ultimate expression of collaborative spirit—a mission in which each part of the global church plays its unique role. By honouring this collaborative model, we not only enhance our reach but also grow stronger and more effective in fulfilling our shared purpose.

The Seoul Statement and the State of the Great Commission Report

While the Congress powerfully underscored the necessity of collaboration, it also highlighted areas where growth is still needed. One area of critique emerged around the release of both the Seoul Statement and the State of the Great Commission Report. Unlike previous Lausanne gatherings, where foundational statements were crafted through real-time discussions and input from delegates, these statements were finalized in advance, leaving limited room for communal shaping by Congress participants.

This disconnect was especially felt during the collaboration sessions. Many of us expected that our discussions would inform the final documents for Seoul 2024. As a content specialist for the session on 'Developing Leaders of Character', I was eager to see how our insights might shape these documents. However, the early release of the Seoul Statement revealed a gap in collaborative leadership, at a time when true partnership is crucial to Lausanne's mission.

The Seoul Statement, produced by a 33-member Theology Working Group, is a robust theological document but lacked a connection to the diverse voices present. Many delegates noted that this felt inconsistent with Lausanne's polycentric, collaborative spirit. While the theological foundations are sound, the rollout missed an opportunity to invite fuller participation from leaders across Africa, Asia, Latin

2 See Daniel Hofkamp, 'Lausanne 4 Concludes with Call to "Accelerate Mission through Collaboration"', *Evangelical Focus*, 30 September 2024, https://evangelicalfocus.com/world/28417/lausanne-4-concludes-with-call-to-accelerate-mission-through-collaboration.

America and beyond. The voices of these leaders should be central in crafting theological statements that resonate with the richness of the global church. In further conversation with Lausanne senior leadership, I learned that the Seoul Statement was meant primarily to address a few gaps in previous statements and documents, including ones noted at previous gatherings, and thus was not seen as something needing further broad collaboration.[3]

The State of the Great Commission Report, while a remarkable overview of the overall state of global mission today, also had its critics. They came from both angles of mission thinking: some from the side of integral mission and others who wanted to see clearer prioritization of evangelism.[4] I have to wonder: if the delegates had been given a greater opportunity for input during the congress, would these critiques have subsided and would the diverse voices in evangelicalism been more fully represented?

The Seoul Statement became a focal point of several side conversations. I know how difficult it is to create documents like these, especially given the global diversity in understanding topics such as Scripture, gender, human sexuality and technology. I appreciate its affirmation of those who pursue celibacy to honour Christ. I also see how challenging it may be for some sisters and brothers who perceive, and rightly so, that parts of the Western evangelical church have veered from traditional biblical views on marriage and gender. Happily, Vaughan Roberts did an exceptional job of addressing these issues from the platform at the congress.

Ultimately, the Seoul Statement's greatest contribution may be its call for a theologically informed view of technology. Over the coming months, further clarifications should emerge, prompting essential conversations that can draw the global church closer together around this statement. These dialogues do not have to be seen as contentious but rather as natural discussions among family, where candid engagement might lead to deeper understanding and unity.

Theological reflections: gender, sexuality, and the body of Christ

A recurring and vital theme of this year's congress was the theology of the body, especially in light of contemporary debates surrounding gender and sexuality. These are pressing questions for the church today, and the congress provided a much-needed space for leaders across diverse cultural contexts to discuss them. What does it mean to be human? How do we live as image-bearers of God, as male and female? What purpose does our embodied existence serve in God's creation?

While LGBTQ+ issues are at the top of Western discourse, leaders from Africa and Asia often prioritize questions around men's and women's roles within marriage

3 See also this response from the statement's two primary authors: Morgan Lee. 'Lausanne Theologians Explain Seoul Statement that Surprised Congress Delegates', *Christianity Today*, 26 September 2024, https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/09/lausanne-seoul-statement-theology-south-korea-evangelism-scripture-discipleship/.

4 For further perspective, see Allen Yeh, 'What Is the Whole Gospel? Insights from the Seoul Statement'. Substack post, 9 October 2024, https://caacptsem.substack.com/p/what-is-the-whole-gospel-insights; Rei Crizaldo, 'Bibimbap Missiology', 5 October 2024, https://xgenesisrei.tumblr.com/post/763512229781979136/bibimbap-missiology.

and family life. These varying perspectives enrich our collective understanding, pushing us to consider a more comprehensive biblical anthropology. The Seoul Statement's call for a robust theology of the body is important, yet its success depends on integrating the plethora of insights from across the global church.

These reflections and the ongoing dialogues are healthy and necessary. As Lausanne continues to call us toward global collaboration, let us pursue a unity that doesn't gloss over differences but rather seeks to understand and embrace them within a shared commitment to the Great Commission. Through authentic collaboration, the polycentric mission of the church can indeed be the profound, transformative force it is meant to be.

The prophetic voice: A missing element

One of the most resonant critiques of the congress noted the absence of a strong prophetic voice, the kind that figures like Ralph Winter brought to previous Lausanne gatherings. Winter's legacy in the Lausanne Movement was commemorated at this congress, and rightly so; his paradigm-shifting contributions to frontier missions continue to shape global mission strategy. Winter's influence lay in not only his message but his prophetic vision—a fearless, expansive view of mission that called the church to stretch beyond comfort zones and tackle the most pressing missional needs. Yet this time around, that kind of piercing, visionary leadership was less evident.

Winter's impact on the movement was profound because he could see what others couldn't and name what others hadn't considered. His voice was more than guidance; it was a prophetic summons to engage the least reached with boldness and sacrifice. As we face secularism's rise, AI's encroaching impact, and the complexities of justice and reconciliation, we need similarly prophetic voices to navigate the nuances and embolden the church for courageous, uncompromising action. I did, however, appreciate Michael Oh's clarion call to reach the least reached in our world today. He kept that missiological lens before us, whereas some other speakers were unclear about what unreached and unengaged peoples mean.

Although a few public addresses focused on disciple-making, I believe this could have been one of those critical prophetic calls from Lausanne 4. Given that the World Evangelical Alliance has called this the defining issue of the decade and Lausanne's listening calls identified disciple-making as the top gap in global mission today, and in view of the need to develop leaders of character in a world filled with evangelical voices who have fallen from grace, this issue is of paramount importance.

Missional koinonia: Fellowship in the body of Christ

One of the congress's more poignant missiological insights came through Eun Ah Cho's analogy of the Asian church as the 'ligaments' of the body of Christ, inspired by Ephesians 4:16. Ligaments connect and stabilize, enabling the body's movements—just as the Asian church has played a vital role in maintaining unity and resilience within the global body of Christ. This beautiful metaphor resonated with the congress's themes of collaboration and mutual support. It underscored that mission isn't an individual effort; it is a communal calling, one that finds its power in our Spirit-filled interconnectedness.

This concept of *missional koinonia*, or fellowship in mission, brings us back to the essence of collaboration. True partnership in mission can flourish only when every part of the body works together with intentional, sacrificial unity. This unity can't be at the surface level; it requires trust, humility and a willingness to serve one another despite our differences. The global church's diversity is a profound gift, but it also demands a commitment to maintaining unity even when cultural and theological perspectives vary.

Several Congress moments underscored this unity. The evening dedicated to Christianity in Korea was one of the most powerful displays of transparency and humility at a global gathering. Korean leaders described their church's journey over the last 25 years, including its challenges and lessons. It was an extraordinary expression of vulnerability and grace before a global audience.

Another deeply moving moment was the day dedicated to the persecuted church. While it may not have seemed as immediately striking as the unveiling of the '10-40 Window' decades ago, this emphasis on persecution may ultimately be just as consequential for the future of missions. Hearing these stories, it dawned on me that the 'window' we need most today is one that views mission through the lens of shared suffering. It's within the crucible of persecution that the debate between evangelism and holistic mission often converges into a seamless expression of the gospel.

The congress's closing eucharist celebration, mentioned above, was another unforgettable highlight. When Korean pastor Jae Hoon Lee and Dr. Masanori Kurasawa, a Japanese missiologist, walked onto the stage together to lead communion, it was a stirring image of reconciliation. Throughout the congress, these seemingly small gestures—often unannounced—expressed the Lausanne leadership's integrity and commitment to fostering a true sense of unity and fellowship among us.

Holding evangelism and social action together

A longstanding challenge for Lausanne, and for the global church at large, is to find a faithful balance between evangelism and social action. The history of missions has often seen a pendulum swing between these two emphases, yet they are both indispensable to a holistic witness. As the Cape Town Commitment emphasized, gospel proclamation cannot be separated from acts of justice and mercy. Both are integral to embodying Christ's love.

But we must guard against sidelining evangelism in our efforts to address social needs. Throughout history, whenever evangelism has been de-emphasized, it has often drifted out of focus entirely. This congress reminded us of the eternal urgency of our call to invite people into a saving relationship with Christ, to make disciples of all nations. While social action is essential, it must not come at the expense of gospel proclamation.

One way Lausanne can keep this tension in balance is by renewing its focus on evangelism in light of Christ's return. The apostles' teaching—that Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead—remains a powerful motivation for sharing the gospel. The Cape Town Commitment rightly emphasized that our proclamation must be rooted in love, yet we must not lose sight of the eternal stakes involved in

one's response to the gospel. Lausanne has the opportunity to lead the church in navigating this tension, ensuring that both evangelism and social action remain central to our mission.

Sadly, a congress like this is not without its challenges. Ruth Padilla DeBorst's presentation on justice stirred a reaction among many and led to the congress submitting an apology, followed by her gracious response. She had limited time to speak and thus her presentation was interpreted as a broad critique of dispensational theology, as well as of Israel's current war in Palestine. This episode, like the reactions to the Seoul Statement and (to a lesser degree) the State of the Great Commission Report, show that we have room to grow both in interrelating social action and evangelism and in having respectful conversations when we disagree. I passed along my concern for Ruth to her husband one evening over dinner. I also expressed my care to David Bennett, who crafted Lausanne's apology, and let him know I was praying for them. I hope that in the future, we can have stronger *koinonia* as we work through our differences, and I pray that we can strive toward a more just world, calling out injustice when necessary. I am encouraged to hear that there may be room for further discussion and deliberation to work through some of the issues around the Seoul Statement.[5]

Theological praxis: Moving from belief to action

While the Seoul Statement provided a robust theological foundation, there was a sense among delegates that it lacked specific guidance on translating these beliefs into action. The congress's emphasis on collaboration and the formation of action teams was a positive step, yet there was a desire for clearer, more practical next steps.

Today's global church faces complex challenges, from secularism and pluralism to justice, gender and the ethical implications of technology. To face these challenges effectively, we need a theology that moves beyond theory into practice and shapes our actions. This is the essence of *theological praxis*: the commitment to let our beliefs drive tangible change. For the global church, this means equipping leaders to transform theological convictions into practices that are faithful to the gospel while contextually relevant.

The congress attempted to do this through catalyzing collaborative action teams, but the technology utilized was often not accessible or working properly, and the clarity of how those teams should evolve was too complex and hard to put into motion. My team, the Lausanne Movement Catalysts for Leadership Development, had a hand in developing a book outlining the gaps for leadership development.[6]

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5 See also Timothy Goropevsek. 'Lausanne Apology for Speaker Remarks on Israel-Gaza, Dispensational Eschatology Risks Stirring Greater Controversy', *Christian Daily*, 25 September 2024, https://www.christiandaily.com/news/lausanne-apology-about-speaker-risks-stirring-greater-controversy.html; Nathanael Somanathan, 'A Sri Lankan's Reflections on L4 and Integral Mission', Church Leaders: The Exchange, 3 October 2024, https://churchleaders.com/voices/exchange/498131-a-sri-lankans-reflections-lausanne.html/3; Mitchell Atencio. A Speech on Justice Criticized Israel: The Global Evangelical Congress Apologized', *Sojourners*, 30 September 2024, https://sojo.net/articles/news/speech-justice-criticized-israel-global-evangelical-conference-apologized.

6 Joseph Handley, Gideon Para-Mallam and Asia Williamson, eds., *Leading Well in Times of Disruption: Leadership Development in Global Mission* (Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2024).

Time will tell if efforts like these will translate into actionable efforts and strategies to help move us towards fulfilling the Great Commission.

As Lausanne moves forward, I am hopeful that future gatherings will continue to integrate this practical aspect of theology. Our task is not simply to develop sound doctrine but to embody it, living out the gospel's transformative power in ways that address the pressing needs of our world. The conversations, critiques and collaborative efforts sparked at the congress will help us draw closer to this vision, inspiring action that honours Christ and advances his mission in every corner of the globe.

Moving forward: Hope for the future

Despite the challenges, my hope for the future of the global church has never been stronger. The Fourth Lausanne Congress underscored the incredible ways in which God is moving across the world. Throughout the congress, we saw a hunger for collaboration, engaged in transformative conversations, and formed connections that, I am convinced, will bear fruit in God's perfect timing.

The congress shone a light on the rising influence of younger leaders and marketplace Christians, many of whom will play a defining role in the next chapter of global mission. As we look to the YLG2026 (Lausanne's Younger Leaders' Gathering) in São Paulo, we see a pivotal opportunity for the emerging generation to take up the mantle of Lausanne. To fulfil our shared calling, we must dismantle the remaining barriers that hinder collaboration and make room for these new leaders to step into their roles with courage, creativity and conviction.

The Collaborative Action Commitment, now posted as a reminder in my office, calls us to unity, partnership and a renewed commitment to God's mission, for which I hope that Lausanne will be a catalyst.

A bold vision for the future: Lausanne 4's enduring legacy

In summary, Lausanne 4 will be a pivotal marker in the history of the evangelical movement. This congress confirmed a series of defining shifts that will shape the next decades of global mission.

A baton passing to the Global South. The reality of polycentric mission has brought forth new perspectives, with voices from Cameroon, Costa Rica and Ghana sharing the stage with long-established Western leaders. It's a new era of global evangelicalism—a faith that is more fully shared, fully owned, and fully led by all.

Collaboration is key. Seoul highlighted the urgency of collaboration as never before. Through cross-cultural dialogue and 'Closing the Gap' afternoon sessions, delegates tackled 25 critical issues to extend connections beyond the congress. Lausanne's unique role as a unifying force has come into focus: few other networks bring together such a diverse range of voices, grounded in a shared love for Christ and commitment to his mission.

Friendship and humility. The Lausanne Movement has always tried to strike a balance between evangelism and social action. Under the congress theme, 'Let the church declare and display Christ together', Seoul reminded us that healthy mission deserves unity and humility.

Shining bright in the darkest corners. Stories of resilience, repentance and hope were displayed throughout the congress, underscoring that the light of Christ shines most clearly in the darkest places. Testimonies from imprisoned Iranian believers, calls for repentance from Sarah Breuel, and displays of reconciliation—like the closing eucharist service—point to the profound truth that our mission is built on the love and light of Christ, even in suffering. This congress reminds us that the church, with all its diversity, stands together as a witness of hope in a world that desperately needs it.

Younger leaders and marketplace believers. Lausanne 4 was marked by a significant focus on young leaders and marketplace Christians—men and women with fresh perspectives and a hunger for the Great Commission. Leaders like Menchit Wong from the Philippines spoke of empowering the next generation. The unprecedented number of marketplace Christians participating highlighted Lausanne's recognition of every sphere of society as a place for gospel witness.

Leveraging technology. With the Digital Discovery Center, Lausanne ventured into new spaces, exploring the intersection of digital advancements and mission. Each day, sessions engaged with AI's role in evangelism and cultural shifts affecting future generations. This congress reimagined our approach, inspiring us to share the gospel through new platforms and engage more interactively with global audiences.

A call to adapt and reimagine. As we celebrate what God has done, Lausanne must also continue to adapt to meet the church's evolving needs. Leaders like Ruslan Maliuta from Ukraine challenged us to think more creatively about how we engage the world, reminding us that every global gathering is an opportunity to redefine our role in reaching the world for Christ. Our task is not merely logistical but deeply theological—to gather and mobilize as a united global church ready to respond to the Spirit's leading.

I hope that Lausanne 4 will be remembered as the congress that launched the Great Collaboration for the Great Commission. As we embrace this polycentric, collaborative model, we can pioneer a fresh chapter in global mission. This is a moment of profound potential, one that could echo through history as the Lausanne Movement carries forward the light of the gospel—together, from everywhere to everywhere.

ERT (2024) 48:4, 302–314

Creating Life in Glass: A Biblical and Ethical Examination of IVF

Ruth Houser

A recent US court decision and political debates have highlighted both the popularity of and the ethical uncertainties surrounding in vitro fertilization (IVF) as a means of achieving pregnancy. This article provides an overview of IVF and a disciplined scientific and theological analysis of how Christians should approach the practice.

Infertility, an experience as ancient as Abraham and Sarah, affects as many as one in six people in the world today.[1] If you have not personally experienced infertility, someone in your church likely has. As in biblical times, childlessness today can be socially, economically, spiritually and emotionally devastating. Couples rightly long for children, but their arms remain empty even as they pray daily for a miracle.

In response to this suffering, scientists have developed various ways to overcome infertility. One of the most popular methods is in vitro fertilization (IVF), which has led to the birth of over 10 million babies since 1978.[2] Many faithful Christians have pursued IVF to enable them to have children, some of whom play in our schools and churches today.

As Christians, we celebrate every life and rejoice with parents who finally have children to hold and love. However, as a people who value life and God's creation, we must carefully examine the ethical implications of technology related to the creation of human life. Children are a treasure, little humans entrusted to us by God to steward for his glory.

On the surface, IVF appears to be a wonderful service in providing the gift of children. But a peek into the mechanics of IVF reveals troubling truths about how this practice actually treats life and human dignity.

In this article, I introduce the complex technology underlying IVF and the troubling ethical questions involved. I explain the IVF process, a few of the main ethical concerns surrounding IVF, and IVF methods that avoid most of these ethical concerns, in addition to a way to save lives placed in jeopardy by the unethical use of IVF.

Ruth Houser (MA, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, USA) wrote her master's thesis on the ethics of embryo adoption. She is currently employed in the childcare sector.

1 World Health Organization, *Infertility Prevalence Estimates, 1990–2021* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2023), 25.

2 European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology, 'ART Fact Sheet' (2023), 1.

Europe welcomed the first IVF baby in 1978 and continues to be a major centre for IVF use, along with North America and parts of Asia.[3] According to a 2019 report by the International Committee for Monitoring Assisted Reproductive Technologies, 10 countries combined to conduct 90 to 95 percent of all artificial reproduction technology (ART) cycles in the world. The top three countries were China, Japan and the United States. All the remaining countries in the top 10, with the exception of Australia, were European.[4]

However, IVF activity has also steadily increased in other parts of the world. Middle Eastern countries boast high ART cycles-per-resident ratios, with Israel recording the highest in the world.[5] While not as prolific, many Latin American countries also provide access to IVF, with Brazil and Mexico hosting the most IVF clinics in the region.[6] Sub-Saharan Africa, on the other hand, is far less IVF-saturated. Nigeria and South Africa are among the IVF leaders in the region while many other countries have no clinics at all.[7] Cost, limited infrastructure, lack of knowledge about ART, and religious concerns limit the use of IVF in Africa.[8] Similar factors, especially cost, also affect IVF access in parts of Latin America, Central Asia and the Middle East.[9]

Despite these barriers, IVF is spreading across the world. If members of our churches are not already using or learning about IVF, it might not be long before they do. We must be prepared to help them think about it biblically.

Summary of the IVF process

In vitro means 'in glass' in Latin, depicting how fertilization in IVF takes place in a petri dish instead of in a human body. The process is complex and some aspects vary by patient. However, there are four basic steps in every IVF cycle. Step one is the collection of eggs and sperm. Egg collection begins with the woman receiving hormonal treatments to artificially stimulate the maturation of multiple eggs at once. The eggs are then retrieved in a laparoscopic surgery. Anywhere from one to over 20 eggs may be harvested at once. Sperm is collected through masturbation, intercourse using a special condom, or a minor surgery.

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3 International Committee for Monitoring Assisted Reproductive Technologies, *ICMART Preliminary World Report 2019* (Copenhagen: ESHRE, 2023), 5–6.

4 *ICMART Preliminary World Report 2019*, 6.

5 Marcia C. Inhorn and Pasquale Patrizio, 'Infertility Around the Globe: New Thinking on Gender, Reproductive Technologies and Global Movements in the 21st Century', *Human Reproduction Update* 21, no. 4 (2015): 415.

6 Inhorn and Patrizio, 'Infertility Around the Globe', 415; Fernando Zegers-Hochschild et al., 'Assisted Reproductive Technologies in Latin America: The Latin American Registry, 2019', *JBRA Assisted Reproduction* 26, no. 4 (2022): 638.

7 W. Ombelet and J. Onofre, 'IVF in Africa: What Is It All About?' *Facts, Views & Vision in ObGyn* 11, no. 1 (2019): 67–68.

8 Barend Botha, Delva Shamley and Silke Dyer, 'Availability, Effectiveness and Safety of ART in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review', *Human Reproduction Open* 2018, no. 2 (2018): 4, 6; Ombelet and Onofre, 'IVF in Africa', 73–74.

9 Inhorn and Patrizio, 'Infertility Around the Globe', 416–17; G. David Adamson, 'Global Cultural and Socioeconomic Factors That Influence Access to Assisted Reproductive Technologies', *Women's Health* 5, no. 4 (2009): 352–53.

The second step of IVF involves fertilization and development. All the mature eggs and sperm are placed in a petri dish to fertilize naturally, or the sperm are injected directly into eggs, a process known as intracytoplasmic sperm injection. Fertilization, also known as conception, takes place when 23 chromosomes in a sperm combine with 23 chromosomes in an egg to form a unique set of 46 chromosomes in one new cell called a zygote. Clinicians observe the newly formed zygotes for several days as the zygotes' cells multiply, taking them to the embryonic stage. Zygotes and embryos who fail to develop are discarded. At this time, embryos are also graded according to their perceived viability.

Once the embryos have developed sufficiently, patients have two options in step three. The first option is to transfer one or more of the most viable embryos into the uterus of the woman with the hope that they will implant in the uterine lining, leading to a successful pregnancy. In this situation, the remaining embryos not chosen for transfer are usually frozen for possible future use. In some cases, doctors will transfer two or more embryos at once to increase the chance of pregnancy. However, this can lead to a multiple pregnancy, which increases health risks to the woman and babies. Due to these risks, the transfer of multiple embryos has become less common. The second option is to defer immediate transfer and freeze all the embryos. Patients may choose this option for many reasons, such as allowing time to heal from ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome caused by the hormone treatments or other illnesses.

The fourth and final step of IVF is to wait to find out if the transferred embryos implanted and pregnancy is achieved. If embryos do not implant in the uterine lining, they die and are naturally expelled from the body. In this situation, patients can choose to thaw one or more frozen embryos and do another transfer. If, however, a woman has multiple embryos transferred and becomes pregnant with multiple babies, doctors may encourage the woman to selectively abort one or more to reduce risks to herself and the remaining babies. This process is called selective reduction and would be the last part of step four before delivery.

Though most IVF customers are heterosexual married couples, some countries grant IVF access to all individuals, including single men and women, unmarried heterosexual couples, and homosexual couples. Regulations on who can access IVF vary across the globe, from Saudi Arabia (which allows only married heterosexual couples to use IVF) to the United States (which allows universal access).[10] Males can make use of IVF through surrogacy, another practice with a patchwork of laws across the world.

There are two important possible variants in the IVF process, and the question of who may have access to IVF provides the context for the first variant—donor gametes (eggs and sperm). Many countries allow individuals to sell or give away their gametes to be used by others through IVF. Individuals or couples may choose to use donor eggs, donor sperm or both to create embryos. They may or may not know the donor but are usually given a description of potential donors, since they are deciding who will contribute biologically to their future children. Though single individuals

10 Mahmoud Salama et al., 'Cross Border Reproductive Care (CBRC): A Growing Global Phenomenon with Multidimensional Implications (A Systematic and Critical Review)', *Journal of Assisted Reproduction and Genetics* 35, no. 7 (2018): 1281.

and homosexual couples are obvious candidates for donor gametes, heterosexual couples may also find donor gametes attractive for reasons including hereditary disorders, poor gamete quality, or limited gametes due to illness or age. Thus, the resulting children may be related to only one or neither of the intended parents. This situation raises a host of biblical and ethical concerns that I do not have space to discuss here, but knowing about gamete donation is helpful to understand the full extent of IVF.

The second additional element of IVF is preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), a practice that is growing in popularity and widely accepted across the world. There are different forms of PGD, but as a general summary, clinicians take cells from an embryo and test them for abnormalities and genetic conditions. These tests can also reveal the embryo's sex and physical characteristics. Embryos testing positive for genetic conditions or cellular abnormalities are usually destroyed. Some patients use PGD for sex selection, though certain countries ban the use of testing for this purpose. PGD is still considered experimental by the Society for Reproductive Technology, can harm embryos, and is not always accurate. Embryos deemed less viable by PGD may lead to live births of healthy babies.[11]

Processes such as donor gametes and PGD increase the cost of IVF, which varies widely. The cost of IVF in the United States ranges from a base of $12,400 to $30,000 or more with medications, added procedures such as PGD, and repeated cycles. In contrast, the Czech Republic offers IVF for an estimated 2,500 to 4,000 euros ($2,675 to $4,424).[12] Turkey is even more affordable at around $2,500.[13] Israel offers free IVF services up to the birth of two children to people who have paid their health insurance bills.[14]

The complexity and advanced technology used in IVF are reflected in the prices involved. Even the basic process of IVF is complicated, and additional factors and circumstances surrounding its use only add to the ethical questions raised by this technology. Before exploring the ethics, however, we must examine one loose end of the IVF process: what happens to the remaining frozen embryos?

Frozen 'leftover' embryos

During the typical IVF process, multiple eggs are retrieved and fertilized at once to improve success rates, avoid the risks of repeating the egg retrieval process, and reduce costs. This leads to the creation and freezing of up to 20 or more embryos for future use. Many factors may prevent the transfer of these embryos. Parents may successfully give birth to the number of babies they want to raise before using all

11 'Frequently Asked Questions', Society for Reproductive Technology, https://www.sart.org/ivf-info/frequently-asked-questions/.

12 'Top 5 Countries to Get IVF Treatment', Brit-Med, 2 June 2021, https://www.brit-med.com/blog/top-5-countries-to-get-ivf-treatment/.

13 'IVF Turkey', Fertility Clinics Abroad, https://www.fertilityclinicsabroad.com/ivf-abroad/ivf-turkey.

14 Amy Klein, 'Doing Fertility Treatments in Israel: Pros and Cons', *Haaretz*, 9 March 2015, https://haaretz.com/science-and-health/2015-03-09/ty-article/ivf-in-israel-pros-and-cons/0000017f-da7b-d432-a77f-df7b83080000.

their embryos; major life changes or shifting family goals may also alter their plans.[15] As a result, millions of 'leftover' embryos are frozen in storage indefinitely.

The number of frozen embryos globally is hard to determine. There are estimated to be over 1.5 million frozen embryos in America, more than 660,000 in Spain, and 500,000 in the UK.[16] Some countries have limits on whether and for how long embryos can be frozen. Germany, for example, allows only three eggs to be fertilized at one time and generally restricts freezing embryos except at very early stages. Other countries, such as Switzerland, New Zealand and Poland, limit the number of years for which embryos can be stored.[17]

There are four main disposition options for those embryos whose parents cannot or will not transfer them: (1) thaw them and allow them to die; (2) donate them for scientific research, which will also lead to their death; (3) donate them to another couple, as I will discuss below; (4) leave them frozen indefinitely. Some couples may be unable or unwilling to transfer their embryos but may find other disposition options emotionally difficult. For this and other reasons, some embryos are 'abandoned'—i.e. clinics cannot make contact with the parents, who did not make disposition decisions before disappearing. The fate of these embryos depends on the laws of their country.

Establishing a theological foundation

Why do IVF issues matter to Christians? Why should Christians care about the ethics of this fertility technology that brings millions of babies into the world? To answer this question, we must begin with a few basic biblical truths about human life and a scientific fact about when life begins.

All people are made in God's image. Genesis 1:27 states that God made man and woman in his image, an image they continue to possess even after their fall into sin (Gen 9:6; Jas 3:9–10). Scholars debate exactly what the image of God means, but it is clear that every person at all times, regardless of location, size, ability, sex or ethnicity, is made in God's image and has immeasurable value in God's eyes. Humans alone have a relationship with God and are the object of the love that led Jesus to die on the cross so that they might live.

