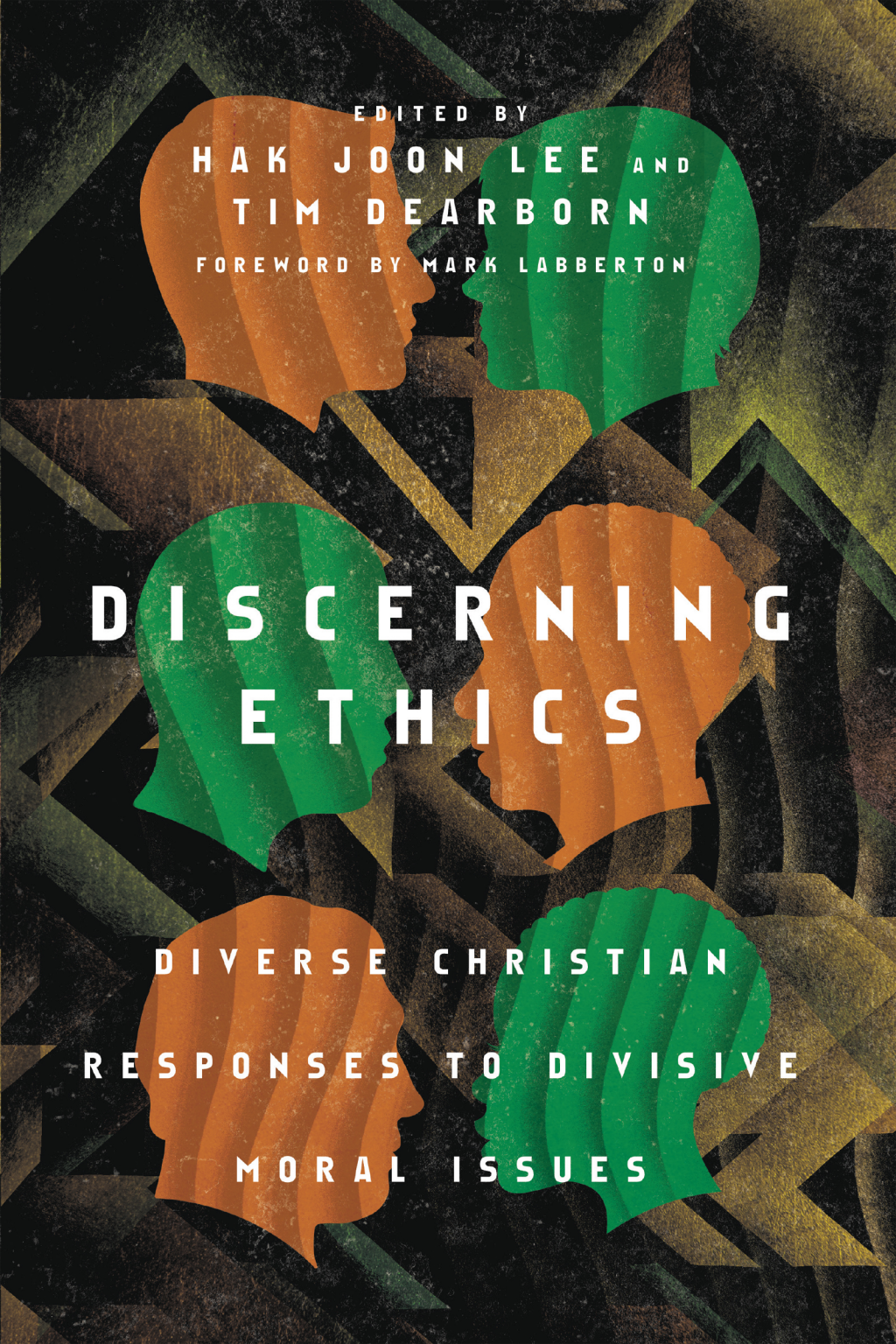
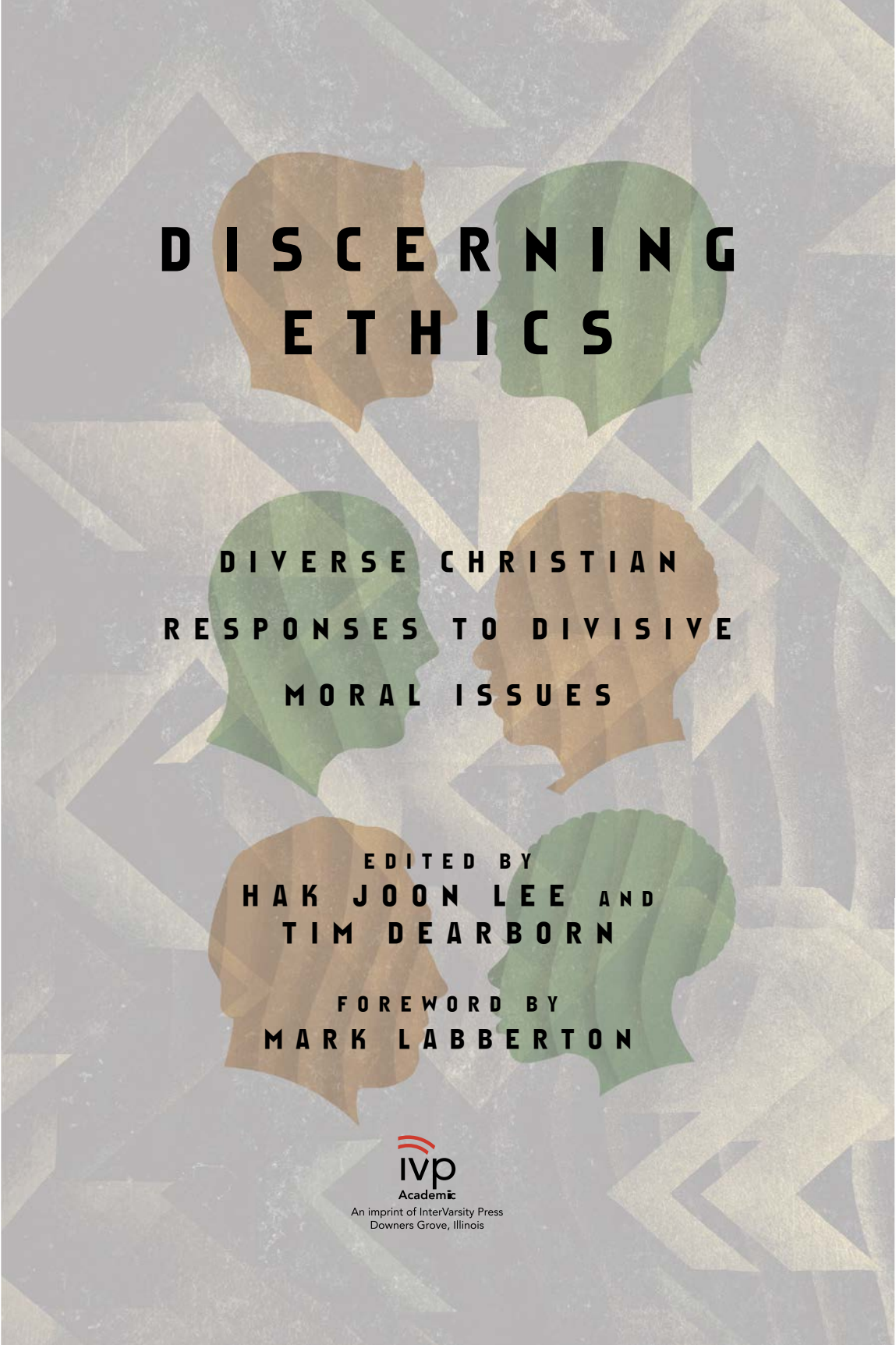

EDITED BY
HAK JOON LEE AND
TIM DEARBORN
FOREWORD BY MARK LABBERTON
DISCERNING
ETHICS
DIVERSE CHRISTIAN
RESPONSES TO DIVISIVE
MORAL ISSUES



# DISCERNING ETHICS

## DIVERSE CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO DIVISIVE MORAL ISSUES

EDITED BY
HAK JOON LEE AND
TIM DEARBORN

FOREWORD BY
MARK LABBERTON

ivp
Academic
An imprint of InterVarsity Press
Downers Grove, Illinois

*InterVarsity Press*
*P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426*
*ivpress.com*
*email@ivpress.com*

*©2020 by Hak Joon Lee and Timothy Dearborn*

*All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from InterVarsity Press.*

*InterVarsity Press® is the book-publishing division of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA®, a movement of students and faculty active on campus at hundreds of universities, colleges, and schools of nursing in the United States of America, and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. For information about local and regional activities, visit intervarsity.org.*

*All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™*

*While any stories in this book are true, some names and identifying information may have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.*

*Cover design and image composite: David Fassett*
*Interior design: Jeanna Wiggins*
*Images: zigzag colorful abstract: © oxygen / Moment Collection / Getty Images*
*gold foil background: © Katsumi Murouchi / Moment Collection / Getty Images*
*white cement & marble background: © iStock / Getty Images Plus*
*patterned wall: © Peter Tachauer / EyeEm / Getty Images*
*marble background: © Alexey Bykov / iStock / Getty Images Plus*

*ISBN 978-0-8308-4372-5 (digital)*
*ISBN 978-0-8308-5272-7 (print)*

Dedicated to the pastors and lay Christians around the world
who are willing to lead others in courageous conversations about the divisive
social issues of our time in pursuit of justice and the common good.

# CONTENTS


Foreword by Mark Labberton ix

Acknowledgments xi

Introduction | HAK JOON LEE 1

## PART ONE: ETHICS OF THE GLOBE

**1.** Climate Change | REBECCA SHENTON AND JOHN MUSTOL 17

**2.** Poverty and Income Inequality | SEUNG WOO LEE 32

**3.** Urban Degradation | JESSICA JOUSTRA 50

**4.** Immigration | JOSHUA BECKETT 69

## PART TWO: ETHICS OF THE BODY

**5.** Access to Health Care | BRIAN WHITE 91

**6.** Abortion | NICK BROWN 108

**7.** Transgender | JENNIFER McKINNEY 125

**8.** Homosexuality and Sexual Identity | MATTHEW JONES 144

## PART THREE: ETHICS OF VIOLENCE

**9.** Violence Against Women | LAURA RECTOR 165

**10.** War, Nonviolence, and Just Peacemaking | JACOB ALAN COOK 183

**11.** Gun Violence | NICK BROWN 200

**12.** Mass Incarceration | JOSHUA BECKETT 218

## PART FOUR: ETHICS OF FORMATION

**13.** Racism | **JEFF LIOU** 239

**14.** Disability | **BETHANY McKINNEY FOX** 258

**15.** Social and Entertainment Media | **JUSTIN ARIEL BAILEY** 277

**16.** Public Education | **RYAN MICHAEL HUBER** 297

Afterword | **TIM A. DEARBORN** 317

Contributors 322

Author Index 326

Subject Index 328

Scripture Index 330

Praise for *Discerning Ethics* 333

About the Authors 335

More Titles from InterVarsity Press 336

# FOREWORD

*Mark Labberton*

I believe the central question for the church in our era is this: Will God's people live our identity? It's not directly a question about God but about us. Will we show in concrete action that our new and peculiar identity as people of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection leads us to enact such love, justice, and mercy in the world? It is not the profession of our gospel for which the world waits. It is whether our actions validate or violate our profession.

This was Jesus' concern first. In Matthew 7, Jesus teaches that what we believe will be apparent in how we act. It will not be enough to hear what we profess but to see what happens when the winds, and the rains, and the floods beat against our house. Do we stand—not just in the sense of survival rather than obliteration, but in the sense of bearing enduringly faithful witness to the God we name and seek to honor?

These are underlying questions that I believe form the backdrop for the sixteen ethical issues explored in this book. Each of these fine essays demonstrates the demands of Christian faithfulness, courage, humility, and confidence needed in Christian moral thought and action. They are written in relation to real life stories while listening to diverse moral voices with the hope of opening relevant questions and nuances that need careful and empathic consideration and discussion. Dr. Hak Joon Lee and Dr. Tim Dearborn, both scholars and pastors, have edited this fascinating and demanding volume of essays to enable Christian identity to be better understood and demonstrated in the face of complex ethical questions raised in a radically pluralistic and globalizing world.

The deepest cynicism against the church emerges when we make so much of our Christian profession while showing so little of its fruit in our words and actions.

Right now, the crisis of the American church is not one imposed upon it by its surrounding cultural and political realities so much as it is a crisis of the church's own making by its failure to remember and to practice its identity. To no small extent, this failure results from the church's fear of diverse moral voices and inability to engage them with mutual respect and theological rigor and nuances. I am grateful that these essays so vividly demonstrate that ethical questions of our day, our faith, and our times need careful and continuous reflection and conversation. These essays are both classical and postmodern; they are like the work of many previous generations and they are also the work of this particular moment. So it should be. Christian ethics are daily read off of the lives of Christian people. Our neighbors know our ethics by how we live, what we do or fail to do, like it or not. And such ethics naturally grows out of our communal life of ongoing dialogue and deliberation in Christ. May these essays cause all their readers, as they have me, to grapple thoughtfully and faithfully, in agreement or disagreement, toward a Christian life of more deeply formed moral thought and action, not as philosophical abstraction but as embodied and humble life that I pray will be a truer reflection of Jesus Christ.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has grown out of a curriculum for "Micah Groups," which gather a dozen church leaders from diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, and church backgrounds to journey together for two years to examine how to incorporate matters of justice into the worship and preaching life of their congregations. Since this program began, 1,250 leaders in seventy-five cities and five countries have grown as wise, empowered preachers who live and lead at the convergence of worship, preaching, and justice. A dozen topics addressed here were used in those groups in a curricular format, but the current volume is substantially different from the curriculum in terms of its content, depth, and scope; it expands and deepens the theological and ethical discussions to a more academic level. We are grateful for the dozens of church leaders who gave input into how these complex issues could be most helpfully presented and examined.

A book of this scope is collaborative by necessity. Behind it is the inspiration of two people in particular. Mark Labberton, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, originated both the idea and the program that ultimately led to the birth of this volume. As the founding director of the Lloyd John Ogilvie Institute of Preaching, he developed the Micah Groups program. We are grateful for his warm support of this book, not least through his contribution of the foreword. Also behind this effort is the endorsement and example of Lloyd John Ogilvie. Throughout his life, as senior pastor at Hollywood Presbyterian Church and later as chaplain to the US Senate, he encouraged Christians to engage difficult issues of justice with wisdom, courage, and grace. He was a steady dialogue partner and friend as this project has emerged.

We thank Joshua Beckett for his tireless effort in service to this volume as a contributor, project assistant, and copyeditor. His gifts as a writer and a rising theologian made a difference for the book. We are likewise grateful to the fourteen other

contributing authors, all well informed in their specialized fields of expertise. They have diverse denominational backgrounds, but they all share a commitment to the same cause of serving Christians with theological education. We appreciate them for their willingness to go the extra mile to make their chapters accessible to readers without compromising theological depth. It has been a tremendous joy to work with them.

Other people who have played integral roles in this endeavor include the staff of the Ogilvie Institute, Jennifer Ackerman and Mark Finney. Jennifer facilitated the "beta" version of these materials and responded to the suggestions of church leaders. Mark Finney researched topics and provided a vast array of current resources to enhance groups' engagement with the issues.

Our hope is that this book will be a resource that serves to help Christians address contemporary ethical challenges. Through our contact with highly motivated and competent seminary students at Fuller and with Micah Group members around the country, we have encountered hundreds of church leaders who are indeed leading their congregations with wisdom and courage. Once again in history, the Spirit of God is stirring churches to be God's *ekklēsia*—the group of diverse women and men who conduct the affairs of the kingdom of God in their community.

# INTRODUCTION

*Hak Joon Lee*

## OUR ANXIOUS ERA

We live in a rocky time—a time of massive structural changes, a civilizational shift, and deepening inequality and injustices. Accelerating globalization and the advance of communication technologies are reshaping our civilization and political dynamics. Eroded by the mobility of globalization, the power of financial markets, and the anonymity and vitriol of the Internet, our social institutions, cultural ethos, interpersonal communications, work experiences, personal tastes, and religious identities are undergoing unprecedented changes. Conventional moral values and norms are being challenged; traditional communities and institutions are losing authority; welfare programs and safety nets are being removed; and numerous jobs are either being outsourced to other countries or replaced by robots and computers.

It seems that the earth is shifting under our feet. This cultural dissonance and structural dissolution engender anxiety, fear, uncertainty, and anomie (as indicated by the rise in drug addiction, depression, and suicide rates), and they create the conditions necessary for an acceleration of xenophobia, nativism, protectionism, and racism. Under the pressure of these structural changes and cultural shifts, the body politic in the United States shows signs of deep cracks and fissures. Trust in our political institutions and politicians are hitting historical lows, and the nation seems more politically polarized than at any other time in recent history. It seems that the American experiment of a democratic, multicultural society now faces unprecedented challenges.

At the heart of this polarization are controversies around how we as a society should deal with particular social issues such as immigration, same-sex marriage,

gun violence, public education, and global warming and their personal, religious, financial, and security implications. These controversies in fact reflect radical divergences and differences in ethics (more particularly social ethics), that is, what our normative and authoritative ideals, vision, values, and virtues should be and why. This polarization, of course, is a symptom of the fragmentation that our society is facing, the demise of its basic common values and shared frame of reference, to a dangerous extent.

Unfortunately, Christians are not an exception to this cultural polarization, but rather at the center of many of these controversial issues, worsening the partisanship, misunderstanding, and conflict. Christians today are as divided over social ethics as they are over doctrines, ethnicity, and worship styles, even while all Christians sing and confess that they are the members of the one body of Christ. Even while we believe in one God, serve one Lord, pray in the one Spirit, and read one book, we are often radically divergent in our understanding of God's will on particular social issues. Debates become passionate and heated because these issues have to do with questions of identity, values, and our calling as Christians. The polarization among Christians frequently boils over to the level of distrust and antagonism, as we all justify our moral stances and positions in the name of God and demonize the other party without hesitating to use fake news and alternative facts.

The current polarized political climate discourages, and at times even appears to preclude, the possibility of studying and learning from different ethical views on social issues. Many preachers and Christians feel cautious or wary about offering biblical teachings and insights on controversial social issues because of their fear of fracturing their own congregations; consequently, they remain noticeably silent about the issues. They do not want to upset people, but the outcome is that many Christians are more influenced by secular ideologies (that they receive from friends, the Internet, or other media sources) than they are by the corporate spiritual formation of their congregation. All too rarely do Christians have any chance to develop theologically informed, publicly tested opinions and ideas at church. As a result, churches are not only racially segregated but also politically and culturally segregated, exacerbating the divisions within the universal body of Christ and the national body politic.

The situation is not much different in classrooms of Christian colleges, seminaries, and divinity schools. Professors and students are often afraid of freely expressing their particular views on controversial social issues, and conversations about these issues are mostly confined to the safety of likeminded people.

## WHY CAN'T WE ALL GET ALONG?

Why can't Christians get along with each other on social issues? Where do these radical differences come from and why? As the following brief observations indicate, the polarization of our moral understanding stems from several different sources.

***Authoritative sources.*** While all serious Christians may genuinely want to know and pursue God's will, they differ in where they find the sources of that knowledge. In ethical decisions, some prioritize the Bible as the primary moral authority, others lift up church teachings or rely on the dogmatic pronouncements of prominent church leaders, while still others endeavor to listen to the direct personal guidance of the Spirit. To make matters more complicated, Christians often prioritize different moral visions, values, norms, or teachings in the same source. For example, while all Protestants hold the Bible to be the primary, central authority in discerning the will of God, there are ongoing debates among Christians as to which biblical texts (e.g., the Ten Commandments, the teachings of Jesus, or the apostolic epistles) are most foundational and authoritative, and whether normative sources other than the Bible (e.g., church tradition, experience, and reason) are relevant for decision making, as well as to what extent and in what order.

Adding further complexity is the reality that interpreting the moral teachings of the Bible can be challenging because of its unresolved ambiguities, tensions, and even silence on certain moral topics that we face today, and it is a mistake for Christians to select one teaching or narrative over the others without examining the entire Bible and the context in which it was written.

***Interpretation.*** Even if Christians rely on the same source(s), values, and norms, their different interpretations of these sources, values, and norms can (and often do) result in different ethical decisions. Humans never read and understand the Bible, or even empirical reality, in the exact same way. This epistemological difference results from the fact that we all wear, implicitly or explicitly, a certain interpretive lens. There is no naked access to reality. Interpretations reflect our different personal upbringing, life experiences, social locations, and cultural heritages as members of particular racial, ethnic, gender, and economic and religious groups. Sometimes our interpretations are colored by our political ideologies and vested interests; hence, careful scrutiny is necessary.

While no interpretation is completely neutral or objective, this does not mean, however, that all interpretations are equally valid or equally flawed. That is, this plurality of interpretation does not entail ethical relativism but rather indicates the inevitably conditional and contingent nature of human knowledge, including

hermeneutics and ethical reasoning. Important for our purposes is the fact that a critical comparison between diverse interpretations is possible.

***Empirical analysis and data.*** As with moral sources and interpretations, different empirical analyses of a specific social issue may also result in different ethical decisions. Many Christians often understand Christian ethics simply as the application of relevant biblical principles and rules to a particular topic, but every ethical decision also includes certain judgments about the factual, empirical aspects of that issue.[1] That is, every ethical issue has an empirical side to it, and its analysis contributes to the decisions that we make. Hollinger notes, "Often differences in ethical decisions are due to differing accounts of what is happening in a given situation. The particular way we portray the reality may well determine, at least in part, the ethical outcome."[2] For example, the controversy around abortion and the use of embryonic stem cells turns on the questions of when a human life begins and whether a fetus is a full person or not. Similarly, the debates on global warming are shaped by whether it is caused by humans or not, and whether science offers reliable evidence on this question. Hence, empirical analysis is crucial for understanding an issue. Any reasoning that disregards relevant empirical realities is very likely to result in a misunderstanding of the issue and its moral nature. History offers numerous examples of how Christian decisions have often been informed and influenced by fear, trauma, ambition, or nationalist ideology (e.g., German Lutheran churches' support of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party (1933–1945); overwhelming American Evangelical support of the Iraq War in 2003).

Because of its broad scope and public nature, an empirical analysis in social ethics requires higher and more rigorous standards. For empirical analysis of those issues, we typically rely on the findings of the social and natural sciences. Social-scientific analysis is different from a few personal anecdotes or individual observations. It usually relies on tested scientific processes and methods of data gathering, observation, analysis, and interpretation. It seeks to discover, as precisely as possible, certain regularities or recurring patterns—causal relationships that persist in natural or historical phenomena.[3]

---

[1]Dennis Hollinger, *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 175.

[2]Hollinger, *Choosing the Good*, 175.

[3]Even in the social and natural sciences, however, interpretive differences cannot be completely avoided; the process of developing a hypothesis and collecting and interpreting data inevitably reflects our presuppositions and cultural values. However, this does not result in relativism. Various guilds of social and natural scientists endeavor to maintain and enhance the objective quality of scientific research and discovery by establishing the standards and norms and implementing the process of rigorous peer review.

In summary, we differ in ethical positions because we often understand God's will, read the Bible, and perceive the empirical realities around social issues differently. To bridge the gap in our differences and avoid unnecessary and dangerous polarity and conflicts, we need to be self-reflective and self-critical of our own ethical perspectives and our ways of seeing reality in conversation with others. The study of ethical reasoning offers an invitation to this process of self-reflection.

## ETHICAL REASONING

In general, Christian ethics addresses the question of how we ought to live as Christians: how we can live faithfully as God's children, or what it means to serve and follow Jesus. Christian ethical reasoning is concerned with how we discern God's will; how we make right, good, or fitting decisions; and how we morally "authorize" our decisions.[4]

Christian ethical decisions necessarily involve an *empirical* (factual) dimension and a *normative* dimension. Empirically, we ask, "What is going on?" Normatively, we inquire, "What is God's will for this issue?" For the former, we study the factual side of an issue (aided by social/natural science), while for the latter, we examine the Bible and other sources (Christian tradition, experience, and reason) and the values, norms, and rules offered by these moral sources. Ethical reasoning is a process that helps us to reach a final decision by asking, "What is a fitting, appropriate action in light of empirical and normative analyses?" Ethical reasoning is inevitable in the Christian life for several reasons.

1. In making a moral decision, we always ask, knowingly or unknowingly, whether my decision is good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable. Would it please God? What would my family, friends, and community think of it? Would I regret it later?

2. Ethical reasoning is necessary to bridge the gap between our normative vision and our current social situations; as our society changes, so does our self-understanding. Many technological and sociocultural developments we experience today were unforeseen by the biblical writers. The historical gap inevitably exists, and ethical discernment is necessary for the faith community to be faithful to God and their neighbor.

3. Ethical reasoning is necessary to distinguish wheat from tares—to examine whether our moral view of a particular social issue, such as gun violence, is informed

[4]Ethical reasoning refers to a process of reaching an ethical decision. In common parlance, ethical reasoning is often termed as "practical wisdom" or "prudence"—an intellectual activity to process, discern, or reach a decision on a certain moral issue.

primarily by Scripture or by dominant social narratives, political ideologies, or cultural traditions. Many individual Christian responses to the complex ethical and justice issues of our day are often shaped more by their social locations, particular political ideologies, and favorite media channels than by the deep theology and wisdom of the gospel and Christian traditions.

Good ethical reasoning is indispensable for a good Christian spiritual life and discipleship—our growth as children of God. Our faith matters in our daily decisions and actions. We want our decisions and actions to cohere with our faith and Christian values. Ethical reasoning brings clarity, intelligibility, and coherence to ethical decisions and actions; it reduces the possibility of grave mistakes. In particular, living in a radically changing society, today we all carry a heavier burden of making important decisions than previous eras. In this context, ethical reasoning is a serious exercise of our faith that bears upon our daily decisions and actions as Christians.

In summary, one may say that ethical reasoning is a kind of art or skill necessary for discipleship. As the Christian life is a journey, ethical reasoning is part of the ongoing process of growth toward the fullness of Jesus Christ and living faithfully as Christians in the world. Its mastery requires time, effort, and many trials and errors. Every ethical decision should be pursued prayerfully and communally in the love of God and others, and be open to mutual testing, correction, affirmation, and challenge from brothers and sisters in Christ. The rewards are our better understanding of God's will and a life lived more faithfully in our journey as God's people.

## IMPORTANCE OF A CONVERSATIONAL APPROACH

This book takes a dialogical approach in dealing with various issues in Christian social ethics. We have chosen sixteen complex, divisive issues in social ethics, and we have set forth diverse, biblically and theologically reasoned responses to them. Our goal is to help readers to better understand other Christians through the study of a wide spectrum of today's complex and urgent social issues with global awareness, open-mindedness, and respect. For this, we believe that dialogue is the best approach.

The basic assumption of the book is that our differences are not necessarily detrimental or destructive but rather could be enriching and edifying to Christian discipleship and ministry. This can be the case when they are guided by a spirit of mutual respect and love, that is, if the participants in the debates "speak truth in love" (Eph 4:16) to each other. In light of this, other reasons for dialogue include the following realities.

1. Christians living in this world cannot but encounter people with different religions, ideas, and opinions and engage with them about important issues and events of society. We spend most of our time in workplaces, social organizations, and institutions other than churches. Hence for our witness, we need to better equip and refine our perspectives through serious and informed dialogue both within and beyond the church.

2. Ethical reasoning in a Christian context is never an individualistic task; it takes place in a community (whether it is a small group like Daniel and his three friends or a church council, as in Acts 15). Ethical reasoning reduces mistakes and fallacies, and it requires mutual testing and examination. Many heretics are also serious believers in their own way, and they make theological claims on crucial subjects, just as false prophets also appeal to God's authority. Careful discrimination, examination, and mutual scrutiny are indispensable for the Christian life, together with mutual love and intellectual solidarity.

3. Dialogue offers a learning opportunity. Dialogue offers the opportunity to expand our vision and enrich our perspectives by learning from others, even to readjust our understanding of the moral nature of a certain issue and ethics. In short, borrowing the apostle Paul's words, it is "the renewal of mind" (Rom 12:2).

Christians need to engage in constant dialogue because no one group exhausts the knowledge of God and God's will on every complex moral issue. Life in a rapidly changing society requires fresh understanding of the issues and rigorous interpretation of the Bible. A plurality of witnesses is not necessarily a sign of inconsistency or disunity. The Bible itself respects diverse theological and moral voices, and the editors did their utmost to include them all without compromising the unity of the whole. While the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is final, one may consider that the New Testament offers four distinctive voices of witness to Jesus' life and ministry with different theological nuances and moral emphases. As God is transcendent and mysterious even in God's revelation, one voice alone is neither perfect nor sufficient to address the complex and profound mystery of God. The knowledge of God is like a rainbow; light has seven different colors in its spectrum, and it cannot be reduced into one. To do so is to commit the fallacy of reductionism, even distortion. For example, the biblical idea of justice addresses three aspects: need, merit, and equality. No one of these alone is sufficient as a principle of justice. Knowing these three dimensions helps Christians to maintain a multifaceted dimension of justice in our relationship with others.

Blind loyalty to a single ethical view to the exclusion of others may result in a distortion in understanding God's will and moral reality itself. Even a view that is

pertinent and compelling at one time may later lose its persuasive power, especially in a different sociocultural context. Hence as Jesus taught us, we need to be alert because the times are changing (Mt 16:3), and the Spirit may be blowing in new directions (Jn 3:8).

Some readers might ask, Is comparison among different ethical positions, views, and reasoning possible? Is it possible to assess whether a particular ethical reasoning is relatively more valid than others? Our answer is affirmative. Just as we know that some sermons are better than others, there do exist more valid and plausible ethical interpretations in each time and place.

Each ethical position or perspective can be assessed in terms of faithfulness, analytic cogency, normative appropriateness, coherence, relevance. That is, we can compare and assess different ethical perspectives in terms of (1) whether its undergirding theology (understanding of God, Christ, Spirit, human nature, Scripture, eschatology, etc.) is faithful to the Bible and the core Christian confessions; (2) whether its empirical analyses are scientifically valid; (3) whether its choice(s) of norms, values, and data are pertinent; (4) whether its claims are logically coherent; and (5) whether its policy proposals and legislations are reasonable and capacious for promoting human flourishing and the common good.

Dialogue gives us the opportunity to understand the complexity around controversial issues and the richness of God's revelation. Hence we need to listen to different voices, assessing their relative strengths and weaknesses. To do so will strengthen our discerning ability and Christian witness. Ethical reasoning, as practical wisdom, often is a matter of proportion, nuance, and balance, neither always clear nor necessarily black and white.

4. Dialogue helps us to avoid caricaturing people with different views. This is probably the only way to avoid the growing polarization within the Christian community around controversial social issues. A group of likeminded people often works as an echo chamber, and this echo chamber becomes the very source of reinforcing our biases, prejudices, and false certainties. Without this process of sincere dialogue, we may unnecessarily fear others. Even worse, we may demean and vilify them, becoming socially narcissistic and tribalistic.

Dialogue is central both to a Christian lifestyle and a political democracy that choses nonviolence over violence, persuasiveness over imposition, truth over blind obedience. Such dialogue is becoming increasingly rare in this era of social networks, with their penchant for ideological reinforcement. Dialogue is a way of practicing our faith: despite our differences, we recognize that we are part of the body of Christ and

that we have covenantal obligations toward each other as brothers and sisters. This mutual covenantal fidelity and obligation is the basis for our dialogue. Our differences should not triumph over our covenantal identity and solidarity. Differences should not lead to caricature or demonization. No matter how passionate one is, no single social issue can exhaust the entirety of God's justice or the complexity of human life. Rigid ideological purity often results in more harm and evil in the world. An ethical litmus test is a sign of reductionism and demonization. Demonization is a betrayal of our humanity and the gospel. Jesus told us not to hate or take revenge against our enemies but rather to love and pray for them. How we treat our opponents also is a matter of righteousness in God's eyes.

In our dialogue, it is important to understand these issues in the context of a biblical perspective and the character of God. Christian social ethics is always based on Christian theology: who God is, what God's relationship is with humanity and the rest of creation, and who we are to each other in God. Importantly, this deeper knowledge of theology helps us to avoid the mistakes of reification and reductionism. In an emotionally charged and politically polarized situation, we tend to reify our moral position on certain issues (e.g., abortion, same-sex marriage, gun violence). Together with the apodictic rules ("shall," "shall not"), we need to examine the broad vision, values, and norms of the Bible, which are embedded in its key narratives, such as the exodus story and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Propositions and commandments alone are not enough. To examine a particular issue in a broader biblical theological context helps to expand our moral imagination and to inculcate civility in our conversation with others, resulting in generosity toward others holding different views.

For example, as Matthew Jones notes in chapter eight, a sexual ethic cannot be reduced to the matter of sexual intercourse alone. Sexuality or sexual relationship should always be viewed in light of the broad, relational, interdependent, covenantal nature of human existence. Sexuality is part of our covenanted life—how we *relate to each other in a way that promotes the common flourishing in the world.* Sexuality is part of the question, What is a good life that God intends for us? Thus it cannot be reduced to sensual pleasure alone; more important, it pertains to human relationships and embodiment.

## OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND DEFINITIONS

As an introductory book, our goal is to help readers become exposed to the range of different ethical perspectives and the rationales behind each position. Rather than

avoiding them, this book accepts and highlights the tensions and conflicts that exist among Christians on controversial social issues. Informed by a wide range of perspectives, readers will have an opportunity to grow in their understanding of complex issues and enhance their ethical reasoning skills.

There could be numerous ethical approaches (both religious and secular) to any particular social issue, but we have chosen three or four representative persons (or groups) in Christian ethics pertaining to the issue. Even within each of these three or four perspectives, there might be several variations, emphases, and nuances. We do not deny that these differences deserve careful attention and discussion. However, our approach is to introduce the kernel of major ethical positions without getting lost in the details. That is, we focus more on the forest than the individual trees of Christian social ethics.

***Variable.*** In each chapter, we identify and study important variables that ethicists rely on in shaping their ethical positions on a controversial moral issue. A variable is an element or a factor that is liable to vary or change in different situations or with different people. In Christian ethics, a variable refers to a certain theological idea, norm, value, or factual data (e.g., God's character, human nature, the right of a fetus, justice) whose value each ethicist differently attributes or assesses in making a decision.

The choice and interpretation of a key variable reflects an ethicist's particular theological, philosophical, and/or sociological assumptions—in the final analysis, his or her worldview. In other words, Christians, in their ethical decisions, make different theological and moral assumptions about God, human nature and destiny, justice, the mission of the church, the role of government, and so on.[5] For example, Christians differ in their views of God's core character (whether God is primarily loving and gracious or just and righteous), human nature (whether people are essentially good or selfishly corrupted), and the principles of justice (whether it should be based on merit, need, or equality). We call variables these weighty theological or philosophical ideas whose particular understanding impacts one's ethical decisions.

The study of variables involves seeing which theological understanding, norm, or value takes priority for an ethicist and how it shapes his or her ethical perspective. A variable is like a rudder of a boat, whose movement sets the course for sailing. Understanding these variables—and how and why they are differently chosen and interpreted by different ethicists—is crucial for understanding an ethicist's overall moral perspective. Hence one may say that variables are what shape the differences

[5]David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 172-88.

in ethical perspectives and conclusions among Christians. It is our hope that by carefully studying ethical variables, readers will come to a better understanding of different ethical perspectives as well as to begin to discover their own.

***Ethical method.*** In Christian ethics, ethical reasoning and variable selection are closely associated with ethical method, which involves the theological and philosophical basis of ethical reasoning. Ethical method explains how and why different ethicists understand and interpret the same moral norms and values differently or choose different variables. The study of ethical method includes how and why an ethicist prioritizes various authoritative sources (the Bible, tradition, reason, and experience) and values or norms, how he or she understands the task of ethics, and how he or she empirically understands the moral issue in question. In short, ethical method studies what assumptions an ethicist makes regarding sources, values/norms, and facts in reaching a decision, and how a certain ethicist theologically and philosophically justifies his or her ethical decision—why a particular decision reached through ethical reasoning is good, right, and fitting. In this sense, one may say, ethical method is the meta-theory of ethical reasoning.

## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into the four major groups: Ethics of the Globe (chapters one through four), Ethics of the Body (chapters five through eight), Ethics of Violence (chapters nine through twelve), and Ethics of Formation (chapters thirteen to sixteen). Obviously there are different ways to categorize these social issues, and several of the chapters could have fit in more than one category. However, we chose this way because broadly, Christian social ethics today cannot avoid its global scope, connectivity, and context; Christian communities cannot avoid the immediate or long-term implications of global physical and social phenomena such as climate change, global capitalism, urbanization, and immigration for our individual and social life. Additionally, Christian social ethics must address the issues that touch upon our bodies, such as health care, abortion, gender, and sexuality; this is especially the case today because average life expectancy has increased, and the advances of medical technology have profound impact on our bodies, transforming our self-understanding with new possibilities and challenges. Our collective life is afflicted by various kinds of violence (war, abuse of women, gun violence, and mass incarceration) that human brokenness and fallenness generates, and they are escalating for various reasons with globalization, economic utilitarianism, and competition. Christian social ethics must urgently speak to these painful realities. At the same time, Christian social ethics is concerned

with the formation of our mind and character, seeing oneself and relating to others notably, though not exclusively, in the areas of education, social media, race, and disability. Again, although there is some overlap among the groups, we hope that our categorization helps the readers gain a better understanding of the distinctive scope, nature, and approach of this book.

## STRUCTURE OF THE CHAPTERS

Each chapter of this book is divided into six sections.

***1. Real life*** opens with a case study or a narrative describing the actual experience of one person related to the issue being explored in the chapter. This adds a human, personal face. That is, the relevant social issue is not a cut-and-dried public matter decided by government bureaucrats and politicians, but it affects the life of a real person.

***2. Real world*** offers a brief, updated overview of the global scope of this particular issue. This section, while quite limited in its scope, attempts to show how the issue is not confined to a particular society. It is our hope that this exposure prompts readers to explore how other communities are approaching the issue.

***3. Range of responses*** constitutes the heart of our project. Each contributor offers three or four carefully reasoned, divergent, and at times even opposing positions on the response that the ethicists take. We have endeavored to present these positions without judgment or evaluation and portray them in ways that their adherents would recognize and hopefully accept as accurate.

Here are several questions you may consider in your study of each position. How does an ethicist's theology inform his or her method? What is each ethicist's understanding of God and God's character? Which aspect of God's character or attribute is prominent in the ethicist's theology, and how is it reflected in his or her understanding of a particular ethical issue? What is an ethicist's understanding of the empirical aspects of a specific issue? In other words, what does he or she think is going on with the issue, such as gun violence or immigration? What social theory does an ethicist implicitly or explicitly rely on in developing his or her perspective? What are the merits and limitations of the theory that he or she chose? How plausibly and coherently does an ethicist connect the empirical reality around the issue with Christian moral resources? In other words, does the diagnosis correlate with prescription? What are the distinctive contributions (or disservices) of an ethicist's perspective? In your judgment, how would it impact the church and its ministry today and in the future?

***4. Author's own response*** follows. In light of the three or four responses, each contributor shares his or her own engagement with the issue, comparing relative strengths and weaknesses and identifying concerns with each ethical position. Each contributor's view is not "the" answer to the issue but just one example of how to critically engage with the different ethical perspectives with respect and discernment. It thus endeavors to serve as a model for readers in their own ethical reasoning. We encourage readers to develop their own responses to diverse ethical positions, including the author's own view.

***5. Discussion questions*** come at the end of the chapter. We offer three to five discussion questions for individual reflection and group discussion that interact with the content of the chapter, with special attention to the range of responses, to guide comprehension, evaluation, and exploration of the various positions and their implications. Again, we have sought to present reflection and discussion questions in such a way that an adherent of each response would feel fairly represented. The goal of the discussion is not to win or convert other participants but to edify each other—to become better Christians.

***6. Additional resources*** include bibliographies and links to specific resources for further study, including books, articles, videos, and web-based resources on the topic.

## AN INVITATION

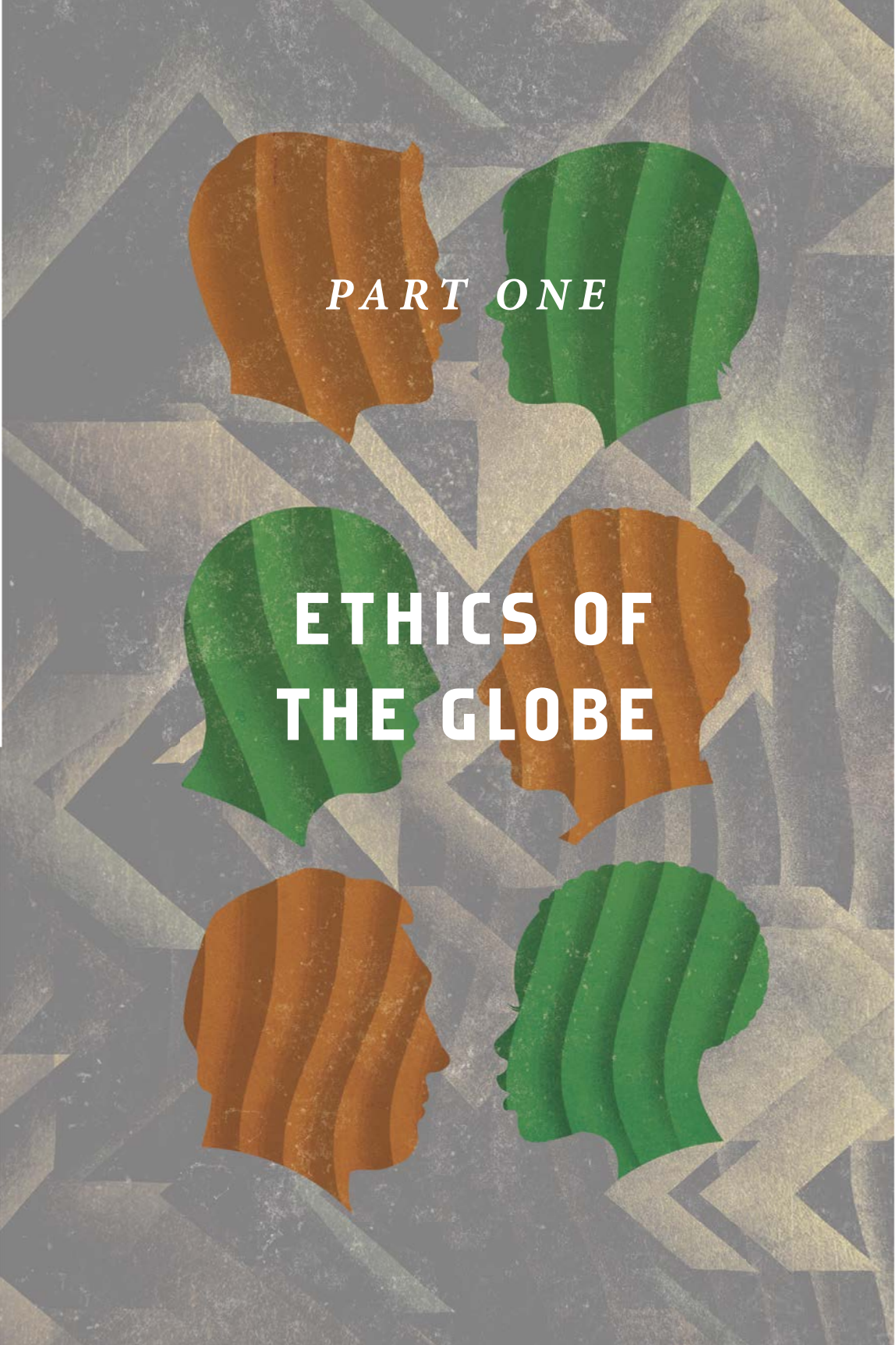
We hope that this book offers fresh opportunities for dialogue among Christians. Through studying this book, Christians in diverse traditions can be open and learn from different voices. By doing so, they will be able to enrich and expand their spirituality and moral horizons and reach a deeper understanding of God's reign in Jesus Christ in diverse ways in history.

We hope that open, sincere, and civil dialogue in the study of diverse Christian moral traditions will help to reduce, if not completely remove, distrust and division within the body of Christ and contribute to the depoliticizing of rhetoric in our ethical discourse and to a better mutual understanding of people with different positions.

It is true that Christian ethics has political implications, since the Lord is the Lord of the world, and God's reign reaches every inch of the world. However, this does not mean that we need to take a partisan side in politics. God's politics is for the flourishing of humanity, other species, and the planet, not for one racial, ethnic, or gender group or a particular political party. In our social engagements, our goal is not political victory but prophetic witness to the truthfulness of God's reign. Christian history

shows many tragic occasions in which alleged doctrinal differences proved to be more about political power struggles or ecclesiastical hegemony. Politicians always want to "use" religion for their own personal gain and partisan purposes. Christians need to exercise a healthy suspicion and put a critical distance between themselves and these political attempts. When we overly identify ourselves with a politician or a party, we may commit the folly of discrediting the entire gospel later when that political leader or party fails. Our political decisions should be carefully discerned and morally informed through ethical reasoning rather than made out of a political ideology or partisan interest.

May God give us wisdom of heart and enlightenment, and may the Spirit move among us as the power of truth as we listen to each other in love.



*PART ONE*

# ETHICS OF THE GLOBE

# 1

# CLIMATE CHANGE

*Rebecca Shenton and John Mustol*

## REAL LIFE

"Pastor Charlie" has been pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Rockport on the Texas Gulf Coast for twenty-seven years. On Wednesday, August 23, 2017, tropical depression Harvey was off the coast with winds of thirty-five miles per hour—not a concern. But with unusually warm water in the Gulf of Mexico, Harvey rapidly strengthened into a category four hurricane and moved onshore. Pastor Charlie and others evacuated, but not all were able to leave. Harvey hit Friday night, August 25, with the eye passing directly over Rockport. Church members Annie and her husband, Bill,[1] were unable to evacuate and rode out the storm barricaded in a closet in their home. It was the most terrifying experience of their lives. They survived, but their badly damaged house was condemned. Harvey lingered over southeast Texas for a week, causing heavy rains, historic flooding, sixty-eight deaths, and $125 billion in damage.[2]

Pastor Charlie returned after the storm to find devastation—homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed, and debris was everywhere. The church and his home were still standing but badly damaged. Some church members lost their homes. Recovery was difficult but encouraging as churches and the community shared resources and worked together as never before. Most members stayed in Rockport, but some moved away—including Annie and Bill. After their ordeal, they could not face another awful storm. Pastor Charlie noted that the storm exposed poverty in

[1]Not their real names.

[2]Office of Coastal Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "Fast Facts: Hurricane Costs," accessed July 17, 2018, coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/hurricane-costs.html.

the community. Many who were poor suffered more because they were already living in inadequate housing and could not evacuate. "No longer can we turn a blind eye to these folks," he said.

Although a few in the community had previously mentioned climate change, it has not been a priority issue. Pastor Charlie says that environmental changes in Rockport are obvious—increased shoreline erosion, higher tides, changing weather patterns—but connecting these to a slow, variable process like climate change is difficult. Besides, the church and community face more urgent concerns, such as caring for their families and one another. As Pastor Charlie put it, despite the experience of Harvey, people are just trying to put one foot in front of the other and get on with life as best they can.

We can draw two lessons from the experience of the people in Rockport. First, ordinary people are concerned with the immediate problems of life, not with a seemingly distant, slow, and variable process like climate change that presents only a potential future threat. For Rockport's residents, Harvey was bad, but the last bad storm was Celia in 1970, almost a half century ago; it doesn't seem like hurricanes are becoming more frequent or severe. The connections between lifestyle, carbon emissions, climate change, storms, and sea level are not clear to most people, so it is hard for them to see the need for change. Second, as Pastor Charlie noted, those who are poor and marginalized suffer most from climate change. This is true globally and presents a profound moral problem for the affluent of the world, who bear greater responsibility for climate change.

## REAL WORLD

*Climate change* or *global warming* involves the entire planet's climate system. For over two hundred years, people have been burning increasing amounts of fossil fuels—coal, oil, and natural gas—for their energy needs. Today, these fuels remain the major energy sources for our global economy.

Burning fossil fuels produces *carbon dioxide* ($CO_2$) and other *greenhouse gases* (GHG)[3], which are emitted into the atmosphere through, for example, our cars' tailpipes and factory smokestacks. The earth's ecosystems remove $CO_2$ from the atmosphere by absorption into the oceans and photosynthesis carried out by plants, especially in the great forests of the world. However, GHG emissions have increased several-fold while we humans have simultaneously been cutting down forests.[4] As a

[3]Nitrous oxide, methane, ozone, chlorofluorocarbons, water vapor, and others.

[4]See for example Frédéric Achard et al., "Determination of Deforestation Rates of the World's Humid Tropical Forests," *Science* 297, no. 5583 (August 9, 2002): 999-1002.

result, the earth's ecosystems can no longer absorb all the $CO_2$ we produce, and atmospheric concentrations are rising—by about 40 percent between 1800 and 2017, from 280 to 406 parts per million (ppm). This is almost entirely due to human activity, and mainly fossil fuel use.

GHGs are normal and necessary. By increasing the heat-retaining capacity of the atmosphere, they warm the earth by 20-30°C (35-55°F), making it suitable for human life. Of course, GHGs and the climate have always varied. For example, in the last 2.5 million years, warming and cooling cycles have caused a series of ice ages. But our current situation is unique because we are raising GHG (mainly $CO_2$) levels far faster than ever before in earth's history, causing global average temperatures to rise rapidly—about 1.0°C (1.8°F) since 1900.[5] A warmer atmosphere contains more energy and moisture, leading to more frequent and intense weather events such as hurricanes, rainstorms, and droughts. Also, warmer temperatures are melting glaciers and the polar ice caps, warming the oceans, raising sea levels, and causing changes in ecosystems, while rising $CO_2$ levels are causing ocean acidification.[6]

Human behavior is the most important yet the most uncertain factor in understanding the future of climate change. Its global scope means that global cooperation is required to address it. This brings up the enormously complex and difficult topic of climate change politics.

Although we have known about climate change since the nineteenth century, it became a public issue only in the 1980s. The United Nations took up the issue and formed the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988, a cooperative international body providing scientific information on climate change and its ecological, political, and economic impacts. At this time, it has produced five reports, the last one in 2014. A special report focusing on the importance of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 to 2.0°C was issued in 2018.[7] A sixth report is due out in 2023. In 1992, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was formed at the UN Conference on Environment and Development

[5]V. Masson-Delmotte et al., eds., "Summary for Policymakers," in *Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Meteorological Organization, 2018), 5.

[6]From 1971 to 2010 ocean surface temperatures rose about 0.44°C (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Summary for Policymakers*, accessed January 1, 2018, www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/AR5_SYR_FINAL_SPM.pdf, 4). Sea levels have risen about 20 cm (8 in) since 1901. Also, the oceans absorb much of the $CO_2$ we produce. When $CO_2$ dissolves in water, it forms carbonic acid, acidifying the oceans (*Climate Change*, 16-17).

[7]Masson-Delmotte, *Global Warming of 1.5°C.*

(UNCED), also called the Earth Summit. Since then, nations continue dialogue in a yearly Conference of the Parties (COP). In 1997, in Kyoto, Japan, the UNFCCC adopted the Kyoto Protocol, which imposed some modest reductions in emissions on developed nations but not on developing countries. Participation has been limited, but some nations (mainly in Europe) have sought to meet these reductions with mixed results. The annual COP meetings have been the principal venues for pushing toward the goal of a global agreement on climate change. After much delay, such an agreement was signed by 195 nations, at the COP 21 meeting in Paris, France, in December 2015. This set a limit of 1.5-2.0°C rise in global average temperatures to be achieved through emissions reductions by all nations, including developing nations. Unfortunately, the Paris Accord is voluntary and has no firm mechanisms for accountability. Nonetheless, many political leaders and activists have hailed it as a landmark event. Its effectiveness was significantly weakened in June 2017 when President Trump withdrew the United States from the accord.

Despite these agreements, global GHG levels continue to rise, illustrating the extreme challenge of climate change. Some factors that complicate its politics include: (1) disputes between the wealthier, more developed nations of Europe and North America (Global North), whose development and affluence have depended on fossil fuel use, and poorer, developing nations of Africa, South America, and parts of Asia (Global South), who want to use fossil fuels for their own development and hold the Global North responsible for their historical emissions that caused the problem in the first place; (2) the rise of economic neoliberal ideologies that favor unfettered capitalism, resist government controls, and view climate change regulations as a threat to economic freedom; (3) our current overwhelming dependence on fossil fuels, impeding our ability to envision alternatives; (4) the potentially catastrophic consequences of climate change if we fail to act, tending to paralyze our thinking and acting; and (5) people's focus on the more immediate concerns of life—self-care, family, jobs, and security rather than long-term consequences for their children and grandchildren. There are many other factors, but these illustrate the extreme difficulty and complexity of the political problem of climate change.

If we continue our present course, $CO_2$ levels could exceed 800 ppm by 2100, and temperatures could rise by 4°C (10°F).[8] Such a world would be much harsher with frequent storms, floods, droughts, higher sea levels, and displaced peoples. Although we cannot predict the exact timing of these changes, unless we act to reduce GHG

[8]Sir John Houghton, *Global Warming: The Complete Briefing*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 140-45.

emissions, they *will* happen. All people must be engaged, especially Christians who worship the God who is Creator and Lord of *all* the earth.

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

Like many other issues, climate change and other environmental problems have become politically polarized in American society. Those on the political left and most moderates generally accept anthropogenic climate change and support, albeit weakly, action to address it. By contrast, those on the political right, including many conservative Christians, tend to deny anthropogenic climate change and oppose action to address it. Moreover, many people resemble the people of Rockport, Texas, who are not particularly concerned with climate change but probably would be if it impacted their lives in a more tangible way and events such as hurricanes were more clearly connected to it. Thus, we see a left-right divide with a moderate middle that characterizes present-day America and the Christian church.[9]

We have chosen three scholars whose work we think is helpful for Christians as we approach this issue (and who reflect this left-right divide). Of course, they do not cover the diversity of Christian views on climate change. First, theologian-activist E. Calvin Beisner argues for a form of creation stewardship through economic activity and trust in God's providence. He acknowledges that the world is warming but denies that human activity is causing this. He relies on human intelligence, ingenuity, and free-market capitalism to improve people's lives and overcome problems. Second, theologian Cynthia Moe-Lobeda is concerned with global ecological justice. She recognizes that climate change is not only caused by individual humans but also by the political-economic systems we have created, and she argues that we must act in ways that fairly share responsibility and burdens, past and present, within the global human community. Drawing on liberationist and ecofeminist thought, she frames her argument in terms of what she calls *climate justice* and *climate debt* owed by affluent societies of the Global North to those of the Global South. Third, biblical scholar Richard Bauckham emphasizes our relationality and membership as finite creatures within the community of creation (human and nonhuman). We must embrace our humble place within ecosystems in interdependent relationship with other creatures. Moreover, all three scholars affirm a Christian duty to care for those who are poor, although they approach this in different ways.

[9]David P. Gushee, *The Future of Faith in American Politics: The Public Witness of the Evangelical Center* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 23-117, 175-79.

**Table 1.1**

| POSITION | VARIABLE: CAUSES AND IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE | MAIN CLAIMS | REPRESENTATIVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Free-market, divine providence | Not caused by humans; impacts are not significant | Stewardship and care of poor through free-market economics, undergirded by divine providence | E. Calvin Beisner |
| Eco-justice | Caused by humans and human-created systems; impacts are significant | Ecological degradation and social injustice are inseparable and systemic | Cynthia Moe-Lobeda |
| Creaturely relationality | Caused by humans; impacts are significant for humans and nonhumans | Humans are finite members of creation who must recover our creaturehood and respect its limits | Richard Bauckham |

***Free-market economics and divine providence***. E. Calvin Beisner is cofounder and national spokesman for the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, a conservative interfaith organization that opposes environmental action on many fronts, including climate change, and supports a free-market approach to environmental stewardship. Beisner agrees and adds that we can trust a wise and sovereign God who has designed a resilient earth and who will care for us no matter what happens.

Beisner claims that while the earth may show a recent warming trend, there is no credible evidence that humans are causing this. Although atmospheric concentrations of $CO_2$ and other GHGs have risen, these increases are tiny, and temperatures do not correlate with $CO_2$ or GHG levels. Furthermore, the global climate system is extremely complex and unpredictable, and our understanding of it is limited, so any predictions we make are at best uncertain.[10] Moreover, proposed measures to combat climate change will be costly yet have little impact, so policy changes and expenditures are not warranted.[11]

Beisner argues further that in contrast to the fear and alarm evidenced by environmentalists, the Bible assures us that a wise God has created a robust and self-correcting climate system. God our Creator foresaw all that humans would do on earth, and he "made the world fit to sustain us as long as He intends us to be here."[12]

[10]E. Calvin Beisner, "Global Warming: A Few Facts to Chill a Hot Debate," Lyman Stewart Lecture, Biola University, October 7, 2009, accessed July 17, 2018, http://open.biola.edu/resources/global-warming-a-few-facts-to-chill-a-hot-debate.

[11]E. Calvin Beisner et al., "A Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor: An Evangelical Response to Global Warming" (The Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, 2006): 2, www.cornwallalliance.org/docs/a-call-to-truth-prudence-and-protection-of-the-poor.pdf.

[12]E. Calvin Beisner, *Prospects for Growth: A Biblical View of Population, Resources, and the Future* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1990), 152-53. Beisner's argument here is undermined by the fact that God has given us dominion over his creation (Gen 1:26-28), so we are responsible. How we treat the planet matters. Further, the same

Furthermore, human beings are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-28) and so possess intelligence and ingenuity, as evidenced by the wonderful modern technology, abundant goods and services, and built environments that surround us and allow our flourishing.[13] Stewardship of creation involves extending human control over nature, exploiting the earth's resources through economic activity and work. But this requires that people have rights of life, liberty, and property within free markets where they are rewarded for their creativity, risk-taking, and work. In this way we generate wealth, which is essential to our stewardship of the planet. In fact, for Beisner, Christian creation stewardship *is* economic activity.[14]

The Scriptures require us to care for those who are poor in conformity with God's law (Rom 13:8-10), and this is best done through economic development, which requires *fossil fuels*. Poor nations should use fossil fuels for their development just as rich nations did. It is our Christian duty to ensure that these fuels are available to developing nations so they can grow their economies and lift themselves out of poverty.[15] Mandatory reductions in GHG emissions advocated by environmentalists would hurt the poor by depriving them of these fuels. Thus, by impeding the economic development of poor countries, environmentalists condemn them to the very poverty and environmental degradation they want to prevent. For Christians, this is unjust and must be opposed.[16]

Beisner says that the real threat we face today is not anthropogenic climate change but *the environmental movement itself*. He calls it a grave threat to the Christian church and "the greatest threat to the survival of western civilization."[17] Environmentalism hurts the poor, undermines our freedoms, jeopardizes the economic system, and

God also created our bodies. They, like the rest of creation, are robust and self-correcting, but only within limits. If we exceed those limits and abuse our bodies, we suffer the consequences. In the same way, if we abuse creation, we will suffer the consequences.

[13]E. Calvin Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness: Evangelical Entry into the Environmental Debate* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 1997), 109.

[14]E. Calvin Beisner, *Prosperity and Poverty: The Compassionate Use of Resources in a World of Scarcity* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), xii.

[15]E. Calvin Beisner, "Biblical Principles," in *An Examination of the Scientific, Ethical, and Theological Implications of Climate Change Policy*, ed. Roy W. Spencer, Paul K. Driessen, and E. Calvin Beisner (The Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, 2005), 16-17, http://cornwallalliance.org/landmark-documents/an-examination-of-the-scientific-ethical-and-theological-implications-of-climate-change/.

[16]The Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, "Protect the Poor: Ten Reasons to Oppose Harmful Climate Change Policies," 2014, www.cornwallalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/2014-Declaration-Final-Final.pdf. Beisner's argument here is weakened by the fact that in 2017, the declining cost of wind and solar generated power reached parity with coal and gas, so it is not more expensive (U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Annual Energy Outlook 2018* [Washington, DC, February 6, 2018], 103-4, www.eia.gov/outlooks/aeo/pdf/AEO2018.pdf).

[17]Beisner, "Global Warming."

moves us toward centralized global governance.[18] Hence for Beisner, a proper Christian response to climate change supports increased use of fossil fuels, minimal government, free markets, and economic growth.

***Eco-justice***. Lutheran theologian and ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda holds a joint appointment in theological and social ethics at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific and Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California. Her views are largely the opposite of Beisner's. She argues for Christian ecojustice, uniting concern for the *social* impacts of globalization and industrialization (e.g., wealth disparities, poor working conditions) with concern for their ecological impacts (e.g., pollution, climate change).[19]

The overarching theme of Moe-Lobeda's work is *structural evil*: by our participation in the economic systems that are embedded in our globalized world, we unwittingly harm others in multiple ways. Those harmed the most are the world's poorest people who live in the Global South, as well as millions of the poorest in affluent nations. In addition to facing ecological and economic challenges resulting from globalization (e.g., multinational corporations putting their factories in countries where there are fewer regulations regarding worker health and safety, lower wages, and fewer restrictions on pollution), people in the Global South are also the most susceptible to the consequences of global climate change. Island nations, subsistence farmers, and those who live along low-lying coastlines prone to flooding will face catastrophic consequences unless GHG emissions are rapidly reduced.

Climate change is a paradigmatic manifestation of our globalized economic system, which does not recognize the limits of the planetary ecosystem and thus threatens its very health and existence.[20] Because of this, our economic system in its current form is not ecologically sustainable, particularly because of its reliance on fossil fuels. Hence, to address climate change, we must make fundamental changes in this system to obey ecological limits, reduce GHG emissions, and promote economic equity. We need

[18]E. Calvin Beisner, "Godly Dominion vs. Environmentalism: Reducing Poverty, Restoring Liberty, and Renewing Human Dignity by Reclaiming the Blessings of Genesis 1:28," lecture at Calvary South Denver, Colorado, May 1-2, 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=35Xr5X4iRJ0.

[19]Dieter T. Hessel, "Eco-Justice Ethics," The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale, 2007, fore.yale.edu/disciplines/ethics/eco-justice/; Larry Rasmussen, "Global Eco-Justice," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 515-27. Hessel and Rasmussen have also contributed to this perspective.

[20]Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 28-29.

appropriate and responsible businesses and entrepreneurship that pursues ecological sustainability rather than global megacorporations focused on maximizing profits, operating in international spaces, and exploiting local peoples and ecosystems without accountability to nations, laws, or citizens.[21]

For Moe-Lobeda, climate change presents a "moral crisis" for our world. However, the responsibility of those in wealthy nations is invisible because it is our participation in a global *system* (rather than individual actions) that is contributing to the suffering and even death of poor people around the world. At the heart of this crisis is what she calls *climate justice*: the impacts of climate change are falling disproportionately on the poor in the Global South, while we who live in the affluent societies of the Global North and who are responsible for the bulk of GHG emissions past and present are suffering less. Climate justice means that the wealthy of the Global North owe a *climate debt* to the people of the Global South, and this debt continues to grow as we live out our everyday lives.[22]

Theologically, Moe-Lobeda's argument rests on the understanding that God's creation is good and that all humans share in a global community and are called to participate in God's "life-furthering" work of tending creation rather than acting in ways that undo God's creative work. The earth will provide enough for all *if* we are able to moderate our lifestyles and live frugally, taking proper consideration of ecological limits and the rights of other humans (and nonhumans) to share in earth's blessings.[23]

Additionally, humans have been created in the image of God and have been given the *vocation* of loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves (Gen 1:26; Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18; Mt 22:36-40). My neighbor is anyone whose life impacts mine or who is impacted by my life; this includes nonhuman members of God's creation. Love, therefore, is an ecological-economic vocation that seeks "ecological sustainability, environmental and economic equity, and economic democracy." As biblical love and justice are inseparable, this vocation requires us to work toward a more equitable sharing of the responsibilities and burdens of climate change among all people on the planet.[24]

So how are we called to respond? We must first become aware of what is going on. We need to develop our moral perception, learning to look beneath the surface of our

[21]Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 41-43.
[22]Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, 3, 6-7, 12, 31-32, 36, 49.
[23]Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, 54-56, 200-204.
[24]Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, 175, 195-97.

actions to the power structures that circumscribe the lives of all on the planet.[25] Then we need to change our lifestyles and work for greater justice for all members of creation. This includes the following.

1. We must take seriously our involvement in the structural sin and evil permeating our global economic system. This difficult work requires us to pay attention to climate debt; it also requires us to attend to the voices of those who are on the underside of the global economic system, for example, agricultural workers, garment workers, miners, and the thousands who live and work in garbage dumps in the Global South.

2. Rather than being immobilized by the immensity of the problem, we need Spirit-guided vision to see that change is possible. We can develop a vision of what could be—what true love of neighbor and climate justice look like in our own lives as well as ways to get there.[26]

3. We must repent of our current death-dealing ways and engage in a changed way of life at the individual, family, community, national, and global levels.[27]

4. We must begin building strong, inclusive local communities and in particular strong churches that can undertake these challenging tasks.[28]

5. We must work toward a global economic system focused on people rather than profits, one that respects the limits of our ecosystem.[29]

While Moe-Lobeda is realistic about the immensity of the threat that we face, she is not mired in despair. She recognizes that the work we are called to do is possible through the indwelling power of the Spirit of God. We are participants in God's good creation, and God desires that all creation flourish. We are responsible to live in ways that will make that possible.

***Creaturely relationality.*** Anglican New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham shares many concerns with Moe-Lobeda but frames his argument in terms of relationships rather than ecojustice. He says that today there is a crisis in the human relationship with God that is "inseparable from the crisis in the human relationship with the rest of creation,"[30] and climate change is the most prominent and dangerous

[25]Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, 84.

[26]Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, 245-46.

[27]Moe-Lobeda, "Climate Change as Climate Debt: Forging a Just Future," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36, no. 1 (2016): 36-37.

[28]Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, "Climate Injustice, Truth-Telling, and Hope," *Anglican Theological Review* 99, no. 3 (Summer 2017): 539-40.

[29]Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda and Daniel T. Spencer, "Free Trade Agreements and the Neo-Liberal Economic Paradigm: Economic, Ecological, and Moral Consequences," *Political Theology* 10, no. 4 (2009): 713-14.