The image of God in humanity leads directly to God's command against murder in Exodus 20:13. David Jones, author and professor of Christian ethics, defines murder as 'the unlawful, malicious taking of innocent human life'.[18] Exodus 20:13 is not just a command to avoid taking life; Jones also writes that the command not to take life implies a converse command to protect human life.[19] Any unlawful attack

15 Anne Drapkin Lyerly et al., "Fertility Patients' Views about Frozen Embryo Disposition: Results of a Multi-Institutional US Survey," *Fertility and Sterility* 93, no. 2 (2010): 506.

16 Gerard Letterie, 'In Re: The Disposition of Frozen Embryos: 2022', *Fertility and Sterility* 117, no. 3 (March 2022): 479; 'More Than 60,000 Frozen Embryos Abandoned in Spain', Instituto Bernabeu, 24 November 2023, https://www.institutobernabeu.com/en/news/more-than-60000-frozen-embryos-abandoned-in-spain/; Zishang Yue and Calum MacKellar, 'A Quantitative Analysis of Stored Frozen Surplus Embryos in the UK', *The New Bioethics* (June 2024): 1.

17 Lisa A. Rinehart, 'Storage, Transport, and Disposition of Gametes and Embryos: Legal Issues and Practical Considerations', *Fertility and Sterility* 115, no. 2 (2021): 275, 278.

18 David W. Jones, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 138.

19 Jones, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*, 106–7.

on innocent human life or failure to protect and value life is an attack on the God whose image we all bear.

If every human is eternally valuable and God commands us to protect life, then it is important for us to know when life begins. Biblical passages such as Genesis 25:22–23, Exodus 21:22–25, Psalm 51:5, Psalm 139:13–16, Isaiah 49:1, Jeremiah 1:5 and Luke 1:42–44 indicate that the unborn are living human beings whom God knows and loves and with whom he has a relationship. The Bible does not, however, state when life begins, which is understandable given the lack of modern scientific knowledge. Neither Moses nor Luke knew about DNA or eggs and sperm. Today, we know that eggs and sperm each contain 23 chromosomes which combine at conception to form a zygote with a complete set of 46 chromosomes different from anyone else in the world. This zygote is distinct from either parent and will immediately begin self-contained development that continues, given a welcoming environment, through birth and throughout life. In *The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture*, Scott Klusendorf shows that biology proves, as many doctors agree, that life begins at the moment of conception.[20] We cannot do justice to the extensive debate around this topic here. What matters to this discussion is that a new human life made in God's image begins at conception. From the point of conception, the image of God is present and we should not callously extinguish or manipulate life as we wish.

Another important biblical truth of relevance to our consideration of IVF is the value and purpose of children. God says that children are a good gift to be stewarded for his glory. In Genesis 1:28, God told Adam and Eve, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.' God's plan from the beginning was for married couples to have children who would populate the earth and worship him. Due to the fall, all children are now sinners in need of redemption, but God's purpose has not changed. 'Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate' (Ps 127:3–5).

Children are a gift from God, a blessing to their parents. Jesus affirmed their value by welcoming children during his ministry when others would have sent them away (Mt 19:13–15). However, God does not give children merely to edify parents. God instructs parents to 'teach [my words] diligently to your children' (Deut 6:7) and to 'bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord' (Eph 6:4). All God's gifts are good for us, so children will bring joy to their parents, but their purpose is not ultimately for their parents' pleasure. Parents are stewards, responsible to ensure their children's well-being and to lead them to know and love God.

The image of God in all humans, the command not to murder, the beginning of a new life at conception, and the value and purpose of children all shine light on the practice of IVF. These principles help us examine the ethics of IVF from a biblical perspective.

20 Scott Klusendorf, *The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 35–37.

Ethical objections

Not surprisingly, whole books have been written on the ethical questions involved in IVF. I will present only a brief overview of a few major ethical objections to IVF here. These objections fall into three main categories: loss of life, departure from God's creation design, and violation of human dignity.

Loss of life

Perhaps the greatest ethical objection to how IVF is usually performed is the massive loss of human life, much of which is intentional. As noted, multiple embryos are typically created during IVF. Throughout the process, embryos who appear less viable, fail PGD testing, are not the sex their parents desire, or are simply unwanted become discarded as biomedical waste. There is no official data on how many embryos are discarded in the IVF process. However, one report found that 1.7 million embryos, roughly half of all those created, were destroyed over a 21-year period in the UK.[21] In addition, other embryos are donated to science where they will be killed in the name of life-giving research. Still others are transferred only to be selectively reduced in the womb. Various locations, such as Malta and the US state of Louisiana, do not permit the destruction of human embryos, but such laws are uncommon as the destruction of embryos is essential to the IVF industry.[22]

In addition to the intentional taking of life, IVF also leads to the indirect death of embryos throughout the IVF process. Many embryos will stop developing after fertilization, die during freezing and thawing, or fail to implant when transferred. Of successfully implanted embryos, 15.5 percent miscarry and 0.5 percent result in a stillbirth according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).[23] Overall, the likelihood of any embryo created in IVF surviving to delivery is very low. Emma Waters of the Heritage Foundation presented this illustration of the loss of embryonic life during IVF:

> Presuming a conservative estimate that only 10 embryos are created in an average round of IVF, this means that the 413,776 rounds of IVF reported in 2021 resulted in the creation of approximately *4.1 million embryos*. When dividing the total number of live-born infants by 4.1 million, this would mean that *only 2.3 percent of all embryos created in the United States result in the live birth of a baby*.[24]

21 Andrew Hough, '1.7 Million Human Embryos Created for IVF Thrown Away', *The Telegraph*, 31 December 2012, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/9772233/1.7-million-human-embryos-created-for-IVF-thrown-away.html.

22 The necessity of embryo destruction to IVF is evident in an article by Rachael Robertson, 'Why Discarding Embryos Is Inherent to the IVF Process', *MedPage Today*, 28 February 2024, https://www.medpagetoday.com/obgyn/infertility/108932.

23 This includes all embryos created through ART, the majority through IVF. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *2021 Assisted Reproductive Technology: Fertility Clinic and National Summary Report* (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2023), https://cdc.gov/art/reports/2021/index.html, 2, 15.

24 Emma Waters, 'Why the IVF Industry Must Be Regulated', Heritage Foundation, 19 March 2024, https://www.heritage.org/life/report/why-the-ivf-industry-must-be-regulated.

Another report from the United States estimated that 7.5 percent of embryos created through IVF result in live births.[25] While success rates for IVF vary across countries and even clinics, overall the vast majority of created embryos do not survive.

The massive loss of embryonic life involved in IVF should alarm Christians. If life begins at conception, intentionally destroying embryos breaks the command against murder. The indirect death of embryos is also concerning. Though no one directly ends these lives, intentionally creating human lives while knowing that they will likely not survive does not protect or honour innocent human life made in God's image.[26]

Departure from God's design

The Roman Catholic Church presents another ethical objection to IVF, stemming from its doctrine concerning marriage. According to Roman Catholic teaching, the purposes of the conjugal act are to unify and procreate.[27] In the marital act, two become one in love, overflowing into the creation of a new human being who is distinct from and yet similar to the parents. This reflects how the triune God, in an overflow of love, created man in his image.[28] In procreation, 'spouses cooperate as servants and not as masters in the work of the Creator' as a new human is conceived.[29] To try to summarize the rich reasoning behind this view, unity and procreation in the conjugal act have inseparable theological significance, conception is not a wholly human endeavour, and children are most dignified when conceived within a marital act; thus every conjugal act must be open to the gift of children and every child should come from a conjugal act.

While Protestants tend to reject the premise that every marital act must be open to procreation, many are also concerned with how IVF distorts God's design for marriage and family. Theologian Albert Mohler writes, 'Protestants, too, have historically recognized the intrinsic relatedness of parenthood to the conjugal bond and the act of marital sex as the design of a loving and merciful Creator, who imposed limits for our good.'[30] Mohler also notes how departing from God's creation design through the use of IVF opens the door to further separation from God's design, such as the use of IVF by individuals outside the biblical marital bond.

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25 'Conception Is a Rare Event, Fertility Study Shows', Reuters, 25 October 2010, https://reuters.com/article/us-fertility/conception-is-a-rare-event-fertility-study-shows-idUSTRE69O50T20101025/.

26 Moreover, research has found a higher chance of medical conditions in children created through IVF. This is another factor to consider when ethically evaluating IVF. See Kallie Fell, 'A Comprehensive Report on the Risks of ART', Center for Bioethics and Culture Network, https://cbc-network.org/issues/making-life/making-life-2/, 17.

27 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 'Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day', Vatican, 22 February 1987, II.B.4.a.

28 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 'Instruction *Dignitas Personae*: On Certain Bioethical Questions', Vatican, 2008, no. 9.

29 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 'Instruction on Respect for Human Life', II.B.4.c.

30 Albert Mohler, 'Christian Morality and Test Tube Babies, Part One', 29 September 2005, https://albertmohler.com/2005/09/29/christian-morality-and-test-tube-babies-part-one-2/.

Human dignity

Not only does IVF depart from God's creation design, but Protestants and Catholics alike note that it violates the dignity of children by turning them into objects and commodities to be used and manipulated according to the will of parents, instead of human beings with equal dignity to their parents. The Catholic instruction *Donum vitae* explains that a child 'cannot be desired or conceived as the product of an intervention of medical or biological techniques; that would be equivalent to reducing him to an object of scientific technology.'[31] This objectification of children is especially evident in how embryos are graded according to perceived viability, tested for genetic fitness in PGD, and then discarded if undesired. All children have equal dignity, yet these practices inevitably separate children with possible genetic disorders, less chance of implantation, or a certain sex as less deserving of life. Mohler notes that such actions attack the dignity not only of these children but also of all people in society. He writes that 'the termination and disposal of human embryos is a reminder that the gruesome reality of the Third Reich is never far from us. A society that will destroy human life and discard unwanted frozen embryos has lost the vital sense of human dignity which is foundational to civilized society.'[32]

The IVF process also encourages the mentality that children are simply commodities for parents to obtain at will rather than equally valuable people gifted by God. This mentality begins with the price tag mentioned above. Although the delivery and care of children can be quite costly, their actual creation carries no financial cost when done naturally. In addition, in IVF children are created en masse, sorted, tested, sometimes chosen based on certain characteristics such as their sex, stored in freezers, used at the convenience of those who created them, and disposed of when found defective or no longer wanted. This is how we generally treat retail items, not people. All children have dignity independently of how they are created or treated, because they are made in God's image. What is at stake is how adults view and care for children who are treasured by God.

Biblically, children are a gift from God, entrusted to parents for a time. Children do not exist to meet the needs of adults; rather, adults are meant to meet the needs of children and thereby to bring glory to God. IVF tends to distort the purpose and value of children by focusing on adults' desire to have children without consideration of God's design and purposes. The desire for children is good, but efforts to fulfil this desire cease to honour God when they violate the well-being and dignity of children by taking their lives, putting them in environments that may kill them, and treating them like objects and as less than human. For these reasons, IVF, as generally practised, should be considered ethically unacceptable for Christians.

Alternative approaches to IVF

If what we have discussed thus far is not complicated enough, there are a few more layers to unwrap so that we can gain a full understanding of the ethical situation of IVF. While the majority of IVF procedures occur as described above, it is possible to

31 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 'Instruction on Respect for Human Life', II.B.4.c.
32 Albert Mohler, 'Christian Morality and Test Tube Babies, Part Two', 12 May 2006, https://albertmohler.com/2006/05/12/christian-morality-and-test-tube-babies-part-two/.

do IVF without its more ethically problematic elements—PGD, grading and destroying embryos, and freezing numerous embryos indefinitely. It should be noted, though, that pursuing IVF without these elements may involve constantly fighting against the use of these procedures and searching for doctors who are willing to do IVF without them. Without these elements, there are two ways to do IVF that some Christian ethicists consider acceptable, along with another hope-filled option that bypasses part of IVF altogether.

The first method involves creating and freezing only as many embryos as the couple is committed to carrying over time. For example, if a couple wants to deliver four children, they would create only four embryos, transfer one and freeze the remaining three with a commitment to transferring them in the future. In this way, a limited number of embryos are created, reducing the risk of leaving large numbers of embryos indefinitely in storage. However, this method still puts children at risk in two main ways. First, parents are presuming that nothing will prevent the transfer of their embryos in the future. As James 4:13–16 warns, no one knows the future. Medical problems, divorce, death or other life changes could prevent the couple from transferring their embryos. I believe that jeopardizing the fate of one's children in this way is unwise. Some parents may plan to donate any embryos they cannot transfer to other infertile couples, a process we will discuss below. However, intentionally creating children with the knowledge that they might be raised by people other than their parents is also ethically questionable.[33]

Second, freezing puts children's lives at risk. As noted, some embryos do not survive the freezing and thawing process. Freezing may also cause embryos to degrade and affect their DNA, though more research is needed to explore these harms.[34] Though rare, it is also possible that embryos may be displaced or accidentally destroyed in storage. In addition, we must ask whether freezing humans in their early development until their parents are ready to retrieve them honours their human dignity. Overall, freezing embryos is not a completely safe or dignifying process for these tiny children. If embryos already exist and are not transferred, freezing is the only way to preserve their lives. However, given the drawbacks of freezing, many ethicists believe it is better not to create and freeze multiple embryos in the first place.[35]

This leads us to the second method of using IVF. Using this method, a couple creates only as many embryos as they are willing to transfer immediately. For example, if a woman is willing to carry one child at a time, the couple would create only one embryo and transfer him or her right away. This would prevent freezing any embryos. However, doing IVF in this way is more expensive and harder on the woman's body, as it will likely require multiple rounds of egg retrieval for a success-

33 For more on the perspective that children have a right to be raised by their biological parents, see Katy Faust and Stacy Manning, *Them Before Us: Why We Need a Global Children's Rights Movement* (Nashville, TN: Post Hill Press, 2021).

34 John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 431; Laura Francesca Rienzi and Alan Trounson, 'Cryopreservation of Embryos and Oocytes', in *40 Years After in Vitro Fertilisation: State of the Art and New Challenges,* ed. Jan Tesarik (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2019), 89–90.

35 David VanDrunen, *Bioethics and the Christian Life: A Guide to Making Difficult Decisions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 140–41.

ful birth. As a result, it may be hard to find a doctor willing to perform IVF in this manner.

Though these two methods of IVF are condoned by some Christian ethicists, others, such as John and Paul Feinberg, do not consider IVF acceptable in any form.[36] The Feinbergs note that even if couples create and transfer one embryo at a time, the likely death of that embryo 'follows a deliberate act to use a procedure that puts the embryo in a precarious position', thus placing moral accountability for this death on the ones who created the child.[37] While I am not completely convinced by this argument, I believe that the additional questions raised by the separation from God's design, the potential to treat children as commodities, and the tendency to distort the purpose of children make the use of IVF, even in the most limited method, unwise.

Even if all forms of IVF ended today, millions of embryos remain frozen in storage. Though the process that made them is ethically flawed, each embryo is a full human being, just as deserving of love and life as any other child. Embryo adoption, also known as embryo donation, is a way to honour their lives without violating additional ethical boundaries. In embryo adoption, a couple decides to give their remaining embryos to another couple or individual to transfer, carry, deliver and raise as their own. Embryo adoption is similar to traditional adoption in that a couple welcomes a child into their family who is not their biological offspring. In other ways, however, the process is very different. First, embryos are legally considered property, not people, in most locations. Therefore, embryo adoption is not legally classified as adoption but as the transfer of property and is not regulated by adoption laws. This point brings us to the difference between embryo adoption and embryo donation.

Embryo adoption was introduced in the United States in 1997 by the Nightlight Christian Adoption Agency.[38] Through their Snowflakes Adoption Program, Nightlight seeks to honour the humanity of embryos by mirroring the adoption process as much as possible, including background checks and home studies. Similar programs have developed since 1997, leading to the adoption of thousands of embryos. Embryo donation, in contrast, occurs within fertility clinics and does not involve the same adoption formality. Typically, clients with remaining embryos entrust them to their clinic to give to another client. This process usually involves less control by the donating couple and screening than an embryo adoption program. While embryo adoption and donation have significant differences, in the remainder of this discussion I will use 'embryo adoption' to refer to both approaches for simplicity. Some countries, such as Egypt and Switzerland, do not allow embryo donation, thus preventing embryo adoption as well.[39]

36 Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 425.

37 Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 425.

38 'Embryo Adoption FAQs', Embryo Adoption Resources, Snowflakes Embryo Adoption Program, https://nightlight.org/snowflakes-resources/#faq.

39 Salama et al., 'Cross Border Reproductive Care', 1281; C. Calhaz-Jorge et al., 'Survey on ART and IUI: Legislation, Regulation, Funding and Registries in European Countries: The European IVF-Monitoring Consortium (EIM) for the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE)', *Human Reproduction Open* 2020, no. 1 (2020): 3.

Many people have ethical reservations about embryo adoption, one of which is its close connection to IVF. However, embryo adoption is not IVF. Embryo adoption does not involve the creation of new embryos—the most ethically concerning part of IVF. Instead, embryo adoption utilizes the second part of the IVF process, in which embryos are thawed and transferred for the purpose of pregnancy. Once embryos exist and are frozen, this is the only way to give them a chance at birth and flourishing. Another objection, that embryo adoption is the same as surrogacy, reflects a misunderstanding of surrogacy. In surrogacy, a woman becomes pregnant with a baby who is not her own for the purpose of giving up the child upon birth. In embryo adoption, a woman becomes pregnant with a child not related to her with the intent of keeping and raising that child as her own.

In another objection to embryo adoption, respected ethicist Gilbert Meilaender argues that we are morally obligated to adopt born children before embryos due to the harm that born children will experience if not adopted.[40] While born children are equally worthy of adoption and do suffer unspeakable harms, I think this argument falls short as it implies that the unborn have inferior value, makes erroneous assumptions about harm, overlooks God's sovereignty and is logically impossible to apply consistently, among other errors.[41]

The Catholic Church has not condoned embryo adoption because it involves procreation outside of the marital act, among other reasons. However, some Catholics, such as Father C. Ryan McCarthy, believe that embryo adoption does fit within Catholic teaching.[42] There are other objections to embryo adoption, but I have not found any of them persuasive.

Though embryo adoption avoids most of the ethical dilemmas of IVF, people who would pursue this option must still remember that adoption is primarily about meeting the needs of children, not personal edification.[43] Embryo adoption is not about procuring a child to fulfil one's dream of a family. While that is a beautiful dream and children do bring joy, embryo adoption is primarily about recognizing the need of children loved by God who have lost the opportunity to be raised by their biological parents and who live in frozen jeopardy. They need help, love, a family and discipleship. Adoption is an act of worship to God and service to others first. This is helpful to remember when one considers that only 42.3 percent of transfers of donated embryos in the United States resulted in live births in 2021, according to the CDC.[44] That does not include the unrecorded number of embryos who did not survive thawing. Those who choose to adopt and love these tiny children will likely suffer loss, and we as the church should grieve this loss with them. Embryo adoption is not easy, but it is a beautiful picture of the gospel and the God who loves us and suffered so that we could become part of his family.

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40 Gilbert Meilaender, *Not by Nature but by Grace: Forming Families through Adoption* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 103.

41 Ruth Houser, 'Frozen Adoption: The Ethics of Embryo Adoption' (master's thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023), 41–45.

42 Charles Ryan McCarthy, *What to Do with the Least of Our Brothers?* (Gastonia, NC: Saint Benedict Press, 2013), 203.

43 Faust and Manning, *Them Before Us*, 192–93.

44 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *2021 Assisted Reproductive Technology*, 13.

The IVF industry has enabled the birth of millions of beautiful babies whom we love and cherish. However, it has also created a pathway to the death and dehumanization of millions of other tiny lives who did not have a chance to grow and thrive. The two methods of IVF discussed above seek to reduce this harm, though neither can completely eliminate all risks and ethical concerns. Embryo adoption, on the other hand, avoids the major ethical pitfalls of IVF while helping children escape their frozen developmental suspension, grow and thrive.

Conclusion

Genuine Christians who sincerely fear God and love their children have used IVF. Many, longing for children, may not have become informed about the process and ethical concerns of IVF before beginning the process. Others find the limited methods of IVF ethically permissible, and still others may disagree with the ethical perspectives of this article altogether. Whatever the reason for using IVF, their children play in our churches, and we cherish their lives. At the same time, our churches are filled with people who are grappling with the news that they cannot have children. We grieve deeply with them in their pain. However, as Christians we must not let either the joy of children or the sorrow of suffering determine how we think. We must test everything in the light of biblical truth and examine facts, no matter how difficult they may be.

The facts surrounding IVF are indeed difficult. The IVF process mirrors the ethical concerns involved in its complexity. Mohler summarizes these ethical concerns well when he notes 'the casual disrespect in which the embryo is held by so many who are ready and willing to destroy innocent life in the name of life-giving technology'—a technology that also tears at God's creation design and the dignity of tiny children.[45]

With the global spread of reproductive technology, IVF may well be coming to your doorstep in the future, if it has not already entered your church. Christians must be ready to properly understand and evaluate IVF in light of God's word so that we will properly love him and the tiny children made in his image.

45 Mohler, 'Christian Morality and Test Tube Babies, Part Two'.

ERT (2024) 48:4, 315–317

Lessons from the Olympic Ceremony Controversy

Thomas Paul Schirrmacher

The 2024 Paris Olympics created considerable controversy at its opening ceremony with a scene that observers interpreted as mocking Christianity. The World Evangelical Alliance responded promptly with a measured, respectful statement, commenting that 'Disrespect, even if unintended, has been felt.'[1] *Now, with three months of distance, one of global Christianity's most prominent voices on human rights offers this analysis to help us respond persuasively to similar situations in the future and to demolish arguments that artistic licence justifies such performances.*

The opening ceremony at the Paris Olympics on 26 July 2024 featured a drama that portrayed drag queens appearing to mimic Leonardo da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper. The portrayal led to widespread criticism from the Christian and Muslim communities, as well as much debate in the media. After the emotional debate died down, I took a close look at the defences presented by the head of the organization that planned the opening and closing ceremonies, Tony Estanguet, and the choreographer, Thomas Jolly.[2]

In making these comments, I am not claiming that Christians deserve special protection or that I care only about the rights and sensibilities of Christians. I would be writing similar words if the scene had mocked an image or event dear to Muslims or another religious group. I firmly defend the freedom of religion or belief, which includes the right of non-religious people to criticize my Christian faith. But we are not talking here about the freedom of opinion or speech of private individuals; we are talking about a global event that was viewed by a billion people around the world and that is intended to promote harmony.

Choreographer Thomas Jolly said that the ceremony was meant to be 'inclusive'. But his version of inclusiveness did not include Christians—that is, 2.3 billion people and one-third of the athletes and spectators. No other group was mocked during the

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1 World Evangelical Alliance, 'Jesus Our True Friend: WEA's Response to the Opening Ceremony at Olympics 2024', 30 July 2024, https://worldea.org/news/26475/jesus/our/true/friend/weas/response/to/the/opening/ceremony/at/olympics/2024/.

2 See Jack Rathborn, 'Paris 2024 Apologises over "Last Supper" Parody at Olympics Opening Ceremony', *The Independent*, 28 July 2024, https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/olympics/olympics-opening-ceremony-last-supper-paris-2024-b2587192.html; Melanie Goodfellow, 'Olympics Opening Ceremony Artistic Director Says Controversial Tableau Was Not Inspired by "The Last Supper"', *Deadline*, 28 July 2024, https://deadline.com/2024/07/olympics-opening-ceremony-artistic-director-intention-mock-or-shock-1236024601/.

opening ceremony; why were Christians singled out? And as Jolly added that he wanted to convey that in France 'we have a right to not be worshippers', it is obvious that this message—which is already accepted by all who support freedom of religion or belief—is equivalent to a justification of the public mockery of Christianity.

Imagine if things had been the other way around—if Christians had made fun of a scene very dear to queer people and then said, 'Oh, we didn't know, we didn't mean to hurt anyone, we just wanted to be inclusive.' Who would have believed them?

Tony Estanguet insisted that the show was meant to be thought-provoking and that its basic lines had been agreed upon with the IOC. If so, that makes the undiplomatic nature of this offence even worse! And what fruitful thoughts about Christianity did they want to provoke?

Jolly, the choreographer, also denied having been inspired by the Last Supper: 'The idea was to have a big pagan party associated with the gods of Olympus.' Then why did virtually everyone recognize the parallel to Leonardo da Vinci's painting? Why is the person in the middle so obviously playing the role of Jesus in da Vinci's painting? Why does the screenplay use the heading 'La Cène sur la scène sur la Seine' (The Last Supper on the Seine stage)? And again, the queer community would not have accepted any excuse based on 'we did not know', if it had been the other way around.

Jolly also claimed that instead he followed a painting by Jan van Bijlert, 'The Feast of the Gods', from which the blue God Bacchus at the end of the scene was taken. One has to smile at this explanation, as van Bijlert's work itself was inspired by da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper!

Da Vinci's image has been misused so many times in the past decades that no one can claim not to know how Christians feel about it. Whoever planned this did so deliberately to ensure maximum global interest by shaming the largest possible group, that is, one-third of the world's population. Since most countries in the world would not have allowed this presentation at an Olympics in their country, it was possible only in the country with the reputation of having the highest percentage of art that shames Christianity.

Incidentally, Barbara Butch, the lead actress in the performance, called herself 'Olympic Jesus' in a post and posted pictures on Instagram afterwards, calling the scene 'Oh yes, the new Gay Testament'.

If the ceremony had used a dance around the Kaaba instead, and if Muslims from around the world had protested, would the organizers have said that they wanted to be inclusive and did not know that Muslims would be offended? Moreover, if the ceremony had used a dance around the Kaaba, churches around the world would have protested on the Muslims' behalf as much as they protested Jolly's work.

Jolly also stated, 'You will never find in my work a desire to mock or denigrate anyone. I wanted a ceremony that brought people together, that reconciled, but also a ceremony that affirmed our republican values of liberty, equality and fraternity.' One thing is important: queer people and other discriminated groups are serious about the fact that it is the discriminated people who decide whether they feel discriminated against or not. By that logic, whether Christians feel shamed by a caricature of the Last Supper must be determined by the Christians' own feelings, not the theoretical intentions of those who shame others. Should there not be equal rights

for all, including Christians? Should the rules that apply to anyone who is discriminated against and shamed not also apply to Christians?

The organizers also used artistic freedom as a defence. Artistic freedom? What nonsense! No one is talking about banning such art by law. There are thousands of places where this kind of performance can be shown. But this was the Olympics, where art should serve the goals of peace and harmony. Or are they saying that they could have called for any kind of discrimination as long as they used art to express it?

Artistic freedom and freedom of expression include the right to dislike or criticize any art, to find it ugly or immoral or uninteresting or too expensive, or to criticize it for any reason. But apparently the offenders are now offended by the objections and demand not to be criticized.

Artistic freedom does not automatically make anything moral. In Russia, art is used to glorify war. Art is loved by all kinds of dictators and autocrats. None of their failures become more moral just because they are presented as art. Neo-Nazi art in Germany is, for the most part, not illegal. Does that make it any better?

Whenever art is used to shame a particular group of people, even if it is legally permissible, it is still morally wrong. Publicly stating that all baldheaded men are stupid is legal in most countries, based on the right of freedom of expression, and equally so if the message is expressed through art. But that does not change its immoral and discriminatory nature. Would it have been a valid message for the opening of the Olympic Games to say that bald people are stupid and then claim that their statement is protected by artistic freedom and freedom of expression?

The negative reaction by many leaders of other religious groups proves that they all felt the intention was to mock a particular world faith, which happens to be the largest one. If the organizers had wanted to humiliate a group larger than the 2.3 billion Christians (31.3 percent of the world's population), the only option would have been to select all women or all men, since even the number of children and youth in the world is slightly smaller than the number of Christians.

Finally, if the organizers had wanted to address a real problem in a controversial manner, they could have done so. They did not dare to express a criticism that might have unleashed powerful resistance, such as protesting China's treatment of the Uighurs, or the abuse of minors by religious leaders, or religious extremism in any form. Instead, they chose the cheap and easy way, knowing that Christians would not respond with violence.

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Reclaiming the *Imago Dei* and Epistemology of Love

Richard Howell

This article explains two Christian doctrines—the believe that all humans are made in the image of God and that true knowledge of God is achieved through love—and their articulation by Irenaeus, Athanasius and modern writers. It demonstrates these doctrines' centrality in God's redemptive and transformative mission, and especially in challenging discriminatory social structures in India's caste system and in church practices.

The *imago Dei* and the epistemology of love are vital theological frameworks for the church to enact God's redemptive mission, demanding the dismantling of exclusionary systems and the fostering of communities that affirm the dignity and equality of all people. The *imago Dei* affirms the inherent worth of every individual, while the epistemology of love reveals that true knowledge of God is relational, grounded in love, and requires justice. These doctrines compel the church to oppose systems of oppression, such as casteism, racism and gender exploitation, and to reflect God's image by embodying love and justice to transform society.

A particularly pressing issue that highlights our failure to embody Christ's mission of justice and love is the persistence of casteism within the church itself.

Imagine entering a church—God's house—only to find that the place meant to welcome all as equals has quietly built invisible walls. Casteism, subtle yet profound, manifests here, separating brothers and sisters in Christ. In some churches, seating arrangements or even communion practices reflect caste-based hierarchies. Members of lower castes are relegated to the margins, their presence tolerated but their dignity ignored, as if their worth in God's eyes were less. How does this happen in a community that follows Christ, who shattered social divisions and invited the outcasts, the poor and the oppressed into his embrace?

Worse yet, leadership roles and decision-making spaces remain closed to many, not because of their lack of faith or calling, but because of their birth. Their voices are silenced, their gifts overlooked. In a space that should foster love, they are treated as second-class citizens, unworthy of participation in God's work. When we see the church reflecting the caste divisions of the world outside—discouraging inter-group

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marriages and reserving positions for the privileged—it breaks the heart of the gospel message.

Jesus' words, 'What you did to the least of these, you did unto me' (Mt 25:40), form a powerful critique of race, caste and gender violence. Jesus identifies himself with the marginalized and oppressed, making it clear that any harm done to them is harm done directly to him. This statement challenges the dehumanization that underpins discrimination and violence, reminding us that every person bears the image of God.

How can the church embody the love of Christ while carrying the heavy chains of casteism? This segregation doesn't just hurt the oppressed; it distorts the very image of God in us all. The church is called to break these chains, to embrace every person as a reflection of God's image, and to create a community where all, regardless of their social or economic status, are loved and valued. Only then will it truly become the beacon of hope, love and justice that Christ intended. Central to this recognition is understanding the interconnectedness of all life through the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, which offers a transformative response to systems of inequality and exploitation.

Biblical foundations

The interconnectedness of all life

The doctrine of the *imago Dei* affirms the inherent dignity of all life, emphasizing the perichoretic[1] interconnectedness between humanity and the rest of creation. This interconnectedness is foundational for understanding the relationships between all beings and how the church must address systems of oppression such as casteism, racism and gender exploitation. The biblical account of creation in Genesis 1 offers a profound reflection on this interconnectedness, particularly through the use of the Hebrew word *nephesh*, meaning 'soul' or 'living being'. In Genesis 1:24 and Genesis 2:7, the term *nephesh chayyah* is used to describe both humans and animals, indicating that all living beings share the same divine breath of life. This shared essence underscores the intrinsic unity between humanity and the wider creation, establishing a common source of life that links all creatures to God. This theological truth confronts human systems of oppression by revealing that dignity is universal and that discrimination is an affront to the sacredness of life.

God's act of breathing life into both humanity and animals (Gen 1:30; 2:7) signifies his intention for all life forms to participate in his creative order. As Walter Brueggemann emphasizes, 'the deep relatedness of all creatures in God's purposeful ordering of life'[2] compels humanity to view creation with reverence and care rather than dominance. This understanding extends beyond the environmental realm and applies directly to social systems that seek to divide and exploit. When the church

1 Perichoresis, often used to describe the interrelational nature of the Trinity, here applies to the cosmic interconnectedness of life, where all creatures exist in a web of relationships sustained by God's presence. See Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985), 56–57.

2 Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 41.

ignores casteism, racism and gender exploitation, it fails to uphold the divine mandate to recognize the interconnectedness of all people and life. The call to 'subdue' and 'have dominion' over the earth (Gen 1:28) must be understood within the context of relational stewardship, where humans are tasked with reflecting God's care and justice in their treatment of others and the environment (Ps 8:6–8). Jürgen Moltmann expands on this point by noting that the shared *nephesh* between humans and animals points to a perichoretic relationship among all creation.

The doctrine of the *imago Dei* directly challenges all practices that deny individuals their inherent dignity based on birth, race or gender. Casteism, especially in South Asia, divides people hierarchically, while racism and gender exploitation dehumanize by stripping people of their intrinsic worth. The *imago Dei* calls for recognizing all individuals as reflections of God's image, as affirmed in Galatians 3:28, which dismantles human-made hierarchies and affirms equality in God's eyes.

The church must confront exclusion by affirming that human dignity is rooted in the divine image shared by all and is not tied to social status, race or gender. Addressing these issues fulfils the church's mission to embody God's redemptive work. The *imago Dei* teaches that all people share the same divine breath, calling for the dismantling of caste hierarchies and fostering a community of equal love.

The epistemology of love

The epistemology of love, rooted in the belief that true knowledge of God is revealed through love (1 Jn 4:7–8), teaches that love is the key to understanding the world and others. It informs the *imago Dei*, asserting that we recognize the divine image in others by approaching them with love, revealing their intrinsic dignity. Jesus' command to 'love one another' (Jn 13:34) becomes the lens for all relationships.

Love compels us to address casteism, racism and gender exploitation as theological issues. It challenges systems of exclusion by affirming the worth of every person, regardless of social status. Love opposes all forms of domination and calls for active engagement in justice, dismantling structures of inequality.

This love also shapes our interaction with creation, guiding stewardship. Romans 8:21 speaks of creation's liberation, tied to human responsibility. The flourishing of humanity is linked to the flourishing of all life, and environmental exploitation reflects a failure to honour this interconnectedness.

The church's mission is not only to proclaim the gospel but to embody it through love, justice and stewardship. In doing so, it reflects God's transformative work and fulfils its role as an agent of reconciliation in the world.

Being loved

God's love for humanity begins with creation itself. Out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), God lovingly fashioned the world through his Word and Spirit as a gift (Gen 1:1–2; Heb 11:3). This act of creation reveals God's generous nature, reflected in Psalm 145:9: 'The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.' In this sense, God is the Cosmic Host, inviting humanity into his creation as honoured guests, partaking in divine hospitality. This invitation includes all people—regardless of caste, race or gender—affirming the dignity and worth of every individual, which human systems of oppression often deny.

Theologically, the creation through Word and Spirit introduces the concept of the divine economy. The act of creation is a dynamic interplay between the Word (*logos*) and the Spirit (*ruach*), who not only participate in creation but also sustain and renew it. As theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg asserts, 'Time and space, as part of creation, are gifts through which the Spirit expresses divine love, demonstrating the sustaining power that upholds all of existence.'[3] This understanding refutes any notion that creation operates independently from God's intervention; rather, it affirms that all life is under the constant governance of both the Word and Spirit. The divine presence actively guides the ongoing process of creation, emphasizing the sacred value of all life, human and non-human alike. This realization challenges the caste, racial and gender divisions that diminish human dignity, highlighting that all creation is part of God's ongoing redemptive plan.

The gift of creation is integral to the divine economy, or God's intentional ordering of the world for the flourishing of all creation. In this divine economy, human beings are not mere consumers or exploiters of resources but stewards entrusted with the responsibility to care for one another and for creation itself. This theological framework has profound implications for addressing exploitation.

For example, the caste system, rooted in hierarchical divisions, systematically denies the inherent dignity of certain groups, particularly Dalits, labelling them as 'untouchable'. Similarly, racism and gender exploitation dehumanize individuals based on their skin colour or sex, reducing their worth to socially constructed categories that contradict the biblical vision of human equality. In Genesis 1:31, God declares all creation, including humanity, to be 'very good'. The human body is a divine gift, enabling us to embody God's image in our relationships with others and with creation. As Miroslav Volf notes, 'A dynamic and cooperative relation to the natural environment is implied in a pneumatological understanding of work. God's Spirit is present in the nonhuman creation that is the object of work and prompts its longing for liberation. The same Spirit gives inspiration and guidance to working people.'[4]

This understanding challenges hierarchical and oppressive systems, such as casteism, that degrade certain forms of work as menial or reserved for those deemed 'impure'. In caste-based societies, those at the bottom are forced into demeaning labour, often based on their perceived 'pollution' or 'impurity'. This exploitation of both human bodies and labour stands in stark opposition to the theological vision of creation upheld by the Word and Spirit. By affirming the divine presence in all forms of work and creation, Christian theology dismantles these systems of subjugation, opening the door to justice, equality and dignity for all. To deny this is to allow for the perpetuation of exploitation.

The imago Dei *and relational love*

Our calling as bearers of the *imago Dei*, rooted in the relational nature of the Trinity, invites us to participate in God's divine economy. Here, work, stewardship and re-

3 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 145.

4 Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Towards a Theology of Work* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 138.

lational harmony become expressions of divine love. As Alistair McFadyen observes, human identity is inherently relational and social: 'Social life and communication are founded on bodiliness, and interpersonal communication is both a social and a bodily activity … anchored firmly in a social world.'[5] This recognition of relationality is especially crucial in addressing issues of caste, race and gender exploitation, where entire groups of people are often stripped of their social identity and denied full participation in society.

This truth resonates deeply when one considers the plight of a Dalit woman whose body has been branded 'untouchable' and trapped within the oppressive structures of impurity dictated by upper-caste Hinduism. Her inherent identity, crafted in God's image, is denied, her social space erased, and her voice silenced. Charles Taylor argues that since identity is partly shaped by recognition from the social setting in which we live, 'non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm [and] can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false distorted and reduced mode of being.'[6] Yet just as Jesus approached the Samaritan woman—who had internalized the divisions of race and gender—he reaches out to the marginalized, affirming their dignity and belonging in the image of God (Jn 4:7–26; Col 1:16). Jesus' interaction with her highlights the *imago Dei* in action, breaking down social barriers and affirming identity through the lens of divine love.

The body plays an essential role in relationships and communication, as seen in Jesus' relational approach. In contrast to the upper-caste and racist ideologies, which approach others in what Buber described as an 'I-It' relationship, Jesus engages in an 'I-Thou' relationship, affirming the full humanity of the other.[7] Unlike dualistic views that separate body and soul, the Bible upholds a unified, psychosomatic view of humanity (Gen 2:7), where the body and spirit are interwoven and integral to our identity and relationship with others. In this context, the divine economy guides relationships and interactions, emphasizing human dignity and mutual respect.

The materiality of salvation

Miroslav Volf emphasizes the crucial role of the body in relation to the *imago Dei*, particularly regarding the materiality of salvation. He argues that excluding materiality from the present salvific work of the Spirit is both theologically and biblically incorrect. The Gospels frequently use terms like *sōteria* (from *sōzō*), which encompass not just spiritual rescue but also physical deliverance, underscoring the material aspect of salvation as integral to God's redemptive work. More importantly, 'they portray Jesus' healing miracles as signs of the in-breaking Kingdom, as deeds done in the power of the Spirit. Healings are not merely symbols of God's future rule but anticipatory realizations of God's present rule; they provide tangible testimony to the materiality of salvation; they demonstrate God's desire to bring integrity to

5 Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 115.

6 Charles Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition', in *Multiculturism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25.

7 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 54.

the whole human being, including the body, and to the whole of injured reality.'[8] Though the world remains broken, these healings are glimpses of what is to come when God transforms the present world into the promised new creation. The Spirit's work is not limited to the inner man but engages the entire creation, demonstrating that the Spirit is involved in both religious experience and worldly engagement. Understanding human work within this broader scope of the Spirit's activity is essential to a complete pneumatology.[9] Both the workplace and work are sacred, demonstrating that salvation has both spiritual and physical dimensions.

Charles Taylor critiques the modern self as detached and autonomous, shaped by a philosophy that promotes self-determination and personal fulfilment over community interdependence. In this framework, individuals seek relationships only for personal gain, neglecting the deeper, inherent relational nature of human existence.[10] This fragmentation of the self undermines the moral gravity of social injustices, such as racism and gender exploitation, where the focus on individual autonomy obscures the relational violations at play.

In the modern view, acts like racism, rape or gender exploitation are often reduced to issues of consent or individual rights, ignoring the profound relational and communal damage they cause. Racism, for instance, is not merely a violation of individual rights, but a rupture in the social fabric that denies the inherent dignity of those who are dehumanized based on race. Similarly, gender exploitation, such as rape or child abuse, involves not only a lack of consent but a destruction of trust and mutual respect that erodes the very basis of human relationships. As Stanley Hauerwas emphasizes, 'The evil of rape is not just that it violates another person's will, but that it destroys the possibility of mutual trust and respect that forms the basis of all human relationships.'[11] This modern, consent-based ethical framework fails to recognize the deeper relational aspect of these violations, reducing humans to isolated agents governed solely by personal autonomy.

Theological visions of transformation: Irenaeus to Moltmann

Contrary to this narrow modern view, theologians from Irenaeus (130–202 AD) to Jürgen Moltmann have offered richer, more holistic visions of transformation that address the relational and community aspects of human existence, not just individual rights or autonomy. These theological perspectives highlight how the Word and Spirit are active in both creation and redemption, restoring not only individuals but also the fabric of human relationships and communities.

Irenaeus' theological vision

Irenaeus' theology, particularly his concept of the 'two hands of God', provides a profound vision of Trinitarian cooperation in creation and redemption. The metaphor of the 'two hands' refers to the Son (the Word) and the Spirit, working in

8 Volf, *Work in the Spirit,* 104.

9 Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 104.

10 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 3–15.

11 Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 91.

tandem under the direction of the Father. This cooperative activity of the Word and Spirit underscores that God's plan involves both the creation and the redemption of the world. As Irenaeus states, 'The initial stage of God's working is the formation of the world, and the subsequent stage is the redemption of man.'[12] Not only is creation the product of God's Word and Spirit, but they are also integral to its sustenance and restoration.

Furthermore, Irenaeus affirms the goodness of creation and God's work within the material world through the Incarnation. He famously states, 'For [God] became what we are, that he might bring us to be even what he is himself.'[13] In this sense, the Word restores the lost image of God in humanity, not just through individual salvation but through the sanctification of the entire created order. This vision is transformative, showing that the relational breach caused by sin—whether through racism, exploitation or other violations—can be healed through the cooperative work of the Word and Spirit in the economy of salvation.

Irenaeus' concept of *recapitulation* emphasizes that Christ, through his life, death and resurrection, sums up and restores all of humanity and creation, reversing the effects of Adam's fall. In this view, Christ becomes the second Adam, redoing humanity's story by obediently following the will of God, and thus renewing the image of God in humans and restoring communion with the Creator. As Irenaeus writes, 'He has therefore, in his work of recapitulation, summed up all things … and abolished death, bringing life and incorruption.'[14]

Finally, Irenaeus envisions the ultimate goal of creation and salvation as the transformation of humanity, stating, 'The glory of God is a living human being; and the life of a human being is the vision of God.'[15] This reflects his belief that the flourishing of humanity in communion with God is the culmination of the cooperative work of the Word and Spirit. Irenaeus' theology brings together the ideas of creation, incarnation and salvation, showing that the ultimate purpose of human life is to reflect God's glory and to be transformed through union with him.

Irenaeus affirms the goodness of creation by emphasizing that time and space are integral to God's plan, that the Incarnation sanctifies the material realm, and that through recapitulation, Christ restores the lost image of God in humanity, reversing the effects of Adam's fall, with the ultimate goal of creation and salvation being the transformation of humanity to reflect God's glory through union with him.

Athanasius: Humanity's participation in divine life through Christ

Athanasius (296–373 AD) was significantly influenced by Irenaeus, especially in his understanding of the Incarnation and the nature of salvation. Like Irenaeus, Athanasius viewed the Incarnation as central to God's redemptive plan for humanity. He echoed Irenaeus' belief that through the Incarnation, the Word of God restores the

12 Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 3.16.6.

13 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* 4.20.4.

14 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.18.7.

15 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* 4.20.7.

image of God in humanity. Athanasius closely reflected Irenaeus when he stated that 'God became what we are that he might make us what he is.'[16]

Athanasius also adopted Irenaeus' idea of the recapitulation of humanity in Christ, where Christ sums up and renews all things. Building on this, Athanasius shaped the doctrine of divinization, or *theosis*, asserting that 'God became human so that humanity might become divine.'[17] For Athanasius, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is not merely a divine intervention but the central event that enables humanity's participation in divine life. He interprets humanity being made in the *imago Dei* as both a reflection of God's image and a foreshadowing of humanity's destiny to share in God's life, a concept deeply rooted in 2 Peter 1:4, where Christians are described as 'partakers of the divine nature'.

However, while humanity participates in divine life through the Incarnation, Athanasius emphasizes that this does not mean becoming consubstantial with God's essence, thereby preserving the distinction between Creator and creation. He redefines salvation as a transformative union with God, challenging legalistic views and emphasizing relational participation in the divine life.

Transformation through union with Christ

Kathryn Tanner (b. 1957) further develops the ideas of Irenaeus and Athanasius, presenting the *imago Dei* as a dynamic process where humanity, through an intimate relationship with Christ, is continually conformed to his likeness. Similar to Irenaeus' emphasis on recapitulation and the renewal of humanity through Christ, Tanner asserts that 'there is only one perfect or express image of God, the second person of the Trinity.'[18] This idea mirrors Irenaeus' understanding of Christ as the model who restores the lost image of God in humanity through the Incarnation.

Building on Athanasius' concept of *theosis*, Tanner highlights that this image becomes ours through a close relationship with Christ, where greater closeness leads to deeper transformation, 'consummated in Christ'.[19] Just as Athanasius asserted that 'God became human so that humanity might become divine', Tanner emphasizes that our transformation is rooted in our union with Christ. She also echoes Athanasius' focus on participation in the divine life by stressing humanity's dependence on 'God for nourishment',[20] as our bodies are ultimately to be remade into Christ's body.

Furthermore, Tanner, drawing on the Trinitarian framework, points out that we are one with Christ through his Spirit, bound together in a life of service shaped by our relationship with God and one another. This reflects both Irenaeus' and Athanasius' views of relational participation in the divine life, where salvation is not merely a legalistic event but a transformative union with God, experienced through the ongoing process of becoming more like Christ.

16 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 54.

17 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54.

18 Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14.

19 Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 14.

20 Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 63.

From the Incarnation to societal transformation

Jürgen Moltmann (1926–2024) draws on the theological frameworks of Irenaeus and Athanasius, emphasizing the Incarnation, suffering and the Trinitarian nature of God. Like Irenaeus, Moltmann underscores Christ's entry into the material world as central to God's engagement, where 'the mediators of creation—the Spirit and the Word—wait and strive in all things for the liberation of them all.'[21] Moltmann extends this idea by highlighting how Christ, through the cross and resurrection, identifies with human suffering and brings redemption to the entire world.[22]

Building on Athanasius' theology of theosis, Moltmann declares that 'God became a crucified God so that so that we might become free sons of God.'[23] Moltmann focuses on humanity's participation in God's life, asserting that Christ's suffering, death and resurrection invite believers into the divine life of love and relationality.[24] This participation is most vividly expressed in the Trinitarian dimension of suffering, where the Father experiences the loss of the Son and the Spirit is intimately involved in the event of the cross. Moltmann's social trinitarianism presents a compelling and innovative relational model of God and human community, though it has faced criticism for potentially undermining God's unity and veering toward tritheism.

Moltmann highlights that the Father, in forsaking the Son, endures an infinite grief—one that is not merely emotional but indicative of a real, dynamic interaction within the Trinity. He writes, 'The Father, who forsakes the Son, suffers the infinite grief of the Father who loses his Son in order to bring salvation.' This dynamic of suffering is born out of love, where the Father's willingness to endure loss underscores the depth of divine love for humanity. For Moltmann, a God who can suffer is a God who can truly love. He critiques a static view of God, asserting, 'A God who cannot suffer cannot love either.'

In Moltmann's theology, God's dynamic engagement with creation is essential to understanding the true nature of divine love. The Father, who forsakes the Son, suffers the infinite grief of the Father who loses his Son in order to bring salvation.[25] This grief is not just emotional but reflects a real, dynamic interaction within the Godhead. The Father's love, according to Moltmann, is expressed in this willingness to endure the loss for the sake of redeeming humanity.

Moltmann moves beyond the early church fathers by linking personal transformation to political and social action. His theology of hope, grounded in the resurrection, challenges Christians to stand in solidarity with those who suffer and to work for justice. In this way, Moltmann extends the insights of Irenaeus and Athanasius into a vision for societal transformation. Through the lens of hope in the

21 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (London: SCM Press 1990), 291.

22 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 204.

23 Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 192.

24 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row: 1981; rpt. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 56.

25 Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 192.

resurrection, suffering and oppression are not the final word. Instead, this hope fuels believers' participation in God's redemptive work.

Moltmann's reinterpretation of *creatio ex nihilo* as an act of divine love, combined with his views on emergence and process, envisions creation as an ongoing, dynamic reality. This dynamic understanding of both God and creation provides a framework where the suffering of Christ and the hope of the resurrection converge, offering both personal and societal transformation.[26]

Moltmann's framework offers a theological basis for addressing race, caste and gender exploitation. His emphasis on God's identification with the suffering of humanity calls for solidarity with the oppressed. The Trinitarian model of love and relationality underscores the value of human dignity, while his theology of hope compels action toward justice. In this way, Moltmann's views inspire efforts to dismantle structures of exploitation and affirm the worth of all people as bearers of God's image.

Racial, caste-based and gender violence not only violate human dignity but are affronts to God himself. Jesus' teaching reveals that those who perpetuate such violence are not merely harming others but are striking at the very heart of God. Therefore, any system or act that exploits or oppresses the vulnerable must be confronted and dismantled, as it stands in direct opposition to Christ's call to love and serve others. True discipleship requires recognizing the divine in 'the least of these' (Mt 25:40) and working for justice, equality and compassion in every aspect of society.

Conclusion

The *imago Dei* and the epistemology of love are critical theological frameworks for the church's role in addressing social inequalities and embodying God's redemptive mission. The *imago Dei*, which affirms the inherent dignity and equality of all individuals, directly challenges oppressive systems such as casteism, racism and gender exploitation. In the Genesis creation story, the shared divine breath between humanity and creation reveals the interconnectedness of all life. This interconnectedness provides a theological basis for dismantling systems that dehumanize individuals based on race, caste or gender.

In parallel, the epistemology of love, rooted in the belief that true knowledge of God is realized through love, underscores the importance of justice and relationality in human interactions. Love is not merely an emotional sentiment but a theological imperative that requires active engagement in addressing injustices. Jesus' teachings on love challenge exclusionary practices and call for the church to act as an agent of transformation, embodying love in all aspects of community life.

The church is tasked not only with proclaiming the gospel but also with embodying it through love, justice and stewardship. By exploring practical examples, such as the persistence of forms of casteism within the church and Jesus' interactions with marginalized individuals, we can see how the theological reflections contained in this essay impact real-world issues.

26 Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom,* 87–103.

ERT (2024) 48:4, 328–337

Six Sigma Soteriology: Applying Business Methodology to Christian Apologetics

Jonathan Corrado

This article is an exercise in gospel contextualization, not for a particular cultural group but for people working in the business sector. It applies 'root cause analysis', a well-known tool in business quality development, to answer the question of why Christ had to die. In this way, it offers both solid biblical interpretation and a creative approach to apologetics.

Many Christians struggle to carry out the Great Commission (Mt 28:19–20), especially in business settings where people's work lives revolve around rigorous, quantifiable and measurable processes. Contextualization, or how we communicate the timeless gospel in very different cultures, is an important issue for global Christianity. In this paper, I focus not on a geographically or ethnically defined culture but on the economic sector of society, seeking to make the gospel relevant for those who work in increasingly secular or gospel-resistant jobs in business and industry.[1]

Resistance to the gospel can be due to many factors. Many people see themselves as 'basically good' and fail to realize that they are sinners, unable to approach God on their own terms. Some fear social rejection or persecution over accepting Christ as their Saviour. In the business world, there is social pressure to conform to what the culture deems important so as to increase profit margins and attract talented employees. In many situations, failure to conform to this secular culture can jeopardize promotions and even employment.

Many Christians face pressure in the workplace to conform to secular policies and to restrict their self-expression.[2] In some cases, these cultural pressures can be antithetical to biblically defined morality and thus resistant to Christianity. For instance, some employers are aggressively promoting LGBTQ+ programs under the

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1 Pew Research Center, 'Key Findings from the Global Religious Futures Project', 21 December 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/12/21/key-findings-from-the-global-religious-futures-project/.

2 Knowledge at Wharton Staff, 'Separation of Church and Cubicle: Religion in the Workplace', *Knowledge at Wharton Journal*, 30 April 2015, https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/separation-of-church-and-cubicle-religion-in-the-modern-workplace/.

banner of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).[3] Western societies in particular are becoming increasingly secular.[4]

Furthermore, some people prefer the things of this world to those of the hereafter. In a capitalist society with a strong emphasis on career and advancement, materialistic pleasures can be very appealing, and the unquenchable thirst for more money, power and possessions can lead to a focus only on this life and what it has to offer (see Mt 19:16–23 for an example). And as the so-called discoveries of evolutionary biology and cosmology seem to shrink the boundaries of faith, the claim that science and religion are compatible becomes more tenuous.[5] Engineers and scientists who profess Christianity are seen as anti-science and even ignorant, as Christianity is viewed as illogical, antiquated and immoral.[6]

Communicating the gospel effectively to this community is an imperative part of Christian mission. Perhaps, for people with a scientific or analytical orientation, using a method from within their culture to explain the need for salvation and the biblically defined means to attain it could help. I believe that certain Six Sigma methodologies can provide such an alternate derivation for salvation while reinforcing the Bible's teaching, thereby offering a way to do Christian apologetics with people who work in industry or business vocations.

What is Six Sigma?

Six Sigma, developed by Motorola, Inc. in 1986, defines various techniques and management tools designed to make business processes more efficient and effective. It provides statistical tools to eliminate defects, identify the cause of errors, and reduce the possibilities for error. In this way, Six Sigma creates an environment of continuous process improvement, enabling businesses to provide better products and services to customers and thereby enhancing the profitability of the business.[7]

Six Sigma includes a tool known as root cause analysis (RCA), used to discover the root causes of problems in order to identify appropriate solutions. RCA is used extensively by airlines, engineering and manufacturing companies, healthcare,

3 See e.g. Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Todd Sears, 'Why Companies Must Recommit to the Fight for LGBTQ+ Rights', *Harvard Business Review*, 7 May 2024, https://hbr.org/2024/05/why-companies-must-recommit-to-the-fight-for-lgbtq-rights.

4 See e.g. Pew Research Center, 'In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace', 17 October 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/#:~:text=The%20religious%20landscape%20of%20the,points%20over%20the%20past%20decade; Yonat Shimron, 'More Americans Are Becoming Secular, Poll Says', *Washington Post*, 17 December 2021, https://washingtonpost.com/religion/2021/12/17/secular-pew-poll/.

5 See Jonathan K. Corrado, 'The Role and Realm of Science', *Institute for Creation Research,* 17 January 2022, https://www.icr.org/article/role-and-realm-of-science.

6 Edward J. Larson and Larry Witham, 'Leading Scientists Still Reject God', *Nature* 394, no. 313 (July 1998): 313–14, https://doi.org/10.1038/28478.

7 Thomas Bertels (ed.), *Rath & Strong's Six Sigma Leadership Handbook* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2003), 20–22. Six Sigma is an important program for many companies. For instance, in September 1995, General Electric CEO Jack Welch announced that the Six Sigma initiative would be the company's top priority for the following five years. See Roger Hoerl, 'An Inside Look at Six Sigma at GE', *Six Sigma Forum Magazine* 1, no. 3 (May 2002): 35–44, https://asq.org/quality-resources/articles/an-inside-look-at-six-sigma-at-ge?id=83c5624f5fbf4688bd3d1af434081c9a.

emergency services and the energy sector, among many other business and industrial settings. These companies use RCA to diagnose and avoid costly mistakes.[8]

The assumption underlying RCA is that it is much more effective to prevent and solve for underlying issues systematically rather than simply treating ad hoc symptoms. RCA goes beyond superficial understandings of cause and effect to show where processes or systems initially fail or cause issues.[9]

The first goal of RCA is to discover the root cause of a problem or event. The second goal is to determine how to fix, compensate for or learn from any underlying issues within the root cause. The third goal is to apply what was discovered from the analysis to prevent future issues or to repeat successes systematically.