[30]Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in the Contemporary World: Hermeneutical Ventures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), x.

manifestation of this relational crisis; it is a consequence of our prideful and selfish pursuit of the modern agenda to master and manage nature and make it serve our desires.

Modernity, which he sees as the ideological source of our ecological crisis, seeks to extend human mastery over nature in the pursuit of wealth, consumption, and excess.[31] Western ideologies of economic globalization, neoliberal economics, and the expectation of limitless growth have spread throughout the world, making the rich richer at the expense of the poor while destroying the environment.[32] Bauckham asserts that the denial of climate change results from an unwillingness to accept that the "American dream" of limitless growth and progressivism is unrealistic.[33]

The ecological crisis shows us that we are finite creatures who must live within the limits of the ecosystem. Scripture teaches that we are members of an interdependent community of creatures (Job 39–41; Ps 104).[34] Today, our Christian calling is to recover our creatureliness and take our place among the other creatures of the earth. The dominion we humans have received from God includes self-control, the willingness to accept the constraints placed upon us by God, Scripture, and creation itself. We are prone to excess, and we must protect creation from ourselves. This is all part of our obedience to God and the order of nature as God made it.

We are also called by God to support those who are poor because Scripture shows us that God favors oppressed and powerless people, and Scripture sees economics from the standpoint of those who are poor. Thus, when considering public moral issues such as climate change, Christians must always ask how the issue and any proposed solutions will affect those who are poor.[35]

In sum, a Christian response to climate change will include: (1) recovering our creaturehood and embracing our membership in the *community of creation*; (2) limiting ourselves according to the constraints of the global ecosystem; and (3) living in humble faith and love so that we foreshadow something of the ultimate hope of God's good creation.[36]

---

[31]Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 14-15.

[32]Bauckham, *Bible in the Contemporary World*, xi, 9-10, 30-31.

[33]Richard Bauckham, "Ecological Hope in Crisis?" *Anvil* 29, no. 1 (September 2013): 44, 51.

[34]Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 64-76, 87-92.

[35]Bauckham, *Bible in the Contemporary World*, 68; Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 145.

[36]Bauckham, "Ecological Hope," 43, 46.

## AUTHORS' OWN RESPONSE

Considering important moral issues such as climate change requires both awareness of ourselves and understanding of the facts. *Self-awareness* involves some critical awareness of our own ethnicity, culture, background, history, and national citizenship, and our social, economic, and ecological location. We are often unaware of these factors and their influence on our behavior, our way of life, and our perception of the world. Without some self-awareness, we may find ourselves holding views and living in ways that belie what we claim we believe. Being more self-aware enables us to see the world (and ourselves) more accurately and helps our capacity to address the problem of climate change. We need to recognize that our behavior impacts other people and God's earth and to engage in confession and repentance that leads to authentic life change (Ezek 18:30-32; Acts 26:20).

We also need to find the *facts*—what's really going on with an issue—and then seek to properly interpret those facts. In today's world, we may be led to believe that facts and even truth itself are defined not by the real world or by God but by individuals, groups, or ideologies. This is a false view of facts and truth. God, God's world, and truth are real, and we *can know* them and interpret them in rational ways. But this requires the self-awareness noted above as well as self-discipline and hard work, especially in today's context, where we are bombarded by a bewildering array of conflicting "facts," "truths," and interpretations—as we see in the climate change debate. Various groups claim to provide "truth" and "facts" when they do not. We should evaluate sources of information. From whom does it come? What are their ideologies and motivations? Who is supporting them? We should weigh what we read and hear in light of Christian theology, Scripture (carefully interpreted), and accurate information from the real world. This requires the hard work of checking sources, researching claims, verifying "facts," and struggling with biblical hermeneutics and theology. Only then should we form the views that guide our lifestyle and behavior—yet remaining humble, being willing to listen critically to others, and revising our actions and lifestyles if warranted. This applies to everything from scriptural interpretation to theology, science, politics, and climate change.

In the "Real World" section, we have presented some facts about climate change, but in interpreting these facts, we recognize that there are things we know with certainty, things we know probably, and things we do not know. For example, we know for certain that the global climate is warming, that human activities are contributing to it, that higher GHG levels produce higher amounts of heat and moisture in the atmosphere, and that this leads to more frequent and severe weather events. However,

we know only probably where, when, or how these events may occur, and at present we do not know if any given event is *caused by* climate change. Ultimately, we do know for certain that if we continue as we are now, these events *will* become more frequent and severe, making life more and more difficult for humans—especially those who are poor and vulnerable.

Given the certainties, probabilities, and unknowns surrounding climate change, we should be careful about how we think and speak about its current and future impacts. The worst consequences of climate change are bad, but at present they are (probably) decades in the future. Nonetheless, climate change is impacting the world *now*, even if those of us with air conditioning and a consistent supply of water and food cannot perceive it. In 2015, a Nepali colleague told Rebecca that in her homeland, a small change in temperature could require a huge shift in agriculture for a poor farmer, and reduction in a water source might force a poor woman to walk much further to obtain water. In the United States, we have already experienced increases in severe weather, wildfires, and droughts—events that, while not exclusively *caused* by climate change, are probably worsened by it. If we continue on the same course, as time passes, such probabilities will slowly become certainties.

The prophet Micah declared that God calls us "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly" with God (Mic 6:8 NIV). Throughout its pages, the Bible emphasizes the importance of justice in our way of life and actions, especially in relation to those who are vulnerable (Prov 29:7; Is 1:17; 10:1-2; Mt 23:23-24). Moe-Lobeda's call for *climate justice* is a concrete response to this biblical call in relation to climate change. This is an enormous moral challenge for affluent Christians. As she points out, "rich" Christians bear greater responsibility for climate change both past and present. In the United States and globally, those with the fewest economic resources will suffer the most from the impacts of climate change. Consequently, richer nations have a moral obligation to help poorer nations finance their efforts to mitigate and adjust to climate change. As Christians, we believe that God is God of the whole world, of all people, and we are all equally part of the global human family. Thus, we have an obligation to pay our climate debt to our brothers and sisters.

Two of the authors refer to the image of God in humans (Gen 1:26-28). Beisner calls attention to our intelligence and power to utilize the earth's resources for our needs as expressing the image of God; for Moe-Lobeda, the image carries a vocation to love God and neighbor. We suggest that both of these interpretations contain truth. The image of God is both substantive in that we have reason and power and relational and vocational in that we are connected with and have responsibilities toward one

another within the human family and within the broader creation. This means we are to use our reason and power to serve not simply ourselves but the greater good of all people and of God's creation. Thus, the entrepreneurship and pursuit of wealth recommended by Beisner must be tempered with genuine service to justice and the greater good of all humans and to ecological responsibility. This is a more difficult way of expressing the image of God, but we suggest it is the one we Christians should seek to embody, and it should inform our advocacy in discussions on climate change.

Action on climate change requires the engagement of ordinary people such as the residents of Rockport and countless other communities around the world. How might this happen? It may require that weather events and other changes impact them directly in ways unmistakably connected to climate change. But by then, it may be too late. Action is required now. Here are a few suggestions for concrete steps we all can follow. First, we can educate ourselves, learning more about the theology, science, and politics involved. Second, we can learn about some of the innovative ways in which people are seeking to move toward a low-carbon economy. Third, when we read or hear about storms, floods, or severe weather, we can think about how it might be related to climate change, and we can ask God to direct our steps to respond concretely to these situations, asking how our behavior may be contributing to the problem. Finally, we can seek to listen to the stories of those in the Global South who are suffering from climate change and share these with others. There is, of course, much more to do, but these suggestions provide a start.

Over Christianity's history, when faced with important moral problems such as slavery, war, and poverty, our responses have been mixed. How we, the Christian church, respond to climate change in this century will write another chapter in our moral history. Our response so far has been halting and conflicted. May God help us to respond to climate change in ways that manifest the true character of God, the love of Christ, and the power of the Spirit.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare the strengths and weaknesses of the three positions. Which do you think is strongest and why? Be mindful of your own social-cultural-economic locations and ecclesial traditions.
2. Discuss the attitudes and concerns of the people of Rockport, Texas, as described in the "Real Life" section. If you had to introduce them to climate change and the need for a community response, how would you do it? What concerns and issues would you focus on? How might they respond and why?

3. Ecojustice claims that environmental problems such as climate change are not merely the result of individuals' choices but are systemic, the result of our involvement within sinful economic systems. If this is true, what role does changing individual behaviors play in addressing environmental issues? What else is necessary?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

Agyeman, Julian, Robert Bullard, and Bob Evans, eds. *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003.

Daneel, Marthinus L. *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001.

Gibson, William E., ed. *Eco-Justice: The Unfinished Journey*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004.

Hayhoe, Katharine, and Andrew Farley. *A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions.* New York: FaithWords, 2009.

Northcott, Michael. *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007.

Peters, Rebecca Todd. *Solidarity Ethics: Transformation in a Globalized World*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

Chirongoma, Sophie. "Karanga-Shona Rural Women's Agency in Dressing Mother Earth: A Contribution Towards an Indigenous Eco-Feminist Theology." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 142 (March 2012): 120-44.

Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation. "The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship." 2014. www.cornwallalliance.org/landmark-documents/the-cornwall-declaration-on-environmental-stewardship/.

Msafiri, Aidan G. "Climate Change and Global Warming in Tanzania: Theological and Ethical Concerns." In *Globalisation of Concern II: Essays on Education, Health, Climate Change, and Cyberspace*, 99-112. Geneva: Globethics, 2012. www.globethics.net/gel/5075925.

Pineda-Madrid, Nancy. "¡Somos Criaturas de Dios!—Seeing and Beholding the Garden of God." In *Planetary Solidarity: Global Women's Voices on Christian Doctrine and Climate Justice*, edited by Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Hilda P. Koster, 311-24. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017.

Pope Francis. *Laudato Si'* (Encyclical on Care for Our Common Home). 2015. w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

"Religious Statements on Climate Change." Interfaith Power and Light. www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/religious-statements-on-climate-change/.

Zachariah, George. "Re-imagining Economy of Life and Creation Theology: A Subaltern Perspective." *Ecumenical Review* 67, no. 2 (July 2015): 234-41.

### *Media and documentaries*

*The Age of Consequences*. Directed by Jared P. Scott. Gravitas Ventures, 2017.

*Before the Flood*. Directed by Fisher Stevens. National Geographic Channel, 2016.

# 2

# POVERTY AND INCOME INEQUALITY

*Seung Woo Lee*

## REAL LIFE

Stephanie is in her mid-thirties with three children, aged five, eight, and thirteen. She became a single mother when her husband left her after the birth of their third child. This enormously increased the economic pressures on the family, and Stephanie moved into subsidized housing near downtown Philadelphia. As a responsible mother, she energetically searched for a full-time job that could secure her family and give her children a brighter future. However, she is a victim of the technology-driven, global labor market in which millions of unskilled people like her fail to find decent-paying jobs. Like many others, Stephanie has managed to get a couple of part-time jobs paying minimum wage. Although she cannot make ends meet on just two part-time jobs, taking care of her children prevents her from working a third job.

Stephanie is typical of an expanding group of people who are poor: a single mother without profitable skills or education. Her struggle attests to her willingness to make sacrifices now in order to give her children a good education. Yet she understands only too well that whatever else education is supposed to be, it is certainly not free. Beyond all those "extras" she cannot afford, which mean so much to children today—field trips, additional books, expensive sports equipment, and visits to places of interest—it is not the physical hardships of life that hurt Stephanie most. Rather it is knowing what she and her children lack compared with other people in the richest nation in the world. She often feels that her family is "invisible." In a revealing moment, Stephanie commented, "I'd like to live a normal life, but can't afford it."

It is not easy for Stephanie to preserve her self-esteem when she feels she has no control of her life. She never has any chance of planning ahead; her concern is always with the present. She and her children often go to bed hungry. Her expectations for herself and her children are at best low-paid employment and at worst unemployment. Stephanie feels "trapped," and she struggles with feelings of guilt over how she has brought down her entire family. She feels quite powerless to change her situation. Stephanie and her children feel like they are leaves tossed by the wind.

Through the years she has lived as a single mother, Stephanie has attended church. Recently, she heard a Sunday sermon that *all* human beings are created in the image of God, and it is God's will that there should be no poor people in his covenant community. Encouraged by the sermon, Stephanie looks forward to the day when she can move out of poverty and live as a successful and responsible mother.

## REAL WORLD

Former UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher's provocative statement, "There is no alternative," constitutes one of the strongest beliefs in *laissez-faire* capitalism or neoliberalism in our own time. Neoliberalism came to the forefront in the late 1970s through the work of University of Chicago economist Friedrich von Hayek and his students, including Milton Friedman.[1] Its proponents seek deregulation based on the belief that governmental interventions and regulations limit human freedom and inhibit economic growth and market expansion. Harvard theologian Harvey Cox's article aptly captures what has been happening to us since the rise of neoliberalism: "The Market as God."[2] As Harvard political philosopher Michael Sandel rightly puts it, "The most fateful change that unfolded during the past three decades was . . . the expansion of markets, and of market values, into spheres of life where they don't belong."[3] As neoliberalism has emerged, economic ideas and market values have come to reign over our lives as never before.

***Global poverty.*** The economic historian Simon Kuznets famously termed the past two centuries (since around 1800) "the period of modern economic growth." Western Europe's per-capita income increased fifteen-fold. US growth was even more astounding: almost twenty-five–fold.[4] Asian countries like Korea, China, and India

[1]Pamela K. Brubaker, *Globalization at What Price? Economic Change and Daily Life* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2001), 27.

[2]Harvey Cox, "The Market as God," *The Atlantic*, March 1999, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/03/the-market-as-god/306397/.

[3]Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 6-7.

[4]Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 27-28.

have experienced fast economic growth for more than two decades. At the same time, poverty is a disturbing and even dangerous global reality coexisting with human prosperity: the number of people living in extreme poverty still remains high. According to the World Bank's most recent poverty estimates, in 2015, 767 million people—10 percent of the world's population—lived on less than US $1.90 a day. Ending Extreme Poverty: A Focus on Children, a briefing note from the World Bank Group and UNICEF, finds that in 2013 almost 385 million children globally were living in extreme poverty.[5]

As the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) reported, "In today's world, deepening impoverishment and increasing enrichment appear to go hand in hand."[6] Too often, overall economic growth does not primarily benefit people in poverty around the globe.

***The reality of poverty in the United States.*** The latest report from the US Census Bureau states that in 2015, 13.5 percent (43.1 million) of Americans lived in poverty. Recently, an article in *The Washington Post* titled "States Across the Nation Are Criminalizing Poverty" described how many states and localities have legal systems that seem to secure revenue from desperate people. According to *The Post*'s Justin Moyer, "More than 7 million people nationwide may have had their driver's licenses suspended for failure to pay court or administrative debt." This system "perpetuates poverty by penalizing poverty."[7] Too many Americans are thus trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty.

According to the Census Bureau, 18.5 million people are in "deep poverty" (their income is less than half of the official poverty level), 5.8 percent of all Americans and 45.6 percent of those in poverty.[8] In their new book *$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*, Kathryn Edin and Luke Shaefer reveal that as of 2011, there were nearly 1.5 million American families, with about three million children, with practically no cash income.[9] Many poor families face hunger, poor housing, hardship, ill health, and despair. In the midst of the US Great Depression in 1936, President Franklin Roosevelt declared, "I see one-third of a nation ill-housed,

[5]UNICEF and the World Bank Group, "Ending Extreme Poverty: A Focus on Children," October 2016, 3.

[6]Bob Goudzwaard, Mark Vander Vennen, and David Van Heemst, *Hope in Troubled Times: A New Vision for Confronting Global Crises* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 20.

[7]"States Across the Nation Are Criminalizing Poverty," *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/states-across-the-nation-are-criminalizing-poverty/2018/05/27/4637b048-5df6-11e8-a4a4-c070ef53f315_story.html?utm_term=.6da78e708510.

[8]The official poverty level in 2018 for a family of four is $25,010 a year.

[9]Kathryn J. Edin and H. Luke Shaefer, *$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America* (New York: Mariner, 2016).

ill-clad, ill-nourished." Unfortunately, the sad reality is that his remarks remain true today.[10]

***Growing inequality around the globe.*** Development economist Jeffrey Sachs suggests that the yawning gap between the rich and poor, nationally and globally, is a new phenomenon that sprouted during the period of modern economic growth.[11] According to UNDP, "In 1969 the incomes of the wealthiest 20 percent of the world's population were 30 times higher than those of the poorest 20 percent of the earth's people. By 1990 that gap had doubled: the incomes of the wealthiest were 60 times higher than those of the poorest 20 percent. The different factor is now 83."[12] Recently, the British antipoverty charity organization Oxfam warned, "The combined wealth of the richest 1 percent will overtake that of the other 99 percent of people . . . unless the current trend of rising inequality is checked."[13] For poor people, the growing economic disparity nullifies the benefits of living in a better-off world.

Income inequality is extremely high in the United States, and it is growing rapidly. In the 1940s, CEOs' salaries for big companies were about twenty times that of the *average* worker. During the past thirty years, however, the salary gap between CEOs and average workers has progressively widened to about 380 times, with some CEOs' salaries exceeding five hundred times what the average worker in their company earns.[14] Although top income shares are rising in most OECD (the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, those of the United States are rising the fastest.[15]

A report published by the Working Poor Families Project in 2018 states, "There are more low-income working families today than there were at the onset of the recession in 2007 (9.5 million). Today, three in 10 working families in the United States may not have enough money to meet basic needs."[16] Although there have been some signs of recovery in the US economy since the Great Recession, many working families—like Stephanie's—do not earn enough to cover basic needs such as food, shelter, and

[10]Peter Corning, *The Fare Society: The Science of Human Nature and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 116.

[11]Sachs, *End of Poverty,* 28.

[12]Quoted in Goudzwaard, Vander Vennen, and Van Heemst, *Hope in Troubled Times,* 20.

[13]Oxfam International, "Richest 1% Will Own More Than All the Rest by 2016," 2015, www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2015-01-19/richest-1-will-own-more-all-rest-2016.

[14]Corning, *Fair Society*, 117.

[15]See Robert B. Reich, *Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future* (New York: Vintage, 2013), 18-25.

[16]Beth Jarosz and Mark Mather, "Low-Income Working Families: Rising Inequality Despite Economic Recovery," www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Spring-2018_WPFP-Policy-Brief.pdf.

medical care. Despite their determination and effort, millions of American breadwinners share an "American Dream" of mere survival.

***An urgent crisis?*** During the Occupy Wall Street protest in 2011, we painfully heard the protesters' slogan, "We are the 99%." This brought into sharp focus the income inequality and wealth distribution in the United States between the richest 1 percent and the rest of the population. Jewish political philosopher Michael Walzer warns of the danger of inequality in societies like the United States:

> Inequality is dangerous for liberal democracy. And the dangers are self-perpetuating: disparities of wealth make it difficult to organize countervailing powers, and the absence of countervailing powers makes for increasingly radical disparities. The long-term effect of this process, the characteristic product of radical inequality, is tyranny in everyday life: the arrogance of the wealthy, the humbling of the poor.[17]

The Nobel Prize–winning economist Paul Krugman terms our age of inequality "the Great Divergence."[18] As the US Catholic bishops wrote in their pastoral letter on the economy, "Extreme inequality [is] a threat to the solidarity of the human community, for great disparities lead to deep social divisions and conflict."[19]

We have long witnessed the world's growing economic divides and deepening poverty. Although our modern world has achieved enormous progress and economic growth, tremendous and urgent challenges remain in tackling poverty and growing economic disparities in the United States and around the globe.

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

In *The End of Poverty,* Jeffrey Sachs suggests that "development economics needs an overhaul in order to be much more like modern medicine, a profession of rigor, insight, and practicality."[20] Poverty and economic inequality share many challenges with clinical medicine. A medical doctor's role is to improve the health of the community that he or she serves. Likewise, we as Christians are called to devote ourselves to diagnose and treat the symptoms of unhealthy societies, including poverty and economic inequality.[21]

---

[17]Michael Walzer, "Gulf Crisis," *The New Republic*, August 5, 1996, 25.

[18]See Paul Krugman, *The Conscience of a Liberal* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 124-28.

[19]National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, 10th anniv. ed. (Washington, DC: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997), 43, no. 74.

[20]Sachs, *End of Poverty*, 75-76.

[21]I partly draw on Judith M. Dean's insights in her essay "The Christian Economist as a Mainstream Scholar," in *Faithful Economics*, ed. James W. Henderson and John Pisciotta (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 25-34.

As Calvin College economist Roland Hoksbergen rightly points out, however, Sachs does not address an important issue: how doctors will prescribe different treatments for the same problem.[22] We must recognize that Christians will differ about the appropriate response to poverty and inequality. We perceive the same realities differently because Christians make different assumptions about the character of God, human nature, the role of government, and justice.[23] Given that a long-standing public debate on poverty concerns the contentious question, "What are the causes of poverty?," the dominant responses to poverty and income inequality by Christians in America can be grouped into three categories, each centering the issue in a different cause and therefore recommending different solutions.

**Table 2.1**

| RESPONSE | VARIABLE: CAUSE OF POVERTY | MAIN CLAIM | REPRESENTATIVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Personal accountability | Personal failure | Solutions are individual competence and free-market capitalism | Michael Novak |
| Economic rights | Systemic injustice | Solutions are full employment and guaranteed income | Martin Luther King Jr., US Conference of Catholic Bishops |
| Communal empowerment | Both | Solutions are personal and structural transformation | Ron Sider |

***Personal accountability and free-market capitalism.*** Individual aspirations and achievements have been powerful, enduring characteristics of American individualism. Assuming that individuals are self-determining beings who are able to shape their own destinies, many Americans believe that *poverty results from individual failures*. The Bible makes it clear that some poverty may be the direct result of an individual failure, or what some may describe as "sinful personal choices," such as laziness (Prov 6:6-11; 23:21; 24:30-34). Accordingly, some Christians view poverty as the result of laziness, immoral behavior, and inadequate skills—a problem of individuals.

*Protestant work ethic and economic individualism.* The idea that poverty results from individual failure has dominated American history. Since Max Weber's publication of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, this view has been associated

[22]Roland Hoksbergen, *Serving God Globally: Finding Your Place in International Development* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 12.

[23]David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 172-88.

with the Protestant work ethic.[24] Weber argued that an ascetic form of Protestantism facilitated the rise of capitalism in the West by engendering a sense of work as a divine calling and sanctioning the disciplined pursuit of worldly gain. The belief in economic individualism drawn from the Protestant work ethic has historically gone hand in hand with a religion of personal conversion. Tying individual salvation and economic success together, this view claims that personal conversion will lead to hard work, which will enable the poor to escape from poverty. This individualistic explanation of poverty is the dominant view among many evangelical Christians in the United States and globally.[25]

Another form of economic individualism is the "prosperity gospel," which claims that material prosperity is one of the signs of God's election and favor. In recent decades, this has developed further into the conviction that "wealth, health, success, and ever-soaring profits in business are coveted, cherished, and publicly flaunted as signs of God's favor. In this new type of Christianity, success and wealth are the only genuine marks of faith."[26] Prosperity gospel advocates such as Joel Osteen and Creflo Dollar teach that God provides faithful believers with tangible rewards, including personal happiness, financial wealth, and physical health. This has been called a "baptized form of capitalism."[27] To support their connection between personal faith and economic success, many prosperity gospel advocates proclaim that predominantly Christian countries are prosperous, whereas non-Christian countries are poor.

*Human nature and the virtue of competition and capitalism.* This first response views individuals as responding to punishments and incentives, assuming that most individuals tend to be lazy and immoral. Andrew Carnegie's *Gospel of Wealth* captures this view:

> We accept and welcome, therefore, as conditions to which we must accommodate ourselves, great inequality . . . [and] the law of competition between these, as being not only beneficial, but essential for the further progress of the race. . . . Such in my opinion, is the true Gospel concerning wealth, obedience to which is destined someday . . . to bring "Peace on earth, among men Good-Will."[28]

---

[24]Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribners, 1958).

[25]For an analysis of four theological approaches to the ethics of poverty, see Warren R. Copeland, *And the Poor Get Welfare: The Ethics of Poverty in the United States* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994).

[26]J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?" *Christianity Today*, October 29, 2009, www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/november/main.html.

[27]Adrian Helleman, "The Prosperity Gospel: A New Heresy," 2013, http://hellemanworld.blogspot.com/2013/05/the-prosperity-gospel-new-heresy.html.

[28]Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays* (Eastford, CT: Marino Fine, 2010), 29.

While the rich are the fittest competitors, the poor are losers in the game. This is the law of the universe, the will of God, and God's "gospel of wealth."

Political commentator George Will articulated what many Americans believe—that inequality is necessary to create incentive and to reward effort: "A society that values individualism, enterprise and a market economy is neither surprised nor scandalized when the unequal distribution of marketable skills produces large disparities in the distribution of wealth . . . there is today no . . . case against the moral acceptability of increasingly large disparities of wealth."[29] Some go so far as to suggest that "[economic] inequality should not be vilified."[30] Free-market capitalism depends on it.

Sharing this understanding of human nature, some mainstream evangelical scholars such as John Jefferson Davis, Ronald Nash, and Brian Griffiths have contributed to the Christian defense of free-market capitalism in alleviating poverty: the competitive market is the best guarantee of self-sufficiency. Through competition, individuals are forced to find efficient ways to get ahead, leading to improvements in living standards for everyone. American Catholic philosopher Michael Novak asserts that a free-market economy, or capitalism, "is a system designed for sinners, in the hope of achieving as much moral good as individuals and communities can generate under conditions of ample liberty."[31] The only real corrective to these human tendencies is the harsh reality of the marketplace.

*Promoting personal accountability.* The basic conviction of this "personal accountability" response is that poverty is consistently attributed to individual shortcomings, while economic success invariably results from personal hard work and competence. George Gilder summarizes this point: "The poor must not only work, they must work harder than the classes above them. . . . But the current poor, white even more than black, are refusing to work hard."[32] Similarly, unemployment is treated as a form of personal failure, not as an inevitable result of a social, political, and economic system.

The competitive nature of a free market system will, on this view, make people more responsible—especially when contrasted with other systems. Welfare systems or charity will keep "poor people poor" by creating dependence. The absence of free markets often encourages "dishonesty, thievery, or use of the heavy hand of

[29]George Will, "What's Behind Income Disparity," *San Francisco Chronicle,* April 24, 1995.
[30]Quoted in Timothy Noah, *The Great Divergence: America's Growing Inequality Crisis and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 166.
[31]Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), 95.
[32]George Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 102.

government to coercively extract wealth from its rightful owner."[33] Poverty is personal failure that can be reinforced by bad incentives provided by government programs. The solution is to promote free-market capitalism that guards individual freedom and accountability, unfettered by government intervention.

***Human dignity and economic rights.*** The second response attempts to *recover the biblical value of human rights*. Its central conviction is that a good society provides good jobs and adequate income for *all* its members. While the first response views the community at its best as a collection of independent individuals, the second recognizes that people are born into membership in community. This view holds that the causes of poverty are social, not individual failures. As Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright asserts, in the Old Testament, "The primary cause [of poverty] is the exploitation of others by those whose own selfish interests are served by keeping others poor."[34] The stipulations of the Mosaic law established legal mechanisms for the protections to which the poor and vulnerable were entitled: guaranteed basic rights such as food (Lev 19:9-10; Deut 23:21-22; 24:19-22), clothing (Ex 26–27), and just business dealings (Deut 25:13-16). The law requires the community to provide a "safety net" for the poor and needy facing hard times.

*The image of God and human rights.* Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff roots the concern about poverty in an understanding of human rights: "Rights are God's charter for the weak and defenseless ones in society. A right is the legitimate claim for protection of those too weak to help themselves. . . . It is the claim of the little ones in society to restraint upon economic and political and physical forces that would otherwise be too strong for them to resist."[35] Therefore, any Christian discussion of poverty should include a concern for economic rights as an integral aspect of human rights, and Christians should support the effective acquisition of economic rights, particularly for the poor.

Jürgen Moltmann bases the theological justification of human rights on the doctrine of the *imago Dei* (Gen 1:26-17): "Whoever honors human beings as the image of God must acknowledge all human rights. . . . Whoever heeds the inalienable dignity of human beings must . . . look to . . . the rights of the whole human race."[36] He holds that human rights make up the inalienable dignity of human beings living in a

[33]Wayne Grudem and Barry Asmus, *The Poverty of Nations: A Sustainable Solution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 193.

[34]Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 170.

[35]Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 84.

[36]Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 34.

covenant relationship with God. Fundamental human rights are necessary to prevent the destruction of human dignity: "Economy, society, and the state have to respect this dignity."[37]

The encyclical *Pacem in terris* of Pope John XXIII, the first systematic treatment of human rights in official Catholic social teaching, offers a comprehensive list of human rights, beginning with the "right to live": rights pertaining to bodily integrity, economic rights, political rights, including the right to participation and to express one's dignity by contributing to the common welfare of fellow citizens.[38] Carrying the Catholic understanding of human rights a step further—with its central motif of the human person as *imago Dei—Gaudium et spes* puts it, "In virtue of the Gospel entrusted to it, the Church proclaims human rights; it acknowledges and holds in high esteem the dynamic approach of today which is fostering these rights all over the world."[39]

*Economic rights for all.* In 1986, the US bishops published their pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All.* In response to modern economic life, the bishops place human dignity at the heart of their moral vision for US economic life. On the tenth anniversary of the pastoral letter in 1996, the bishops rearticulated this principle: "Society as a whole . . . has the moral responsibility to enhance human dignity and protect human rights."[40] In Catholic teaching, human rights include economic rights as well as civil and political rights. The bishops believe that society has a moral responsibility to guarantee that basic human needs for all are met.

Martin Luther King Jr. strongly advocated for the centrality of economic rights in protecting human dignity. Christian ethicist Hak Joon Lee observes: "[King] declared, 'I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits.'"[41] King's vision for an "Economic Bill of Rights" embraces two specific principles: jobs and income support.[42] For all persons

[37]Moltmann, *On Human Dignity*, 23.

[38]*Pacem in terris* 11-27.

[39]*Gaudium et spes* 40.

[40]National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All,* 17, no. 18.

[41]Hak Joon Lee, *The Great World House*: *Martin Luther King, Jr. and Global Ethics* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2011), 56.

[42]Michael Greene, *A Way Out of No Way: The Economic Prerequisites of the Beloved Community* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 40. In recent years, in the West and other parts of the world, political and social interest in securing universal basic income has increased. This economic feature is unconditionally granted to all citizens on an individual basis, irrespective of any work requirement. Philippe Van Parijs is a prominent promoter of universal basic income globally. See Philippe Van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght, *Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

to live a life of dignity within the context of community, every society needs jobs for the jobless and income support for those who are not able to participate in the paid labor market.

*Government as guardian of economic rights.* The cornerstone of this response is the premise that society as a whole (and therefore the government) must guarantee a decent level of subsistence to every member of the community as a fundamental human right. Hence, this view naturally leans heavily on the side of the more comprehensive, and less punitive, vision of the "welfare state." The positive role of government for economic life is affirmed in the Old Testament (Ps 72). The ideal ruler takes responsibility for the needs of the people as their shepherd (Ezek 34:23).

Based on this conviction, Martin Luther King Jr. believed that the "ultimate" answer to the problem of poverty is found in the government, which is "morally bound to serve as employer of last resort."[43] Through policies, grants, work programs, and wage and tax laws, the government is mandated to pursue a full employment policy and guaranteed income support programs. Walter G. Muelder summarizes this point: "It is no longer a question of government versus no government; it is a question of the community accepting responsibility for the general welfare."[44] As a guardian of economic rights, the government has a positive and active role, and indeed an imperative mandate for addressing poverty and economic inequality.

***Communal empowerment.*** The third response essentially combines the previous two, asserting that *both individuals and society must be fundamentally changed in order to end poverty*. The first response leaves people on their own, whereas the third seeks to "help individuals develop into the people they can be."[45] Moving beyond the impasse between conservatives and liberals, this response views poverty as the mixed failure of individuals and society to provide the context in which people can become strong. As Lisbeth Schorr summarizes, society must "raise the chances that millions of ordinary children, growing up in circumstances that make them vulnerable, will develop into healthy and productive adults."[46] Thus, proponents of communal empowerment advocate for social service programs designed to help poor children and families develop into *strong* people (Lev 25:35).

*Comprehensive personal and structural change.* Ronald Sider, a leader in the movement for social justice in the United States, maintains that the multiple causes of

[43]Greene, *A Way Out of No Way*, 43.
[44]Walter G. Muelder, *Religion and Economic Responsibility* (New York: Scribner, 1953), 169.
[45]Copeland, *And the Poor Get Welfare,* 75.
[46]Lisbeth B. Schorr with Daniel Schorr, *Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage* (New York: Anchor, 1988), xx.

poverty require both personal transformation and structural change. Sider lays out a vision for empowering the poor that places responsibility on individuals and the government. Both of the previous perspectives are needed. Further, he asserts that "effectively empowering the poor so they can become productive citizens (paying taxes instead of requiring public assistance or even police and prison) benefits everyone in society."[47] Better individuals make for a better community.

Thus, the economic policy agenda must be comprehensive, for "neither economic changes by themselves nor behavioral changes in family life by themselves can solve contemporary poverty." Sider seeks changes on both fronts.[48] His holistic vision calls us to look beyond a mere reduction in financial poverty to the incorporation of other important aspects of life that are essential to social participation, such as health and education.

*Justice as equal access to resources.* Sider's understanding of biblical justice includes "helping people return to the kind of life in community that God intends for them."[49] Restoration to community involves more than lifting the impoverished to a minimal level of sufficiency. From his interpretation of the Year of Jubilee and the Sabbatical Year, Sider argues that God demands adequate access to productive resources for every person and family, as well as limits on economic inequality. The standard for evaluating economic equality in a society is that all have access to productive resources necessary to be dignified participants in their community.[50]

Thus, Sider strongly supports an expansion of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and educational reform. The health needs of poor children certainly do not end at birth, since they grow up in neighborhoods exposed to disease and environmental hazards.[51] On the issue of quality education for everyone, Sider asserts, "It is not only—or even primarily—a matter of unequal funding, although that is one problem. Lingering racism, unsafe drug-infested neighborhoods, dysfunctional families, malnutrition, oversized administrative bureaucracies, unresponsive teachers' unions, and peer pressure that mocks academic success all play a role."[52] His call for educational reform has the following four goals: (1) demand equity in funding, qualified teachers, and physical facilities; (2) allow families to choose the kind of

[47]Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 115.
[48]Sider, *Just Generosity*, 125.
[49]Sider, *Just Generosity*, 72.
[50]Ronald Sider, *Fixing the Moral Deficit: A Balanced Way to Balance the Budget* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 57.
[51]Schorr, *Within Our Reach,* 85-110.
[52]Sider, *Just Generosity*, 198.

education that is best for their children; (3) respect freedom and pluralism for every religious tradition to be treated equally in the process; and (4) promote the common good by taxation to ensure that every child has access to the necessary funds for a quality education.[53]

*Strengthened families.* As an indication of the multifaceted complexity of poverty, Sider asserts that the absence of one or both parents is the single best predictor of who will become poor: "Unless we can heal our broken families, we are simply not going to end poverty." For renewing family life, all segments of society—including faith-based organizations, businesses, the media, and government—are called upon to "promote the norm for a family assumed by virtually all civilizations for millennia: a mother and father united in lifelong marital covenant, with their children, surrounded by a larger extended family."[54] His proposals for addressing the problem of broken families include the Christian community modeling wholesome families and promoting abstinence for teens, sex education in public schools, a home ownership tax credit to help poor families to own a home, a "television code" to make advertising and programming more family friendly, and businesses providing more flexible working hours.[55] Sider's emphasis is on holistic communal support programs to help poor children and families become and remain strong.

*Principles of comprehensive economic justice.* Sider proposes foundational principles that the church should consider in approaching the issue of wealth, poverty, and income inequality.

1. Justice does not demand equal income and wealth, but it does require that everyone has access to the productive resources (land, capital, education) so that, when they act responsibly, they will be able to earn an adequate living and be respected members of society.

2. Economic equality is not a biblical norm. But economic inequality that harms the poorer members of society and prevents them from gaining access to productive resources (e.g., quality education) is wrong.

3. Intergenerational justice is important. One generation should not benefit or suffer unfairly at the cost of another. Scripture clearly teaches that parents should act in ways that help their children to flourish (Deut 6:7; Ps 78:4; Joel 1:3).[56]

Integrating the individualistic and the structural perspectives into a holistic framework, the third response advocates various communal service programs designed to

[53]Sider, *Just Generosity*, 205.
[54]Sider, *Just Generosity*, 153.
[55]Sider, *Just Generosity*, 162-71.
[56]Sider, *Fixing the Moral Deficit*, 69-74.

empower poor children and families. In contrast to the first response, its advocates do not believe that poor people can easily become self-determining. As individuals are shaped decisively by the society where they live, society as a whole (including the government) must provide supportive services to help those who are poor, especially poor children, to develop into motivated, competent human beings.

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

The view of the human person significantly affects the methodologies and outcomes of any academic discipline. Political philosophers attempt to arrange society according to their understanding of human nature. However, their perspectives on the essential nature of humanity diverge. It is clear that the three responses above reflect views of the nature of human persons that are at variance with one another. By reflecting upon and evaluating their views on humanity, we can not only arrive at a deeper understanding of today's poverty and economic inequality but also develop a clear Christian moral vision toward which our economy and society should seek to move—rather than simply accepting neoliberalism as our *only* alternative.

The bottom line of the "personal accountability" response is the self-determining individual. Independent individuals are the fundamental human reality and are motivated by *economic* incentives. This view arises from a neoliberal economic growth model based on *homo economicus*: the view of the human being that underlies and drives *laissez-faire* capitalism—an isolated, rationalistic, profit-maximizing, self-interested, and competitive individual. The renowned economist Arthur Lewis's 1955 dictum, "First, it should be noted that our subject matter is growth, and not distribution,"[57] reflects this position's emphasis on economic growth. Responding to poverty through economic growth may have advantages, but it certainly has one major shortcoming: its conclusion that the only solution to poverty is to foster economic growth. As we have witnessed, the dominance of wealth subordinates democratic political power to unaccountable economic power: any adequate understanding of poverty must include the extraordinary levels of economic inequality that characterize today's world. As Michael Walzer rightly claims, "In a capitalist society, capital is dominant and readily converted into prestige and power."[58] Today, inequalities in economic and political power reinforce one another.

The foundation of the "economic rights" response and the starting point for its vision of society is its belief in the inherent dignity of the human person created in

[57]W. Arthur Lewis, *The Theory of Economic Growth* (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, 1955), 9.
[58]Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 11.

the image of God. Recognizing how economic and political power shapes the lives and struggles of powerless (poor) people, this response reminds us how fundamental human rights are necessary to prevent the destruction of *human dignity*. As uncontrolled free-market capitalism fails to take into account people's dignity, this response proposes a radically dissimilar solution to poverty. One of the most significant strengths of the "economic rights" response is to ground the protection of human rights *theologically* and thus to place Christian involvement in the struggle for human rights at the heart of the church's ministry. However, the "personal accountability" perspective can perceive this view's emphasis on *rights* as rejecting poor people's moral responsibility for their own condition.

The "communal empowerment" response embraces the two views on humanity in a dynamic and selective way. In part, this view agrees with the "economic rights" response that jobs and income supports are essential to tackling the problem of poverty. However, its distinctive position is that these will never be enough without adequate social service programs to help poor children and broken families benefit from that work. This view shares the "personal accountability" response's emphasis on the individual, but it has a very different view of the relation between individuals and society. The "personal accountability" response seeks the fully independent individual: success or failure depends primarily on one's personal effort. In contrast, the "communal empowerment" view recognizes the power of *social relations* in shaping individuals; it advocates *social* service programs designed to bring new motivations and influences into the lives of poor children and families.

During the 1990s, the World Bank conducted extensive research on poverty by asking more than sixty thousand poor people from six low-income countries a fundamental question: "What is poverty?" The research found that for poor people, ideas of a good quality of life are multidimensional. A good quality of life includes material well-being, bodily well-being, social well-being, security, and freedom of choice and action.[59] Based on this research, we can see something of value in the basic anthropological assumptions of each of the three responses. However, each expresses only a part of the totality of well-being described in the research.

To engage the contemporary issues of poverty and economic inequality more prophetically and holistically, I propose the theological anthropology of Calvinist jurist and political theorist Johannes Althusius (1577—1638), which is based on the idea of "symbiosis," or literally, "living together." With his theological conviction

[59]Deepa Narayan, Robert Chambers, Meera K. Shah, and Patti Petesch, *Crying Out for Change: Voices of the Poor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21.

that God created human beings with "the instinct for living together and establishing civil society,"[60] Althusius sought to develop a symbiotic political theory. His political project was, among other things, to discover the biblical covenant as a symbol of God's order for the creation, according to which symbiotic life is established. Since no individual is by nature entirely self-sufficient, all human beings seek relationships and enter into *covenants* in order to lead sustainable lives. He claims that this inherent mutual dependency moves people to "pledge themselves each to the other, by explicit or tacit agreements, to mutual communication of whatever is useful and necessary for the harmonious exercise of social life."[61] Althusius's symbiotic anthropology has much in common with the "economic rights" and "communal empowerment" perspectives. Seeing the human person in relationship with God and other human beings, Althusius draws together the basic themes of human dignity, respect for human freedom, and the relationship of this freedom to society as a whole. There is no warrant in Althusius's thought for an extreme form of individualism that takes no account of human relationships, which are the link between freedom and mutual responsibility.

Christian identity is relational rather than individualistic, in that "Christians have been claimed by God and by a community so that their destiny is bound up with others."[62] It refuses to polarize the self and other interests. For Stephanie to flourish in the fullest sense, our efforts must be grounded in the dignity of the human being who is called to live in community and solidarity with others—the mark of humanity created in the image of God. A way toward consensus in the church's response to today's growing economic divides and deepening poverty can be found in Althusius's *symbiotic* vision of covenant that pursues a moral community where solidarity, communal responsibility, and the respect for dignity are fostered. Our concrete actions of solidarity with those who are poor like Stephanie participate in the ongoing work of God, who shows his deep concern for them through Jesus' identification with the least. Such an endeavor cannot be successful unless it is disciplined by a holistic view of humanity and society, one that is very different from what Larry Rasmussen calls "detached individualism,"[63] and one that does not leave people like Stephanie behind.

---

[60]Johannes Althusius, *Politica*, trans. Frederick S. Carney (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995), 24.
[61]Althusius, *Politica*, 17.
[62]William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 163.
[63]Larry Rasmussen, *Moral Fragments and Moral Community: A Proposal for Church in Society* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 11.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What major strengths and serious weaknesses do you find in each of the responses? Has your initial response to poverty and inequality changed while studying this chapter?
2. Which of these three responses to poverty would be most appealing to people in your faith community? Why do you think they would hold that position?
3. Brainstorm a proposal for a church ministry or program aimed at helping people like Stephanie in your neighborhood.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

Bradley, Anne R., and Art Lindsley, eds. *For the Least of These: A Biblical Answer to Poverty.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

Collins, Chuck, and Mary Wright. *The Moral Measure of the Economy*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007.

Corbett, Steven, and Brian Fikkert. *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself*. Chicago: Moody, 2012.

———. *When Helping Hurts: The Small Group Experience.* Chicago: Moody, 2014.

Hicks, Douglas A. *Inequality and Christian Ethics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Horsley, Richard. *Covenant Economics: A Biblical Vision of Justice for All.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009.

Hughes, Dewi. *Power and Poverty: Divine and Human Rule in a World of Need.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008.

McLaren, Brian. *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.

Myers, Bryant. *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011.

Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom*. New York: Random House, 1999.

Sider, Ronald J. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger.* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015.

Wilkinson, Richard, and Kate Pickett. *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2009.

Yunus, Muhammad. *Banker to the Poor: Micro-Lending and the Battle Against World Poverty.* New York: Public Affairs, 2007.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

Oxfam International. "Richest 1% Will Own More Than All the Rest by 2016." www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2015-01-19/richest-1-will-own-more-all-rest-2016.

Sen, Amartya. "Equality of What?" In *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, edited by Sterling M. McMurri, 1:195-220. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press and Cambridge University Press, 1980.

———. "Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioural Foundations of Economic Theory." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 6 (1977): 317-44.

United Nations Development Programme. Annual Report 2017. https://annualreport2017.undp.org.

Working Poor Families Project. "Low-Income Working Families: Rising Inequality Despite Economic Recovery." www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Spring-2018_WPFP-Policy-Brief.pdf.

World Economic Forum. The Global Risks Report 2018. www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GRR18_Report.pdf

### *Media and documentaries*

*The End of Poverty?* Directed by Philippe Diaz. Cinema Libre Studio, 2008.

*Inequality for All*. Directed by Jacob Kornbluth. 72 Productions, 2013.

*The Line*. Directed by Linda Midgett. Midgett Productions/Vision Video, 2012. http://thelinemovie.com.

*Requiem for the American Dream*. Directed by Peter D. Hutchison, Kelly Nyks, and Jared P. Scott. PF Pictures, 2016.

*Two American Families*. Written by Kathleen Hughes and Bill Moyers. PBS/Frontline, 2013.

# 3

# URBAN DEGRADATION

*Jessica Joustra*

## REAL LIFE

"Everything around here, well, it keeps changing . . . but those city lights, they're always there." Corey points to the lights of the city center, a couple dozen blocks away from his home. The neighborhood Corey calls home has seen huge changes in his lifetime: people coming, others going, industries leaving, shops closing, rising violence, increased poverty, and more. In the turbulence of ever-present change, the consistent view of the skyline is comforting.

When Corey was young, the neighborhood was mostly white. Industry abounded. People were happy to live in the area. "Back then," Corey recalls, "there weren't a lot of us [African Americans] around. But things were good. Everyone worked at the factory. We all had enough to get by. We had everything we needed." But things started to change. More people, primarily African Americans, came into the area in search of jobs at the factories. As they came, many of the white residents left for the suburbs. Quickly, the neighborhood demographics shifted. Along with these shifts came racial tension, deteriorating housing options, more renters, and fewer job opportunities. Eventually, the factories shut down, and the neighborhood situation began to change: gathering spaces now donned spray-painted walls; once-occupied houses now were vacant; the bright neon "open" signs at stores were replaced with boarded-up windows.

Amid these changes, Corey stayed. "This is home," he explains. But life in the neighborhood was more difficult. Most of the stores had left town, and the few that remained—a convenience store, a donut shop, a couple clothing stores—weren't hiring, so it was challenging to find work. As more people left, schools began to fail. Even the community hospital shut down.

"I went away for a couple years to serve in the military. When I came back the neighborhood was in even worse shape. More places were vacant, more people were without work, more poverty, worse schools, more gangs, more violence, and more drugs. I barely recognized this place anymore. See, most of my friends left. They went on to better, safer neighborhoods. People just want to get out. I get that, but still, I couldn't be one of those people."

So Corey chose, again, to stay. "I want to be a part of the positive change that can happen here." For him, change starts with the church where he now works; he calls the church's ministry center "a real beacon of hope." It provides jobs; it provides a safe haven for people who have gotten into trouble and are trying to get clean; it provides food in the weekly food pantry; it provides academic support in the makeshift after-school tutoring center. The church also advocates for change in the neighborhood: church members march together against gun violence, and the center helps people buy homes in the neighborhood, working with potential owners who are from the neighborhood and committed to staying. That commitment of organizations and individuals, says Corey, makes all the difference. "Because people see the neighborhood as home, not a place to leave as soon as they can, they want to see it get fixed up. We are all coming together to do it. Things might seem rough, but there's a whole lot of good here."

## REAL WORLD

Cities around the world are struggling with urban degradation or decay, the gradual process of a city falling into disrepair and disorder. To understand this phenomenon, we must look to the changing global landscape: in 2016, 54 percent of the world's population lived in urban areas; the United Nations projects that by 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will be urban. This rapid urbanization presents both opportunities and challenges for development and the daily life of city dwellers. As the UN explains, "Cities drive economic and social development as hubs of commerce, transportation, communication and government. But rapid, unplanned urban growth can lead to an expansion of urban slums, exacerbating poverty and inequality, hampering efforts to expand or improve basic infrastructure and deliver essential services, and threatening the environment."[1]

The challenges accompanying rapid urbanization are often even more acute in the emerging megacities.[2] In these urban contexts, many already exhibiting higher

[1]United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision, Highlights* (2014), 1.

[2]The UN World Urbanization Prospects projects that "by 2030, the world is projected to have 43 megacities with more than 10 million inhabitants, most of them in developing regions"; cf. Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006), 2.

fragility,[3] perennial struggles have become exacerbated.[4] As one famous book puts it in its title, we are staring down the prospect of a *Planet of Slums*, with metropolitan areas like Mexico City, Mumbai, Cairo, and Lagos struggling to keep up with basic infrastructure like sanitation.[5]

Developing countries experience urban degradation in different ways than developed countries (although both contexts are rapidly urbanizing, contain fragile cities, and experience urban degradation). The opportunities in the city are enormous, as are the challenges some areas adversely encounter. The great social and economic promises of megacities come with a cost, as we see in Mexico City, one of the largest megacities in the world.[6] The challenges facing this city shed light on some of the unique realities of urban degradation in these contexts.

High immigration rates and high birth rates have resulted in rapid population growth in Mexico City in recent decades; with this came new opportunities and challenges, including an increased need for housing.[7] Urban poverty, especially concentrated in slums, quickly outpaced industrialization.[8] Economic dislocation, social clashes, and irregular housing in undesirable areas accelerated. The UN's report regarding public housing projects in the city underscores the interconnected nature of these challenges:

> Inadequate self-administration of these projects has led to lack of maintenance, invasion and degradation of public space, structurally dangerous alterations and bad neighborhood relations. All of this is aggravated by the original cheap construction, low space standards and the increasing impoverishment of their working-class occupants, smitten by unemployment, alcohol and drug dependency, social violence and high crime rates.[9]

The challenges faced in Mexico City shed light on the way adverse impacts of population growth outpace industrialization in urban areas. But many factors impacting

[3]The Igarapé Institute developed a metric to determine the fragility of a city based on factors including rapid urbanization, inequality, poverty, unemployment, persistence of conflict, and climate risk. See "Fragile Cities," *Igarapé Institute,* accessed July 28, 2018, https://igarape.org.br/en/apps/fragile-cities-data-visualization.

[4]Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2007), 5.

[5]See United Nations General Assembly, *Five Mega-Trends*, November 3, 2009, www.un.org/press/en/2009/gashc3964.doc.htm, and Robert Muggah, "Fragile Cities Rising," *The Global Observatory*, July 10, 2013, http://theglobalobservatory.org/2013/07/fragile-cities-rising/.

[6]Davis, *Planet of Slums,* 4.

[7]UN—HABITAT, *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003* (London, 2003), vi-v, 216.

[8]Davis, *Planet of Slums,* 17; cf. 13-14.

[9]UN—HABITAT, *The Challenge of Slums,* 217.

urban degradation—education, racism, transportation, public policy, and so on—are shared among developing and developed contexts.[10]

While urban degradation affects cities differently around the globe, the example of the United States can also provide a window into some of the causes and effects of degradation in urban areas. Detroit, infamously titled "the most miserable city in America," is one of the most oft-cited examples of urban degradation in the United States.[11] But it is not alone; many cities share in its plight, from "Baltimore, Maryland to Gary, Indiana, to San Bernardino, California—where urban infrastructure is crumbling and distressed municipal governments struggle to provide basic public services."[12] While the effects of urban degradation seem evident, identifying its cause is more complicated.

Urban degradation is a complex phenomenon that does not equally affect the entirety of a city. One neighborhood can suffer severe symptoms of urban degradation while another thrives. Issues like racism, gun violence, environmental problems, housing, education, drug use, gang activity, public policy, and public health play an important role in the evolution of urban degradation. While it is impossible to speak of urban degradation in isolation, we can identify some of the factors that play into the decline of a city, such as segregation, deindustrialization, population loss, and other structural shifts.

In the United States, race is a significant factor in patterns of urban degradation.[13] As Patrick Sharkey writes, "The story of neighborhoods and race in America is one of enduring, *inherited* inequality."[14] Understanding racial inequality and the need for racial justice must inform our understanding of urban degradation. Another key factor that contributes to urban degradation is the economic and structural shifts that first promoted, then eroded the key position of the city center in industrial sectors.[15]

In the twentieth century, many Americans moved into the city.[16] Following this urbanization came patterns of suburbanization, partially out of a desire for privacy

[10]Davis, *Planet of Slums,* 20-69.

[11]Brent T. White, Simone M. Sepe, Saura Masconale, "Urban Decay, Austerity, and the Rule of Law," *Emory Law Journal* 64, no. 1 (2014): 3.

[12]White, Sepe, and Masconale, "Urban Decay, Austerity, and the Rule of Law," 3-4.

[13]Mark Mulder, *Shades of White Flight*: *Evangelical Congregations and Urban Departure* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 10.

[14]Patrick Sharkey, *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress Toward Racial Equality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 398; emphasis original.

[15]Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *The Kingdom, the City, and the People of God: Urban Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 68-69. Again, these shifts cannot be understood in isolation from racialization.

[16]Conn and Ortiz, *Kingdom, the City, and the People of God*, 64.

and security, often on account of the urban growth and decay associated with industrialization. Again, race contributed to white Americans moving out of the city during this time. After World War II, the Great Migration intensified, with many African Americans moving into northern cities. But as African Americans migrated to the urban North, they "would suffer disproportionately the effects of deindustrialization and urban decline."[17]

Suburbanization was initially a trend of the wealthy; however, with the expansion of public transportation, white-collar workers began to follow the "trolley tracks through urban fragmentation to the suburban dream."[18] With automobiles, the working class could join the exodus to the suburbs.[19] After World War II, the suburbs were heavily subsidized by the US government. Underwritten by federal mortgage programs, infrastructure investment, and transportation programs, suburban sprawl helped worsen the conditions of American cities.[20]

In 1920, the majority of the US population lived in cities; by 1970, more Americans were living in the suburbs than in the cities.[21] This rapid shift of American workers from the cities to newly founded suburbs meant that opportunities for jobs, housing, food, social services, schools, and pleasure also shifted out of the city and nearer to the suburbs. The remaining residents of the city were often those left behind in this exodus,[22] and the disappearance of work in urban centers created a new kind of urban poverty.[23] As a response to these changes, in the 1950s major urban reform was attempted, involving large-scale projects to clear away city slums in place of public housing.[24] These projects, attempting to revitalize aging and decaying inner cities, continued into the early 1970s. Many consider these a failed attempt at reinvigorating inner cities.[25]

From the late 1990s through the beginning of the twenty-first century there has been a move *back* into the city. This move, by educated, affluent people—whether driven by a desire for cheaper housing, shorter commutes, access to urban social

[17]Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 8.

[18]Conn and Ortiz, *Kingdom, the City, and the People of God*, 70.

[19]Eric Jacobsen, *The Space Between* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 48.

[20]See Jeff Liou's chapter in this volume on racism for a discussion of the practice of "redlining."

[21]Howard P. Chadacoff, *The Evolution of American Urban Society* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 264.

[22]Conn and Ortiz, *Kingdom, the City, and the People of God*, 70. Ethnic migration patterns were also involved.

[23]William J. Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 37.

[24]Jacobson, *Space Between,* 55.

[25]For one thoughtful commentary on this attempt, see Jacobson, *Space Between,* 164-66.

amenities, or a missional commitment to the city[26]—has led to gentrification, a phenomenon in which urban "neighborhoods start to become fashionable and wealthier people begin to purchase homes there, home values go up, rents go up, apartments get converted to condominiums, and all the people who were living in the neighborhood are forced by economic reasons to relocate."[27]

Because of income and racial segregation, the recent renewed interest in the city often left the poor in one area of the city, while the middle and upper classes moved into others. This cycle builds on problems of the past. New jobs have been created; however, most require advanced degrees and training, thus once again disproportionately excluding inner-city residents who were previously limited by failing education systems and underemployment.[28] The gap between available jobs and the skill set of those seeking employment has helped contribute to new issues: increased poverty, vacated housing, crime, and escalated drug use, among others.[29]

Urban degradation is a complex phenomenon, with a cyclical pattern between its causes and effects. When multiple factors converge—such as industry, sprawl, and racial tension—parts of a city can begin to erode, populations shift, crime often increases, home values decrease, and jobs relocate. These realities further the decay of an urban environment. Rapid urbanization is happening around the globe, but the growth of cities, particularly the disproportionate growth of some sectors of cities, has led to hardship in other areas, most often the inner city. These hardships, culminating in unemployment, vacancies, decreased access to social services, and higher crime rates, are often characterized together as urban degradation.

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

As we consider the various issues present in the midst of cities in crisis, particularly the causes and effects of urban degradation, our discussion must begin with the fact that God's grace already overflows in the city. To merely focus on the problems of blighted cities is to fail to do justice to those who live, work, and make their home in these places. But as we've seen, there are also significant challenges within many cites. While urban triumphs are often praised, urban degradation presents a scandalous question mark next to the affluence of those who are thriving in our cities. How do

[26]The renewed interest in urban life, partially through urban renewal efforts, was accompanied by both social and political reform.

[27]Jacobsen, *The Space Between*, 230-31.

[28]Mark R. Gornik, *To Live in Peace: The Bible and the Changing Inner City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 45.

[29]Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, 55; cf. Gornik, *To Live in Peace*, 46-47.

we, as Christians, respond to this juxtaposition of affluence and blight within the city? What does it look like to pursue the common good, particularly in areas experiencing urban degradation?

Mark Gornik, director of City Seminary in New York City, highlights three key motifs for Christians and churches as they live in and work with urban areas in distress:[30]

- churches as healing communities;
- churches as healers of communities; and
- churches as organizers for more just communities.

While no response fits exclusively into one of these paradigms, the examples that follow generally illustrate one of these categories.

**Table 3.1**

| MOTIF: CHURCHES AS | VARIABLE: MODEL OF TRANSFORMATION | MAIN CLAIMS | REPRESENTATIVE (MINISTRY) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Healing communities | Solidarity | Following Jesus through faithful presence and neighborliness | Shane Claiborne (The Simple Way) |
| Healers of communities | Relocation | Following Jesus' incarnational ministry through relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution | John Perkins (Christian Community Development Association) |
| Organizers for more just communities | Public policy | Seeking God's *shalom* through structural change | Jonathan Bradford (Inner City Christian Federation) |

***Transformation through solidarity (church as a healing community).*** The church as a healing community understands the role of the church to be primarily, though not solely, focused on spiritual needs. As Gornik describes, the church

> is a space for laying down burdens and discovering the restorative power of grace. The full life of the church can offer healing through worship, prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and sharing. For children and young people faced with the dangers of the street, the church is a place of literal salvation. For women faced with added burdens of oppression, the church is a shelter from the storm; for people in recovery, the church is a support system. . . . The church tells and enacts the healing power of dignity, hope and new life in Christ.[31]

[30]Gornik, *To Live in Peace,* 12; Gornik adapts John Hatch and Anne Callana's typology, found in "How Churches Can Function as Healing Communities" (Chapel Hill: School of Public Health, University of North Carolina, n.d.).
[31]Gornik, *To Live in Peace,* 12-13.

The Simple Way, founded by Shane Claiborne, embodies the "church as healing community." The Simple Way is a "web of subversive friends conspiring to spread the vision of 'Loving God, Loving People, and Following Jesus' in our neighborhoods and in our world," a faith community committed to living with the people in the city, building relationships and—out of this communal lifestyle—seeking justice and transformation in the city.[32] This community is not focused on bringing resources into the community. Rather, they strive to be a loving presence in the city simply by living in the city, with the residents of a neighborhood, experiencing the joys and injustices of city life together. The reasoning behind this community is both strikingly simple and incredibly complex: we do this because Jesus did.

This model of intentional, community living is based on the church in Acts where "there was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34). The community strives to be faithful, doing "small things with great love."[33] To embody this faithful presence, the community's core foundations include:

1. Simplicity—living with what one needs, not with what one wants.
2. Nonviolence—a communal and individual commitment not to use violence.
3. Spirituality—expressed through work, worship, prayer, and the sacraments.
4. Relationships—within the community and in the neighborhood.
5. Kingdom of God—committed to building God's kingdom through ending poverty.
6. Together—working *with*, not for, neighbors most affected by injustice.
7. Healing—individual, communal, and social.
8. Projects—the community may find projects to do, but these ought to be born out of love, with community involvement in mind.
9. And more, to ground a community seeking hope and beauty.[34]

These foundations ground the community's commitment to live as though "there is enough. Those with plenty can meet the needs of the poor, if s/he . . . who can gather

[32]The Simple Way, Twitter post, accessed June 18, 2018, https://twitter.com/theSimpleWay. The Simple Way is not a lone instance of this type of response to urban degradation; Claiborne is a leader in the New Monastic Movement, a movement of many communities who follow the twelve marks of new monasticism. These marks include relocation to abandoned places, sharing economic resources, hospitality, and pursuit of reconciliation amid division. For more, see Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism: What It Has to Say to Today's Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008).

[33]Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 78.

[34]"Foundation," *The Simple Way,* accessed December 9, 2015, www.thesimpleway.org/about/foundation/.

much will not gather too much (2 Cor 8:13-15). We believe that the Kingdom of God is free of poverty and oppression. We echo and attempt to live out Christ's prayer that the 'Kingdom come and will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'"[35]

The practices of The Simple Way, modeled upon the example of Jesus and the early church, have had tangible results. Public parks, community gardens, tutoring programs, flag football leagues, more affordable housing, and a food bank have all become a part of their Philadelphia neighborhood on account of the work of this community.

The Simple Way addresses poverty by living together, building relationships, and addressing injustice from this shared life, showing the radical love of Jesus in both how we live and where we live. Instead of one group (the rich) coming to the aid of another (the poor), The Simple Way is a group of neighbors coming together to address the issues and injustices in their neighborhood.[36]

As a way to transform urban communities, Claiborne and his community strive toward faithful presence and neighborliness that is rooted in the revolutionary love of Christ to all people. Just as Christ said to his disciples, "I do not call you servants any longer . . . but I have called you friends" (Jn 15:15), The Simple Way seeks to embody a neighborhood—of rich and poor—that is filled with mutual love and genuine relationships. This posture moves beyond charity and toward justice. It is a posture of solidarity with the poor and oppressed. In order to combat urban poverty, Claiborne and his community join it. A faithful presence within the community is the primary way that he addresses the problem of urban degradation.

***Transformation through neighborhood change (church as healer of community).*** The church can also function as a healer *of* the community; in this approach, the church seeks to build up the community. The church focuses on "social, economic, and spiritual models of ministry."[37] Within this role, churches initiate efforts that give tangible expression to God's love and justice. This model also necessitates a move to the city but often takes on a more action-oriented, programmatic emphasis when Christians move into the city.

One prominent example of this posture, moving into the neighborhood in order to elicit neighborhood transformation, is the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA).[38] CCDA argues that "the desperate conditions that face the poor

[35]"Our Commitments," *The Simple Way,* accessed December 9, 2015, www.thesimpleway.org/about/our-commitments/.

[36]Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution*, 114.

[37]Gornik, *To Live in Peace,* 13.

[38]CCDA brings together many likeminded Christians who seek this response to urban degradation. Their membership directory details nearly one thousand churches and nonprofits that have joined with them to seek the transformation of communities in this way.

call for a revolution in the church's approach to the problem."[39] This revolution calls for relocation: "There have been many attempts by 'outsiders' to alleviate the problems, but most have fallen short of lasting change. Rather, the most creative long-term solutions to the problems of the poor are coming from grassroots and church-based efforts. The solutions are coming from people who see themselves as the replacements, the agents, for Jesus here on earth, in their own neighborhoods and communities."[40]

CCDA seeks holistically restored communities, with Christians fully engaged in the process of transforming neighborhoods and communities.[41] They understand the best long-term solutions to poverty, including urban poverty and decay, to be from grassroots and church-based efforts. To best order to understand and solve the issues facing a community, one must be a part of that community. Living out the gospel means literally, tangibly sharing in the suffering and pain of others.[42] Thus, the ministry of CCDA is "incarnational," that is, ministry that relocates, moves in, and lives with.

Transformation begins when we move in. Because of God's desire for reconciliation and justice, CCDA seeks to transform cities in crisis using the "three-R's of community development," a strategy developed by CCDA's cofounder, Dr. John M. Perkins:[43]

1. Relocation: In the incarnation, Jesus "became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14 ESV). We follow this kind of love in relocation, which "transforms 'you, them, and theirs' to 'we, us, and ours.' Effective ministries plant and build communities of believers that have a personal stake in the development of their neighborhoods."[44]
2. Reconciliation: CCDA emphasizes that reconciliation between God and humanity flows into reconciliation between people. "Christian Community Development begins with people transformed by the love of God, who then respond to God's call to share the gospel with others through evangelism, social action, economic development, and justice. . . . The power of authentic reconciliation between us and God, and between people of every

[39]"Philosophy," Christian Community Development Association, accessed December 9, 2015, www.ccda.org/about/ccd-philosophy.

[40]"Philosophy," Christian Community Development Association.

[41]"Mission," Christian Community Development Association, accessed December 12, 2015, www.ccda.org/about/vision-mission.

[42]"Relocation," Christian Community Development Association, accessed December 9, 2015, www.ccda.org/about/ccd-philosophy/relocation.

[43]For a detailed discussion see John Perkins, *With Justice for All: A Strategy for Community Development* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014).