RCA can also be used to modify core processes and system issues to prevent future problems. Instead of merely treating the symptoms of a football player's concussion, for example, RCA might suggest wearing a more advanced helmet to reduce the risk of future concussions. Treating individual symptoms may make people feel productive, but if the root cause of a problem is not diagnosed, the same problem will likely manifest repeatedly.[10]

In this paper, I will use RCA to illustrate an explanation of the gospel that can be presented in a manner that industry and business practitioners familiar with the language of Six Sigma should immediately recognize and feel comfortable with.

Methodology

As my starting point, I use 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, because 1 Corinthians 15:2 specifically states that 'by this gospel you are saved'. I then apply the RCA methodology to derive the necessity of salvation and the means to attain it, according to the Bible.

The basic RCA methodology involves investigating the event, analyzing the data, determining the root cause, and developing actions to 'correct' the issue and prevent reoccurrence. Here, the 'event' is Christ's death as discussed in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, and the 'data' come from the Bible. (I should clarify that I am not using RCA to prevent Christ's death from happening again! Rather, I am deploying RCA as a process structure to derive the gospel using the Bible in a novel and logical manner.)

Once data are gathered, the first step in the RCA process is to create a timeline of events called an event, cause and factors (EC&F) chart. Based on this timeline, one can determine whether an event is (a) unrelated to the original event being investigated but provides context, (b) an issue (that is, is consequential to the event being investigated), or (c) a causal factor that could have contributed to the cause of the event being investigated or is directly associated with it.

After this determination is made, the 'five whys' (or 'why analysis') technique is applied to the timeline of events. 'Five whys' is an iterative, interrogative technique used to explore the cause-and-effect relationships underlying a particular problem. The primary goal of the technique is to determine the cause of an event or problem by repeating the question 'Why?' five times. The expectation is that by the fifth

8 Esther Han, 'Root Cause Analysis: What It Is and How to Perform One', *Harvard Business School: Business Insights*, 7 March 2023, https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/root-cause-analysis.

9 Paul F. Wilson, Larry D. Dell and Gaylord F. Anderson, *Root Cause Analysis: A Tool for Total Quality Management* (Milwaukee, WI: ASQ Quality Press, 1993), 34.

10 Wilson, Dell, and Anderson, *Root Cause Analysis*, 36.

question, one should reach the root cause.[11] In complex RCA, however, five questions may not be sufficient to determine the cause. In this case, given the enormity of the Bible, the 'why analysis' is not limited to five questions, thus allowing a more exhaustive causal determination.

When data analysis is complete, the root cause is determined by combining the outcomes (that is, the answer to the last 'why') of the why analysis 'staircases' (as well as the why analysis derivation data for the complete picture). Once the root cause is determined, corrective actions can be taken to remedy the cause and thus prevent a recurrence of the event under investigation. In typical corrective action development, the root cause (and contributing causes, if any exist) are analyzed, and corrective actions are determined that are achievable, measurable and actionable. Additionally, the efficacy of each corrective action is verified; its applicability to other processes, operations and areas is assessed to prevent the occurrence of the same or similar issues; and its impact on other facilities, operations, equipment and personnel is assessed to ensure that the corrective action does not produce undesired consequences. In this study, we are not looking for corrective actions; rather, we are seeking reasons to explain and justify the event of Christ's death.

Results

The 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 EC&F chart is shown in Figure 1.

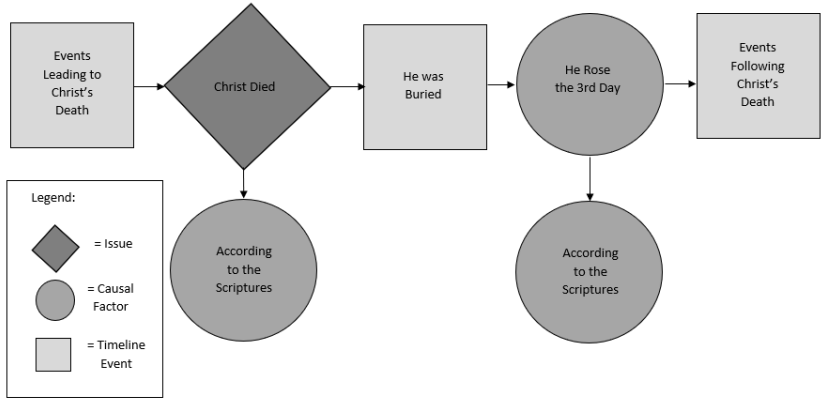

Figure 1: 1 Corinthians 15:3–4: Event, Cause, and Factors Chart

Why analysis

The EC&F chart identifies three statements suitable for 'why' questions: why did Christ die, why did he rise on the 'third day', and why should this information be presented as 'according to the Scriptures'? Just as typically happens in Six Sigma, I created an RCA team with six of my colleagues to work through the why analysis and pursue root causes. As part of establishing the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, we agreed that we should cite a Bible verse as evidence for every answer

11 Ivan Fantin, *Applied Problem Solving: Method, Applications, Root Causes, Countermeasures, Poka-Yoke and A3*, 2nd ed. (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 129.

given in each 'why' chain or staircase. A sample of one why chain appears in Figure 2. I will now discuss the derivation of this why chain as an illustrative example of the potential apologetic value of this process.

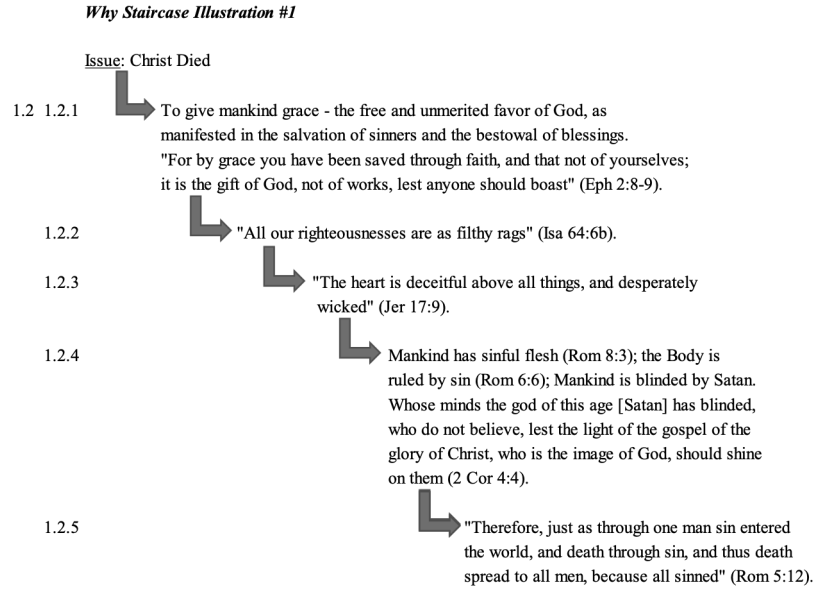

Figure 2: Sample Portion of the Root Cause Analysis

Note: This is only a selected portion of the complete analysis, which is available from the author on request at corradojk@gmail.com.

One of the answers we generated to the question 'Why did Christ die?' (see Figure 2, line 1.2.1) was as follows: 'To give mankind grace—the free and unmerited favour of God, as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph 2:8–9).'

This leads to another question in the why chain: 'Why is grace from God alone and not merited?'

Our answer to this question (1.2.2) comes from Isaiah 64:6b: 'All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.' There is no salvation for anyone who relies on their own acts of righteousness to commend themselves before God, because such acts (without repentant faith in Christ's death for our sins) are like menstrual clothes in the eyes of a holy God. 'Not by works of righteousness' are we saved, but only by 'his mercy' (Tit 3:5).[12]

The why question derived from this answer is, 'Why are our righteousnesses [or our works] like filthy rags?'

12 John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 1858.

Our answer to this question (1.2.3) was that 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked' (Jer 17:9). The heart of every problem in life is the problem in the heart, and the human heart is 'deceitful' ('Jacob' in Hebrew) and incurable. God searches the heart and mind and knows exactly how to reward each person. If we want to know what our hearts are like, we must read the Word and let the Spirit teach us—only God's Word gives completely reliable counsel. The hearts of the Jewish leaders were turned away from the Lord and his truth. As a result, they made unwise decisions and plunged the nation into ruin.[13]

As this series of questions illustrates, the RCA method can demonstrate the biblical soteriological framework, thus providing additional justification for the scriptural understanding of our redemption. It can also identify where other perspectives deviate from evangelical faith. For example, a Mormon or a traditional Catholic may answer the questions differently, if they do not accept faith alone as sufficient for salvation. In such cases, applying this methodology can spot where our dialogue partner departs from biblical soteriology. From here, the discussion might proceed to consider God's Word as our supreme authority (2 Tim 3:16), the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice (Heb 7:25; Jn 19:30), or a proper understanding of the relationship between faith and works (Eph 2:8–10; Jam 2:14–26).

Alternatively, a participant might wish to continue the why analysis beyond Jeremiah 17:9 by asking, 'Why is the heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked?'

Our team answered this question from Scripture (1.2.4) by stating that mankind has sinful flesh (Rom 8:3); the body is ruled by sin (Rom 6:6); and man is blinded by Satan. 'Whose minds the god of this age [Satan] has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them' (2 Cor 4:4). Outside of Christ, we are under the power of sin through our flesh and tempted to sin by Satan.

One might then ask, 'Why is mankind sinful?' The answer to this question (1.2.5) is that 'just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin … in this way death spread to all men, because all sinned' (Rom 5:12).

One could perhaps extend this 'why' staircase further by asking why Adam sinned, but I would contend that with the answer to 'Why is mankind sinful?' we have reached a logical and rational culmination of the chain, beyond which further 'why' questions do not yield a more specific or unique answer.

This, then, is one 'why' staircase. The initial question was answered by Ephesians 2:8–9, and subsequent questions were answered by Isaiah 64:6b, Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 8:3 (along with Romans 6:6 and 2 Corinthians 4:4) and finally Romans 5:12.

Our team generated six other possible answers to the initial question of why Christ had to die:

1. An innocent death was required (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 9:22).
2. We cannot put our trust in anyone else for salvation (Ps 146:3).
3. To provide the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Rom 1:16).

13 See Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 1103.

4. God so loved the world that he gave his Son so that we might have everlasting life (Jn 3:16–17).
5. Christ died once for all so that no other offerings for sin would be needed (Heb 10:10, 12, 18).
6. Ever since Adam's fall, God cursed and declared war on Satan but promised hope and mercy for mankind (Gen 3:15).

Root cause analysis

In each case, our series of 'why' questions brought us eventually to the question 'Why is mankind sinful?' which can be answered by Romans 5:12, leading us to the identification of a root cause.

One of the 'why' analyses identified what we consider a second root cause (1.7.2): Satan fell from heaven due to sin (Is 14:12–14; Ezek 28:12–19) and now prowls around like a roaring lion seeking people he may devour (1 Pet 5:8). He fills people's hearts with lies (Acts 5:3), is 'the tempter' (1 Thess 3:5), and blinds humankind (2 Cor 4:4).

Applying the causal data and combining the two root causes, we can arrive at this overall statement of the reason for Christ's death, as discussed in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4: As a result of corrupt flesh and Satan's deceit, humankind is sinful and blinded to the truth of the gospel, resulting in spiritual death.

Corrective action analysis

As previously stated, in lieu of determining corrective actions to prevent a recurrence (as RCA normally does in a business context), here reasons are explored to explain and justify the event (see Figure 3 for a sample). In 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, two causal factors are identified: 'Christ rose on the third day' and 'according to the Scriptures'. We applied the 'why analysis' technique to these two statements in search of the justification for the event and arrived at the following three causes:

- Jesus is God, and all things were made through him. There is no other God (Jn 1:1–3; Is 43:10). Therefore, Jesus had the ability to rise from death and leave the tomb.
- The Scriptures, in Jewish tradition, are God's inspired word to humans, able to make us wise for salvation (2 Tim 3:15).
- Death had spread to all people through sin (Rom 5:12).

Combining the causal and 'why' analysis derivation data, we can arrive at this summary statement: As the entirety of the Bible conveys, salvation is freely offered to humankind, not by works, but by faith alone, by grace alone, and in Jesus alone. Jesus is the eternally existing Son of God and a perfect sacrifice for sin.

Discussion of results

The process described above has clarified the necessity of salvation and the means of attaining it by using the Six Sigma methodology of RCA, while reinforcing the Bible's teaching on the matter. Although the Bible is sufficient in itself and does not

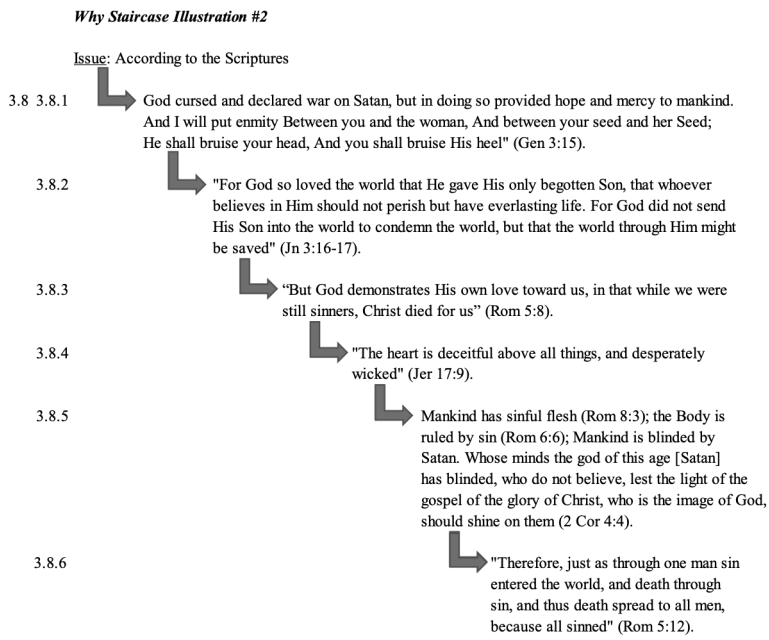

Figure 3: Sample of a Portion of the Corrective Action Analysis

Note: This is only a selected portion of the complete analysis, which is available from the author on request at corradojk@gmail.com.

need any such reinforcement, and although flawed human reasoning cannot improve on or even prove the correctness of Scripture, this exercise may help believers and unbelievers alike to perceive the Bible's coherence and persuasiveness.[14] The methodology functioned like an inverse pyramid, in the sense that a wide variety of statements, when further interrogated through 'why' chains, ultimately showed that the entire weight of the Bible rests on the gospel's life-saving core message. Combining the root cause and corrective action yields this simple but life-altering truth and hope for humanity:

14 One may think that the gospel message is complicated, but there are simplicity and elegance in it. Matthew 11:29 suggests that Jesus does not present himself as a complicated Saviour. If we are to understand the gospel message, God must give us the opportunity. But this does not imply that the gospel is difficult and requires a high level of intelligence to apprehend; rather, it is a testament to the darkness and fallenness of the world. As history teaches us, the temptation to complicate the gospel message testifies to our propensity to complicate things. Unfortunately, the efficacy of the gospel has been diminished, and its acknowledgement potentially compromised, by the influence of individuals who have succumbed to the complexities associated with its dissemination and reception. Institutionalized presentations of God's will, which the Pharisees cultivated during the time of Christ and which their modern-day counterparts advance today, pervert the gospel to the point where it is rendered ineffective (Mk 7:13). In contrast, the simplicity of the gospel message as delivered by Christ and the apostles, in line with God's will for creation, is repeatedly emphasized in the New Testament.

> As a result of corrupt flesh and Satan's deceit, humankind is sinful and blinded to the truth of the gospel, resulting in spiritual death; however, as the entirety of the Bible conveys, salvation is freely offered to humankind, not by works, but by faith alone, by grace alone, and in Jesus alone; Jesus is the eternally existing Son of God and a perfect sacrifice for sin.

Not coincidentally, this statement can serve as the preamble to the remainder of the series of passages from the book of Romans that are often connected in evangelistic presentations as the 'Romans Road': 'The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom 6:23b); 'If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved' (Rom 10:9); and 'Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom 5:1).

Additionally, this methodology logically arrives at the above statement in the context of the Bible. Inserting extra-biblical traditions, non-biblical authorities and false doctrines that add to, twist or refine biblically derived salvation breaks the logic chains of the why analysis and, in some cases, directly contradicts their logic, thus yielding inconsistencies and making it impossible to produce a coherent root cause and/or corrective action. For instance, adding works to Jesus' perfect and sufficient sacrifice as a means of salvation contradicts numerous passages of Scripture that appear in our 'why' chains (Is 64:6b; Rom 3:28; 5:6; Gal 5:4; Eph 2:8–9). Claiming that Jesus is not God (or a member of the Trinity) violates such statements as John 1:1–3 or Jesus' declaration that he is 'the resurrection and the life' (Jn 11:25). Or if one believes that one's individual spirituality or personally defined pathway can achieve salvation, one is confronted by the 'why' analysis at Jeremiah 17:9. Thus, the RCA method of deriving the necessity of salvation and the means of attaining it confirms the Bible's message and its integrity, and it thwarts the alternative paths offered by false or contrived religions or individually defined means of salvation.[15] There is only one narrow gate (Mt 7:13–14) to salvation, as the use of the RCA method reinforces.

Conclusion

The use of Six Sigma's RCA methodology and 'why' analysis, beginning from 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, has demonstrated how the core message of salvation is coherent and consistent with the whole message of the Bible. In doing so, I have offered an approach to Christian apologetics that may appeal to people who work in business and industry. I have also shown how attempts to engage in syncretism, combining the Bible's message with non-biblical doctrines or personal preferences, break the logic chain of Scripture, yielding inconsistencies and making it impossible to produce a coherent root cause and/or corrective action.

This paper exhibited the power of the RCA methodology in an apologetics context, using the gospel as expressed in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 as an illustration of its utility; however, this is merely one demonstration of how to apply the method.

15 Several Bible passages warn against distorting the gospel (Gal 1:8–9), going beyond what is written (2 Jn 1:9), twisting the Scriptures (2 Pet 3:16), and adding or subtracting from the Word of God (Rev 22:18–19).

The efficacy of this methodological framework is that it can be used to yield answers and/or conclusions on all topics, issues or questions concerning biblical Christianity in a logical and systematic way that is, in most cases, commonplace and familiar for people in business and industry.

Of course, this analysis has assumed the reliability of Scripture. How might one use RCA with someone who is not already convinced that the Bible is God's authoritative, inerrant, inspired Word and the sole authority for faith and practice? For example, one might start from the question 'Why does evil exist?' and guide a dialogue partner through both a Bible-based analysis and an analysis using human knowledge and/or extra-biblical information. The goal would be to demonstrate rigorously that an RCA based on the Bible yields a coherent answer whereas attempting an RCA based on other sources or claims is ultimately unsatisfying or indecisive. The underlying objective is to encourage skeptics to recognize the Bible's reliability and integrity, thus performing Christian apologetics in a manner that business and industry professionals can understand and relate to.

ERT (2024) 48:4, 338–350

The Real Presence of Christ in the Church: A Central Theme in Casiodoro de Reina's Confession of Faith

Andrew Messmer

Casiodoro de Reina, a 16th-century Spanish Reformation scholar, wrote a confession of faith, influential in its time but largely forgotten today, that uniquely unites Christian doctrine and practice in terms of obedience to Christ's triple office as prophet, priest and king. This article presents Reina, his confession and its continuing relevance today.

Casiodoro de Reina was born around 1520 in Spain and died in 1594 in Frankfurt. At the midpoint of his life, in 1557, he left Seville, and he would spend the rest of his life on the move throughout Western Europe. After receiving theological training at the Colegio de Santa María de Jesús (today the University of Seville), he joined the Hieronymite order of monks at the San Isidoro del Campo monastery in Santiponce, where he was active from 1546 until 1557, when he left Spain permanently. After brief stays in Geneva and Frankfurt, he reached London in 1558 or 1559. There, with the help of other Spanish exiles, he wrote a confession of faith in 1560 or 1561 in Latin, which he later published in 1577 in Spanish with minor changes. Other notable achievements are the first translation of the Bible from the original languages into Spanish (published in Basel, 1569); his pastorates in Seville (underground), London (Reformed), Antwerp (Lutheran) and Frankfurt (Lutheran); and his establishment of a charity that exists to this day.[1]

Few know about Casiodoro de Reina and his theology, but this is due more to historical accident and language barriers than to the measured judgement of experts. Reina was trained in Thomistic theology in Seville, was fluent in at least three languages (Spanish, French, Latin) and proficient in at least four more (Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Greek), maintained a sophisticated correspondence with Theodore

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1 Reina was invited to pastor in Strasburg, but there is conflicting evidence as to whether he was officially installed. Founded in 1585, his charity is now called the Dutch Community of the Augsburg Confession (Niederländische Gemeinde Augsburger Confession).

Beza on the Lord's Supper, and was a trusted informer of Wilhelm IV, Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel. Moreover, during his pastorate in Antwerp, he wrote a Lutheran catechism that was endorsed by major Lutheran theologians such as Johann Marbach, Martin Chemnitz, David Chythraeus and others. In short, Reina was a serious pastor–theologian with impressive intellectual capabilities, but whose theological contributions have been unfortunately neglected over the last five centuries.

In particular, Reina's confession of faith, which is the focus of this study, deserves much closer attention than it has received thus far.[2] By the time he had written the first edition of his confession of faith in 1560/1561, Reina was approximately 40 years old and had already secured his theology degree from Seville, continued his theological reflection within the confines of his monastery, pastored an underground Protestant church, read important Protestant works, and begun his translation of the Bible. By the time he published his confession in 1577, he had achieved further university training at the Academy of Basel, finished his commentaries on Matthew 4:1–11 and the Gospel of John, and published his Bible translation, making him one of the very few authors of a confession of faith who also was a Bible translator with pastoral experience. In short, Reina wrote as a well-rounded and informed pastor–theologian.

The confession itself (if one excludes the introductory prefaces and concluding appendix) contains 21 chapters that function as a commentary on the Apostles' Creed. Chapters 1–6 discuss doctrines typically associated with the Father as Creator: God's unity and trinity, creation, humanity, the fall, the promise of redemption, and the Old Testament. Chapters 7–16 discuss doctrines typically associated with the Son as Redeemer, as well as some others: Christ's fulfilment of the Old Testament promises, his two natures, his offices of king, priest and prophet, justification, and the external means of justification, which are the sacraments, the preaching of the Word, and church discipline. Chapters 17–21 discuss doctrines typically associated with the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier: the work of the Spirit in the lives of believers, the universal church, the marks of the Spirit in the church and believer, the power of the keys, and eschatology.

Thus, looking at the structure of Reina's confession from a macro perspective, Reina's theology is explicitly trinitarian. Additionally, although not demonstrated here, readers of Reina's confession will notice other examples of his trinitarian theology emerging in various chapters. In short, his theology is deeply marked by trinitarian thought, both structurally and as applied to specific areas of theology. However, seen from another perspective, the confession's centre of gravity is Christology and ecclesiology, and how the two are united through the Holy Spirit. The present article shows how Reina worked all this out in his confession.

2 As noted above, there are two editions of Reina's confession. The first one, written in Latin at London in 1560/1561, exists only in manuscript; the second, written in Spanish at Frankfurt in 1577, was published. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Reina's confession come from his published Spanish edition. The two editions are similar enough, however, that usually both editions are implied.

Introduction to Reina's confession

In Reina's confession, the largest, overarching theme that he develops is the threefold office of king, priest and prophet. It shows up mainly in chapters 9–16, but it also appears in chapters 5–7, 17, and 19–20, and by extension in chapters 3–4, thereby spanning almost the entirety of the confession. Reina's primary burden was to demonstrate Christ's continued presence with his people as their King, Priest and Prophet, and that he in turn makes the believers kings, priests and prophets through the Holy Spirit.

One reason why this theme has been so hard to identify, and thus neglected even by experts in the Spanish Reformation, is that Reina does not make the connections explicit.[3] On the contrary, he seems to assume the categories of king, priest and prophet throughout his confession and that readers will be able to make the connections themselves. This assumption on Reina's part implies that he has had sufficient time to assimilate these categories and incorporate them into his theology, which means that he had been familiar with them for quite some time. Thus, it seems quite plausible that Reina's confession is representative of Sevillian Protestant theology of the mid-16th century.

Although these connections have not been seen by many, there are enough explicit affirmations and conceptual and verbal parallels throughout the confession to justify the claim that Reina's overriding theme is Christ's triple function as King, Priest and Prophet, along with the implications for ecclesiology because of the Holy Spirit. No other Protestant confession is framed in such a way, and thus this issue may be seen as Reina's contribution—and, by extension, the contribution of Sevillian Protestants in general—to greater Protestant theology and spirituality. We can summarize the structure of the confession by saying that Reina sees Christ anticipated as King, Priest and Prophet before his incarnated state in the Mosaic covenant, present with his people during his incarnated state in his earthly life, and continuing to be present after his glorification in the church's three marks and in the lives of individual believers.[4]

Christ as King, Priest and Prophet in the Old Testament

The anticipation of Christ as King, Priest and Prophet in the Old Testament is the least clear category in Reina's confession, as he nowhere explicitly makes the connec-

3 To my knowledge, only Steven Griffin has argued for the basic ideas presented here. I largely agree with Griffin's analysis, taking exception in only a few places. See Griffin, 'Desde el exilio alemán y londinense. Casiodoro de Reina y la eclesiología del desplazamiento', in *Reforma y disidencia religiosa*, ed. Michel Boeglin, Ignasi Fernández Terricabras and David Kahn (Madrid: Collection de la Casa de Velázquez, 2018), 277–90; Griffin, 'Los "instrumentos externos de justificación" y la reforma de la identidad eclesial en la *Declaración de fe* de Casiodoro de Reina', in *Casiodoro de Reina. Ensayos en honor del 500 aniversario de su nacimiento. Su vida, Biblia y teología*, ed. Andrés Messmer (Barcelona: Editorial Clie, 2023), 171–85.

4 Perhaps it is no coincidence that Antonio del Corro asked Reina about the three distinct times of Christ's existence: before his incarnation, during his incarnation, and after his glorification (letter to Reina, 24 December 1563). Unfortunately, the letter was intercepted and never delivered to him, and thus we don't know how he would have replied.

tion between the Mosaic covenant and Christ's threefold office. Nevertheless, there are enough conceptual parallels to justify the interpretation adopted here.[5]

In chapters 5–7, Reina subtly lays the groundwork for the theology he will develop in subsequent chapters, especially 9–16. In chapter 5, speaking about the promised Seed that would come to undo the fall of man (which Reina had discussed in chapter 4), he states that the Seed would be 'so mighty' that it would 'undo the whole rule of the devil', an anticipation of Christ's kingly office, and would be 'of such holiness' that everyone 'would be sanctified and blessed', an anticipation of Christ's priestly office.[6]

For Reina (as well as for historic Christianity), Christ's kingly and priestly offices are the most fundamental to Christ's ministry toward humanity. As further demonstration of this point, these are the only two offices he specifically connects with the cross and Christ's current ministry at the right hand of the Father (9.4–5, 7–8), and the only two he directly connects with justification (10.1).[7] Nevertheless, in chapter 7, he provides a complete description of the threefold office of Christ being anticipated before his coming. Reina here states that, in fulfilment of God's promise, Christ would 'abolish all the legal ceremonies and sacrifices' (priestly office) and 'undo sin, and consequently the force of the law' (kingly office), and that 'to all the world might be preached in his name repentance and remission of sins' (prophetic office, as applied to the church).

The anticipation of Christ under the Mosaic covenant is seen most clearly in chapter 6, where the 'promise' (referring to the promised Seed in 5.2) is renewed with Israel in the form of a 'covenant' which consisted of 'many and diverse manners of commandments, ceremonies, and forms' that would make them desire the 'mighty sacrifice, and of such power, that, being once offered, it might be sufficient to give perfect and eternal sanctification and cleansing' (kingly and priestly offices). The idea is that the commandments, ceremonies and forms were anticipating Christ, specifically his kingly, priestly and prophetic offices, thereby showing Christ's presence amongst the Israelites, albeit in a shadowy form, and functioning as God's way of preparing his people to yearn for the true King, Priest and Prophet, which Reina also develops in chapter 7 as explained above.