[44]"Relocation," Christian Community Development Association. Perkins describes relocation in this way: "Your need is my need" (Perkins, *With Justice for All,* 60).

culture and race is an essential component of effective ministry in our hurting world."[45]

3. Redistribution: Seeking justice includes a just distribution of resources: "Redistribution brings new skills, new relationships, and new resources and puts them to work to empower the residents of a given community of need to bring about healthy transformation."[46]

In this model, each "R" builds on the next: as Christians "are visibly present and living among the poor (relocation), and when people are intentionally loving their neighbor and their neighbor's family the way a person loves him or herself and family (reconciliation), the result is redistribution, or a just distribution of resources."[47]

To these, CCDA has added five other practical principles to guide community transformation:

1. Leadership development—focusing on building up leaders within the community, especially young leaders.
2. Listening to the community—utilizing asset-based community development in order to identify and build upon the resources, talents, and abilities already in the community.
3. Church based—community development not only through parachurch organizations but through the church.
4. "Wholistic" approach—beyond simplistic answers, community transformation attends to every aspect of people's lives—spiritual, social, economic, political, cultural, emotional, physical, moral, judicial, educational, and familial.
5. Empowerment—affirming the dignity of people and empowering people as community developers, not merely recipients of aid.[48]

Responding to urban degradation necessitates addressing the whole person and whole community. CCDA practitioners relocate, move in, live with, and empower community members to creatively imagine new solutions to their problems. In order to combat

[45]"Reconciliation," Christian Community Development Association, accessed December 9, 2015, ccda.org/about/philosophy/reconciliation/. In Perkins's words, reconciliation seeks to create a "community of believers reconciled to God and each other . . . who would live together, worship together and reach out together as the people of God" (Perkins, *With Justice for All,* 114).

[46]"Redistribution," Christian Community Development Association, accessed December 9, 2015, ccda.org/about/philosophy/redistribution/. Guiding Perkins's affirmation of the need for redistribution in community development is his analysis of the problems leading to poverty: "Production is not our problem. Our problem is unjust distribution" (Perkins, *With Justice for All,* 160).

[47]"Redistribution," Christian Community Development Association.

[48]"Philosophy," Christian Community Development Association.

urban degradation, CCDA ministries move into the neighborhood, acting as a prophetic voice to empower neighbors and transform neighborhoods.

***Transformation through public policy (church as organizer for more just communities).*** The church can also function as an organizer for just communities, mobilizing people on behalf of the institutions that provide services for the neighborhood or city. This approach encourages sustained engagement with institutions, government and otherwise, that provide the necessary services for justice in communities. As Gornik describes, "Congregations are key agents in mobilizing people on behalf of schools that educate children, wages that sustain families, housing that stabilizes neighborhoods, and public services that maintain communities."[49]

The social and economic injustices in cities experiencing urban degradation mandate Christians working toward structural changes; this response actively engages, critiques, and works alongside governmental institutions. One such organization is the *Inner City Christian Federation* (ICCF, Grand Rapids, Michigan).[50] Their mission reads: "In response to God's call to justice, the Inner City Christian Federation provides housing opportunities and services that encourage family responsibility and independence, thereby helping to build stable communities."[51]

Empowered by an eschatological vision of God's *shalom* and partnering with other government organizations, ICCF seeks to rebuild the broken neighborhoods by providing new, high-quality, and affordable housing for those who are living in the city who are either currently homeless or long-time renters. Changing this one significant structural aspect of the city, housing, can transform neighborhoods.[52] ICCF's response to urban degradation is to provide housing opportunities and services that contribute to healthy communities.

Alongside their primary work of providing affordable housing, ICCF also works with many government agencies to ensure that residents have access to other necessary services: financial management, help acquiring food stamps and access to food services, employment assistance, rent subsidies, child care, foreclosure counseling, tax counseling, and more. ICCF focuses on working with existing government

[49]Gornik, *To Live in Peace,* 13.

[50]ICCF is only one example of a Christian organization working toward structural change through public policy and mobilization. Gornik highlights other examples of this model of transformation: the Industrial Areas Foundation, the Gamaliel Foundation, Direct Access Resource Training, and the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (*To Live in Peace,* 13).

[51]"Mission," Inner City Christian Federation, accessed December 11, 2015, www.iccf.org/about-us/.

[52]Jonathan Bradford, "Calves and Lions, Infants and Cobras," Inner City Christian Federation, accessed December 13, 2015, www.iccf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Blueprints-12-13-Small2.pdf.

organizations to make structural changes in decaying neighborhoods.[53] These structural changes involve three key areas: finance, construction, and education and empowerment.[54] ICCF's work toward just, beauty-filled neighborhoods flows directly from their theological commitments. As founder Jonathan Bradford explains, "God has thought enough of [each person] to create them in his image. He wants good for them. He wants opportunity and hope and flourishing and nurture. He wants shalom." This truth directly impacts how one ought to act.

This model of addressing urban decay seeks structural change. ICCF works with government organizations to make structural changes in decaying neighborhoods. Combatting urban degradation requires more than the action of individual congregations, and more than churches acting autonomously from government and business. Public policy changes are necessary for healthy, just communities, and this requires multi-sector engagement. In order to combat urban degradation, ICCF seeks to mandate and implement structural changes to produce healthy and just neighborhoods.

In each of these responses to urban degradation, we find a shared conviction that Christians ought to pursue justice. The method of one's approach, however, varies. Upholding the importance of humanity as created in the image of God, the example of Jesus, and the eschatological vision of a renewed earth, we've surveyed responses that emphasize becoming a *healing* community, being healers *of* community, and being *organizers* for more just communities. Each demonstrate different ways that Christian communities can be key actors in the process of holistic change and revitalization in the urban world.[55]

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

God has called us to seek the welfare of the city.[56] Noah Toly, professor of urban studies and politics at Wheaton College, reminds us that "urban life is full of promise and fraught with peril, and it is in this ambiguity that we must seek the welfare of our

[53]Jonathan Bradford, "Community Building for All," Inner City Christian Federation, accessed December 13, 2015, www.iccf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Blueprints-7-14.pdf.

[54]ICCF does not simply focus on the mechanics of homeownership; they also focus on beauty in homes and neighborhoods. See Bradford and Smith, "Shalom Starts at Home" and Jonathan Bradford and James K. A. Smith, "Inequality, Gentrification, and Justice: Continuing the Conversation with Jonathan Bradford," *Comment Magazine*, June 26, 2014, www.cardus.ca/comment/article/inequality-gentrification-and-justice-continuing-the-conversation-with-jonathan-bradford.

[55]Gornik, *To Live in Peace,* 12.

[56]For further theological reflection on the city see Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), and Stephen T. Um and Justin Buzzard, *Why Cities Matter: To God, the Culture, and the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

cities. Both poles of this reality call us to action, highlighting desperate need and great potential, inviting us to transform our cities into communities of peace and justice."[57] Organizations like CCDA, ICCF, and The Simple Way have enacted this call as they work toward justice and renewal in urban areas.

There are many different scriptural themes that we could discuss in order to cultivate a richer understanding of the city and a more theologically informed response to urban degradation: the image of God, justice, mercy, human agency, *shalom*, authority and our relationship to the state, repentance for the ways we may be complicit in some of the causes of urban degradation, and more. Alongside these, responses highlighted by The Simple Way, ICCF, and CCDA also raise another important question: What is the role of the church in enacting justice, and what do we mean by "the church"? It is this question that will be our focus here. Reflecting on Daniel 2-4, Toly offers an orienting insight: "God's Word teaches [that] it is less than human to treat the poor with contempt, and for this reason we should consider the needs of the poor first . . . we are called to treat the vulnerable with love and mercy, to place the poor at the center of our concerns . . . this is the responsibility of our communities and their leaders—including secular authorities like the King of Babylon—and the church."[58]

Undeniably, Christians are called to love their neighbor (Mk 12:31), pursue justice (Mic 6:8), and seek for the welfare of the city (Jer 29:7). The role of the *church* in these activities, however, is more contested. In the three responses surveyed above, the role of the church is not directly clarified, but we can begin to glean some differing approaches and resulting questions. The questions, first: when we are speaking of "church," do we mean individual Christians or groups of Christians as the body of Christ, the church, working in the world? Or do we mean congregations or denominations? Or can we mean both—and does it make a difference? Once we've wondered about *who* the "church" is referring to, we can also wonder about the primary responsibility and action of the church: Is the church primarily concerned with the spiritual well-being (as with the church as a healing community, although even here lines become blurry as the church is not limited to the spiritual needs of those they care for)? Or does the church engage in programmatic ways of caring for the needs of a person and community (as with the church as a healer of community)? Or ought the church partner with government and other institutions to seek justice (as in the church

[57]Noah Toly, *Cities of Tomorrow and the City to Come: A Theology of Urban Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 70-71.
[58]Toly, *Cities of Tomorrow,* 57.

as organizer for just communities)? Simply put, a key question is, "Who does what" as we seek to love our neighbor, pursue justice, and seek the welfare of the city?

Herman Bavinck, a nineteenth-century Dutch theologian, borrows two biblical metaphors and distinctions to help answer this question: a pearl and leaven. These metaphors come from two of the shortest parables in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven as a pearl of great value and a leaven.[59] Using these metaphors, Bavinck argues that the gospel does not merely address either spiritual problems or social problems. As each of the surveyed responses suggested, the gospel necessarily addresses both. But the tasks are not one and the same; rather, the gospel is both a pearl and a leaven. The gospel is the spiritual reality of the kingdom of God, God's gift of righteousness, salvation, and eternal life, obtained by faith: a pearl of great price. The gospel also bears fruit in society; it has culture-making, culture-swaying, and culture-transforming power: a leavening agent throughout the world.

Bavinck's appeal to the biblical images of the pearl and leaven helpfully correspond with two other images that he uses to distinguish between two senses of the church: the church as institution and the church as organism. Rather than understanding the tasks of spiritual renewal and the task of justice-seeking as either diametrically opposed tasks, lacking differentiation between the two, or collapsing these categories, Bavinck helps us delineate who does what in the distinction that he draws between the two senses of church.[60] The church as an institution is gathered around the Word and sacraments, corresponding to church as it is often identified: corporate worship, the offices of the church, the official programs of the church, and administration of the Word and sacrament. Here, spiritual renewal is the priority. The church as an institution protects and proclaims the pearl of great price. On the other hand, the church as an organism consists of the communal life of believers; it corresponds to the many vocations of the people of God, not limited to a formal or liturgical setting, as they spread out in the world. Here, Christians seek both spiritual renewal *and* social action—including seeking justice and restoration in the city.[61]

These distinctions helpfully clarify "who does what"; they offer categories for what "church" means and how various manifestations of "church" ought to enact the mission

[59]Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 141; Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), 268-69.

[60]Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume IV: Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation,* ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 329-30.

[61]For more reflections on these distinctions, see *The Church's Social Responsibility,* ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Robert Joustra (Grand Rapids: Christian Library, 2015).

of God in the world. Applied to urban degradation, they remind us that the church, in its different forms, ought to be involved in both spiritual renewal and justice-seeking work. The two go hand-in-hand, done by different parts of the body.

The church (as institution) is tasked with the proclamation of the gospel, a gospel that necessarily includes the scriptural call to "let justice roll down like waters" (Amos 5:24). Scripture compels us to seek justice, as we follow our God who "loves justice" (Ps 37:28) and "proclaim[s] justice" to the nations (Mt 12:18). The institutional church preaches the fullness of the good news of the gospel, good news that is not limited to the salvation of persons but also includes the whole cosmos being made right. Thus the institutional church must preach prophetically about justice; in doing so, it provides the framework out of which Christians seek and enact justice. The church (as organism) then applies this framework in every sphere of life, including policy, advocacy, and mobilization in urban areas. To use Bavinck's metaphors once again, hearing and receiving the "pearl" leads to "leavening" work in the world; that is, church as organism is sent out, discipled by the institutional church, seeking justice in the city.

The question that follows is how the gospel orients us to respond to urban degradation. In thinking about this, we should not overlook the vision of the "holy city" in the book of Revelation. The work of seeking justice in degraded neighborhoods is work aimed toward God's work of restoration and renewal in those communities. The picture of God's redeemed creation in Revelation points us toward a world where "the old order of things has passed away" (Rev 21:4 NIV). Everyone has what they need, no one fears violence, and justice is done for all. As Richard Mouw writes, "The Christian life is directed toward a City, a place in which God's redemptive purposes for his creation will be realized."[62] This vision is instructive for us as we seek justice. We ought to work for a just ordering of our cities so that they may look more and more like the holy city that is to come. Thus our response to urban degradation ought not be a revitalizing attempt that displaces all the current residents of a neighborhood, simply moving the problems of degradation to another location, or neglects neighborhoods that are experiencing degradation for fear of evidence of gentrification. Rather, we need to cultivate a new posture within the church, one built on eschatological hope and kingdom imagination. Anticipating God's renewal of all things and partnering with God in the work of restoration, we can cultivate a different way of redeveloping neighborhoods: one not built on displacement but one that affirms the work that God is already doing and affirms the good gifts (creativity, skills, knowledge, wisdom, and more) that are present.

[62]Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 19.

John Eigege, a church planter in the historic Third Ward of Houston, Texas, reflects on the work of restoration this way: "There is another way to equitably develop a neighborhood. It is a way that sees both the brokenness and the beauty simultaneously. It speaks to the needs and mobilizes the assets of the neighborhood for change. It honors the people, history, and culture of a place. It is community driven and deeply participatory. Development without Displacement."[63] This type of development sees all people as able to participate in this vision in God's work of bringing all things under the lordship of Christ.

Urban degradation is a complex phenomenon. As we saw in Corey's story, there is no one cause, and the effects can often compound on one another, creating a cyclical pattern. None of this, however, means that a city or neighborhood is without beauty, goodness, or hope. Responding to urban degradation is necessarily complex, but we ought not shy away from this task. The church is called to actively participate in development and renewal, responding in a way that recognizes the way God has been—and continues to be—moving and working in the city. We are called to pursue justice with eschatological hope and imagination. The church as institution is called to preach and prophetically witness to the work of justice. The church as an organism is a leavening agent throughout the world, enacting the complex work of justice.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *The Simple Way* grounds their practices in the picture of church in Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-35. What are the models emerging from these passages? How should they have a normative claim on the way we think about what a church community looks like?
2. The response of CCDA emphasizes community development that is focused on resources internal to the community. What is the relationship between asset-based community development (community development based on the skills, resources, and leadership already within the community) and the skills, resources, and leadership that those external to the community can bring?
3. The final approach, seeking change through public policy, is the least focused on relocation. Is it important to move into the neighborhood in which you seek to see transformation occur? What is the role of relationships when advocating for structural change?

[63]John Eigege, "The Gospel of Gentrification," *Do Justice*, March 19, 2018, http://dojustice.crcna.org/article/gospel-gentrification.

4. What is distinct, and what is similar between these three approaches in regard to bearing witness to God's coming kingdom? What can we learn from each of these models? What are the relative strengths and limitations of each?
5. Each of these positions identifies a tangible way to respond to the challenges of urban degradation. Among these three options, which approach might your own community (racial/ethnic/religious) prefer, and why?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

Corbett, Steve, and Brian Fikkert. *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself*. Chicago: Moody, 2009.

Gordon, Wayne, and John M. Perkins. *Making Neighborhoods Whole: A Handbook for Christian Community Development.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013.

Greenway, Roger S., and Timothy M. Monsma. *Cities: Missions' New Frontier.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000.

Jacobson, Eric O. *Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith.* Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003.

Kuyperus, Tracey, and Roland Hoksbergen. *When Helping Heals.* Grand Rapids: Calvin College Press, 2017.

Lupton, Robert D. *Toxic Charity.* New York: HarperOne, 2011.

Perkins, John M. *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993.

———. *Restoring At-Risk Communities: Doing It Together and Doing It Right*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000.

Sider, Ronald J., John M. Perkins, Wayne L. Gordon, and F. Albert Tizon. *Linking Arms, Linking Lives: How Urban-Suburban Partnerships Can Transform Communities*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

Cleveland, Christena. "Urban Church Plant(ation)s." *Evangelicals for Social Action*. June 13, 2014. www.evangelicalsforsocialaction.org/reconciliation-and-dialogue/urban-church-plantations/.

Lupton, Robert D. "Principles for Helpers." *Focused Community Strategies.* http://static1.squarespace.com/static/55d4a499e4b0dc45ceeb69fd/t/560a992ae4b0a427e3b6f701/1443535146053/Principles+for+Helpers.pdf.

Pelz, Mikael. "Gentrification: Building Diverse Communities?" *Capital Commentary*. July 14, 2014. www.cpjustice.org/public/capital_commentary/article/126.

Wirth, Peter. "Urban Peacemaking." *Sojourners*. July–August 1995. https://sojo.net/magazine/july-august-1995/urban-peacemaking.

### *Media and documentaries*

Gates, Theaster. "How to Revive a Neighborhood: With Imagination, Beauty, and Art." *TEDTalks.* March 2015. www.ted.com/talks/theaster_gates_how_to_revive_a_neighborhood_with_imagination_beauty_and_art#t-49042.

Griffiths, Toni. "A New Vision for Rebuilding Detroit." *TEDTalks.* October 2013. www.ted.com/talks/toni_griffin_a_new_vision_for_rebuilding_detroit.

*The Pruitt-Igoe Myth: An Urban History*. Directed by Chad Friedrichs. First Run Features, 2011.

# 4

# IMMIGRATION

*Joshua Beckett*

## REAL LIFE BY JENNIFER HERNANDEZ

My story begins in Guatemala, where I lived with my mother, grandfather, and younger sister. My family dynamics changed when my mother immigrated to the United States. As a single mother with limited education and the sole family provider, she wanted to find a "better life" for her family. We stayed behind with our grandfather. I was eight and my sister was four years old.

Sadly, when I was fourteen, my grandfather passed away and my mother had to bring us north to live with her. Like many undocumented immigrants, including herself, my mother did not have the means to do it "the right way," nor was there a right way to do it. I was fifteen and my sister was eleven years old when we embarked on a one-month journey to the United States. Our journey was filled with so much sadness, loss, and fear. I did not want to come to this country. I had lost my grandfather and now I was going to lose the place where I belonged, home. I recall two memories from our journey. The first is riding a cargo train known today as The Beast. The second is walking the Mexico-Arizona desert for two days. When we arrived, the only sign that "welcomed" us was a long, paved highway.

In 1998, when I came to live with my mother in Los Angeles, I did not understand the implications of what it meant to have crossed the Mexico-US border without authorization. I only knew I needed to be with my mother. She enrolled me in high school to begin my ESL immersion program because she wanted me to have a "better life." And thanks to AB540 (a unique university scholarship designed to support undocumented students), DACA, and countless allies, I graduated with a master's degree in 2016.

My journey tells both a successful and painful immigrant story. Despite my success in higher education, I cannot ignore the burdens I have carried as an undocumented and now DACAmented person in the United States. Besides, my "successful" story is not universal. There are many broken dreams in the undocumented community because many still live in the shadows of this society. In today's political arena, there's a lot of uncertainty and fear in my immigrant community because we are constantly reminded that we do not belong here and are not welcome.

In September 2017, the current administration fulfilled its campaign promise to end DACA. Thankfully, recent federal court orders have temporarily blocked this xenophobic decision. Today I find myself living somewhere between fear and courage. I fear deportation and family and community separation. But I am certain I do not want to be afraid or ashamed of who I am and how I came to this country. Today, I feel empowered to own my story and share it to empower my listeners to be in solidarity with my immigrant community and me.

Los Angeles is my home now. It is the place where my family was reunited, where I take afternoon walks along the ocean and watch my favorite sunsets. I am a DACAmented immigrant and my story begins in Guatemala.

## REAL WORLD

***Global overview.*** People move for many reasons. Some are pushed out of their countries of origin because of war, political unrest, economic hardship (as in the case of Jennifer Hernandez), or natural disaster. Others find themselves pulled toward a new land by the prospect of better economic and social opportunities for their families. But as international migration accelerates throughout the globe, the reactions of nation-states and various groups within them diverge dramatically.[1] Depending on one's vantage point, the presence of immigrants, whether authorized or unauthorized,[2] may be considered a hostile threat to national security,[3] a

[1]Khalid Koser summarizes, "There are more international migrants today than ever before, and their number is certain to increase for the foreseeable future. Almost every country on earth is, and will continue, to be affected." *International Migration: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

[2]A terminological note: in this chapter, I use "unauthorized" to describe migrants who enter a nation without, or remain beyond, its permission. This is preferable to "undocumented" (which is imprecise, since many migrants do have documentation that may be incomplete, expired, or forged) or "illegal" (which, while perhaps appropriate when applied to actions, is offensively reductive when applied to persons).

[3]"When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. . . . They're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people." *Time* Staff, "Here's Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech," 2015, http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/.

long-overdue opportunity for family reunification,[4] an undesirable wage depressant,[5] a welcome boost to business,[6] an aggressive assault on a nation's cultural self-understanding,[7] or a clear call to aid victims of ethno-racial conflict and ecological disasters.[8]

Multiple factors shape the movements of peoples. Data about migration patterns reveal frequent destinations for migrants: people with varying motivations to countries next door, workers to regional economic centers, and citizens of former colonies to older imperial powers.[9] Colonizers and colonized are linked together in a complicated history of violent conquest and resource exploitation, cultural and linguistic exchange, economic cooperation, and opportunity.

Refugees and asylum-seekers escaping warfare and persecution, or natural disasters and ecological degradation, are another major feature of migration today. People fleeing from war-ravaged nations like Syria, or from ethnocide in nations like Myanmar, overwhelm neighboring countries' capacities. Thus, they travel farther on, often to Europe, which remains divided about the proper response to these humanitarian crises. Victims of violence or disaster are stranded between a physically impossible situation in their homelands and a psychologically unwelcome continent; this can lead to perpetual limbo for millions of traumatized refugees.

***US context.*** Immigration is a contentious topic in the United States, particularly across its southern border. One flashpoint is the estimated eleven million noncitizens residing in the United States without permission. Nearly everyone sees this situation as less than ideal, though for different reasons. For many

[4]"These processes also can involve waiting years or decades . . . [family sponsorship] should remain in place to preserve the unity of families." Evangelical Immigration Table, 2018, http://evangelicalimmigrationtable.com/cms/assets/uploads/2018/02/EIT-Letter-on-Family-Reunification-2.15.2018.pdf.

[5]"Uncontrolled, mass migration displaces British workers, forces people onto benefits, and suppresses wages for the low-paid." Theresa May, 2012, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/9739590/Curbing-mass-immigration-could-bring-down-house-prices-Theresa-May-says.html.

[6]"[Reform is] essential to continued economic growth. . . . We support reform that will improve our competitiveness, attract and retain the best talent and workers." US Chamber of Commerce, 2013, www.uschamber.com/letter/multi-industry-letter-s-744-border-security-economic-opportunity-and-immigration.

[7]"This is an invasion, the greatest invasion in history. . . . Nearly 90% of all immigrants now come from continents and countries whose peoples have never been assimilated fully into any Western country." Pat Buchanan, *State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America* (New York: St. Martin's, 2006), 5.

[8]"We see the tracks of millions of persons who do not choose to go away but, driven from their land, leave behind their dear ones. . . . God invites us to become sentinels for all those bowed down by the despair born of encountering so many closed doors." Pope Francis, 2017, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20171224_omelia-natale.html.

[9]Cf. Katy Lee, "Where the World's Migrants Go, in One Map," www.vox.com/2015/3/9/8161259/-migrants-destinations-map.

Americans, when migrants enter into the country irregularly or remain beyond legal limits, they violate US sovereignty and drain its resources. Thus, the proper responses are a denial of social services and immediate deportation. However, many other Americans feel compassion for these neighbors and worry about the creation of a permanent underclass living in the shadows of national life. They also note disparities in current immigration protocols and enforcement, and recognize the many strong contributions that unauthorized migrants make to the US economy. Their solution is comprehensive reform of national immigration laws leading to more humane treatment of migrants while facilitating their social integration and adaptation.

In order to develop a truly biblical and theological response to unauthorized immigration in the United States, an integrated look at the complexities of international migration is essential. Myopic visions and superficial solutions abounding in our society are unfortunate byproducts of a shrill public debate.[10] Likewise, without developing an integrated theological perspective, Christian theology, ministry, and activism will be diminished. Our productive point of departure for Christians is to benefit from the contribution of three disciplines—political science, legal studies, and sociology—on the relationship between national politics and immigration. We need to pay attention to the reasons for the current migration "crisis" in the United States: both the injustice of a broken system fostering perennial poverty and the perceived threat to national sovereignty and identity.

***Political, legal, and social analysis.*** Political scientist James Hollifield identifies three major themes in migration politics: control, security, and incorporation.[11] Regarding control, a nation's ability to regulate its internal affairs and monopolize the use of force within its boundaries is essential to its political power, yet an international commitment to human rights inhibits nations from enacting the restrictive measures that some citizens desire.[12] Regarding security, nation-states are more willing to risk opening themselves up to trade and migration for economic gain when

[10]As well as, at times, egregious violations of human rights, such as occurred in June 2018 with the Trump administration's aborted but devastating policy of intentional traumatization of unauthorized migrants via separating thousands of children from their parents at the southern border without plans to reunite them. These actions provoked fierce backlash and widespread condemnation, both domestically and around the world. Over a year later, some children have still not been reunited with their parents, and many others continue to be detained in appalling conditions.

[11]James F. Hollifield, "The Politics of International Migration: How Can We 'Bring the State Back In?'" in *Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines*, ed. Caroline B. Brettell and James F. Hollifield, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 189.

[12]Hollifield, "Politics of International Migration," 188-92.

an international regulation program is in place,[13] yet economic arguments often take a backseat to "national identities and founding myths."[14] Regarding incorporation, ideas about citizenship, labor, and civil rights are partially constrained both by dominant economic interests and cultural narratives that powerfully shape the nation's social imagination.[15]

Globalization further complicates these political themes as nations become increasingly interconnected. Capital and goods travel across borders with ease, but the movement of labor—essential for the survival and flourishing of the global economy—is either restrained or unleashed, slowed down or sped up, depending on which narratives rise to prominence and win the hearts and minds of the people.[16] Furthermore, it is impossible to separate the contributions that migrant laborers bring to a host country from the needs that they require from it. This reality has been well captured by Swiss playwright Max Frisch, who ironically quipped, "We asked for workers, but human beings came!"[17]

Legal scholar Peter Schuck explains that laws in sending and receiving countries, as well as international treaties, shape migration opportunities for individuals and groups.[18] Yet large gaps between "the law on the books" (legislation and jurisprudence), "the law in action" (enforcement), and "the law in people's minds" (public consciousness) remain,[19] especially since government agencies offer low-level agents broad discretion for day-to-day law enforcement decisions.[20] Maintaining these breaches between the laws in the books, in action, and in people's minds can actually serve important functions. There are many obstacles to immigration control: migrants themselves, ethnic communities, advocates, constitutional courts, and public acceptance of human rights.[21] Completely halting unauthorized immigration is impossible. Yet the contradictions between legislation and enforcement release government and

[13]Hollifield, "Politics of International Migration," 161. Unlike global governance for trade (GATT/WTO) and finance (IMF/World Bank), international migration lacks a strong regulatory regime. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees is relatively weak (207).

[14]Hollifield, "Politics of International Migration," 210.

[15]Hollifield, "Politics of International Migration," 222.

[16]Hollifield, "Politics of International Migration," 213.

[17]Quoted in Ray C. Rist, "Migration and Marginality: Guestworkers in Germany and France," *Daedalus* 108, no. 2 (Spring 1979): 95.

[18]Peter H. Schuck, "Law and the Study of Migration," Brettell and Hollifield, eds., *Migration Theory*, 241.

[19]Schuck, "Law and the Study of Migration," 242. Various constituencies interpret immigration law very differently: (1) authorized immigrants, (2) unauthorized immigrants, (3) citizens in countries of origin, (4) INS officials, (5) state and local law enforcement officials, (6) the State Department, (7) the Department of Labor, (8) consular officials, (9) voluntary agencies, (10) federal judges, and (11) state judges.

[20]Schuck, "Law and the Study of Migration," 244.

[21]Schuck, "Law and the Study of Migration," 248.

public alike from facing this failure, "sustaining the attractive, reassuring, ennobling myth that the rule of law is a paramount, priceless ideal that we relentlessly pursue. At the same time, it obscures the reality that our actual goal is the less exalted one of enriching ourselves by condoning illegality and then concealing this fact beneath a veil of hypocritical high-mindedness."[22] This hypocrisy should caution against idealistic notions of "the law" of immigration policy.

Sociologist Stephen Castles further explores this policy "failure." There is a complicated relationship between the official migration policies of nation-states and their actual migration processes on the ground (or in the air or across the sea). Castles contends that given the complexities, "states tend toward compromises and contradictory policies. . . . An important underlying reason is the contradiction between the national logic of migration control and the transnational logic of international migration in an epoch of globalization."[23] Failure is built into the system because of the impossibility of achieving total success in both tight migration control and openness to globalization. Indeed, policy failure may actually achieve the real goals of politicians, who "sometimes give lip service to anti-immigration rhetoric while actually pursuing policies that lead to more immigration, because it is important for labor market and economic objectives."[24] Economic realities strongly affect migration at the macro level of globalization, the meso level of nation-states, the micro level of particular communities, and the social dynamics that span them all.

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

These deep divisions regarding immigration resonate among Christians, for whom these debates are also theologically loaded. Some leaders and laypersons alike prioritize respect for the rule of law, while others emphasize the practice of hospitality for the stranger. Still others locate forgiveness of unauthorized immigration as a matter of justice. Representatives of each position see their proposals as grounded in Scripture and reflective of God's will for today's context.

[22]Schuck, "Law and the Study of Migration," 249-50.

[23]Stephen Castles, "The Factors That Make and Unmake Migration Policies," in *Rethinking Migration: New Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*, ed. Alejandro Portes and Josh DeWind (New York: Berghahn, 2007), 31.

[24]Castles, "Factors That Make and Unmake Migration Policies," 44.

**Table 4.1**

| RESPONSE | VARIABLE: DEFINITION OF JUSTICE | MAIN CLAIM | REPRESENTATIVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Respect for the law | Social conformity to a legal standard by migrants and citizens alike | The Christian priority is obedience | James Hoffmeier |
| Hospitality to the stranger | Social support for marginalized migrants by compassionate citizens | The Christian priority is hospitality | M. Daniel Carroll R. |
| Forgiveness as justice | Social resolution of an invisible debt between migrants and citizens | The Christian priority is forgiveness | Ilsup Ahn |

***Respect for the law.*** One prominent Christian response to immigration is an approach that highlights the duties of all people—citizens and migrants—to submit to the governing authorities by obeying the nation-state's laws. Adherents of this approach see migrants who enter the United States without permission primarily as people who have broken the law. This view often entails opposition to increased immigration and to the comprehensive reform of currently existing laws, and it is usually associated with a theologically and politically conservative worldview.

Adherents of this approach differ in their motivation for holding their perspective. For many, their concerns are primarily economic (fear of competition for low-wage jobs) or security driven. Others' hostility toward immigration is primarily rooted in nativism; they see the increase in the migrant population as a threat to national identity and culture. A second area of differences concerns beliefs about the best strategies for addressing the status of unauthorized migrants. Some advocate for comprehensive governmental discovery and deportation. Others call churches to employ all legal means to assist migrants but to encourage the practice of self-deportation in the absence of legal remedies. Even though Christians have espoused all of these positions, not all of them are worthy of careful analysis. Nativism, which distrusts and detests migrants because they "aren't like us," clearly militates against the image of God in migrants and can be forcefully rejected as contrary to biblical faith. Likewise, closing off compassion for migrants who have made an unauthorized border crossing demonstrates an inadequately Christian mentality.[25]

Old Testament scholar James K. Hoffmeier of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School represents the "Respect for the Law" response. He avoids nativist appeals and tries

[25]For instance, "There is no legal way to justify the brazen, dangerous act of violating our country's borders. When illegal immigrants choose to break the law, they suffer from . . . self-inflicted wounds." Harry R. Jackson Jr. and Tony Perkins, *Personal Faith, Public Policy* (Lake Mary, FL: Fontline, 2008), 89.

to ground his proposals biblically. Although better known as an Egyptologist, Hoffmeier has written on this topic with his book *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible* and subsequent articles and interviews. Hoffmeier's main burdens are a concern for exegetical precision and a passion for legal obedience. As a biblical scholar, Hoffmeier is disconcerted by the use of Scripture in the national debate about immigration. He states his aim: "I have made every effort to . . . look at the role that law plays and the obligation of citizens in general and Christians in particular, not to mention immigrants, to the rule of law."[26] Thus, "Respect for the Law" has a double meaning: God's law (the words of Scripture) and human law (a nation's regulations).

*Respect for God's law: Torah and terminology.* Regarding respect for God's law, Hoffmeier primarily focuses on the ancient Near Eastern context: migration patterns, narratives, laws, and prophecies. The crux of his argument rests on differences between Hebrew words for foreigners: *ger*, *nekhar*, and *zar*.[27] The first is most significant: *ger* (translated as "alien," "sojourner," or "stranger") appears in commands to offer hospitality (Lev 19:33-34), equal justice (Num 15:15-16), and equal pay (Deut 24:14-15). In fact, a *ger* was even allowed to celebrate Passover (Ex 12:48). By contrast, a *nekhar* or *zar* ("foreigner" or "alien") did not have the same rights and benefits (Ex 12:43; Deut 15:3).

Hoffmeier thinks that *ger* should be restricted to describing only persons and groups who migrate with the express permission of their new context's authorities. Translated for the current moment, "the immigrant with a green card in the U.S. corresponds to the *ger* of the Old Testament, whereas the illegal immigrant should be equated with the *nekhar* or *zar*."[28] Therefore churches and ministries who show hospitality to or advocate for unauthorized immigrants (on the basis of Lev 19:33-34 and parallels) may do so without proper biblical warrant.

*Respect for human law: Sanctuary and submission.* Relatedly, Hoffmeier opposes the sanctuary movement,[29] in which churches offer their facilities to assist

[26]Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 17-18.

[27]Hoffmeier, *Immigration Crisis,* 29-58.

[28]Hoffmeier, "Reforming Immigration: Watch Your Words," *Christianity Today*, www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/march/8.54.html. He makes this claim on the basis of two passages in which *gerim* ask the legal authorities for permission to enter a territory (Gen 47:3-6 and Num 20:14-21). However, the other ninety references to the word *ger* in the Old Testament do not mention a similar request, nor do standard lexicons (such as *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* and *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*) include permission-seeking as constitutive of the concept of "sojourner." See the appendix below for a table demonstrating the Bible's use of *ger* and related words.

[29]Hoffmeier, *Immigration Crisis*, 19-22, 154-55.

unauthorized migrants, and cities (such as New York and Denver) or states (such as California) refrain from cooperating with federal authorities in apprehending them. He sees it as a misapplication of the biblical concept of the sanctuary as a place of refuge for someone who committed involuntary manslaughter or negligent homicide (Ex 21:12-14; Josh 20:1-6). This was intended as a context for ensuring a fair hearing when an accidental death had occurred, not a place for permanently avoiding the penalty for breaking national laws.

For Hoffmeier, Romans 13:1-7 definitively prescribes submission to the governing authorities, including the laws created and enforced by them. This means taking an unambiguous stance against illegal immigration. While he does seek to exhibit nuance in addressing complex problems and to express compassion for people who find themselves in desperate situations, he is passionately frustrated by what he sees as the abuse of Scripture. For instance: "American cities that use their communities to circumvent the law to help the illegal alien in the name of justice are doing a gross injustice to the letter and spirit of the biblical law."[30] Christian faithfulness includes recognizing that God commands obedience as well as compassion.

***Hospitality to the stranger.*** If "Respect for the Law" begins with reference to the state and then derivatively moves on to address the church's responsibilities, "Hospitality to the Stranger" is a Christian response to immigration that begins with reference to the responsibilities of the church and then derivatively moves on to address the state. This second approach likewise draws from a deep well of Christian tradition—the practice of hospitality, through which strangers come to be treated as family. Adherents of this approach see migrants who enter the United States without permission primarily as people who need welcome and care. This view often entails support for increased immigration and the comprehensive reform of currently existing laws. While it has often been more closely associated with a theologically and politically moderate or liberal worldview, "Hospitality to the Stranger" has increasingly gained momentum among theological conservatives.

Another Old Testament scholar, M. Daniel Carroll R. of Wheaton Graduate School, represents the "Hospitality to the Stranger" model. Carroll identifies as half Guatemalan and is well known throughout the country for his work on immigration. He is frequently consulted on the topic by news media, ministry organizations, and conferences, and he has been instrumental in raising awareness, particularly in more theologically conservative circles, of the challenges that immigrants face, and in

[30]Hoffmeier, "The Use and Abuse of the Bible in the Immigration Debate," www.cis.org/bible-use-and-abuse-immigration.

mustering support for national reform. His book *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* has been instrumental in sparking widespread reflection on the role of churches in addressing the needs of migrants at various levels, and he has refined and clarified his views in a host of online articles and a second edition.

Carroll explains, "My intention is to try to move Christians to reconsider their starting point in the immigration debate. Too often discussions default to the passionate ideological arguments, economic wrangling, or racial sentiments that dominate national discourse."[31] He focuses primarily on Hispanic immigration to the United States, seeking to demonstrate biblically both the ways that the experiences of contemporary immigrants resonate with biblical characters and the need for American Christians to assume a welcoming posture toward their new neighbors.

*Instruction from the Old Testament.* Carroll turns to the Old Testament for guidance about a proper response to the contemporary situation. He discerns a few areas with direct bearing on today, preeminent among them being the *imago Dei*. This crucial concept is the proper entry point for a discussion of immigration. Carroll's emphasis is not on the long-debated question of what precisely the image of God means but rather that all human beings are made in the image of God: "What the image-of-God premise does, though, is establish a basic mind-set from which one can formulate policy and evaluate pragmatic decisions that must be made in the many spheres of national life. It also should inform the tone of Christian participation in the national debate. Ultimately, immigration is about people. This is where the discussion should begin, not with disputes over legal status."[32]

Carroll also draws heavily upon narratives of people and groups migrating to new contexts and sometimes returning to where they began. This can be due to reasons of famine (Jacob's family in Egypt, Naomi's family in Moab), slavery (the people of Israel's captivity and deliverance), and exile (the Assyrian destruction of Ephraim and the Babylonian deportation of Judah). Of course, the call of God (Abram and Sarai's faith journey) should not be overlooked. The treatment of God's people as they sojourn is a deep concern for biblical writers.[33]

The law is also significant for immigration.[34] God's commands to his people are set in a context of deliverance and promise (rather than as a way to earn their salvation or identity) and are intended to make visible and concrete God's vision of proper living

[31]M. Daniel Carroll R., *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), xxv.
[32]Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 49.
[33]Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 43-74.
[34]Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 75-101.

to the other nations of the world. Israel's treatment of the sojourners (who were classified with widows and orphans as a vulnerable group) in its midst occupies a significant part of Torah legislation. Carroll notes that the sojourners could benefit from gleaning laws (Lev 19:10) and were included in the provision of rest on the Sabbath (Ex 20:10). Israel was to remember their own history of sojourning and exhibit better treatment than they had received in Egypt (Lev 19:34).

*Exhortation from the New Testament.* Before concluding with a gentle invitation for Christians to embrace their "other,"[35] Carroll also draws widely from the New Testament.[36] He begins with Jesus' life and teaching. Jesus himself was a refugee when he and his parents fled from Herod to Egypt (Mt 2). In his teaching ministry he traveled throughout Palestine, often crossing cultural barriers (as in his encounter with the Samaritan woman in Jn 4). Additionally, Jesus' teaching consistently called people back to the love of God and neighbor, including care for those who were socially and ethnically different (as in the parable of the good Samaritan in Lk 10).

Apostolic teaching about Christian identity and hospitality also has relevant bearing: in light of what Christ has done, Christians receive a new identity that radically alters their position in the world. Some of the New Testament epistles actually employ migration language in their teaching on the distinctiveness of Christian identity: they are foreigners and exiles (1 Pet 1:1) who are seeking their own city (Heb 13:14) and have citizenship in heaven (Phil 3:20). In the midst of their sojourn, they are to practice hospitality (Heb 13:2), even to enemies (1 Pet 3:9). Hospitality is also a critical requirement for potential church leaders (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8).

Carroll's biblical survey would be incomplete without addressing the passage most often deployed against unauthorized immigrants, Romans 13. He notes that whether in its crass form ("What is it about 'illegal' that you don't understand?")[37] or with more nuance, the fact that unauthorized immigrants have broken the law is a huge challenge for Christians helping them. His response is multifaceted: first, not all of the nation's laws are just; when they are not, we may sometimes be faced with the same choice as the apostles—whether to obey God or people (Acts 4:19). Additionally, Romans 13 cannot be taken in isolation; in context it follows Romans 12's exhortation to mutual service, hospitality, mercy, and self-giving love. While Christians should respect the government's role, they should not be conformed to the world's pattern. Finally, the US political system allows Christians to disagree

[35]Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 132-35.
[36]Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 103-28.
[37]Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 123. His larger discussion of this passage can be found on pages 122-28.

with and try to alter bad laws. Romans 13 should not stifle debate about noncompliance with current policy.

***Forgiveness as justice.*** Justice is the animating virtue at stake in both the "Respect for the Law" and "Hospitality to the Stranger" positions. Both presuppose significant tension, if not outright conflict, between obeying the law and practicing hospitality. This is in large part because their implicit definitions of justice differ—as a matter of social conformity to a legal standard, or alternatively as a matter of social support for marginalized persons. But is it possible to integrate both of these underlying concerns in a definition of justice? A third position aims to accomplish precisely this endeavor.

Korean American ethicist Ilsup Ahn of North Park University, who has also written about the economic ethics of debt, has contributed to immigration discourse with his 2013 book *Religious Ethics and Migration: Doing Justice to Undocumented Workers*. The burden of his book is to answer the question "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9) in light of current immigration realities. Although he forthrightly acknowledges the possibility of "contradiction between 'being an undocumented neighbor's keeper' and 'being a law-abiding citizen,'" Ahn argues that these concerns can actually be resolved together, since "the political appropriation of forgiveness is the most justifiable and practical solution to the current immigration crisis . . . it is a moral imperative for U.S. society to enact and implement more *forgiving* immigration laws."[38] Safeguarding against potential misunderstandings, Ahn clarifies that his position neither diminishes the importance of a society's laws nor denies a nation-state's prerogatives: "Paradoxical as it may sound, I develop an argument for the political appropriation of forgiveness because I take the law and the political rights of the host country *seriously*."[39]

*Invisible debt and social connection.* Central to Ahn's case is the lurking reality of an invisible debt between citizens and migrants: "The putative creditor-debtor consciousness of hosting citizens and migrants is commonly exemplified in the senses of 'you owe us your presence' and 'I owe you my security and success.' Due to its invisibility, the invisible debt has been largely obscured in the public discourse, resulting in the lack of needed ethical consideration to overcome its hidden but effective logic."[40] This invisible debt, along with the negative moral economy that it exudes, can only be overcome by a far more radical hospitality than the classic gift model, which has

[38] Ahn, *Religious Ethics and Migration: Doing Justice to Undocumented Workers* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3.
[39] Ahn, *Religious Ethics and Migration*, 7.
[40] Ahn, *Religious Ethics and Migration*, 13.

been compromised by global capitalism's logic. The theological call to radical hospitality is heard "through the hosts' remembrance of their own forgiveness as well as indebtedness."[41]

For Ahn, forgiveness as justice is not merely a moral possibility but a political responsibility. He builds on Iris Marion Young's social connection model, in which "all those who contribute by their actions to structural processes with some unjust outcomes share responsibility for the injustice."[42] Incorporating this collective-structural perspective (for instance, by recognizing NAFTA's catastrophic effects on the Mexican agricultural sector, which subsequently accelerated Mexican migration) yields a new relationship between citizens and unauthorized migrants. The latter are "not simply reduced to violators of the law," while the former "can be regarded as unfair beneficiaries or even complacent accomplices of an unjust international economic system."[43]

*Radical hospitality and state racism.* Similarly, Ahn affirms the sanctuary movement, given its roots as a Christian response to US human rights violations; following Jon Sobrino, "sanctuary is not just legitimate, but also ethically demanded because the United States has been the determining cause of numerous, lasting, and profound evils for the Central American peoples."[44] In a contested public arena, Ahn argues, Christians are called both to advocate politically for undocumented migrants and to demonstrate social solidarity through radical hospitality.[45] These twin vocations are urgent, given the long history of nativist racism as a matter of explicit US immigration policy—not only against Latinos[46] but also against Asians.[47]

After filling out his proposal of theological connection with the themes of covenant, kingdom, and the body of Christ, Ahn cites the Kino Border Initiative as an example of radical hospitality in practice. There, through pastoral outreach, education programs, and research-supported advocacy, Jesuit participants engage and "meet the humanitarian needs of returning or deported migrants who are often dehydrated, hungry, suffering from medical infirmities, and experiencing psychological crisis."[48]

---

[41] Ahn, *Religious Ethics and Migration*, 29.
[42] Ahn, *Religious Ethics and Migration*, 40.
[43] Ahn, *Religious Ethics and Migration*, 36-37.
[44] Ahn, *Religious Ethics and Migration*, 53.
[45] Ahn, *Religious Ethics and Migration*, 103-4.
[46] E.g., Operation Wetback ending the Bracero program in the twentieth century, or Arizona's S.B. 1070 in the twenty-first.
[47] Especially the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which "became the most vivid racist immigration policy against non-whites . . . making Chinese the first people declared undesirable by the U.S. Congress" (Ahn, *Religious Ethics and Migration*, 140), and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.
[48] Ahn, *Religious Ethics and Migration*, 181.

He concludes, "The first task of justice is not about assigning rights or duties, but about saving people from sufferings and injuries. Sufferings and injuries are not only the crucial starting point for theological reflections and explorations of religious experience, but also the primary subject matter of political discourse on justice."[49]

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

***Renewing our imagination.*** The Bible offers substantial teaching on the two most prominent themes in Christian public discourse on immigration: hospitality and the law. Both themes have at times been handled irresponsibly and need to be revived by a fresh look at biblical teaching.

*Hospitality.* Hospitality should be reimagined in at least three ways. First, the biblical emphasis on *repentance and restitution* should temper our rhetoric about sharing blessings. Although today's (especially white) American citizens did not perpetrate the nation's many historic wrongs against Native Americans and Latin Americans concerning their land—as well as African Americans and Asian Americans concerning their labor—the dominant white society nevertheless benefits from (and at times, perpetuates) such injustices. Beyond simple generosity, biblical patterns of restitution (Ex 22) and bearing the fruit of repentance (Mt 3:8) apply here.

Second, Scripture leads us to *redefine the stranger*. Although there is much to appreciate about Carroll's attempt to connect contemporary immigrants with the biblical sojourner, the use of "otherizing" language requires caution. Employing words like "stranger," "alien," or even "guest" in contrast to "normal," "citizen," or "host" can strengthen existing patterns of privilege and power. Conversely, a theological vision reckoning all who believe in Christ as foreigners (Heb 11:13) and sojourners (1 Pet 2:11) in the world helps subvert this imbalance.[50]

The third aspect of hospitality that the Bible recalibrates is *reciprocity in the body of Christ*. In an age in which various expressions of migration proliferate globally, the transnational community of faith has a rich opportunity to demonstrate healthy forms of reciprocity. When Christians link their primary allegiance to the lordship of Christ with their primary identity in the body of Christ, the possibility of robust mutuality emerges. Solidarity can flourish in many concrete situations caused by immigration, "that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same

[49] Ahn, *Religious Ethics and Migration*, 185.

[50] Both Carroll (*Christians at the Border*, 126-29) and Hoffmeier (*Immigration Crisis*, 137-39, 152) give a brief reference to these passages, but neither discusses in depth the implications of this identity for social relationships.

care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (1 Cor 12:25-26).

*Law.* Scripture should also lead to a reassessment of "the law." First, the nature of Christians' relationship to the *authorities* requires special care. The epistle to the Romans was composed in the shadow of an oppressive, unjust empire, and there are indeed parallels between ancient Rome and contemporary America. However, it is a simplistic misapplication of Romans 13 for Hoffmeier to presume that today's contradictory policies, arrived at by competing interests and often enforced in an inhumane manner, should be automatically enshrined as worthy of obedience. The historic Christian practice of principled, nonviolent disobedience to the state—in matters of conscience and under conditions of oppression—bears careful consideration, and perhaps emulation, here.

Additionally, the Bible's teaching about *boundary stones* retains remarkable relevance in the case of the US-Mexican border. Biblical law strictly forbade the theft of another's territory by moving the stones that delineated the border, cursing those who did so (Deut 19:14; 27:17). The prophets linked this crime to the outpouring of divine wrath (Hos 5:10). How does this relate to disgraceful chapters in US history, such as when imperialistic Manifest Destiny led to an unjust war and the aggressive seizure of huge swaths of Mexico[51]—and even earlier, when American settlers and armed forces committed genocide in pursuit of First Nations' land?[52] Ahn rightly implies that American moral authority regarding these contested territories is severely compromised.

Finally, the nature and limits of *Caesar's prerogatives* are perennially pertinent questions for conscientious Christians. Jesus' connection between image and ownership for both temporal and divine governance (Lk 20:25) should compel us to look out for any nation-state narrative or practice, including immigration policy, that diminishes God's image in other human beings.

***Taking action together.*** Christians have long been involved in efforts of providing services to migrants and advocating for immigration reform. Yet in order for the body of Christ to operate with healthy mutuality, subverting dichotomies of citizen/host and stranger/guest, migrants must also be free to speak with their own voice. Jennifer

[51]President Ulysses S. Grant, who fought in the Mexican-American War as a lieutenant, later called it "one of the most unjust [wars] ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation." Quoted in Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 44.

[52]Navajo activist Mark Charles comments, "From a Native American perspective, the U.S. is a country of more than 300 million undocumented immigrants." https://sojo.net/magazine/december-2015/whats-name.

Hernandez's opening words help us to transcend the stale rhetoric of the nation-state and refocus our attention on migrants as image-bearers who, amidst difficulties, seek to respond faithfully to the God who calls and guides.

The agency of God as undergirding and sustaining the agency of migrants should not be underrated. Indeed, many of the Christians who cross US borders without documentation or permission do so with a sense of divine call; migration policy is merely another obstacle to be overcome in pursuit of a mission. Similarly, for some transnational faith communities, even the negative experience of deportation can be incorporated into God's plan—as an impetus to help plant new churches![53] With this in mind, Christians can live into the process of becoming a new "we" by respecting migrant stories on their own terms and by seeking partnerships of reciprocity and prayer with migrant communities.

Seeking God in prayer together for and with others has the doubly salutary effect of relativizing the power of any one group and explicitly honoring God's prior initiative, sustaining grace, and empowering presence. A prayerful posture distinguishes the church on the move from progressive political goals and conservative economic ambitions. Christians are a pilgrim people who sojourn through the earth on mission in anticipation of receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28). Meanwhile, God calls us to seek the peace of the city (Jer 29:7) without adopting the thought patterns of the empire.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare these three positions; what are the strengths and weaknesses of each? What do they have in common? Is anything significant absent from any of them?
2. Given the major differences between the contemporary United States (a democratic representative republic), ancient Israel (a theocratic covenant community), and the early church (a persecuted minority in an empire), how do we apply Scripture's instructions and exhortations to our context today?
3. How can Christians seek to support unauthorized migrants without condoning lawlessness? How can Christians seek to honor the authorities without supporting the nativism and xenophobia that often are part of political speech?

[53]Juan Francisco Martínez, "Remittances and Mission: Transnational Latino Pentecostal Ministry in Los Angeles." In *Spirit and Power: The Growth and Global Impact of Pentecostalism*, edited by Donald E. Miller, Kimon H. Sargeant, and Richard Flory (New York: Oxford, 2013), 210, 216.

## APPENDIX: OLD TESTAMENT WORDS IN CONTEXT

**Table 4.2**

| HEBREW WORD | COMMON TRANSLATIONS | CHARACTERISTIC ATTITUDE | NUMBER OF REFERENCES | SAMPLE PASSAGES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Ger* | Sojourner, alien | Generally positive: a foreign person who chooses to live among the people of Israel | 92 | Mostly in the Torah: Abraham (Gen 15:13, prophecy about his descendants; Gen 23:4, purchase of a tomb for Sarah); Exodus (Passover inclusion, Ex 12); and legislation. Fourth commandment prescribes Sabbath rest for *gerim* (Ex 20:10; Deut 5:14), and Moses calls Israel to treat them with justice and compassion (harvest gleaning, Deut 24:19-21; no oppression, Ex 22:21). God's law is the same for Israelite and *ger* (Num 15:15-16). If Israel disobeys, the *ger* will rise above them (Deut 28:43).<br>The Prophets and Writings continue this trajectory without much alteration. They repeat stern warnings against oppressing (Zech 7:10) or wronging (Jer 22:3) the *ger*; Ezekiel's visions include equality between Israelites and *gerim*, whether in punishment of idolatry (14:7) or in promise of inheritance (47:22-23). Psalms emphasize the *ger*'s vulnerability (39:12; 146:9). Descriptions are positive: *gerim* work for the temple (1 Chron 22:2) and rejoice with Israel at the Passover (2 Chron 30:25). |
| *Toshab* | Alien, settler | Positive to ambivalent | 14 (12 paired with *ger*) | *Toshab* is only contrasted with *ger* in Ex 12:45 and Lev 22:10 (*toshabim* not allowed to eat Passover or other holy things). |
| *Nekhar* | Foreign/ foreigner | Mostly negative: implies hostility, danger, and even foreign gods | 36 (+ 45 for *nokri*, the substantive) | 2 Sam 22:45 (David boasts of foreigners cringing before him); Deut 17:15 (warning against submission to *nokri* leadership); Is 60:10 and 61:5 (prophetic hope of reversal from oppression to mastery); Ezek 44:9 (exclusion from the sanctuary); Neh 9:2 (exclusion from the people as a whole).<br>Rare glimpses of grace: Gen 17 (inclusion in Abraham's covenant of circumcision) and Is 56 (where a *nekhar* can join himself to the Lord and pray at God's holy mountain). |
| *Zar* | Strange(r), foreign(er) | Very negative: often signals the threat of enemies and punishment | 70 | Proverbs repeatedly describes the adulteress in this way. Prophets also speak of enemies (Is 29:5) and link them to idolatry (Jer 2:25). The *zar* plunders Israel's land (Lam 5:2) |

Sources: *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997); *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997).

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

Ahn, Ilsup. *Religious Ethics and Migration: Doing Justice to Undocumented Workers.* New York: Routledge, 2013.

Brettell, Caroline B., and James F. Hollifield, eds. *Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Budde, Michael. *The Borders of Baptism: Identities, Allegiances, and the Church.* Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011.

Carroll R., M. Daniel. *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014.

Cavanaugh, William T. *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

De La Torre, Miguel A. *The U.S. Immigration Crisis: Toward an Ethics of Place*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016.

Groody, Daniel, and Gioacchino Campese, eds. *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008.

Hoffmeier, James K. *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009.

Kaemingk, Matthew. *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.

Koser, Khalid. *International Migration: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford, 2007.

Lee, Hak Joon. "Immigration." In *Asian American Christian Ethics: Voices, Methods, Issues*, edited by Grace Y. Kao and Ilsup Ahn, 177-202. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015.

Portes, Alejandro, and Josh DeWind, eds. *Rethinking Migration: New Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*. New York: Berghahn, 2007.

Rahendra, Tisha M. *Migrants and Citizens: Justice and Responsibility in the Ethics of Immigration.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

International Organization for Migration (United Nations). "World Migration Report 2018." www.iom.int/wmr/world-migration-report-2018.

Migration Policy Institute. "Immigration Data Matters." www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigration-data-matters.

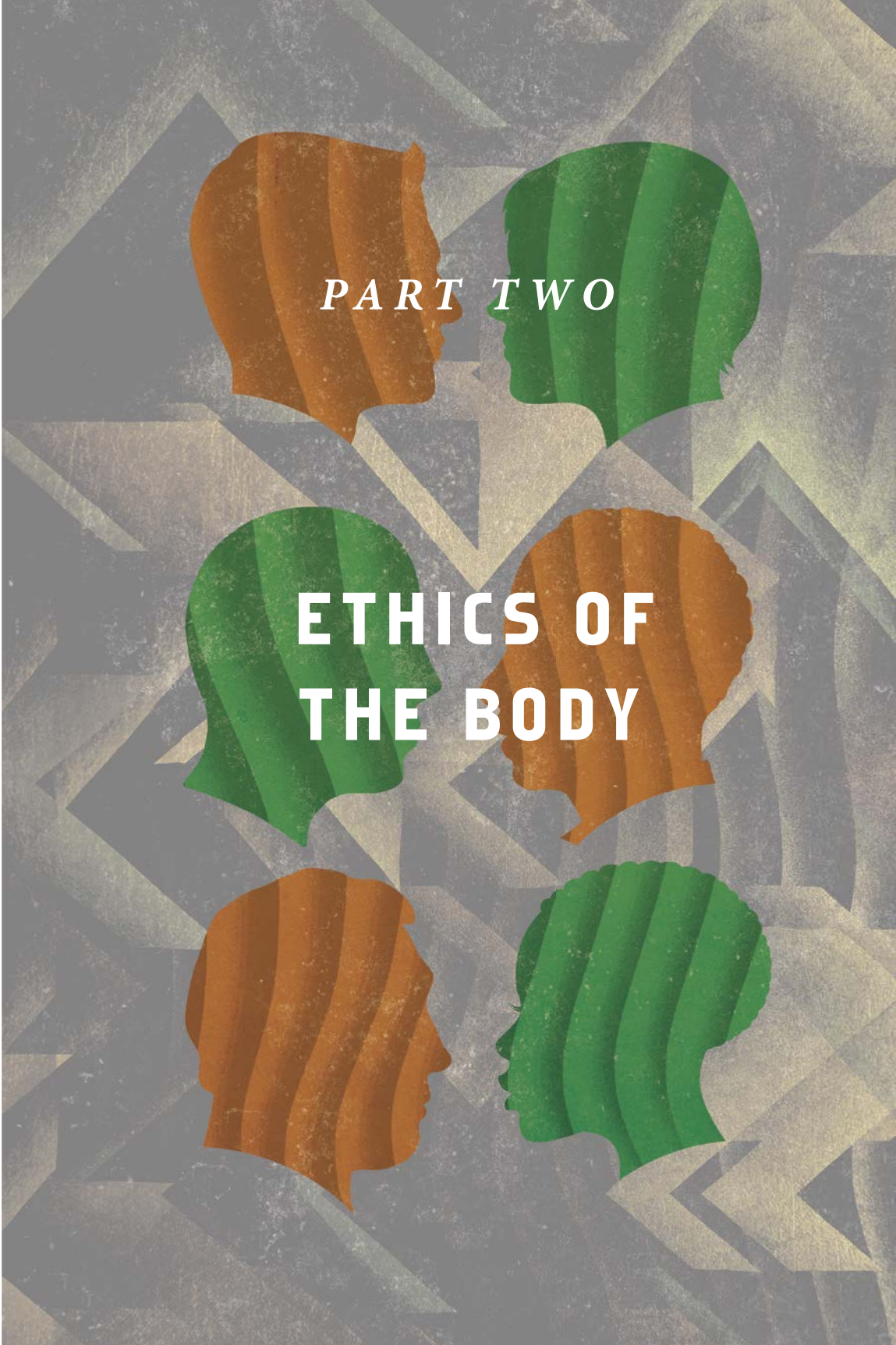
Pew Research Center. "Origins and Destinations of the World's Migrants, 1990-2017." www.pewglobal.org/2018/02/28/global-migrant-stocks/.

Rowen, Beteh. "Immigration Legislation." www.infoplease.com/us/immigration/legislation-timeline.html.

Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2016.

### *Media and documentaries*

*All of Me*. Directed by Arturo González Villaseñor. Acanto Films, 2014.
*Human Flow*. Directed by Ai Weiwei. 24 Media Production/Amazon Original, 2017.
*The Stranger*. Produced by Linda Midgett. Evangelical Immigration Table, 2014.
*Who Is Dayani Cristal?* Directed by Marc Silver. Pulse Films, 2014.



*PART TWO*

# ETHICS OF THE BODY

# 5

# ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

*Brian White*

## REAL LIFE

On April 8, 2016, the director of Uganda's cancer institute at the Mulago Hospital announced that the country's only radiotherapy machine, used for the treatment of a broad range of cancer patients, had finally broken down beyond repair.[1] This machine typically treated around one hundred patients every day, and the hospital received nearly forty-four thousand new referrals each year, not only from Uganda but also from the neighboring countries of Rwanda, Burundi, and South Sudan.

The news hit fifty-five-year-old Victoria Akware hard. She had recently sold her land to help pay for the long trip to the Uganda Cancer Institute to receive treatment for her cervical cancer. For the patients who can afford it, another radiotherapy machine is available in Kenya.[2] But this was not an option for Akware. "I feel terrible, plus I'm in pain and I don't have money for expenses. We are broke, there is no money to do anything. What remains is to pray to God to help me."[3] Akware could not even afford to return home and instead was forced to wait, unsure of her future, at a hostel set up for women cancer patients.

This story is typical of the type of scarcity of medical resources confronted by those who are sick in poorer, developing nations, where technically advanced treatments are often hard to come by. Limited supply of equipment and physicians

---

[1]Nii Akrofi Smart-Abbey, "Uganda's Sole Radiotherapy Machine Breaks Down, Cancer Patients at Risk," *Africanews*, April 8, 2016, www.africanews.com/2016/04/08/uganda-s-sole-radiotherapy-machine-breaks-down-cancer-patients-at-risk/.

[2]BBC Africa, "Uganda's Radiotherapy Machine for Cancer Treatment Breaks," *BBC World News*, April 8, 2016, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35997075.

[3]Catherine Byaruhanga, "Uganda Cancer Patients in Limbo After Radiotherapy Machine Breaks," *BBC World News*, April 15, 2016, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36047346.

can lead to difficult decisions for hospitals and doctors to ration health care resources. However, it is not just in cases of advanced therapies that the global disparity in health care is apparent. The Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa in 2013 underscored just how limited even basic health care can be in certain areas of the world and the devastating results that such disparity can bring about. In Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, the spread of the epidemic was exacerbated by the scarcity of basic health care resources like protective equipment for doctors and nurses and a health care infrastructure already overextended from dealing with malaria and other endemic diseases.[4]

## REAL WORLD

This disparity in access to quality medical care is not limited to developing nations. Rather, it is an international phenomenon felt even in wealthy nations like the United States. A 2016 report by the US Department of Health found that racial minorities and those who are poor suffer disproportionate limitations in receiving necessary medical care. Those classified as "poor" received "worse access to care" on all access measures compared to higher income individuals.[5] African American newborns are 2.2 times more likely to die than white newborns.[6] Latinxs are 70 percent more likely to have diagnosed diabetes compared to non-Latinx Caucasians.[7] Importantly, this gap in health care access and quality has remained largely unchanged over the past decade.[8] This fact demonstrates both how complex and deeply rooted the problem is. Certainly, the philosophical debates regarding the types of health care system are important, as we will discuss shortly. But just as significant are the more subtle, structural forms of disparity. For example, when Jenny Woo, a Korean American, was diagnosed with gestational diabetes, she was given a meal planner that was meant to help her calculate and control the amount of carbohydrates in her meals. However, the meal planner was designed around "typical" American meals and did not consider staple parts of Jenny's regular diet like rice.[9] While a relatively small issue, this example

[4]Anthony S. Fauci, "Ebola—Underscoring the Global Disparities in Health Care Resources," *New England Journal of Medicine* 371 (2014): 1084-86.

[5]AHRQ, "National Healthcare Disparities Report, 2016," www.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqrdr/nhqdr16/index.html.

[6]AHRQ, "National Healthcare Disparities Report, 2015," www.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqrdr/nhqdr15/index.html.

[7]American Diabetes Association, http://main.diabetes.org/dorg/PDFs/Advocacy/flyer-advocate-latino.pdf.

[8]AHRQ, "National Healthcare Disparities Report, 2016," www.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqrdr/nhqdr16/index.html.

[9]Story taken from a personal discussion in February 2014. Name has been changed out of respect for privacy.

demonstrates how subtle assumptions can compound to create worse health outcomes for minorities.

Key to the discussion of health care access is the relatively recent concept of health care as a human right. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) from 1948 claims: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and *medical care*."[10] This understanding of health care as a basic human right has been influential in serving as the basis for health care reform in many nations, calling attention to the disparities in access to medical care that exist between different racial, ethnic, and economic groups.[11]

However, the concept of health care as a human right is not without controversy. In particular, there is the question of obligation. If medical care is a human right, then who has the obligation to provide that care? Should rich people and countries help to pay for the medical needs of the poor? Should this be a legal obligation? Or is "charity" the best model to provide for these basic needs?

Especially in Europe, the right to medical care has been interpreted as an obligation for governments to provide universal health care to their citizens. However, in the United States, the right to medical care is also often framed in opposition to the right to individual liberty. In the case of a universal health care system in which the cost of care is distributed through taxes, there is a sense in which one is being forced to pay for another person's care. Even though we may idealistically wish to provide for the sick and needy, we may have concerns about paying for the care of individuals who have failed to take responsibility for their own health.

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

At the societal or structural level, there are typically three primary models for distributing national health care resources: (1) universal, (2) mixed or two-tier, and (3) private or market-based.

***Universal.*** Universal health care systems are also known as single-payer or socialized health care systems. Systems of this type have been practiced in Canada and much of western Europe and are typified by tax-based universal coverage and national ownership or control of medical services. The primary strength of this system is that it ensures at least a minimal level of care to everyone. Single-payer systems have often

[10] *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, article 25, www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/, emphasis added.

[11] Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Theolgical Bioethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 137-38.

been criticized, however, for inefficiency and sometimes debatable quality of care compared to private health care systems.[12]

***Mixed or two-tier.*** A mixed or two-tier system strives to provide a middle ground between a purely universal and a purely market-based health care system. There is a significant range of diversity in the ways that a two-tier system could be implemented, with some providing a minimum level of care universally, while others simply provide a "safety net" of care for those without the means to purchase care on their own. All two-tier systems are intended to provide universal *access* to health care while also encouraging market-based competition. However, in reality, the benefits of such a system are mixed. One particular downside of the two-tier system is greater complexity—both for patients and for medical providers.

***Private or market-based.*** The market-based insurance model lies on the opposite end of the spectrum from the single-payer system. Within this system, health services are privately owned and distributed. Medical care is treated as a marketable commodity rather than an absolute right. Many see efficiency and innovation as the primary benefits of such a system. Because health care providers are forced to compete with each other for patients, costs are driven down. In theory, better care and innovation is rewarded with more patients. The most obvious downside to a market-based system is that it is profit-driven, limiting one's care only to what one is able to afford. Such a system would rely largely on charity to provide care to those without the means to purchase care on their own.

Which system should Christians support? What insight does Scripture provide? As we begin to explore these questions, we will consider the perspectives of three prominent Christian ethicists. All three agree that care for the sick and the poor is central to the Christian witness. Where the perspectives differ is in their views regarding what form of health care system biblical justice requires. Scott Rae, one of the ethicists we will be considering, identifies three distinct aspects of biblical justice that are relevant to the issue of health care access: equality, need, and merit. These are helpful variables to consider during our discussion, as underlying the differences between each of the viewpoints we will be looking at is the tension that exists between these three principles of justice.

[12]Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 134.

**Table 5.1**

| POSITION | VARIABLE: JUSTICE EMPHASIS | MAIN CLAIMS | REPRESENTATIVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Universal | Equality | Health care is a human right | Lisa Sowle Cahill |
| Mixed (or Two-Tier) | Need | A fair minimal level of health care is a human right | Allen Verhey |
| Private (or Market-Based) | Merit | Health care is a market commodity | Scott Rae[1] |

[1]As we will discuss below, Scott Rae's position is not purely market-based. He also advocates for some level of a social safety net through charity and government programs that extend beyond the market. However, Rae does emphasize the free market as the primary and most just means for providing access to health care (which makes his position distinct from Allen Verhey's). Moreover, Rae rejects an understanding of health care as a human right, arguing instead for health care to be viewed as a market commodity.

***Universal health care (equality).*** Many mainline Protestant denominations as well as the Roman Catholic Church have consistently advocated for more universal and equitable access to medical resources. In 2016, for example, the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution calling for a single-payer health care system in the United States.[13] In 1993, the Roman Catholic bishops of the United States issued a joint resolution, which asserted, "Every person has a right to health care. This right flows from the sanctity of human life and the dignity that belongs to all human persons, who are made in the image of God."[14] Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have both denounced the commoditization of health care resources, arguing that health care must be considered "a universal good to be guaranteed and defended from becoming a mere 'product' subjected to the laws of the market, hence accessible to few."[15]

The Roman Catholic position is especially notable due to such clear and public statements as well as the significant number of Catholic-run hospitals and clinics that serve the nation's health care needs. The Catholic Health Association reported in January 2016 that "1 in 6 patients in the U.S. is cared for in a Catholic Hospital," and that with more than six hundred hospitals, "the Catholic health ministry is the largest group of nonprofit health care providers in the nation."[16]

[13]United Methodist Church, "Health Care for All in the United States" in *Book of Resolutions* (2016), www.umc.org/what-we-believe/health-care-for-all-in-the-united-states.

[14]U.S. Bishops, "Resolution on Health Care Reform," *Origens* 23, no. 7 (1993), section IA.

[15]Pope Benedict XVI, "Address to Participants in the International Congress Organized by the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers," November 17, 2012, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121117_hlthwork.html.

[16]Catholic Health Association of the United States, "Catholic Health Care in the United States," January 2016, www.chausa.org/about/about/facts-statistics.

To better understand the moral and theological grounding that has stood beneath the Roman Catholic stance urging more universal access to health care, we will turn to Lisa Sowle Cahill as our representative of this position.[17] In her work on medical ethics, she draws primarily from the long tradition of Catholic social thought but also incorporates insights from feminist and liberation theological traditions. We will begin by considering some of the key biblical themes that Cahill identifies within the Catholic position.

As we saw in the quotation from the bishops' resolution, the theme of human dignity as beings created in God's image is central to the Catholic vision for health care. Human life, from this perspective, is not something that can be "commodified"—you cannot put a price on life. For the Catholic bishops, this fact leads them to assert that basic health care should be understood as a right—something that everyone, as bearers of God's image, should have access to, regardless of wage, age, sex, or race. This vision of equality leads Cahill to reject a market-based health system. As she explains, "Universal medical care will never be accomplished by the market alone. . . . Markets are good at meeting demand efficiently, but not at equity, if equitable access to a resource is defined as access according to need."[18]

Exegetically, Cahill draws upon the biblical image of "Jesus' healing ministry to society's outcasts"[19] and "the biblical call to heal the sick and to serve 'the least of these,'" noting in particular the parable of judgment at the end of Matthew 25.[20] This emphasis on the poor and the sick that we find in Jesus' own ministry reinforces for Cahill several key principles of Catholic social teaching: the concept of the common good and the preferential option for the poor.[21]

According to Cahill, the Catholic vision of the common good speaks especially against the "religion of the market," which has become incredibly powerful in the field of health care with the growth of for-profit health care providers and the pharmaceutical industry. Human worth in this worldview is defined as economic worth, and the highest good is individual autonomy. Against this, Cahill argues that Christians understand human life as a life "in community and in solidarity with others."[22] We are not isolated

[17]Lisa Cahill is a theological ethicist at Boston College. She has written and taught extensively on the topic of medical ethics. Her books include *Bioethics and the Common Good* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2004) and *Theological Bioethics*.

[18]Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 133.

[19]Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 1.

[20]Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 143.

[21]Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 45, 143, 145. For a helpful summary and list, see www.catholicsinalliance.org/catholic_social_teaching.

[22]Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 30.

individuals. Rather, we are brothers and sisters, and when one of our members is hurting, we all share in that suffering. It is precisely for this reason that a preferential option for the poor is needed. This principle finds its basis in both Jesus' own ministry to the poor but also in the Hebrew prophetic tradition in which God used prophets to call attention to the injustice of neglecting the poor and marginalized.

Cahill recognizes that care for the poor in terms of access to medical services can be done in several different ways. In the United States, the poor are supported by what has come to be called the "social safety-net," which includes social services like Medicaid but is primarily dependent on charity hospitals.[23] This type of charity care is essential, but, as Cahill argues, it should not be understood as the solution to the problem of health care access. In addition to neglecting the importance of preventative medical care, emergency charity care also "enables other members of society to assume that the poor do not need guaranteed equitable access, because they will somehow be able to get essential access when they need it."[24] Charity, in other words, should not be viewed as a replacement for justice. For these reasons, Cahill argues, "U.S. citizens have an obligation to seek equity and universality in access to the goods necessary for health in their own national community."[25]

***Two-tier approach (need).*** The next position can be described as a *strong two-tier system*. Distinct from a safety-net approach, this system provides a basic level of care to all while allowing for care beyond this universal baseline to be purchased on the free market. Allen Verhey, a representative for this approach, argues that this type of a system is a necessary compromise between what we hope for, as Christians, and the reality of our sinful, fallen condition.[26] Verhey's perspective is grounded in the recognition of the inherent tragedy that comes from living in a sinful world that is filled with disease but with limited resources to cure even the diseases for which we have treatments.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10) serves as the jumping-off point for Verhey's reflections on a Christian response to health care reform. For Verhey, compassion is at the heart of this story. The compassion of the Samaritan leads him to stop, to bind the man's wounds with oil and wine, and to even pay for his care at a nearby inn. As Verhey summarizes, "Medicine is full of the sad stories . . . of people

[23]Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 148.
[24]Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 149.
[25]Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 132.
[26]The late Allen Verhey (1945–2014) was a professor of theological ethics at Duke Divinity School and wrote many books on medical ethics, including *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine*. Notably, he contributed the "Protestant Perspective on Access to Healthcare" in the *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* (1998).

left 'half dead' by injury or disease. The appropriate human and Christian response to such stories has always been compassion and care."[27]

However, Verhey reminds us that we cannot directly equate this biblical parable to our present-day situation. Scarcity is a reality we cannot ignore: "Suppose the oil and the wine and the stay at the inn left the wounded man in the story only half alive. Would the Samaritan continue to pay for his care? Or suppose he encountered another neighbor on the side of the road when he returned to pay the bill for the first wounded traveler. Would he do the same for this second neighbor?"[28]

In other words, Verhey argues that we must lead with compassion, but compassion alone is not enough to guide us in light of the real, concrete limitations we face. In addition to the compassion of the Good Samaritan, we need the justice of a Fair Samaritan.[29] When we fail to respond with compassion, we forget the sanctity of the lives at stake. At the same time, though, fairness is necessary to be able to respond to the challenge of scarcity.

To illustrate this tension, Verhey cites the example of the Seattle Artificial Kidney Center, which needed to decide how to allocate kidney dialysis treatment in 1961, when the technology first became available. There were far too many patients to treat, and so they chose to provide dialysis only to those patients whom the committee deemed to be the "most deserving, the most valuable to society."[30] This approach was roundly criticized once the news broke of this method of selection. "A strategy of denying sanctity was—and remains—morally unacceptable."[31]

Later, in 1972, the United States Congress responded to the growing need of kidney dialysis by passing a law that would provide almost universal funding for the treatment. However, the cost of this program was expensive, and "a policy providing kidney dialysis for everyone still distinguishes those dying from end-stage renal disease from those dying from other equally grave diseases."[32] Even with a universal health care system, decisions regarding where public funds will be directed have to be dealt with.

At the heart of this tension is the question of justice. As Verhey points out, the parable of the good Samaritan is told by Jesus to a young lawyer who was seeking to "justify himself." The amazing thing about Jesus' answer to this lawyer, though, is that the parable does not immediately lead us to identify with the good Samaritan. Rather,

[27] Allen Verhey, *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 362.
[28] Verhey, *Reading the Bible*, 361.
[29] Verhey, *Reading the Bible*, 369.
[30] Verhey, *Reading the Bible*, 367.
[31] Verhey, *Reading the Bible*, 367.
[32] Verhey, *Reading the Bible*, 367.

Jesus invites the lawyer to first identify with the man lying half-dead on the side of the road. Before we get to the Samaritan, we—along with the lawyer—are reminded of the human vulnerability to suffering that we all share.[33] This is the beginning of understanding God's justice.

God's justice in the Bible is on the side of the one beaten and broken—the poor, the marginalized. We see this in the Old Testament, in the proclamations of the prophets against "the pride of kings and of wealth."[34] And we see it most clearly in the person of Jesus, who was both healer of the sick and the preacher of good news to the poor. For Verhey, when we look closely at what the Bible says about God's heart for the poor and the overlap that this demonstrates between God's compassion and God's concern for justice, we must find ourselves nudged toward "the notion of justice in the direction of a social requirement that health care be provided to the sick poor."[35]

For Verhey, this means that *need* should be the fundamental criterion for distributing health care resources and not the ability to pay. Even acknowledging the fact that economic forces can provide important incentives for productivity and creativity, Verhey notes that there are certain services that simply cannot be distributed according to wealth, like police protection and education. "To provide police protection only to those who can pay for it would be unjust," and medical care falls into a similar category.[36] In a civil society, both must be guaranteed to those who need it.

Ultimately, then, Verhey suggests that a fair Samaritan would call for a minimum of a "two-tier" system, in which an "adequate level" of health care would be guaranteed and publicly provided universally. Beyond this "decent minimum" level of care, one can use the ability to pay as a standard for further distribution, allowing "market mechanisms to allocate medical care above and beyond that level" in the same way that one might hire a tutor to supplement one's public education.[37]

Importantly, though, Verhey concludes his thoughts with a reminder and a lament. Such a two-tier system, while perhaps good enough for a fair Samaritan, is hardly enough to satisfy a good Samaritan. "To provide a decent minimum of care is both possible and, we have argued, required by a *just* compassion. But not to provide the best care for any patient is not, therefore, good. It remains tragic."[38] For this reason, as Christians, we must always push for policies that continue to raise the "decent

[33]Verhey, *Reading the Bible*, 376.
[34]Verhey, *Reading the Bible*, 380.
[35]Verhey, *Reading the Bible*, 381.
[36]Verhey, *Reading the Bible*, 383.
[37]Verhey, *Reading the Bible*, 384.
[38]Verhey, *Reading the Bible*, 386.

minimum" level of guaranteed care until the very best care can become a possibility for everyone.

***Market-based health care (merit).*** Both Verhey and Cahill advocate for systems of health care allocation that are consistent with an understanding of health care as a human right. In this section, we will consider a market-based approach that rejects this rights-oriented perspective and instead argues that health care should be considered a marketable commodity. Scott Rae, a Christian ethicist who has specialized in medical and business ethics, advocates for this type of market-driven approach to health care.[39] Central to Rae's argument is the understanding that business can also be used for the glory of God's kingdom. In tying business and medicine together, Rae acknowledges that we often feel uneasy mixing these two worlds together—the altruistic world of medical care and the bottom-line driven world of business. However, as Rae points out, this is not a new arrangement. Business has always been a part of medicine, to the extent that doctors have always been paid for their services.

The problem, according to Rae, is not with business playing a role in the medical system. The problem is with the way that our medical system has developed. As he argues, when the patient only ever sees the cost of a co-pay or our insurance premium, then there seems to be no downside to ordering that extra test or using the premium brand of medicine. When there are no incentives for some members of the population to be frugal in their use of medical resources, other members of the population suffer from that waste.[40]

For this reason, *stewardship* is central to a Christian response to health care access. We need to wisely balance "between the patient's best interests and the interests of the entire patient population."[41] To this end, Rae argues that medicine and business cannot be understood as completely separate fields with contradicting goals. HMOs and the for-profit managed-care system have proven to be able to reduce costs and minimize waste.[42] Within such a system, doctors are not paid according to the services they provide but rather a flat fee each month. Rae acknowledges that within these systems, there may be financial incentive to undertreat patients, and there are many horror stories shared about patients who have "either been denied care or given

[39]Scott Rae has served as the dean of the faculty and chair of the department of philosophy at Biola's Talbot School of Theology. He has also written extensively in the areas of medical and business ethics, including *Brave New Families: Biblical Ethics and Reproductive Technologies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) and *Bioethics: A Christian Approach in a Pluralistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[40]Scott B. Rae and Paul M. Cox, *Bioethics: A Christian Approach in a Pluralistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 260.

[41]Rae and Cox, *Bioethics*, 261.

[42]Rae and Cox, *Bioethics*, 273.

substandard care apparently for cost reasons, and have suffered or even died as a consequence."[43] But, Rae argues, while such horror stories are very personally convicting, they ignore the broader, social harm that comes from approaches that deny scarcity altogether.

The question remains, however, as to which Christian principles should be applied to the business of medicine, especially with regard to the distribution of care and resources. Rae identifies several key criteria for a biblical understanding of justice that are relevant to a just distribution of medical resources: *need, merit,* and *equality*.[44]

Beginning with *equality*, we find that equality "is rooted in the principle of fairness and respect for human dignity, ultimately rooted in the image of God."[45] However, Rae argues that because of the reality of scarcity, equality alone is not sufficient as a principle of justice. This leaves the concepts of *need* and *merit*. The criterion of need is supported in the Bible's firm mandate to care for the poor. "God has a special concern for the poor that is captured in the Old Testament and was something for which Jesus became well known in his public ministry."[46] However, Rae argues that *merit* also plays an important role in a biblical understanding of justice. "It is assumed in both Testaments that if people are able to work to earn their share of society's goods, they are obligated to do so. If they are able and unwilling to work, they do not merit a share of society's goods (1 Thess 5:12-14; 2 Thess. 3:6-10)."[47] Rae notes that in Scripture, poverty was sometimes considered a misfortune, but other times it was understood as resulting from laziness—a lack of moral character (Prov 6:6-11; 10:4-5; 24:30-34). In these situations, the sluggard is not entitled a share in any of society's goods.

Ultimately, then, Rae argues that as we think about health care, the Bible mandates a concept of justice that is a blend of *need* and *merit*. "Clearly there should be a high place for health care resources delivered on the basis of need."[48] But there are not enough resources to provide for the needs of everyone. "Thus there is also a legitimate place for merit, as measured by the ability to pay."[49]

As Rae summarizes, "For those who have genuine need and no ability to pay, our theological principles drawn from Scripture would suggest that society has an obligation to meet this need. For those who have need and the ability to pay, society has no

[43]Rae and Cox, *Bioethics*, 258.
[44]Rae and Cox, *Bioethics*, 269.
[45]Rae and Cox, *Bioethics*, 269.
[46]Rae and Cox, *Bioethics*, 270.
[47]Rae and Cox, *Bioethics*, 271.
[48]Rae and Cox, *Bioethics*, 272.
[49]Rae and Cox, *Bioethics*, 272.

obligation to pay for their health care resources."[50] The system Rae is describing is a market-driven, two-tier health care system, but one in which there is no universally provided minimum level of care. Those without the ability to acquire health care should be provided for through minimal public programs and private charity efforts. However, those who *can* afford their own medical care should receive no public provision. For this reason incentives should be put in place to help individuals save for their health care and make better decisions about how to purchase medical services. "This would involve, minimally, using insurance for catastrophes, in the same way we use auto insurance (we don't expect our auto insurance to pay for our oil changes and gas!), allowing for insurance companies to compete nationally and expanding the tax advantages and incentives for medical savings accounts."[51]

Rae compares his approach to health care distribution to the distribution of other basic-level commodities, like food and housing. "We have a vigorous market for both food and housing, and those who cannot afford them are given help, through food stamps, subsidized housing, and various private-sector charity efforts."[52] Because health care is best understood as a commodity, from Rae's perspective, it is entirely possible for an individual's poor choices to put her in a situation of being unable to receive the medicine she needs. In other words, if I earn enough money that I *should* be able to purchase health care, but I spend that money frivolously, it is not the obligation of society to provide for my care. Of course, private charities and personal communities can step into these situations of personal failing. But this is not a requirement of justice.

In this respect, Rae's position differs from Verhey's, even as they both advocate a two-tier system to some degree. Fundamentally, Verhey considers health care to be a right, and as such, there is no "merit" or "worth" that should be required to receive a basic level of care. This is why Verhey advocates a universal public provision of care up to a certain level. Additionally, Rae's perspective glosses over the fact that there are some respects in which health care cannot be treated as a simple commodity. For example, one cannot "shop around" for a hospital in the same way that one might check Yelp reviews for a restaurant. Many communities, especially in rural areas, are served by a doctor or medical facility that effectively enjoys a monopoly of business. For this reason, many of the benefits of the free market (cost efficiency, competition on quality of care) only exist in theory but not in actual practice.

[50]Rae and Cox, *Bioethics*, 272.
[51]Rae and Cox, *Bioethics*, 148.
[52]Rae and Cox, *Bioethics*, 148.

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

Especially in the current political climate of the United States, the issue of health care reform has been extremely politicized and divisive. However, as our discussions have demonstrated, care for the sick and the poor remains an important part of the biblical witness. Moreover, the essential role that health plays in our lives means that these are issues that we cannot simply avoid. Because we are mortal beings who become sick, injured, and old, we will all have to deal with the questions of how to seek out adequate care in times of need. The key question is whether our response to these issues will be primarily formed by Scripture or by other societal narratives and ideologies.

Looking back at the authors we highlighted above, one of the key points of divergence between them was in their particular emphases and understandings of the requirements of biblical justice. Cahill's understanding of biblical justice is centered on equality, especially human dignity. Human dignity grounded in the image of God requires, from Cahill's perspective, that *equality* of health care access should be the priority for a truly just system. This idea of justice brings her to look critically at the role that racial bias and systemic injustice has played in developing the deep disparities in health care access and outcomes between people of different races and ethnicities in the United States.[53] She recognizes the inherent social inequality that exists for minorities. This is one reason why she rejects any form of market dependence for health care access. Even in the case of a two-tier system, structural racism and inequality will lead to a situation in which minorities are marginalized and given less or worse care than those in the majority.

Verhey's perspective is unique in the way that he argues for not only a two-tier approach to health care but a two-tier approach to justice as well. Similar to a Niebuhrian distinction between love and justice, Verhey argues that *fairness* may be the most that is possible for determining a just system of access to health care today. However, as Christians, we should always long for a system that exceeds fairness—indeed, one that is truly *good*. We see this challenge reflected in Verhey's exegesis of Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan. The compassion that Jesus expresses for the poor, sick, and marginalized is a powerful image, and one that we are called to bear witness to in a world of brokenness. This emphasis on compassion also demonstrates Verhey's clear recognition of need as the most important criterion for a just distribution of health care resources.

[53]Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 133.

Rae provides an interesting counter-perspective in that his survey of justice in the Bible is broader, but it lacks the more nuanced hermeneutic found in Cahill's or Verhey's work. The breadth of Rae's analysis is a strength of his perspective, drawing from very diverse parts of Scripture (both the Old and New Testaments, the prophets, Proverbs, the Gospels, and the Epistles) to achieve a more complex understanding of biblical justice, which includes an aspect of *merit*. Like Cahill, Rae acknowledges the special concern that God has for the poor, but beyond the more structural aspects of justice, Rae also draws upon those passages that deal with individual character. He cites Proverbs 24, which "suggests that those who were able but not willing to work are the sluggards and the lazy for whom there is little compassion and no deserved share of society's goods."[54] While he does add a footnote to suggest that we cannot draw a one-to-one comparison between the poor in the Bible and in our current society, unlike Cahill, Rae does not strive to translate the economic world of Scripture to our current context. He simply lets the Scripture stand on its own.

One way that we see all of these different aspects of justice (equality, need, merit) brought together in the Bible is in the concept of covenant. Against the Western ideal of the autonomous individual, human life is made up of a mix of periods of relative autonomy and relative dependence. The biblical concept of covenant speaks to the interconnectedness we experience in community through both our dependence and independence. In the Bible, God uses covenants as a way of establishing moral communities bound by a mutual history and by obligations toward one another. This covenant relationship is not like a contract—easily broken, discarded, and dissolved. A covenant is marked by fulfillment of obligations that go beyond the mere letter of the law, because such obligations are understood not just as defining a momentary task, but as defining an enduring communal identity. In the New Testament, we find this type of covenantal bond expressed by the apostle Paul with the metaphor of a body made up of interconnected parts. When one part of the body suffers, the whole body feels that pain (1 Cor 12:26). Cahill draws on this image of the body when she similarly argues that Christian life is one lived "in community and in solidarity with others."[55]

For most of us, our lives will move through periods of independence and dependence—times of health and times of illness. If we understand ourselves simply as autonomous individuals, responsible for our own well-being, the best we can hope for during times of illness and need is a contractual relationship that is dependent on

[54]Rae and Cox, *Bioethics*, 272.
[55]Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, 30.

our own ability to pay for needed care. Anything beyond this is charity. However, if we understand ourselves as belonging to a covenantal community, we share responsibility for one another. This means that in times of independence, we are tasked with the care of those who cannot care for themselves. In times of dependence, we receive the gift of care that comes from belonging to the covenanted community.

Importantly, this way of understanding our covenantal relationship with one another helps to bridge together the three aspects of justice we have seen emphasized in various ways by the authors above: equality, need, and merit. By virtue of its interconnectedness, a covenantal community will strive for *equality* of care. As one member suffers, the whole community shares in that suffering. Similarly, *need* is acknowledged as a criterion of justice within a covenantal community by recognizing times of both dependence and independence among its members. Finally, *merit* is found in the covenantal emphasis on mutual obligation. Because we belong to one another, I am obliged to provide for myself, as much as I am able. However, unlike a contract, a covenant is not broken when that obligation is not met—when one fails to merit or earn his or her keep. Grace is just as much a part of a covenant relationship as merit, if not more.

## PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Ultimately, the Bible does not mandate a particular health care system. However, the obligation of care for the sick—and particularly care for those who are poor, sick, and marginalized—is a task consistently mandated for God's people. Followers of Jesus should do everything they can to seek wisdom in providing for equitable health care access in the societies in which they live, as is consistent with their proclamation of the gospel.

However, health care advocacy does not take place entirely at the federal, governmental level. There is much that can be done on a more local scale as well. Elizabeth Piatt, for example, suggests that one way churches and individuals can become practically engaged in the struggle that many face in receiving medical care is to become a patient navigator. She explains, "It seems the health care system [in the United States] is organized in a way that expects patients to be advocates for themselves and to know the right questions to ask of the right people. This way of conducting the business of medicine limits the flow of vital information, especially to patients with limited education and an inability to access information resources."[56] Patient

[56]Elizabeth Piatt, "Navigating Veronika: How Access, Knowledge, and Attitudes Shaped My Sister's Care," *Health Affairs* 34, no. 2 (2015).

navigators—people who are trained to help patients navigate the complexity of the health care system—can provide much needed guidance during times of vulnerability. Even hosting a seminar with a health care specialist who is familiar with different health care options in a local community could be a powerful resource for those struggling through the system.

Looking back to the story of Victoria Akware, we can imagine how we might respond. Certainly, we can grieve the inequality of access to specialized equipment like a radiation machine. But more than this, we should call such inequality an injustice. Men and women like Victoria are members of our human covenantal community. Perhaps if someone were willing to navigate the system with her, she could find alternative care or resources that would allow her to seek the treatment she needed internationally.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you think each position would respond to the issue of growing health care inequality, such as was described at the very beginning of the chapter?
2. Racial and ethnic disparity in health care is one of the primary challenges faced by many in the United States. How do you think each position responds to this problem, if at all?
3. All three authors draw upon Christian Scripture, imagery, and values in making their arguments. To what extent do you think each position is convincing to you and your community? Why?
4. Health care is one of the major social issues that our world continues to grapple with. Are there ways that you could communicate the key moral principles of each position to non-Christians without relying on knowledge of Scripture or a theological perspective? If so, how would you do it?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

De La Torre, Miguel. "Life and Death." In *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*. 2nd ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014.

Grimes, William R. "Starting a Free Clinic in a Rural Area: People in a Small Kentucky Town Pool Their Talents to Solve the Access Problem." In *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*, ed. Therese M. Kotva and Jospeh J. Kotva Jr. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.

Maldonado, Teresa. "Sick of Being Poor." In *On Moral Medicine*, ed. Kotva and Kotva.

Townes, Emilie Maureen. *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death: African American Health Issues and a Womanist Ethic of Care*. New York: Continuum, 1998.

Vigen, Aana Marie. "Listening to Women of Color with Breast Cancer: Theological and Ethical Insights for U.S. Healthcare." In *On Moral Medicine*, ed. Kotva and Kotva.

———. *Women, Ethics, and Inequality in US Healthcare: To Count Among the Living*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

Catholic Health Association. *Ethics Lab 3: Facing Disparities in Health Care*. www.chausa.org/store/products/product?id=499.

Christian Community Health Fellowship. www.cchf.org.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. "Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor." August 2003. www.elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Health-Care?_ga=1.105938307.1055979731.1462834838.

Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. "Statement on Health Care Reform." March 2010. https://blogs.lcms.org/2010/lcms-issues-statement-on-health-care-reform.

National Center for Cultural Competence. *Sharing a Legacy of Caring*. Winter 2001. https://nccc.georgetown.edu/documents/faith.pdf.

Nielsen, Nancy L. *Using Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor in Your Congregation*. Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2004.

Presbyterian Church (USA). "An Affirmation on Advocacy on Behalf of the Uninsured." 2002. www.pcusa.org/resource/resolution-advocacy-behalf-uninsured/.

United Methodist Church. "Health Care for All in the United States." 2008. http://umc-gbcs.org/resolutions/health-care-for-all-in-the-united-states-3201-2008-bor.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. "A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform." 1993. www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/health-care/upload/health-care-comprehensive-care.pdf.

### *Media and documentaries*

Catholic Health Association. "Righting Health Care Disparities: The Theological and Moral Imperative." March 2012. www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8fkDlxfFfo.

*Clínica de Migrantes*. Directed by Maxim Pozdorovkin. HBO, 2017. www.hbo.com/documentaries/clinica-de-migrantes.

*Escape Fire: The Fight to Rescue American Healthcare*. Directed by Matthew Heineman and Susan Froemke. CNN Films, 2012. www.escapefiremovie.com.

"Minority Health Disparities: Michelle's Story." Johns Hopkins Medicine, 2017. www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlVZKZNXYBA.

*Sick Around the World*. Directed by T. R. Reid. Frontline, 2008. www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/sickaroundtheworld/.

*Unnatural Causes*. Produced by Larry Adelman. PBS, 2008. www.pbs.org/unnaturalcauses/.

*U.S. Health Care: The Good News.* Directed by T. R. Reid. PBS, 2012. www.pbs.org/program/us-health-care-good-news/.

*The Waiting Room*. Directed by Peter Nicks. International Film Circuits, 2012. www.whatruwaitingfor.com.

# 6

# ABORTION

*Nick Brown*

## REAL LIFE

On November 27, 2009, a twenty-seven-year-old pregnant mother of four children was admitted to St. Joseph's Hospital Center in Phoenix because she had difficulty breathing. She was entering her twelfth week of pregnancy, and physicians at St. Joseph's examined her and initially diagnosed her with partial heart failure. They also determined that her condition was so severe that her chances of dying by carrying her pregnancy to full term were "close to 100%."[1] Termination of the pregnancy was therefore considered to be the best course of medical treatment.

However, because St. Joseph's is a Catholic hospital, this treatment recommendation had to be reviewed by the hospital's clinical ethics committee. Upon much anguished deliberation and debate, the committee ultimately agreed that an induced abortion should be authorized in order to preserve the life of the young mother. The abortion was performed, and the young woman survived and recovered.

Shortly afterward, however, Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted—the bishop of the Catholic diocese of Phoenix—learned of the induced abortion and asked to speak directly with Sister Margaret McBride, a member of St. Joseph's ethics committee. After their conversation, Bishop Olmsted decided that Sister McBride's recommendation to authorize the abortion not only directly contradicted the Catholic Catechism's strict prohibition against abortion but also violated the United States

[1]Barbara Bradley Hagerty. "Nun Excommunicated for Allowing Abortion," National Public Radio, May 19, 2010, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126985072.

Conference of Catholic Bishop's (USCCB) Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Care Services.[2]

Sister McBride and other members of St. Joseph's ethics committee passionately argued that their decision to authorize the abortion was ethically sound and medically appropriate since it was in accordance with Directive 47 of the USCCB's *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Care Services*, which states, "Operations, treatments and medications that have as their direct purpose the cure of a proportionately serious pathological condition of a pregnant woman are permitted when they cannot be safely postponed until the unborn child is viable, even if they will result in the death of the unborn child."[3] Thus this case vividly and tragically captures the competing moral claims at the heart of the debate about abortion.

## REAL WORLD

What this case powerfully demonstrates is that a proper theological and ethical evaluation of abortion does not always easily lend itself to being either "pro-life" or "pro-choice." Both positions were pro-life in one way while permitting harm to a life at the same time.

Before examining the larger question of abortion from the perspective of Christians, it is important to attend to some of the key attitudes and legal issues from within the abortion debate, both in the United States and around the world.

***Public perceptions of abortion.*** Within the United States, public advocacy for and against legalized abortion after Roe v. Wade has tended to remain relatively stable over time. Recent public polling shows that as of 2017, 57 percent of all US adults favor abortion being legal in all or most cases, while 40 percent of all US adults think it should illegal in all or most cases.[4] This is very close to the 1995 statistics of 60 percent of all US adults approving, and 38 percent of all US adults disapproving. Recently, approval has gone up some from the statistics of 47 percent approving and 44 percent disapproving in 2009.[5]

Public support of abortion is also directly tied to which month during the pregnancy an abortion is performed. A majority of US adults (61 percent) think an abortion should be permitted in the first trimester of a pregnancy (one to three months), and 31 percent do not. When it comes to the second trimester of a pregnancy (three

[2]United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Care Services*, 5th ed., www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/health-care/upload/Ethical-Religious-Directives-Catholic-Health-Care-Services-fifth-edition-2009.pdf.

[3]USCCB, *Ethical and Religious Directives.*

[4]"Public Opinion on Abortion: Views on Abortion, 1995–2017," Pew Research Center, Religion and Public Life, July 7, 2017, www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/public-opinion-on-abortion/.

[5]Pew, "Public Opinion on Abortion."

to six months), support for legal abortion drops to 27 percent, while opposition rises to 64 percent. This level of opposition is even more pronounced in the third trimester of a pregnancy (six to nine months) with 80 percent holding that abortion should be illegal, with only 14 percent thinking it should be allowed.[6]

With respect to religious affiliation in the United States, 70 percent of white evangelical Protestants hold that abortions should be illegal in all or most cases, as do 41 percent of black Protestants and 44 percent of Roman Catholics. On the other hand, 80 percent of those who identify as being religiously unaffiliated support abortion being legal in all or most cases, as do 55 percent of black Protestants and 53 percent of all US Roman Catholics.[7]

Regarding gender, US women and men register comparable levels of support for abortion with 59 percent of all US women supporting abortion in all or most cases, along with 55 percent of all US men. And while a majority of all US adult blacks and whites think abortion should be legal in all or most cases—62 percent and 58 percent, respectively—the views of adult US Hispanics is more split, with 50 percent saying abortion should be legal in all or most cases, and 49 percent saying it should be illegal in all or most circumstances.[8] As to the cause(s) of this attitudinal variation on abortion across different racial cohorts, studies indicate that the reasons correlate with age, gender, level of church or religious community involvement, and political affiliation.[9] People who are highly involved in church life tend to oppose abortion at high rates. This factor that cuts across racial differences, especially among US Latinos who identify as conservative Protestants.[10]

When comparing US attitudes on abortion to the public views of other countries, the United States is comparatively moderate in terms of level of support. For instance, when asked whether an abortion should be permitted "whenever a woman decides she wants one," 40 percent of all US adults answered yes. This compares with 78 percent of all adults in Sweden and 13 percent of all adults in Brazil. Conversely, only 6 percent of all US adults agreed that abortions should never be permitted compared with 1 percent in Great Britain and 16 percent in Mexico.[11] In a similar vein, 49 percent

[6]"Abortion," Gallup, last modified May 2017, http://news.gallup.com/poll/1576/abortion.aspx.

[7]Pew, "Public Opinion on Abortion."

[8]Pew, "Public Opinion on Abortion."

[9]J. Scott Carter, Shannor Carter, and Jamie Dodge, "Trends in Abortion Attitudes by Race and Gender: A Reassessment Over a Four-Decade Period," *Journal of Sociological Research* 1, no. 1 (2009): 1-17.

[10]John P. Bartkowski et al., "Faith, Race-Ethnicity, and Public Policy Preferences: Religious Schemas and Abortion Attitudes Among US Latinos," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 2 (2012): 343-58.

[11]J. Lester Feder, Jeremy Singer-Vine, and Jina Moore, "This Is How 23 Countries Around the World Feel About Abortion," June 4, 2015, www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/this-is-how-23-countries-around-the-world-feel-about-abortio?utm_term=.piJnWpRlp#.yswQV89A8.

of all US adults think that having an abortion is morally unacceptable, compared to 93 percent of all Filipino adults and 14 percent of all French adults.[12]

Surveying this data, it is extremely difficult to figure out which particular factors account for the differences in public perception about abortion. Even so, it is safe to say that the level of religious or church involvement is one key reason people oppose abortion both in the United States and around the world.

***Demographics of abortion.*** According to the Guttmacher Institute's research, 75 percent of all US women receiving abortions in 2016 were either considered poor or low-income. Sixty-two percent of US women receiving abortions had a religious affiliation, and 59 percent already had one or more children. Sixty percent of US women having an abortion were in their twenties, and 12 percent were teenagers, of which 4 percent were minors. Thirty-nine percent of US women receiving abortions were white, 28 percent were black, 25 percent were Hispanic, and 6 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander.[13]

Among women receiving abortions in other countries, the Guttmacher Institute found that women between twenty and twenty-nine years old received a disproportionately high number of abortions in low- and middle-income countries. Within Asian and European countries, women between thirty and thirty-nine received a disproportionate number of abortions.[14]

***Legal issues around abortion.*** In terms of the laws that regulate abortion within the United States, two US Supreme Court cases are most important. These are Roe v. Wade (1973) and Planned Parenthood v. Casey (1992).

*Roe v. Wade.* In 1973, in a 7-2 decision, the majority of US Supreme Court justices ruled that a woman has a constitutional right to receive an abortion. They connected this to the right to privacy found in the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. At the same time, the court ruled that the woman's right to privacy must be balanced against the federal and state governments' interest in establishing laws to protect a woman's health and to protect potential human life (the developing fetus). To balance all of these competing concerns, the Supreme Court ruled to permit states the authority to regulate access to abortion in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy.

[12]"Global Views on Morality," Pew Research Center, Global Attitudes and Trends, May 1, 2013, www.pewglobal.org/2014/04/15/global-morality/table/abortion/.

[13]"US Abortion Patients," Guttmacher Institute, May 9, 2016, www.guttmacher.org/infographic/2016/us-abortion-patients.

[14]"New Study Highlights Demographics of Women Who Have Abortions in 28 Low- and Middle-Income Countries," Guttmacher Institute, May 10, 2017, www.guttmacher.org/news-release/2017/new-study-highlights-demographics-women-who-have-abortions-28-low-and-middle.

*Planned Parenthood v. Casey.* In 1992, the Supreme Court upheld Roe's decision to affirm a woman's constitutional right to an abortion but also replaced the trimester framework for allowing state regulation of abortion with an "undue burden" standard. As Bridgette Dunlap explains:

> *Casey* replaced *Roe*'s trimester framework, which set out different standards for what restrictions are permissible by trimester, with the "undue burden" standard. Under *Casey*, the government may try to promote potential life from the outset of pregnancy—but only by trying to influence a woman's decision, not by trying to hinder her once she has made it. A law with the purpose or effect of placing a substantial obstacle in the path of a woman seeking a pre-viability abortion is "an undue burden" on her right and thus unconstitutional.[15]

This ultimately served to make it easier for women to get abortions and to make abortion more socially acceptable. In terms of international law, the United States is one of fifty-eight countries that legally permit abortion upon request. Countries only permitting abortion to protect the health of a woman number 134, and six countries prohibit abortion altogether.[16]

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

People within the Christian tradition over time have held that that abortion is profoundly tragic and deeply wrong because it is the willful destruction of a vulnerable human life. It was precisely this radical commitment to preserve and protect human life in all its vulnerability (especially for infants or people who were ill) that most set apart the earliest Christian (and Jewish) communities from the surrounding Greco-Roman cultures.[17]

---

[15] Bridgette Dunlap, "Three Constitutional Basics Every Abortion Rights Supporter Should Know," Rewire, June 17, 2016, https://rewire.news/article/2016/06/17/three-constitutional-basics-every-abortion-rights-supporter-know/.

[16] Andree Gorman, "The 9 Countries with the Most Draconian Abortion Laws in the World," Business Insider, December 15, 2016, www.businessinsider.com/countries-strictest-abortion-laws-2016-12. On May 26, 2018, the Republic of Ireland held a popular referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment of its constitution, which granted an equal right to life for both a mother and an unborn child, thus placing significant restrictions on abortion. The repeal vote won handily (66.4 percent to 33.6 percent) and paves the way for Ireland to expand the circumstances in which abortions are legally permitted.

[17] The historical and textual evidence attesting to the early Christian condemnation of the first-century Greco-Roman practice of infant exposure is vast. For three recent studies that document a representative sample of this condemnation and its theological and ethical underpinnings, see O. M. Bakke's *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), Erkki Koskenniemi's *The Exposure of Infants Among Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), and Larry Hurtado's *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

Because this has been the case throughout the history of Christianity, those Christians who believe there are reasons to nuance or overturn this sacred obligation must give thorough and convincing reasons why. Christians who believe there should be exceptions to protecting and preserving vulnerable human life (like a developing fetus) must offer especially compelling theological and moral rationale. They need to show why modifying or removing this obligation either results in something morally equivalent or an even higher good, or prevents a greater moral evil from taking place.

With these observations in mind, we will now explore three distinct Christian ethical responses to abortion. For the sake of clarity, these perspectives will be called the *natural law*, *pro-choice*, and *pro-life* perspectives.

**Table 6.1**

| RESPONSE | VARIABLE: HUMAN PERSONHOOD | MAIN CLAIM | REPRESENTATIVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Natural law | Human personhood begins at conception | All human life possesses intrinsic dignity and thus should be protected | Christopher Kaczor |
| Christian Pro-choice | Human personhood is contingent on the presence of cognition, sentience, and other "human features" | Although the biblical canon articulates an "expansive pro-life" ethic, there are instances in which abortion is tragically justified | Kira Schlesinger |
| Pro-life | Human personhood is expressed most fully through "unconditional acceptance and nurture of dependent, immature life" | Even though a human life should be afforded full dignity, there may be dire circumstances in which abortion is permissible | Sidney Callahan |

***Natural law perspective.*** There are a number of contemporary Christian natural law thinkers. Christopher Kaczor[18] is widely recognized as a particularly good representative of the tradition.[19]

*Human personhood.* In trying to discern what constitutes and defines human personhood, Kaczor engages the question most often raised within contemporary moral debates on abortion: "Does personhood begin at conception?" He notes that answering this question requires engagement with two related questions: "Is every

[18]Christopher Kaczor is a professor of philosophy at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. He is also an appointee to the Pontifical Academy for Life and has been a Consultor to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

[19]See, for example, *A Defense of Dignity: Creating Life, Destroying Life, and Protecting the Rights of Conscience* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), and *The Ethics of Abortion: Women's Rights, Human Life and the Question of Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

human being a person?" and "Do human beings begin to exist at conception?"[20] The first is a "moral question" in that it "asks about who is a member of the moral community," and the second is a "biological question" in that it "seeks to know when human life begins."[21] Kaczor also perceptively recognizes that answering the question as to whether all humans count as persons will have implications on many issues outside of abortion; it also "applies to various other ethical questions such as: race relations, national rivalries, religious conflicts, slavery, criminal punishment, conjoined twins, deformed human beings, handicapped human beings, and ethnic cleansing, to mention a few."[22]

Kaczor found it important to create a definition of human personhood that both celebrated human diversity and did not make personhood something a person had to achieve. For him, all human beings are equally and fully recognized as persons not because they can do certain things or perform certain functions but because they have the same fundamental nature, namely "biological humanity."

So if all human beings are persons simply because of their biological humanity, when in the development of a fetus can we affirm that its biological humanity comes into being? This is Kaczor's second question; again, he emphasizes that it is a biological question, not a moral one. In his view, there is undeniable scientific evidence confirming that a full-fledged human being does come into existence even at the earliest moment of biological life—namely, the moment of conception.

Kaczor is therefore convinced that a human embryo "is properly classified as an individual human being rather than a collection of human cells." For whereas "skin cells are merely part of a human being without a dynamic, intrinsic operation to develop toward maturity in the human species," the human embryo, by contrast, "is a whole, complete organism, a living individual human being whose cells work together in a coordinated effort of self-development towards maturity."[23]

*Obligation to protect and preserve human life.* Having already established that all human beings are persons and that human personhood begins at conception, Kaczor thus finds the ethical question at the heart of the abortion debate to be whether it could ever be right to intentionally kill a human person. In light of this ethical conviction, Kaczor thus concludes that the "vast majority of abortions are morally impermissible" inasmuch as the "human being in utero is an innocent person, a being with right to life."

[20]Kaczor, *Ethics of Abortion*, 100.
[21]Kaczor, *Ethics of Abortion*, 100.
[22]Kaczor, *Ethics of Abortion*, 100.
[23]Kaczor, *Ethics of Abortion*, 113.

*Possible exemptions to this obligation.* Regarding rape and/or incest, Kaczor contends that while those acts are deeply wrong—and justify moral outrage—their wickedness does not change the fact that if these acts result in an embryo, that embryo is a person. The "circumstances of one's conception," he writes, "even if conception takes place because of rape, does not seem to make any difference in terms of personhood." Thus "even if a human fetus is conceived as a result of rape, it does not follow that the human fetus is not a person."[24]

Kaczor then tackles the more complicated question of whether a woman who has been impregnated by rape and/or incest is still morally required to protect and preserve the life of the person conceived. He acknowledges, "Like other women in crisis situations, women who face pregnancies due to rape deserve unconditional love and compassion *whether they choose abortion or not*." At the same time, Kaczor asserts that "true love and compassion includes honesty about difficult moral truths and, sometimes, even a call to heroic generosity."[25]

By invoking a call to "heroic generosity" and thus calling upon a woman impregnated by rape and/or incest to bring the resulting child to term, Kaczor recognizes he goes well beyond what most would consider the call of duty. In most circumstances, "one has a choice between what is morally wrong, what is morally permissible, and what is morally heroic."

Turning to cases of maternal-fetal conflict wherein the life of the mother is threatened, Kaczor acknowledges that these are "easily the most difficult cases for critics of abortion" because they pit the obligation to preserve and protect the life of the mother against the obligation to protect and preserve the life of a child.[26]

In order to properly weigh and decide upon these competing moral obligations, Kaczor appeals to thinking within the Catholic tradition, and more specifically to the principle of double effect, or what he calls "double-effect reasoning (DER)."[27] Briefly, DER stipulates that you can engage in an action that results in two outcomes (usually one positive and one negative) as long as two things are true: (1) the negative outcome is not your primary goal, and (2) there is an equally weighty positive reason for allowing the negative one to happen.[28]

Kaczor observes that applying DER to abortion, especially to instances of maternal-fetal conflict, can be especially helpful because it helps us distinguish between direct

[24]Kaczor, *Ethics of Abortion*, 196
[25]Kaczor, *Ethics of Abortion*, 196, emphasis added.
[26]Kaczor, *Ethics of Abortion*, 203.
[27]Kaczor, *Ethics of Abortion*, 204.
[28]Kaczor, *Ethics of Abortion*, 204.

and indirect abortions. According to Kaczor, a direct abortion "is properly defined as the intentional killing of the human fetus, that is, killing a human fetus either as a means or as an end."[29] DER would prohibit direct abortion, Kaczor maintains, since the negative outcome (killing the fetus) is the primary goal of the act.

An indirect abortion, by comparison, would include actions that result in the death of the fetus, but they are done with a good goal in mind—namely, preserving the life of the mother. For instance, in the case of an ectopic pregnancy, where the egg implants outside of the uterus, a surgeon may remove a woman's fallopian tube in which an embryo is lodged. This would result in the unintended death of the embryo, but this would be viewed as an indirect side effect of care for the health of the mother and not the main goal of the procedure.

Unfortunately, Kaczor does not engage in a more detailed discussion of delineating which circumstances of maternal-fetal conflict allow for indirect abortion and which do not. It would be difficult, for example, to discern how he would evaluate the dilemma at the start of this chapter. Even so, it seems reasonable to extrapolate from his discussion of double-effect reasoning (DER) that he would oppose the decision to *directly* induce an abortion, as this would be an intentional decision to destroy human life, even if done so for the compelling purposes of sparing the life of the mother.

***Christian pro-choice perspective.*** There is a growing chorus of Christian voices offering a theological rationale in favor of abortion, especially among women. Kira Schlesinger offers a particularly robust case.[30]

*Human personhood.* What constitutes human personhood in Schlesinger's estimation? Here Schlesinger appropriates Joel Feinberg's philosophical concept of "common-sense person" which holds that one achieves the status of personhood if they are one who "thinks, feels, communicates, [and] has more-or-less human features."[31] Such a definition of personhood is inclusive, Schlesinger argues, as it would include "the mentally disabled, the ill, the elderly, even those in a permanent vegetative state who have a 'residual social place'—relations, property, citizenship, etc."

---

[29]Kaczor, *Ethics of Abortion*, 205.

[30]Rev. Kira Schlesinger is an Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Tennessee. She received her master of divinity from Vanderbilt University. For a contrasting pro-choice perspective that does not invest a human fetus with a moral status, see Michele Goodwin's article "If Embryos and Fetuses Have Rights," *Law & Ethics of Human Rights* 11, no. 2 (2017): 189-224.

[31]*Pro-Choice and Christian: Reconciling Faith, Politics and Justice* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 86. Joel Feinberg was an American political and legal philosopher. His philosophical explorations of individual rights are widely recognized and hailed as being foundational for contemporary American jurisprudence. Feinberg defines the concept of "common-sense person" in a chapter titled "Abortion" that appears in *Matters of Life and Death*, 2nd edition (New York: Random House, 1986), 256-93.

In addition to giving philosophical and conceptual reasons in disagreement with those who believe an early fetus should be considered a person, Schlesinger also thinks there are sound biblical reasons to support her skepticism as well.

She reads Psalm 139, specifically verses 13-16, which are generally used to support the view that a fetus is a person. In contrast to this view, Schlesinger posits that it is a misguided biblical interpretation to conclude that "the author of Psalm 139 wrote verses 13-16 to address when life begins or the moral status of a fertilized egg, zygote or fetus." Instead, both the broader theological themes and meaning of Psalm 139 itself, as well as these specific verses, suggest "that God is the all-knowing Creator of everything that is, not a literal, objective statement about the personhood of an embryo or fetus."[32]

*Obligation to protect and preserve human life.* While Schlesinger expresses doubt about the personhood status of early fetal life, she still acknowledges the ethical commitments to preserve and protect human life that echo throughout the whole Bible. Indeed, she argues that the "whole of the biblical witness is an expansive pro-life statement, from the creation of the cosmos to the second coming of Christ."[33]

For Schlesinger, the ethical importance and resulting actions that emerge from this biblical "expansive pro-life" sentiment are clear for the contemporary Christian community. For if "we say that we follow Jesus, who has triumphed over death and the grave, then we must be broadly and passionately pro-life for all people, not just the unborn."[34]

It is on this last point that Schlesinger is especially adamant. For if the biblical canon consistently and emphatically calls Christians to be committed to protecting and preserving life in all its forms, then being pro-life "also looks like advocating against the death penalty and supporting workers who demand safer working conditions"; it means "making society safe for women by fighting sexual harassment, assault and abuse"; and it means "taking steps so that we leave a healthy planet for the generations after us."[35]

*Possible exemptions to this obligation.* While Schlesinger does not specifically name possible exceptions to this consistent pro-life ethic as does Kaczor, she nonetheless gestures toward situations where those exceptions should apply. The first is concerned with quality of life and reducing harm.

[32]Schlesinger, *Pro-Choice and Christian*, 57-58.
[33]Schlesinger, *Pro-Choice and Christian*, 92-93.
[34]Schlesinger, *Pro-Choice and Christian*, 93.
[35]Schlesinger, *Pro-Choice and Christian*, 97.

There is a substantive and qualitative difference, Schlesinger maintains, between "physical, biological life and life as the full expression of human potential." Inasmuch as this qualitative difference holds, "family members make decisions for loved ones, including young children, not to prolong life artificially and minimize suffering when recovery is not likely."[36] In the same vein, "Mothers who learn that their unborn child would most certainly suffer and die after birth are affected by these concerns."[37] While Schlesinger does not explicitly endorse abortion as morally permissible in the case of fetal deformity or significant health problems, one could reasonably infer this conclusion from her comments about quality of life and minimizing suffering.

A second situation where Schlesinger hints that abortion may be morally permissible is in instances of rape and/or incest. "Even some of the staunchest antiabortion advocates agree," she writes, "that women should be allowed access to abortion in cases of rape and incest, so as not to traumatize further the victims of these horrible crimes."[38] Here it also seems apparent that Schlesinger is emphasizing the importance of allowing women to exercise some agency over the medical treatment they receive.

In light of these exemptions, it seems that Schlesinger would approve of the St. Joseph's ethics committee's decision to induce an abortion from the opening illustration, as such a decision would not only spare both the mother and unborn child further physical suffering (and even the potential death of the mother) but also because it would afford the mother the appropriate agency to exercise informed choices about her health care treatment.

***Pro-life perspective.*** A perspective between the natural law and pro-choice perspectives is a pro-life perspective. Sidney Callahan is a pro-life feminist who helpfully navigates and integrates both of these positions.[39]

*Human personhood.* Callahan does not go as far as Kaczor in granting an embryo the status of full human personhood. She considers it difficult to determine the precise moment in the fetal developmental process when a human embryo or fetus crosses the bright line separating pre-personhood from full-fledged human personhood. Callahan is also concerned with this endeavor to establish a specific set of criteria that qualifies someone for personhood for other reasons. She notices that the qualities

[36]Schlesinger, *Pro-Choice and Christian*, 94.
[37]Schlesinger, *Pro-Choice and Christian*, 94.
[38]Schlesinger, *Pro-Choice and Christian*, 103.
[39]Sidney Callahan is a distinguished scholar at the Hastings Center and also a licensed psychologist. Prior to her appointment to the Hastings Center, she was a professor of psychology and visiting chair of moral theology and psychology at Georgetown University and St. John's University.

scholars list for someone to be considered a person tend to emphasize consciousness and self-awareness in a way that unhelpfully uplifts patriarchal values, something women should be especially wary and critical of.

So, while Callahan cannot say exactly when human personhood begins, she is insistent that what distinguishes feminism from other points of view is a "mother's unconditional acceptance and nurture of dependent, immature life."[40] As such, "Pro-life feminists who defend the fetus emphatically identify with an immature state of growth passed through themselves, their children and everyone now alive."[41]

*Obligation to protect and preserve human life.* Callahan recognizes that the foundation of the pro-choice position is the idea that a person's freedom to choose how to use the resources they have been given is necessary for them to do good or act morally.[42] This is why the pro-choice perspective argues that "if one does not choose to be pregnant or cannot rear a child, who must be given up for adoption, then better to abort the pregnancy."[43]

While this point about freedom and moral choice sometimes holds true, Callahan also emphasizes that responding well to things that happen to us that we did not choose can be an even higher example of human moral excellence.[44] And there is no more persuasive example of this kind of unchosen moral responsibility than the parent-child relationship. In this viewpoint, a "woman, involuntarily pregnant, has a moral obligation to the now existing dependent fetus whether she explicitly consented to its existence or not."[45]

But why should the fetus be able to demand a particular course of moral action by the mother? According to Callahan, this is because the fetus still has essential human life, and "human life from the beginning to end of development *has* intrinsic value, which does not depend on meeting the selective criteria or tests set up by powerful others."[46] Since the fetus is a human life that has fundamental value, it follows in Callahan's judgment that because of its "membership in the species," a human fetus possesses "natural human rights," the most basic of which is the right to life.[47]

---

[40]Sidney Callahan, "Abortion and Sexual Agenda: A Case for Pro-Life Feminism," in *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives on Medical Ethics*, ed. Therese M. Lysaught, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 941.

[41]Callahan, "Abortion and Sexual Agenda," 940.

[42]Callahan, "Abortion and Sexual Agenda," 941.

[43]Callahan, "Abortion and Sexual Agenda," 941.

[44]Callahan, "Abortion and Sexual Agenda," 941.

[45]Callahan, "Abortion and Sexual Agenda," 941.

[46]Callahan, "Abortion and Sexual Agenda," 941.

[47]Callahan, "Abortion and Sexual Agenda," 941.

*Possible exemptions to this obligation.* Callahan does not explicitly address situations in which the human fetus's right to life and the mother's moral responsibility to protect that right may be qualified or violated. The closest she gets to engaging such a question is when she states that the so-called "hard cases" of abortion only constitute "3 percent of today's abortions."[48] But even here she does not spell out what those "hard cases" are, nor does she explain whether these "hard cases" could warrant an exception to the moral commitment to protect and preserve fetal life.[49]

In the absence of direct comment, it seems fair to assume that in the case of the opening vignette, Callahan would adopt a position similar to that of Schlesinger. Since this is clearly not a situation where the mother is intentionally turning away from her unchosen responsibility (to value the life of her unborn child), the ethics committee's decision to allow the abortion was, though tragic, ethically permissible.

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

In listening to the diversity of moral convictions dominating the current political debate on abortion, I am struck by one persistent theme: incoherence. Obviously the "pro-choice" and "pro-life" positions are incompatible, and their key values are stated as being dramatically different. On the one hand is the extreme defense of individual choice at the expense of all else, and on the other hand is the extreme defense of the preservation of human life at the expense of all else.

In light of this moral deadlock, perhaps the most useful and faithful contribution the Christian community can make to the abortion debate is to articulate coherently the clarity of its own values and convictions—with a coherence that sees a commitment to protecting and preserving life as a seamless garment. How might the Christian community begin to live our commitments consistently with respect to abortion? Despite their differences, there exists enough common ground between the natural law, pro-choice, and pro-life perspectives to suggest some specific practices.

***A posture of hospitality.*** "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs" (Mt 19:14). Stanley Hauerwas states that the "Christian community's openness to new life and our conviction of the sovereignty of God over life are but two sides of the same conviction"

[48]Callahan, "Abortion and Sexual Agenda," 944.

[49]According to recent survey conducted by Sophia Chae, Sheila Desai, Marjorie Crowell, and Gilda Sedgh, from 2008 to 2010 the top three reasons US women cited for having induced abortions were being financially unprepared (40 percent), not being the right time to have a child (36 percent), and partner-related concerns (31 percent). Risk to maternal health (3.8 percent) and risk to fetal health (2.7 percent) were cited as the penultimate and last reasons respectively. See "Reasons Why Women Have Induced Abortion: A Synthesis of Findings from 14 Countries," *Contraception* 96 (2017): 233-41.

because as Christians we believe that "we have the time in this existence to care for new life, especially as such life is dependent and vulnerable, because it is not our task to rule this world or 'make our mark on history.'"[50] The natural law, pro-choice, and pro-life perspectives all affirm the Christian duty to protect and preserve human life as a bedrock moral value, because such life is viewed as the creation and domain of God's love.

So perhaps one of the most radical and powerful ways that Christians can testify to and embody this truth—in a culture that increasingly sees the creation of new life as either a burden and encroachment on the self or as a project to be perfected—is simply to be a community of gracious hospitality that loves and welcomes children as they are. For it is by learning to welcome all children into their midst—with all their beauty, but also in all their vulnerability, dependency, and messiness—that Christians come to know and testify to the truth that ultimately children are not our own but gifts entrusted to us.

Practices that encourage and maintain this posture of welcoming children can take a multitude of forms: the inclusion of children in worship and liturgy, congregational-based daycare and preschool, crisis pregnancy centers, congregational support for adoption, and celebrating and nurturing families of children with physical and intellectual disabilities.

***A posture of justice.*** "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others" (Mt 23:23). Even though they disagree on whether and when a fetus is a person, the natural law, pro-choice, and pro-life perspectives all agree that the fetus possesses inherent dignity and thus should be afforded special legal protections. All perspectives also recognize that abortions performed in response to instances of rape or incest, or because of maternal-fetal conflict, constitute only a small fraction of the overall number. A far greater number of abortions occur because of the financial and economic stresses that accompany parenthood. Finally, all the perspectives acknowledge that an instance where a continued pregnancy directly threatens the life of the mother is a situation where an abortion may be tragically but morally permissible.

In light of these realities, another way Christians can witness to and practice a consistent ethic of life is to advocate for and support legislative measures that combine

[50]Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 226.

both legal protections for fetal life with economic and medical supports for families, especially women.

Christian ethicist Charles Camosy has proposed such legislation and called it the Mother and Prenatal Child Protection Act (MPCPA).[51] Among its many provisions are the following.

- Granting prenatal children equal protection of law and thus prohibiting direct or indirect surgical abortion based on mental or physical disability, gender, or race.
- Allowing direct surgical abortions in order to save the life of a mother.
- Equal pay for equal work, regardless of gender.
- Increased employment protections for women and mothers that would prohibit termination by an employer based upon real or perceived family responsibilities.
- Universal access to postpartum maternal health care.
- Increased paid pregnancy leave.
- Two years of universal and affordable child care at work and school.
- The allowance of indirect abortion in cases where it is clear the child would die at birth or soon after.[52]

***A posture of discernment and comfort.*** "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Rom 12:15). Finally, the natural law, pro-choice, and pro-life perspectives all acknowledge that the limitations and brokenness of human existence means that sometimes abortion may be a tragic, morally permissible choice, although they disagree about which situations make it allowable.

This reality calls the Christian community to not only inhabit a posture of welcome toward children but also to inhabit a similar posture of invitation and hospitality to parents or potential parents. The Christian community should create a space where those who are contemplating abortion have access to not only the community's love and support but also the community's gifts of moral discernment. In some instances, this discernment may come to the conclusion that an abortion is tragically necessary. When that is the case, the Christian community should join with those who have made this tragic decision in grieving and mourning the loss of life. In other instances, it may find that the circumstances of the situation do not warrant the tragic choice of abortion.

[51]Charles Camosy, *Beyond the Abortion Wars: A Way Forward for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 135.

[52]Camosy, *Beyond the Abortion Wars*, 155-56.

What might inhabiting such postures look like? Returning once again to the opening vignette, it would recognize and commend Bishop Olmsted's deep-seated commitment to honoring the sacredness of human life and his work to ensure that the medical community and public-at-large keep those commitments. By the same token, it would recognize and commend Sister McBride's and the ethics committee's decision to engage in the painstaking process of discerning how they could best honor the life of both the unborn child and mother. But it would also remind both that their perspectives and decisions are woven into a community who has something meaningful to say to a watching world about the sacredness of human life, precisely because we recognize that our lives are not our own.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the three perspectives on the question of what qualifies someone to be considered a person. How would you answer this question, and what sorts of biblical, theological, medical, philosophical, and legal sources would you draw upon?
2. Compare and contrast the three perspectives on possible exceptions to our theological and ethical obligation to protect and preserve human life. Do you think there are legitimate theological and ethical reasons that exempt us from this responsibility?
3. Which aspects of these positions might you draw upon to talk with people who are not informed by a Christian theological framework (e.g., secular liberals)?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

Bellinger, Charles K. *Jesus v. Abortion: They Know Not What They Do*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016.

Camosy, Charles. *Beyond Abortion Wars: A Way Forward for a New Generation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015.

Gorman, Michael J., and Ann Loar Brooks. *Holy Abortion? A Theological Critique of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003.

Greasley, Kate. *Abortion Rights: For and Against*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Haugeberg, Karissa. *Women Against Abortion: Inside the Largest Moral Reform Movement of the Twentieth Century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017.

Houle, Karen. *Responsibility, Complexity, and Abortion: Toward a New Image of Ethical Thought*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2014.

Kaczor, Christopher. *The Ethics of Abortion: Women's Rights, Human Life and the Question of Justice*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Lee, Patrick. *Abortion and Unborn Human Life*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010.

Roberts, Melinda A. *Abortion and the Moral Significance of Merely Possible Persons: Finding Middle Ground in Hard Cases*. New York: Springer, 2010.

Schlesinger, Kira. *Pro-Choice and Christian: Reconciling Faith, Politics and Justice*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017.

Steffen, Lloyd, ed. *Abortion: A Reader*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1996.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

Camosy, Charles. "Common Ground on Surgical Abortion? Engaging Peter Singer on the Moral Status of Potential Persons." *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 33, no. 6 (2008): 577-93.

Hare, Christopher D. "At the Original Position as Fetus: Rawlsian Political Theory and Catholic Bioethics." *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (2010): 677-86.

Lastochkina, Maria. "Remedying Sexual Asymmetry with Christian Feminism: Some Orthodox Christian Reflections in Response to Erika Bachiochi, 'Women, Sexual Asymmetry and Catholic Teaching.'" *Christian Bioethics: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Ethics* 19, no. 2 (2013): 172-84.

Nobis, Nathan. "Abortion, Metaphysics and Morality: A Review of Francis Beckwith's *Defending Life*: *A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion*." *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 36, no. 3 (2011): 261-73.

Stephens, Moira, Christopher F. C. Jordens, Ian H. Kerridge, and Rachel A. Ankeny. "Religious Perspectives on Abortion and a Secular Response." *Journal of Religion and Health* 49, no. 4 (2010): 513-35.

Thomas, Dan. "Better Never to Have Been Born: Christian Ethics, Anti-Abortion Politics, and the Pro-Life Paradox." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 44, no. 3 (2016): 518-42.

### *Media and documentaries*

Aronson, Raney. *The Last Abortion Clinic*. PBS: Frontline, 2005.

Grady, Rachel, and Heidi Ewing. *12th and Delaware*. HBO Films, 2010.

Shane, Martha, and Lana Wilson. *After Tiller*. Ro*co, 2013.

Tragos, Tracy Droz. *Abortion: Stories Women Tell*. HBO Documentary Films, 2016.

# 7

# TRANSGENDER

*Jennifer McKinney*

## REAL LIFE

Growing up in a conservative Christian home, Len understood that there were clearly distinct roles for men and women. He participated in his local youth group and choir, and had a strong faith in God. Len and his high school sweetheart chose to attend an evangelical Christian university. Len became a popular student there, serving on the student government and participating in chapel and a variety of Bible studies. He was proud that his education taught him to integrate his faith with his business major.

While popular with his male peers, Len found that he spent most of his time outside of class with his girlfriend and her friends in the women's residence hall. He served as a safe person for the women in the dorm, who talked with him about their relationships. He felt more comfortable with these women than the men on his floor, who consistently denigrated women in their conversations. Len found this talk extremely disturbing.

After graduation, Len and his girlfriend married and moved to another state where he began a promising business career. As they established their life together, Len became restless. Thoughts and feelings Len had always pushed aside, given his upbringing in the church, resurfaced. He found himself staying up late at night searching the Internet for answers. One night he stumbled upon a blog post of someone describing exactly his experience. He was riveted. After several weeks of pursuing similar blog posts, web sites, and the professional literature, he finally understood that he was not alone and that there was language to describe him: transgender.

As Len learned more about being transgender, he reached out to his wife, who was pregnant with their second child. Len's wife was stunned by his revelation. Over several months, they discussed the implications of Len's situation, until, together they made the decision for Len to transition to Lindsey. Having made the decision to transition, Lindsey felt hurt when many of her Christian friends and family did not support her. Lindsey says,

> Throughout my life, whenever I looked into a mirror I was struck that there was something wrong between how I looked and who I was. I always pushed those feelings aside. At points through adolescence and college, I found myself contemplating suicide. Whenever that happened, I would be instantly convicted by the presence of God and the reality that God knew exactly who I was. God had made me, and God was bigger than anything I could ever encounter or understand. My faith in God saved me then and my faith in God sustains me now.[1]

## REAL WORLD

Transgender describes the experience of someone having a gender identity that differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. High-profile gender transitions like Olympian Caitlyn (formerly Bruce) Jenner, "bathroom bill" legislation restricting lavatory use to assigned sex, and religious freedom laws that allow businesses to refuse services to LGBTQ+ people based on religious convictions have placed transgender issues on center stage in politics and religion. In the midst of American culture's changing norms, Christians are asking whether there is a difference between sex and gender, if the experience of being transgender is a lifestyle choice that goes against God's created order, or if being transgender is evidence of the diversity inherent in God's creation. Because people who are transgender disrupt the traditional idea of two distinct and complementary sexes, issues surrounding transgender can be quite contentious for Christians.

***What is transgender?*** While many cultures have traditionally recognized two gender categories, many other cultures have traditionally recognized more than two gender categories.[2] Each recorded era of history includes stories of hermaphrodites, a category used to describe people of ambiguous sex, who might be characterized today as intersex, transgender, or homosexual. In the Jewish tradition, the Talmud and Tosefta have extensive conventions for integrating people of ambiguous

[1]Case study is adapted from a personal conversation. "Len" and "Lindsey" are pseudonyms.