Christ as King, Priest and Prophet in his incarnate state

In chapter 9, Reina organizes his discussion of Christ under two main headings: 'first, with respect to God his eternal Father, and second, with respect to us' (9.1). With respect to the Father, Reina says that he was God's Angel, Servant, Apostle and High Priest of our faith. More important for our purposes is how he presents Christ's ministry towards us, dividing his discussion of Christ into the offices of King (9.4–6), Priest (9.7–8) and Prophet (9.11–12). He incorporates no other categories into

5 Although my analysis here focuses on chapters 5–7, Reina's own logic may include chapters 3–4 as well, as I discuss in footnote 3 above.

6 Quotations from Reina's confession are translated from Andrés Messmer (ed.), *Credo: La confesión de fe de Casiodoro de Reina* (Trujillo: Translation Committee, 2023).

7 Griffin connects Christ's priesthood with his ministry towards the Father, but in light of his comments in 9.11–14, I do not make this connection. Instead, I see his priesthood as another ministry towards humanity.

this chapter, the longest in the confession, so the three offices are clearly an important organizing principle for Reina. Throughout this chapter, Reina shows how Christ ministered as King, Priest and Prophet during his incarnate state and how, through the Holy Spirit, he makes us kings, priests and prophets as well.

Christ as King, Priest and Prophet in the church

Christ's continued presence in the church as King, Priest and Prophet is the most extended idea that Reina develops in his confession, spanning the entirety of chapters 11–16. In these chapters, Reina develops his thoughts on the connection between Christ and the church and understands the three marks of a true church—sacraments, the preaching of the Word, and discipline—as applications of Christ's threefold office. The sacraments correspond to Christ's priestly office, the preaching of the Word to his prophetic office, and discipline to his kingly office.[8] In other words, just as Christ was anticipated in the Old Testament before his incarnation and present with his people during his earthly ministry, he continues to be present in the life of the church after his ascension into heaven. In this way, Reina understands Christ as King, Priest and Prophet to be present with his people throughout Scripture: he was preparing his people for his coming as Christ before his incarnation, and he continues to be present with them after his ascension. He does not make any explicit connection between his discussion of the offices in chapter 9 and the life of the church in chapters 11–16, but once again, there are enough conceptual and verbal parallels in these chapters to justify this interpretation.

Before we turn to chapters 11–16, we should briefly consider chapter 10 on justification. At the end of the first paragraph, Reina writes that we are justified by repentance and faith, by which 'we are pardoned, and his righteousness and innocence are imputed' (an allusion to Christ's priestly ministry), and 'the virtue and strength of his Spirit are given to us so that, dying with him to sin, we might also be raised with him to new life of righteousness', an allusion to his kingly ministry. Once again, the three offices of Christ shape his presentation of doctrine, this time on justification. And once again, we see Reina's preference for Christ's kingly and priestly ministries, not necessarily at the expense of his prophetic ministry but certainly as the two offices most fundamental to his thought.

Let us turn now to the connections between chapter 9 (Christ's incarnate ministry) and chapters 11–16 (Christ's continued presence in the church through the three marks). In chapter 9, where he speaks of Christ's kingship, Reina says that Christ 'freed us from the tyranny of sin, the devil and death' so that we would 'serve' him 'in righteousness and in holiness of life all of the days that remain for us to live' (9.4), and that he is the 'defender of his church in every age' (9.6). Correspondingly, in chapter 15 where he speaks of church discipline, he says that believers are 'kept … in righteousness and purity of life', and that 'every believer ought to submit' to it to the extent possible (15.1–2). Moreover, in chapter 16 Reina includes civil discipline in the same order as church discipline, and here he discusses the civil magistrate, who has the 'sword, to keep the state in peace and tranquility, defending

8 As we will see at the end of this section, in chapters 11–16 Reina is not talking about the three marks of a true church *per se*, but there is significant overlap between the two sets of three categories.

it from enemies, punishing evildoers, and honoring and rewarding the virtuous, all for the advancement of the kingdom of the Christ and his glory' and to whom everyone owes 'respect, tribute, and subjection' (16.1–2). Also, 'he enjoys supreme authority to put into implementation everything that may be found to pertain to the kingdom of God and the advancement of his glory' (16.3). Seen as a whole, the way that Christ's kingly ministry remains active in the church is through church (and civil) discipline, to which every believer ought to submit.

Similarly, in chapter 9 where he speaks of Christ's priesthood, Reina says that Christ 'obtained for us … entire and complete forgiveness of all our sins', imparted to us 'the divine nature, in which, having been regenerated, we are his children', and 'acquired for us access and right to the inheritance of the glory of God' (9.7). Correspondingly, in chapters 12–13 where he discusses the sacraments, he says that in baptism we receive firm testimony 'of the complete forgiveness of sin, of complete righteousness and lasting salvation, of regeneration through the Holy Spirit, and of entry into the kingdom of heaven' (12.1). Furthermore, he notes, we put off the old man and put on the new, which is a conceptual parallel to regeneration, and possibly even to adoption. In the Eucharist, he adds, believers remember the Lord's death, are 'spiritually sustained and kept', and 'participate in his divine and eternal life being incorporated in him' and 'made flesh of his flesh, and bones of his bones' (13.2), which is conceptually similar to participating in the divine nature.[9] Thus, the way in which Christ's priestly ministry remains active in the church is through the sacraments, which he understands to be baptism and the Lord's Supper.[10]

Finally, in chapter 9 where he speaks of Christ's prophetic office, Reina says that Christ is 'our Teacher and instructor of righteousness' (9.11) who, by the Spirit, has written his law on our hearts and who communicates his prophetic office to believers, such that they 'know how to declare the divine will in the world' (9.13). Correspondingly, in chapter 14 where he discusses the preaching of the Word, he says that the elect are called and justified, and that Christ calls, authorizes and makes fit (by his Spirit) ministers, and sends them to call his church, and they are given authority similar to the prophets of the Old Testament, such that 'the one who would obey or despise them ought to be seen as obeying or despising the same Lord' (chap. 14).[11] Also noteworthy is that in 9.14, in his discussion of how the prophetic office of Christ is communicated to Christians, he alludes to the content found in chapter 14 and cites it in a footnote, thereby making a direct, conscious link between these chapters. In summary, the way that Christ's prophetic ministry remains active in the church is through the preaching of the Word, especially (although not exclusively) as it is proclaimed by the ministers Christ himself has ordained and sent out.

Reina did not understand these three offices and their corresponding application to the church as strict, hermetically sealed categories without any crossover. On the

9 Also notably, in 20.1–2 Reina states that the church's 'power to bind and loose sins' resides 'principally and immediately in Christ … and by his commission in all legitimate ministers of the gospel, to whose Word said power is linked'. Thus, Christ is the one who truly binds and looses sins, but he does so through the church.

10 Regarding the other five sacraments that have been traditional since the 12th century (cf. Peter Lombard, *Sentences* 4.2.1), Reina refers to them as 'rites' or even 'sacred and necessary rites' (11.3).

11 Cf. Deut 18:19; 2 Chr 36:15–16; Jer 26:4–5; Dan 9:6.

contrary, there are numerous examples of overlap across the three offices, such as when he says that in baptism, which, according to his framework, is a priestly act, we 'profess … a perfect renunciation of the devil, of sin, of the world and of ourselves' (12.1), which is a kingly act that corresponds to church discipline (9.4). However, we should expect this overlap, since Christ can never act as King without also acting as Priest and Prophet, and vice versa. Nevertheless, in spite of the permeable membrane that exists between the distinct offices, Reina still distinguishes them as generally corresponding to church discipline, the sacraments and the preaching of the Word, respectively.

This analysis has an astounding implication: at certain points in Reina's theology, Christology and ecclesiology merge into the same reality, such that the three marks of a true church are actually three ways in which Christ makes himself present in the church. For Reina, one might say, it is not the church that exercises discipline, but rather the King himself; it is not the church that administers the sacraments, but rather the Priest himself; it is not the church that preaches the Word, but the Prophet himself. Although these roles are typically associated with the pastor, he does not perform them in his own name or power, but rather in the name and power of Christ, a right granted to him by Christ himself and made possible through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Reina goes beyond the traditional understanding of the pastor acting 'in the person of Christ' (*in persona Christi*), which emphasizes Christ's presence in the pastor during the celebration of the sacraments, to include three major responsibilities of every pastor (preaching, administering the sacraments and exercising church discipline). For Reina, to the extent that the pastor is faithful to his biblical calling, he becomes an instrument through whom Christ himself is preaching, administering and disciplining.

This relation helps us interpret some of Reina's more confusing language, such as when he speaks of the 'external means, or instruments, of our justification' (cf. 11.1–2; 14.1; 15.1). A surface reading of this expression could lead the reader to think that Reina is somehow blurring the lines between justification and sanctification and basing human salvation on one's works—specifically, one's participation in the sacraments, preaching and discipline. However, this is not the case. In 10.1, Reina makes a clear statement on justification that coheres with the basic Protestant framework: Christ's righteousness is imputed to us by faith alone (which itself is a gift from Christ; cf. 11.2), in Christ alone, apart from any works or merits on our part. In 10.2, he explicitly rejects a Roman Catholic understanding of justification. Thus, Reina understands the Protestant doctrine of justification and is not seeking to contradict it.

Nevertheless, for Reina (as well as for Protestants in general), Christ's offer of salvation is not a one-time event that requires a one-time expression of faith without ongoing change in a person's life. He would most likely have called that a dead faith. Rather, Christ has always been and continues to be present with his people, and they are called to exercise 'living faith' in him, an expression that Reina uses throughout his confession (e.g. 7.2; 10.1–2; 17.5). Reina understands justification as closely connected to regeneration, as he makes clear at the end of 10.1: repentance and faith grant us not only forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness, but also the gift of the Spirit so that we might live a new life which, according to

Reina's overall scheme, would emphasize kingly, priestly and prophetic elements. As the Old Testament saints were called to express their living faith in the hope of the coming Christ through 'commandments, ceremonies and forms' (6.2), New Testament saints are called to express their living faith in Christ through the external means or instruments that Christ himself has established, namely the sacraments, preaching and church discipline. Thus, to use Reina's language from 11.1, the external means or instruments are the way in which Christ 'bestows on us, seals to us and confirms to us' the benefit of our salvation by the exercise of his kingly, priestly and prophetic offices.

Christ as King, Priest and Prophet makes us kings, priests and prophets

Finally, Reina extends Christ's kingship, priesthood and prophetic ministry to Christians. Through the Holy Spirit, we participate in Christ (9.9; chap. 17); we too are kings (9.9), priests (9.9) and prophets (9.13). Although Reina does not develop the way in which Christ's kingship makes us kings, he does state that Christ's priesthood makes us priests such that we offer ourselves and our lives, the sacrifice of praise, and prayer (9.9), and that Christ's prophetic office allows us to be taught by God and declare the divine will to the world (9.13). Based on what he says in 19.5, Reina sees the Spirit's work in the lives of Christians as more important than his work through the institutional church. This should not be taken to mean that Reina rejected the visible church, but rather that he saw the evidence of a changed life as more indicative of the Spirit's presence than the external marks of a true church (since even hypocrites could belong to it).

Another application that Reina takes from the threefold office is found in 17.1. In this paragraph, entitled 'The end for which we are justified', he provides three 'ends' that correspond to the three Christological categories we have seen throughout his confession. First, 'the end for which he frees man from sin, death and the devil', which corresponds to Christ's kingly office, is 'that he might serve him in righteousness and holiness of life all the days that he lives', which corresponds to the Christian submitting to discipline and remaining within the church. Second, 'the end for which he regenerates him and makes him a new creature by his Spirit', which corresponds to Christ's priestly office, is that 'he might put on the new and heavenly' image, 'which is the Christ', which corresponds to the sacraments. Finally, 'the end for which he puts him to death through the rigour of his law and buries him with the Christ', which corresponds to Christ's prophetic office, is that 'he might be resurrected and raised up to the heavens with him' and 'might live a heavenly life, with which God might be known and glorified among men as author of such a marvelous work, and the world convinced of its corruption and sin', which corresponds to preaching of the Word. Thus, the 'end' for which God uses the threefold office of

Christ to save believers is so that they would live out the offices of king, priest and prophet by the power of the Spirit.[12]

Christ's presence in the church and the external means of our justification

We can now look more closely at Reina's use of the phrase 'the external means, or instruments, of our justification' (cf. 11.1–2; 14.1; 15.1) to introduce the three ways in which Christ's kingly, priestly, and prophetic ministries are applied to the church. The reason I am returning to this topic more fully is that Reina bases chapters 11–16 on this concept, and that thus it plays a key role in elucidating his understanding of Christ's continued presence in the church. By way of introduction, it should be noted that the phrase 'external means of justification' was not common among 16th-century Protestants or Roman Catholics, in Latin or Spanish, and thus, until other texts are discovered that aid in the interpretation of Reina's comments, we are left to rely on Reina's text itself to provide its own explanation.[13]

It appears that the best way to understand Reina's intent is to interpret his words in the context of 'living faith' and his comments in 11.2. Living faith is a key principle that appears in numerous passages throughout Reina's confession and is essential to understanding his idea of faith as it is fleshed out in works, and his comments in 11.2 are the clearest explanation he gives as to what he means by the external means or instruments of our justification.

Regarding living faith, for Reina, justifying faith is a living faith that brings about life in the Spirit, and the Spirit's role is to connect the believer to Christ, especially to his kingly, priestly and prophetic offices. Thus, living faith, which embraces both justification and sanctification, is always active in the life of the believer and must continually manifest itself in good works, specifically those connected to listening to the preaching of the Word, receiving the sacraments and submitting to discipline (for other marks, this time at an individual level, see 19.5–13). Although Reina understands justification as a one-time event and something the believer can have certainty of obtaining, he also sees it as an ongoing event by which we continually apprehend Christ as he is active in the church through the preaching of the Word, the sacraments and discipline.

Admittedly, Reina's language more closely resembles the medieval conception of justification than the Protestant one, since the latter draws a clear, conceptual

12 More research is needed before advancing a coherent argument, but a plausible case can be made that in 19.5–13, Reina is filtering the seven marks of a true believer through the categories of kingship, priesthood and prophethood. One such proposal is that the first mark (presence of the Spirit) functions as an umbrella category, the second and third marks (speech and desire for the Word) correspond to the prophetic category, the fourth through sixth marks (mercy, love for one's enemies, and brotherly love) correspond to the kingly category, and the seventh mark (cross) corresponds to the priestly category. But Reina's parenthetical thought in 19.13 ('and it could be that there are others than these [marks]') could be seen to support the idea that he is simply listing seven relatively random qualities that he thought ought to be present in the life of Christians. For another attempt to categorize Reina's seven marks of the true believer along kingly, priestly and prophetic lines, see Griffin, 'Desde el exilio alemán y londinense', 283–84.

13 A notable exception is found in Luis de Granada's work *The Sinner's Guide* (*Guía del pecador*), in which he wrote of 'the sacraments, which are the instruments of our justification' (chap. 5).

distinction between justification and sanctification, which Reina does not do as clearly. Nevertheless, his thought and intent closely resemble the Protestant understanding of justification. He provides a clear statement of justification in agreement with the Protestant position in 10.1 (i.e. imputation of Christ's righteousness, by faith alone, apart from human merit), he renounces the Roman Catholic view of justification in 10.2, and his confession was accepted by Reformed churches as orthodox.[14] Thus, one could say that Reina was more in line with the concerns and theology of James 2:14–26 than with those of Romans 3:21–31. Just as it can be shown that James was not trying to contradict Paul but, rather, to provide a complementary perspective on the relationship between faith and works, so too we might say that Reina was not attempting to contradict the Protestant understanding of justification but was focusing on a complementary aspect of the relationship between living faith and works—namely, that Christians continually apprehend Christ by faith as he is present in the church through preaching, the sacraments and church discipline. This emphasis may be Reina's (and other Sevillian Protestants') reaction against the dead religious ceremonialism of his time, in which faithless, exterior compliance was regarded as the norm.

In 11.2, Reina gives the fullest statement of the issue when he says, 'It belongs to [Christ] alone to institute the means or external instruments by which this benefit [i.e. justification] is granted to us, as are the sacraments, and the ministry of the Word and of them.' In other words, the three marks of a true church are the external means that Christ instituted to grant the benefit of justification to Christians. Two issues need to be discussed at this point.

First, external means appear to be the external counterparts to the internal means that Reina discussed in 10.1: on our part, repentance and faith; on God's part, his mercy and goodness. If so, then there are two dynamics at play regarding the relationship between repentance and faith, on one hand, and good works on the other: a one-time/ongoing dynamic and an internal/external dynamic. As for the former, Reina sees repentance and faith as a one-time event (chap. 10), but also as ongoing by means of 'living faith'. As for the internal/external dynamic, Reina makes a conceptual but not formal distinction between the repentance and faith that one can experience in one's heart and the repentance and faith that one ought to express in Christ externally through preaching, the sacraments and discipline. Ideally, these would be overlapping realities, but as Reina himself states throughout his confession in different ways (e.g. 19.5), there may be times in which the internal does not line up with the external. In these cases, Reina's emphasis on the personal presence of the Spirit in the life of the believer predominates, and he squarely aligns himself with the priority of the internal over the external. In summary, Reina's understanding of 'living faith' is both punctiliar (justification) and ongoing (sanctification), both internal (in one's heart) and external (preaching, sacraments and discipline).

14 Although Reina received critiques from Reformed churches on other parts of his confession, he was never critiqued for his doctrine of justification. Also importantly, although in the Spanish translation Reina uses the word *medio* ('means') to refer both to repentance and faith, on one hand, and to sacraments, the preaching of the Word and discipline on the other hand, in the Latin edition the words are distinct: repentance and faith are the *ratio* ('basis') of our salvation, whereas the three marks of a true church are *media* ('means').

Second, there is some doubt as to whether Reina understood the 'benefit of our salvation' (11.1) to be salvation itself or something different. Connected to this is the language used in 11.1, where Reina says that Christ 'particularly bestows on us, seals to us, and confirms to us' this benefit (cf. 11.2 for 'bestows on us', probably shorthand for the longer phrase in 11.1).[15] The two extreme positions are that, on one hand, preaching, sacraments and discipline 'bestow' salvation itself, or, on the other hand, that they 'confirm' the 'benefits' of salvation. Between these two extremes, there are multiple possibilities that Reina could have intended as well. Currently, we lack sufficient evidence to favour any interpretation, aside from the general observation that Reina understood himself as writing a broadly Reformed (i.e. Calvinist) confession of faith that would be accepted as such by other Reformed churches, and that therefore any interpretation would have to fit within the limits imposed by this system. In the end, more comparative research is needed to shed light on Reina's meaning here.

For the sake of completeness, and as a possible illustration, it may be that in chapter 6 Reina is drawing a parallel between the 'many and diverse manners of commandments, ceremonies and forms' that the Old Testament Israelites were placed under and the three marks we are discussing here. Their commandments, ceremonies and forms were, after all, meant to 'prepare' them for the 'mighty sacrifice' that was to come in Christ (6.2), and given Reina's overall framework, it would be natural for him to understand these commandments, ceremonies and forms as foreshadowing the coming Christ's kingly, priestly and prophetic offices. If this is true, then the Old Testament saints' continued obedience to God (i.e. living faith) could be seen as a prefiguring of what Reina means when he says that the preaching of the Word, the sacraments and discipline are 'external means, or instruments, of our justification'.

Reina's Christology and broader Sevillian Protestant theology

As I have indicated throughout this essay, Reina's emphasis on Christ as King, Priest, and Prophet and its application to the church and Christian living are probably not unique to Reina himself but, rather, reflect broader Sevillian Protestant theology of the mid-16th century. Since Reina left Spain in 1557 and wrote his confession in 1560 or 1561, it is unlikely that he developed this framework in the intervening period, during his stays in Geneva, Frankfurt and London. If this were the case, it would be normal to assume that he learned it from others in those cities, and that the framework would have shown up in one or more extant writings from other scholars in those cities, especially considering how influential the three cities were in shaping Protestant theology. But already having noted the absence of similar ideas in other writers, we are left to look elsewhere, and it seems reasonable to posit that the framework that played such a shaping influence in Reina's confession was an expression of the broader Sevillian Protestant theology that was being developed in the 1540s and 1550s. More comparative research is needed, especially using records

15 There is an important variant in the Latin text, which has only 'seals' (i.e. 'the Lord on his part seals [us]'). This probably mitigates against assigning each of the three verbs —bestow, seal and confirm—to one of the three marks of a true church.

from the Inquisition and the writings of Juan Pérez de Pineda, Antonio del Corro and others, but I would like to draw readers' attention to a likely source behind Reina's theology: Constantino de la Fuente.

A cursory reading of Constantino's largest surviving work, *Christian Doctrine*, yields many parallels with what we have seen throughout this article.[16] For example, in chapter 33 he discusses the difference between dead faith and living faith; in chapters 55–56, Constantino discusses the three offices of Christ as King, Priest and Prophet, describes the offices with similar language and imagery, places more emphasis on his kingly and priestly roles than on his prophetic one, claims that through Old Testament figures God was preparing his people (and the world) for the coming of his Son as King and Priest, and says that our King, Priest and Prophet wants to make us kings, priests and prophets through the Holy Spirit that we share with him. In addition to these specific examples of similar language, many other connections can be drawn between Constantino's theology and Reina's confession. Moreover, both were active as underground pastors in the Sevillian Protestant church during the 1550s, which further increases the likelihood of Constantino's influence on Reina (and possibly the reverse as well). Thus, I would propose that this framework—understanding the relationship between Christology and ecclesiology through the Holy Spirit, combined with the issue of living faith—is representative of broader Sevillian Protestant theology and is one of its important contributions to Protestant theology in general.[17]

Conclusion

The categories of kingship, priesthood and prophecy have an enormous influence in Reina's confession of faith, showing up frequently in various ways through most of the text and at times shaping entire chapters and sections. No other Protestant confession of faith from the 16th century was written with a similar framework in mind, and thus this one can be seen as a distinct contribution to Protestant theology in general. It is intensely Christocentric and carries with it the ability to shape contemporary Protestantism's ecclesiology, stating that through the Holy Spirit, Christ is really present in the church, as well as the fountain and model of Christian living.

Reina's understanding of doctrine is highly personal, as opposed to propositional or strictly dogmatic.[18] He interprets the Apostles' Creed primarily in terms of

16 Constantino de la Fuente, *Doctrina cristiana*, ed. David Estrada Herrero (Barcelona: Editorial Clie, 2018).

17 Part of Reina's and/or Constantino's theology may have been influenced by other Protestants, such as John Calvin, who was the most influential Protestant writer on the three offices of Christ; cf. his Catechisms of 1537 (§20), 1538 (§20), and 1545 (Q 34–45); *Institutes* (1559), 2.15. Although it was written subsequently to Reina's confession, cf. Heidelberg Catechism Q 31. Victor d'Assonville argues that Christ's prophetic ministry links together larger portions of the Heidelberg Catechism; cf. '"Prophet, Doctor Jesus": The Son of God as "Our High Priest and Teacher" in the Heidelberg Catechism', in *A Faith Worth Teaching: The Heidelberg Catechism's Enduring Heritage*, ed. John Payne and Sebastian Heck (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), 181–94 (my thanks to Judson Marvel for this source).

18 Although not discussed here, supporting this claim is the fact that Reina's confession reads more like a narrative than like a series of affirmations and denials or abstract doctrine. In that sense, it is closer to the Nicene Creed than to the Athanasian Creed.

Christ's presence with his people and the implications it carries for the church and individual believers. It is perhaps for that reason that his confession is so congenial as an ecumenical document and, indeed, was written as such: his focus on Christ led him towards affirming the core elements of the Catholic faith as it had been reformed by the Protestant movement, and away from entering into theoretical discussions that could cause divisions. This is another crucial lesson that Casiodoro de Reina (and other Spanish Reformers) can teach us: focusing on Christ will lead us to a more united church, something that is greatly needed in today's world.

Finally, although Reina himself does not affirm this in his confession, I see a connection between Reina's development of the threefold ministry of Christ and Christian catechism. Dating back to the Patristic period (especially Augustine) and then relaunched in the 16th century, catechisms often contained three primary parts, structured around the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love. The Apostles' Creed provided the outline for explaining faith, the Our Father provided the structure for discussing hope, and the Ten Commandments (and the Sermon on the Mount) provided the categories for explaining love. Interestingly, these can be seen as corresponding to kingship, priesthood and prophethood, especially in light of how Reina explains them in his confession. For him, kingship corresponds to one's life and thus to the Ten Commandments; priesthood corresponds to one's sacrifices to God and thus to the Our Father; and priesthood corresponds to one's proclamation of the Gospel and thus to the Apostles' Creed. In this light, we could say that Christ is the primary catechist, teaching his followers about the essentials of himself as they relate to his threefold ministry of King, Priest and Prophet.

ERT (2024) 48:4, 351–361

Barnabas and Paul: What Galatians and Acts Tell Us

Jim Reiher

Scholars have long struggled with how to relate the passages in Galatians and Acts regarding Paul's visits to Jerusalem. This article argues that Acts 9 and Galatians 2 (not Galatians 1 as is usually assumed) describe the same visit and considers practical applications that can be derived from this historical reflection, as well as spotlighting Barnabas's key role in the early church's mission.

Over the last 150 years, when discussing the relationship between Galatians and Acts and how Paul's visits to Jerusalem as described in the two books align with each other, most commentators, especially from the last 50 years, say that Galatians 1:18–24 is the same visit as Acts 9:26–30. The debate has focused on the Galatians 2 visit to Jerusalem and which visit that refers to in Acts (either the famine visit of Acts 11–12 or the Jerusalem council visit of Acts 15).[1]

If the Galatians 1 visit is the same as the Acts 9 visit, it seems strange that Paul does not mention Barnabas in Galatians 1:18–24, his summary of his first visit to Jerusalem post-conversion. In the Acts 9 account, Barnabas is instrumental. He is Paul's ticket to meeting with and being trusted by the Jerusalem leadership. Nevertheless, when Paul writes about that (supposedly) same visit to Jerusalem in Galatians 1, he does not even mention Barnabas in passing, whereas in Galatians 2, he refers to Barnabas and Titus.

This paper explores Barnabas's relationship with Paul in depth to justify the conclusion that Galatians 1:18–24 cannot record the same visit to Jerusalem as Acts 9:26–30. In doing so, I support the little-known thesis of Willis J. Beecher,[2] which appears to have been ignored and forgotten. Beecher argued that the two visits of Galatians line up with Acts in a different way. He agreed that Galatians 1 was Paul's first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem, but he contended that Acts does not describe

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1 There are scholars who have dismissed Luke as unreliable and so decided the Acts 9 visit was a mistake, or a repeat of a later visit or an invention of Luke's theological agenda. For example, Frank W. Beare, 'The Sequence of Events in Acts 9–15 and the Career of Peter', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 62, no. 4 (1943): 295–306; Donald Fay Robinson, 'A Note on Acts 11:27–30', *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1944): 169–72; Solomon Zeitlin, 'Paul's Journeys to Jerusalem', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 57, no. 3 (1967): 171–78; Pierson Parker, 'Once More, Acts and Galatians', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86, no. 2 (1967): 175–82. I am focusing here on the more contemporary debate and how it begins with an almost unchallenged assumption that Galatians 1 equals Acts 9.

2 Willis J. Beecher, 'Paul's Visits to Jerusalem', *Biblical World* 2, no. 6 (1893): 434–43.

this visit, because Luke either did not know about it or considered it unimportant and insignificant.[3] Beecher then equated the Galatians 2 visit described by Paul with the one in Acts 9.[4]

No one else has ever supported or advocated for that view.[5] As noted above, most commentators connect Galatians 1 with Acts 9, while some critical scholars dismiss the historicity of the Acts 9 account. They then connect Galatians 2 with Acts 11–12 or Acts 15. No one since Beecher has even entertained the possibility that the Galatians 1 visit was not mentioned by Luke at all. The suggestion that Paul might have made additional visits to Jerusalem that are not recorded in Acts seems to be dismissed as unacceptable, even though Acts leaves out at least eight 'silent years' of Paul's post-conversion life.

My exploration of the different theories, speculations, reconstructions and harmonizations has led me to the belief that the humble figure of Barnabas contributes to the debate in an important way.