[2]Examples of cultures with multiple gender categories include Native American Two Spirits, Pakistan's hijras, the xanith of Oman, Japan's wakashu, the muxe of Mexico, Thailand's kathoey, and Indonesia's waira.

sex into Jewish society.[3] In the Christian tradition, eunuchs emerged as a recognized third gender category to describe those who did not fit neatly into male or female sex categories.[4]

During the latter half of the twentieth century, awareness of and interest in sex and gender variation increased. Scientific, medical, and technological advances provided more latitude and specificity in differentiating sex from gender. These advances also gave doctors the ability to alter sex characteristics, impacting people who are intersex and people who are transgender. Intersex conditions, where chromosomes, hormones, sex organs, and/or genitalia differ from a male or female pattern, affect between one in 1,500 to one in 4,500 people, depending on the definition.[5] For this population, surgeons can alter ambiguous genitalia, rendering people with intersex conditions publicly invisible.

People who are transgender have a clear male or female sex pattern, but their gender identity does not match their sex. Employing the same technology, doctors and surgeons can use hormone therapy and/or surgery to change primary and/or secondary sex characteristics to more closely align a person's body to their gender identity.[6] While intersex and transgender are substantively different, they are conceptually similar as variations to what have been seen as strict sex or gender dichotomies. Understanding intersex as it relates to sex can help foster understanding of transgender as it relates to gender.

## KEY TERMS[7]

**Sex** refers to someone's status as male or female and is characterized by chromosomes, gonads, reproductive organs, and genitalia.

**Gender** refers to the psychological, social, and cultural traits linked to a person's sex. Across time and culture, expectations of what is masculine and feminine varies.

**Gender identity** is defined as a person's deeply felt, inherent sense of being a girl /woman or boy/man.

---

[3]Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 33.

[4]Megan K. DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 66.

[5]"Answers to Your Questions About Individuals with Intersex Conditions," American Psychological Association, 2006, www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/intersex.pdf.

[6]The World Professional Association for Transgender Health, *Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People*, 2011, https://www.wpath.org/publications/soc.

[7]"Key Terms and Concepts in Understanding Gender Diversity and Sexual Orientation Among Students," American Psychological Association, 2015, www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/programs/safe-supportive/lgbt/key-terms.pdf.

**Gender dysphoria** refers to the distress or discomfort associated with a discrepancy between a person's gender identity and their sex assigned at birth.

**Gender expression** is an individual's presentation, including physical appearance, clothing and accessories, and/or behavior that communicates aspects of their gender.

**Gender nonconforming** describes individuals whose gender expression, identity, or role differs from the norms associated with their sex assigned at birth.

**Intersex** refers to a range of conditions associated with atypical development of physical sex characteristics, and can include abnormalities of the external genitals, internal reproductive organs, sex chromosomes, or sex-related hormones.

**Transgender** is an umbrella term incorporating differences in gender identity wherein a person's assigned sex at birth does not match their felt gender identity.

**Sexual orientation** is a component of identity that includes a person's sexual and emotional attraction to another person and the behavior that may result from this attraction.

**LGBTQ+** refers to the full spectrum of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning community.

Reflecting officially what has been practiced culturally, many nations (and US states) have recently passed laws recognizing more than two gender categories, lowering the barriers for people to choose their own gender identity.[8] Global estimates of the transgender population are reported between 0.1 and 1.1 percent.[9] There is no definitive cause for transgender; however, since the late twentieth century, people experiencing a disjuncture between their sex and gender identity have been characterized as experiencing a mental health disorder, which has been controversial.[10] In 2018, the World Health Organization reclassified *gender incongruence* from a mental disorder to a sexual health concern, thereby removing the stigma associated with

[8] In 2012 Argentina passed a law stating that anyone over the age of eighteen can choose their gender identity, undergo gender reassignment, and revise official documents without prior judicial or medical approval. Colombia, Denmark, Ireland, and Malta have also removed barriers to changing gender on official documents. Nepal, Pakistan, and India have each called for the recognition of a third gender, while Bangladesh's cabinet has issued a decree recognizing hijras as their own legal gender. "Rights in Transition: Making Legal Recognition for Transgender People a Global Priority," Human Rights Watch, January 2016, www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/rights-in-transition.

[9] "The Gap Report 2014: Transgender People," UNAIDS, September 2014, www.unaids.org/sites/default/ files /media_asset/08_Transgenderpeople.pdf.

[10] Areas of research include disjunctures in sex development, neuroanatomical brain differences, fetal exposure to hormones, variations in genes, and psychosocial developmental concerns. See Susannah Cornwall, "Intersex and Transgender People," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 659-60; and Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 61-80.

transgender, while preserving the diagnosis required for meeting medical needs.[11] In the United States, an effort to destigmatize transgender culminated in the *Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders (5th Edition)* changing *gender identity disorder* to *gender dysphoria*; again, this diagnosis is necessary for those seeking hormone therapy or surgery to alleviate the distress associated with being transgender and/or for aligning their bodies with their gender.

The criteria for being diagnosed with gender dysphoria vary depending on age. In children, transgender may be difficult to ascertain, since most children, at times, exhibit gender atypical behavior. Children who are transgender uniquely experience a "pervasive, consistent, persistent, and insistent sense of being the other gender."[12] Children diagnosed with gender dysphoria exhibit some degree of distress and/or impairment in functioning, as well as a range of preferences for dressing as their preferred gender and playing with toys and playmates of their preferred gender. Conversely, children who are transgender often reject dressing as and playing with the toys and having playmates of the gender that aligns with their assigned sex. Children who are transgender also tend toward a strong dislike of their anatomy and a strong desire for the physical sex characteristics that match their gender identity.

Clinical studies of children who have been referred for treatment for gender dysphoria estimate that 5 to 12 percent of girls and 2 to 6 percent of boys exhibit cross-gender behavior.[13] Of children referred for treatment, approximately 10 to 27 percent continue to experience the symptoms of gender dysphoria into adolescence.[14] A study by the Williams Institute estimates that 0.7 percent of adolescents ages thirteen to seventeen identify as transgender (approximately 150,000 youth).[15] For adolescents experiencing symptoms of gender dysphoria, approximately 75 percent have symptoms that persist into adulthood.[16]

Finding reliable estimates of the number of transgender adults is complicated. In the United States, federal and state agencies typically record legal sex (sex assigned at birth) but not gender identity. Drawing from twelve representative surveys conducted

[11]"ICD-11: Classifying Disease to Map the Way We Live and Die," World Health Organization, accessed July 16, 2018, http://www.who.int/health-topics/international-classification-of-diseases.

[12]Gender identity is formed between the ages of two and five, while sexual orientation develops around ages nine to ten. "Fact Sheet: Gender Diversity and Transgender Identity in Children," American Psychological Association, accessed May 15, 2018, www.apadivisions.org/division-44/resources/advocacy/transgender-children.pdf.

[13]American Psychological Association, "Fact Sheet."

[14]American Psychological Association, "Fact Sheet."

[15]Jody L. Herman et al., *Age of Individuals Who Identify as Transgender in the United States* (Los Angeles: The Williams Institute, 2017).

[16]World Professional Association of Transgender Health, *Standards of Care*.

between 2007 and 2016 with questions on gender identity, Esther L. Meerwijk and Jae M. Sevelius estimated the adult transgender population at 0.39 percent of the population, or almost one million American adults.[17] Utilizing data from the Center for Disease Control's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, the Williams Institute found 1.4 million Americans, or 0.6 percent of the adult population, identified as transgender.[18] Both studies found that college-aged adults (eighteen to twenty-four) were more likely to identify as transgender. These studies are consistent with research showing that the full spectrum of the LGBTQ+ community is approximately 4 to 4.5 percent of the American population (ten to eleven million people) and that millennials are more likely than older generations to identify as LGBTQ+.[19] These data may be surprising, since Americans significantly overestimate the LGBTQ+ population. More than a third of Americans place the gay and lesbian population, for example, at more than 25 percent of the total population.[20] Given the lack of education and the confusion in American culture regarding transgender, it should be no surprise to see similar misunderstandings reflected in the church.

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

In 2015 the Pew Research Center released a study on religious groups' policies regarding transgender members.[21] Christian denominational responses were quite varied. Citing biblical affirmations of the goodness and diversity of creation, the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ adopted statements encouraging their congregations to welcome people who are transgender into membership and ministry, including ordination.[22] The Southern Baptist Convention, the Assemblies of God, the

[17] Esther L. Meerwijk and Jae M. Sevelius, "Transgender Population Size in the United States: A Meta-Regression of Population-Based Probability Samples," *American Journal of Public Health* 107, no. 2 (2017): e1-e8.

[18] Andrew R. Flores et al., *How Many Adults Identify as Transgender in the United States?* (Los Angeles: The Williams Institute, 2016).

[19] Tristan Bridges, "Shifts in the US LGBT Population," *Sociological Images*, January 16, 2017, https://thesocietypages.org/ socimages/2017/01/16/shifts-in-the-us-lgbt-population/. Frank Newport, "In US, Estimate of LGBT Population Rises to 4.5%," *Gallup*, May 22, 2018, http://news.gallup.com/poll/234863/estimate-lgbt-population-rises.aspx.

[20] Lisa Wade, "Americans Way (like, Way) Overestimate the Number of Gays and Lesbians," *Sociological Images*, June 11, 2012, https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2012/06/11/americans-way-like-way-overestimate-the-number-of-gays-and-lesbians/.

[21] Aleksandra Sandstrom, "Religious Groups' Policies on Transgender Members Vary Widely," Pew Research Center, December 2, 2015, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/02/religious-groups-policies-on-transgender-members-vary-widely/.

[22] Jaweed Kaleem. "Episcopal Church Approves Transgender People Ordination," *The Huffington Post*, July 9, 2012, www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/09/episcopal-church-transgender-ordination_n_1660465.html. United Church of Christ, *Affirming the Participation and Ministry of Transgender People Within the United Church of Christ and Supporting Their Civil and Human Rights*, July 15, 2003, http://uccfiles.com/pdf/2003

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and the Roman Catholic Church opposed validating transgender identity, arguing that God's design for men and women is determined by biology rather than individual perceptions of gender.[23] Denominations falling between these two positions include the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the United Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church (USA).[24]

While Christians have no consensus on issues of transgender, they do share commitments to live faithfully as followers of Christ by valuing God's creation, the authority of Scripture, and fidelity in marriage. These commitments, however, are informed by and filtered through polarized perspectives regarding transgender. The two major perspectives are encapsulated in statements released in the summer of 2017, with a *family values perspective* represented by the Nashville Statement and a *liberation perspective* represented by several statements, including the Denver Statement and the Christians United Statement.

Released in August of 2017 by A Coalition for Biblical Sexuality, the Nashville Statement is the clearest expression of the dominant conservative Christian perspective on what constitutes biblical sexuality.[25] In fourteen articles, each comprising an affirmation and denial, the statement articulates that male and female sex, as well as heterosexual orientation, are fundamental aspects of God's creation. The statement unequivocally denies that being transgender is consistent with God's "purposes in creation and redemption."[26]

The backlash to the release of the Nashville Statement from some circles was immediate. Nadia Bolz-Weber, an Evangelical Lutheran Church of America pastor, countered the statement—article by article—with the Denver Statement.[27] Mimicking the preamble for the Nashville Statement, Bolz-Weber writes, "The pathway to full and lasting joy through God's good design for God's creatures is clearly inclusive of a variety of identities of gender and expressions of sexuality that have previously

-affirming-the-participation-and-ministry-of-transgender-people-within-the-united-church-of-christ-and-supporting-their-civil-and-human-rights.pdf.

[23]The General Council of the Assemblies of God, "Homosexuality, Marriage, and Sexual Identity," August 4-5, 2014, https://ag.org/Beliefs/Topics-Index/Homosexuality-Marriage-and-Sexual-Identity. Southern Baptist Convention, "On Transgender Identity," 2014, www.sbc.net/resolutions/2250/on-transgender-identity. Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, "Gender Identity Disorder or Gender Dysphoria in Christian Perspective," May 17, 2014, https://blogs.lcms.org/2014/ctcr-releases-paper-on-gender-identity-disorder.

[24]Sandstrom, "Religious Groups' Policies."

[25]Members from the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention comprised the Coalition. "Nashville Statement," August 30, 2017, https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/.

[26]"Nashville Statement," Article 7.

[27]Nadia Bolz-Weber, "The Denver Statement," August 30, 2017, www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber / 2017/08/the-denver-statement/.

been denied by shortsighted and limited thinking, teaching and preaching that has ruined lives and dishonored God." The coalition Christians United also responded to the Nashville Statement by affirming sex and gender diversity as a bold response to the Holy Spirit's call to renew the church's outdated understanding of sexuality and gender identity.[28]

These family values and liberation perspectives appear to be diametrically opposed to one another. Family values proponents see the distinction between male and female sex as fundamental to God's creation and the foundation of marriage and family, which serve as the basis for a moral society. Liberation proponents see an individual's identity as multi-faceted, with biological sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation as distinctive facets. While family values and liberation proponents arrive at different conclusions, both appeal to Scripture to substantiate their understandings of transgender. A third, *integrated,* perspective is emerging to bridge the family values and liberation perspectives, advocating for Christians to demonstrate empathy toward people who are transgender. Each of these perspectives is described below.

**Table 7.1**

| PERSPECTIVES | MAIN CLAIMS | REPRESENTATIVES | MINISTRIES |
|---|---|---|---|
| Family Values | Sex—male and female—is the fundamental aspect of identity. Transgender is a willful rebellion against God's design for sex. | John Piper, James Dobson, Francis Chan, Steve Gaines, Tony Perkins | Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, Focus on the Family, Southern Baptist Convention |
| Liberation | Sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation are different aspects of individuals. Transgender is a natural occurrence in creation. | Jeff Kuan, Mary Elizabeth Moore, Rachel Held Evans, Nadia Bolz-Weber | Disciples of Christ, United Church of Christ, Fellowship of Affirming Ministries, Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists |
| Integrated | There can be a disjuncture between sex and gender identity. Transgender is a medical/mental health issue that should be treated with empathy. | Mark Yarhouse | Sexual and Gender Identity Institute |

***Family values perspective: The goodness of male and female.*** The drafters of the Nashville Statement perceived a need to clarify issues of biblical sexuality, a need stemming from shifting sex and gender norms in Western culture. Family values proponent John Piper writes, "In recent years, the celebration of attempts to transform oneself from male to female, or female to male, and the normalization of same-sex

[28]"The Statement," Christians United, August 30, 2017, www.christiansunitedstatement.org.

attraction, including so-called 'same-sex marriage,' have reconfigured the global landscape of sexual ethics."[29] The Nashville Statement describes this landscape as one that "no longer discerns or delights in the beauty of God's design for human life . . . and that his good purposes for us include our personal and physical design as male and female."[30]

The Nashville Statement aligns with the teaching of a variety of conservative parachurch organizations, including the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and Focus on the Family. The statement also aligns with denominations (e.g., the Southern Baptist Convention), nondenominational churches, and high-profile evangelical pastors (John Piper, James Dobson, Francis Chan, Steve Gaines, Tony Perkins, etc.). Tenets of the statement reflecting the family values perspective can be found in the doctrines of these various pastors, denominations, and organizations. In their series on "Transgenderism," for example, Focus on the Family summarizes the perspective:

> God divinely ordered human creation to have two sexes—male and female, and He planned for sexual expression to take place within marriage between a husband and wife. In contrast, today we in the West are confronted by a spirit of "transgender" activism—flowing out of the gay rights movement—that says gender no longer matters, the distinctives of male and female are merely social constructs, the sexes are interchangeable, there are an infinite variety of genders, and gender is changeable.[31]

This statement from Focus on the Family illustrates that part of their concern with transgender is related to how biological sex defines gender roles in marriage. With the founding of the Moral Majority in 1979, traditional family values became a core public commitment for politically and theologically conservative Christians. This commitment is stipulated in Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood's Danvers Statement, which advocates for distinctive and complementary roles for men and women within marriage and church, with men bearing the responsibility of authoritative teaching and leadership in both.[32] Transgender, characterized as an extension of the gay rights movement, then violates the created order of complementary sex and roles within the family. Since marriage from this perspective is predicated on the

[29]John Piper, "Precious Clarity on Human Sexuality: Introducing the Nashville Statement," August 29, 2017, www.desiringgod.org/articles/precious-clarity-on-human-sexuality.

[30]"Nashville Statement," Preamble.

[31]"Transgenderism Brings Chaos from Order," Focus on the Family, 2015, www.focusonthefamily.com / socialissues/sexuality/transgenderism/transgenderism-brings-chaos-from-order.

[32]"Danvers Statement," Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, November 1988, https://cbmw.org / uncategorized/the-danvers-statement/.

heterosexual union of male and female, sex serves as the most consequential factor of a person's identity.

For the family values perspective, sex is an all-encompassing identity, the place where the creation of male and female illustrates God's divine ordering and separations: heavens and earth, light and dark, water and land. The pinnacle of creation is the separation of humans into two complementary sexes uniquely bearing God's image.[33] The necessity of binary sex categories is embedded throughout the Nashville Statement, which devotes its first five articles to establishing marriage as a lifelong union of one man and one woman (Article 1); that chastity outside of marriage (and fidelity within) is God's revealed will for all people (Article 2); that God made male and female distinctively (Article 3); that the different sexes have divinely ordained differences meant for human good (Article 4); and that these differences are integral to God's design for self-concept as male or female (Article 5). Thus, from a family values perspective, transgender identity is inconsistent with God's creation.

Family values proponents attribute transgender to the fall of creation and the sin that ensues. People who are transgender are thought to be making autonomous and rebellious decisions by rejecting their God-given sex. In his book *Transgender*, Vaughn Roberts summarizes his problem with transgender, stating that the fall of humanity results in disordered minds and hearts, representing a perversion of thought and a rebellion against God.[34] Concurring that transgender "is a decisive complaint or rebellion against God," Robert Gagnon writes that transgender is "an even more extreme version of the problem of homosexuality: an explicit denial of the integrity of one's own sex and an overt attempt at marring the sacred image of maleness and femaleness formed by God."[35]

The family values perspective does not believe that people are created transgender. Rather, the perspective sees people who are transgender as asserting a radical independence that distorts the physical embodiment of God's creation and subverts the freedom "found in embracing and *being who we are*."[36] Because we are God's creation, not our own, "it is not only foolish, but hopeless to try to make ourselves what God did not create us to be."[37] Since gender identity is not a matter of individual preference,

[33]"Male and Female He Created Them: Genesis and God's Design of Two Sexes," Focus on the Family, 2015, www.focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/sexuality/transgenderism/male-and-female-he-created-them-genesis-and-gods-design-of-two-sexes.

[34]Vaughn Roberts, *Transgender* (London: Good Book, 2016), 49-54.

[35]Robert Gagnon, "Transsexuality and Ordination," 2007, www.robgagnon.net/articles/TranssexualityOrdination.pdf.

[36]Roberts, *Transgender*, 35, 38, emphasis original.

[37]"Nashville Statement," Preamble.

approving of or adopting a gender identity apart from biological sex "constitutes an essential departure from Christian faithfulness and witness."[38] Thus, people who are transgender are exhorted to "resist feelings that encourage them to see themselves as anything other than the sex of their birth."[39]

***Liberation perspective: the goodness of identity.*** Proponents of the liberation perspective hail from a variety of denominations and parachurch ministries focused on the affirmation and inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community. Members of Christians United, for example, represent the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ, as well as the Fellowship of Affirming Ministries, Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, and More Light Presbyterians. High profile signers include Jeff Kuan, president of the Claremont School of Theology, Mary Elizabeth Moore, dean of the Boston School of Theology, and the late author/blogger Rachel Held Evans.

Like the family values perspective, the liberation perspective emphasizes the goodness of God's creation. Liberation proponents value male and female as part of God's design; however, they also believe that "every human being is created in the image and likeness of God and that the great diversity expressed in humanity through our wide spectrum of unique sexualities and gender identities is a perfect reflection of the magnitude of God's creative work."[40] From a liberation perspective, the existence of people who are transgender does not invalidate the goodness of male and female: "While male and female gender identity reflects a majority of the human family, God has created individuals whose gender identity does not fall on such a binary spectrum."[41] Liberation proponents are not seeking to abandon God's creation but to expand the understanding of the variety of identity inherent in that creation.

Liberation proponents, in part, are responding to traditional church teachings that make sex and gender variation invisible or that actively seek to exclude those who do not fit a strict male/female binary. Citing intersex individuals, the liberation perspective assumes that "gender identity is at least in part rooted in innate or early developing physiological systems," rendering transgender as a natural part of human gender variation.[42] Thus, Christian theologies that assume stable

[38]"Nashville Statement," Article 10.
[39]Roberts, *Transgender*, 66.
[40]"The Statement," Article 1.
[41]"The Statement," Article 5.
[42]Heather Looy and Hessel Bouma III, "The Nature of Gender: Gender Identity in Persons Who Are Intersexed or Transgendered," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 33, no. 3 (2005): 170.

and binary models of sex and gender must shift to be inclusive of those who are intersex and transgender.

Susannah Cornwall writes on what liberation means for those who do not fit a sex or gender binary:

> Liberation means being supported to live safely in a particular body, even if it is unusual and troubling, even if it is "ambiguous," and even if it is not the body that others believe one "should" have. Liberation also means emancipation from tired stereotypes about sex and gender in social and cultural terms, and from theological anthropologies grounded in outmoded medical and scientific paradigms. This entails being critical of how theologians and the Christian Churches have discussed sex and gender in the past.[43]

Liberation proponents view gender as a vital way to express humanity but do not see a male/female binary as a straightforward division of humankind. Appealing to Scripture that might be interpreted to affirms individuals who do not fit a strict sex dichotomy (Mt 19:11-12; Acts 8:26-40), the liberation perspective does not assume that humanity has a single, fixed, and timeless division of male/female sex. For people who are transgender, liberation proponents draw on the existence of eunuchs in the Scripture to infer that a sex or gender binary is not the only way to render identity. Standing outside of the conventional sex-gender categories, the scriptural eunuchs allow people who are transgender to see themselves reflected in the biblical story and to see that "like other people, they are created in the image of God and that their embodiment is good."[44] This endorsement of the variety of embodiment leads liberation proponents to critique perspectives that uphold what they consider conservative social norms rather than the integrity of the individual.

One key divergence between liberation and family values perspectives is how they conceptualize sex in the role of identity. Whereas family values proponents see biological sex as an all-encompassing identity, liberation proponents make distinctions between biological sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Thus, for liberation proponents, individuals born with a physical body that is not congruent with their gender identity are a reflection of the diversity within creation. Given each individual's unique identity through the facets of sex, gender, and orientation, liberation proponents believe that each individual should be trusted and supported "in regards to their own self-knowledge" about their identities.[45]

---

[43]Cornwall, "Intersex and Transgender People," 671.
[44]Cornwall, "Intersex and Transgender People," 672.
[45]"The Statement," Article 5.

Another divergence between liberation and family values proponents is how they view marriage. Liberation proponents believe God's design for marriage is a covenantal bond between two people (regardless of gender) who have committed to each other over the course of their lifetimes.[46] This perspective focuses on the individual's relationship to Jesus as fundamental to honoring the marriage covenant, irrespective of biological sex (or sexual orientation). For liberation proponents, making biological sex the fundamental aspect of identity undermines the complexity of individual identity and privileges heterosexual procreation as the core of marriage and family.[47]

Liberation proponents criticize the preaching of a gospel that excludes people in the LGBTQ+ community. In his response to the Nashville Statement, Jesuit priest James Martin addresses the harm the church has done in singling out LGBTQ+ individuals as "sinners."[48] Similarly, the Liturgists castigate churches that use their platform to "demean the basic dignity of gay, bisexual, lesbian, trans, intersex, and queer people" because these beliefs "have life-or-death consequences."[49] These reactions to the Nashville Statement reflect a perspective that seeks to celebrate God's creation in all of its forms.

***Integrated perspective: the goodness of empathetic understanding.*** Some family values proponents have moved away from understanding sex as an all-encompassing identity. In regard to sex, many family values proponents do affirm that people who are intersex are created in the image of God.[50] In regard to gender, there is also an understanding that for some, gender identity can deviate from biological sex. Even with this concession, changing genders is actively discouraged because family values proponents do not believe sex and gender are determinations individuals can make for themselves.[51] Others, however, are building on the movement toward disaggregating sex and gender to create more empathetic understandings of transgender.

In *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, Mark Yarhouse argues for a more nuanced response to transgender persons.[52] As a licensed clinical practitioner and professor

[46]"The Statement," Article 2.

[47]Cornwall, "Intersex and Transgender People," 671.

[48]James Martin, SJ, "Seven Simple Ways to Respond to the Nashville Statement on Sexuality," *The Washington Post*, August 30, 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/08/30/seven-simple-ways-to-respond-to-the-nashville-statement-on-sexuality/.

[49]"The Liturgists Statement," The Liturgists, August 29, 2017, www.theliturgists.com/statement.

[50]"Nashville Statement," Article 6.

[51]Stanton L. Jones, "Is Sex or Gender a Choice?" March 2013, www.efca.org/resources/document/sex-or-gender-choice.

[52]Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 22.

of psychology, Yarhouse regularly encounters Christians who struggle to understand how transgender concerns fit into a consistent Christian sexual/moral ethic. He also encounters people experiencing gender identity conflict who suffer from isolation, anxiety, and depression, due to their treatment by Christians and churches. Yarhouse theologically locates transgender as an effect of the fall of creation while also acknowledging the lack of scientific consensus regarding its etiology: "We do not know what causes gender dysphoria."[53] Additionally, he believes that being transgender does not separate people from God's love and care, nor should it separate them from the church; rather, Yarhouse urges Christians to embody a posture of compassion, not condemnation.

In creating a middle ground for Christians on issues of transgender, Yarhouse first surveys and critiques three prominent frameworks that are frequently used, consciously or unconsciously, to evaluate people who are transgender. He begins with the *integrity framework*, which views the sacredness (and complementarity) of male and female sex as immutable and essential aspects of personhood. Since this framework, drawing from a particular reading in Genesis 2, places a premium on sex as the primal part of humanity (encompassing biological sex, gender, and sexual orientation), any deviation from one's biological sex is deemed immoral. Yarhouse notes, "Theologically conservative Christians will resonate with this framework. To them, the integrity framework most clearly reflects the biblical witness about sex and gender and becomes the primary lens through which they view gender dysphoria."[54]

Alternately, and consistent with a recognition of a disjuncture between sex and gender identity resulting from the fall, the *disability framework* removes any negative moral evaluation from individuals who are transgender, because they are seen as having a mental health disorder they did not choose. Yarhouse explains, "For Christians who are drawn more to this framework, gender dysphoria is viewed as a result of living in a fallen world in which the condition—like so many mental health concerns—is a nonmoral reality. Whether we consider brain-sex theory or any other explanatory framework for the origins of the phenomenon, the causal pathways and existing structures are viewed by proponents of the disability framework as not functioning as originally intended."[55] However, it should be noted that even as it resolves the integrity framework's moral disapprobation, assessing gender

[53]Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 61.
[54]Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 47. Note the resonance here with the Family Values perspective.
[55]Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 48.

dysphoria as a disability can practically result in denying meaningful identity to those who are transgender.

Finally, by not rooting humanity in male or female sex, the *diversity framework* celebrates gender identity regardless of form. The diversity framework disagrees with and seeks to transcend both moral and disability evaluations to prioritize honoring the identity of each individual. Many Christians reject a strong version of the diversity framework, which seeks "to recast sex as *just as socially constructed* as gender."[56] A weak version of the diversity framework highlights the goodness of identity and community. Yet evangelical Christians often remain wary of a weaker version of the framework, believing that it still denies the sacredness of male and female sex, and challenges traditional gender norms. Unfortunately, rejecting either version of the diversity framework can sometimes also lead to rejecting people who are transgender.

Yarhouse "draws on the best of each existing framework" in order to craft an *integrated framework*.[57] This integrated perspective upholds the sacredness of male and female (integrity framework), treats people who are transgender empathetically (disability framework), and affirms each person's identity to provide them meaning, validation, and community (diversity framework). By maintaining the sacredness of male and female as integral to God's creation, Yarhouse draws from the core of the family values perspective. Conceptually separating sex and gender and affirming individual identity includes the core of the liberation perspective.

While Yarhouse suggests that people should work with their community and psychological or medical experts "to find the least invasive ways to manage the dysphoria,"[58] his perspective is elastic enough to allow people to adopt their gender identity through hormone therapy and/or surgery. The integrated perspective encourages family values proponents to resist "rigid gender stereotypes that frequently functions as a knee-jerk response to this cultural momentum" in their efforts to protect the distinctions of biological sex (and social gender norms).[59] The perspective also encourages liberation proponents to resist devaluing scriptural authority by embracing inclusivity and diversity at the expense of denying the sacredness of sex differences, even as "the sociocultural context in which we live in the West is rapidly moving in this direction."[60]

[56]Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 50, emphasis original.
[57]Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 53.
[58]Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 144.
[59]Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 157.
[60]Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 50.

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

***Toward a Christ-centered perspective.*** People who are transgender challenge our understanding of what it means to be made in the image of God. Family values, liberation, and the integrated perspectives each seek to faithfully interpret the Christian message in an age of changing sex and gender norms. Scripture and tradition are used to validate each perspective, yet each arrives at significantly different conclusions about what transgender is and how Christians should respond. Family values-centered and liberation-centered perspectives may both reflect aspects of Christian culture more than Christian Scripture.

Certain aspects of the family-centered perspective should be problematic for Christians. Jesus did not deny the goodness of family, but he consistently pointed to the kingdom of God as comprising a new family that demands our allegiance over and above the biological family (Mt 5:47; 10:37; Mk 3:31-35; Lk 14:26).[61] In debates over sexual ethics, family values proponents have often ignored or suppressed information about people who are transgender (and intersex) because it undermines their beliefs about God's design for male and female, especially in regard to marriage and family.[62] Since family forms and gender expectations shift across cultures and over time, even within the Christian tradition, focus on traditional family values may more accurately reflect the postwar American breadwinner/homemaker ideal than a scriptural mandate (Prov 31; Lk 10:38-41).

Likewise, certain aspects of the liberation perspective should be troubling for Christians. Focusing on individual autonomy may better reflect America's expressive individualism than biblical texts. Individual conversion is a cornerstone of Christian faith, but Jesus calls us to be the body of Christ in the context of the church. The rise of expressive individualism in American culture creates an individualistic search for a spirituality focused on personal growth and self-identity.[63] When faith becomes a pursuit where each person seeks his or her own way, congregations and churches become sources of information and services rather than committed bodies of believers united in common beliefs and rituals.[64]

Mark Yarhouse's integrated perspective pushes the boundaries of the family values perspective to legitimate the experience of people who are transgender. Yet because

[61]Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 73.
[62]DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, xv.
[63]Andrew J. Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the American Family Today* (New York: Vintage, 2009), 107-8.
[64]Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round*, 106.

they believe Scripture makes a male/female sex binary clear, family values proponents criticize the integrated perspective as relativizing Scripture.[65] Locating transgender within the context of the fall instead of within God's creative work violates core tenets of the liberation perspective. The integrated perspective seems to reach too far for family values proponents and fall far too short for liberation proponents.

In early Christianity, binary models of sex and gender had to be supplemented in order to account for the full range of human variation.[66] Jesus acknowledged people who do not fit a sex or gender binary without indicating that they are a category of people needing restoration due to sin, illness, or social deformity.[67] In fact, during the Middle Ages, eunuchs prominently served as leaders in the Byzantine Church.[68] As this history is rediscovered, churches and theologians must ask new questions to recover a more robust understanding of sex and gender.

***Lindsey.*** I invited Lindsey to the evangelical school where I teach to speak about her experience as a Christian transgender woman. Her testimony highlighted the grace of Christ, who had kept her alive to become who she was made to be. After requesting an honorarium be sent to Lindsey, I received a call from the office processing the paperwork. The person I spoke with was agitated, telling me that Lindsey's social security number was registered to a man. I explained that Lindsey was a transgender woman and her social security number must still reflect her previous name. After a long silence, the person said, "Well, I guess not everyone here is really Christian," and refused to write Lindsey a check.

Eventually Lindsey received her honorarium, but this interaction gave me a glimpse of Lindsey's experiences with some Christians and churches. Lindsey told me that she and her family, who now present as a lesbian family, were often stared at, pointed to, and in some cases simply asked to leave a church before the service even started. While Lindsey holds tenaciously to her faith, she despairs that she and her family might never be able to find a church where they can be accepted for who they are.

Striving to preserve rigid stereotypes of what it means to be male and female exacerbates the struggles of transgender (and intersex) individuals and can separate them from the church.[69] At the same time, an outright dismissal of the concerns of believers who struggle to see how (or if) transgender fits into a Christian sexual/moral

[65]Denny Burk, "The Transgender Test," in *Beauty, Order, and Mystery*, ed. Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 93.

[66]DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, 68.

[67]DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, 104.

[68]DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology,* 97-98.

[69]People who are transgender regularly experience social rejection, physical and sexual violence, and high rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide. UNAIDS, "The Gap Report."

ethic separates Christians from each other. As Christians learn more about the complexity of creation, we are also compelled to develop more comprehensive understandings of transgender, as we have with intersex. Until then, we must remember that marginalizing any member of the body of Christ, intentionally or not, undermines the transformative power of Scripture and God's redemptive intentions.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you respond to Lindsey's story and experience through the lenses of family values, liberation, and the integrated perspectives?
2. How can we celebrate the distinctives of being made male and female without excluding people who are transgender (or intersex)?
3. How does the integrated perspective address the concerns of family values and liberation proponents? Are there areas where the perspective can be strengthened?
4. How might being Christ-centered, rather than family- or identity-focused, change how Christians and churches respond to the issue of and people who are transgender?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

DeFranza, Megan K. *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015.

Hartke, Austen. *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016.

Hiestad, Gerald, and Todd Wilson. *Beauty, Order, and Mystery: A Christian Vision of Human Sexuality*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017.

Nutt, Amy Ellis. *Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family*. New York: Random House, 2016.

Walker, Andrew T., and R. Albert Mohler. *God and the Transgender Debate*. Purcellville, VA: The Good Book Company, 2017.

### *Articles, reports, and statements*

Brooks, Jon. "Children as Young as Three Are Changing Their Gender Expression. Is That Too Young?" KQED Science. May 3, 2018. www.kqed.org/futureofyou/440851/can-you-really-know-that-a-3-year-old-is-transgender.

"Gender Revolution." *National Geographic Magazine*. January 2017. Special Issue: The Shifting Landscape of Gender. www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/01/.

Signal, Jesse. "When Children Say They're Trans." *The Atlantic*. July/August 2018. www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/07/when-a-child-says-shes-trans/561749/.

Spiegel, Alix. "Two Families Grapple with Sons' Gender Identities." *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio. May 7, 2008. www.npr.org/2008/05/07/90247842/two-families-grapple-with-sons-gender-preferences.

### *Media and documentaries*

*Becoming More Visible*. Directed by Pamela French. Independent, 2016.
*Gender Revolution: A Journey with Katie Couric*. National Geographic/World of Wonder, 2017.
*Growing Up Coy*. Directed by Eric Juhola. Still Point Pictures, 2016.
*Raising Zoey*. Directed by Dante Alencastre. Film Bliss Studios, 2016.
*Real Boy*. Directed by Shaleece Haas. Independent Lens/PBS, 2017.

# 8

# HOMOSEXUALITY AND SEXUAL IDENTITY

*Matthew Jones*

## REAL LIFE

There are countless stories with which this chapter could begin, but I will use my own. For if there is one thing I have learned over the past several years of writing and speaking publicly about sexuality and faith, it is that it can be terrifying to have your life used by someone else to make a point. And in the debates surrounding homosexuality, that "point" is often weaponized, wielded against people on the other sides of the so-called "culture war." I have had my story used to condemn friends and strangers, and I have had others' stories used to condemn me. I want to avoid this pattern by offering two excerpts from my life that, I hope, add a more human dimension to the positions that will be discussed below.

In the first, I am twenty-two and sitting in my car breathing more shallowly than I would like. I had just finished my first of many meetings with the pastoral staff of the church in which I had grown up and in which I had been, until that week, interning. The meeting had made it clear, however, that the internship was terminated. This caught me off guard, as I had experienced nothing but warm friendship over the prior three years of coming out and had felt optimistic about the head pastor's request that I share my testimony with the staff. After all, I held a traditional view of marriage and was committed to celibacy, and I would even avoid using words like "gay" or "sexual minority" to avoid potential confusion. What I learned was that wasn't enough, and so I could no longer be trusted as a church leader.

For most of the pastoral staff, the presence of my attraction to men was in itself a sin for which I was morally responsible, and the implications of this became apparent during that first meeting: the conditions for any future church leadership

would require trying to become straight, training under an elder to become more masculine by changing the way I walked, talked, moved my hands when I spoke (I am an incurable flailer), and dressed. According to the pastor, my body, and the ostensibly effeminate way I inhabited it, would make the congregation rightly uncomfortable and was thus "a barrier to the gospel." I refused. So I sat in the car as those acid words ate through my skin and soul, realizing for perhaps the first time in my admittedly privileged life that my very existence was something that some people could disagree with—that I was a walking, breathing argument whether I wanted to be or not.

In the second vignette I am sitting across a table from someone, holding his hand as he cries quietly. After a long silence he asks me, "What's the point? What good comes out of your beliefs here?" After a longer silence, I admit that I don't really know anymore. This person had been profoundly hurt by his family, his childhood church, and his Christian friends and had at last stopped claiming to believe Christianity. This hadn't changed our relationship at all until after a particularly heated argument with his mother, who continued to tell him that she was praying he would stop being gay. Moments before those long silences, we had been processing through the fight when he suddenly realized that because of my still–fairly traditional beliefs about sexuality and marriage, I was *in some way* "on the same side" as all the people who had harmed him. No matter how nuanced I might try to sound, how many qualifying statements I made, or how extensive my history of being there for him in difficult moments, the behavior of other Christians and the broader cultural atmosphere had created a situation in which I hurt someone in ways that went beyond the simple pain of disagreement. Waves of powerlessness and anger began sweeping over me in that moment, and I'm not sure I've been able to come up for air since.

These brief stories bring a few key realities to the fore: that speaking of sexual ethics, in this case homosexuality and sexual identity, must never be abstracted from the real human lives that such ethics affect, and that our words are never spoken into a contextless vacuum. There are innumerable experiences and histories that precede us and change how our words are perceived and received, and we must learn how to navigate the tensions and complexities of the current discourse. The stories should also give some sense of my own positions and sensibilities: I do not pretend to be neutral, and I do not think every position has equal ethical or theological merit. That said, I am committed to presenting each approach in a way that does justice to how adherents would explain their convictions, withholding evaluation until the final section.

## REAL WORLD

***The current global context.*** It is undeniably true that there has been a massive shift in support for same-sex marriage throughout many parts of the world. This is especially noticeable in the United States, in which same-sex marriage went from being outright opposed by about 69 percent of the population in 1989 (the year Denmark became the first country to grant legal status to gay couples),[1] to gaining majority approval for the first time in 2012, to becoming the law of the land in 2015. With the Obergefell v. Hodges ruling, the United States joined twenty-six countries that authorize same-sex marriage. At the time of this chapter's writing, the most recent data from the Pew Research Center claim that over 60 percent of the entire US population sees gay marriage favorably, with millennial support reaching 74 percent.[2]

However, according to a global Pew study from 2017,[3] the vast majority of countries still largely oppose gay marriage and occupational rights, some with approval below 2 percent. Opponents of gay marriage in the United States and abroad use that fact to accuse "progressives" of the very colonial influence they vocally despise as they leverage the West's greater economic and political power to coerce countries into exchanging traditional understandings of marriage for (allegedly) Western, modern forms. Examples of this might be the Obama administration's 2011 memorandum that (in part) began a pattern of using foreign aid agencies or trade deals to "advance the human rights of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender persons" around the world,[4] or the more nefarious practice of "pinkwashing," in which a country (most notably, at the moment, Israel) promotes itself as a bastion of LGBTQ tolerance and inclusion in order to subdue detractors of their other human rights abuses.[5]

At the same time, not only is gay marriage illegal in many countries, but homosexuality itself is criminalized, and sexual minorities experience pervasive stigma, abuse, and violence that is, tacitly or explicitly, state sanctioned. Thus, many Christians

[1]Sam Frizell, "This Is How Much More Popular Same-Sex Marriage Is Today Than in 1989," October 1, 2014, http://time.com/3449788/gay-marriage-1989/.

[2]"Changing Attitudes on Gay Marriage," Pew Research Center, June 26, 2017, www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/.

[3]David Masci and Drew DeSilver, "A Global Snapshot of Same-Sex Marriage," December 8, 2017, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/12/08/global-snapshot-sex-marriage/.

[4]Barack Obama, "Presidential Memorandum—International Initiatives to Advance the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Persons," https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/12/06/presidential-memorandum-international-initiatives-advance-human-rights-l.

[5]Sarah Schulman provided one of the first in-depth examinations of Israeli pinkwashing in 2011. It is worth reading at length. Sarah Schulman, "A Documentary Guide to 'Brand Israel' and the Art of Pinkwashing," November 30, 2011, http://mondoweiss.net/2011/11/a-documentary-guide-to-brand-israel-and-the-art-of-pinkwashing/.

who would defend biblical forms of marriage end up supporting politicians or policies that profoundly betray other essential aspects of the biblical ethics they claim they are trying to uphold. In fact, the Obama administration memo that so many evangelicals railed against was specifically formulated in response to a reappearing Ugandan bill that would give the death penalty for those caught having gay sex, and the fact that some Americans were more scandalized by possible international overreach than by murder is, itself, scandalous.

***A brief history of sexual identity in the West.*** One of the few features that proponents of each perspective presented below agree on is that sexual identity, as it exists today, is a distinctly modern phenomenon. While there is disagreement about the significance of this fact, it is undisputed that the writer Karl Maria Kertbeny coined the term "homosexual" in a private letter in 1868 to describe an increasingly visible group of Germans that were being targeted by a law against "unnatural fornication."[6] Although men had been having sex with men and women had been having sex with women for millennia, what those actions have meant within their respective societies has been unfixed and often unnamed—there was never a discrete social class in the West for people who experienced romantic or sexual attraction for members of the same sex until the late nineteenth century. Indeed, the very idea of sexual orientation as a distinct category likely did not exist until recently, either.

For the first few decades after they were coined, both the terms "homosexuality" *and* "heterosexuality" denoted excessive sexual desire, with whatever constituted "normal" sexuality remaining unnamed. However, by the 1920s, heterosexuality had shed its stigma and become synonymous with normative desire, while homosexuality remained deviant from that norm.[7] The ongoing influence of psychotherapeutic or pathological understandings of homosexuality ensured it remained listed as a disorder in the American Psychological Association's Diagnostic and Statistics Manual (DSM), although exactly what kind of disorder the experts thought it was shifted over the decades. As the old psychological models gave way to the now-prevailing "human variation" model—in which homosexuality is simply a natural phenomenon, much like left-handedness—pressure to remove homosexuality from the DSM mounted until the APA finally conceded in 1973.

It is clear that categories of sexual orientation and gender identity have now become normative throughout much of the world. However, what options exist within those

[6]Jonathan Ned Katz, "'Homosexual' and 'Heterosexual': Questioning the Terms," in *Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 177.
[7]Katz, "'Homosexual' and 'Heterosexual,'" 178.

categories and how those categories relate to each other continue to change rapidly. There is insufficient space to analyze the currently prevailing identity labels, but what is most important to grasp is that sexual identities emerge from particular socio-historical contexts along with their particular notions of gender, embodiment, social hierarchy, and ethno-racial dynamics. Thus, ongoing biblical and theological reflection on sexual identity must not become too fixated on any one of those dimensions.

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

Due to the deeply personal nature of questions surrounding sexuality and identity, responses vary widely from individual to individual and often defy easy categorization. That said, it is not impossible to see certain unifying theological and social convictions that form distinct "camps": one encouraging the renunciation of all nonheterosexual identities as a witness to the centrality of gender complementarity within marriage; one supporting "traditional marriage" while remaining open to a range of non-heterosexual identities; and one affirming same-sex marriage as a viable Christian expression of nonheterosexual identities. Each section will attempt to describe the positions as charitably as possible, carefully navigating their particular appeals to Scripture, tradition, and the activity of God in the world.

**Table 8.1**

| RESPONSE | VARIABLE: APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO NONHETERO-SEXUAL IDENTITIES | MAIN CLAIM | REPRESENTATIVE (ORGANIZATION) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Biblicist Essentialism | Renunciation and potentially replacement | "Male" and "female" are the only true sexual identities | Rosaria Butterfield, Denny Burk (CBMW) |
| Adaptive Traditionalism | Provisional acceptance and sublimation | Sexual identities are helpful as social descriptions but do not change the male-female requirement of marriage | Wesley Hill, Eve Tushnet (Spiritual Friendship, Revoice) |
| Convicted Revisionism | Acceptance and potentially sexual expression in nonheterosexual marriage | Gender complementarity is not essential to marriage, nor does the Bible preclude diverse sexual identities | Megan DeFranza, Matthew Vines (The Reformation Project) |

***Biblicist essentialism.*** Toward the end of August 2017, the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) convened a group of evangelical pastors, theologians, and ministry leaders to discuss appropriate responses to the rapidly shifting cultural attitudes toward sex, sexuality, and gender. Over the course of the meeting the group drafted fourteen articles that were then collated into a single "declaration,"

which was released on August 29 as the Nashville Statement. Each article contained an affirmation of a biblical truth and a denial of its inverse. Article 1 contained its definition of marriage:

> WE AFFIRM that God has designed marriage to be a covenantal, sexual, procreative, lifelong union of one man and one woman, as husband and wife, and is meant to signify the covenant between Christ and his bride the church.
>
> WE DENY that God has designed marriage to be a homosexual, polygamous, or polyamorous relationship. We also deny that marriage is a mere human contract rather than a covenant made before God.[8]

Although each article ought to be read to gain a full picture of their argument, two claims in particular highlight the divide between this position and the other two that will follow: Article 7's "denial" and Article 10's "affirmation." The first says, "We deny that adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is consistent with God's holy purposes in creation and redemption."[9] For the authors and signatories of the Nashville Statement, adopting any "identity" beyond simply *male* or *female* is a direct challenge to God's creative intentions and human ontology (one's deepest reality). One of the Nashville Statement's highest profile signatories, Rosaria Butterfield, argues this point at length in her book *Openness Unhindered*. Butterfield, who was a tenured English professor and partnered lesbian before her unexpected conversion, stresses the need for Christians to "reject any identity that Christ has not prepared" for the believer.[10] More than this, she claims that if Christians adopt such categories or language, then they will have effectively allowed anti-Christian anthropology to usurp biblical anthropology. Noting the fact that sexual identities (and even the concept of sexual orientation) are recent phenomena, Butterfield says, "If we privilege secular categories of personhood over and against God's, we are doubting the Bible's ability to understand humanity."[11]

This confrontation between identity language and the Bible is central to Butterfield's (and the CBMW's) narrative. In fact, as Butterfield clarifies in a blog post explaining her decision to sign the Nashville Statement, "The issue is not primarily homosexuality; it's Scripture."[12] If Christians approve the use of sexual

[8]"The Nashville Statement," August 29, 2017, Article 1, https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/.

[9]"The Nashville Statement," Article 7, https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/.

[10]Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 2015), 4.

[11]Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 96.

[12]Rosaria Butterfield, "Why I Signed the Nashville Statement," August 31, 2017, https://cbmw.org/topics/the-nashville-statement/rosaria-butterfield-why-i-signed-the-nashville-statement/.

identity labels that blur the line between personhood and sexual practice and were invented in the nineteenth century, then they implicitly (like those advocating the second approach) or explicitly (like those advocating the third approach) undercut *sola Scriptura*, denying that the Bible provides sufficient revelation of human nature.[13] Christians have "no liberty to hybridize gospel truth with the world's cares. Because the Bible manifests God's character of immutability, its wisdom—while composed before the world began—anticipates our need today."[14] On this subject the Bible is a unified voice,[15] and thus although pastoral care must be sensitive to each individual story, it would cease to be truly pastoral if it compromised the integrity of Scripture. She sees many ostensibly Christian denominations and ministries as falling into this trap, obsessing over "listening" and "nuance" rather than the proclamation of God's clear Word, and she goes so far as to claim that she has "met Satan more than once in the last two years disguised as a brother or sister seeking Christian unity and peace, often twisting God's truth with heartfelt personal experience."[16]

Christians who adopt this posture often see themselves as engaged in a black-and-white conflict with society, particularly with those who adopt society's antibiblical categories. For them, the clarity of the Bible's teachings on sexuality must be communicated to the world with a matching clarity, as the stakes are nothing less than the trustworthiness of the Bible, the foundation of society (the family), and the eternal destiny of those who might otherwise be deceived by a false gospel.

Article 10 of the Nashville Statement affirms that approving of "homosexual immorality or transgenderism" is an "essential departure from Christian faithfulness and witness," denying that it is a "matter of moral indifference about which otherwise faithful Christians should agree to disagree."[17]

Although compassion and sensitivity are certainly necessary components of any expression of evangelism or pastoral care, Butterfield contends that tiptoeing around the serious consequences of accepting sexual identities (even if one still affirms "traditional marriage") does no one any favors, obscures the promises and the demands of the gospel, and offers a false, deadly freedom. In an address to a Presbyterian Church of America congregation, Butterfield explains that she thinks her conversion would have been far more delayed and difficult if it had happened in 2016 rather than 1999;

[13]Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 43.
[14]Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 46.
[15]Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 48.
[16]Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 47.
[17]"Nashville Statement," Article 10.

the new forms of "gay Christianity" would have been like quicksand between her and the cross.[18]

As society becomes more unquestionably shaped by the sexual revolution, the church must not be shamed into silence but rather, as the Nashville Statement preamble says, "draw courage from Jesus, and unashamedly proclaim his way as the way of life" and maintain a "clear, counter-cultural witness to a world that seems bent on ruin."[19] Thus, legislative matters related to normalizing sexual identities must be resisted, and weddings not between a man and woman ought to be avoided lest one give the appearance of approving sin. Even though this might be socially (and perhaps economically) costly in a post-Obergefell America, such symbolic actions remain necessary reminders to a country that seems dangerously eager to forget God's designs.

***Adaptive traditionalism.*** It is somewhat of a truism for advocates of this next position to comment on their relative "forgottenness" in the broader conversation on faith and sexuality. Although still adhering to a more traditional theology in which Christian marriage is restricted to one man and one woman, those adopting this approach to sexual ethics are often comfortable using LGBTQ labels and discussing sexual identity as a *social* reality that does not compromise one's Christian ontology. While acknowledging that language is important and that sexual identity labels can be unhelpful if given too much weight,[20] most people with this view see numerous problems with categorically renouncing such labels, especially when communicating with non-Christians. Central to this position is the idea that sexual identity encompasses far more than just the desire (or lack thereof) for sex, so certain labels are capacious enough to be used by those with a more traditional sexual ethic.

Adherents to this view share some biblical interpretive and hermeneutic moves with the previous perspective, agreeing that the scriptural expression of marriage is "premised on [gendered] bodily difference that seemed to gesture toward (albeit faintly) the transcendent difference of Creator from creature."[21] The whole biblical witness seems to affirm this, with perhaps Jesus' use of Genesis in Matthew 19:5 the most definitive example.[22] Additionally, this view, as it is heavily influenced by and developed in conversation with Roman Catholics and the great

[18]Rosaria Butterfield, Grace Presbyterian Church, December 4, 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_B7SmD1crU&feature=youtu.be&t=53m.

[19]"Nashville Statement," Preamble.

[20]Wesley Hill, "Christ, Scripture, and Spiritual Friendship," in *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, ed. Preston Sprinkle (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 143.

[21]Wesley Hill, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love and Friendship in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015), 19.

[22]Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 19.

tradition of the church, sees the rare univocity throughout the church's history as confirming that, at least on the fundamental claim about marital complementarity, the Bible is clear.

However, although they believe that the Bible prohibits same-sex sexual relationships, they will also acknowledge that there are many Spirit-filled Christians who disagree. Whereas signatories of the Nashville Statement would deny that one can be a Christian and marry someone of the same sex, writers like Wesley Hill, perhaps the most prominent evangelical advocate for this view, are a bit more ambivalent, especially as the Spirit is evident in many married gay people's lives and relationships. But while the Spirit's presence demands humility and sensitivity, it does not constitute a hermeneutical imperative to go beyond the Spirit's revelation in Scripture and tradition.

What Hill and the other writers at Spiritual Friendship (a website he cofounded that explores the topic of faith and sexuality)[23] do see as imperative is the need to develop a more robust theology and practice of community and friendship. For them, the Nashville Statement's "culture war" posture is both unnecessary and counterproductive. Not only does it end up alienating sexual minorities (many of whom are vulnerable or at risk of harm), but it also blinds Christians to the ways God might be revealing the failures of the church and calling them to repentance and transformation. Rather than blame everything on the sexual revolution of the 1960s and locate the "solution" in simply returning to prerevolution conservative values, Hill sees churches' over-valorization of marriage and failure to prioritize deeply committed community as more fundamental problems.[24]

A primary reason so many people have changed their mind on gay marriage is that it now seems almost unthinkably cruel to condemn someone to a life of lonely singleness, to deny them the chance to experience what all those songs and movies and sermons tell us is one of the most essential human experiences: falling in love and building a life with someone. Thus, Hill spends much of his time and energy urging Christians to elevate their perception and practice of friendship, because in a hypermobile society like the United States, people see friendships as too impermanent and secondary to invest heavily in, or perhaps as important only until one can find a committed romantic partner. But Hill sees in the Bible and in the Christian tradition an emphasis on the goodness and profound dignity of friendship. He argues that if churches truly acted as the family that Jesus called them to be, and if nonsexual

[23]As a matter of disclosure, I have written a number of posts for the Spiritual Friendship website.
[24]Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 11.

intimacy were more widely valued and practiced, then perhaps Christians wouldn't feel so much of the anxiety and despair that characterizes singleness or celibacy these days. Churches that focus on fighting a culture war without examining their own sins that contributed to the conflict (in particular, the abuse of LGBTQ people through harmful reparative therapy and pervasive stigma) are failing to discern the movement of the Spirit and only making a traditional sexual ethic seem further implausible to a watching world.

Predictably, members of this group do not share a consensus on what faithful political engagement looks like. Even though they do not see gay marriage as a Christian option, many are fine voting to extend the civil benefits of marriage to gay couples, and their closer association with LGBTQ communities in general makes them more likely to vote in favor of initiatives that reduce stigma and increase legal protections for sexual minorities. At the same time, questions of religious liberty are still important, and most would want churches and private religious schools and other institutions to have the freedom not to violate their convictions. Additionally, many would be willing to attend a gay friend's wedding, since the friend would already know their convictions and not going would damage the relationship in potentially irreparable ways. Given the existential complexity of what faithfulness looks like as a sexual minority in twenty-first-century America, Christians like Hill tend to be more willing to acknowledge that they might not get everything perfectly correct but rather trust that the grace of God would meet them as they try to embody the truth, goodness, and beauty of a sexual ethic that sometimes feels like none of those things.

***Convicted revisionism.*** Not everyone, of course, is convinced that the biblical text—or at least the proper application of the biblical text—forbids people from entering into loving, monogamous marriages with people of the same sex/gender. Groups such as the Reformation Project, founded by Matthew Vines in 2013, have gained influence and visibility over the recent years by developing resources aimed at equipping pastors and lay leaders to guide their congregations toward greater acceptance and celebration of LGBTQ people and their identities. While partnering with a diverse array of Christian and non-Christian groups that advocate for full LGBTQ inclusion in church and society, organizations like the Reformation Project do not see their work as the destruction or alteration of the biblical text and Christian tradition but rather as the truly christocentric expression of the gospel in contemporary context. The goal is "not to overturn the church's traditional sexual ethic, but to graft LGBTQ Christians into the heart of it" by encouraging "churches to bless

same-sex relationships in a way that is consistent with the historic marital-covenantal ethic of the church."[25]

Exemplary of this approach is the scholar Megan DeFranza, who builds a biblical case for expanding the Christian imagination beyond male-female gender complementarity as a constitutive part of Christian marriage in her book *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*. Whereas proponents of the previously discussed views will generally claim that marriage and some degree of embodied complementarity (whether role-based or simply procreative) were instituted before the fall and that postlapsarian sexual phenomena that do not match that original vision—even if they aren't necessarily sinful—do not change the fundamental reality of God's design, DeFranza argues that intersex bodies (and by extension, homosexuality) are *not* a result of the fall but are rather a part of standard anthropological variation that has existed since the beginning. Just as Genesis 1's poetic use of binaries like "day and night" or "land animal and sea animal" does not preclude the existence of twilight or amphibians, "male and female" does not preclude the pre-fall possibility of beloved humans and sexual partnerships that did not conform to a male-female binary.

While noting that "heterosexual" marriage is the norm in Scripture and tradition—especially in its significance as an analogy for Christ and the church—DeFranza's central thesis is that there is *also* a scriptural and traditional precedent for the complete integration of "eunuchs" (see Mt 19), a category that she argues extends to include intersex people and, perhaps, LGBTQ people. DeFranza is careful not to use intersex people as rhetorical pawns for LGBTQ-affirming theology, but she does see a theological connection between the groups: if intersexed bodies existed "pre-fall" and "male and female" were never the only ways to be human; if Adam and Eve "function as progenitors rather than paradigms" for human difference; if intersex bodies (along with homosexual orientations and transgender identities) are simply biological realities; if biblical authors never explicitly defended marriage "on the basis of procreative, physical, or psychological complementarity";[26] if the various injunctions against "men laying with men" are, as many scholars argue, primarily referencing pederasty or lustful excess (since "homosexuality" as an orientation did not conceptually exist then); and if noncomplementary relationships are equally capable of conforming to the biblical requirements of monogamy, *askesis*, and chastity, then the foundation for

[25]The Reformation Project, "Sexual Ethics," accessed March 20, 2018, www.reformationproject.org/sexual-ethics/.

[26]Megan DeFranza, "Journeying from the Bible to Christian Ethics in Search of Common Ground," in Sprinkle, ed., *Two Views on Homosexuality*, 98.

excluding sexual minorities from faithful romantic relationships may not be quite as solid as many have claimed.

DeFranza does not pretend that the Bible is unequivocal or uncomplicated on the topic, and so she stresses the importance of humility in making these claims. At the same time, LGBTQ-affirming Christians can have confidence because "God's living voice . . . includes not only Scripture but also the voices of creation, tradition, and the Spirit."[27] DeFranza and the members of the Reformation Project emphasize the role of the Spirit in discerning God's favor on monogamous, romantic, queer relationships; it is simply an *ad hoc* reality that LGBTQ people are, and have been, manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in powerful ways. Not only this, but the higher rates of depression, attempted suicide, and homelessness among sexual minorities who either believe in the sinfulness of gay marriage or live in a community that does are certainly *not* signs of the Spirit's confirmation. Thus, although DeFranza is willing to admit that it is perhaps easier to argue for traditional marriage from Scripture, she does not believe that is the end of the discussion. Just as the New Testament community had to wrestle with the contradiction between the Tanakh's apparent injunction *against* Gentile inclusion and the undeniable movement of the Spirit among Gentiles, Christians today should consider that perhaps God is asking them to support the "weaker position from Scripture supported by the Spirit" rather than "the stronger position opposed by the Spirit."[28] DeFranza summarizes: "If we do move 'beyond the Bible,' we must do so 'biblically.'"[29]

At stake here is nothing less than the lives of vulnerable LGBTQ people and the integrity of Christian faith and witness. Although advocates were willing to strike a more diplomatic tone while public and ecclesial sentiment were still heavily against gay marriage—often making the case that, at the very least, this could be something about which Christians should agree to disagree—the cultural shift toward LGBTQ inclusion has led to a rhetorical emphasis on the harm caused by nonaffirming theologies (such as conversion therapy or "forced celibacy"), and the ethical imperative for Christians and Christian institutions to affirm non-cishet identities has become increasingly nonnegotiable. In a post-Obergefell society, this ethical imperative usually includes supporting ballot measures that expand nondiscrimination laws in all sectors and dismantling aspects of religious freedom laws that often shield institutions from the consequences of their homophobia or transphobia and leave LGBTQ

[27]Megan DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 267.
[28]Kenton Sparks, quoted by DeFranza, *Sex Difference*, 266.
[29]DeFranza, *Sex Difference*, 267.

students/employees/parishioners inadequately protected. This political advocacy is in line with Jesus' own willingness to challenge the oppressive religious elite and elevate the marginalized members of society, and it embodies the beauty of God's justice and love to a world that is all too willing to sacrifice the most vulnerable members of society in order to maintain power and status.

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

I will provide cursory thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses of the examined approaches before offering a few closing suggestions on how to ethically and Christianly engage the questions at hand. As mentioned before, my current framework is largely similar to the one articulated by Wesley Hill—that the Bible is normative for Christian belief and practice, that both proper interpretation of the text and its proper extrapolation in historical tradition locates sex as an act reserved for marriage, and that marriage is a (potentially) procreative union between a man and woman. At the same time, the theological and ethical claims raised by Megan DeFranza and other "affirming" scholars (as well as by my own life experiences) cannot be dismissed and necessitate some degree of development to my framework that may be more definitive than I have anticipated.

The first position, as expressed by Rosaria Butterfield and the Nashville Statement, is, I think, not wrong when it takes issue with the cultural tendency to essentialize sexual identity; critics of Butterfield's claims ought to acknowledge that language is a powerful, formative thing and that many people do internalize sexual identity (or any number of social identities) in a way that might conflict with Christian anthropology. At the same time, social identities (e.g., lesbian, Latinx) are not inherently essential challenges to one's Christian identity—the distinction between *descriptive* and *definitive* is important here—and the persistent policing of language comes across as both sectarian and, given their prescriptive essentializing of damaging gender roles, hypocritical. Additionally, these beliefs tend to coincide with a view of society that does not give adequate weight to systemic injustices, often placing the burden of "sexual ethics" entirely on the shoulders of sexual minorities without considering societal factors that affect one's ability to flourish. In other words, I've noticed a pattern in this group to make certain ethical demands of Christians without providing (through passive neglect, active antagonism, or both) a context in which those ethical demands can be met in healthy ways. I consider this pattern to be abusive. It is one thing to acknowledge that Christian discipleship can be difficult and costly, and it is quite another to add weighty rocks to the light yoke of Christ and then shame someone

for growing weary. Thus, although I would need more space to develop this claim more fully, I find that the "Christian sexual ethics" of this first group often fail to be either Christian or ethical, contributing instead to unjust social structures that contradict the gospel witness.

Those that accept and use LGBTQ language—even as they acknowledge its mercurial nature—while still upholding some form of "traditional" marriage are right to strike a balance between the twin claims that celibacy/chastity is mandated outside of "heterosexual" marriage and that contemporary culture—and, particularly, a long history of church failure and bigotry—has made faithful expression of that mandate profoundly more difficult than it should be. However, because this position is so counterintuitive in most American circles for a variety of reasons, the amount of *ressourcement*, theological ground clearing, and systemic change it calls for is, for the average person/community, daunting at best. Most of the writers for this perspective are fairly educated white males with a stable socioeconomic status that enables them to cultivate their personal interests, and the lack of intersectional reflection/resources available is concerning, especially as so much of this ethic is predicated upon reimagining Christian communities to become more familial and hospitable. In other words, I do believe this view accurately diagnoses the central problems with contemporary American Christian sexual ethics and offers a compelling and coherent ethical goal for churches to aim for but struggles with offering concrete ways forward that are plausible in the diverse contexts to be found in the United States. Both this perspective and the previous one also inadequately address the experiences and concerns of intersex and trans people, especially in regard to the question of what defines one's gender.

Last, I appreciate the Reformation Project's intersectional approach to sexual ethics, and I believe their commitment to centering the statistical outlier experiences of the socially marginalized is consistent with the biblical witness. At the same time, I am unconvinced by both their biblical and hermeneutical arguments. I do not think "harm" is a substantive or specific enough ethical metric to justify "going beyond the Bible" in a fairly unprecedented way, nor am I certain that the affirmation of Spirit can be entirely determined by phenomenological criteria. And although this does not mean they are wrong, the historically unique emergence of their theological arguments following a broader cultural shift should at least give some pause, especially as language, categories, and scientific claims continue to change so rapidly.

The differences between the positions are profound, and I will not pretend to be optimistic about any collaborative possibilities; this is especially true for sexual

minorities who have traumatic histories with a particular theology. But I do think that the three groups can find some common ground in addressing certain failures of the past century. We cannot adequately discuss sexual ethics and Christianity until we reintegrate them into a broader discussion about social ethics and church life. It is my contention that a community cannot have a coherent sexual ethic if it does not consistently embody a healthy, robust social ethic within its context. Sexuality and sexual ethics are not reducible to issues surrounding sexual intercourse (although of course they are not entirely separable, either). Rather, it would be helpful to think of sexuality as primarily about *relating to others in a way that brings life into the world.* Marriage, sex, and childbirth are the obvious expressions of this, but it should be clear that they do not exhaust the category.

How we relate to others, how we form connections and interact with other bodies in space, constitutes the central issue of sexual ethics. Though perhaps a little too vague, I like to discuss sexual ethics as attempting to answer the question, "What are we supposed to do with our bodies to bring life into the world?" When society and the church reduce sexuality to matters of sex, our ability to imagine what constitutes a healthy sexuality, and thus a healthy life, is also reduced. But in a world where death abounds in so many forms of injustice—genocide, systemic racism, misogyny, militaristic nationalism, xenophobia, economic exploitation, to name just a few—we need a more *fleshed out* understanding of the relationship between sexuality and the pursuit of justice. If churches do not have a richly developed social ethic; if they are not actively involved in their communities resisting death in all its manifestations; if they have little going on aside from small groups and family ministries; then they will not have much of an answer to the question, "What are we supposed to do with our bodies?" because their vision of what bodies are for is oriented toward and centered on sex and the nuclear family. As mentioned above, this only overburdens marriages and alienates single people.

Regarding questions of sexual minorities, identity, and the definition of marriage, the frequent reduction of sexuality to sex (which cuts across the various perspectives on gay marriage) is dangerously inadequate and has contributed to the intensity of the cultural polarization. One's beliefs about whether gay marriage or sexual-identity labels are blessed by God should not prevent one from acknowledging that the overemphasis on sex and marriage (or at least on romantic relationships) as necessary for maximal human flourishing is a departure from Christian teaching and has generated numerous false premises that, unfortunately, now shape many people's instinctive reactions to the lives of sexual minorities.

Any attempt to predict how social and sexual realities will develop in the future is probably futile, but it does seem likely that the conversations will continue to shift away from homosexuality and toward gender identity, especially as trans visibility increases alongside descriptions like "pansexual" and "nonbinary." Additionally, the average age at which people are first adopting sexual identity labels for themselves continues to decrease, and most churches are unprepared or unwilling to figure out how to talk to children about these topics in a way that does justice to both the theological and social dynamics at play.

Being a sexual minority of faith in the current cultural moment feels a bit like being a brittle rope in a game of tug-of-war with far too many participants, their engagement with each other only occurring through conflict over my life experiences and choices. Rereading the various resources while writing this chapter was exhausting. I was reminded (not that I had ever forgotten) how rapidly the prevailing ideas and rhetoric have been shifting over the years and how unavoidably polarized discourse is and will continue to be. I do not know a way beyond this polarization—the foundational commitments held by the various groups, rooted in questions of ultimate justice and the will of God, by nature preclude ethical ambivalence or compromise. However, my hope is, at the very least, that by providing a bit more context to the contested terms and concepts people might better appreciate both how novel and mercurial sexual identity discourse is (which should humble us) and how that doesn't change the fact that it touches some of the deepest aspects of our humanity from the moment we are born (which, again, should humble us).

Navigating the unstable terrain of future discourse will require greater measures of unpretentious flexibility and grounded conviction. Such characteristics are not sufficient in themselves, but they *are* essential for any Christian ethic that hopes to engage the world transformatively in harmony with God's just and restorative will.

I want to conclude the same way I end most of my speaking engagements—with a benediction. This is for everyone, of course, but primarily for those for whom the topics of this chapter are much more personal realities: You are beautiful, your bodies are good, and you have so much love to give. Live deep into your gifts and callings, and use them to bless those around you, proclaim the gospel, and create a more just society. You are worthy of a community to surround and support you—a community that you can serve and support, yourselves. And the church, imperfect as it is, is a better family with you in it.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Regardless of your personal beliefs about biblical marriage and/or same-sex romantic relationships, do you think your church has healthy teachings and practices of community that decenter romance and the nuclear family in a way that better supports single *and* married people? If yes, what do you think makes them successful? If no, what are the main problems, and what are concrete steps that might be taken to address them?
2. Have you discussed same-sex marriage or sexual identity with someone who disagreed strongly with you? What seemed to make the conversation successful or unsuccessful? Given the fundamental differences between the viewpoints mentioned above (and in society generally), is constructive dialogue possible? If so, what is the goal of dialogue?
3. Given the increasingly young ages at which kids are internalizing ideas and labels referencing sexual identity, what might be some helpful strategies for equipping and empowering them to navigate these complex questions in a Christian manner?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

Cahill, Lisa Sowle. *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Callaway, Kutter. *Breaking the Marriage Idol: Reconstituting Our Cultural and Spiritual Norms.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018.

Chu, Jeff. *Does Jesus Really Love Me? A Gay Christian's Pilgrimage in Search of God in America.* New York: Harper Perennial, 2014.

Coakley, Sarah. *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God*. London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015.

Collins, Nate. *All but Invisible: Exploring Identity Questions at the Intersection of Faith, Gender and Sexuality.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017.

DeFranza, Megan. *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015.

Hill, Wesley. *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love and Friendship in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian.* Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015.

Jones, Beth Felker. *Faithful: A Theology of Sex*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015.

Lee, Justin. *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate*. New York: Jericho, 2013.

Paris, Jenell Williams. *The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex Is Too Important to Define Who We Are*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011.

Simon, Caroline J. *Bringing Sex into Focus: The Quest for Sexual Integrity*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012.

Sprinkle, Preston, ed. *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.

Tushnet, Eve. *Gay and Catholic: Accepting My Sexuality, Finding Community, Living My Faith*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 2014.

Winner, Lauren. *Real Sex: The Naked Truth About Chastity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005.

Yarhouse, Mark A., et al. *Listening to Sexual Minorities: A Study of Faith and Sexual Identity on Christian College Campuses*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender. www.centerforfaith.com.

"The Great Debate." Side-A perspective by Justin Lee: www.geekyjustin.com/great-debate. Side-B perspective by Ron Belgau: www.ronbelgau.com/great-debate.

The Reformation Project. www.reformationproject.org.

Spiritual Friendship. www.spiritualfriendship.org.

### *Media and documentaries*

*Desire of the Everlasting Hills*. Directed by Erik Van Noorden. 2015.

*Give Me Sex Jesus*. Directed by Matt Barber. Vimeo, 2015.

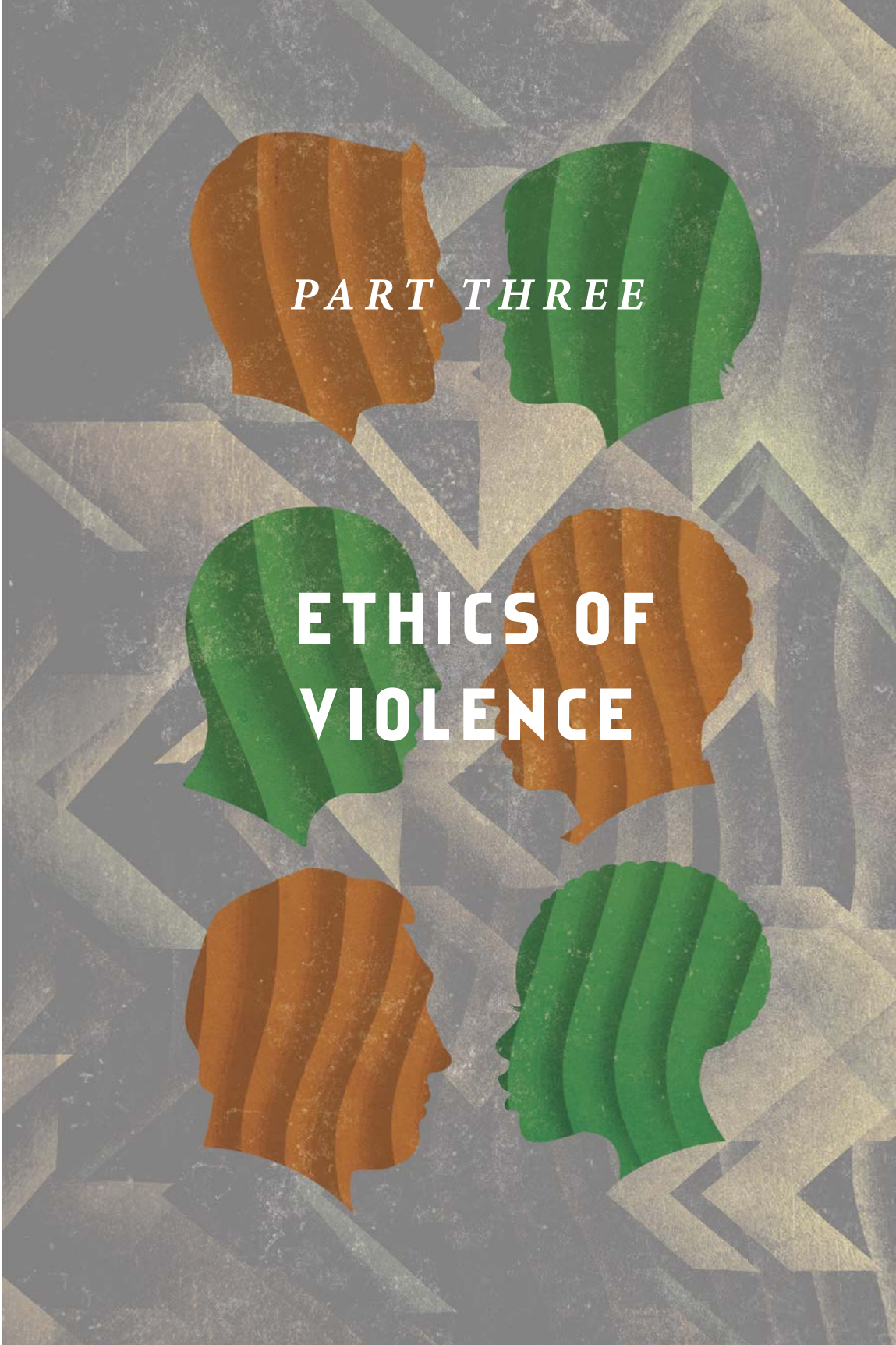
*God Loves Uganda*. Directed by Roger Ross Williams. Full Credit/Motto, 2013.

*The Miseducation of Cameron Post*. Directed by Desiree Akhavan. Beachside, 2018.

*Moonlight*. Directed by Barry Jenkins. A24/Plan B, 2016.

*Philadelphia*. Directed by Jonathan Demme. Columbia TriStar, 1993.

*We Were Here*. Directed by David Weissman and Bill Weber. Weissman Projects, 2011.



*PART THREE*

# ETHICS OF VIOLENCE

# 9

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

*Laura Rector*

## REAL LIFE

Susan was just a child when the abuse started. When she told family members, the sexual abuse was dismissed and denied. The result? Susan learned that "love" was something that created "that ugly stuff" in the pit of her stomach.

Susan married at age twenty and divorced at twenty-two, ultimately because her first husband didn't create those bad feelings for her. She then became involved with a drug addict who gave her "a little bit of that feeling." She became pregnant and converted to Christianity shortly after her first daughter's birth. Susan's second pregnancy followed quickly. Her church said they could no longer associate with her unless she left her boyfriend. Susan struggled with how she could do that when she was pregnant and had another small child, so she left the church instead.

When the man beat Susan, breaking her nose, her parents came and took her and her children to their home. Susan tried finding a church again, but "fell between the gaps" with two jobs, two small children, and no transportation.

She ultimately became involved with another man who violently "disciplined" her toddler until she went into convulsions. The young mother promised that she would take the blame for the child abuse if she could just take the child to get help. Her daughter died, Susan was jailed, and her abuser had custody of her older daughter until his own arrest. Susan was sentenced to fifteen years to life in prison for second-degree murder.[1]

---

[1]Many thanks to Susan for telling me her story personally. Her name has been changed due to the sensitive nature of these experiences.

## REAL WORLD

Susan's experience echoes the experiences of women around the world. Consider the millions of stories from the #MeToo movement that gained traction in 2017. In 2017, actress Alyssa Milano tweeted the phrase first coined by civil rights activist Tarana Burke and encouraged other women to share their experiences of sexual abuse and sexual harassment, and #MeToo became a global movement. Christian women also shared such experiences with #ChurchToo. Examples from the movement show us the injustices women experience worldwide. Just as Susan was failed by her parents in her initial abuse, Pakistani model Frieha Altaf says her family wants her to remain silent about sexual assaults she experienced.[2] A South Korean woman's abuse by her father was enabled by her mother.[3] Susan was failed by her church, and so was Chichi Ogbonnaya of Nigeria, who endured childhood rape for five years by a respected church member.[4] Ultimately, Susan was *failed by government institutions* when she was falsely imprisoned for the abuse perpetrated by her partner. The Chinese government failed women in a different way with government censorship of Chinese women's #MeToo stories and threats against activists.[5]

The United Nations calls violence against women "a human rights violation of pandemic proportions,"[6] stating that as of 2013, an estimated 35 percent of women globally have been physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner or sexually assaulted by a nonpartner. Some studies have shown that as much as 70 percent of women in some nations have been physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner.[7] Of women killed in 2012, about half were killed by intimate partners or family members—contrasted with about 5 percent of men.[8] Based on a 2017 UN report compiled over several years, 176 million children globally under age five live in homes where their mothers are abused.[9] It is difficult for women to leave

[2]Euan McKirdy and Sophia Saifi, "Celebrity Pakistani Women Add Their Voices to the #MeToo Movement," CNN, January 16, 2018, www.cnn.com/2018/01/16/asia/pakistan-metoo-prominent-voices-speak-out/index.html.

[3]Laura Bicker, "#MeToo Movement Takes Hold in South Korea," BBC News, March 26, 2018, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-43534074.

[4]Stephanie Busari and Torera Idowu, "The #MeToo Stories You Haven't Heard: Meet the Women Speaking Out in Nigeria," CNN, March 2, 2018, www.cnn.com/2018/03/02/africa/nigeria-rape-survivors-metoo-asequals/index.html.

[5]Javier C. Hernandez and Zoe Mou, "'Me, Too,' Chinese Women Say. Not So Fast, Say the Censors," *New York Times*, January 23, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/01/23/world/asia/china-women-me-too-censorship.html.

[6]UN Women, "Violence Against Women: Facts Everyone Should Know," accessed March 28, 2018, http://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/infographic/violenceagainstwomen/en/index.html.

[7]UN Women, "Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women," accessed March 28, 2018, www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures.

[8]UN Women, "Violence Against Women."

[9]UNICEF, *A Familiar Face: Violence in the Lives of Children and Adolescents*, November 1, 2017, https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-familiar-face/.

such situations, because women can form complicated relationships with their abusers through what psychologists call "trauma bonding."[10] They also may face financial barriers, have little or no work experience, or fear they will lose custody of their children.[11]

A 2017 UNICEF report says that approximately 750 million women and girls living today were child brides.[12] In some cultures, girls who refuse to marry will be subject to honor killings and other honor-shame actions like acid attacks (which is also the punishment for female rape victims, women who speak to unrelated males, and women who refuse to tell male relatives their whereabouts).[13] The same UNICEF report points out that at least two hundred million girls and women have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), putting them at risk for health complications; this number is based only on the countries that have available data.[14]

Rape and rape culture also marginalize women and girls. As mentioned, 35 percent of women have been physically or sexually assaulted.[15] Rape culture normalizes such violence against women through social conditioning in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. While the "virgin cleansing myth," seen in some African and Asian cultures, that sex with a virgin cures someone from AIDS may sound ludicrous to Western ears, there are often other cultural practices that socially condition rape and sexual assault.[16] Sometimes this takes place implicitly, such as in a catchy tune like Robin Thicke's song, "Blurred Lines."[17] Other examples include media choices to label rape as "sexual misconduct" and focusing on how a rape allegation will negatively affect the rapist's life while giving little attention to the victim's life. A politician might say that there is no such thing as rape between spouses (on the contrary, it does exist, often as a very

[10] Abuse and Relationships, "Trauma Bonding," 2008–2018, www.abuseandrelationships.org/Content/Survivors/trauma_bonding.html.

[11] Julie Rodriguez, "Ten Reasons Why Women Don't Leave Their Abusers," Care2, August 25, 2013, www.care2.com/causes/10-reasons-why-women-dont-leave-their-abusers.html.

[12] UNICEF, *Is Every Child Counted? Status of Data for Children in the SDGs,* March 2017, https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/SDGs-publication-SPREADS-WEB-1.pdf.

[13] See Human Rights Watch, "Honoring the Killers: Justice Denied for 'Honor' Crimes in Jordan," April 19, 2014, www.hrw.org/report/2004/04/19/honoring-killers/justice-denied-honor-crimes-jordan, and BBC, "Honor Attack Numbers Revealed by UK Police Forces," December 3, 2011, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-16014368.

[14] UNICEF, *Is Every Child Counted?*

[15] UN Women, "Facts and Figures."

[16] Susan Brink, "Fake Cures for AIDS Have a Long and Dreadful History," NPR Southern California Public Radio, August 17, 2014, www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2014/07/15/331677282/fake-cures-for-aids-have-a-long-and-dreadful-history.

[17] Alanna Vagianos, "Listen Carefully, This Is What Rape Culture Sounds like in America," *Huffington Post*, December 22, 2014, www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/22/rape-culture-in-america-slam-poem-button-poetry_n_6366620.html.

violent form of rape). Jokes about rape might be considered "just fun,"[18] or a politician might shield a victimizer for political gain.[19]

The church is also guilty of supporting rape culture. Prominent evangelicals excused, supported, and helped to elect a US president who bragged about sexual assault.[20] The #ChurchToo scandals have highlighted clergy sexual abuse.[21] Recent data showing the full extent of clergy sexual abuse is unavailable. However, a definitive 2008 Baylor study showed that in the average congregation of four hundred members, at least seven women were victims of clergy abuse. Even when labeled *consensual*, such abuse capitalizes on uneven power relationships between pastors and their congregants, and when women come forward about the inappropriate behavior, they often are scapegoated or dismissed.[22] Christians can also contribute to rape culture indirectly with conceptions about women's and girls' bodies. Frequently, Christian conceptions of modesty assign the responsibility for male lust to the female body and do little to teach men to take responsibility for their sexual agency and control.[23]

The International Labour Organization and Walk Free Foundation report there were an estimated forty million victims of modern slavery "on any given day in 2016." This includes victims of forced labor (including sex trafficking) and forced marriages. Women and girls represent 71 percent of that total.[24] Women also earn less than men in the workplace and hold less overall wealth.[25] Women also accounted for two-thirds of illiterate adults as of 2015.[26] In light of all of this data, it is evident that Christians

[18]Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), "What Is Rape Culture?" 2014, www.wavaw.ca/what-is-rape-culture/.

[19]Maggie Haberman and Amy Chozick, "Hillary Clinton Chose to Shield a Top Adviser Accused of Harassment in 2008," *New York Times*, January 26, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/01/26/us/politics/hillary-clinton-chose-to-shield-a-top-adviser-accused-of-harassment-in-2008.html.

[20]Eugene Hung, "What's Really Deplorable?" Feminist Asian Dad, October 20, 2016, https://feministasiandad.com/2016/10/20/deplorable-evangelical-rape-culture/.

[21]Hannah Paasch, "Sexual Assault Happens in #ChurchToo—We're Living Proof," *Huffington Post*, December 4, 2017, www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/sexual-abuse-churchtoo_us_5a205b30e4b03350e0b53131.

[22]Baylor University, "Clergy Sexual Misconduct," accessed March 28, 2018, www.baylor.edu/clergysexualmisconduct/.

[23]Jennifer Mathieu, "The Troubling Connection Between Modesty Culture and Rape Culture," *Time*, July 8, 2015, http://time.com/3918215/modesty-culture-rape-culture/; Marissa Cwik, "Modesty: A Word for Boys and Girls," *E-Quality* 6 (Winter 2007): 1, www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/other/modesty.

[24]International Labour Organization and Walk Free Foundation, "Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage" (Geneva, 2017), 5, www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—-dgreports/—-dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf.

[25]See Mariko Lin Chang, *Shortchanged: Why Women Have Less Wealth and What Can Be Done About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[26]United Nations Statistics Division, "The World's Women 2015," https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/worldswomen.html.

need to both attend to and respond to the multiple ways in which women are being abused and marginalized. But what exactly should this response look like?

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

Mimi Haddad, a college professor and the president of Christians for Biblical Equality, points out that Christians traditionally have viewed women through three categories: historical patriarchy, complementarianism, and egalitarianism.[27] For this project, the editors and I have avoided a discussion of patriarchy as a legitimate response since those who now self-label as "patriarchists" can advocate some forms of violence against women such as what's called "Christian domestic discipline," rather than prevent it.[28] Instead, we include Christian intersectional theologies as our third approach, although this last category actually encompasses a huge range of approaches too broad for a fully developed discussion in this brief chapter, and we recognize that space constraints make it difficult to recognize the unique spaces carved out by women developing different intersectional theologies. While I will use the categories in this chapter as tools, it is important to recognize that each child of God has a unique voice on this subject and that people sometimes draw practices and beliefs from multiple categories. With that caveat in mind, what do complementarianism, egalitarianism, and Christian intersectional theologies look like in light of the injustices that women and girls face?

***Complementarianism.*** Complementarians believe God created men and women to be equal with distinct roles (Gen 2:18; 21-24). This is supported by an interpretation of the New Testament's Household Codes (Eph 5:22-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Pet 3:1-7), which says there is a created order in familial relationships with husbands as the head of the family. Women should submit to them. They believe this male headship also carries over into church life with restrictions on women's leadership roles (1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Tim 2:11-15; 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9).[29] Although there are extremists who use the same Scriptures to justify violence against women,[30] complementarians explicitly state that violence against women is sinful: "We believe that abuse is not only a sin but is also a

[27]Rachel Held Evans, "Ask an Egalitarian . . . (Response)," http://rachelheldevans.com/blog/ask-an-egalitarian-response.

[28]See Meredith Bennett-Smith, "Christian Domestic Discipline Promotes Spanking Wives to Maintain Biblical Marriage," Huffington Post, June 21, 2013, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/christian-domestic-discipline-spanking-jesus-marriage_n_3479646.

[29]"Danvers Statement," Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, November 1988, https://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/.

[30]Bennett-Smith, "Christian Domestic Discipline."

crime. It is destructive and evil. Abuse is a hallmark of the devil and is in direct opposition to the purposes of God. Abuse must not to be tolerated in the Christian community."[31] They see the solution to women's painful experiences as a return to "traditional" gender roles.

**Table 9.1**

| POSITION | VARIABLES | MAIN CLAIMS | REPRESENTATIVES |
|---|---|---|---|
| Complementarianism | Equal worth of men and women, but God-ordained hierarchy, restrictions on women's leadership roles | Men and women are equal in worth, but women's leadership is limited in some or all spheres (varies) due to a God-created hierarchal order | John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Mary Kassian, John Eldridge, Elisabeth Elliot (Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood) |
| Egalitarianism | Mutuality, reciprocity, relationship, mutual accountability | Women and men are equal in worth and created for mutual, reciprocal relationships in covenant with God, and God places no limits on women's leadership in any sphere | Catherine Clark Kroeger, Aída Besançon Spencer, Ron Pierce, Cindy Long Westfall, Eugene Hung, Tara Beth Leach (Council for Biblical Equality) |
| Intersectional Theologies | Women's experiences, liberation or emancipation, preferential option for the oppressed | Women and men are equal in worth and patriarchal culture, language, and religious practices should be reconstructed to promote women's worth | Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Traci West, Katie Geneva Cannon, Marianne Katoppo |

This is the view advocated by John Piper, a popular speaker, author, and pastor named in 2018 as one of America's twelve most effective preachers.[32] In response to the #MeToo movement, he argued that women are being abused because society has failed to teach men their role as protector.[33] His response to the global #MeToo movement can best be understood by looking at the understandings of *submission* and *authority* that he has put forth elsewhere. For example, in an abusive marriage, Piper believes that a female victim must find others to discipline her abusive spouse, namely the church and civil authorities, because these other authorities have authority over

[31]CBMW Board of Directors, "Statement on Abuse," Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, March 12, 2018, https://cbmw.org/about/statement-on-abuse/.

[32]Kate Shellnutt, "12 Most Effective Preachers," *Christianity Today*, May 2, 2018.

[33]Bob Allen, "John Piper Blames Abuse of Women on 'Egalitarian Myth,'" Baptist News Global, March 20, 2018, https://baptistnews.com/article/john-piper-blames-abuse-of-women-on-egalitarian-myth/#.WsCLAdPwYxc.

the man while the woman does not.[34] He draws this view from Scripture, saying: "Every Christian is called to submit to various authorities and to each other: children to parents (Ephesians 6:1), citizens to government (Romans 13:1), wives to husbands (Ephesians 5:22), employees to employers (2 Thessalonians 3:10), church members to elders (Hebrews 13:17), all Christians to each other (Ephesians 5:21), all believers to Christ (Luke 6:46)."[35]

Piper made a distinction between types of abuse that cause a woman to sin, "like group sex," and types of abuse that are "simply hurting her."[36] If the situation does not cause the woman to sin, then he suggests temporarily enduring some forms of abuse like "verbal abuse" or "being smacked for one night" until the woman can seek the church's help, although he says the violence breaks God's moral law.[37]

Later, Piper clarified that the church should turn that person over to civil authorities while ministering to the husband in other ways. It is the male church members' role to help the husband to repent so that he can be a proper spiritual leader of his wife. The goal of this discipline should be the reconciliation of the couple.[38] Other complementarians illustrate the church's discipline of abusive husbands that Piper discusses. Author and pastor Thabiti Anyabwile explains in an open letter, "Your hands were not made for battering your wife, but for beautifying her. It's never permissible under any circumstance for you to raise your hand toward your wife in anger or abuse or in any way other than to caress her in love or help her in strength. Never. Under any circumstance."[39]

As for the wife's response, Piper supports a moral responsibility for the wife to love her abuser, keep him from sinning, and avoid being a participant in his sin by seeking help for him from appropriate authorities. He does not mention whether the woman should have sorrow over what has happened to the woman herself, but says she should have sorrow for her husband and a longing for the restoration of the relationship.[40]

---

[34]John Piper, "Clarifying Words on Wife Abuse," December 19, 2012, http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/clarifying-words-on-wife-abuse.

[35]Piper, "Clarifying Words."

[36]John Piper, "Does a Woman Submit to Abuse?" August 19, 2009, www.desiringgod.org. The original video has been removed from the website. See the transcript/files posted at Cheryl Schatz, "John Piper: 'What Should a Wife's Submission to Her Husband Look Like if He's an Abuser?'" Strive to Enter, August 21, 2009, http://strivetoenter.com/wim/2009/08/21/john-piper-on-submission-in-abuse/#comment-7071.

[37]Piper, "Does a Woman."

[38]Piper, "Clarifying Words."

[39]Thabiti Anyabwile, "Dear Jack: A Letter to an Abusive Husband," Gospel Coalition, November 26, 2012, www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabiti-anyabwile/dear-jack-a-letter-to-an-abusive-husband/.

[40]Piper, "Clarifying Words."

Some of his fellow complementarians take this a step further and suggest that women need to repent of their role, if any, in the conflict. Paul Tripp and David Powlison tell pastors to look for both parties' sin in instances of domestic violence: "You should typically expect to find two sinners embroiled with each other, not one irredeemable monster oppressing one innocent victim who needs no redemption. . . . Perhaps one spouse draws most of the attention because he acts with his fists; but on closer inspection the other spouse may skillfully wield her tongue in ways that seek to bring hurt through her words."[41]

The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) is generally cited as the leading organization that affirms complementarianism. The bloggers on its website typically do not address social issues about the marginalization of women and girls. At least one CBMW blogger does mention statistics on women's circumstances. Just as Piper did with the #MeToo Movement, the writer blames these situations on equality movements for women's rights and on a failure to recognize gender distinctions.[42]

Yet, other complementarians do care about justice for women, as evident in their websites. At the Gospel Coalition, Lindsey Holcomb passionately advocates for at-risk women and girls.[43] Focus on the Family has presented a series of anti-trafficking articles.[44] The Southern Baptist Convention issued a 2013 Resolution "On Human Trafficking,"[45] and their Woman's Missionary Union has launched antitrafficking efforts.[46] Complementarians vary in their understanding of women's roles in the church and society. Some say women, for example, may serve in the church as long as they are not senior pastors. Others encourage women to be full-time homemakers.[47]

---

[41]David Powlison, Paul David Tripp, and Edward T. Welch, "Pastoral Responses to Domestic Violence," in *Pastoral Leadership for Manhood and Womanhood,* eds. Wayne Grudem and Dennis Rainey (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 271.

[42]Derrick Dickens, "The High Honor of a Weaker Vessel," Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, April 16, 2014, http://cbmw.org/public-square/marriage-public-square/the-high-honor-of-a-weaker-vessel/.

[43]Lindsey Holcomb, "The Church and Women At-Risk," Gospel Coalition, October 20, 2014, www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-church-and-women-at-risk.

[44]Dawn McBane, "How You Can Get Involved in the Fight Against Sex Trafficking," Focus on the Family, 2014, www.focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/family/sex-trafficking/how-you-can-stop-sex-trafficking.

[45]Southern Baptist Convention, "On Human Trafficking," Houston, Texas, 2013, www.sbc.net/resolutions/1231/on-human-trafficking.

[46]Staff/Woman's Missionary Union, "Human Trafficking Targeted by WMU Ministry," Baptist Press, September 2, 2014, www.bpnews.net/43272/human-trafficking-targeted-by-wmu-ministry.

[47]David Gushee and Glen Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 241-42.

***Egalitarianism.*** Biblical egalitarianism teaches that God created men and women for a beautiful relationship in which spouses mutually submit to one another, and roles are determined by gifting, not gender. Egalitarians place no limits on women's roles in the home, church, or secular society. To support their view, they frequently quote the unity seen in Galatians 3:28;[48] refer to gifted female leaders in Scripture such as Miriam, Deborah, Phoebe, and Priscilla;[49] and reference the unprecedented ways Jesus interacted with women.[50] They point out that the "submission" of Ephesians 5:22 is a supplied verb in Greek that comes from the overarching mutual submission of Ephesians 5:21.[51] The emphasis is on mutuality, reciprocity, gift-based roles, and covenantal relationships based on a "joint commitment to God" rather than hierarchy.[52]

Catherine Clark Kroeger was the first president of Christians for Biblical Equality—an international, educational organization founded in 1988 that has been at the forefront of the egalitarian movement. She also founded a group called Peace and Safety in the Christian Home. Instead of seeing one spouse as subordinate to the other's authority, Kroeger presents both spouses as equal in authority and in need of a pattern of mutuality. She says, "It is significant that New Testament calls for wifely submission are always constructed within a framework of mutuality (1 Cor 7:3-5; Eph 5:18-33; Col 3:13-19; 1 Pet 2:16-3:8) and always accompanied by specific directives to prevent abuse on the part of the husband (Eph 5:28-29; Col 3:19; 1 Pet 3:7)."[53]

The personal story of fellow egalitarian, author, and church historian Ruth Tucker illustrates the concern of egalitarians about a one-sided form of submission. She writes:

---

[48]Evangelical Covenant Church, "A Biblical and Theological Basis for Women in Ministry," 2010, www.covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2010/04/A-Biblical-and-Theological-Basis-for-Women-in-Ministry.pdf, 2.

[49]Evangelical Covenant Church, "Biblical and Theological Basis," 1-2.

[50]David E. Malick, "An Examination of Jesus's View of Women Through Three Intercalations in the Gospel of Mark," *Priscilla Papers* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2013), www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/priscilla-papers/examination-jesus%E2%80%99s-view-women-through-three-intercalations.

[51]Lisa Baumert, "Headship in Ephesians," Christians for Biblical Equality International, September 15, 2010, www.cbeinternational.org/blogs/headship-ephesians.

[52]Cristina S. Ritchie, "Marriage: Patriarchal, Sacramental, or Covenantal?" *Priscilla Papers* 31, no. 3 (Summer 2017), www.cbeinternational.org/sites/default/files/Marriage-Patriarchal%2C%20Sacramental%2C%20or%20Covenantal%20Richie.pdf. For additional books on egalitarianism, see Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, and Gordon D. Fee, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), and Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

[53]Catherine Clark Kroeger and Nancy Nason-Clark, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 126.

> During his violent rages, my ex-husband often hurled biblical texts at me, as though the principal tenet of Scripture was, "Wives, submit to your husbands." He spit the words out, repeatedly beating me over the head, at least figuratively, with his black-and-white Bible. His hitting and punching and slamming me against doors and furniture, however were anything but figurative.[54]

Regarding domestic violence, Kroeger does not hold the woman responsible for seeking help, recognizing that the trauma and fear may be too great to make that possible. Nor does she think that gentleness or appeasement will change the abuser's character.[55] She also strongly rebukes the church for its silence on women's struggles. In fact, she argues that churches often add to women's pain. Kroeger advocates women getting help through social service agencies as well as their churches.[56] She and her colleague Nancy Nason-Clark also offer resources for improving church engagement on the issue.[57]

Although sometimes open to reconciliation, egalitarians stress that reconciliation can only take place after meaningful steps to stop the abuse. Spouses may need a time of separation, and "both parties must carefully consider how to prevent a recurrence of the abuse and victimization."[58] Due to safety concerns, Kroeger writes, "Forgiveness does not necessarily imply reconciliation. In the case of domestic violence, to continue on as before may throw open the door to continued abuse. The perpetrator may see that the consequences of his misbehavior were relatively light."[59] She and her colleague paint a cautious picture of what repentance and help for the batterer look like. She writes, "All parties should understand that it is exceedingly difficult for abusers to alter their patterns of behavior" and tells how one abuser deceived multiple accountability groups.[60]

So what does egalitarian theology look like when applied to other issues? Egalitarians tend to be much more justice-oriented in their social ethics with an emphasis on women and men working in mutually reciprocal relationships.[61] This type of justice

---

[54]Ruth Tucker, *Black and White Bible, Black and Blue Wife: My Story of Finding Hope After Domestic Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), introduction.

[55]Kroeger and Nason-Clark, *No Place,* 169-70, 125-32.

[56]Catherine Clark Kroeger, "The Rebuke of Peace," in *Beyond Abuse in the Christian Home: Raising Voices for Change*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger, Nancy Nason-Clark, and Barbara Fisher-Townsend (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 214-16.

[57]Kroeger and Nason-Clark, *No Place,* 186-212.

[58]Kroeger and Nason-Clark, *No Place,* 149.

[59]Kroeger and Nason-Clark, *No Place*, 147.

[60]Kroeger and Nason-Clark, *No Place*, 165.

[61]Alan F. Johnson, "Gender and Justice in the New Testament," *Priscilla Papers* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2009), www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/priscilla-papers/gender-and-justice-new-testament.

means that women and men are both heard and held accountable for only their own actions, even while advocacy work is promoted. This can be seen, for example, in how some egalitarians tie some modesty discussions to a rape culture that blames women for men's sin.[62] Egalitarians also cover a broader range of women's issues and voices than complementarianism. Only a short perusal of the CBE website shows that egalitarians talk as a matter of course about the marginalization of women through abuse but also through gendercide, rape culture, racism, and economics.[63] Egalitarians also sometimes call themselves feminists (whom I will include below in "intersectional theologies), but they tend to be more conservative in both their theology and their political stances on LGBTQ issues and reproductive rights than other feminists.[64]

***Intersectional theologies.*** Intersectional theologies oppose the oppression of women and others by looking at interlocking factors of discrimination such as gender, race, and class.[65] Some readers may ask, "Why didn't you discuss feminism as a response to gender injustice?" This category includes some of the best efforts of contemporary feminism, but it also includes other scholars who wish to empower women, but who are not comfortable with the term feminism. Christian intersectional theologies critically examine Christians' sacred texts, doctrines, and practices with the goal of challenging, critiquing, and reconstructing these texts, doctrines, and practices in reference to the value they show women in all their identities. North American and European white feminists, womanists[66] and black feminists, *mujerista* theologians,[67] African feminists,[68] and Asian/Asian American feminists[69] represent

[62]Luke Harms, "On Modesty and Male Privilege," *Mutuality* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2013), www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/mutuality/modesty-and-male-privilege.

[63]Christians for Biblical Equality International, accessed March 28, 2018, www.cbeinternational.org.

[64]See Grace Ying May and Hyunhye Pokrifka Joe, "Setting the Record Straight: A Response to J. I. Packer's Position on Women's Ordination," *Priscilla Papers* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1997), 1-10; Mimi Haddad, "Egalitarian Pioneers: Betty Friedan or Catherine Booth?" *Priscilla Papers* 20, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 53-59; Held Evans, "Ask an Egalitarian . . . (Response)."

[65]We draw this title from the term "intersectionality," which was first used by legal scholar and civil rights activist Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the multiple forms of oppression faced by African American women. It is now used widely to describe multiple, overlapping forms of systemic discrimination. See "Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More Than Two Decades Later," Columbia Law School, June 8, 2017, https://www.law.columbia.edu/pt-br/news/2017/06/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality.

[66]See, for example, the works of Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie Townes, Delores S. Williams, and Cheryl Sanders.

[67]See Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *En La Lucha/In the Struggle: A Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

[68]See Daniel Kasomo and Loreen Iminza Maseno, "A Critical Appraisal of African Feminist Theology," *International Journal of Current Research* 2, no. 1 (January 2011): 154-62, www.academia.edu/4228093/A_Critical_Appraisal_of_African_Feminist_Theology.

[69]See Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free: An Asian Woman's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1980); Hyun Kyung Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis,

different types of intersectional theologies, each with relevant concerns and distinguishing nuances that this short chapter simply does not have the space to cover. However, all of these theologies share common qualities that set them apart as a broad group from the other two responses. Namely, their methods interrogate women's experiences, emphasize liberation or emancipation, and express a preferential option for the oppressed.

Unlike the previous two approaches, there are not necessarily specific biblical texts to which all of these scholars turn to form a theological framework. For example, womanist scholar Delores S. Williams wrote about the experiences of Hagar in Genesis 21:8-21 in correlation to the experiences of black women in her groundbreaking work *Sisters in the Wilderness,* and although egalitarians and complementarians may talk about Hagar at some point, it is not a passage that chiefly shapes their positions.[70]

When those developing intersectional theologies do interpret the relevant biblical texts discussed by complementarians and egalitarians, they do so in a way that intersects women's lived experiences with a willingness to interpret, deconstruct, and reconstruct Scripture in light of those experiences. For the purposes of this brief overview, it is helpful to look at the work of Harvard professor Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Besides serving as the first female president of the Society of Biblical Literature, Schüssler Fiorenza cofounded the Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion in 1985 and has remained a coeditor ever since.[71]

In *In Memory of Her,* Schüssler Fiorenza interprets the New Testament's household codes (Col 3:18–4:1; Eph 5:22–6:9; 1 Tim 2:11-15; 5:3-8; 6:1-2; Titus 2:2-10) as the early church's response to cultural critics after Christians' attempts to live out the freedom and equality of Galatians 3:28. Although the church was originally supposed to be a place of gender equality, oppressive cultural influences soon crept into its teachings. As the author of her biography points out, "The real issue is whether the method of interpreting the Household Codes builds up or tears down the status and well-being of women." From Schüssler Fiorenza's standpoint, the misogynist tone of the biblical texts means that Scriptures should be examined with a "critical feminist hermeneutic of liberation" that recognizes that biblical interpretations are not objective, dismantles

1990); Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, *The Jesus of Asian Women: Women from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006).

[70]Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993).

[71]"Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza," Harvard Divinity School, 2018, https://hds.harvard.edu/people/elisabeth-schussler-fiorenza.

language and cultural practices that define women based on their relationships with men, examines the struggles against domination in Scripture, and reconstructs religious ideas and practices in an inclusive way for all.[72]

Schüssler Fiorenza's methodology also shows a preferential option for the oppressed; it is especially concerned with their emancipation. For example, she focuses on "interpreting" rather than "reading" texts because globally there are still many women who cannot read. Interpretation is more inclusive. Schüssler Fiorenza also wants to dismantle power structures with the reconstruction of language about God and culture, including referring to God with feminine pronouns and names.[73] Rather than use the term "patriarchy," she connects sexism to other "-isms" by coining the term *kyriarchy*, which looks at "multiplicative intersecting structures of domination."[74] She labels her paradigm of interpretation "emancipatory" because it "openly confesses that it engages in biblical interpretation for the sake of conscientization."[75]

Mujerista theologian Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz expresses the concern for the oppressed emphasized in intersectional theologies in her writing as well. For example, she writes,

> Often we have seen the experiences of other marginalized groups, including Hispanics, molded to fit into the accepted formats of theological discourse. We believe this has led to distortions that have resulted in new ways of silencing these groups, such as using their experiences as examples to illumine answers to questions determined by those who control the systems, while never allowing the marginalized groups to pose the questions.[76]

The liberation of women also liberates men, as Indonesian theologian Marianne Katoppo pointed out when she titled a chapter of her book, "Woman's liberation is also man's" in which she laid a theological basis for her work by writing about Mary "the truly liberated, fully liberated human being" after discussing Indonesian beliefs about women.[77]

On a final note, the nature of intersectional theologies makes it difficult to name any one organization as "representative," as I was able to do with CBE or CBMW in the previous responses. These scholars have a variety of justice concerns ranging from the promotion of women's rights in the church, home, and society to reproductive

---

[72]Glen Enander, *Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2005), ch. 3.
[73]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, introduction to *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005).
[74]Schüssler Fiorenza, glossary of *Wisdom Ways*.
[75]Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, ch. 1.
[76]Isasi-Diaz, *En La Lucha*, 63.
[77]Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free*, 9-24.

rights, LGBTQ rights, and of course, violence against women. Many engage in advocacy through organizations specifically addressing such issues.

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

No theologian exists devoid of an embedded context.[78] Like every other woman in the world, I've had my own experiences with violence and discrimination: having men reach out and grab my breast in a public setting, harass me on the street, threaten me with violence or punch me, and having a stalker consistently stop by my apartment. Like most women in theology, I could also name some church-specific experiences of injustice. In an MDiv course where I was the only woman, my complementarian classmates spent several minutes of each class talking about the limits they felt God places on women's callings and roles. I was never once called on by the professor in those class discussions. I was asked if I was sure I was in the right spot on the first day of another theology class where, once again, I was the only woman. I've had my calling questioned by total strangers in chance meetings and my sermons labeled as "testimonies" when introduced by a male pastor. Furthermore, at other times, male students have questioned my knowledge and abilities based solely on my gender or even suggested I need conversion because women who teach theology are "lost."

But my identity—and the identity of every other woman—is not and should not be reduced to "victim" or a permanent label based on some of the darker moments of our lives. We are children of God with sacred worth. A theology that truly seeks gender justice is one that allows us to resist violence against women and other sexism while also allowing us not to be solely defined by the things that have hurt us. In *Wounds of the Spirit*, Traci West, professor at Drew University Theological School, presents a "resistance" ethic that concentrates not simply on how to heal victim-survivors but also on how women (particularly African American women) resist violence; this also addresses their communities. Her goal is to view the trauma that happens to women in a way that neither overstates nor understates their victim status or their agency.[79]

In Scripture, we see Jesus protect, heal, and teach women, but we also see that Jesus recognizes women as change agents for their communities.[80] Christians can respond

[78]Reggie L. Williams, "A Thicker Jesus as a Contextual and Embodied Christian Ethics," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 155-66.

[79]Traci C. West, *Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence, and Resistance Ethics* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), chs. 6-7.

[80]Douglas Groothuis, "What Jesus Thought About Women," *Priscilla Papers* 16, no. 3 (Summer 2002), www.cbeinternational.org/sites/default/files/pp163_4wjtaw_0.pdf.

by going and doing likewise. By affirming both the protection and moral agency of women and girls, Christians can imitate Jesus' way of healing them. Doing so grounds women's and girls' identities in something positive and redemptive rather than assigning them an identity based solely on their problems. It heals each unique woman and girl while also offering healing through them to their communities.

To address the injustices that women experience, a faithful reading of the biblical text must be done with the genuine experiences of women in mind—particularly in passages that may support patriarchy through distorted interpretation. *Flawed Families of the Bible* illustrates the mutuality of egalitarianism in the joint writing of its husband-wife coauthors but also demonstrates the type of biblical interpretive work that neither changes or devalues the scriptural text or minimizes the injustices women experience in both the Bible and contemporary society. David and Diana Garland walk readers through the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34, for example, by paying careful attention to the biblical background of the text as well as modern sociological data on rape.[81]

Along with this egalitarian method of biblical interpretation, churches must pay careful attention to communal practices and rituals that harm women. It is here that I see the most value in reconstruction, although I would reframe it as both corporate and individual repentance. Authors such as feminist scholar Marie Fortune and former US president Jimmy Carter say that religion must also pay attention to its own role in violence against women.[82] One author points out, for example, how the important theological concept of forgiveness can be a tool for abuse if institutional truth telling is not part of the forgiveness process: "To promote forgiveness in the face of its privatization may be to engage in religious abuse. These issues point to serious difficulties with the appropriateness of encouraging private acts of forgiveness between individuals when public discourse from cultural, including religious, institutions fail to tell the truth about those institutions' complicity with abuse."[83] In a similar way, prayer can be a tool that benefits those marginalizing

[81]David E. Garland and Diana R. Garland, *Flawed Families of the Bible: How God's Grace Works Through Imperfect Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007), 71-101.

[82]See Marie M. Fortune and Joretta Marshall, *Forgiveness and Abuse: Jewish and Christian Reflections* (New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2002); see also Jimmy Carter, *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014). Also, see Laura Rector, "Toward New Narnia: An Evangelical Response to Children's Suffering Grounded in Human Rights," PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2014, ch. 4, for a full discussion of forgiveness.

[83]Margaret F. Arms, "When Forgiveness Is Not the Issue in Forgiveness: Religious Complicity in Abuse and Privatized Forgiveness," in Fortune and Marshall, eds., *Forgiveness and Abuse*, 112.

women and girls if it is used to make women submit to those hurting them, if they are told to pray and just be more spiritual, or if an abuser uses prayer to justify or make light of the harm resulting from his actions.[84] As Christians, we must be careful not to put a spiritual face on the violence and marginalization of women and girls in a way that denies them justice.

Finally, to help women in violent situations like Susan—we have to disciple what ethicist James McClendon called the virtue—or practiced skill—of "*presence*." Christians need to be there with tangible help for women in violent situations rather than pushing them away or asking them to endure abuse—not because we don't care deeply about the covenant of marriage but because we also are called to "do justice, and to love kindness" (Mic 6:8) and genuinely practice neighbor-love (Lk 10:25-37). McClendon reminds us, "Presence is being one's self for someone else; it is refusing the temptation to withdraw mentally and emotionally; but it is also on occasion putting our own body's weight and shape alongside the neighbor."[85] Whether we help women start over with new homes,[86] load the moving van to safety for them,[87] or simply offer genuine friendship to an unmarried mother who shows up at church, presence could mean the difference between life and death.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Consider each of the approaches. How would embracing each one impact your life?
2. It can be very difficult for women to leave situations of violence and discrimination due to trauma bonding, financial resources, or even language barriers.[88] How might each understanding of gender roles help or hurt women facing such barriers?
3. How does one's theological understanding of women's roles affect one's response to violence against them?

---

[84]Laura Rector, "Can Prayer Be Abusive?" Baptist News Global, December 10, 2015, https://baptistnews.com/article/can-prayer-be-abusive/#.WsCv_tPwYxc.

[85]James McClendon, *Ethics*, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), ch. 3, emphasis original.

[86]YWCA Nashville and Middle Tennessee, "Re-New at the YWCA," 2018, www.ywcanashville.com/what-we-do/renew/.

[87]Brittany Woolsey, "Meathead Movers Offers Services for Free to Victims of Domestic Violence," *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 2015, www.latimes.com/socal/weekend/news/tn-wknd-et-1206-meathead-movers-20151206-story.html#

[88]Abuse and Relationships, "Trauma Bonding"; Julie Rodriguez, "Ten Reasons Why Women Don't Leave Their Abusers"; and Polaris, "The Victims and Traffickers," accessed March 28, 2018, https://polarisproject.org/victims-traffickers.

## GLOSSARY

**complementarian:** a worldview that says men and women are created equal but that their roles are hierarchical based on a created order by God, which limits leadership roles to men in all or some spheres.

**egalitarian:** a theologically conservative form of feminism that emphasizes the equal worth of men and women and reciprocal mutuality of the sexes and that places no limits on women's leadership roles in any sphere in which a man could also be a leader.

**female genital mutilation/cutting:** the ritual cutting or removal of female genitalia in some cultures.

**intersectional theologies:** theologies that examine people's overlapping identities (such as race, gender, and class) to dismantle oppressive societal patterns, language, and practices and advocate for equality for all people.

**rape culture:** the normalization of rape and the sexual assault of women through cultural practices and attitudes.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

Gerhardt, Elizabeth L. *The Cross and Gendercide: A Theological Response to Global Violence Against Women and Girls*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014.

Sanders, Cheryl Jeanne. *Ministry at the Margins: The Prophetic Mission of Women, Youth & the Poor*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

Spencer, Aída Besançon, William David Spencer, and Mimi Haddad. *Global Voices on Biblical Equality: Women and Men Ministering Together in the Church*. House of Prisca and Aquila Series. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008.

Storkey, Elaine. *Scars Across Humanity: Understanding and Overcoming Violence Against Women*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

National Domestic Violence Hotline. "What Is Domestic Violence?" Accessed July 22, 2018. www.thehotline.org/is-this-abuse/abuse-defined/.

One. "Poverty Is Sexist: Why Girls and Women Must Be at the Heart of the Fight to End Extreme Poverty." March 8, 2015. www.one.org/us/policy/poverty-is-sexist-why-girls-and-women-must-be-at-the-heart-of-the-fight-to-end-extreme-poverty/.

United Nations Women. "The Girl Child." Accessed July 22, 2018. http://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/in-focus/girl-child#facts.

### *Media and documentaries*

*Audrie and Daisy.* Directed by Bonni Cohen and Jon Shenk. Netflix, 2016.

*Breaking Silence—Femicide in Latin America.* Directed by Paula Rodriguez Sickert. DocFilm, 2014.

Global Center for Women and Justice. *End Human Trafficking* Podcast Series. Vanguard University, 2011–2018. https://endinghumantrafficking.org/podcast/.

*It's a Girl.* Directed by Evan Grae Davis. Shadowline Films, 2011–2016.

*A Walk to Beautiful.* Directed by Mary Olive Smith. Engle Entertainment, 2007.

# 10

# WAR, NONVIOLENCE, AND JUST PEACEMAKING

*Jacob Alan Cook*

## REAL LIFE

Jim McClendon (1924–2000) was born and raised in the South, professed faith and was baptized in a Southern Baptist church, and enrolled in the Junior ROTC as a matter of course. He came of age in a world beset by war, recalling, "The question that the Pearl Harbor attack raised for American Christian youths like me was not whether to enlist in the armed forces of our country, but in which service to enlist."[1] Jim was serious about following Jesus—memorizing Scripture, never missing church, and teaching Sunday school. If he received a message about war and peace, it was that Christians could enjoy inner peace when duty calls them into outward conflict.[2]

As a college sophomore, Jim enlisted in the Naval Reserve, but boarding his ship within hours of Japan's surrender, his mission became bringing troops home. At some friends' suggestion, he connected with a Tokyo resident who showed him (a recent enemy) hospitality, giving Jim a guided tour of the city. Surveying the terrible destruction wrought by US firebombing, Jim recalls, "So, I said to myself—this is war. I'm certainly glad our side won. Inwardly I shrugged. Outwardly I thanked my host for his interesting tour."[3] He remembers feeling convicted about his responsibility to fight for righteousness' sake, since God was obviously in the Allies' corner.[4]

---

[1]McClendon, "The Radical Road One Baptist Took," in *The Collected Works of James Wm. McClendon, Jr.*, ed. Ryan Andrew Newson and Andrew C. Wright (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 1:18.
[2]McClendon, "Taking the Side of the World," in *Collected Works*, 2:366.
[3]McClendon, "Radical Road," 20.
[4]McClendon, "Taking the Side," 365-66.

In the 1960s, Jim, now a theology professor in the Bay Area, found himself in a much different context. He supported the civil rights movement, opposed America's military activity in Southeast Asia—even organizing faculty to call for withdrawal from Vietnam—and encouraged students protesting about these issues. During these years of activism, Jim was pressured out of faculty posts at two Christian schools. He explains his rationale for opposing the Vietnam War with realist language, calling it "the wrong war at the wrong time in the wrong place."[5]

But later, while teaching a course on the ethics of war and peace, Jim tells us, "It dawned upon me that I had come to oppose not only Asian wars, not only unjust wars, but all wars. Perhaps I recalled Mr. Saito [his host] and firebomb-devastated Tokyo. At the very least, I no longer believed that violence was an option for a Christian."[6] By his own account, his convictions about war had shifted *imperceptibly*. Jim did not come from a historic "peace church"; his theory of nonviolence was not highly developed; and his path led him over a diverse terrain of experience and thought. He sensed, however, that his opposition to war was emerging from certain basic convictions before he was fully aware.[7] In short order, Jim came to see the experiences he had been gathering his whole life fitting together in a fresh understanding of Christian discipleship and its stakes—and a commitment to follow Jesus anew.

## REAL WORLD

Augustine once wrote, "Such is the instability of human affairs that no people has ever been allowed such a degree of tranquility as to remove all dread of hostile attacks on their life in this world."[8] Some 1,600 years later, those words ring true in a new register as mass gun violence incidents and other terrorist attacks seem ever present. One way of situating the instability and insecurity that Augustine described in twenty-first-century terms is to put a price tag on it. In 2018, military expenditures around the world grew to $1.8 trillion, which amounts to 2.1 percent of the global gross domestic product (GDP).[9] At $610 billion, US military spending in 2018 accounted for more than the next seven highest spending countries combined, or 35.9 percent of the global total, and 3.2 percent of its own GDP.

[5]McClendon, "Radical Road," 20.
[6]McClendon, "Radical Road," 20.
[7]McClendon, "Radical Road," 22.
[8]Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (1972; repr. New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 17.13.
[9]Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "World Military Expenditure Grows to $1.8 Trillion in 2018," April 29, 2019, www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2019/world-military-expenditure-grows-18-trillion-2018.

Whatever we spend, just and lasting peace remains elusive even (maybe especially) in those regions that have recently seen military intervention. Here we will consider two contemporary situations that color how social ethicists argue about moral responses to violence.

***Afghanistan, Iraq, and the "War on Terror."*** Within days of the 9/11 attacks, the US Congress approved an open-ended "Authorization for Use of Military Force" (AUMF) giving the president discretionary authority in pursuing those responsible. Framing its actions in terms of self-defense, the US military engaged al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and their affiliates within the borders of several nations—predominantly Afghanistan, where the Taliban were the controlling party at the time, and Pakistan. Although ultimately shifting tactics (i.e., seeking fresh approval from Congress and the UN), the Bush administration linked the cause for war against Iraq to the "war on terror."[10] Critics of the 2001 AUMF note that its emergency powers have been invoked to justify distinct military actions not foreseeable then—like Obama-era interventions in Libya (2011) and Syria (since 2014)—and worry about its susceptibility to abuse in justifying future violence (e.g., against Iran).

In a "war on terror," victory cannot be envisioned as obtaining a ceasefire surrender from a nation-state with organized, disciplined forces and moving on from there. The various "sides" in the conflict are unevenly matched since the enemy combatants represent not nation-states but ideologies without recognizable political boundaries. In this *asymmetrical* warfare, battlefield victories cannot be the sole measure of success. Other strategies must be pursued concurrently in hopes that one's actions will not generate sympathy or, worse, support for the other side. So, we might ask, how does a state deploy a range of strategies to promote and preserve a just civil order within the borders of other states where nonstate, enemy combatants have embedded themselves? And how might military tactics and technologies (e.g., drones) be restrained to prevent noncombatant deaths and unnecessary collateral damage?

The language we use to discuss this particular conflict matters. For example, many envision the "war on terror" as an outcropping of the broad, inevitable *clash of civilizations*, putting the enemy's ideology and actions somewhere on a continuum with a typical practicing Muslim.[11] This is an especially easy move to make for Christians who have learned to analyze culture in terms of discrete, competing worldviews. Whether we recognize it or not, such conceptuality affects our intuitions

[10]See for example Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Just War Against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 186.

[11]The italicized phrase comes political theorist Samuel P. Huntington's frequently cited thesis about such conflict, *The Clash of Civilizations: The Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

about other human beings—even our neighbors—and our sense of compassion for the innocent souls suffering in war zones. Christians must ask hard questions about these ways of speaking and the nature of our witness in a broken world. For another example, political use of absolute moral language like "evil" to describe the enemy effectively identifies the American cause with righteousness or even holiness (i.e., God's own cause).[12] As such, we might ask, does the conviction that we are "the good guys," or that God is on our side, present a barrier to accountability for US conduct?

***Humanitarian crises and the responsibility to protect.*** Aside from self-defense, a realist description of why peoples go to war adapts the timeworn "God, gold, and glory" motivations for Western exploration and conquest. The "God" concept covers claims to manifest destiny, "holy warriors" raging against the heathen, as well as coercive missionaries "making" converts. Gold could be interpreted as not merely riches but resources more broadly—especially when those resources are essential and scarce. Glory manifests in expansion and conquest, in the will to power—an idolatry that identifies the ruler's cause with the definition of justice itself.

But the situations that really press modern Christians for answers about war, nonviolence, and just peacemaking center on their sense of responsibility to engage in humanitarian crises and, thus, may not be self-interested. To be sure, wars have often been framed at least partly in terms of humanitarian intervention; for example, US authorities sometimes advertised involvement in Iraq in the early 1990s as action against a brutal regime developing and deploying biological and chemical weapons. But nations like the United States have "passed" on intervention in some of the most devastating recent global conflicts—including genocide campaigns in 1994 in Rwanda (where some eight hundred thousand people were killed in one hundred days) and between 2003 and 2005 in the Darfur region of Sudan (where some two hundred thousand people were killed and millions displaced).[13]

Following the Arab Spring of 2011, civil war and infighting in places like Yemen and, more conspicuously, Syria have resulted in widespread displacement and misery and taken the lives of countless innocent persons. There is strong evidence of systematic ethnic cleansing by the military in Myanmar. By the end of 2018, according to the UN's refugee agency, 70.8 million individuals were "forcibly displaced

[12]Stanley Hauerwas registered this point at the start of the Iraq War in "No, This War Would Not Be Moral," *Time* 161, no. 9 (March 3, 2003): 45.

[13]In addition to these figures, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, offers resources for confronting and preventing genocide at www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/cases.

worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations."[14] More than a third of those people (25.9 million) were refugees, among whom 67 percent were from just five countries (Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, and Somalia), and about half were children under the age of 18.

These occasions for humanitarian intervention put serious questions to Christians given the command to love our neighbors. We can imagine many possibilities for nonviolent engagement in conflict zones the world over (e.g., World Vision). And in full knowledge of massive inhumanities, compassion might draw one to consider military intervention. In either case, the logic is self-sacrificial, and thus quite uncommon in political discourse—unless it can be used to justify wars that are otherwise self-interested.

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

On the topic of war, Christians can only have peace on their minds—for the church and, in some way, also for the world. That said, I might guess that McClendon's early experience of the church and state nurturing separate duties for distinct senses of peace remains common in twenty-first-century American churches. Augustine tells us, "Peace is the instinctive aim of all creatures and is even the ultimate purpose of war."[15] So, as we will discuss it below, *good policy* aims to order human lives so that they might enjoy a reasonably just peace.

To be sure, we will not only be talking about *public* policy, nor will we limit the conversation to the relatively just peace that *worldly* practices promise. Yet we still might helpfully imagine each of the three responses that follow as a unique posture toward the common claim that war is "the continuation of policy by other means."[16] First, we will discover the just war tradition, which establishes limits for the practice of war, restricting its use to situations in which, among other conditions, the goal truly is the restoration of a just peace, such that war must be planned and waged in service to that policy goal. Second, we will take up a reading of Christian faith that defines the church as a community of peace maintained by the practice of forgiveness and existing as a witness to Jesus' nonviolent lordship over all the world, such that war is never a continuation of its policy. And third, we will hear from those concerned with the reality that war follows from all too many policies, arguing that certain

[14]UNHCR, "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018," accessed August 22, 2019, www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018.

[15]Augustine, *City of God* 19.12.

[16]Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 584.

practices have proven effective in disarming conflict and even preventing some wars by focusing on a just peace as the primary goal.

**Table 10.1**

| POSITION | VARIABLE: CHRISTIAN PARTICIPATION IN WAR | MAIN CLAIMS | REPRESENTATIVES |
|---|---|---|---|
| Just War Tradition | Yes, under strict limits | God ordained civil authorities to execute justice and wrath. War can be justified if controlled to limit its frequency, suffering, violence, and recurrence | Jean Bethke Elshtain, Brian Orend, Michael Walzer |
| Church as Nonviolent Witness | No | The church exists as an alternative social body to nations, and its peace is built upon forgiveness. Christian service of Jesus and his kingdom prohibits killing—especially for civil authorities | Lisa Sowle Cahill, Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder |
| Just Peacemaking Paradigm | The question is open | Jesus teaches his followers concrete practices to make peace. These practices have "scaled up" analogs for use in public, and they have proven effective | Glen Stassen, Susan Thistlethwaite |

***Just war tradition.*** For many Christians, just war thinking rests on the conviction that God has willed human civil governance and instituted its basic structures (cf. Rom 13). On this account, civil authorities are tasked with promoting a just peace among their citizens, as in coordinating projects for the common good and safeguarding the fair distribution of society's goods. This conviction can also energize Christian advocacy for public policies that reflect the good life for which God created us. But in a broken world, as Paul writes in Romans 13:4, "the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer." Read a certain way, Christians might be able to both serve God and participate in civil governance—even when it entails violence.

That said, Christian just war thinking begins with a strong presumption against killing. Its core goals and more specific rules or principles set a rather high bar for overriding this presumption. Whatever happens in war, it is decidedly strange to, and estranged from, a life ordered by hard-and-fast definitions of *justice* and nonviolent methods for resolving conflicts. To call a war "just" can only mean that, considering the current situation, it is a reasonably *justifiable* way to restore a more just peace.[17]

[17]Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), x.

The core goals of just war thinking engender specific limits for three distinct moments of a conflict: (1) when considering war, (2) when waging war, and (3) when warfare has ceased.[18]

1. Considering *jus ad bellum* (the right to war), a conflict must meet a standard set of criteria before a nation can justifiably engage in war. These criteria support the goal of *limiting the frequency of war* in a broken world. Deliberations begin with the right intention (rule 1): securing a more just and peaceful situation. Starting here helps us perceive a justifying cause (rule 2) as something that seriously disrupts a relatively just and peaceful state. Because war is bound to generate additional suffering and misery, its projected cost—including pain inflicted on the enemy—must be proportional (rule 3) to the intended goal of a just peace, and other policy options must be exhausted to make war the last resort (rule 4). Within these bounds, one can only justify the costs of warfare if there is a reasonable probability of success (rule 5). And finally, the proper authorities (rule 6) must approve the use of force and clearly announce (rule 7) their aims and intentions.

These rules have been vigorously debated, yet the notion that such terms have commonsense meanings often clouds their use in public arguments about specific wars. We can only briefly discuss two rules here, but each merits a more thorough study and debate.

*Right intention.* If a nation's warfare is to be justified, it must intend to produce a more just state of affairs. There must also be a sense that, after the conflict subsides, most human beings at risk on the other side will (hopefully) be rehabilitated and restored to community. Warfare should give way to neighboring. In the "war on terror," some have argued that the ideological commitment of this particular enemy (the true "evildoer") involves a death drive that bars them from community with others.[19] But even in that case, the United States would do well to consider policies (military and otherwise) that limit the appeal of such ideologies by improving everyday living conditions.

*Justifying cause.* Against the backdrop of imperial power and conquest, the idea that military force should be limited to specific reasons was controversial in Augustine's day. The original just cause was to serve justice by punishing bad actors and restoring a peaceable order, which evolved into national self-defense. In recent years, the international community has recognized humanitarian intervention to

[18]For a well-reasoned interpretation of just war theory via these "three core goals," see Jeffrey P. Whitman, "Just War Theory and the War on Terrorism: A Utilitarian Perspective," *Public Integrity* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2006–2007): 23-43.

[19]This view of "radical Islamists" is at the center of Elshtain's *Just War Against Terror*.

stop active genocide attempts or pervasive violations of basic human rights as not only a just cause for war but also a *responsibility*—the UN-ratified language is "the responsibility to protect." These are all *worldly* reasons for war; despite the appeals to good versus evil or a righteous cause or even Jesus' command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:39), just war thinking advertises its thoroughgoing worldliness at every stage.

2. Given its concern for intentions and proportionality, just war thinking also aims to *limit the violence and suffering of war* with *jus in bello* (law in waging war). Looking ahead at his own death for the many, Jesus teaches his disciples, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13). Here we sense the solemn willingness to love one's friends to the bitter end. The Christian at war should be somber and disciplined, as was Jesus on the cross, in order to participate in violent conflict while keeping their eye on the ultimate aim and resisting warfare's particular vices.[20] Discipline is good for the combatants themselves, on whom war takes an immense toll—all the more when compelled to engage in unjust activities (e.g., torturing POWs). Fighting well also has strategic benefits that become particularly clear in asymmetrical warfare: ugly and unjust tactics serve to justify the enemy and aid their recruitment.

3. If we think of a just peace as the controlling theme of just war thinking, calculations at each stage should also include reasonable efforts to *limit the possibility of war recurring*. In addition to the regulation of conduct during war, this recently articulated goal involves leaving the conflict zone better than the previously existing state of affairs once the fighting stops (i.e., *jus post bellum*).[21]

***Church as nonviolent witness.*** An unswerving commitment to nonviolence begins with a fundamentally different reading of the human condition and our most basic social structures. Here the *fallenness* of government and other social realities (e.g., economy or race) is registered through biblical concepts like "principalities and powers" (Col 1:16) and "elemental spirits of the world" (Gal 4:3; Eph 2:2; and Col 2:20). This latter phrase means something like *the spirit of the times* (or nation or movement)—an ethos that shapes how people think and live. Many such spirits and interests compete for attention and sway in a complex society like our own, even offering to order the world (by violent means) for a particular kind of peace. To some extent, they are actually *mis*shaping our minds and *mis*directing our hearts, often

[20]See Augustine's comments on "the real evils in war" in his "Reply to Faustus the Manichean," 22.74.

[21]For more, see Eric Patterson, ed., *Ethics Beyond War's End* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012).

without our awareness. These powers sow division, hold people captive, and inhibit them from discovering the peace of God.

Jesus' posture toward worldly powers emerges not only in his teaching but also in his example—to the point of death on the cross. In his living, Jesus suffers violence while bravely obeying God in all things, and, in his dying and rising, he undoes the logic of violence on its own grounds. He does not establish the peaceable kingdom of God with the civil authority's sword, nor does he defend himself or his followers when the going gets tough. Jesus takes everything the powers of sin and death throw at him, demonstrating their ultimate ineffectiveness (e.g., removing the sting from death).

To be sure, Christians often frame a *principled* commitment to nonviolence as a plain-sense reading of Jesus' own witness; however, in the variety of pacifism that I am summarizing, Jesus' teachings on nonviolence are interpreted not as principles or rules but *a way of life*. In the longest account of his message (the Sermon on the Mount), Jesus teaches not to "retaliate against an evildoer" but instead to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:39, 44). There he also teaches his audience to seek peace with others who have something against them (Mt 5:23-26) and to forgive others so that God may forgive them (Mt 6:14). Jesus trains his disciples in the practices of forgiveness and peace, which become the guiding norms in the new kind of community among those who follow after him.