Barnabas in Galatians

Paul mentions Barnabas three times in Galatians 2, indicating that the recipients knew him. Since Paul and Barnabas went their separate ways at the start of the second missionary journey, these references suggest that Galatians was written before their split—most likely after the first missionary journey and before the Jerusalem council. Indeed, many see this as a reason to support an early date for the letter.[6]

Others have counterargued that Paul might name someone else when addressing an audience who does not know the person so named, though they might have heard of him.[7] Yes, that is possible. However, the way in which Barnabas is described and the repeated references to him create a strong impression that the readers knew him and would be shocked at his slip-up noted in Galatians 2:11–13. If the recipients of the letter did not know Barnabas, they would not appreciate the magnitude of the

3 Beecher did not add the following, but it is worth pointing out in this context: Luke frequently made editorial decisions about what to include and what to leave out. For example, he says nothing of Paul's trip to Arabia, which is also noted in Galatians 1. Luke says nothing about the three shipwrecks that Paul was involved in (see 2 Cor 11:25) well before the one he writes about in Acts 27. Luke leaves out years of Paul's ministry before the first missionary journey recorded in Acts 13 and 14.

4 Some readers will immediately be wondering about Paul's 'after fourteen years' statement and how that can possibly fit into Acts 9. That will be addressed shortly.

5 I have not been able to find a single citation (in a journal article or book that discusses the issue) of that particular work of Beecher, until *Evangelical Quarterly* published my own paper on the Beecher thesis: Jim Reiher, 'Paul's Visits to Jerusalem: Could Galatians 1 Be the First Visit, Unrecorded in Acts, and Galatians 2 Be a Reference to the Acts 9 Visit? Professor Beecher's 1893 Thesis Revisited', *Evangelical Quarterly* 94, no. 2 (2023): 113–32.

6 For example, Richard Bauckham, 'Barnabas in Galatians', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 1, no. 2 (1979): 61–70.

7 For example, James Montgomery Boice, *Galatians,* in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 10: *Romans–Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 416–17. He suggests that one can reasonably speak of someone not known to a group, and he cites 1 Cor. 9:6 as an example where Barnabas is mentioned to the Corinthians, who probably had never met him. (That one-phrase passing reference in 1 Corinthians, however, is nowhere near the detail given about Barnabas in Galatians.)

mistake he and Peter made. Paul seems concerned that the readers of the letter might be impacted in the wrong way by the legalism of fellow Christians whom they admired.

Richard Bauckham takes a different tack,[8] exploring what he considers a relative lack of discussion of Barnabas in a letter to churches that were directly connected to Barnabas. Bauckham concludes that Galatians was written while the issue of legalists and the problem of Galatians 2:11–13 were still raw and unresolved. He suggests that at Paul's time of writing, he and Barnabas had still not worked out the disagreement, and hence Paul was reluctant to say too much about Barnabas, lest he seem to justify his colleague's recent act of legalism. Bauckham goes on to say that the dispute would be resolved soon after the letter was written, and that the two men would go to the Jerusalem council together and united. (Nevertheless, after the council, their dispute over John Mark was the final straw that split a weakened partnership.)

If Bauckham is right, perhaps that explains the lack of any reference to Barnabas in Galatians 1. Paul did not want to show his indebtedness to Barnabas who was clearly 'led astray' (Gal 2:13) by Peter and other Jewish Christians' behaviour. However, this argument would seem stronger if Barnabas had been left out of Galatians 2 as well. If all Paul did was to highlight Barnabas's mistake, then Bauckham's observation might be all we need to resolve the question of the missing Barnabas in Galatians 1. Such is not the case, however. That fact leads some to reject Bauckham's theory.

How much of a rift actually happened between Paul and Barnabas over the Galatians 2:11–13 incident? After all, first and foremost, the problem is a major disagreement with Peter. Second, because of the respect Peter commanded, he influenced other Jewish Christians in Antioch to 'join him in his hypocrisy' (2:13). Only after noting those two things does Paul add, 'so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray' (2:13). Barnabas is mentioned almost as an afterthought, after Peter and the other Jewish Christians. But just what does 'Barnabas was led astray' really mean? Does it mean that he too stopped eating with Gentile believers? As a key leader of the Antioch church for some years, fellowshipping with both Jewish and Gentile believers, would he really suddenly do that?

In the context of Galatians 2, could Paul's phrase about Barnabas mean that Barnabas was being challenged theologically and had questioning conversations with Paul that offended Paul's understanding of the pure gospel message? Or did Barnabas actually stop eating with Gentile believers? Either option is possible. If Peter and James were adopting a different view, that would certainly give Barnabas (a previous member of that Jerusalem team) cause for reflection. We cannot be certain that Barnabas actually withdrew from the company of Gentile believers. In Paul's memory of events, Barnabas was led astray by the others, but he may not have been a central player in the conflict.

In view of Barnabas's importance in Acts 9, we really need a convincing explanation as to why he is absent in Galatians 1, where Paul lists the key leaders he met with during his 15-day visit. He even emphasizes that he saw none of the other apostles and that he is telling the truth (1:20). If Barnabas was there in Jerusalem, and if Bar-

8 Bauckham, 'Barnabas in Galatians', 61–70.

nabas was the first person to risk life and limb by meeting with Paul[9] and then introduced him to the other leaders, it would seem not just likely but necessary for Paul to include his name in the Galatians 1 summary. Paul's assurance that he was not lying becomes hollow if in fact he met Barnabas as well.

Some might say that Paul was listing only the *apostles* he met, not other leaders, and therefore omitted Barnabas. But James was not one of the original 12 apostles either. Yes, Paul calls him an apostle in Galatians 1:19, but he was no more and no less an apostle than Barnabas. Luke even calls Barnabas an apostle in Acts 14:14, whereas he never calls James the brother of the Lord an apostle. Unless one proposes that the James named here is 'James the Less',[10] the objection fails. The James named here is universally seen as James the brother of the Lord, the first bishop of Jerusalem, soon to be the unquestioned leader of the church of Jerusalem.[11]

The text of Acts 9 does not say that Barnabas was already in Jerusalem when Paul arrived. They could have travelled to Jerusalem together. We learn in Acts 11 that Barnabas was sent off to Antioch some time after the death of Stephen (how long after is not specified, but it is reasonable to presume a relatively short time interval). It is therefore probable that Paul and Barnabas met during the intervening years (some of Paul's so-called 'silent years').

It would be difficult to imagine Paul not mentioning Barnabas in either scenario (i.e. whether Barnabas met him in Jerusalem and introduced him to the apostles or they travelled together). It is especially difficult to say they had not met at all if the gap between visits was actually fourteen years.

These considerations indicate that Paul's 15-day visit of Galatians 1:18 was a solo, private, short affair and not the visit noted by Luke in Acts 9:26–30. Barnabas was not present at the first visit of Paul to Jerusalem (Galatians 1), but he was present at Luke's first mentioned visit of Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 9). All these pieces do fit together, however, if we see Luke's Acts 9 visit as Paul's *subsequent* visit to the capital—his second post-conversion visit.

In Galatians 2, Paul notes that after fourteen years[12] he and Barnabas and Titus all went up to Jerusalem again (2:1). Paul writes that both he and Barnabas were given 'the right hand of fellowship' (2:9). Some commentators identify this trip as the Acts 11 famine relief visit[13] and others as the Acts 15 Jerusalem council

9 This is the commonly assumed view of how things unfolded. It is not my own position, as will be explained shortly. (I do not subscribe to the theory that Barnabas was in Jerusalem when Paul arrived, but rather I propose that Barnabas went with Paul to Jerusalem from Antioch.)

10 And virtually no one does. That would mean that Jesus had at least one of his earthly brothers as part of the 12 apostles.

11 Note how Peter defers to James in Acts 12:17 and how James, not Peter, is the leader and final voice at the Jerusalem council in Acts 15.

12 Most see this as 'fourteen years since his conversion' rather than 'fourteen years after that first trip, or seventeen years after his conversion'.

13 R. A. Cole, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: Tyndale Press, 1971); D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed, (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2005); Colin J. Hemer, 'Acts and Galatians Reconsidered', *Themelios* 2 (1977): 81–88; Robert G. Hoerber, 'Galatians 2: 1–10 and the Acts of the Apostles', *Concordia Theological Monthly* 31, no. 1 (1960): 55; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

visit.[14] But if Galatians 1 is an earlier visit unrecorded in Acts, then the second visit noted by Paul in Galatians logically would be the Acts 9 visit (unless there were other unrecorded visits, of course).

This conclusion is supported by the parallels between Galatians 2 and Acts 9: (1) they both mention Barnabas; (2) they are both *private* meetings with the church leadership; and (3) the purpose of both visits is essentially the same—to become acquainted with the leaders in Acts 9 and to 'set before them the gospel I preach' in Galatians 2.[15]

There are differences that need to be addressed: (1) there is no mention of Judaizers in Acts 9, (2) there is no mention of Titus in Acts 9, and (3) there is no mention in Galatians 2 of Paul preaching in the streets and debating Hellenized Jews or having a death threat made against him.

These differences are not difficult to answer. (1) Luke is editing his material in Acts as he goes. He will discuss the Judaizer problem soon enough, in the context of the Jerusalem council. The Cornelius story is yet to be given as well, and Luke is aware of how much space he will give to 'the Gentile issue'. He does not need to mention it here. (2) The absence of Titus in Acts 9 need not surprise us. Titus is not mentioned *anywhere* in Acts.[16] He was a secondary companion with Paul and Barnabas on that trip. Paul does note Titus in Galatians, because he serves as a great object lesson to prove his point to those Christians: when Titus was in Jerusalem, he was not required to be circumcised by the Jerusalem leadership, even though he was a Greek. Unlike Paul in Galatians, Luke has no need to include this information. (3) The fact that Paul does not mention the preaching and plot against his life in Jerusalem can be explained by noting that his agenda in Galatians is to show three things: (a) he did not get his gospel message from the Jerusalem apostles, but rather from Christ himself; (b) his authority is not dependent on the Jerusalem apostles, but on Christ; and (c) to make clear the pure gospel message of grace and faith, not law. None of those goals are served by giving other details not related to his purpose in writing.

Barnabas in Acts

In Acts, we get bits of information about Barnabas, but then he drops out of the picture altogether after his split with Paul. He is first mentioned in Acts 4:36–37, which describes 'Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement)'. We get the impression, though it is not stated clearly, that he was a new convert (possibly from the day of Pentecost), though there is nothing to say that he was not one of the wider group of followers Jesus

14 J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 3rd ed. (London: McMillan and Co., 1869); Boice, *Galatians*; William O. Walker, 'Why Paul Went to Jerusalem: The Interpretation of Galatians 2:1–5', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (1992): 503–10; Parker, 'Once More, Acts and Galatians', 175–82; Craig Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019).

15 For more on the parallels, see Beecher, 'Paul's Visits to Jerusalem', 438, 439.

16 That in itself is a perplexing problem for commentators. Why is Titus missing from Acts when he was clearly an important co-worker of Paul's? He is mentioned by Paul in 2 Corinthians (eight times by name), Galatians, 2 Timothy and Titus (assuming that those two books are genuinely from Paul). His absence cannot be used to determine the answer to this question, since he is absent everywhere in the book.

attracted during his earthly ministry. (The fact that he is from Cyprus might add weight to the Pentecost theory.) The first thing we see Barnabas do is to generously sell a block of land that he owned and donate the money to those in need. Our first impression of this man is solid: he is faithful and his faith overflows into good works.

The next mention of Barnabas is in Acts 9, when Paul visits Jerusalem and Barnabas recommends him to the apostles. A common understanding is that this visit by Paul took place three years after his conversion (based on Galatians 1:18). It is then assumed that Barnabas was living and ministering in Jerusalem at the time, and that he was the first brave disciple to venture out and meet Paul. He gave Paul the benefit of the doubt, risking his own life in so doing. If Paul was pretending to be a Christian to draw out future prisoners, Barnabas was putting his life on the line here. The result was positive: Paul really was a genuine disciple and Barnabas introduced him to the apostles. Soon Paul was freely preaching in the streets and debating with Hellenistic Jews.

I have come to reject some aspects of that common understanding. First, nothing in the passage says that Barnabas was living in Jerusalem at the time. If he knew Paul already, he may well have travelled with Paul to Jerusalem for the specific purpose of being his 'referee' to the suspicious Jewish disciples there. Second, if some time had passed (at least three years), Barnabas might well have been in Antioch by then. The chronology of the next few chapters is open to considerable debate, especially when we get to 11:19–30. There the story jumps back to the aftermath of Stephen's death (which was in chapter 7) and we learn about the establishment of the church in Antioch as people fled the persecution. No clear dates are given in the brief summary of 11:19–30. That passage starts around the year 31 or 32 (with Stephen's murder) and ends about 46 (with the relief trip to Jerusalem by Paul and Barnabas). At what point during that time did Barnabas go to Antioch? We do not know. Since the church in Antioch was born shortly after Stephen's death, it would be at least a few years old by the time Paul made his first trip to Jerusalem. If the work there was growing and becoming noticeable, it is reasonable to see Barnabas being sent there before three years of activity passed.

Now, consider again the possibility that the Acts 9 visit by Paul is actually fourteen years after Paul's conversion (the Galatians 2 visit). Certainly, by this point, with the church in Antioch well established, Barnabas was actively ministering there. If one thinks that more than three years must have passed before Barnabas went to Antioch, then the Beecher scenario gives us plenty of time for Barnabas to have moved north.

Beecher argues that Acts 9:26–30 cannot be the same visit as described by Paul in Galatians 1 for several reasons: Galatians 1 is a short, 15-day private visit to just Peter and James, not a seemingly longer visit to all the apostles; there is no mention of street preaching or a plot to kill Paul in Galatians 1; there is no mention of Barnabas in Galatians 1; and the places Paul goes to after each of the noted visits are different (Caesarea and Tarsus in Acts 9:30; Syria and Cilicia in Galatians 1:21).[17] Hence Beecher does not see a three-year gap between Paul's conversion and this recorded

17 Beecher, 'Paul's Visits to Jerusalem', 435–37.

Acts 9 visit, but a 14-year gap. The Galatians 1 visit (unrecorded by Luke in Acts) happened earlier, and this visit in Acts 9 matches Galatians 2.

Could there really be 14 years between Paul's conversion and Acts 9:26? If Jesus was killed in 30 AD and Paul converted around 32,[18] then 14 years later (remembering that parts of years were counted as years) would bring us to 44 at the earliest. That leaves enough time for Paul and Barnabas to be back in Antioch for a year (11:25–26) during which the prophet Agabus arrived with his prediction about a coming famine (11:27–28). By this time, they collected what they wanted to take for the famine relief visit, which probably happened about 46. That leaves considerable time for the first missionary journey before the Jerusalem Council in either 49 or 50. So the timeline does fit. The only difficulty here, really, is accepting a different scenario from the one we have become accustomed to.

Acts 9:26 says that the disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of Paul, not believing that he was a disciple. Barnabas puts their minds at ease. One might ask: if Paul was converted some fourteen years earlier and had been busy evangelizing in Gentile areas over that time, how on earth would the Jerusalem disciples not have heard of that? Of course they would have. Some might conclude, therefore, that the 14-year scenario is probably wrong. On top of this, there is another problem with the Beecher thesis. Peter and James had supposedly met Paul after three years, so they would have known he was a real believer. How could the Jerusalem Christians fear Paul all this time later?

The first concern about the time frame and not knowing if Paul was a true believer is actually just as real a problem for the three-year scenario. Surely, if Paul was converted three years earlier and was evangelizing in Syria and Cilicia (Gal 1:21), then the Jerusalem church members must have heard of that too. So the same dilemma exists for both scenarios. This suggests a different reason for the disciples' fear. They were not afraid of a 'fake conversion' to draw the disciples out and then have them arrested and handed over to Jewish authorities who might want to kill them. Rather, they were afraid of the persuasive and determined *heretic* Paul, a supposedly Jewish Christian follower of Jesus, but someone who allegedly showed a total disregard for Moses, the law and the ways of the Jewish people. They were afraid that he could cause trouble in the Jerusalem church. They were scared because they thought he was not really a disciple—that is, a proper law-following, circumcision-preaching, Jewish Christian. Such a view could easily have grown since the visit of Paul some 11 years earlier to Peter and James. People can change over time. Rumours can take hold, especially if the target of the rumour is never around to defend themself. Some even feared he was telling Jewish believers not to circumcise their boys (an incorrect rumour that was still around in Acts 21:21).

18 There is considerable debate about the date of Paul's conversion. It can be placed by different commentators anywhere from 31 to 38 AD. James D. G. Dunn made a pertinent observation that it needed to be reasonably soon after the other resurrection appearances to hold credibility with others: 'It is likely that Paul was converted within two or three years or less of Jesus' crucifixion … the sequence of apostle-making resurrection appearances did come to an end (1 Cor. 15:8—"last of all"). For Paul's claim to be accepted it must have followed quite closely upon those which had preceded.' Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 120.

Consider again the wording of the text in Acts 9 regarding Barnabas. It does not say Barnabas was living in Jerusalem at the time and ventured out to have his very first meeting with Paul. No, it simply says that the Jerusalem disciples were afraid of Paul and that 'Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them of how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him' (9:27). That certainly allows for Barnabas to have travelled to Jerusalem with Paul and, once there, taken the initiative to introduce Paul to the leaders there. They knew Barnabas already, of course. They would be more inclined to trust his recommendation.[19] Barnabas would have put their minds at ease that Paul was no heretic; he did not tell Jewish converts to stop being Jews as well.

As noted above, it is impossible to know just when during those 14 years Barnabas went to Antioch. Perhaps Paul's conversations with Peter (the Galatians 1 visit) helped the Jerusalem church realize just how much work was being done elsewhere. He certainly was not idle for the first years of his conversion, whether it was three or 14 years. If Barnabas was in Antioch for some time and Paul did not remain stationary, then it is quite likely that they had met in Antioch.[20]

After Acts 9, the next mention of Barnabas occurs in Acts 11, where he was sent to Antioch as the representative of the Jerusalem church and stayed there to help with the growing work. Luke, having paused his narrative about Paul at Acts 9:30 (noting that Paul was sent to Tarsus), now tells us that Barnabas went to Tarsus to collect Paul and bring him to Antioch to help with the work there.

The traditional view is that between Acts 9:30 and Acts 11:25, there could be as much as a decade of unaccounted-for years in Paul's life and ministry. That is based on the need to place the Acts 9 Jerusalem visit just three years after Paul's conversion. Beecher's thesis puts a much smaller time gap between Acts 9:30 and 11:25—perhaps only some months—before Barnabas collected Paul from Tarsus and brought him back to Antioch, where Paul was already a part of the work. Antioch is a reasonable distance from both Tarsus (to which Paul had escaped) and Jerusalem, so a long gap would not be needed for things to cool down enough that he could return to that city in northern Syria.

Accepting the Beecher thesis and timeline does require us to see the material in Acts 9–12 as not perfectly chronological. As already demonstrated, Acts 11:19–30 is clearly not sequential relative to the material before it. It jumps back to about 32 AD and Stephen's murder, so that Luke can tell us about the church in Antioch and Barnabas being sent there. Those 12 verses summarize events in Antioch that span more than a decade. Likewise, most of the material in Acts 12 is thought to have happened in 44 AD, the year of Herod's death. The famine relief visit noted at the end of chap-

19 Robinson, 'A Note on Acts 11:27–30', asks similar questions about how Paul and Barnabas met and how they came to both be in Jerusalem for Barnabas to introduce Paul to the other disciples. While I disagree with much of Robinson's paper, it is good to see him grappling with different possibilities here.

20 Robinson writes about how Barnabas 'sponsored' Paul on the Acts 9 visit to Jerusalem: 'When and where had Barnabas met him [Paul]? There is not the slightest indication Barnabas had ever visited Damascus. On the other hand, if Paul already belonged to the church in Antioch, of which Barnabas was a leading member, and if Paul had come to Jerusalem as Barnabas' companion, it is quite understandable that he should on that occasion been sponsored by Barnabas.' Robinson, 'A Note on Acts 11:27–30', 171.

ter 11 and then picked up again at the end of chapter 12 probably happened after the famine had begun (the year 35), and many place that visit to Jerusalem in 36.

If Luke is not writing perfectly chronologically (until the first missionary journey of Paul at least), that does not pose a problem. After all, Luke himself was not a part of the story until Paul's second missionary journey. The closer to events he is, the more sequentially he writes about them. But the early material is not all chronological. Rather, it follows a biographical structure. Luke tells us about the Twelve, then about Peter and John, then about Stephen, and then about Philip the deacon. He narrates Paul's conversion and then goes back to Peter. Each time he changes the focus, he backtracks and tells a new set of stories. The lack of chronological sequence does not imply untruthfulness.

At some point during the intervening years, Paul and Barnabas met and became friends. It seems reasonable to conclude that Paul and Barnabas were together in Antioch when the decision was made for Paul to revisit Jerusalem (Acts 9:26ff). Paul, we assume, would have filled Barnabas in on his first rather uneventful, short 15-day visit to Jerusalem (11 years earlier, three years after his conversion). When a problem with some Judaizers arose (Gal 2:4–5), Paul and Barnabas decided to do two things on one visit to Jerusalem: have Barnabas introduce Paul to the wider group of apostles (as mentioned by Luke) and attempt to deal with the Judaizers (not mentioned by Luke yet). After the plot to kill Paul surfaced, he got away to Tarsus (Acts 9:30), and then after a relatively short time, when it seemed safe and appropriate, Barnabas brought him *back* to Antioch (not to Antioch for the first time).

Such an explanation is speculative because of the gap years and lack of detail in Acts. Nevertheless, every theory about Paul's visits to Jerusalem has speculation and gaps. There is nothing far-fetched or ridiculous in this reconstruction.

Application

Church historians are sometimes criticized for spending time on historical curiosities with little practical significance. So it is incumbent on us historians to point out the relevance of what we do.

First, we should consider closely the implications of theories we accept or reject. For example, if we accept the argument that Galatians 1 and Acts 9 describe the same visit by Paul to Jerusalem, and if we assume that Paul did not mention Barnabas in Galatians 1 because he had squabbled with Barnabas and wanted to downplay his important role in that visit, we are actually saying that Paul was willing to distort the truth to undermine someone he was annoyed with. Paul would have been denying credit where credit was due, all because of a more recent disagreement.

Such reasoning reduces Paul to a very flawed Christ-follower. Of course, no one is perfect, but it would be quite a blemish on Paul's record if he purposely lied about or downplayed the work of a solid Christian brother or sister, just because they subsequently had some type of falling out. If we tolerate such an attitude in Paul, we might also justify it in ourselves, ignoring the positive contributions of people we don't like. Our interpretation of Paul's motives can reinforce our own carnal behaviours. May we not fall into such clever methods that hinder our own sanctification process.

Conceivably, you might conclude that Paul exhibited immaturity here and you might decide not to behave in the same manner. That would be a better outcome (for you, at least). But still, your study of the history of Galatians and Acts and of Paul's visits to Jerusalem would be responsible for encouraging you to be a more honourable person. In either case, doing serious church history will have served an important purpose.

Second, our analysis of the relationship between Galatians and Acts deepens our understanding of the main players in the story and the lessons we can learn from them. Barnabas befriended and worked closely with Paul for years. Even though Paul, through his persecution of the church, had been instrumental in hurting people whom Barnabas knew and loved, Barnabas embraced him, saw God's work in him, and became not just his friend but his advocate and defender. He would stand up for Paul in Jerusalem. Are we similarly loyal friends even to those in the church who might have wronged us in the past? Do we get over past hurts, embrace former enemies, and welcome them as co-workers whom we will stand up for or promote for further ministry opportunities? The example of Barnabas is extraordinary. He inspires us to love others more deeply, just as Christ loved us.

Conclusion

Barnabas was a key player in the life of the early church. He was a generous, kind and dedicated worker who contributed greatly to the church as it reached out to the Gentile world.

In Galatians 1, Paul speaks of his first visit to Jerusalem and makes a vow that what he is saying is the truth. He says he saw only Peter and James. He does not mention Barnabas at all. And yet Luke in Acts 9 highlights the role Barnabas played in that particular visit to Jerusalem by Paul. This paper has shown that for this and other reasons, we can conclude that the Galatians 1 visit is not the same as the Acts 9 visit. The Galatians 1 visit would have taken place before Luke's first mentioned visit by Paul, noted in Acts 9.

When all the above is taken into account, Acts 9 flows (with the Galatians material incorporated) roughly as follows:

> Acts 9:19–31: Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus [but very soon after departed to Arabia for a time, and then returned to Damascus—Galatians 1:17]. **20**At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. … **22**Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.
>
> [The Galatians 1 visit to Jerusalem takes place at some time around here, three years after Paul's conversion.]
>
> **23**After many days [some of Paul's silent years happen here. Trips into Syria and Cilicia were probably a part of that; see Acts 15:41 on the church established in those areas] had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, **24**but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him [cf. 2 Corinthians 11:32–33, probably about 37 or 38 AD]. **25**But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

[More of Paul's silent years fall here: evangelizing in Gentile areas. Much of 2 Corinthians 11:23–27 occurred during these years.]

26When he came to Jerusalem [14 years after his conversion—the Galatians 2 visit, approximately 44 AD], he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple [but rather a heretical Jewish so-called Christian who, they believed, had abandoned his Jewish roots and the laws of Moses]. **27**But Barnabas [who had travelled with him from Antioch—Galatians 2:1] took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. **28**So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. **29**He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. **30**When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

[Some weeks or months later, Barnabas collected him from there and brought him back to Antioch—Acts 11:25.] **31**Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

ERT (2024) 48:4, 362–375

Perspectives on the Problem of Evil

Joshua Jo Wah Yen

'If God is good, why did he let this happen?' is one of the most common challenges to faith. Although the book of Job suggests that we will not receive a complete answer in this life, philosophers have made various attempts to reconcile the existence of God and the evils we experience. This paper summarizes main approaches in readable fashion and evaluates their usefulness in Christian apologetics.

The problem of evil is often presented as the strongest argument against theism. Evil and suffering are undeniable aspects of human existence, posing an existential and theoretical challenge for people struggling to reconcile their personal struggles with an all-loving God. There are many possible responses to sceptical arguments regarding the problem of evil. This paper is designed to introduce Christian readers to both intellectual and pastoral responses.

I first summarize the historical development of the problem of evil. After that, I present three aspects of the problem: logical, evidential and abductive. I then examine four promising responses to the problem, known as free will, soul-making, anthropodicy and sceptical theism. Finally, I engage with the pastoral issues, considering how one can address the reality of evil at a practical level.

Historical perspectives

Mark Edwards argues that, unlike modern debates where evil is used to challenge the existence of God, ancient philosophers instead used evil as a tool to help us understand the divine order.[1] This ancient perspective is best embodied in Boethius' (ca. 480–525/6) *Consolation of Philosophy*, in which he questioned both why there was so much evil if there was a God and how there could be any good if there were no God.[2] Although Job's anguished speeches show that some people wrestled pastorally with the problem of evil long ago, not until medieval and Enlightenment thinkers such as Aquinas, Leibniz and Hume was there a growing recognition of evil as a challenge to the existence of God.[3]

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1 Mark J. Edwards, *The Problem of Evil in the Ancient World: Homer to Dionysius the Areopagite* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2023), 297.

2 Mark Larrimore, *The Problem of Evil: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), xviii.

3 Aquinas, 'Summa Theologica', in Larrimore, *The Problem of Evil*, 96. Aquinas recognizes the usage of evil as an argument against God, even though there were few or no medieval sceptics to whom he had to respond.

There are several reasons for this development. First, the religious consensus in the ancient world varied greatly from ours. In ancient times, the existence of the supernatural was taken as given. To deny the existence of God was not a viable alternative worldview. Furthermore, polytheism was more common than monotheistic faiths. In polytheism, gods were depicted as superior to humans in longevity and power but not in morals.[4] Therefore, there was no expectation that the gods needed to act in a morally virtuous way, thereby resolving—although not in a happy manner—the problem of evil. However, the growing acceptance of Western views of God as all-loving, all-good and all-powerful (often referred to as classical theism) intensified the implications of evil regarding the existence of God.

Second, as Odo Marquand has argued, the modern age heightened the problem of evil due to major improvements in the quality of life.[5] Improvements in medicine and technology created a growing distance between humans and evil, which gave humans greater ability to analyze evil not just as an immediate life-or-death issue but also as an abstract principle. Furthermore, given mankind's growing ability to prevent evils such as infant mortality, sickness and premature death, we became more inclined to put God on trial for not defeating such challenges himself when they persisted.