From Jesus' words and deeds, we learn the way of the church in the world as an alternative to the ways of powerful spirits that would (mal)form our lives to do their bidding—that resist Jesus' rightful Lordship over all of life. Refusing to participate in violence and coercive practices is central to the church's existence as a sign of God's grace and judgment in a fallen world as well as a place for Christians to practice our true humanity. The social relations of this community are founded on the practice of forgiveness and a genuine commitment to the ongoing acts of confession and repentance that make forgiveness practicable. We might say this community's peace is secured only in the grace of the one who teaches us, by example, to forgive even our enemies. In a world that always impatiently demands our attention here or there, when wayward elemental spirits frenetically attempt to secure and maintain a relative peace for themselves, the church fosters patience and an abiding peace.

Within the broad response outlined here, there is some debate about how the church should relate to its surrounding society. The reign of God has been inaugurated in Jesus, and the powers will be subjected to his rule—no matter how much they resist in the meantime. As such, Christians might work to influence social structures for the good but only if their engagement does not compromise their way of life. The

world measures its activity in terms of its supposed effectiveness in achieving set goals, but the church, as Stanley Hauerwas argues, is measured by its faithfulness to its calling. So, the church and its people must refuse forms of advocacy and activism for worldly peace driven by humankind's anxiety and insecurity.

When Christians pursue public policies with hopes of transforming the world into something more like their understanding of God's kingdom, they risk operating as though the state is the point of reference for their moral lives. This happens in subtle ways, as when, to get the business of politics done, the church and its people adopt worldly concepts to make more persuasive arguments. Thinning down the church's mission by translating it into public language like "just peace" risks abandoning the witness element that is central to the church's relation to the world. Such thinking subverts the conviction that the church is, in itself, a social body sufficient to order human lives toward God and one another in love.[22] No amount of worldly justice will make an earthly nation into the kingdom of God.

In any case, as an alternative social body, the church forms individuals to resist the practices by which the world tries to secure peace for itself. Few who offer such a response are suggesting anything like a complete withdrawal from their surrounding culture since it is neither possible nor desirable. To the contrary, Myles Werntz argues, "Operating from a position 'inside' war provides churches with the basis for bearing witness to their societies, as one creature to another."[23] We cannot live our lives apart from the order that at least certain powers provide, but we must learn how to live *faithfully* in a world shaped by those powers. Given the lives of Christians as creatures, just like their neighbors, one can assume a kind of common intelligibility when each speaks of "peace."

There is a paradox here. Churches share the goods and benefits of a society at war, but "should not be characterized by the ways and means through which society makes peace."[24] So, those multifaceted points of contact between church and world in a society are sites for witness and selective engagement—sometimes rejecting (as with war and violence), sometimes affirming what is consistent with deeper commitments, modifying, or some other response.

***Just peacemaking paradigm.*** If we look at early arguments toward the just peacemaking paradigm, its practices find their rationale in two key biblical points. First, Jesus' life and ministry are connected with the prophetic ministry of Isaiah, who

[22]Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).
[23]Myles Werntz, *Bodies of Peace: Ecclesiology, Nonviolence, and Witness* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 26.
[24]Werntz, *Bodies of Peace*, 34.

envisioned the coming kingdom or reign of God in concrete terms: deliverance and salvation, restoration to community, righteousness and justice for the poor and oppressed, healing, and peace among nations.[25] In the incarnation, this vision becomes an inaugurated reality; the marks of God's kingdom are manifest in Jesus himself. Because God's reign truly covers all of life and all of the world, one might anticipate finding the Spirit at work beyond the walls of the church and join in God's work there.

Second, Jesus teaches concrete practices for participating in the reign of God as it takes shape on earth on the assumption that Jesus' ministry makes present its reality—even as we await the perfect peace of God's kingdom come. The late Baptist peacemaker Glen Stassen's reading of the Sermon on the Mount is unique in discovering a threefold pattern in fourteen of its teachings. Many interpreters have noticed the seemingly "antithetical" language Jesus repeatedly uses: "You have heard it said . . . but I tell you . . ." But, Stassen tells us, reading this sermon in Greek suggests three distinct moves that name a nugget of traditional wisdom or interpretation, how that tradition traps us in a vicious cycle, and a transforming initiative for breaking that cycle. It is not just, *You have heard it said do not murder, but I tell you do not even be angry*; the transforming initiative is: *go and be reconciled* (see Mt 5:21-26).

Stassen took the emphasis on transforming initiatives, along with some of Jesus' specific teachings, and worked out eight "biblical" peacemaking steps. At least one of these bears mentioning here before focusing on the public-facing paradigm: *Acknowledge your alienation and God's grace realistically.* Bringing this point home, Stassen names "our own ill-suitedness as peacemakers. I can become a peacemaker only when I give up my self-righteous judging and controlling and begin to rely on the transforming initiatives of God's grace."[26] These steps begin at the level of individual Christians and their local relationships, but many have analogs at the level of societal and international conflict. Most importantly, the emphasis on a plain reading of these teachings as culminating in transforming initiatives broadens their applicability to all relations in which Christians are found. These practices help us to participate in God's reign, and they actively narrate "others" into the circle of God's care.

The just peacemaking strategy for taking these insights to the level of preventing violent conflict has been to promote a set of ten practices, which emerged as a

[25]Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 37-42.
[26]Stassen, *Just Peacemaking*, 60.

consensus among thinkers who differ on the question of whether Christians can participate in war.

1. Support nonviolent direct action.
2. Take independent initiatives to reduce the threat.
3. Use cooperative conflict resolution.
4. Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice; seek repentance and forgiveness.
5. Advance democracy, human rights, and religious liberty.
6. Foster just and sustainable economic development.
7. Work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system.
8. Strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights.
9. Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade.
10. Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations.

This paradigm is answering the question about whether Christians will actively contribute to the peace of their world. Stassen and company have attempted to convince realists that war may not be necessary in this or that case; to get just war thinkers to really use the last resort criteria and to realize the just peace goal; and to draw pacifists into some real action to make for peace in the world around them even as they hold their higher commitment. Although we cannot expect everyone to share the same narrative or detailed vision of a world at peace, we can reasonably hope that peace-seeking folks will agree to support practices that foster a more just peace.

To get some of the flavor here by way of an example, we might consider one of the more surprising practices for a "public" model: *Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice and seek repentance and forgiveness.* Situated near the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, Poland, Willy Brandt Square commemorates the moment Germany's chancellor spontaneously knelt in silence for about half a minute —a gesture of repentance now referred to as the Warsaw Knee-Fall. This act was accompanied that day by the signing of a treaty committing both sides to a relationship of nonviolence as well as guaranteeing that Germany would accept the borderlines imposed by the Allies after World War II. Altogether, these actions made a positive impact on the chilly relations between East and West and won Brandt himself a monument in Poland's capital city.

Many times, just peacemaking proponents have framed the public-facing ethic as a matter of effectiveness in achieving the desired results. But this rhetoric need not suggest any overly optimistic sentiment about human progress (i.e., abolishing war) in a broken world. It starts with acknowledging that God's work bears a certain peaceable shape and that its trajectory extends beyond the community of those who claim Jesus' name.[27] That Christian practices are often effective in social bodies beyond the church community is a testimony to Jesus' existence as divine *Logos*—as the incarnation of the logic that holds reality together. For the moral realist, the right thing to do is whatever harmonizes with reality, and for just peacemaking proponents, the practices they are advocating do just that.

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

The stories that encompass the just war and Christian nonviolence responses have an undeniable power to generate moral discourse, shape the conscience, and motivate action. And, as Stassen argues, those who embrace the third response (just peacemaking) must still wrestle with the question the other two answer: Can Christians participate in war?[28] When we embrace one of these stories, however, we risk being seduced by their tidiness and lulled into a false sense of moral security. Once we determine the genuine reading of Christian tradition, we may think Christian faithfulness means just sticking to our principles. But each response can be lived out well or poorly.

Christian nonviolence begins with the ideal of God's kingdom, for which the church is an outpost in this fallen world. The options for intervention in humanitarian crises tend to be painted as a stark contrast between violent intervention and a principled commitment to purity in nonviolence. And if this is the framework within which Christians embrace pacifism, it can amount to a premeditated excuse for inaction (or passivism), resulting in inattentiveness to the cries of neighbors in need and a lack of interest in imagining creative, nonviolent ways of getting involved. In either case, the church compromises its witness in a sometimes-brutal world—not least if the Christians practicing nonviolence are safe outside the war zone.

The just war tradition begins with the ideal of God-willed structures for civil governance, which is revised to fit the realities of a broken world. As such, the goals and rules for a just war are best practices for a non-ideal reality. But just (i.e., *justifiable*) war theory can devolve into a realist attitude that it is just (i.e., *merely*) war; its

[27]Stassen, *Just Peacemaking*, 87.

[28]David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 337.

unavoidably immoral actions can be justified in advance as "the right thing to do." The anguish of violating the church's character is relieved in advance, resulting in a kind of callousness about the realities of warfare and the conviction that one can enjoy an inner peace even as they participate in the hell of war.

Our stories may be *convenient* devices for interpreting the world, but when we set our conscience by them, we misplace our confidence. When we hear the cries of fellow human beings rising—whether an individual down the street or masses half a world away—we sense that we are somehow responsible for their well-being. And we are, so we have choices to make about how to exercise that responsibility (ethicists call this "moral agency"). We hope to justify ourselves in light of our stories—to know that we have done what is right before God and, if possible, humankind. However, no rational application of our preformulated "knowledge of good and evil" should make us feel at ease about a decision to exercise violence—or a decision against intervention. Whatever the outcome, we should continue to feel the weight of our choices and to wrestle with their adequacy, long after moments of decision.

We must confess the ideal of God's kingdom: nonviolence and problems solved through repentance and forgiveness. We gain nothing by denying this core truth. Yet we must ask some hard questions about the role of our ideals in the context of a life following after the living Jesus. Here we might learn a lesson from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian and advocate for Christian nonviolence who was put to death for his part in a conspiracy against Adolf Hitler.

As Bonhoeffer explains, inasmuch as the human conscience is an original creation of God, its goal is to guide human beings in serving God and loving their real-life neighbors. It does not originate in God's law or our airtight stories. Only after the fall does the conscience bind humans to their personal knowledge of good and evil (see Gen 3). Trying to be like God, humans listen to their inner voices rather than the living God who speaks in *this* historical moment. In other words, when we find our security in our stories (or our understanding of the biblical worldview), we evade the risen Jesus. Conversely, in calling us to follow after him, Jesus sets the conscience free to fulfill its purpose. As Bonhoeffer tells us, the effect is quite disorienting:

> The freed conscience aligns itself with the responsibility, which has been established in Christ, to bear guilt for the sake of the neighbor. In contrast to the essential sinlessness of Jesus Christ, human action is never sinless but always contaminated by original sin, which is part of human nature. Nevertheless, as responsible action, in contrast to any self-righteous action justified by a principle, it does participate indirectly in

> the action of Jesus Christ. Responsible action is thus characterized by something like a relative sinlessness, which is demonstrated precisely by the responsible taking on of another's guilt.[29]

Although this sounds like a nightmare to many Christians, we cannot be justified by our fastidious obedience to what we think we know of God's will. Jesus frees us from our personal knowledge of good and evil so that we may be open to his lead. Moreover, as Bonhoeffer sums up the truth in six deeply unsettling words: "Everyone who acts responsibly becomes guilty."[30] Even as the Christian is called to live in the church as their primary social reality, they are responsible for their neighbors. The normative mode of Christian existence is one maintained by repentance and forgiveness, and responsible action may call the Christian to become guilty in order to serve their neighbor—and to hope for a "relative sinlessness" in Christ.

Rather than polishing our ideals and arguing with those of others, we must account for the reality that we will sometimes feel compelled to violate some ideals, and we must accept our responsibility before God and others. When Christians find themselves in this position, it would be good to know the best-reasoned limits of violent intervention and to bear always in mind the moral impermissibility of their behavior. Openness to Christ and to neighbor may not ever amount to support for a war after accounting for relevant historical factors. Yet, hovering over this final section are broader questions about Christians and violence than just the "narrow" issue of military service, which is rather distant from many of us. Even during wartime, peacemaking could range from domestic activism and public demonstrations to involvement with NGOs on the ground in conflict zones.

The real scandal here may not be a Christian who feels compelled to break their ideals at some point. It may be that so few of us are willing to say so—to grapple honestly with real-world realities. Only the living Jesus can break into such a life, set the captive free, and speak a word about what to do here and now. The nagging sense that "before God they hope only for grace" is a necessity in such a time. However we might justify overriding our normative convictions about human worth and social relations (e.g., do not kill, love your enemies), we cannot rest comfortably with having "done the right thing" in conflict. Those who participate in war are doing the morally unthinkable and must face the wrongness of their actions.

---

[29]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, English edition, vol. 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 279. See also Christine Schliesser's excellent treatment of this theme in Bonhoeffer's work in *Everyone Who Acts Responsibly Becomes Guilty: Bonhoeffer's Concept of Accepting Guilt* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).

[30]Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 275.

But abstention from warmaking cannot protect one from sin. In distinctly Christian ethics, the spirit of our moral laws is proven by their openness toward the risen Christ, who alone is sinless and offers hope in his fellowship. To leave open the possibility of intervening on another's behalf is not to draw warmaking into the articulation of a Christian ethic—reality is not so tidy. The world is broken, we are responsible, and God holds all things together with grace. But, at some point, the question may be: *Am I willing to lay down my ideals for the sake of another?* For that question, there is no easy answer in advance.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Reflect on your relationship to issues of conflict and injustice. Would you say you have thought much about the possible tensions between Christian discipleship and participation in war? Where do you get convictions about war and peace?
2. Between just war and the church as nonviolent witness, which do you think is more realistic? Why? Which seems to have the most biblical support (beyond the references in this chapter)? Can you see the case for the other response?
3. What appeals to you about the different responses to the issue of war and peace? What is unsettling about them?
4. Have you ever participated in a just peacemaking practice (maybe without knowing it was one)? Can you think of an area of conflict that you feel compelled to engage in some way?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

Bell, Daniel M., Jr. *Just War as Christian Discipleship: Recentering the Tradition in the Church Rather Than the State*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009.

Cahill, Lisa Sowle. *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Pacifism, Just War, and Peacebuilding*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019.

Huckins, Jon, and Jer Swigart. *Mending the Divides: Creative Love in a Conflicted World*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017.

Lederach, John Paul. *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians*. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2014.

Orend, Brian. *The Morality of War*. 2nd ed. Buffalo, NY: Broadview, 2013.

Sider, Ronald J., ed. *The Early Church on Killing: A Comprehensive Sourcebook on War, Abortion, and Capital Punishment*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.

Stassen, Glen, ed. *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War*. 3rd ed. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2008.

Thistlethwaite, Susan Brooks, ed. *Interfaith Just Peacemaking: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives on the New Paradigm of Peace and War*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Boston: Beacon, 1996.

Walzer, Michael. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*. 5th ed. New York: Basic Books, 2015.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

Crump, David. "Whom Would Jesus Torture?" In *I Pledge Allegiance: A Believer's Guide to Kingdom Citizenship in Twenty-First-Century America*, 1-10. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.

International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. "The Responsibility to Protect." Ottawa, ON: IDRC, 2001. www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/ICISS%20Report.pdf.

Kimball, Charles. "The Just Peacemaking Paradigm and Middle East Conflicts." *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 23, no. 1 (2003): 227-40.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. "The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace." Washington, DC: USCCB, 1993. www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/the-harvest-of-justice-is-sown-in-peace.cfm.

United States Institute of Peace. "Education and Training in Nonviolent Resistance." Special Report 394. October 2016. www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR394-Education-and-Training-in-Nonviolent-Resistance.pdf.

Werntz, Myles. "War in Christ's World: Bonhoeffer and Just Peacemaking on War and Christology." *Dialog* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 90-96.

### *Media and documentaries*

*Budrus*. Directed by Julia Bacha. Just Vision, 2009.

*Countdown to Zero*. Directed by Lucy Walker. Magnolia Pictures, 2010.

*The Devil Came on Horseback*. Directed by Ricki Stern and Anne Sundberg. Break Thru Films, 2007.

*Hotel Rwanda*. Directed by Terry George. MGM, 2005.

*Last Men in Aleppo*. Directed by Feras Fayyad. Grasshopper Film, 2017.

*Selma*. Directed by Ava DuVernay. Pathé/Harpo Films, 2014.

# 11

# GUN VIOLENCE

*Nick Brown*

## REAL LIFE

It was the early evening of June 17, 2015—seemingly just another typical Wednesday in Charleston, South Carolina.

For a group of thirteen faithful congregants from Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, this night was the occasion to gather once again in the *koinōnia* of Christian fellowship and engage in that most dynamic and transformative of Christian practices—weekly Bible study.

However, what made this particular Bible study at Mother Emanuel extraordinary was a visitor in their midst, Dylan Roof. As they would with any other guest, the members of Mother Emanuel (all of whom were black) embraced Roof (who was white) with a generosity and hospitality worthy of their church's maternal moniker.[1] It made no difference that Roof was unknown and made even less of a difference that he was white, and in fact unbeknownst to them a white nationalist.[2] For this was a congregation that deeply knew and had been deeply shaped by the memory of what it meant to live as strangers in a strange land, and thus the importance of obeying the divine injunction to "love the stranger" (Deut 10:19).

---

[1] Roof himself attested to this when he later told police that "[I] almost didn't go through with [the shooting] because everyone was so nice to [me]." Daniel Arkin and Erik Ortiz, "Dylan Roof 'Almost Didn't Go Through' with Charleston Church Shooting," *NBC News*, last modified June 19, 2015, www.nbcnews.com/storyline/charleston-church-shooting/dylann-roof-almost-didnt-go-through-charleston-church-shooting-n378341.

[2] Shortly after his apprehension and arrest law enforcement officials discovered that Roof created and operated a website called "The Last Rhodesian." The site contained photos of Roof posing with white supremacist and neo-Nazi symbols as well as a lengthy manifesto in which he articulated his animus toward blacks and other racial minorities.

Their beautiful and powerful expression of this Christian virtue of hospitality made what transpired next such an incongruous and ghastly juxtaposition. After an hour of participating in the Bible study, Roof proceeded to stand up, pull out a Glock 41 .45 semiautomatic pistol and shoot and kill eight of its participants. In that moment what had for so long been a sacred and loving space affirming the imago Dei of black (and all human) flesh was instantaneously and horrifically transformed into a site of its hateful desecration, and in particular the flesh of Cynthia Marie Graham Hurd (54), Susie Jackson (87), Ethel Lee Lance (70), Tywanza Sanders (26), Sharonda Coleman-Singleton (45), Myra Thompson (59), and Clementa C. Pinckney (41)—the church's senior pastor who also served as a South Carolina state senator.[3]

## REAL WORLD

According to a 2014 report published by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, 35 percent of all adults in the United States lived in households that owned firearms.[4] In terms of raw numbers, the Congressional Research Service estimates that by 2009 there were approximately 310 million firearms in the United States—106 million handguns, 103 million rifles, and 83 million shotguns.[5] This amounts to an average of more than one gun per person living in the United States.[6]

Of the estimated eight million new civilian firearms that are manufactured worldwide every year, approximately 4.5 million, or 56 percent, are purchased within the United States.[7] Conversely, in 2011 the United States exported approximately $715 million dollars in small arms—nearly $200 million dollars more than the next largest exporter, Italy.[8] Thus the United States is by far and away both the largest importer and exporter of small firearms in the world many times over.[9] As of October 2017 there were 64,417 licensed gun retailers in the United States as

[3]A ninth church member and participant—Daniel Simmons (74)—was also shot and later succumbed to his wounds.

[4]Tom W. Smith and Jaesok Son, *Trends in Gun Ownership in the United States, 1972–2014* (Chicago: NORC at the University of Chicago, 2014), 3.

[5]William J. Krouse, "Gun Control Legislation" (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 8.

[6]Christopher Ingraham, "There Are Now More Guns Than People in the United States," *The Washington Post*, October 5, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/10/05/guns-in-the-united-states-one-for-every-man-woman-and-child-and-then-some/.

[7]Institute of International Studies, *Small Arms Survey 2007: Guns and the City* (Geneva: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 46.

[8]Institute of International Studies, *Small Arms Survey 2011: States of Security* (Geneva: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 11.

[9]*Small Arms Survey 2011*, 11.

compared to 14,146 McDonald's restaurants, 31,490 coffee shops, and 25,400 grocery stores.[10] And according to a 2014 National Shooting Sports Foundation report, the firearms and ammunition industry in the United States accounted for an incredible $42.96 billion dollars of economic activity.[11]

Given the extraordinary number of guns it possesses, it is only logical to conclude that the United States also has a high corresponding rate of gun violence. And indeed, there is ample empirical research confirming a strong positive correlation between the availability of guns and the incidence of gun violence.[12] But once again, however, what makes the United States truly remarkable is not only its high rates of gun violence but also how those rates compare to other developed countries.

Every year in the United States an average of one hundred thousand people are shot by guns. This amounts to 289 people being shot every day.[13] In the same vein, between 1982 and 2018 the United States had 101 public mass shootings, which are defined as shootings that killed four or more people.[14] By comparison, in that same time period the Philippines experienced eighteen such public mass shootings, Russia fifteen, Yemen eleven, and France ten.[15] In other words, in less than half a century, the United States has had nearly double the number of mass shootings than the next four highest countries combined.

The deadly numbers continue. Every seventeen minutes a person is shot and killed in the United States, amounting to eighty-seven people killed per day and 609 per week.[16] As a result, the US firearm homicide rate of 29.1 per one million people is nearly four times that of Switzerland (7.7 gun homicides per one million people), six times that of Canada (5.1 gun homicides per one million people), fifteen times that of Germany (1.9 gun homicides per one million people), and a whopping twenty-one times that of Australia (1.4 gun homicides per one million people). To help put those numbers in perspective, since 1968 more

[10]Leanna Garfield, "There Are 50,000 More Gun Shops Than McDonald's in the US," *Business Insider*, October 6, 2017, www.businessinsider.com/gun-dealers-stores-mcdonalds-las-vegas-shooting-2017-10.

[11]National Shooting Sport Foundation, "Firearms and Ammunition Industry Economic Impact Report 2014," accessed on August 15, 2014, www.nssf.org/impact/EconomicImpactofIndustry.pdf.

[12]See for example David Hemenway and Matthew Miller's study "Firearm Availability and Homicide Rates Across 26 High-Income Countries," *The Journal of Trauma, Injury, Infection and Critical Care* 49 (2000): 985-88.

[13]"Just the Facts: Gun Violence in America," NBC News, January 16, 2013, http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/01/16/16547690-just-the-facts-gun-violence-in-america?lite.

[14]Mark Follman, Gavin Aronsen, and Deanna Pan, "US Mass Shootings, 1982–2018: Data from Mother Jones' Investigation," May 18, 2018, www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-mother-jones-full-data/.

[15]Adam Lankford, "Mass Shooters, Firearms, and Social Strains: A Global Analysis of an Exceptionally American Problem," Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Chicago, IL, August 23, 2015.

[16]"Just the Facts."

Americans have been killed by guns than the total number of casualties of all US wars combined.[17]

Of those who are shot and killed by guns in the United States every day, thirty-four on average are victims of homicide, and fifty-five on average are victims of suicide.[18] An average of seven children and teenagers under the age of twenty are killed by guns every day, which makes firearms the second leading cause of death for young people under the age of twenty.[19] Finally, African Americans are nearly twice as likely to die from gun violence as whites and almost three times as likely as Latinos.[20]

Yet despite the irreparable harm that gun violence continues to inflict within the United States, little has been done by way of legislative action to address it. The notable exception was the Federal Assault Weapons Ban, which was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1994. This law restricted the manufacture, sale, and possession of 660 different kinds of semiautomatic weapons. However, it expired in 2004 when Congress failed to extend it, despite the ban's enjoying broad support from state and federal law enforcement agencies.

By way of comparison, after a gunman shot and killed thirty-five people with a semiautomatic rifle in a café in Australia in 1996, the nation passed, with a large majority of conservative support, a sweeping gun control law known as the National Firearms Agreement (NFA). As a result of the NFA, gun ownership was more strictly regulated, a national gun registry was created, and certain kinds of automatic and semiautomatic weapons were banned.[21] It also instituted a mandatory nation-wide gun buyback program, which removed some 650,000 guns from circulation, or almost 20 percent of all privately owned guns in Australia.[22]

The results of the NFA have proven quite remarkable and effective. According to a 2011 study conducted by David Hemenway and Mary Vriniotis, the NFA was estimated to be responsible for lowering Australia's firearm suicide rate by 57 percent and its firearm homicide rate by 42 percent.[23]

---

[17]Nicholas Kristof, "Lessons from the Virginia Shooting," *New York Times*, August 26, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/08/27/opinion/lessons-from-the-murders-of-tv-journalists-in-the-virginia-shooting.html.

[18]"About Gun Violence," *Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence*, accessed September 7, 2015, www.bradycampaign.org/about-gun-violence.

[19]Brady Campaign, "About Gun Violence."

[20]B. Kalesan, S. Vasan, M. E. Mobily et al., "State-specific, Racial and Ethnic Heterogeneity in Trends of Firearm-Related Fatality Rates in the USA from 2000 to 2010," *BMJ Open*, 2014, https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/4/9/e005628.

[21]Zach Beauchamp, "Hillary Clinton Praised Australia's Gun Control Measures, Which Seized 650,000 Guns," *Vox*, October 16, 2015, www.vox.com/2015/8/27/9212725/australia-buyback.

[22]Beauchamp, "Hillary Clinton."

[23]Beauchamp, "Hillary Clinton."

As to why comparable forms of gun control legislation have failed to be enacted in the United States, a chief if not singular reason is the existence of a constitutional right to "bear arms" codified in the Second Amendment. Although originally established by the framers of the US constitution to establish and maintain individual state militias, over the course of history the Second Amendment has been progressively interpreted to encompass—inter alia—an individual right to gun ownership. This interpretation was formally established in the 2008 Supreme Court decision District of Columbia v. Heller when a majority of the court ruled that the Second Amendment does in fact secure a constitutionally protected right for individuals to own firearms.[24]

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

Broadly speaking, there are two divergent positions that US Christians have adopted when confronting gun violence—those who support maintaining a broad legal and moral right to gun ownership, and those which argue in favor of significantly curtailing that right.

Within these broader responses, however, we can identify three subtypes. Among those favoring a broad legal and moral right to gun ownership are those who argue that the possession of guns is integral to fulfilling both a biblical obligation to defend and protect the neighbor as well as a God-ordained natural right to self-defense. There also are those who defend the ownership and use of guns on the grounds of exercising individual as opposed to collective moral discernment, and who also appeal to the idea of devolving political power to local communities as opposed to it being arrogated to a central state. In terms of addressing gun violence, both responses stress the importance of moral suasion and spiritual renewal—both personally and societally—as the most effective means to curb it. I respectively label these subtypes as the "Just Defense" and the "Prudential Judgment" responses.

Conversely, there are those Christians who see gun violence as not simply a manifestation of personal moral degradation but rather as a symptom of a much deeper structural and systemic sin that is bred by social and economic justice and a slavish devotion to what theologian Walter Wink calls the "myth of redemptive violence."[25] Accordingly these Christians argue for significantly limiting a broad legal right to gun

[24]For an in-depth historical analysis of the origins of the Second Amendment and its interpretive evolution in American jurisprudence, see Michael Waldman's *The Second Amendment: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

[25]See Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), esp. 13-33.

ownership by appealing to a theological and moral commitment to practice pacifism and nonviolence. This subtype is labeled as "Pacifism."

**Table 11.1**

| RESPONSE | VARIABLE: TRADITION | MAIN CLAIM | REPRESENTATIVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Just Defense | Christian just war tradition | The use of firearms is permissible in order to protect and defend one's neighbor. | David French |
| Prudential Judgment | Roman Catholic casuistry tradition | On prudential grounds individual citizens may own and use firearms in order to protect and defend | Rachel Lu |
| Pacifist Response | Jesus' teaching and example of nonviolence; theology of powers | Christians are prohibited from owning and using firearms in order to follow Jesus' own example of nonviolent pacifism | James E. Atwood |

***Just defense.*** In several respects the Just Defense response reiterates some of the same theological and ethical rationale put forward by the Christian just war tradition, and in particular the Augustinian claim that the use of violent force is sometimes justified to fulfill Jesus' commandment of neighborly love.[26]

Nonetheless, there are also significant differences that separate these two perspectives, the most noticeable of which is the view that each takes on the theological and ethical permissibility of individuals using violence for self-defense. For whereas Augustine himself explicitly proscribed a Christian justification for violent self-defense on account of both Jesus' commandments to "turn the other cheek" (Mt 5:39; Lk 6:29) and because such an action could be motivated by a selfish egoism, and whereas the *jus ad bellum* criterion of "legitimate authority" restricts the right to use violence to governing authorities only and not to individual actors, the Just Defense response holds that individual self-defense is legitimate both biblically and theologically/philosophically.[27]

A representative example of the Just Defense response can be found in David French's post on his *Patheos* blog *French Revolution: American Faith, Politics and*

[26]For an extended and illuminating examination of Augustine's theological appropriation of the Roman just war tradition see Lisa Sowle Cahill's *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), esp. 55-81. The obligation of neighbor love also features prominently in Paul Ramsey's theological defense of the just war tradition. See his *The Just War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1968), esp. 142-43.

[27]For a good discussion of Augustine's views on self-defense see Jean Bethke Elshtain's article "The Just War Tradition and Natural Law," *Fordham International Law Journal* 28, no. 3 (2004): 742-55. For a good discussion of a Christian interpretation of the legitimate authority criterion, see Daniel Bell Jr.'s *Just War as Christian Discipleship: Recentering the Tradition in the Church Rather Than the State* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), esp. 101-26.

*Culture*.[28] Titled "The Biblical and Natural Right of Self Defense," French sets forth to demonstrate why "God has not merely sanctioned the right of self-defense but has explicitly approved even the use of deadly force to protect human life."[29]

French begins his argument by first referencing Genesis 9:6, wherein God tells Noah after the flood waters have subsided, "Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind." He notes that this statement "is not made to a nation-state or to a police force but instead to a small band of people who are rebuilding human society from the ground up." French is nonetheless certain that a pivotal theological and moral principle is clearly enunciated, namely, "Human life is precious and God mandates the ultimate penalty for taking life."[30] And while French concedes that this principle does not directly touch on the question of self-defense *per se*, he is still confident that reading other "biblical commandments and examples" in its light will "demonstrate how God expects us to protect life in the real world."[31]

Thus when studying "Mosaic law," for example, French notes that while "God obviously continued his mandate of the death penalty for murder (as well as for blasphemy and other crimes)," not all forms of killing were categorically prohibited.[32] On the contrary, he asserts that Exodus 22:2 "specifically carve[s] out an exception" for killing in "the defense of one's home" insofar as it states that "if a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him."[33] Examining this verse, French observes that it is important to note "the grace that God gives the citizen in the midst of the fear and ambiguity of a nighttime invasion—even a 'thief' (not a rapist, not a murderer) can be killed at night," although the same grace is not granted for killing a "thief (again, not a rapist or a murderer)" in the "clarity of day."[34]

What this verse and its underlying theological and moral principle of protecting human life attest to, according to French, is that Scripture holds a clear presumption

[28]David French is a staff writer for *National Review* magazine and a senior fellow at the National Review Institute. He received his law degree from Harvard University and served with the United States Army in Iraq from 2005 to 2007 as a Squadron Judge Advocate. For a perspective that is comparable to French's see David B. Kopel's text *The Morality of Self-Defense and Military Action: The Judeo-Christian tradition* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2017).

[29]David French, "The Biblical and Natural Right of Self Defense," French Revolution (blog), July 27, 2012, www.patheos.com/blogs/frenchrevolution/2012/07/27/the-biblical-and-natural-right-of-self-defense/.

[30]French, "Biblical and Natural Right."

[31]French, "Biblical and Natural Right."

[32]French, "Biblical and Natural Right."

[33]French, "Biblical and Natural Right."

[34]French, "Biblical and Natural Right." David B. Kopel offers a similar interpretation of Exodus 22:2-23 in his article "The Torah and Self-Defense," *Penn State Law Review Journal* 109, no. 1 (2004), http://davidkopel.com/2A/LawRev/The-Torah-and-Self-defense.pdf.

of the "morality of the right of self-defense."[35] And this presumption is only further reaffirmed, he says, in Nehemiah's instruction for his fellow Jews to "fight for your kin, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes" (Neh 4:14) when being attacked by foreign enemies, and in the narrative of Esther when the Jews, in order to defend themselves against Haman's genocidal plot, "struck down all their enemies with the sword, slaughtering and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them" (Esther 9:5).[36]

But what of the New Testament, and more specifically Jesus' own refusal to use violence either to defend himself or his disciples? French responds to this challenge by acknowledging that the New Testament does in fact "remov[e] from the individual Christian any justification for vengeance." However, he also argues that this sanction needs to be understood as applying specifically to the "*lex talionis*," or "rule of proportionate justice" and not to "self-defense."[37] In other words, French contends that while meting out appropriate retribution and punishment to evildoers should strictly be done under the aegis of the government (Rom 13:1-5), this limitation does not, in and of itself, preclude an individual from using violence to defend her or himself. Furthermore, with respect to Jesus, French notes that not only did "Jesus' disciples carr[y] swords and even [say] the unarmed should arm themselves" but also "the sword's use was only specifically forbidden when Peter used violence to block Christ's specific purpose to lay down his life."[38]

In French's judgment, it therefore follows that since the Bible affords a moral right to self-defense, an individual Christian can, in good conscience, own and use guns for that intended purpose even if they must kill to do so. Indeed, they should do so.

***Prudential judgment.*** Another subtype of the response maintaining a broad legal and moral right to gun ownership is the Prudential Judgment response. This view draws heavily from the moral theology and casuistry of the Roman Catholic tradition and in particular the eponymous concepts of prudential judgment and subsidiarity.

A good example of this approach applied to gun violence can be found in an article written by Rachel Lu for *Crisis Magazine* titled "Consider Gun Ownership for Family Protection."[39]

---

[35]French, "Biblical and Natural Right."
[36]French, "Biblical and Natural Right."
[37]French, "Biblical and Natural Right."
[38]French, "Biblical and Natural Right."
[39]Rachel Lu is a freelance writer who has published work in *National Review, The American Conservative*, *America Magazine*, and the *The Federalist*. She received her PhD in philosophy from Cornell University and taught philosophy at St. Thomas University in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Lu begins her piece in a similar fashion as French by noting that in light of the 2008 Supreme Court ruling in the case of District of Columbia vs. Heller, the "American Constitution guarantees the right to bear arms" and that this right "extends not only to the military and law enforcement officials, but also to private citizens who wish to own firearms for lawful purposes," which includes self-defense.[40]

However, she then hastens to ask, "Is this consonant, however, with our obligations as Catholics?"[41] Lu admits that an answer to this question is not always forthcoming since "authoritative Catholic documents have very little to say on the subject of guns directly" and also because while the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* "affirms that it is permissible to do injury to another in an act of self-defense," it also affirms that "killing is to be avoided when possible" and that "incapacitating one's attacker is preferable to killing him."[42]

Nevertheless, despite this lack of teaching, Lu acknowledges that in recent years the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops "have argued for stricter control on firearms" as well as expressed their support "for sensible regulation of handguns, and also for the treatment of the mentally ill."[43] Even so, the fact still remains that "neither the Church nor the bishops have made definitive statements condemning either guns themselves or civilian ownership of guns."[44] "In the end, then," she concludes, "it would seem that it is permissible for Catholics to support the Second Amendment, and to own guns."[45]

Still, even while granting the legal and moral permissibility for US Catholics to own and use guns for self-defense, Lu maintains that "important questions remain." "First: what sort of public policy would be most consonant with both the Constitution and Catholic moral principles? And second: How should we approach the personal decision whether or not to own guns?"

---

[40]Rachel Lu, "Consider Gun Ownership for Family Protection," *Crisis Magazine*, last modified on June 18, 2014, www.crisismagazine.com/2014/consider-gun-ownership. For a perspective that is similar to Lu's in terms of appropriating the Catholic tradition of prudential judgment as it applies to gun control, see Pia de Solenni's article "Guns vs. Gun Control" *The National Catholic Register*, www.ncregister.com/daily-news/guns-vs.-gun-control.

[41]Lu, "Consider Gun Ownership."

[42]Lu, "Consider Gun Ownership."

[43]Lu, "Consider Gun Ownership." See for example the USCCB's "Call for Action in Response to Newtown Tragedy" (www.usccb.org/news/2012/12-219.cfm) and the testimony it submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee on February 12, 2013 titled "Proposals to Reduce Gun Violence: Protecting Our Communities While Respecting the Second Amendment" (www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/criminal-justice-restorative-justice/upload/USCCB-Senate-Testimony-Proposals-to-Reduce-Gun-Violence-2013.pdf).

[44]Lu, "Consider Gun Ownership."

[45]Lu, "Consider Gun Ownership."

It is in crafting a response to the first question that Lu calls for an exercise of prudential judgment. For while there may be many legal questions surrounding restrictions on the sale of guns, she also insists that "on a moral level we can easily see that there are multiple *prudential* questions to be answered here."[46]

Among such prudential questions to be answered is how effective stricter gun control laws would be in protecting "innocent life." Lu is skeptical of their efficacy insofar "the sorts of people who misuse guns typically aren't scrupulously law-abiding."[47] Thus since criminals are likely to obtain their guns illegally, measurements like expanded background checks "would likely have little effect on violent crime."[48] "Moreover," she argues, "with more than 300 million guns already on the streets, total disarmament of the whole nation is not realistically possible."[49]

Turning to the second question of whether individual Catholics should own guns, Lu asserts that a "strong argument" in favor of ownership exists and that it "is based primarily in the doctrine of subsidiarity."[50] For if subsidiarity means that "power and responsibility ought to be as decentralized as reasonably possible," then it stands to reason, Lu argues, that it "is similarly up to us to consider how best to protect our family from harm. In modern society, a willingness to summon the police should certainly be part of any reasonable family protection plan. But it may be that a personal firearm can also contribute positively to family security. If so, that constitutes a compelling reason to own a gun, and a well-constituted society should at least acknowledge the legitimacy of that desire."[51]

Thus while Lu's argument in favor of gun ownership on prudential grounds and in accordance with subsidiarity looks quite different from French's appeal to a biblical and natural right of self-defense, its trajectory follows a similar moral and theological arc inasmuch it puts forward a specifically Christian rationale for owning and using firearms.

***Pacifist response.*** As mentioned above, the Pacifist response to gun violence finds theological and moral tractions for its position in two key sources.

The first and most significant of these is Jesus' teachings on violence and his own nonviolent example. There are of course, other religious and philosophical traditions that extol the virtue of nonviolence, so Jesus is not unique in this regard.[52] However,

---

[46]Lu, "Consider Gun Ownership," emphasis added.
[47]Lu, "Consider Gun Ownership."
[48]Lu, "Consider Gun Ownership."
[49]Lu, "Consider Gun Ownership."
[50]Lu, "Consider Gun Ownership."
[51]Lu, "Consider Gun Ownership."
[52]For an excellent survey of different religious tradition of nonviolence see Daniel Smith-Christopher's *Subverting Hatred: The Challenge of Nonviolence in Religious Traditions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998). For a

those who articulate this response view Jesus' nonviolent teachings and witness as not just another shrewd political stratagem but instead as uniquely embodying and foreshadowing the full eschatological manifestation of the kingdom of God. Moreover, they also witness to a decisive cosmological transformation, namely that "Christian pacifism which has a theological basis in the character of God and the work of Jesus Christ is one in which the calculating link between our obedience and ultimate efficacy is broken, since the triumph of God comes through resurrection and not through effective sovereignty or assured survival."[53]

The second source is the New Testament's theology of the principalities and powers and how these entities can corrupt and distort human existence in structural and systemic ways.[54]

An illustrative example of the Pacifist response to gun ownership is found in James E. Atwood's *America and Its Guns: A Theological Exposé*.[55] When contemplating the epidemic of gun violence that plagues American society, Atwood asserts that a necessary place to begin is the way violence itself is embedded in the American collective psyche. The very theopolitical identity and sense of rights that David French lauds, Atwood sees as leading to the tragedy of violence in America.

Atwood appropriates Walter Wink's analysis of the principalities and powers, and calls this violent ethos that permeates American self-identity the myth of "redemptive violence." And rather than valorizing and extolling it, he judges it to be a "blasphemy" in as much as "we consider ourselves to be God's chosen people and therefore responsible and entitled to bring violence upon others whose intentions and purposes are, or *may be*, contrary to ours."[56] Ultimately it is this myth that Atwood finds underpinning and perpetuating gun violence in America:

philosophical defense of nonviolence as an effective political tactic see Gene Sharp's three-volume set *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Manchester, NH: Extending Horizons, 1973).

[53]John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 239.

[54]There is a vast literature examining this subject. Some good texts, in addition to Wink's trilogy cited above, are Hendrik Berkhof's *Christ and the Powers*, trans. John Howard Yoder (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1962); Marva Dawns's *Powers, Weakness and the Tabernacling of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), Jamie Pitts's *Principalities and Powers: Revisiting John Howard Yoder's Sociological Theology* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2013), and Robert Moses's *Practices of Power: Revisiting the Principalities and Powers in the Pauline Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

[55]James E. Atwood, *America and Its Guns: A Theological Exposé* (Eugene: Cascade, 2012). Atwood is pastor emeritus of the Trinity Presbyterian Church of Arlington, Virginia. See also Atwood's *Gundamentalism and Where It Is Taking America* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017). Preston Sprinkle also articulates a Christian pacifist response to gun violence in *Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013).

[56]Atwood, *America and Its Guns*, 65.

> The concept of redemptive violence is the motivating force behind Gun Empire's promotion of concealed carry on college campuses, churches, schools, gas stations, and shopping malls. After the Virginia Tech and Tucson executions . . . which were both carried out by mentally crazed young men armed with semiautomatic hand guns, some students and others sponsored demonstrations with the message: "If students, professors, and citizens had been armed these tragedies would never have happened." To have a concealed carry weapons permit (CCWP) is to believe in redemptive violence.[57]

In order to counteract this false and, in his words, idolatrous myth of redemptive violence that fuels America's crisis of gun violence, Atwood calls upon Christians to remember the kind of God they worship and serve. In particular, he invokes the eschatology imagery of Revelation 5:11-14, where the resurrected Jesus is hailed as "The Lamb that was slain" and states:

> The violent power of the Beast is overcome not by a more brutal power, which is history's norm nor are these principalities and powers crushed by a cataclysmic event. The Beast is laid low by the power of the One who renounces violence altogether. The old has passed away and God's new earth has arrived. The natural order of things is turned on its head. Life is different now. It is the way it is supposed to be. The Beast and Wicked Babylon are overwhelmed by the Lamb that was slain. To believe God is to know that what ought to be done *will* be done.[58]

In light of this transformation that God has effected in Jesus through the renunciation of violence, Atwood argues that Christians are now called to be agents of peace and justice. As such he thinks Christians are called to "love in Christ's name." However, Atwood understands the commitment to love to entail active confrontation with those forces and powers that foment violence. This conception of love has two direct consequences for how Christians should respond to gun violence. First, it requires that Christians confront those who own guns and who advocate gun ownership and call them to repentance. Second, it requires Christians to actively enter into the public sphere and call for and support gun control policies.

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

**Shalom *and rights.*** A fruitful place where Christians can begin to both broaden and deepen their discussion of gun violence lies at the intersection of *shalom* and rights, and more specifically *shalom* and the natural rights of self-protection. Recall from David French's Just Defense response that one of the reasons Christians support

[57] Atwood, *America and Its Guns*, 65.
[58] Atwood, *America and Its Guns*, 205-6.

gun ownership and use is because they see the right of self-defense as a biblically enshrined natural right that accords with God's natural law.

There is much to commend in this argument but also much to critique as well, or at least expand. Let us begin with the commendation first. Despite the vociferous objections of many recent theologians and ethicists, it must be recognized that the whole vocabulary and tradition of natural rights is deeply indebted to and steeped in Christian thought. Indeed, as Nicholas Wolterstorff and David Gushee have convincingly and admirably demonstrated, the whole concept and moral logic of the natural rights arose from the theological affirmation that human life is sacred and thus deserving of special protections and privileges.[59] Thus, far from being an aberration or even worse a corruption of Christian theology, the tradition of natural rights provides a substantive theological and ethical framework.

Nevertheless, as important as it is to remember that Christian theology provides natural rights with its ethical and metaphysical grounding, it is just as important to see that within the West as a whole and the United States in particular, the natural rights tradition has evolved in such a way as to be largely shorn of its theological antecedents and moorings. As a result, "the rights-bearing subject has been conceived as the exclusive proprietor of his . . . spiritual and physical being and capacities and of those external objects necessary to their preservation and development," and "his . . . freedom as self-possession consists in independence from, or non-subjection to, other wills, externally imposed obligations, and natural limitations."[60]

To be sure, such a view is incompatible with a Christian vision insofar as it elevates the sovereignty of the self above God and pits the well-being of the self in conflict with the neighbor. And there are some ways in which a Christian appeal to own and use guns in order to exercise the right of self-defense can unwittingly traffic in these distortions. In particular, it can begin to view others not as sacred selves deserving of reverence and protection in their own right but instead as impediments, or even worse, as threats to the self.

How, then, can an invocation of biblical *shalom* help modify and correct this increasingly distorted view of natural rights, including the right to self-defense? First, it can help retrieve the robust network of personal and social obligations that

[59]See Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) and David Gushee's *The Sacredness of Human Life: Why an Ancient Biblical Vision Is Key to the World's Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

[60]Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, "Historical Prolegomena to a Theological Review of 'Human Rights,'" *Studies in Christian Ethics* 9 (1996): 64.

originally accompanied a natural rights framework.[61] In so doing it can show that just as the biblical idea of *shalom* "is not merely the absence of hostility, not merely being in right relationship," but instead "at its highest is *enjoyment* in one's relationships."[62] So too a Christian conception of natural rights entails not just negative claims against others but also positive duties toward them.[63] Second, and in relation, it can help show that like *shalom*, the true aim of a Christian conception of natural rights is not merely the protection of human life but its proper flourishing in all of its dimensions.[64]

Thus, a rereading of the natural rights tradition through the lens of *shalom* can both affirm and challenge the different sides of the gun violence debate. For those who support the ownership and use of guns as a means of self-defense, *shalom* affirms not only the unique sacredness of human life but also the personal and societal responsibilities to see to its protection. By the same token, however, a *shalom*-infused understanding of natural rights will challenge those who support gun ownership and use to see that not only do they have a right to protect the sacredness of their own lives, but they also have a duty and responsibility to protect the sacredness and promote the holistic flourishing of all human lives.

Conversely, for those who support stricter gun controls, *shalom* affirms their commitment to work for the flourishing of all life. Yet it also challenges them to see that the protection of human life and reverent respect for its sacredness is also an integral aspect of *shalom* and thus a fundamental right that is deserving of recognition and respect.

***Pursuing an ethos of* shalom.** Another fruitful place where Christian engagement on gun violence can be both broadened and deepened is to consider strategies for active preemption and prevention. Here the practice of just peacemaking can serve as a valuable guide and model.[65]

Although formally addressing the question of how to prevent and/or ameliorate armed conflict between states, it is nevertheless possible to appropriate some specific

[61]See Wolterstorff's *Justice*, esp. 44-64, wherein he documents how early Christian jurists discussed natural law as not only supplying rights as claims against others but also as duties and responsibilities to others.

[62]Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 69-71.

[63]Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 69-71.

[64]Jonathan Warner, "Rights, Capabilities, and Human Flourishing," in *Christianity and Human Rights: Christians and the Struggle for Global Justice*, ed. Fredrick M. Shepherd (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2009), 165.

[65]For more on the just peacemaking paradigm, see Glen H. Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2008). See also the chapter in this volume by Jacob Cook.

just peacemaking practices and adapt them such that they are applicable to the issue of gun violence. Why is this so?

Regarding its theological and ethical rationale, because just peacemaking is concerned with actively preventing war, it draws support from both those Christians who subscribe to the just war tradition and those who are pacifists. This is because both agree that whatever their differences are on the ethics of war, both the Bible and the Christian tradition as a whole unequivocally present *shalom* as normative calling for all of God's people. Accordingly, all Christians have an obligation and duty to pursue it.

Like the question of war, the question of whether Christians can and should use guns for either self-defense or defense of others is a question that is sure to remain a point of protracted disagreement for some of the reasons delineated above. However, regardless of where they stand on that question, Christians on both sides of the argument can agree that gun violence fundamentally violates God's *shalom* in all its personal and social dimensions. Thus, pursuing just peacemaking as a strategy for actively preventing gun violence provides an inclusive platform where Christians of opposing views can join and work together against gun violence without having to forfeit their deeply held theological and ethical convictions on self-defense/protection and nonviolence/pacifism.

When considering which just peacemaking practices[66] seem applicable to the issue of gun violence, four in particular stand out. These include: (1) supporting nonviolent direct action, (2) taking independent initiatives to reduce threat, (3) using cooperative conflict resolution, and (4) reducing offense weapons and weapons trade. A particularly powerful example of the first three practices being enacted to prevent gun violence is found in the "Interrupters"—a group of former Chicago gang members who work to actively defuse conflicts in inner city Chicago neighborhoods.[67]

Given the persistent and active resistance against the implementation of more rigorous control measures within the United States, the adaptation and implementation of the just peacemaking practice of reducing offensive weapons and the weapons trade may initially appear both naive and misguided. However, previous history and popular perceptions notwithstanding, there is actually strong empirical evidence to suggest that a sizable majority of all Americans—including those who own firearms—are supportive of some increased gun control measures.

According to a recent public opinion survey published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, researchers found that 84 percent of gun owners and 74 percent of NRA

[66]Jacob Cook's chapter further identifies and discusses the ten principles of just peacemaking.

[67]See the Frontline documentary "The Interrupters," directed by Steve James, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/interrupters/.

members supported requiring a universal background check prior to purchasing a gun. This compares to 90 percent of all non–gun owners.[68] Furthermore, 76 percent of gun owners and 62 percent of NRA members supported prohibiting someone from owning a gun for ten years after a violation of a domestic violence restraining order, and 71 percent of gun owners and 70 percent of NRA members supported a mandatory two-year prison sentence for a person convicted with selling a gun to someone who is not legally allowed to own a gun.[69]

There is thus very fertile ground for crafting gun control measures that would enjoy broad public support. And what makes these kinds of controls especially appealing for the Christian community is that they would provide a meaningful way forward to both reduce the potential of gun violence while also preserving and respecting the rights of those who exercise responsible gun ownership.

Indeed, had a universal background check system been in place when Dylan Roof attempted to buy the Glock 41. 45 semiautomatic pistol he ultimately used to kill the nine members of Mother Emanuel Church, he most likely would have been denied the opportunity to purchase this weapon due to a previous felony drug conviction.[70]

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you interpret Genesis 9:6, and how does this shape your perspective on capital punishment? In what way does this perspective shape and inform your congregation regarding gun violence and whether a Christian has the moral authority to use a firearm to exact punishment against an evildoer?
2. How do you see the relationship between acknowledging the authority of church tradition and teaching on the one hand, and applying it to specific situations and contexts on the other? What sorts of principles help keep these two sources of moral and theological knowledge in a healthy tension? How do you prudentially apply the teaching of your own church tradition to the question of gun violence?
3. How does your congregation and/or church tradition read Jesus' teaching and practice of nonviolence and pacifism? What sort of interpretive tools does it prescribe? How does it respond to the critiques of its position registered by Christians who subscribe to a different view?

[68]Colleen L. Barry et al., "After Newtown—Public Opinion on Gun Policy and Mental Health," *The New England Journal of Medicine*, February 3, 2013, www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1300512.

[69]Barry et al., "After Newtown."

[70]Michael S. Schmidt, "Background Check Flaw Let Dylan Roof Buy Gun, F.B.I. Says," *New York Times*, July 10, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/07/11/us/background-check-flaw-let-dylann-roof-buy-gun-fbi-says.html.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

Agger, Ben, and Timothy W. Luke, eds. *Gun Violence and Public Life*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2014.

Cook, Philip J., and Jens Ludwig. *Gun Violence: The Real Costs*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

DeFoster, Ruth. *Terrorizing the Masses: Identity, Mass Shootings, and the Media Construction of Terror*. New York: Peter Lang, 2017.

Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne. *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment*. San Francisco: City Lights, 2018.

Kraus, Laurie, David Hoylan, and Bruce Wismer. *Recovering from Un-Natural Disasters: A Guide for Pastors and Congregations After Violence and Trauma*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017.

Marano, Diane. *Juvenile Offenders and Guns: Voices Behind Gun Violence*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Pearson, Sharon Ely, ed. *Reclaiming the Gospel of Peace: Challenging the Epidemic of Gun Violence*. New York: Morehouse, 2015.

Sakora, Lea, ed. *Is Gun Ownership a Right?* Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven, 2010.

Schildkraut, Jaclyn. *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths and Realities*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2016.

Squires, Peter. *Shooting to Kill? Policing, Firearms and Armed Response*. Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2010.

Twine, Fance Winddance. *Girls with Guns: Firearms, Feminism and Militarism*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Whitney, Craig R. *Living with Guns: A Liberal's Case for the Second Amendment*. New York: Public Affairs, 2012.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence. "Interfaith Coalition Issues Statement on Parkland School Shooting and Call to Action." February 16, 2018. www.fcnl.org/documents/540.

Frank, David A. "Facing Moloch: Barack Obama's National Eulogies and Gun Violence." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 17, no. 4 (2014): 653-78.

Grinshteyn, Erin, and David Hemenway. "Violent Death Rates: The US Compared with Other High-Income OECD Countries, 2010." *The American Journal of Medicine* 129, no. 3 (2016): 266-73.

Lemieux, Frederic. "Effect of Gun Culture and Firearm Laws on Gun Violence and Mass Shootings in the United States: A Multi-Level Quantitative Analysis." *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences* 9, no. 1 (2014): 74-93.

Morral, Andrew R., et al. *The Science of Gun Policy: A Critical Synthesis of Research Evidence on the Effects of Gun Policies in the United States*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018. www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2088.html.

Shakespeare, Lyndon. "Friendship, Love and Mass Shootings: Toward a Theological Response for Gun Control." *Anglican Theological Review* 95, no. 4 (2013): 607-25.

Webster, Daniel W., Jon S. Vernick, and Michael R. Bloomberg. *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.

### *Media and documentaries*

Cole, Kenneth, and Maria Cuomo. *Living for 32*. DVD. Directed by Kevin Breslin. Breslin Films, 2010.

Disney, Abigail, and Kathleen Hughes. *The Armor of Light*. Directed by Abigail Disney. Fork Films, 2016.

Doob, Nick, and Shari Cookson. *Requiem for the Dead: American Spring 2014*. DVD. Directed by Shari Cookson. HBO, 2015.

Frontline. *Gunned Down: The Power of the NRA*. PBS, 2016.

Greenwald, Robert. *Making a Killing: Guns, Greed and the NRA*. DVD. Directed by Robert Greenwald. Culver City, CA: Brave New Films, 2016.

Nelson, Zed. *Gun Nation*. Directed by Zed Nelson, 2016.

Richie, John. *91%: A Film About Guns in America*. DVD. Directed by John Richie. New York: Cinema Guild, 2016.

———. *Shell Shocked*. DVD. Directed by John Richie. Vimeo, 2013.

# 12

# MASS INCARCERATION

*Joshua Beckett*

## REAL LIFE

Life for Walter McMillian had never been easy.[1] Racial discrimination in post–civil rights Alabama persisted in employment, education, and the legal system. Yet through foresight and courageous risk-taking, in the 1970s he established his own pulpwood business and became one of the few black self-employed entrepreneurs in the area. It was hard work, but by the 1980s Walter had attained a position of independence and relative success.

Abruptly, he found himself accused of killing a young white woman. He was incredulous; a dozen witnesses could confirm his alibi—he had been hosting a church fish fry. Yet the accusation was no mistake but a deliberate, calculated plot. For months, local police had been unable to solve the crime; they needed a scapegoat to assuage mounting pressure by fearful citizens. The police paid and coerced witnesses to testify falsely against Walter; on the basis of these perjured testimonies, Walter was convicted by an all-white jury and sentenced to death in 1987. Terrified and bewildered on death row, he did not know where to turn.

Meanwhile, Harvard Law School graduate Bryan Stevenson had discovered shocking injustices in the ways that Alabama treated poor and minority defendants in its criminal justice system. When Walter's case came to his attention, Stevenson waded through antagonistic judges and hostile prison guards, stretching himself to the limits of his time and energy. Refusing to give up on Walter, he and his team at

[1] This case study is drawn and synthesized from Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2014).

the Equal Justice Initiative[2] painstakingly gathered evidence, endured death threats, constructed an airtight case, and finally won judicial relief. Six years later, Walter's conviction was overturned, and he was released.

Yet the rest of Walter McMillian's life was profoundly shaped by his years of incarceration. Early onset dementia set in, and he increasingly found it difficult to distinguish his post-prison reality with his traumatic experiences of unjust punishment. Stevenson explains:

> You can't threaten to kill someone every day year after year and not harm them, not traumatize them, not break them. . . . [We] can't continue to have a system of justice defined by error and unfairness and tolerate racial bias and bias against the poor and not confront what we are doing to individuals and to families and to communities and to neighborhoods. [McMillian] is in some ways a microcosm of that reality. He's representative of what we've done to thousands of people.[3]

## REAL WORLD

This story highlights several problems present in the US criminal justice system: public fear, corrupt officers, perjured witnesses, unfair trials, and false convictions. It is tempting to comfort ourselves that Walter's experience is an outlier, that our criminal justice system is usually effective (keeping society safe from the guilty) and just (keeping the innocent free from prison).

The truth, however, is both more complicated and more disturbing. Most people who end up incarcerated are not innocent like Walter; they have indeed committed a crime. Yet not all arrests, convictions, and sentences are created equal. Rather, with alarming regularity, African Americans and Latino/as receive more hostile police attention, harsher court judgments, and lengthier correctional control than whites who commit similar crimes at similar rates.

In the wake of horrific deaths inflicted by law enforcement on unarmed African Americans, implicit bias and unjustified violence have taken center stage in our national discourse. This conversation merits sustained attention, yet the criminal justice system extends further. What happens to the many people whose encounters with the police do not end in their death but in their detainment, trial, and incarceration? How has the number of people incarcerated in the United States skyrocketed

[2]For a brief synopsis of EJI's work, cf. Stevenson's March 2012 TED Talk, "We Need to Talk About an Injustice," www.ted.com/talks/bryan_stevenson_we_need_to_talk_about_an_injustice?language=en.

[3]Bryan Stevenson, interview with Terri Gross, "One Lawyer's Fight for Young Blacks and 'Just Mercy,'" NPR, October 20, 2014, www.npr.org/2014/10/20/356964925/one-lawyers-fight-for-young-blacks-and-just-mercy.

over four decades? And why are African Americans and Latino/as imprisoned so disproportionately? This chapter explores mass incarceration, the contemporary lockup of Americans that is unprecedented both worldwide and across history.

Many features of the US criminal justice system are not unique in global perspective. Indeed, prison populations worldwide have increased 10 percent in the past decade, including in private prisons. The overrepresentation of foreign nationals, indigenous peoples, and minority groups represents a sinister stain on the justice systems of other nations as well.[4]

Despite the similarities, the scale and complexity of the US prison system are unique.[5] The rise in incarceration since 1970 is statistically unrelated to the crime rate, which remained flat. In other words, locking more people up has not led to fewer people committing crimes.[6]

One of the primary contributors to the steep acceleration in American imprisonment was the war on drugs. Burnishing his crime-fighting credentials, Richard Nixon famously declared drug abuse "Public Enemy Number One." His public rhetoric emphasized strict drug law enforcement and demonized the collective enemy. As his domestic advisor, John Ehrlichman, later admitted,

> [Nixon] had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people . . . by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.[7]

These tough-on-crime tactics swayed public opinion, and Nixon won reelection. Leaders from both parties followed his example. Harsh rhetoric and policies proved an effective electoral strategy, and state policies have followed suit, stiffening penalties for drugs and other crimes.

Yet enforcement of increasingly severe drug laws has diverged widely across communities. Studies repeatedly demonstrate that people of all races buy, sell, use, and abuse drugs at similar rates; nevertheless, police departments disproportionately

[4]"Global Prison Trends 2017," www.penalreform.org/resource/global-prison-trends-2017/.

[5]For a breakdown of the makeup of US federal, state, and local facilities, cf. Peter Wagner and Bernadette Rabuy, "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2018," www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2018.html.

[6]"The incarceration rate rose independent of crime—but not of criminal-justice policy." Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration," *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 2015, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/10/the-black-family-in-the-age-of-mass-incarceration/403246/.

[7]Dan Baum, "Legalize It All: How to Win the War on Drugs," *Harpers Magazine*, April 2016, https://harpers.org/archive/2016/04/legalize-it-all/.

target lower-income urban neighborhoods with high minority populations. As with other aspects of American society, access to adequate defense has been broadly stratified across racial lines. When threatened with lengthy sentences, many alleged criminals opt for a plea bargain and a lighter punishment—even when innocent. A half-century of drug and crime policies has resulted in the escalation of federal prison populations and a racially skewed geography of mass incarceration.[8]

Another aspect of American incarceration lies closer to home. Beyond the high population of inmates in federal and state prisons, upward of 750,000 people are held in local jails. Many have been charged but not convicted; they are still awaiting trial but cannot afford to pay bail. Often they have merely been charged with traffic violations, yet the longer they remain in jail, the more they are assessed fines and fees and then further incarcerated for their inability to pay. This vicious cycle of jailing the poor (known as overcriminalization)[9] is not an unfortunate accident; indeed, some municipalities plan to meet their budget through traffic tickets, jail costs, and court fees for minor infractions and misdemeanors.

Across these levels, those who find themselves incarcerated (frequently men of color)[10] pay the most immediate price. Yet inmates' families also face profound hardship: both the loss of the personal presence and material support of their loved one, and the cost of staying in contact. Since prisons are usually built in rural areas, visits require long drives, while phone companies charge predatory rates. Upon release, the burdens to the family shift but do not dissipate.[11] Strict parole conditions can functionally force the former offender to remain home; he may also face legal barriers to employment, public benefits, housing, and voting. Thus recidivism remains high for "penal welfare at its finest."[12]

The social and economic tolls of mass incarceration are staggering. Across the political and ideological spectrum, there is a growing consensus that the status quo is both unjust and unsustainable. Regarding this shift, one analyst observes, "Perhaps the most important development is the sharp decline in crime since the turbulence of the early 1990s."[13] Other factors include conservative concerns about

[8]Peter Wagner and Daniel Kopf, "The Racial Geography of Mass Incarceration," July 2015, www.prisonpolicy.org/racialgeography/report.html.

[9]Cf. the interview with Nancy Fishman, a project director at the Vera Institute for Justice, NPR, May 11, 2016, www.npr.org/2016/05/11/477547366/is-america-engaged-in-a-vicious-cycle-of-jailing-the-poor.

[10]Though see Niall McCarthy, "No Country Incarcerates More Women Than the U.S.," Statista: The Statistics Portal, September 25, 2014, www.statista.com/chart/2755/no-country-incarcerates-more-women-than-the-us/.

[11]"Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families," http://whopaysreport.org/key-findings/.

[12]Coates, "Black Family."

[13]Matt Ford, "Can Bipartisanship End Mass Incarceration?" *The Atlantic*, February 25, 2015, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/02/can-bipartisanship-end-mass-incarceration/386012/.

careening financial costs, libertarian unease with government overreach, and progressive outrage at civil and human rights abuses. Bipartisan sponsorships have aimed to find practical ways to reduce the population of America's overcrowded federal and state prisons.

Yet significant barriers to the achievement of a lasting solution to mass incarceration remain. The craftiness of a powerful private prison lobby should not be underestimated. Additionally, the 2016 campaign's vitriol has temporarily poisoned the well against creative cooperation. President Trump has repeatedly spewed blatantly racist rhetoric on crime,[14] while Attorney General Sessions unraveled the Obama administration's modest reforms (indeed, the even more modest, overwhelmingly bipartisan First Step Act was only signed into law after his ouster from the administration). Beyond discouraging recent trends, however, perhaps the most intractable obstacle to reform is the massive scale of the system itself.[15]

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

Mass incarceration involves a complex convergence of factors: politicized narratives, short-sighted legislation, policing practices, courthouse policies, different stages of the criminal justice process, and different levels of government and society. Taking in the big picture is difficult because many people, organizations, and institutions are implicated in perpetuating the problem. The past few years have seen an increase in discussion and debate about the proper approaches for untangling the twisted webs of the system, bringing about its renewal in a more just and humane direction, and addressing the millions of people already ensnared in its net.

Christians have not been silent on these matters but have long been concerned with caring for both the victims and perpetrators of crimes as well as their families. Among Christian responses to mass incarceration, three prominent ones are explored below. These approaches are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they contain space for conceptual convergence and practical overlap.

Additionally, all three responses agree that crime is devastating for both victims and their communities, and thus serious consequences should be in order for perpetrators as they grapple with the debt to society that their actions have incurred. That

[14]He is also deeply tied, via donations and executive actions, to the private prison lobby. See the reporting by the Brennan Center for Justice (www.brennancenter.org/blog/trump's-first-year-has-been-private-prison-industry-best) and *Newsweek* (www.newsweek.com/trump-private-prison-campaign-donors-leaked-memo-795681) for further details of this relationship.

[15]For a more detailed analysis of multiple features that complexify the system, see German Lopez, "Mass Incarceration in America, Explained in 22 Maps and Charts," *Vox*, October 11, 2016, www.vox.com/2015/7/13/8913297/mass-incarceration-maps-charts.

is, none of these responses are "soft on crime." Yet all three approaches concur that retributive punishment alone—focusing on maximal penalties for wrongdoers—is inadequate to address the current problems (profound ineffectiveness and radical injustice) that pervade the criminal justice system.