A third impetus for change could also be the extent of evil experienced. In the past, evil could perhaps be more plausibly explained as part of human life. However, leading sceptics such as Kenneth Surin and D. Z. Philips have suggested that the grave evils of the 20th century, including major world wars and the Holocaust, have exceeded a threshold beyond which any theodicy (i.e. explanation of God's justice) is possible. For them, God is not just on trial—he is guilty and has no defence.

Regardless of the explanation, the theoretical problem of evil has been discussed with great rigour over the last three centuries. We can place the influential discussions in three broad categories: the logical, evidential and abductive problems of evil.

The logical problem of evil

Some thinkers have sought to demonstrate logical inconsistency between God's properties (omnipotence, moral perfection, and omniscience) and the existence of evil. In other words, if evil exists, then it is *logically impossible* for God to exist. John Mackie, widely considered one of the 20th century's most influential atheistic philosophers, stated that the success of this argument depends on demonstrating an inconsistency from the following propositions: 'God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists.'[6]

The definitions of 'omnipotence' and 'wholly good' are of importance here. Consider the difference between strong and weak omnipotence. Strong omnipotence posits that an omnipotent being can do all things, even if they are logically impossible, such as making a square circle. Weak omnipotence entails only that one

4 Edwards, *The Problem of Evil in the Ancient World*, 299.

5 Odo Marquand, *In Defence of the Accidental: Philosophical Studies*, trans. Robert Wallace (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11–12.

6 J. L. Mackie, 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind* 64, no. 254 (1955): 200, http://jstor.org/stable/2251467.

can do all logically possible actions. A good example of this would be the relationship between God and free will. Weak omnipotence can be applied to counter Mackie by suggesting that one cannot expect God to both permit free will and ensure that free beings always do good, as that would be logically impossible.[7]

Likewise, Mackie presents a nuanced definition of 'wholly good' according to which a good being 'is opposed to evil such that a good thing always eliminates evil'.[8] This would imply that any evil is the result of the failure of good beings to prevent them. However, as I will explain below, this is not the only presentation of good. It can be argued that a wholly good being might not always eliminate evil if there is an equal or higher good that would be prevented by such elimination.

The evidential problem of evil

The evidential problem of evil consists of an argument that evil and suffering make it *improbable* that God exists, since God would intend to prevent them from occurring. Therefore, the continual existence of such evils reduces the probability of the existence of God.[9]

To support this argument, philosophers often raise examples of intense suffering. William Rowe, for instance, discussed a dying fawn:

> A fawn is trapped [in a forest fire], horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering. So far as we can see, the fawn's intense suffering is pointless. For there does not appear to be any greater good such that the prevention of the fawn's suffering would require either the loss of that good or the occurrence of an evil equally bad or worse.[10]

Rowe's presentation illustrates three important distinctions in the evidential problem: categorical versus consequential reasoning, gratuitous versus non-gratuitous evil, and moral evil versus natural suffering.

The distinction between categorical and consequential moral reasoning concerns the ways in which evil can be judged. Under a categorical perspective, events are judged by their intrinsic merits. In contrast, to a consequentialist, moral value is determined by an event's outcomes and their instrumental benefits. Often, atheists object to theists' consequential treatment of evil. According to the atheist, adopting instrumental morality presents God as monstrous, acting as 'an utterly objective and impersonal moral machine, calculating the costs of innocent suffering against the benefits of greater goods'.[11] Regardless of whether one accepts this criticism, the choice between categorical and consequential reasoning will influence what arguments can be used to justify evil.

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7 It could be suggested that the concept of strong omnipotence is incoherent, as anything that God can do is thus logically possible, or else God would not be a logical being. However, thinkers like Mackie have suggested that God could transcend logical laws, though the implications of such a suggestion, both on God and on logic, are less explored.

8 Mackie, 'Evil and Omnipotence', 201.

9 William L. Rowe, 'The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1979): 335–36. http://jstor.org/stable/20009775.

10 Rowe, 'The Problem of Evil', 337.

11 Toby Betenson, 'Anti-Theodicy', *Philosophy Compass* 11, no. 1 (2016): 58.

One implication of the consequential and categorical divide is the difference between gratuitous and non-gratuitous evils. Those who believe in gratuitous (or unjustified) evil state that there exists some evil which happens for no reason. Those who believe that all evil is non-gratuitous (or justified) contend that all occurrences of evil lead to a higher good. Applying this distinction to the previous one between categorical and consequential thinking, one can say that if there are no gratuitous evils, then a consequentialist can dismiss the challenge from evil. Alternatively, if gratuitous evil exists, one can question why God would allow such evil to occur, as no ulterior goods arise from such evils. For the categorical ethicist, however, both gratuitous and non-gratuitous evil lead to potential challenges to theism.

Finally, in presentations of the problem of evil, it is important to distinguish between moral evil and natural suffering. In the former category, a moral agent is responsible for an evil act, as in the Holocaust. In contrast, there is no obvious moral agent causing a landslide or tsunami.[12] The distinction between moral evil and natural suffering dictates the types of theodicies that the theist can apply. For example, if one accepts the impartial and amoral nature of natural suffering, then one cannot appeal to free will to explain why God would permit that evil.

Abductive developments

A recent development in evidential problems of evil is Paul Draper's abductive argument. (An abductive argument is an inference to the best or most likely explanation.) Inspired by David Hume, Draper proposes that there is another hypothesis, logically inconsistent with theism, which better predicts the existence of both pleasure and pain (which he refers to as O) than theism. Draper labels this as the hypothesis of indifference (HI): 'Neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by non-human persons.'[13]

HI could be consistent with either naturalism or supernaturalism. It is, however, inconsistent with classical theism as it entails that even if supernatural entities existed, they are not motivated by a concern for our well-being. Based on HI, Draper argues that O is more probable on the assumption of HI than on the assumption of theism, making it more reasonable to believe in HI instead of theism.[14] This is an inventive and powerful argument.

Unlike the logical problem of evil, the evidential and abductive approaches argue for the improbability, not the absolute impossibility, of God's existence. The differences between the approaches demonstrate that Christians cannot respond to the problem of evil with a 'one solution fits all' mindset; rather, they must actively interact with the arguments each objector presents.

12 Historically, some theists have attributed cases of natural suffering to divine entities, most notably the ancient Greeks and Augustine. More recently, C. S. Lewis has also made such an appeal in chapter 9 of *The Problem of Pain* (London: HarperCollins, 2012).

13 Paul Draper, 'Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists', *Nous* 23, no. 3 (1989): 332, https://doi.org/10.2307/2215486.

14 Draper, 'Pain and Pleasure', 333.

Defences and theodicies: a selection of Christian responses

Theologians have provided a variety of responses to the problem of evil. Here I examine four types of responses: free will, soul-making, anthropodicy and sceptical theism. This is not an exhaustive list of responses provided by Christians. However, I consider them the most promising ones available.[15]

The free will defence and free will theodicies

Appealing to free will is one of the most common and well-regarded responses to the problem of evil. I will first present the free will defence (FWD) as developed by Alvin Plantinga, one of the most influential Reformed Christian philosophers of the late 20th century, before discussing how free will can also be used as a theodicy. Plantinga is widely recognized as having effectively responded to the logical problem of evil, and his FWD is one reason why recent sceptics have focused on evidential problems of evil instead.

As a response to the logical problem of evil, the FWD must demonstrate the possibility of God's coexistence with evil. For such a demonstration to suffice, one can propose the existence of an additional proposition or idea that would resolve the apparent inconsistency between the two ideas, God and evil. Plantinga writes that his goal is to 'produce a third proposition *r* [in this case free will] whose conjunction with *p* [in this case God] is consistent and entails *q* [in this case evil]'.[16] Since free will is the ability to choose between good and evil, by giving humans freedom, God allows for the possibility for evil to occur. This demonstrates that God can coexist with evil if free creatures exist, disproving the central proposition of the logical problem of evil. There are two notable objections to the FWD, but the responses to those objections help to illustrate its strength.

First, it has been argued that the FWD fails to provide a satisfactory alternative to Mackie's definition that a good thing 'always eliminates evil'.[17] In response, I contend that Stephen Davis' more conservative suggestion is appropriate. Davis writes that what 'the FWD must insist on is, first, that the amount of evil that in the end will exist will be outweighed by the good that will then exist; and second, that this favourable balance of good over evil was obtainable by God in no other way.'[18] There are two ways to demonstrate Davis' claim. A consequentialist can argue that it is possible for the good which arises from free will to outweigh the evil. Or one can make the categorical argument that free will is a higher-order good, such that regardless of how much evil is done, the intrinsic value of free will is sufficient. Even if both suggestions are false, it appears intuitive that these options are at least *possibly* true. Therefore, Mackie's proposition that a good thing 'always eliminates evil' is incorrect.

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15 Since I am writing for a primarily evangelical audience, I will not address process theodicy, which is not consistent with orthodox Christian teaching. Process theodicy denies the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and God's omnipotence. See David R. Griffin, 'Creation Out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil', in *Encountering Evil*, ed. Stephen Davis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 104–5.

16 Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 165.

17 Mackie, 'Evil and Omnipotence', 201.

18 Stephen Davis, 'Free Will and Evil', in Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil*, 69–100.

Second, Mackie has argued that it is possible for God to actualize a world in which all free creatures choose to do good. Since it is not logically impossible for one to choose good on several occasions, it follows that it is also possible for her to freely choose good on every occasion. But if it is possible for one to freely choose good on every occasion, it must also be possible for everyone to freely choose good on all occasions.[19] However, the theist again has two responses available. First, Plantinga appeals to the possibility of 'transworld depravity', which means that every free being will commit at least one act of moral evil in their lives.[20] Second, one should make the distinction between what is logically *possible* and what is *feasible*. Mackie's argument contains the implicit premise that it is not only possible for such a world to exist, but that such a world is feasible. The theist can reject this premise. If one views free will as the ability 'to perform that action and [be] free to refrain from performing it; [without] antecedent conditions and/or causal laws', then even if it is possible for humans to do only good, their decisions cannot be compelled by God.[21] Therefore, Mackie's suggestion that God could actualize a world in which all free moral creatures choose to do only good is incorrect.

Despite the strength of the FWD, some scholars have noted that even if it does demonstrate God's possible existence, it falls short of proving the *plausibility* of God's existence.[22] Although plausibility was never the goal of the FWD, it would be helpful for theists to know that their faith in God is not only possible, but plausible as well. Richard Swinburne, an emeritus professor at the University of Oxford notable for his development of philosophical arguments for God, demonstrates not only that free will makes it *possible* for God and evil to coexist, but that free will is of sufficient value that God would plausibly allow for evil to exist.

To Swinburne, a perfectly good God would create a world in which certain good states, like beauty, truth, action and worship, can be realized.[23] Free will is necessary for such states to occur. He writes, 'The glory of humans is not just their very serious free will, but the responsibility for so much which that free will involves.'[24] For humans to have significant responsibility, it is vital for them not only to be able to cause good, but also to knowingly cause evil.[25] If humans want to have the responsibility to partake in God's creation, they must also accept the moral risk that is entailed. As a result, a world which increases human freedom and responsibility must also increase the probability of sadness and pain.

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19 Mackie, 'Evil and Omnipotence', 209.

20 Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity,* 188. Although transworld depravity is possible, Swinburne notes that it is highly implausible and thus not a convincing solution to the logical problem of evil. Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 129–31.

21 Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1975), 29; this argument is also presented in Davis, 'Free Will and Evil', 74.

22 John Hick marshals this objection against the FWD, writing that it 'wins a Pyrrhic victory, since the logical possibility that it would establish is one which, for very many people today, is fatally lacking in plausibility.' Hick, 'An Irenaean Theodicy', in Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil*, 39–68.

23 Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 49–122.

24 Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 106.

25 Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 154.

By including the theme of responsibility in one's conception of the FWD, Swinburne provides a powerful free-will theodicy. Free will without the ability to make morally significant decisions about good and evil does appear to be a lesser form of free will in comparison to one which places greater responsibility on humans. Therefore, although one may question whether humans are worthy of such responsibility, Swinburne's argument for the importance of free will to our conception of what it means to be human adds to the discussion.

The soul-making theodicy

The soul-making theodicy, developed by John Hick and often labelled the 'Irenaean Theodicy', defends two major propositions.[26] First, virtues developed through facing challenges are intrinsically more valuable than those granted at birth. Second, there is an afterlife which culminates in eternal bliss as a result of soul-making.[27] Based on these propositions, Hick argues that since our hard-earned virtues lead to a state of ultimate bliss, any evil experienced in this world is justified by the future goodness God has in store for us.

Three implications of the soul-making theodicy are noteworthy. First, the soul-making theodicy treats evil consequentially. Stating that all evil works towards eternal bliss, Hick rejects the existence of gratuitous evil. In fact, one could suggest that under the soul-making theodicy there is no evil. Just as one would not classify vaccination as evil because it leads to future immunity, soul-making theodicy suggests that evil is a temporal aid to achieving eternal bliss.

Second, Hick affirms that 'God must take ultimate responsibility for both the origin and resolution of evil.'[28] According to soul-making, evil is another tool in God's locker to help humans achieve eternal bliss. In fact, if God did not allow for evil, the soul-making theodicist could make a positive case against God's goodness. If the soul-making framework is correct, it would follow that a God who did not allow for evil would be morally imperfect for withholding paradise to avoid temporary suffering.

Third, the soul-making theodicy implies that everyone will partake in eternal bliss, a view often referred to as universalism.[29] Hick writes, 'Only if [salvation] includes the entire human race can it justify the sins and sufferings of the entire human race throughout all history.'[30] If some people go unsaved, in Hick's frame-

26 Irenaeus writes, 'As these [created] things are of later date, so are they infantile; so are they unaccustomed to, and unexercised in, perfect discipline. … [God] offered Himself to us as milk, [because we were] as infants. He did this when He appeared as a man, that we, being nourished, as it were, from the breast of His flesh, and having by such a course of milk nourishment, become accustomed to eat and drink the Word of God, may be able also to contain in ourselves the Bread of immortality, which is the Spirit of the Father.' Irenaeus, 'Against Heretics', in Larrimore, ed., *The Problem of Evil*, 31. John Hick was an influential 20th-century philosopher in the fields of theodicy, eschatology and Christology. He held evangelical views early in his life before evolving towards universalism.

27 Hick, 'An Irenaean Theodicy', 44–49.

28 Michael L. Peterson, 'Recent Work on the Problem of Evil', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1983): 321–39, http://jstor.org/stable/20014015.

29 This concept should not be conflated with universally accessible salvation as presented by John Sanders.

30 Hick, 'An Irenaean Theodicy', 52.

work, the suffering experienced in their life would be in vain. Therefore, Hick believes that the goodness which arises from universal salvation is necessary for all evil to be justified.

The strength of the soul-making theodicy lies in its simplicity. Moreover, we have both anecdotal and scriptural evidence for the development of virtues through suffering (Prov 17:3; Jas 1:2–4, 12; Heb 12:4–11). Likewise, if heaven is the destination for everyone, especially as a result of the aforementioned virtues, to the consequentialist, the trade of finite suffering for infinite pleasure is an easy decision.

Several concerns can be raised with the soul-making theodicy. First, there is an inherent danger in its instrumental treatment of evil. Since the soul-making theodicy argues that evil isn't terribly severe because it leads eventually to heaven, Surin's concern that it provides a 'tacit sanction of the myriad of evils that exist on this planet' seems justified.[31] This alone is not a good reason to reject soul-making, as consequentialism entails instrumentalizing all things including evil. However, this concern does illuminate the broader question of whether consequentialism is a moral theory universally applicable to the realities of evil.

The second concern stems from the extent of evil. Even if one is inclined to accept that *some* evil is necessary for soul-making, in a post-20th-century world one can ask whether *that much* evil was necessary. If all people would, sooner or later, develop the virtues required to enter heaven, were the fires of Auschwitz necessary to speed up the process? I am inclined to believe that some evils cannot be justified by the soul-making theory. The consequentialist can still appeal to future goods, but if the future goods would occur either way, it would seem unreasonable and unnecessary to speed up their acquisition through great suffering.

Finally, soul-making implies that everyone will be saved. Even if the argument may be philosophically sound, from an evangelical perspective universalism faces numerous challenges from Scripture (Mt 7:21–23; Rev 2:11; 20:14). However, not all soul-making theodicies rely on universalism. One could make a more modest claim that suffering brings people closer to accepting Christ. While some lose their faith as a result of suffering, many also discover or strengthen their relationship with God as a result of suffering (cf. Job and Dostoevsky). Therefore, it seems plausible to suggest that God might allow certain evils to occur in order to bring people closer to salvation. In view of human free will, the decision about faith comes down to the individual, and many may choose to reject God and not be saved. This variation of the soul-making theodicy maintains the strengths of Hick's argument while avoiding universalism.

Anthropodicy: Handing the problem to humanity

Since evil challenges both theist and the atheist alike, some scholars have suggested that instead of framing evil as an argument against God, one should allow evil to transform one's understanding of meaning, value and God.[32] Given the posited responsibility for humans to face evil, arguments which fall under this category have been referred to as anthropodicies instead of theodicies. In this section, I will exa-

31 Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 51.

32 Frederick Sontag, 'Anthropodicy and the Return of God', in Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil*, 137–66.

mine two influential versions, John Roth's theodicy of protest and Frederick Sontag's anthropodicy.

Central to Roth's theodicy of protest is that God must share the responsibility for evil. By setting the laws of nature and choosing not to intervene, God in effect permits evil.[33] From this, Roth draws two conclusions. First, God's decision to give humans free will leads to God's disappointment with our moral failures. This disappointment implies that God is not sovereign and cannot be morally perfect.[34] Referring to this idea as God 'suffering the consequences', philosophers such as D. Z. Phillips have suggested that regardless of whether God allowed for evil with or without a 'second thought', it would 'make no sense to speak of the perfect goodness of God'.[35] If God allowed evil without a second thought, God can be viewed as callous and insensitive. Likewise, if he did so with a second thought, it would seem that God would then be involved in evil.

Second, Roth argues that it is our duty to fight against the evil which God permits. Since humans have evidence that God will not intervene in free decisions, Roth believes that the future is open and can be shaped by both good and evil acts. Therefore, to shape a good future, humans must fight evil and do good.[36] This act of fighting against evil can be viewed as both a form of protest and support of God's plan. It is protest as it represents a rejection of God's permission of evil, yet it is also an act of support by siding with the good in defiance of evil.

Roth's sentiment that we must oppose evil is noble. However, the argument that the God who suffers the consequences must also be morally imperfect is incorrect and a non-sequitur. A God who recognizes the potential for evil yet creates the world anyway could still be sovereign and morally perfect. In fact, the God of Christianity does suffer the consequences of the world he created. Christ responded to evil with sadness at the time of Lazarus' death (Jn 11:35) and in the garden of Gethsemane (Lk 22:43–44). Likewise, Jesus is crucified to save the world from their sin. Therefore, one can preserve the theodicy of protest by fighting against the evil permitted by God without needing to concede any moral imperfection on behalf of God.

Sontag's anthropodicy argues that the problem of evil is flawed because humans frequently overestimate their ability to understand the nature of God.[37] Instead of adhering to preconceived notions of God's properties as seen in classical theism, Sontag invites Christians to approach the phenomenon of evil and use it to re-evaluate our understanding of and relationship with God. Sontag is concerned that our over-emphasis on God's love and mercy may lead to overlooking God's sovereignty and wrath, resulting in an underestimation of the God we worship. According to Sontag, evil gives us good reason to believe that God is not bound by our moral codes nor should he be placed into a box of love and mercy.[38] Rather, Sontag invites us to re-examine our beliefs in God, suggesting that we might find a different answer from what we started with.

33 John Roth, 'A Theodicy of Protest', in Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil*, 11–16.
34 Roth, 'A Theodicy of Protest', 7.
35 D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 33.
36 Roth, 'A Theodicy of Protest', 19.
37 Sontag, 'Anthropodicy and the Return of God', 140–42.
38 Sontag, 'Anthropodicy and the Return of God', 146–48.

Is Sontag's position a tenable one for the Christian? It does echo the words of God to Job: 'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?' (Job 38:2 KJV). As the book of Job demonstrates, God is not required to give an explanation of his decisions. God is sovereign and can act however he sees fit. Likewise, just as Job finds reassurance in God's theophany without any further explanation of his suffering, Christians' response to evil must also be one of trust and avoiding overconfidence in their expectations of God.

One can argue that both Roth and Sontag fail to provide a direct response to the atheist's problem of evil. However, given the framework of anthropodicy, this objection misses the point. Anthropodicy prompts us to challenge our conceptions of evil and God, viewing the problem of evil as a pastoral challenge. If the theist faces a theoretical challenge, then the theist can appeal to free will or soul-making. However, from an existential perspective, anthropodicy can also be a useful option.

Negative sceptical theism and Rowe's evidential problem

Sceptical theism questions our cognitive ability to make statements about gratuitous and intense suffering. Sceptical theism has historically been split into two categories: positive and negative sceptical theism. While both are based on human insufficiency to comprehend all first-order justifications of evil, positive sceptical theism may attempt to provide certain second-order justifications for evil, such as mystery or free will, whereas the negative sceptical theist does not attempt to provide any such reasons, merely casting doubt on our cognitive capacities. I will first analyze negative sceptical theism as it has been the more dominant version.

Stephen Wykstra presented sceptical theism as a response to Rowe's evidential problem. He argues that the first premise of the problem, i.e. that there are instances of intense suffering which God could have prevented, is unsubstantiated as it fails to satisfy 'the Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access' (abbreviated as CORNEA).[39] According to CORNEA, one is entitled to claim, on the basis of intense suffering, that there appears to be no God only if one could confidently argue that if God existed, then intense suffering would not exist. However, due to our limited cognitive faculties, there is reason to doubt our ability to know the justifications God may have for allowing intense suffering, making such a claim unwarranted. Therefore, under CORNEA, even if intense suffering may provide *prima facie* justification to doubt the existence of God, further examination would undercut said justification and lead one to be sceptical about the problem of evil.[40]

Parallel to Wykstra, Bergmann argues that we do not have good reason to think that we understand all the relations between possible goods and evils.[41] Given this lack of awareness, the claim that there exist instances of intense suffering which God could have been prevented without losing some greater good or permitting some evil that is equally bad or worse comes into doubt.

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39 Stephen Wykstra, 'The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of "Appearance"', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16, no. 2 (1984): 74, http://jstor.org/stable/40012629.

40 Wykstra, 'The Humean Obstacle', 85.

41 Michael Bergmann, 'Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil', *Noûs* 35, no. 2 (2001): 279, http://jstor.org/stable/2672007.

While the limitations of our cognitive faculties may seem intuitive, given the intuitive idea that a good God ought to prevent evil, a proponent of the problem of evil is reasonably entitled to ask for a defence of scepticism. William Alston has presented three justifications for such scepticism:

1. The lack of data when it comes to judging any instance of evil. Many factors impact the judgement of positive or negative effects of evil, and these factors make it impossible to arrive at an educated judgement of their overall value.
2. The data we would need to evaluate are more complex than we can handle. Any changes in natural laws or history could lead to unexpected outcomes that humans cannot evaluate. For example, one could suggest that if Rowe's fawn existed in a universe without fire, then that example of suffering could be avoided. However, a universe without fire would have drastic and unforeseen impacts on the development of humanity.
3. The difficulty of determining what is metaphysically possible or necessary. Building upon my previous example of a fireless universe, one may suggest that it is metaphysically possible that God would give us another heat source that is more easily controlled. But this suggestion raises further implications. How would trees react to such heat sources? Given sufficient oxygen and heat, would the trees combust into flames? But since there is no fire in this world, it would follow that trees, as well as any other flammable substance, would need to be different, which would lead to further implications for this world. Considerations such as these demonstrate the difficulties of positing alternative universes to resolve evil.[42]

Based on such considerations, there is good reason for one to support the sceptical positions of Wykstra and Bergmann and to doubt Rowe's claim that there exist instances of evil which God would eradicate if God existed.

Positive sceptical theism

Despite negative sceptical theists' attempts, one shortcoming of negative sceptical theism is Draper's abductive problem. Bergmann has argued that if one were to grant sceptical theism, one would lack the cognitive faculties to make any statement about the probability of O (recall from above that O is Draper's way of signifying the existence of both pleasure and pain) given theism (represented as P(O/T)).[43] Due to the difficulty of assigning a value to P(O/T), it would be problematic to make the claim that P(O/HI) (where HI is Draper's hypothesis of indifference) is greater than P(O/T). In a similar vein, Wykstra and Timothy Perrine argue that humans do not have an encyclopaedic knowledge of O. Therefore, it is difficult to make any judgements of the net balance of pleasures and pains. In other words, pleasure and virtue could still outweigh instances of intense suffering, which would imply that

42 William Alston, 'The Inductive Argument From Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition', *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 59–60, https://doi.org/10.2307/2214090.

43 Michael Bergmann, 'Skeptical Theism and The Problem of Evil', in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 383.

P(O/T) would be greater than P(O/HI).[44] I have two main concerns with these suggestions.

First, in response to Bergmann, one need not propose an exact value for P(O/T) to suggest that intuitively P(O/T) is lower than P(O/HI). Imagine a presidential debate in which two candidates, X and Y, are questioned on foreign policy. Y provides a lengthy response as to why she supports an interventionist stance, whereas X, a talented politician, provides a non-answer, even though in the past she has provided slight evidence in favour of isolationism. After the debate, one is asked about the probability of the country withdrawing military support in a foreign conflict (W) if each president were elected. Even if one does not have sufficient evidence to establish a value for P(W/X), if one has sufficient reason to believe that P(W/Y) is low and intuition would suggest that P(W/X) is high, one is within reason to believe that P(W/Y) is lower than P(W/X). The evaluation of P(O/HI) and P(O/T) matches this example. Even negative sceptical theists like Bergmann recognize that there are some things we can expect given theism, such as that 'a human life [would not be] literally *nothing more* than a series of agonising moments from birth to death.'[45] These predictive criteria can help us make *prima facie* judgments regarding P(O/T) in relation to P(O/HI).

Second, even if one doesn't have a full understanding of O, it is reasonable to argue that, without further evidence, the evils we observe are antecedently more likely to exist given HI instead of theism.[46]

Drawing on the work of Swinburne and Hick, John DePoe argues that even if one is sceptical about first-order justifications for evil, there may be second-order justifications which would improve the theistic hypothesis. If one accepts that God wants a universe which promotes moral struggle and development, then one would expect such a universe to contain both good and evil.[47] Therefore, DePoe concludes, there is good reason to believe that P(O) under positive sceptical theism is higher that P(O/HI). As such, one can view positive sceptical theism as a credible response to both Draper's abductive problem of evil and Rowe's evidential problem.

The pastoral challenge from evil: A practical response

Up to now, I have analyzed various philosophical views on the nature of evil and its relation to God. However, many Christians come to faith not as a result of philosophical reasoning, but through personal interaction with believers. Therefore, disregarding the pastoral dimension may cause us to miss opportunities for meaningful conversations that can bring our interlocutors closer towards God. Accordingly, I will now turn to the pastoral problem of evil and how we may provide godly comfort in situations where we or someone we know has suffered from evil.

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44 Timothy Perrine and Stephen Wykstra, 'Skeptical Theism, Abductive Atheology, and Theory Versioning', in *Skeptical Theism: New Essays*, ed. T. Dougherty and J. McBrayer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 156–57.

45 Bergmann, 'Skeptical Theism and the Problem of Evil', 390.

46 Paul Draper, 'Confirmation Theory and Core of CORNEA', in *Skeptical Theism: New Essays*, ed. T. Dougherty and J. McBrayer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 140–41.

47 John DePoe. 'Positive Skeptical Theism and the Problem of Divine Deception', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 82, no. 1 (2017): 93–95, https://jstor.org/stable/48700391.

Confronting the pastoral question is challenging and uncomfortable. In theoretical discussions, we tend to remain distant from the direct impact of evil. This abstract and impersonal perspective, while vital to maintain objectivity in philosophical discussions, can feel like callousness and insensitivity to a suffering victim, trivializing the severity of the evil involved.[48] As such, when faced with instances of evil, personally and within our community, we must step beyond the bounds of theory and interact with evil on a practical level.

One suitable response to the pastoral problem of evil arises from the perspective of anthropodicy, which asks us to struggle with the victims of evil and ask the important question, 'What next?' Unlike the theoretical responses of free will and soul-making, anthropodicy does not force a philosophical framework upon the victim. Rather, victims are invited to determine their own meaning of and response to evil. They have an open path to shape both their reply to evil and their conception of God, as proposed by Roth and Sontag, respectively.

One must recognize the inherent risk of this approach. A victim of suffering may decide to confront evil as Christ did on Calvary and echo the words of Job, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust him' (Job 13:15 KJV). But the victim may also become resentful and lose her faith. This may be a risk that a counsellor feels unwilling to take, but it is exactly the risk that God took by creating a world where good and evil coexist. If God allowed for this outcome, then we must follow suit.

This picture of existential risk need not be as bleak as presented. Evil can lead people away from God, but it can also bring them closer to God. A theistic and supernatural worldview is the only worldview under which evil is not trivialized. Here, I echo Ivan Karamazov's famous dictum that 'without immortality there can be no virtue.'[49]

Let's assume that naturalism is true and we are the result of billions of years of stardust. Apart from the subjective meaning we give to the world, we have no intrinsic value which separates us from a tree, a pig or a rock. From a naturalistic perspective, there is no real difference between a forest being cut down, pigs being killed and a civilization going extinct by disease or genocide. We may feel worse about the latter, but that would be only a result of our feelings and nothing more. In naturalism, evil thus becomes an emotive term without further meaning.

Alternatively, if God exists, everything that happens in the world carries intrinsic value. As Christians, we believe that God so loved the world that he came down from heaven to die for us on the cross (Jn 3:16). Likewise, we read in Jeremiah 29:11 that God has a plan for us, not to harm us but to give us hope and a future. We may not know what his plan is. The path may not be sunshine and rainbows but, rather, the path of David, Job and Moses, all great biblical figures who experienced suffering. However, with hindsight, we can see that God had a plan to use them and their suffering to fulfil a great purpose.

Given this contrast between the Christian and the naturalistic response to evil, I would suggest that the anthropodical approach is not as bleak or hopeless as one may believe. Of course, no one can guarantee anyone else's response apart from their

48 Philips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*, xi–xii.

49 Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2003), 95.

own. But I personally find great hope and peace in the knowledge that God has a plan for me, regardless of the circumstances I face and the lack of clarity I may have.

As the sceptical theist reminds us, the existence of evil is a mystery beyond our cognitive faculties.[50] Job never gets an explanation from God as to why his suffering happened. In fact, God seems to criticize Job's friends for attempting to explain Job's suffering. However, I take heart in the faith of Job who, regardless of his suffering, refused to speak ill of God and continued to worship him.

Conclusion

The problem of evil raises important theoretical and pastoral questions for both the Christian and the unbeliever. It forces us to consider how Christians can approach God, but also how humanity should confront the evil we experience in the world. It is tempting to hide in our ivory towers of philosophy and approach evil from a theoretical and impersonal perspective. Although there is a place for such discussions, most encounters with evil call us to interact with the real experiences of the victims. Our response to evil, as the church, is to listen to the victims, talk with them, and mourn with them. We must avoid the trap of Job's friends who tried to rationalize evil, and we should promote a life of prayer and faith in a God who loves. For secular and theoretical interlocutors, meanwhile, the free will defence, soul-making or sceptical theism may provide the basis for a successful response.

I hope that this article can enhance believers' confidence in engaging further with academic literature and in interacting with secular peers. We must remember that Christianity is not afraid of evil. The crucifixion is part of the central narrative of our faith! Yet just as the Christian message does not end with despair on Calvary but with the resurrection of Christ, so too must we have faith in the hope that Christ brings and the ultimate defeat of evil in the life to come.

50 DePoe, 'On the Epistemological Framework of Skeptical Theism', 40.

ERT (2024) 48:4, 376–380

On the Unlikely Trajectory of US Evangelical Politics

Bruce Barron

A few days after the publication of this essay, the US electorate will choose a president. One choice is an unabashed advocate of abortion and LGBT rights. The other is a blustering narcissist who obstructed the peaceful transfer of federal power in 2021 and is widely viewed as posing an unprecedented threat to US democracy.

Given those two choices, most politically conservative US evangelicals have preferred the latter option, Republican party nominee Donald Trump. (These evangelicals are generally white. Black US evangelicals, for whom poverty and racial equity are highly salient concerns, have tended to vote for the Democratic party; Hispanic and Asian evangelicals are more split.)[1]

This improbable alliance with a casino magnate known for his marital unfaithfulness, admiration for dictators and propensity for disrespectful comments has caused great controversy and distress in the global evangelical community.[2]

Media coverage tends to depict the evangelical-Republican partnership, and especially the evangelical-Trump relationship, as tighter than it is. The National Association of Evangelicals (the World Evangelical Alliance's affiliated national alliance in the US), which expresses its political recommendations in a spiritually mature, respectful, relatively centrist, and consistently nonpartisan manner, receives virtually no media attention.[3] *Christianity Today*, US evangelicalism's flagship magazine since Billy Graham founded it in 1956, has been a notable non-traveller on the Trump train: in 2019, its editor, Mark Galli, called for Trump's impeachment, and the magazine's president wrote that 'the alliance of American evangelicalism

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1 A Pew Research Center poll found 82 percent of white evangelicals supporting Trump; see Gregory A. Smith, 'White Protestants and Catholics Support Trump, but Voters in Other U.S. Religious Groups Prefer Harris', Pew Research Center, 9 September 2024, https://pewrsr.ch/47m8etz. For recent articles on minority groups, see Daniel K. Williams, 'Democrats Can't Rely on the Black Church Anymore', *The Atlantic*, 18 September 2024, https://theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2024/09/democrats-black-church-voting-religion/679909/; Paola Ramos and Aarne Heikkila, 'Latino Evangelicals Are a Growing Voter Bloc as Parties Vie for Their Support', NBC News, 6 September 2024, https://nbcnews.com/news/latino/evangelical-latino-voters-2024-election-harris-trump-rcna169911; Deepa Bharath, 'Asian American Evangelicals' Theology Is Conservative. But That Doesn't Mean They Vote That Way', Associated Press, 17 October 2024, https://apnews.com/article/election-2024-asian-american-evangelicals-voters-9d40ec99fbb51c56f5f08a23ab6cda9e.

2 See Kate Shellnutt, 'Global Evangelical Leaders: Trump's Win Will Harm the Church's Witness', *Christianity Today*, 15 November 2016, https://christianitytoday.com/2016/11/global-evangelical-leaders-trump-win-will-harm-churchs-witn/.

3 See National Association of Evangelicals, 'For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civil Responsibility' (2004, rev. 2018), https://nae.org/for-the-health-of-the-nation-publication/.

with this presidency has wrought enormous damage to Christian witness.'[4] Nevertheless, polls and public discourse indicate that a significant majority of US voters who identify as evangelicals are voting for Trump in 2024.

After three decades as researcher, commentator and frequent practitioner in US evangelical politics, I'm better positioned than most to comment on this situation. And I'm at no risk of being fired from my ERT position for speaking candidly, because I've already announced that this is my last issue. So in this short essay, I will attempt to explain US evangelicals' seemingly inexplicable behaviour to our global audience. You might find this information helpful when answering people who use evangelical support for Trump as an excuse to reject the gospel.

Evangelical Christians' relationship to politics has varied considerably across US history. In 1800, many of them energetically opposed electing the 'infidel' Thomas Jefferson as president.[5] During the 19th century, they espoused an activist, even postmillennialist stance, initiating moral crusades against slavery and alcohol and for the King James Bible in public schools. As the culture moved away from them—especially after the 1925 Scopes trial in which Christian opposition to evolutionary science was exposed to public embarrassment—conservative Christians largely withdrew from the public square. They began returning after World War II, encouraged by leaders like Carl Henry who saw engagement in public life as an important part of living out the gospel.[6]

But conservative US Christians' big leap to political prominence occurred in the late 1970s, when Republican operatives capitalized on evangelical dissatisfaction with abortion rights and threats to Christian schools' tax exemptions to mobilize evangelicals behind Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential candidacy.[7]

Since 1860, the US has had only two viable political parties, creating a very different dynamic from multiparty systems. In the US, to make political progress, you have to choose to negotiate with both parties or align firmly with one of them. For the last 40 years, evangelical leaders and most of their followers have chosen to ally with Republicans, often giving them 80 percent support in national elections. They have had some successes—notably ensuring that every Republican presidential nominee since 1980 has been pro-life on abortion—but have also expressed frustration at times over being taken for granted by the Republican party.[8]

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4 Mark Galli, 'Trump Should Be Removed from Office', *Christianity Today*, 19 December 2019; Tim Dalrymple, 'The Flag in the Whirlwind: An Update from CT's President', *Christianity Today*, 22 December 2019.

5 Daniel L. Dreisbach, 'The Wall of Separation', Christian History Institute (originally published 2008), https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/the-wall-of-separation.

6 George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), is the best source on these events; Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947).

7 Among the best early analyses was Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow, *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation* (New York: Aldine, 1983). Randall Balmer, 'The Real Origins of the Christian Right', *Politico*, 27 May 2014, https://politi.co/2JsQoNr, though somewhat jaundiced, provides a corrective to the assumption that evangelicals mobilized politically in response to the famous 1973 US Supreme Court *Roe v. Wade* decision on abortion.

8 See Laurie Goodstein, 'Conservative Christian Leader Accuses Republicans of Betrayal', *New York Times*, 12 February 1998, https://nytimes.com/1998/02/12/us/conservative-christian-leader-accuses-republicans-of-betrayal.html.

My personal life intertwined with this story in 1990. While completing a dissertation on US evangelical political involvement, I gravitated towards a limited-government philosophy and offered to help the Republican party in my home city. I ended up as campaign press secretary for Rick Santorum, who won election to the US Congress that year, moved on to the US Senate for two terms in 1995, and placed second in the Republican primary race for president in 2012.

Part of my motivation in 1990 was to help in rehabilitating the somewhat unfavourable (though not nearly as bad as it is today) public image of conservative Christians in politics by exemplifying servanthood. For four years, I sought to live out what I declared in my 1992 book: 'We desperately need social and political leaders who will be public servants in spirit, not just in name. Christians should be especially qualified for this role, because if they take Jesus' words seriously they will be the persons least bound by self-interest.'[9]

Even while embedded in heated campaign settings, I always tried to combine advocacy for my boss's views with respect for other views, and I never connected Christian faithfulness with supporting Republicans. After I left Santorum's staff in 1995, one of my standard lines in presentations on Christian involvement in public life was that God is spelled G-O-D, not G-O-P. ('GOP' for 'Grand Old Party' is a common nickname for the Republicans.)

After Santorum's inspiring 2012 presidential campaign, in which he emerged out of nowhere to win Republican primary elections in 11 states, I thought he was very well positioned to become the Republican nominee for president in 2016. I was shocked when both he and Mike Huckabee, a Baptist pastor and former state governor who had run an excellent campaign for president in 2008, each got just 1 percent in the first state primary of 2016 and promptly dropped out.

What had happened? During the eight years of Democrat Barack Obama's presidency, the Republican electorate had become angry.

I recall talking with a solidly evangelical Republican friend as the 2016 campaign began. To my amazement, he was open to supporting Donald Trump, saying that he wanted to back 'whoever could win'. I had immediately ruled out Trump because of his casino background. His performance in early debates was embarrassing, revealing his gross ignorance on policy matters. I said there was no way Republicans would elect him. I was wrong. He embodied the cultural frustration of Republicans, including evangelical Christians, and promised to be their defender.

After winning the Republican nomination, Trump faced Hillary Clinton, who, despite her lifelong commitment to Methodism, was widely seen as a threat to Christian values and even to religious freedom.[10] I maintain that the vast majority of conservative evangelicals would have preferred a more reasonable Republican, but if they wanted to vote for a viable candidate, they had only two choices. (I satirically urged support for Peyton Manning, a famous US athlete who was not running.)[11]

9 Bruce Barron, *Heaven on Earth?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 169.

10 Gary Scott Smith, *Do All the Good You Can: How Faith Shaped Hillary Clinton's Politics* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2023).

11 Bruce Barron, 'Peyton Manning for President—He's Our Last Hope', *Denver Post*, 3 November 2016, https://denverpost.com/2016/11/03/peyton-manning-for-president-hes-our-last-hope/.

By this point, most politically active US evangelicals were so wedded to the Republican option—and the Democratic party had moved far enough to the left—that they had nowhere else to go, standing by Trump even when an explosive tape in which he bragged about his lewd behaviour was released. (Well, theologian Wayne Grudem wavered for a few days and then came back to Trump.)[12]

This tight alignment with the Republican party may also explain why US evangelicals tend to be outliers relative to the global evangelical community on various issues, including climate change, immigration, and the Israel-Palestine conflict.

The Trump administration certainly had some positive features. For example, it was the most aggressive administration in US history on religious freedom issues. But for most global Christian observers, his role in the shocking assault on the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 proved beyond dispute that he was not fit for office.[13]

Not for Americans. In fact, nearly four years later, millions of Americans continue to believe that the 2020 presidential election was stolen.[14]

Republicans have responded to the situation in various ways. At one extreme, Liz Cheney, a former Republican member of Congress from a very conservative state, supported Trump's impeachment and has insisted that Trump must be stopped at all costs. Her state's voters kicked her out of office by an overwhelming margin. At the other extreme, JD Vance, who once compared Trump to Hitler, is now his running mate and shares Trump's bizarre claims that Haitian immigrants are stealing and eating their neighbours' pets. In between are people like the Republican running for Congress in my own, conservative-leaning district: he has endorsed Trump—doing otherwise would be political suicide—but rejects false claims such as that the 2020 election was stolen.

For US evangelicals who consider the sanctity of human life, religious freedom, parental rights and matters of marriage and sexuality to be the most important issues of the day, the choice is obvious: Kamala Harris is intolerable and Donald Trump must be elected. This message is unmistakable even at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, an organization that Billy's son Franklin has openly politicized.[15]

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12 David A. Fahrenthold, 'Trump Recorded Having Extremely Lewd Conversation about Women in 2005', *Washington Post*, 8 October 2016, https://washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-recorded-having-extremely-lewd-conversation-about-women-in-2005/2016/10/07/3b9ce776-8cb4-11e6-bf8a-3d26847eeed4_story.html. Grudem urged Trump to withdraw the next day; see Sarah Pulliam Bailey, 'In a Stunning Reversal, Theologian Pulls Back Support from Donald Trump', *Washington Post*, 9 October 2016, https://washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/10/09/in-a-stunning-reversal-theologian-pulls-back-support-from-donald-trump/. But when Trump did not withdraw, Grudem renewed his endorsement; see Wayne Grudem, 'If You Don't Like Either Candidate, Then Vote for Trump's Policies', *Town Hall*, 19 October 2016, https://bit.ly/townhall-waynegrudem.

13 For my commentary following the Capitol assault, see Bruce Barron, 'A Time for Christians To Be the Nation's Healers', Religion Unplugged, 7 January 2021, https://bit.ly/religionunplugged.

14 Sarah Fortinsky, 'One-Third of Adults in New Poll Say Biden's Election Was Illegitimate', *The Hill*, 2 January 2024, https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/4384619-one-third-of-americans-say-biden-election-illegitimate/.

15 See Decision Magazine Staff, 'America's Future in the Balance', *Decision*, 1 October 2024, https://decisionmagazine.com/americas-future-in-the-balance/; see also Katherine Stewart, 'At Pray Vote Stand Summit, Religious Right Leaders Reckon with GOP Pivot on Abortion', Religion News Service, 17 October 2024, https://religionnews.com/2024/10/17/at-pray-vote-stand-summit-religious-right-leaders-reckon-with-gops-abortion-pivot/.

Regardless of the sincerity and selflessness of pro-life advocates who have devoted their political efforts to voiceless, endangered unborn children, these patterns have troubling implications for our witness. As WEA senior theological advisor Thomas K. Johnson commented, 'The way in which Christians are tolerating Trump's pure nonsense, which is on display in his speeches, leaves our neighbours with the impression that the Christian faith is pure nonsense.'

Moreover, linking the gospel so closely to political stances suggests that if one does not share certain political views, they are not welcome in the church. Our attempts to defeat our political opponents drown out our core Christian message that we want them to know Jesus regardless of their political stance. Strikingly, 'evangelical' has become a political label rather than simply a spiritual one in the US, embraced by many who may be culturally Christian but do not attend church.[16]

Recognizing that political engagement can undermine our attempts to communicate our spiritual message does not mean that we should avoid politics. Yes, politics is a dirty business, and if all Christians exited politics, that would only make it dirtier. There are plenty of positive examples of Christians who do politics civilly and respectfully, bringing honour to God along the way. I look to the European Evangelical Alliance's political engagement as a positive model.[17] Conversely, the history of US evangelicals' involvement over the last 45 years should teach Christians everywhere the risks of approaching politics from a perspective of cultural warfare rather than servanthood. Historically, the gospel has spread most effectively through Christians' example of sacrifice and service, not domination.[18]

But when we feel bewildered and frustrated by the limitations of politics, that is a good time to remember that we should not feel fully comfortable in politics, because no arrangement of the structures of this world will be fully satisfactory. We are aliens and strangers here, and our true citizenship is in heaven (Heb 11:13; Phil 3:20).[19] Our whole lives, including our political activity, should bear witness to where our deepest allegiance lies.

We should not minimize the potentially profound, even lethal repercussions the US presidential election could unleash around the world. But whatever happens to the United States or any other country, Christians must not fear. My country is not what I might wish it was, but we serve a sovereign God who never says on the day after an election, 'Gosh, I didn't see that coming.'

16 See Ryan Burge, 'Why "Evangelical" Is Becoming Another Word for "Republican"', *New York Times*, 26 October 2021, https://nytimes.com/2021/10/26/opinion/evangelical-republican.html.

17 See Julia Doxat-Purser, 'Teaching on Politics', *Evangelical Focus*, 17 September 2024, https://evangelicalfocus.com/european-evangelical-alliance/28242/teaching-on-politics. For my own contribution on how to do honest politics, see Bruce Barron, *Politics for the People* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996).

18 Although I do not share the author's evolution on abortion policy, Rob Schenck, *Costly Grace: An Evangelical Minister's Rediscovery of Faith, Hope, and Love* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018), is useful reading for Christians who may need to re-evaluate their overly contentious political style.

19 See Russell Moore, 'Political Homelessness Is a Good Start', *Christianity Today*, March 2024, https://christianitytoday.com/2024/02/political-homelessness-russell-moore-polarization/ .

ERT (2024) 48:4, 381–384

Book Reviews

The Priesthood of All Students: Historical, Theological, and Missiological Foundations of a Global University Ministry
Timothée Joset

Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2023
Pb., 409 pp., bibliog.

Reviewed by Jessica A. Udall, faculty member,
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In the previous decades of the modern world enamoured with innovation, there has hardly been time to go back and consider the roots of societal phenomena. Yet in today's climate of widespread disorientation and disequilibrium—both within and outside Christian circles—there seems to be a recent evangelical trend of historical investigation and inquiry in order to make sense of current realities. Timothée Joset's *The Priesthood of All Students* fits into this category. It not only provides insights into the origins and development of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) but also brings to light larger issues, controversies and challenges within the worldwide Christian church and globalizing society as a whole.

Beginning with a broad overview of the history of IFES—a task which the author acknowledges as difficult to do because of the vastness and variety of the organization's worldwide presence—Joset sketches its birth and growth both chronologically and with regard to the development of its ideas about 'theology (the legitimation of IFES's mission); ecclesiology (the legitimation of the form of IFES's mission); and university (the context of IFES's mission)' (p. 5). He suggests that 'as Paul used the imperial Roman road system to spread his message, IFES uses the university system' (p. 153).

Joset's generous use of primary sources demonstrates his commitment to an unbiased presentation. Giving IFES's critics a prominent voice along with its proponents, he ultimately contends that a missional ecclesiology 'legitimiz[es] a ministry on campus which is the contextual incarnation of the mission of the church and not anything *beside* it or potentially secondary to it' (p. 359).

Joset delves into the day-to-day activities of IFES as well as the 'theological, ecclesiological and missiological questions' (p. 169) which they necessarily raised and continue to raise. These activities include witness, prayer, Bible reading and fellowship, which Joset explains within the themes of immediacy, mediation and participation. These themes, Joset suggests, point to 'the implicit "priesthood of all believers" logic at work in IFES', which holds that 'because IFES students have a direct relationship to God (*immediacy*), they can be frontline witnesses (*mediators*) of Christ on their campuses … in the context of their membership of [and, thus, participation in] the IFES fellowship as well as in the church' (p. 181).

Whether in the initial formulation of IFES's Doctrinal Basis or the gradual articulation—informed by the questions and contributions of its growing constituency from all over the world—of IFES's missional ecclesiology, Joset argues that IFES

operates with a presupposition of the priesthood of all believers. He then explores the biblical and theological background of this doctrine, intentionally including non-evangelical sources to claim that the doctrine has a 'growing ecumenical consensus' (p. 253). He also goes beyond the church/parachurch binary, instead demonstrating IFES's self-understanding as 'the natural, contextual outworking on campus of a *missional* understanding of the church' (p. 238) in which students serve a pilgrim-priestly role by participating in the mission of God on campus, since the New Testament 'witnesses a widening of the priestly prerogatives to the *whole* people of God' (p. 252).

Joset concludes by offering a way forward for IFES and the global body of Christ: the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers—with its attendant themes of immediate access to God and the mediatorial role between God and the academic and global world—can make possible more constructive conversations on matters such as indigeneity and contextualization.

Understanding campus ministry as part of the priestly function of all believers, says Joset, allows it to operate in an apostolic way that does not compete with but is in fact an integral part of the ministry of the local church in a community that contains a university. This conviction becomes the foundation for empowering student leaders to study and share the Word of God for themselves, while also encouraging them to learn from others, including the leaders of both the global church and the local churches in their communities. Doing so requires a wise navigation of tensions between 'the opposite pairs *church–parachurch, academically trained–untrained*, *experienced–inexperienced*, *ordained–lay*, and *young–old*' (pp. 357–58).

As the global church seeks to navigate similar tensions while experiencing a shift from the Global North to the Global South, Joset's work is timely in honestly depicting an organization that has struggled and succeeded in spreading across the globe, in a way that has involved reciprocal intercultural partnership and a mutual give-and-take of ideas and practices among its ethnically varied iterations. This book will be helpful to those involved in university ministry as well as those concerned about the perennial tension between church and parachurch organizations. Both Joset and IFES question those categories and propose instead that a 'community [like IFES] is not an alternative local church, but the manifestation of the invisible church on campus' (p. 217).

The Memory of Ignatius of Antioch
Frazier MacDiarmid

Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022
Pb., 269 + xii pp., indices

Reviewed by H. H. Drake Williams III, Guest Associate Professor of New Testament, Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, Belgium

With influence from Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann, memory studies in early Christianity have been growing substantially over the past several decades. Many of these have examined the recollections of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. Others have considered the recollection of Jesus in other places in the New Testament and early

Christian literature (see e.g. C. L. Keith, H. K. Bond and J. Schröter, *Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries*, 2019). Few scholars, however, have pursued the role of memory of Jesus in Ignatius of Antioch's writings. This book is the first full-length monograph about memory in Ignatius' letters.

MacDiarmid's work has three sections, explaining how Ignatius remembers, how he aspires to be worthy of remembrance, and how he was remembered in later church history. The first section starts with a chapter on how Ignatius remembers the legacy of the Old Testament, which he quotes only sparingly. While his letters have just a few citations and allusions, MacDiarmid points out references to Old Testament concepts which are interwoven into his writing and used with authority. MacDiarmid views Ignatius' writing like that of the medieval rabbis who discovered meaning in contemporary events as they seemed to agree with types that emerge from Scripture. These are applied to the people of God so that they might see the correct path to proceed.

MacDiarmid also finds Ignatius using the legacy of the Old Testament against the two most widely recognized opponents within his letters: Judaism and Docetism. He uses scriptural ideas to strengthen the cohesion and identity of the communities under his influence against these two threats. MacDiarmid observes, 'Community is therefore constructed on the basis of shared remembrances correctly interpreted. Memories shared, whether experienced at first-hand or inherited through traditions and stories, constitute and contribute towards the communal identity of those who remember together' (p. 27). This is an important and underdeveloped thought in the current understanding of Ignatius.

Next, MacDiarmid considers how Ignatius remembered aspects of the ancient world. Scholars have noticed the parallels between Ignatius and Plutarch especially and have also seen overlaps with Hellenistic Gnostic thought and the Second Sophistic movement. MacDiarmid explores Ignatius' recollections about the city of Antioch, pagan cults and the Roman Empire at the time. He sees Ignatius as relying less directly on pagan thought than on the Christian ideas that run throughout his writing.

The book's second part, on how Ignatius wanted to be remembered, includes his self-perception as a sacrifice of God. MacDiarmid concludes that Ignatius wanted to be known as a Christian whose entire life was devoted to his God, as is made most obvious in his journey as a martyr.

While some have wanted to view Ignatius' death as a means of expiating the sins of the Antiochene church, MacDiarmid does not find this theme in Ignatius' writing. Rather, Ignatius presents himself as debased with the purpose of aligning himself with the apostles. MacDiarmid believes that Ignatius wants his suffering rather to confirm the validity of the gospel message and to strengthen the church in Asia Minor against division. This viewpoint runs counter to the position of Allen Brent, which has gained adherents recently.

The second chapter in this section concerns René Girard's perception of Ignatius as a scapegoat. While Girard is interested in patristic theology more generally, he does extend these thoughts to other places in early church history. MacDiarmid recognizes the overlap of violence, scapegoating and imitation and believes that these topics deserve attention in Ignatius. Following a lengthy explanation,

MacDiarmid expresses agreement with Girard. He also believes that the divinity of Christ provides the basis for imitating Christ. He presses this point further to support how the Christian should submit to the threefold structure of church leadership (i.e., bishop, elders and deacons) as the necessary outgrowth of such a confession. Ignatius' act of martyrdom is different from the common Roman notion of sacrifice. MacDiarmid's explanation of it deserves serious consideration in Ignatius studies.

As for how early Christianity remembered Ignatius, MacDiarmid intriguingly explores the 'long recension', or fourth-century pseudonymous writings attributed falsely to Ignatius. He considers these letters valuable in illustrating early Christian memory of Ignatius. MacDiarmid argues that ancient writers could legitimately write under a false name if they were in agreement with the authentic line of tradition. He goes too far, however, in aiming to convince the reader of the value of the pseudonymous text. It would be better to conclude that a carefully evaluated pseudonymous text likely contains important aspects of a remembered tradition. The long recension was designed to adapt Ignatius to the Arian controversy of the fourth century, which is not directly related to Ignatius' concerns in the second century. Those aspects that are clearly later should be dismissed as not authentic. For example, the long recension includes the names of various heretics who lived after Ignatius.

MacDiarmid says one of the most important aspects of the long recension is the modernization of thought from the second century as well as the 'queasiness at many of Ignatius' usages' (p. 156). He sees the author of the fourth century text as an ambassador for the conciliatory, weak Arian theology of his community. This purpose is reinforced by the two imprimaturs drawn from Ignatius: his martyrdom and his antiquity. But it would be helpful if MacDiarmid could provide clear criteria to assess what recollections from a fourth-century document are an adapted memory.

The final chapter analyzes three later documents in church history that recall Ignatius: the Antiochene *Acts of Ignatius*, John Chrysostom's 'Homily on the Holy Martyr Ignatius', and the Roman *Acts of Ignatius*. These texts provide a hagiographic discourse testifying to a plurality of images and receptions of Ignatius. They memorialize the suffering and death of Ignatius as a benefit to others, along with a noble example of Christian piety. His death was seen as saving Christians from punishment—an overlap with Ignatius' original self-presentation as an offering to God, which was made most visible in his martyrological procession. MacDiarmid does not view these latter documents as portraying Ignatius as a scapegoat. Chrysostom depicts the martyr as an exemplar to be imitated as well as strengthening the faithful.

In his conclusion, MacDiarmid contends that regardless of how Ignatius actually lived, it is the remembered Ignatius who is important today. All accounts recall him as a benefactor of the church in both his life and his death, whose bravery served to strengthen the church. MacDiarmid also argues that memory studies could deepen our understanding of other second-century figures such as Polycarp, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, as well as being applicable in medieval and modern contexts. This is an important volume both for memory studies in early Christianity and for our understanding of Ignatius of Antioch.