At the same time, however, these three responses involve clear differences in both analysis and action. They center on different themes, operate at different levels of examination, and advocate different proposals. In order to clarify their distinctive features, for each approach, we will look at a thought leader and summarize their assessment of and response to the criminal justice system and mass incarceration, a representative ministry that embodies that response, and the biblical and theological supports that they offer for it.

**Table 12.1**

| RESPONSE | VARIABLE: LEVEL OF ANALYSIS | MAIN CLAIM | REPRESENTATIVE (MINISTRY) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Relationship | Individuals and families | The goal is to seek prisoners' conversion and discipleship | Chuck Colson (Prison Fellowship) |
| Restoration | Communities and societies | The goal is to heal the wounds of crime comprehensively | Christopher Marshall (Centre for Justice and Restoration) |
| Reform | Systems and structures | The goal is to correct the problems at their racialized roots | Michelle Alexander (Live Free) |

***Relationship.*** *Overview and brief biography.* This first response operates with a deeply personal frame of reference, addressing the prison system at the level of individual prisoners and their families. Its primary goals include gospel proclamation for the conversion of prisoners, their discipleship and rehabilitation while in prison, and communal support for returning citizens and their families. The most prominent and vocal proponent of this approach has been the late Chuck Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship.[16]

Chuck Colson reached the height of his political career as special counsel to the president. He was known and despised for his ruthlessness, yielding the nickname "Nixon's hatchet man." During the Watergate investigation, his earlier illegal activities came to light; in 1974 he pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice and served seven months in prison. Before beginning his sentence, a friend told him about new life in Christ. In despair over the disintegration of his life, Colson became a Christian, much to the derision of political observers; a newspaper mocked, "If Mr. Colson

[16]The following sketch is drawn from "Our Founder, Chuck Colson," www.prisonfellowship.org/about/chuckcolson/.

can repent of his sins, there just has to be hope for everybody."[17] However, his conversion stuck; upon his release he wrote the bestseller *Born Again* and established Prison Fellowship. From 1976 until his death in 2012, he threw himself wholeheartedly into prison ministry as well as writing books, articles, and speeches of moral and political commentary.

*Ministry profile.* Prison Fellowship's core concern is to see incarcerated people experience the regeneration that so transformed its founder. To that end, at the top of its list of areas of ministry[18] is *restoring prisoners*: "sharing the Gospel, spreading hope, and teaching life-changing classes" through Bible studies and discipleship courses facilitated by over eleven thousand volunteers nationwide. *Supporting successful reentry* programs of holistic life skills and mentoring round out the curriculum for inmates, and they also build church-based post-release support networks.

This model of individual discipleship at the center extends beyond prisoners to those with whom they come into contact most often: their wardens and families. A ministry of *empowering great wardens* trains prison officials in best practices for fostering safer, more humane contexts. Additionally, Prison Fellowship's practice of *ministering to families* includes its famous Angel Tree program, which delivers Christmas presents to the children of the incarcerated.

Finally, Prison Fellowship is involved in *advocating for restorative justice reform*. Thus, it shares some commonalities with the two other responses—Restoration and Reform—surveyed below. Prison Fellowship helped develop a model of restorative justice,[19] which brings together victims of crime, the responsible parties, and their communities. Also, the ministry has advocated for passage of bipartisan reform legislation. Regarding the racial disparities present throughout the criminal justice system, however, Prison Fellowship is largely silent.

*Biblical and theological framework.* "Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them" (Heb 13:3). Colson was emphatic in connecting Prison Fellowship's public work with its members' personal faith in Christ. He testified, "Christian conviction inspires public virtue, the moral impulse to do good. It has sent legions into battle against disease, oppression, and bigotry. It ended the slave trade, built hospitals and orphanages, tamed the brutality of mental wards and prisons. In

[17] Jessica Gresko, "Watergate Figure Charles Colson Dies at 80," *Boston Globe*, April 21, 2012, www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2012/04/21/watergate-figure-charles-colson-dies/z357H5h8WPqOxFAdIjOFMI/story.html.

[18] "Our Approach," www.prisonfellowship.org/about/.

[19] "Justice That Restores," www.prisonfellowship.org/about/justicereform/justice-that-restores/.

every age it has given divine mercy a human face in the lives of those who follow Christ [including] the tens of thousands of Prison Fellowship volunteers who take hope to the captives."[20]

A few basic biblical and theological themes undergird Prison Fellowship's approach.

1. Remembrance: based on the above theme verse, journeying together and being present with the incarcerated is the primary expression of their ministry.
2. Human dignity: "Our ministry is founded on the conviction that all people are created in God's image and that no life is beyond God's reach."[21]
3. Jesus as restorer: Christ is both the means and the end of the ministry. The Lord was "brought to trial, executed, buried, and brought to life again [and] offers hope, healing, and a new purpose for each life. . . . Through an amazing awakening to new hope and life purpose, those who once broke the law are transformed and mobilized to serve their neighbors, replacing the cycle of crime with a cycle of renewal."
4. Individual responsibility: the ministry treats prisoners as unique persons with moral responsibility. This accent was central to Chuck Colson's worldview and significantly shaped his social analysis. He believed, "Crime is not caused by environment or poverty or deprivation. It is caused by individuals making wrong moral choices. . . . The answer to crime therefore is the conversion of the wrongdoer to a more responsible lifestyle."[22]

***Restoration.*** *Overview.* A second response to the crisis of mass incarceration is restorative justice. While practitioners of restorative justice are certainly interested in developing relationships and assisting individuals (victims and perpetrators) and their families, as well as advocating for systemic and structural reform, restorative justice especially focuses on communities and societies. Proponents of restorative justice seek to engage multiple community constituencies and resources to heal the wounds of crime comprehensively and to reshape a social imagination entrenched in retribution. In this way, although it is certainly linked to Relationship and Reform, Restoration is a distinct, mediating approach.

Restorative justice processes have been implemented in public schools, local municipalities, and even nations (for example, South Africa). However, nonprofits comprise the bulk of restorative justice initiatives. Although not all organizations

[20]"Templeton Prize," www.templetonprize.org/news_colson.html.

[21]"Prison Fellowship's Values," www.prisonfellowship.org/about/beliefs/.

[22]Kathryn Schulz, "From the White House to the Jailhouse to the Pulpit: Chuck Colson on Being Wrong," *Slate*, October 20, 2010, www.slate.com/blogs/thewrongstuff/2010/10/20/from_the_white_house_to_the_ jailhouse _to_the_pulpit_chuck_colson_on_being_wrong.html.

practicing and teaching restorative justice are faith-based, many are explicitly Christian in their foundation and goals.

There are several interrelated models of restorative justice, but they involve similar features: attempting to remedy the painful ripple effects of particular crimes, bringing together both victims and perpetrators in a safe environment with community support, empowering victims to find their voice and express how they have been affected, and offering perpetrators the opportunity to express their repentance through restitution. The real, concrete needs of the victim are given a higher priority than any abstract conception of a perpetrator's debt to society.

*Ministry profile.* One prominent ministry is the Centre for Justice and Reconciliation, which states, "While operating from within the Christian tradition, the Centre finds common ground and joins in advocating for restorative justice with people from all backgrounds and traditions."[23] CJR's mission is to "develop and promote restorative justice in criminal justice systems around the world," anticipating a vision of "a future in which restorative justice is a normal response to crime." Its distinctive programs are the Sycamore Tree Project, which brings together unrelated victims and offenders to talk about justice, and Communities of Restoration, holistic prison experiences that promote character development and reciprocal relationships in community.

Beyond practical expressions of restorative justice, the Centre for Justice and Reconciliation teaches the inner logic of the model in an accessible, comprehensive tutorial. Some of its most important features include exposition of restorative justice's key communal and social principles, normative values, programs of repair, and conceptual issues about the system.[24]

*Biblical and theological framework.* "He looked down from his holy height, from heaven the Lord looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die" (Ps 102:19-20). For an explicitly biblical treatment of the theme we turn to Christopher Marshall, a professor of restorative justice in New Zealand. Marshall has devoted his life and scholarship to offering biblical and theological inspiration for promoting restorative justice and human rights. He is particularly concerned with mass incarceration and its devastating effects on racial minorities.

In an essay, Marshall highlights the frequency of biblical discussions of the subject:

[23]"Centre for Restorative Justice," http://restorativejustice.org.

[24]"Tutorial: Introduction to Restorative Justice," http://restorativejustice.org/restorative-justice/about-restorative-justice/tutorial-intro-to-restorative-justice/.

> Many of the great characters of the biblical story experienced periods of imprisonment—Joseph, Samson, Jeremiah, Micaiah, Zedekiah, Daniel, John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, Silas, Paul, Epaphras, Aristarchus, Junia, and even Jesus himself, who was held in custody between his arrest and execution, and then, in death, was imprisoned in a guarded tomb. But probably the most renowned (and recidivist) prisoner of them all was the apostle Paul, who had a veritable career in the penal system![25]

Humor aside, Marshall's biblical synthesis reveals sobering realities for shaping our perspective.

1. *Imprisonment was a cause of great suffering*. From Jeremiah's cistern to Micaiah's starvation rations, and from the psalmists' despairing cries to the Romans' vigorous beatings, the Bible always associates prisons with darkness and misery.
2. *Imprisonment in biblical times was an instrument of oppression* more than an instrument of justice. Old Testament law did not prescribe imprisonment, and in fact Israel may have learned about prisons from pagan neighbors. But their use was mitigated, among other factors, by the Torah's emphasis on restitution, communal responsibility for obedience, and their memory of the exodus.
3. *Imprisonment is identified in Scripture with the spirit and power of death*. This link may spring from an association between cisterns and pits with entrance to the underworld. Regardless of its origins, Marshall explains, "Prison is not simply seen in the Bible as a social institution or material entity but as a spiritual reality, a kind of living death."[26]
4. *God wants to set prisoners free*. From the Torah's recounting of God's actions to the psalmists' glowing praise, and from Isaiah's prophetic vision to Jesus' ministry manifesto, God consistently brings freedom.

Marshall focuses on the justice of God expressed in the teachings and life of Jesus and the writings of Paul: "Whereas Paul sees the cross and resurrection as the focus point of God's justice, the Gospel writers consider Jesus' entire life and ministry to be a demonstration of divine justice."[27] Jesus calls for forgiveness of offenders (in Mt 18:21-35 and the Lord's Prayer), a stance of nonretaliation (in Lk 9:51-56 and the Beatitudes), and love of enemies (Mt 5:38-48; Lk 6:27-36). Meanwhile, Paul places *dikaiosynē* ("righteousness, justice") at the heart of the gospel. Justification by faith is a form of

[25]Christopher D. Marshall, "Prison, Prisoners, and the Bible," restorativejustice.org/10fulltext/marshall-christopher.-prison-prisoners-and-the-bible.pdf, 5.
[26]Marshall, "Prison, Prisoners, and the Bible," 10.
[27]Christopher D. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 69.

restorative justice, as God equally judges and forgives both Jews and Gentiles (Rom 1:18–3:31); indeed, the cross of Christ is a matter of redemptive solidarity (Rom 5:1-21).[28]

Beyond this synthetic biblical survey, Marshall address the difficulties of how "the 'in-house' ethical teaching of the New Testament applies to the wider pluralist community."[29] He identifies three concerns for "any attempt to apply Christian insights to the criminal justice domain."[30] These are: preserving the unity of personal and social ethics, integrating the complex relationship of love and justice, and intelligibly expressing Christian ethical arguments in public.[31]

***Reform.*** *Overview and brief biography.* The first two responses work within the system (Relationship) or develop alternatives to it (Restoration). A third response begins with a bleaker perspective: that the criminal justice system is so inherently unjust—its structures so fundamentally broken, and its practices so profoundly discriminatory—only a radical transformation will do. One of the leaders most effectively raising awareness about these complex issues is Michelle Alexander.

When Michelle Alexander, a Stanford law graduate, began leading the ACLU's Racial Justice Project in northern California, she first encountered the comparison between the drug war and Jim Crow, considering it "an absurd comparison."[32] But when a young man with a felony drug charge presented her a careful documentation of police harassment, she sadly explained that no jury would believe his testimony. Storming out of her office, he shouted that everybody was in the system. Alexander saw that criminal justice was "not just another institution infected with racial bias but rather a different beast entirely. . . . I came to see that mass incarceration in the United States had, in fact, emerged as a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow."[33] Alexander identifies the following stages.

1. *The roundup*: "Vast numbers of people are swept into the criminal justice system by the police, who conduct drug operations primarily in poor communities of color. They are rewarded in cash—through drug forfeiture laws and federal grant programs—for rounding up as many people as possible."[34]

[28]Marshall also finds ample Old Testament evidence that divine justice is restorative, as witnessed by the Torah (Deut 30:3), the Prophets (Amos 5:24), and the Writings (Ps 147:7-10).

[29]Marshall, *Beyond Retribution*, 16.

[30]Marshall, *Beyond Retribution*, 17.

[31]The Christian story "does not furnish a ready-made theory of criminal justice, but it does a great deal to enlarge our understanding of justice and to foster a commitment to its pursuit." *Beyond Retribution*, 31.

[32]Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010), 3.

[33]Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 4.

[34]Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 185.

2. *The conviction and formal control*: "Once arrested, defendants are generally denied meaningful legal representation and pressured to plead guilty. . . . Once convicted, [they] spend more time under the criminal justice system's formal control—in jail or prison, on probation or parole—than drug offenders anywhere else in the world. [Once released], they are transferred from their prison cells to a much larger, invisible cage."[35]
3. *The period of invisible punishment*: "They will be discriminated against, legally, for the rest of their lives—denied employment, housing, education, and public benefits. Unable to surmount these obstacles, most will eventually return to prison and then be released again, caught in a closed circuit of perpetual marginality."[36]

*Parallels, discontinuities, and proposals for resistance.* Alexander identifies many parallels between contemporary mass incarceration and previous legal segregation. These include institutional inception,[37] legal discrimination, political disenfranchisement through the denial of voting rights, exclusion from juries, the closing of the courthouse doors to legal challenges of racial bias, racial segregation, and the symbolic production of race.[38] But there are limits to the analogy; important contrasts between mass incarceration and Jim Crow include the absence of racial hostility (the system is formally colorblind), the presence of white victims of racial caste,[39] and black support for "get-tough policies." Unfortunately, these differences make exposing the system's racial effects more difficult.

Maddeningly complicated problems require soberly comprehensive responses. Half-measures cannot fix broken structures. Alexander discusses a few elements essential for a lasting solution: embracing the task that "civil rights advocates have long been reluctant to do: advocacy on behalf of criminals,"[40] eschewing colorblind advocacy,[41] and expanding public imagination to encompass the suffering of poor and working-class white people. Class-based remedies and interracial solidarity are both necessary, as is white willingness to sacrifice privilege.

---

[35]Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 186.

[36]Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 186-87.

[37]Both segregation and mass incarceration allowed "white elites to exploit the resentments, vulnerabilities, and racial biases of poor and working-class whites for political or economic gain." *New Jim Crow*, 191.

[38]A "racial caste system [needs] to define the meaning of race in its time. Slavery defined what it meant to be black (a slave), and Jim Crow defined what it meant to be black (a second-class citizen). Today mass incarceration defines the meaning of blackness in America: black people, especially black men, are criminals." *New Jim Crow*, 197.

[39]White people that get caught up in the Drug War are "collateral damage," even though they are not the original targets. *New Jim Crow*, 204.

[40]Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 226.

[41]"The prevailing caste system cannot be successfully dismantled with a purely race-neutral approach." Rather, the priority should be on forging "a new, more compassionate public consensus about race." *New Jim Crow*, 239-40.

*Biblical and theological framework.* "And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). The academy, the courts, and the public square are the primary arenas of Alexander's work, so she does not usually cite Scripture to support her arguments. However, her Christian faith deeply informs her speaking and writing, revealing an implicit theological framework.

1. *The primacy of grace*: "there's more to us as human beings, as children of God, than the worst act we've ever committed. So I think part of redeeming our criminal justice system is acknowledging at every stage of the process the dignity and basic humanity of all."[42]
2. *Humility stemming from solidarity in sin*: Alexander reframes our views on sin and crime: "All of us have broken the law at some point in our lives. . . . I've spoken in churches and I'll say to a large congregation, 'We're all sinners.' And everyone will nod their head, oh, yes, we're all sinners. And then I'll say, 'And we're all criminals.' And everyone just stares at me kind of bug eyed. . . . Isn't it interesting how eager we are all to admit that we violated God's law, but how reluctant we are to admit that we've violated man's law?"[43]
3. *Compassion-infused justice*: this is perhaps Alexander's central theological theme: "Justice is love made visible—we need both freedom and abolition. And our culture needs a compassionate-restorative-rehabilitative attitude, rather than a punitive one."[44]
4. *Love for the truth*: Alexander forces us to confront inconvenient, devastating truths about our history and present reality. But as painful as these are, she finds hope in the many people who are gaining awareness and committing themselves to action.
5. *Community*: recognizing humanity's need for community, Alexander envisions an interdependent movement of Christians enacting transformation: "We need a new underground railroad, people opening up their homes and churches to released convicts. But we also need prophetic advocacy to address the injustice. We need to study together, pray together, and march together. . . . Courage

[42]Michelle Alexander interview with Harold Dean Turner, "Fighting the U.S. Caste Culture," *Evangelicals for Social Action*, November 4, 2014, www.evangelicalsforsocialaction.org/human-rights-2/fighting-the-u-s-caste-culture/.

[43]Michelle Alexander, interview with Krista Tippett, "Who We Want to Become: Beyond the New Jim Crow," *On Being*, April 21, 2016, https://onbeing.org/programs/michelle-alexander-who-we-want-to-become-beyond-the-new-jim-crow/.

[44]Plenary address, Christian Community Development Association "Cultivate" Conference, New Orleans, LA, September 13, 2013. Cf. 1 Corinthians 12.

comes from people of faith who are willing to take bold risks—not from politicians or leaders."[45]

*Ministry profile.* Although Michelle Alexander has become the foremost representative of this new social movement, there are many other organizations, including Christian ministries, who are likewise committed to systemic reform. One such group is Live Free, which describes itself as "organizing the faith community to end the mass criminalization of black and brown people." A part of the Pico Network, and led by Pastor Mike McBride,[46] Live Free operates on several fronts. These include "banning the box" (removing the question about conviction history from job applications), reducing gun violence through community partnerships, and getting out the vote. Utilizing a Body-Ballot-Buck framework, they invite Christians' physical engagement, electoral process participation, and economic power. McBride asks, "Can we embrace our call to be prophets of a righteous resistance rather than chaplains in a failing empire?"[47]

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

The depth and breadth of injustice endemic to the criminal justice system in the United States is simultaneously outrageous and devastating. Understanding the unique problems related to mass incarceration at each layer of society is essential if they are to be remedied. Each of these approaches toward the complex, interlocking issues of criminal justice can make a claim to biblical faithfulness at some level. Indeed, "level" is the operative word: because the system impinges upon (and malforms) individuals, communities, and macrostructures, the respective solutions of relationship, restoration, and reform are vital.

Thus, while each response to mass incarceration has been presented separately to highlight their distinct contributions, they work best together. But they break down when a remedy appropriate for one layer of society is reductively billed as the solution to the whole system. For example, when conversion (an appropriate goal for individuals) is presented as *the* answer to the problem of crime, the distorted structures of the broader system are left unexamined and unmended.[48]

---

[45]"Cultivate" plenary address.

[46]For biographical information, Mike McBride's personal website is http://pastormikemcbride.com/about/. The organizational website for Live Free is www.livefreeusa.org.

[47]For an example of McBride's prophetic resistance in action, see his sermon at Fuller Theological Seminary on the realities of criminal justice. "Wake Up!," Pasadena, CA, February 3, 2016, https://vimeo.com/154113804.

[48]Unfortunately, at times Chuck Colson tended toward this direction—dismissing social environment, poverty, racism, and depravation as factors that contribute to the development of crime in people and their communities. The individualistic bent of his analysis led to reductive prescriptions that ignored the systemic and

Additionally, each approach has sustained critiques that deserve careful attention. Prison Fellowship has been criticized for favoritism toward Christian prisoners,[49] even being found in violation of the Establishment Clause by an Iowa court.[50] Meanwhile, restorative justice requires refinement in precision, even as it gains ascendancy in popularity. That is, methodological care and clear communication are necessary to ensure that different people and organizations are referring to the same thing when they speak of restoration.[51] Finally, even scholars sympathetic to the goals of systemic reform raise concerns about the limits of the New Jim Crow framework; for example, one law professor suggests that the analogy "ignores violent crimes while focusing almost exclusively on drug crimes, obscures class distinctions within the African American community, and overlooks the effects of mass incarceration on other racial groups."[52] These critiques do not undermine the broad validity of relationship, restoration, and reform, but they do highlight potential weaknesses that may require creative correction.

Discerning readers will have noticed the absence of retribution as a viable Christian perspective on crime and punishment. There are multiple reasons for this omission. First, as mentioned from the outset, a harshly punitive approach that prioritizes punishment over all other social goals is not only profoundly reductive but also substantially ineffective, as high recidivism rates show.

More significantly for Christians, models of retributive justice that have developed throughout church history have often been theologically inadequate, even in their intent to be biblical. Although Old Testament proof texts (such as Gen 9:6 and Lev 24:19-20) have been cited in support of severe retribution, these have been abstracted from their canonical, cultural, and covenantal contexts. The thrust of the Noahic covenant is to highlight the value of human life (as well as the earth and its creatures), not to advocate for its destruction. Similarly, the *lex talionis* prescriptions at Sinai seek to restrain humanity's vengeful impulse, not validate it.

---

structural dimensions of the problem. See, for example, "New York, New York," from March 9, 2010, one of his weekly "Two Minute Warning" videos: www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6pekdCeXx8.

[49] One of many examples stems from Samantha M. Shapiro's 2003 investigation for *Mother Jones*, titled "Charles Colson's Jails for Jesus." www.motherjones.com/politics/2003/11/jails-jesus-charles-colson/.

[50] The case was Americans United for Separation of Church and State v. Prison Fellowship Ministries.

[51] Criminologist Arlène Gaudreault expounds upon this concern in her article, "The Limits of Restorative Justice," *Proceedings of the Symposium of the École Nationale de la Magistrature* (Paris: Edition Dalloz, 2005), www.victimsweek.gc.ca/symp-colloque/past-passe/2009/presentation/arlg_1.html.

[52] James Forman Jr., "Racial Critiques of Mass Incarceration: Beyond the New Jim Crow," *Faculty Scholarship Series,* paper 3599, 2012, http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers/3599/. It should be noted that the last feature of this critique does not apply to Michelle Alexander's particular account.

Finally, given that the ultimate coherence and intelligibility of Scripture is found in Jesus, all considerations of texts about retribution must be refracted through the lens of his life and teaching. Although the theological and social debates on this subject remain complex, requiring hermeneutical care when applying biblical teaching to the public square, the Sermon on the Mount underscores the reality that the operating paradigm for Christians is nonretaliatory enemy love, not vengeance.[53]

So what roles are Christians and churches are called to play in correcting the painful, racialized, and systemic injustices of mass incarceration? As this chapter has sought to demonstrate, the dimensions of the problem are staggering, far too much for any one person, community, or institution to fix in isolation. Therefore it is imperative to remember the biblical image and metaphor of the body. No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. In today's contested sociopolitical climate, the horizons for comprehensive solutions appear to have significantly narrowed for the present. A candid assessment of this bleak reality does not diminish the need for ongoing political advocacy (at federal, state, and local levels) but rather underscores the necessity for Christians to discern and embody additional practices, both in our own communities and in concert with people and organizations that do not share our faith.

Possible means of involvement include learning more about the system; raising awareness within our networks; correcting narratives that demean the image of God in incarcerated people; practicing restorative justice in our own families and congregations; participating directly in local prison ministries; changing habits of consumption and investment by boycotting and divesting from companies that profit from prison labor; and voting for political candidates that eschew scapegoating rhetoric and seek creative, bipartisan solutions.

The precise ways in which congregations and individuals should become involved in correcting the massive injustice of mass incarceration depend on several factors: available partnerships, local nuances, communal gifts, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Yet the urgency for such participation stems both from the pain of millions like Walter McMillian, who continue to suffer under the criminal system in the United States and beyond, and from Jesus' own solidarity with those in prison. He explicitly identifies with the poor, the stranger, the sick, *and the prisoner*, thus rendering poverty, immigration, health care, *and incarceration* as spiritual and theological issues, not merely social and political ones. His declaration is both stirring and sobering: "Truly

[53]Matthew 5:38-48. Indeed, even the Pentateuch recognizes that vengeance is a uniquely divine prerogative (Deut 32:35), a stance not lost on New Testament writers (e.g., Rom 12:17-21).

I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. . . . Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me" (Mt 25:40, 45 NRSV).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare the three approaches. What would embracing and participating in each of them cost you and your congregation, ministry, or community?
2. Perhaps the biggest difference between the three responses to mass incarceration concerns the extent to which they address the question of racial justice. What are some of the consequences of these differences?
3. What are the potential opportunities—and challenges—that each approach presents for partnering with people and organizations that may not share Christian faith convictions?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: New Press, 2010.

Blackard, Kirk. *Love in a Cauldron of Misery: Perspectives on Christian Prison Ministry*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012.

Camp, Jordan T. *Incarcerating the Crisis: Freedom Struggles and the Rise of the Neoliberal State.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016.

Colson, Charles W. *Born Again.* Grand Rapids: Chosen, 1976.

Dubler, Joshua and Vincent Lloyd. *Break Every Yoke: Religion, Justice, and the Abolition of Prisons.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Forman, James, Jr. *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2017.

Gilliard, Dominique DuBois. *Rethinking Incarceration: Advocating for Justice That Restores.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018.

Magnani, Lauraet, and Harmon L. Wray. *Beyond Prisons: A New Interfaith Paradigm for Our Failed Prison System.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006.

Manza, Jeff, and Christopher Uggen. *Locked Out: Felon Disenfranchisement and American Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Marshall, Christopher D. *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Mauer, Marc, and Meda Chesney-Lind, eds. *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment*. New York: New Press, 2002.

Spitale, Lennie. *Prison Ministry: Understanding Prison Culture Inside and Out.* Nashville: B&H, 2002.

Stevens, Wesley. *Learning to Sing in a Strange Land: When a Loved One Goes to Prison*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009.

Stevenson, Bryan. *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2014.

Waquant, Loic. *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

Charles Colson Task Force on Federal Corrections. "Transforming Prisons, Restoring Lives." January 2016. www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/77101/2000589-Transforming-Prisons-Restoring-Lives.pdf.

Ella Baker Center for Human Rights et al. "Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families." September 2015. http://whopaysreport.org/key-findings/.

Grassroots Leadership. "The Dirty Thirty: Nothing to Celebrate About 30 Years of the Corrections Corporation of America." June 2013. http://grassrootsleadership.org/sites/default/files/uploads/GRL_Dirty_Thirty_formatted_for_web.pdf.

Justice Policy Institute. "Gaming the System: How the Political Strategies of Private Prison Companies Promote Ineffective Incarceration Policies." June 2011. www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/gaming_the_system.pdf.

Pew Center on the States. "One in Thirty-One: The Long Reach of American Corrections." March 2009. www.convictcriminology.org/pdf/pew/onein31.pdf.

Prison Reform International. "Global Prison Trends 2017." May 2017. www.penalreform.org/resource/global-prison-trends-2017/.

Syndicate Theology. "Redeeming a Prison Society." January 2015. https://syndicate.network/symposia/theology/redeeming-a-prison-society/.

### *Media and documentaries*

*The Central Park Five*. Directed by Ken and Sarah Burns. Florentine Films/WETA, 2012.

*Concrete, Steel, and Paint*. Directed by Cindy Burstein and Tony Heriza. Independent, 2009.

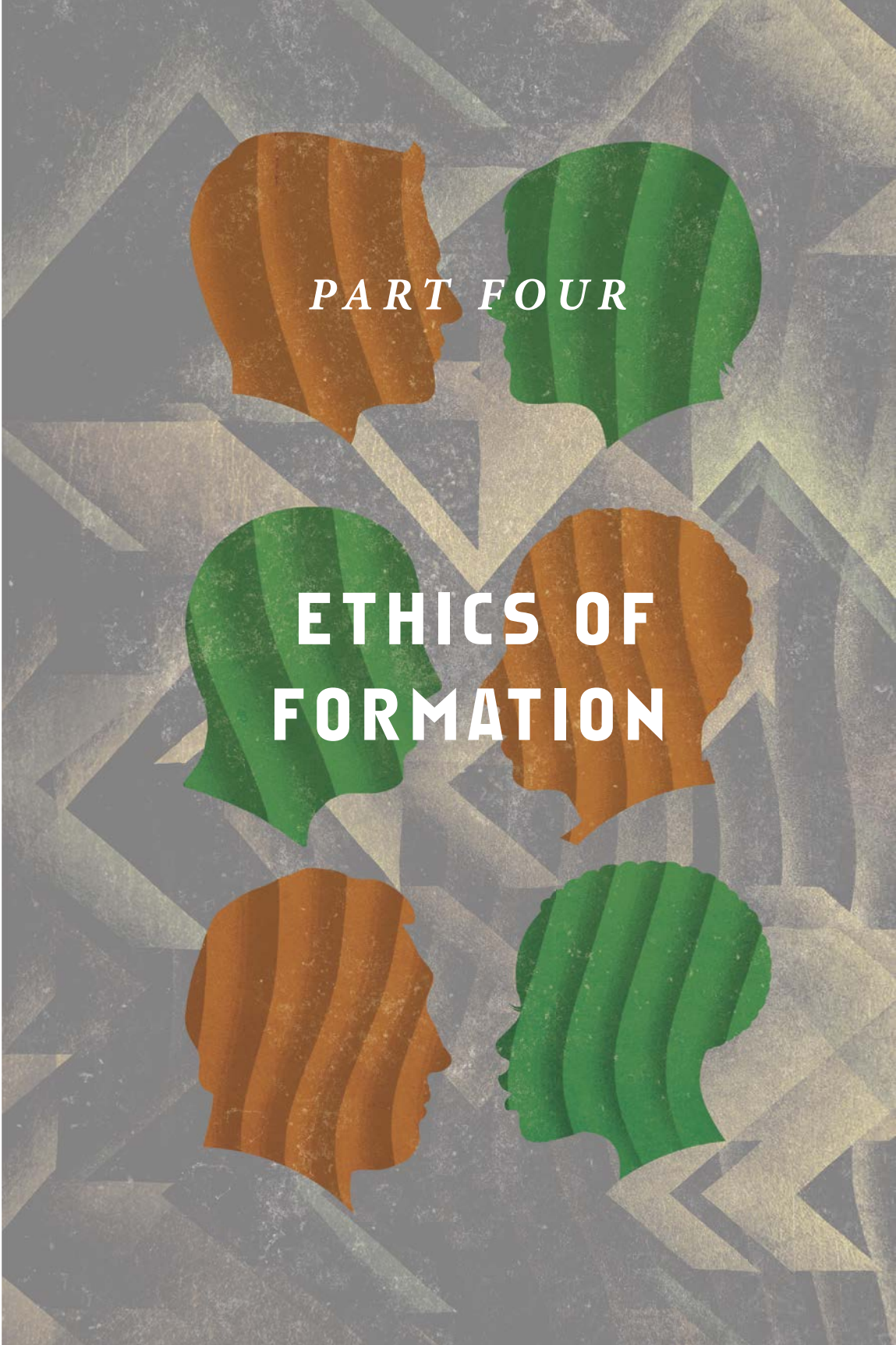
*Herman's House*. Directed by Angad Bhalla. First Run Features, 2012.

*The House I Live In*. Directed by Eugene Jarecki. Cinetic, 2012.

*Prison State*. Directed by Daniel Edge. PBS/Frontline, 2014.

*Serving Life*. Directed by Lisa R. Cohen. Lightworks Pictures/OWN, 2011.

*13th*. Directed by Ava DuVernay. Netflix, 2016.



*PART FOUR*

# ETHICS OF FORMATION

# 13

# RACISM

*Jeff Liou*

## REAL LIFE

On August 13, 2016, hundreds of protesters converged on the neighborhood where Sylville Smith, a twenty-three-year-old black man fleeing a traffic stop, was killed that day by a black Milwaukee police officer. Smith's death ignited protests in a community where poverty had been concentrating over decades, manufacturing jobs had left the area, and transportation deficiencies worsened the community's isolation and segregation. Confrontation with police officers began to escalate, and soon journalist Aaron Mak found himself a target of the crowd's frustration. Mak's beating finally ceased when concerned bystanders repeatedly shouted to his attackers that he is Chinese. This incident came almost exactly two years after Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, Missouri. Brown's death propelled the Black Lives Matter movement into the national spotlight. Mak's article on the incident, in which he was asked, "You're Asian, right? Why are you even here?" includes his reflection on the place of Asian Americans in the conversation around movements like Black Lives Matter specifically, and race more generally, in the United States.

Two years later, special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 US presidential election uncovered a Russian-operated Twitter account attempting to stoke racial tension during the protest over Smith's death in Milwaukee.[1] The Twitter account appeared to be operated by a Tennessee GOP supporter, blamed President Obama for the protest in Milwaukee, and in many other

[1] Associated Press, "Report: Russia-Linked Accounts Stirred Discord in Milwaukee," March 15, 2018, http://journaltimes.com/news/state-and-regional/report-russia-linked-accounts-stirred-discord-in-milwaukee/article_f817ea4a-bf7a-53ee-85ea-4688d42cc1f3.html.

tweets retraced the nation's already racially charged political fault lines. The manipulation of US racial strife by foreign actors to further another country's political aims is alarming. The escalation of the incident in Milwaukee and its real impact on people's lives in that city is deeply problematic.

Furthermore, Mak's article underscores the black-white binary that so strongly characterizes the history of the conversation on race in the United States. There is a barrier to entry into that conversation for Asian Americans like Mak whose experiences are not the same as those of the black community, and yet they are shot through with a unique blend of racial exclusion, cooption, and exoticization. However, Mak's experience also illustrates the precariousness of talking about race *outside* of the black-white binary and, in so doing, decentering the life-and-death stakes about which black and brown communities have been speaking, demonstrating, and advocating for so long. There are myriad other considerations and voices that could add to a discussion of this incident in which a person, precious to God, lost his life—the identity of the police officer, the outcome of the officer's 2017 trial, the diverse perspectives of other Americans, and so on.

***Definitions of "race," "ethnicity," and "racism."*** Rather than being a definitive guide to these terms, this brief excursus primarily serves to describe the way in which these terms will be used in this chapter.

*Race.* This chapter treats race as "perceived common physical characteristics that are held to be inherent."[2] Pseudoscientific theories of race that argued the inherency of these differences have been debunked. Findings from genetic research confirm that a small percentage of genetic material determines physical appearance. Additionally, humans can share more DNA in common with people across racial groups than within them.[3] Nevertheless, the significance of race in conversations around kitchen tables and in the halls of highest authority cannot be understated. In the history of race, beholders ascribe racial categories upon others (e.g., "red," "yellow," "black," and "white"). Named groups do not have any say in the matter. This is one of the important differences between "race" and "ethnicity."

*Ethnicity.* Ethnicity, according to Richard Schermerhorn's influential definition, is "a collectivity within larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements

[2]Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, 2007), 25.

[3]D. J. Witherspoon et al., "Genetic Similarities Within and Between Human Populations," *Genetics* 176, no. 1 (2007): 351.

defined as the epitome of their peoplehood."[4] To possess such memories requires self-determination. Groups that assert their own sense of peoplehood are considered ethnic groups by this definition. While race is first ascribed, it can also become asserted like ethnicity. What is important to remember is that the concept of "race" implies an historical relationship between groups of people in which one group exercised naming power over and against another.

*Racism.* In common parlance, the word "racism" centers the attitudes and actions of individuals. The word implies feelings or beliefs of superiority and inferiority on the basis of race. Prejudice toward and discrimination against others on the basis of perceived racial hierarchy is also in view.[5] After the civil rights movement, racism as "prejudice plus power," pointed to unequal societal outcomes.[6] According to this view, any person may be racially prejudiced, but only some possess the ability (i.e., power) to deploy their prejudices to shape the various spheres of life (political, economic, educational, etc.). This second definition focuses on measuring wages, housing, and employment, since feelings and attitudes cannot be measured easily. Finally, sociologist David Wellman found that "the essential feature of racism is not hostility or misperception, but rather the defense of a system from which advantage is derived on the basis of race."[7] In other words, there are those who do not express prejudiced feelings or attitudes, yet are prone to deny the need for beneficial social reorganization that might adversely affect their own interests.

## REAL WORLD

***Global survey.*** In the West, physical features became legal and even "scientific" criteria by which value was assigned to entire people groups. Racist abuses of power (and the systems built upon those abuses) have led to unspeakable atrocities like slavery, the Holocaust, and apartheid. Other parts of the world, some argue, have not been shaped by the concept of "race" the same way that the West has. Still, examples of unequal treatment on the basis of race can be found on every continent.

---

[4]Richard A. Schermerhorn, *Comparative Ethnic Relations: A Framework for Theory and Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 12.

[5]This common usage of the word is reflected in various English dictionaries.

[6]This definition was originally proposed by Patricia A. Bidol in *Developing New Perspectives on Race: An Innovative Multi-Media Social Studies Curriculum in Racism Awareness for the Secondary Level* (Detroit: New Perspectives on Race, 1972). Later, Lutheran pastor Joseph Barndt took up this definition in his antiracist work in Chicago. See Joseph R. Barndt, *Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991), 28-34.

[7]David Wellman, *Portraits of White Racism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 210.

This section will list only a few of the innumerable, contemporary sites of racism across the globe.

*Europe.* After the refugee crisis brought a wave of migrants into Europe in 2015, German police agencies reported a dramatic rise in attacks against refugees and asylees. Fingers were pointed at the National Democratic Party (NPD), referred to as a neo-Nazi organization in part because the NPD has historic Nazi ties. The European Union seated a handful of ministers (MEPs) from political parties that have been branded by their country's political opponents as racist organizations. Elections across Europe have seen the rise of nationalist parties, some of which are explicitly racist.[8] The conversation around race in Europe centers on issues of immigration and national identity, especially since the 2015 Paris attacks and the ongoing refugee crisis raised concerns among some about the security of European nations.

*Asia.* Discriminatory business practices were the target of Hong Kong's antidiscrimination ordinances meant to protect vulnerable South Asian populations working in low-wage jobs in Hong Kong. In Japan, biracial Ariana Miyamoto raised controversy when she represented Japan in (and won) the Miss Universe pageant. Many wondered whether someone who didn't "look Japanese" could represent Japan in the pageant. In India, African nationals regularly report attacks against them and being suspected of crime, drug use, and poor hygiene. In Taiwan, aboriginal groups have called for the removal of statues that honor Zheng Chenggong (aka Koxinga), who liberated the island from Dutch colonial control but brutalized aboriginal peoples during his reign.

*South America.* The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics continues to gather census data, using "white," "brown," "black," "yellow," and "indigenous," as racial categories. Significant socioeconomic differences can be correlated with these racial categories. In other South American nations, racial categories highlight the importance of indigenous versus *mestizo* (a term that denotes a mixture between indigenous and colonial ancestry) heritage. John Barnshaw observes that "in many parts of Latin America, racial groupings are based less on the physical features and more on an intersection between physical features and social features such as economic class, dress, education, and context."[9]

[8]See, for example, Monika Kopytowska's edited volume, which contains chapters that describe conflicts about immigration in the UK, Greece, Austria, the Netherlands, etc. *Contemporary Discourses of Hate and Radicalism Across Space and Genres* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2017).

[9]John Barnshaw, "Social Construction of Race," in *The Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity and Society*, ed. Richard T. Schaefer (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2008), 1:1096-97.

*Australia.* After many years of mistreatment, aboriginal populations in Australia have seen decades of antiracist legislation passed since the late 1950s. Nevertheless, Western Sydney University has published survey results indicating a significant percentage of the population does not believe that all people are "equal." After the 2014 siege at Martin Place in Sydney, in which an Iranian Australian killed one man and held many others hostage, sympathetic citizens offered their support to Muslims over the Internet by using the hashtag #IllRideWithYou to support those who might fear reprisals on public transit.[10]

*Africa.* In 1996–1997, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission gathered the stories of just some of those who were targeted in racist attacks or were killed during apartheid. Racist policies restructured the whole society according to a different set of racial categories.[11] As such, one can still see the ongoing effects of legally enforced segregation on South African society. For example, at the end of apartheid, 90 percent of the nation's land was owned by 10 percent of the population. Now, South Africa is facing the complexities of land reform while needing to pay attention to food production on farmland in the process of transfer.

*United States.* Scholarship on race in the United States typically pertains to relations between blacks and whites.[12] Other racial minority groups have sought to describe their own daily experiences of racism in the United States. Asian Americans highlight the racist immigration policy called the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, xenophobic internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, pejorative depictions of Asian Americans in popular media, turning aggregated Asian American educational attainment data into a wedge that works against other racial groups, and the unending perception that Asian Americans born in the United States are still foreigners.

Even though there are undocumented immigrants from many countries, immigrants from Mexico and Central America are suspected of "stealing" jobs from US Americans, taking advantage of social services paid for by US citizens, and being disproportionately responsible for violent crimes. Hispanic immigrant populations from the Caribbean, Central America, and South America feel the threat of being lumped together in national conversations about immigration.

---

[10]Brittany Ruppert, "Martin Place Siege: #illridewithyou Hashtag Goes Viral," *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 16, 2014, www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/martin-place-siege-illridewithyou-hashtag-goes-viral-20141215-127rm1.html.

[11]Notice, however, that the categories are quite different in South Africa. See, for example, "Still an Issue; Race in South Africa," *The Economist* 402 (February 4, 2012): 52.

[12]Bianca Gonzalez-Sobrino and Devin R. Goss, "Exploring Mechanisms of Racialization Beyond the Black-White Binary," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (March 15, 2018): 3.

Native peoples in the United States, who were dispossessed of their tribal lands, experience higher infant mortality rates and poverty, especially on reservation lands. The National Congress of American Indians comments on the controversial mascots and team names this way: "In general, NCAI strongly opposes the use of derogatory Native sports mascots. However, in the case where mascots refer to a particular Native nation or nations, NCAI respects the right of individual tribal nations to work with universities and athletic programs to decide how to protect and celebrate their respective tribal heritage."[13]

The highly publicized killings of unarmed black males by police has heightened scrutiny of police forces and their tactics, training, and weapons, and they have led to allegations of racist targeting of African Americans. African American students' experiences and protests of discrimination on college campuses have led to high-profile resignations of administrators at the highest levels of several universities.

Social scientists have observed that some white Americans bristle at this litany of inequalities. Michael Norton and Samuel Sommers measured the feeling of antiwhite bias in the United States and summarize their findings this way: "Not only do Whites think more progress has been made toward equality than do Blacks, but Whites also now believe that this progress is linked to a new inequality—at their expense."[14] This anxiety drove a record number of white nationalists (including a neo-Nazi in Illinois and another candidate running on an explicitly anti-Semitic platform in California) to run for elected office during the 2018 midterm elections. Additionally, the so-called alternative right, or alt-right political movement, operating under seemingly innocuous organization names such as American Renaissance and National Policy Institute, advances white nationalist ideology. Self-identified members of the alt-right participated in a 2017 Charlottesville, VA, demonstration chanting white supremacist slogans. One counterprotestor, Heather Heyer, was struck and killed by a car driven by James Fields, who was convicted of first-degree murder in 2018.

In sum, the ubiquity of racial problems around the world reminds us that race affects the way people live their lives. For Emerson and Smith, "a racialized society is a society wherein race matters profoundly for difference in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships."[15] Whatever one thinks about the way race

[13]"Anti-Defamation & Mascots," accessed June 12, 2018, www.ncai.org/policy-issues/community-and-culture/anti-defamation-mascots.

[14]Michael I. Norton and Samuel R. Sommers, "Whites See Racism as a Zero-Sum Game That They Are Now Losing," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 6, no. 3 (2011): 215-18.

[15]Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religions and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

should or should not matter in the United States, the data continue to show that life experiences, opportunities, and relationships are all impacted by race—the consequences of the concept of race are quite measurable.

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

As the different definitions of racism suggest, how individual and collective ethical imaginations have been formed on this issue vary widely. For some, racism has only ever been a part of the private beliefs and attitudes of individuals, while to others, racism is seen as a part of the fabric of society and the daily experience of people of color. Some emphasize racism as an affront to the gospel itself. Others, without denying this, emphasize the rupture of relationship between people of different racial groups. Some responses merely call for abstentions while others call for policy solutions and active demonstrations. These divergent views comprise a number of responses explored in this section.

**Table 13.1**

| POSITION | VARIABLE: UNDERSTANDING OF RACISM | MAIN CLAIMS | REPRESENTATIVES |
|---|---|---|---|
| Individual Moral Responsibility | Racism as sinful beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals | Christian witness and personal conversion are solutions | Voddie Baucham, Franklin Graham |
| Interpersonal Relationship and Friendship | Includes the above in addition to deficient relationship with Jesus and others | Racial reconciliation is the promise of the gospel | National Association of Evangelicals |
| Structures and Systems | Includes all of the above in addition to systems of advantage that benefit the privileged | Racial justice and conciliation must occur first | Christian Community Development Association |

***Individual moral responsibility.*** One common approach to racism and racial inequality (including unequal outcomes in education, housing, income, mortality, etc.) focuses on the moral responsibility of each individual. According to this view, individuals are responsible for their own behavior. One is responsible for how one handles the inequalities and injustices one experiences in life and that one inflicts upon others. Assigning blame to "the system" or obligating white Americans (a dominant racial group) to enact a fix for unequal treatment can be a way of shirking responsibility. Accepting or justifying prejudice and racism as human realities also is a way of shirking responsibility. The real problem, the proponents of this position argue, is not an impersonal system but personal sin for which we are individually

accountable to God alone. Therefore, the solution, both for victims and perpetrators of racism, is personal conversion and discipleship.

For those following social media over the last few years, several high-profile Christian personalities voiced their concerns about issues of race in the United States. Some of their statements have gained attention and become conversation pieces in many friendship networks. For example, in response to the police killings of unarmed black men, Franklin Graham wrote a Facebook post that has since received close to two hundred thousand likes and over eighty-three thousand shares. In March 2015, Graham wrote the following:

> Listen up—Blacks, Whites, Latinos, and everybody else. Most police shootings can be avoided. It comes down to respect for authority and obedience. If a police officer tells you to stop, you stop. If a police officer tells you to put your hands in the air, you put your hands in the air. If a police officer tells you to lay down face first with your hands behind your back, you lay down face first with your hands behind your back. It's as simple as that. Even if you think the police officer is wrong—YOU OBEY . . . The Bible says to submit to your leaders and those in authority.[16]

This response stresses a Christian's duty to submit to those in governmental and municipal authority, and assume responsibility for our own actions and response. The impulse to blame others (e.g., a social system) results from finding one's identity in anything other than Jesus Christ.

Voddie Baucham, an African American pastor near Houston, is troubled by Christians who view themselves primarily as victims of what he calls their "ethnicity" and of others' prejudices, or who find their identity "as members of an ethnic . . . community more than they see themselves as members of the body of Christ."[17] One's accountability is to God, not to one's racial group or anything else. Personal sin is the real issue, and it is the theological root of the problem; hence, according to Baucham, people end up defying God when they engage in misconduct because they claim to be victims of systemic racial bias.

Rather than speaking about systemic racism, Baucham prefers to speak to other issues that he considers are located in personal failings that lead to high rates of fatherlessness in African American communities. He writes, "Any truly gospel-centered response to the plight of black men must address these issues first and foremost.

[16]Franklin Graham's Facebook page, accessed March 31, 2018, www.facebook.com/FranklinGraham/posts/883361438386705.

[17]Voddie Baucham, "Thoughts on Ferguson," November 26, 2014, www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/thoughts-on-ferguson/.

It does no good to change the way white police officers respond to black men if we don't first address the fact that these men's fathers have not responded to them appropriately."[18] The gospel addresses sinfulness and the result of individuals' choices to engage in sinful behaviors.

In addition to his concern regarding fatherlessness in African American communities, Baucham applies his outlook on sin and responsibility to police power, acknowledging the tense relationship between police and communities of color. Baucham recounts his own negative experience of being pulled over by police without cause. Baucham writes, "The cops who stopped me were sinners. They were not taking their cues from some script designed to 'keep me down.' They were simply men who didn't understand what it meant to treat others with the dignity and respect they deserve as image bearers of God. It does me absolutely no good to assume that my mistreatment was systemic in nature. No more than it is good for me to assume that what happened in Ferguson was systemic."[19] The solution, Baucham argues, is some form of Christian witness that leads to the conversion of police personnel. This shifts the responsibility for a solution in this life to the soteriological activity of God. Without conversion, in this view, behavioral modifications cannot be effective.

In this view, the transformative power of the gospel of Jesus Christ is applied primarily to Christian persons. Wickedness, self-loathing, disordered love, lack of faith, and pride are sins that contribute to and give rise to racist prejudice. But the Christian's virtues are transformed, their low self-image is healed, their energies are redirected, their hopelessness dissipates, and their high view of themselves gives way to glory of God in Christ. John Piper's attempt to bring together different streams of thinking on the issue of race in the United States centers this understanding of the gospel.[20] There is also an emphasis on law-breaking in biblical texts. For example, Piper explains that racism is a violation of the injunction against partiality in James 2.[21]

***Interpersonal relations and friendship.*** Some months before racial tensions in Los Angeles boiled over in the 1992 Los Angeles riots, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) approved a resolution that displays another very common approach to racism. Measurements of racial attitudes in the country at the time

[18]Baucham, "Thoughts on Ferguson."

[19]Baucham, "Thoughts on Ferguson."

[20]John Piper, *Bloodlines* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011). Piper's book cannot be placed squarely in this first category of responses to racism, as he attempts to consider multiple lines of thinking. However, the way he explains the effect of the gospel and his emphasis on racism as individual sin fit the category well. Additionally, Piper gives a defense of personal responsibility that should be held in tension with his treatment of systemic injustice.

[21]Piper, *Bloodlines*, 181-90.

showed that white attitudes toward minorities were changing in two paradoxical directions at the same time. On the one hand, white Americans felt that the country should be made fairer for all people. On the other hand, white Americans held personal, negative stereotypes about minorities. In its response, the NAE expressed its support for reforms that make the country fairer for all people—in access to voting, housing, education, law enforcement, employment, and so on. As a prophetic denunciation of those who discriminated against racial minorities, the NAE stressed improving "race relations." In the National Association of Evangelicals Resolution on Racism (1991), the NAE proclaims that throughout its history, it has "judged racial discrimination as a violation of the teachings of Christ," advocated for civil rights for racial minorities, and urged Christians to "support civil legislation that would promote equal opportunity for all Americans" and "accelerate the desegregation of their own institutions."[22]

The following notable features of NAE's position all come from the same statement on racism as above. The NAE identifies racism as an "insidious sin" and "a rejection of God's will." It "brings scandal to the very gospel we profess to proclaim (2 Cor 5:18-20)." To surmount this, the NAE encourages "partnerships between black and white churches to plant churches in urban America; working aggressively to remove all barriers to Christian fellowship and communion; affirming biblical norms in race relations in churches and communities; challenging schools, colleges, universities and seminaries to provide caring and loving environments for students of various races or economic classes." Furthermore, "we can join hands in joint ministry projects, including pulpit exchanges, family retreats, youth groups, counseling services, adoption services, Christian schools and prison ministries. We can also join hands in ministries of mercy toward the homeless, unwed mothers and individuals with AIDS." The NAE encouraged pastors to preach against the sin of racism and for parents to model and teach respect for all people.

Emphasizing both preaching the gospel of reconciliation and building multiracial relationships are common approaches by white Christians to address racism. Michael Emerson and Christian Smith have studied and described this approach in *Divided by Faith*. For evangelicals, the doctrines of sin and salvation are cast relationally. Salvation is to be found in relationship with Jesus. This relationship with Jesus becomes the engine that powers the drive to behave ethically. Sin, including interpersonal hate toward a person of another race, is viewed as a personal failing of one's relationship with Jesus. This view asserts that racism can be overcome by creating well-intentioned,

[22]National Association of Evangelicals, "Racism" (1991), www.nae.net/racism/.

right-thinking people who build friendships with those from backgrounds other than their own.

Portions of the New Testament are taught using this relational lens and reinforce relational ethics. The "dividing wall" in Ephesians 2 becomes analogous to strained race relations. The unity of the body of Christ relies on greater love for one another. Overlooking the Greek-speaking widows in the daily distribution of bread in Acts 6 is a failure of getting to know one's neighbors well enough. Soteriological reconciliation between God and God's people is likened unto relational reconciliation between people of different races. The Spirit works to transform individuals from sinful prejudices and judgments and to propel us into new kinds of relationships that surmount interpersonal hatred, distrust, and alienation. The quality of our cross-racial relationships becomes a measure of our growth in Christ.

However, people's social networks are often racially homogeneous. Some progress, though slight, has been made in a growing number of congregations. By 2012, the most recent National Congregations Study reported that 20 percent of congregations in the United States could be considered "diverse" or multiracial by the aforementioned standard.[23] Although this is significant growth from previous years, it should be noted that mosques and Catholic churches had the highest rate of multiethnic composition. Evangelical churches had the lowest.[24]

***Structures and systems.*** In contrast to the relational approach represented in the NAE resolution above, an increasingly common approach (especially among younger Christians) considers the importance of other aspects of life together in society. Sociologists like Baylor University's Jerry Park zoom out from a focus on person-to-person relationships that comprise the relational approach. Whether a single individual harbors racist attitudes is no longer the sole focus. Instead, patterns of behavior within society (e.g., hiring practices or megachurch growth patterns) and social institutions (e.g., families, universities, or churches) can be observed and described. In some cases, patterns of behavior can lead to greater racial inequality without individuals who participate in those patterns necessarily harboring actively racist attitudes.

In a famous example, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was created in 1934 in order to address a housing crisis caused by the collapse of banks during the Great Depression. Based on their calculations, the FHA regulated interest rates

[23]Mark Chaves and Alison Eagle, "National Congregations Study: Religious Congregations in 21st Century America" (2015), 20, www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSIII_report_final.pdf.

[24]Michael Lipka, "The Most and Least Racially Diverse U.S. Religious Groups," July 27, 2015, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/.

and set new terms for mortgages to make the housing market more stable. Many African American neighborhoods suffered from these calculations that deemed African American neighborhoods too risky for mortgage lending.[25] By the time the practice was outlawed in 1968, a generation of African Americans watched their neighborhoods decline and were excluded from the opportunity to build home equity that they could pass on to their families. Now deemed a racist practice, the US legal system is *en garde* for patterns of lending that reproduce the same inequalities that redlining does.

Just as this illegal business practice cannot accurately be described as interpersonally malicious, social psychologists describe *unconscious* tendencies in individual persons that produce disparate treatment across many types of human difference. Park refers to "implicit bias" as a means for analyzing the persistence of inequality in the United States.[26] The Implicit Association Test (IAT) attempts to measure beliefs that individuals might be unable to express because they are not consciously held. Like a habit, there are many behaviors in which we engage because they are automatic. The shaping power of structures and systems quietly form these biases in people.

Those who study the Bible from this point of view find deeper structures and systems at work. When Jesus cleansed the temple in Mark 11:17, he quotes Isaiah 56:7, asking, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'?" The Old Testament reference may very well refer to the fact that the local economic system crowded out the court of the Gentiles where the *ethnē* would have come to worship God. Similarly, when gospel transformation came to Ephesus in Acts 19, the implications for the local idol-making industry were dramatic, leading to a riot. Finally, where many might simply assume that the woman at the well was an unvirtuous adulteress, other interpreters might see a woman made vulnerable by a patriarchal society in which husbands would leave her because she could not bear them any children.

John Perkins, founder of the Christian Community Development Association, prescribed "three R's" for wholistic ministry. *Relocation* invites Christians to become a part of a community in order to understand, first-hand, the needs of that community.

[25]I would be remiss, however, to imply that financial calculations alone led to the discriminatory practice. Certainly, some derogatory stereotyping and misinformation fueled the practice as well. Recently, however, Associated Bank in Wisconsin settled with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development to the sum of $200 million for what HUD alleged as redlining. Associated Bank denied the charge of unequal treatment.

[26]Jerry Park, "One Step Forward, but Now What?" March 4, 2015, www.patheos.com/topics/march-from-selma/one-step-forward-jerry-z-park-030415.html/.

A ministry should not begin working in a community without having learned about and earned the trust of the community. Second, like the NAE, Perkins and CCDA prescribe *reconciliation* between people. However, reconciliation can imply a return to loving relationship that never existed. Conciliation, then, requires the work of justice—including the last "R," *redistribution*. Rather than focusing on financial assets, Perkins describes redistribution this way:

> Redistribution for the CCDA means, in part, striving for justice—especially in underserved communities. It means working to bring justice to our criminal courts and prison system, to hiring practices and housing policies, to the educational system. We need to work to change laws, policies and attitudes that give some people unfair advantages over others. Justice should not be available only to those with the economic means to acquire it.[27]

In some ways, the differences between these views and their proponents seem irreconcilable. For example, Emerson and Smith name the refusal to identify structures and systems as culprits, "anti-structuralism."[28] There are, however, possibilities for dialogue. For example, those who claim that structures and systems contribute to racism do not always deny that racism is also a theological and relational problem. Furthermore, in all three of the positions above, some Christians (though not all) can be found taking up a critical posture to the social construction of race and what they see as its divisiveness. Not wanting to grant the concept of race any ontological status, these responses aim to realize different visions of unity. In the first position, humanity is already united under God's judgment against sin. The gospel calls all people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ for hope of justification before God and sanctification from beliefs and attitudes that prompt racist actions. In the second, humanity operates as it should when relational harmony is realized. It is believed that the credibility of Christian witness is diminished when members of the body of Christ do not live in demonstrable harmony.[29] The third position can view injustice and inequality as the main hurdles to the relational harmony of the second view. Additionally, working toward flourishing neighborhoods is aligned with God's desires for human community and is organically connected to the gospel.

---

[27]Wayne Gordon and John Perkins, *Making Neighborhoods Whole: A Handbook for Christian Community Development* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 77.

[28]Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 76.

[29]Brenda Salter-McNeil, who was a keynote speaker at the 2016 CCDA conference, has been one consistent voice calling for Christian discipleship to take on the reconciling dimensions of Jesus' work on the cross. See, for example, Brenda Salter-McNeil and Rick Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

Each of the positions above is a good-faith attempt to uphold the dignity of all people. It must be said, however, that the three are not equally effective. What follows is a critical evaluation of the three positions and the proposal of a fourth.

Individual Moral Responsibility is not wrong to celebrate real personal transformations that occur when Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, begins a new work in a human life. Racism is, indeed, a theological problem to be remedied by spiritual means. However, advocates of this position would benefit from focusing on the theological problem more specific to the issue at hand.

J. Kameron Carter locates the flaw in Christian theology at the point where theology distanced Gentile Christians from Jewishness. Carter observes that for Immanuel Kant, Jesus was an idealistic fulfillment of Greek wisdom in ways that eclipsed the importance of Jesus' covenantal relationship to Israel, his historicity, and his Jewishness.[30] For Kant, Carter alleges, whiteness was also a kind of idealistic fulfillment that set it apart from the rest of humanity. This is what Willie Jennings considers a modern form of docetism. The docetic denial of the truly human, historical-physical body of Jesus (in favor of the mere semblance of humanity) was at work as theologians were conscripted to rationalize the enslavement and dispossession of dark flesh from their homelands.[31]

Individual Moral Responsibility is not right to prefer personal conversion as the mechanism by which, ultimately, racial inequality will be eradicated as personal beliefs and attitudes are transformed. To do so is to fall into a docetic trap, an illusionary idealism beyond the realities of lived experience. It is an idealism that permits disciples to forget the bodily needs of people and communities in crisis.

Advocates of Interpersonal Friendship and Relationship are not wrong to hope for meaningful community and to count diversity and harmony as a form of witness to the gospel. Like any folk remedy, however, prescribing friendship makes sense primarily because its evangelical purveyors have been consistent in propounding it for decades. Unfortunately, this advice has been tried and found wanting over years of well-intended efforts.[32] One of the fatal flaws in this position is the failure

[30] J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[31] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

[32] The fading of the Promise Keepers movement is a prominent example of the fatigue that accrues to groups who, however well-intentioned, center racial reconciliation. See L. Dean Allen, "Promise Keepers and Racism: Frame Resonance as an Indicator of Organizational Vitality," *Sociology of Religion* 61, no. 1 (2000): 55-72.

to specify the quality of community that can withstand the number of identities and chasms of difference that continue to grow. Interpersonal Friendship and Relationship is not right to neglect a covenant-shaped community and cultivation of associations that restrains the kind of individual liberalism that allows people to affiliate merely on the basis of "revocable consent."[33] The slow work of growing friendships between individuals cannot keep pace with the rapidly deepening inequality between entire communities.

John Perkins and CCDA invite Christians to relocate to neighborhoods and communities. They are not wrong to invoke the doctrine of the incarnation to encourage Christians to pattern their ministry after the high-priestly ministry of Jesus Christ. The high calling to relocate (not to discount reconciliation and redistribution) has been answered by sincere and highly motivated disciples since CCDA began in 1989.

New challenges, however, lie ahead for movements whose founding leaders were forged in the crucibles of the civil rights era. The scope of CCDA's ministry and the breadth of racial inequality raise myriad practical and political issues for this diverse movement. Relocation has been reexamined in light of the problem of gentrification (the displacement of disadvantaged residents by wealthier ones) and Native American theology of the land. Reconciliation seems distant in the wake of the police killings of black men, the rise of Black Lives Matter, the trenchant analyses of critical race theory, and the tumult of the 2016 election cycle. Redistribution encompasses a long list of social and political issues that provoke old concerns about politicization of the gospel—especially among those for whom structures and systems are deemed outside the scope of gospel ministry. One would be naive to think that attention spread thin across these many issues will dislodge the evangelical church's fondness for individual liberalism, which advantages the strong.[34]

This critique of liberalism's favoritism for the strong is fundamental to critical race theory (CRT). Early writers in CRT were legal scholars who saw that racism is modern-day business as usual that "will keep minorities in subordinate positions."[35] They find that even the legal system, rather than being neutral and impartial, can be made to

[33]Dennis Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

[34]Here, "liberalism" is not to be confused with the left end of the US political spectrum. Rather, liberalism is a political philosophy fundamentally concerned with the maximization of individual freedoms and liberties (hence, liberalism). In the US context, "conservatives" are right-wing liberals, and "progressives" are left-wing liberals.

[35]Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 21. See also David Gushee's appreciative summary of critical race theory in David Gushee and Glen Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

preserve the interests of the strong and maintain hierarchical social relations. They also observe that legal victories from the civil rights era build upon constitutional liberalism that is yet vulnerable to abuses.

Asian critical race scholars take this another step further. "The black-white racial paradigm," legal scholar Robert Chang writes, "ignores the complexity of a racial hierarchy that has more than just a top and a bottom."[36] That the US racial imagination merely envisions a top and bottom is referred to as the black-white binary. In this mode, Asian Americans can be treated as a wedge that further separates the two ends of the binary. When measured together, Asian Americans appear to have succeeded financially, in terms of educational attainment, and so on. This leads some to ask (mistakenly) why other minority groups do not simply do the same.[37]

Simultaneously, important challenges must be leveled against the myth that Asian Americans are the model minority. Universities that admit "critical masses" of Asian American students benefit from being able to report higher racial diversity *and* higher average standardized test scores. However, sociologists Julie Park and Amy Lin argue that when Asian American admissions statistics are disaggregated, several things come to light. First, some Southeast Asian American subgroups are still underrepresented in higher education, which means that a significant percentage of individuals in those subgroups are not benefitting from a college education at all. Second, "it is assumed that critical masses (and sometimes amply more at certain institutions) of Asian American students are enrolled in selective higher education institutions and that these students have no need for extra care or support."[38] To overlook care and support for all Asian American students creates a gap through which certain subgroups will inevitably fall.

In my view, all this strongly suggests the need for intentional race consciousness. It is tempting to be satiated by a cultural boutique of foods, dress, or customs—symbols

[36]Robert S. Chang, "Toward an Asian American Legal Scholarship: Critical Race Theory, Post-Structuralism, and Narrative Space," *California Law Review* 81, no. 5 (1993): 1267.

[37]Rakesh Kochhar and Anthony Cilluffo, "Key Findings on the Rise in Income Inequality Within America's Racial and Ethnic Groups," Pew Research Center, last modified July 12, 2018, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/12/key-findings-on-the-rise-in-income-inequality-within-americas-racial-and-ethnic-groups/. Of course, this ignores two important confounding facts. First, Asian American income inequality is now the highest in the United States. To forget that there are significant numbers of Asian Americans that experience poverty is disastrous. Second, the US immigration system explicitly favors "professionals" and "skilled workers" to come from abroad. Asian immigrants with advanced degrees in particular fields will naturally find job prospects and probably already carry with them significant assets.

[38]Julie J. Park and Amy Liu, "Interest Convergence or Divergence? A Critical Race Analysis of Asian Americans, Meritocracy, and Critical Mass in the Affirmative Action Debate," *Journal of Higher Education* 85, no. 1 (January 2014): 53.

of ethnicity that epitomize a group's self-perception. Even John Perkins balks at the term "racial reconciliation" in his book *One Blood*. He writes, "The idea of 'racial reconciliation' is a false idea. It's a lie. It implies that there is more than one race. This is absolutely false. God created only one race—the human race."[39] Resistance to the reification of race is both understandable and common. Since race is so fraught, it is tempting to make the same retreat to ethnicity or culture. But the theological argumentation from all three ethical positions impedes the kind of intentional race consciousness that methodically and thoroughly considers racial difference.

Race may not be *the* problem to overcome. Rather, if Carter and Jennings are right, race was instantiated by a few tragic bursts of heresy. Interrogating, dismantling, and altering the systems and structures that now reproduce racial inequality is a worthwhile endeavor. Race, however, will no more disappear than Christ's "wounds yet visible above." Racial identities that were once ascribed for evil have been asserted for good.[40]

Intentional race consciousness in theology and ministry attempts to avoid the docetic problem. It precludes the escapist impulse to reinvent ourselves and unmasks the false promise of affiliation by revocable consent. This view bids us to work tirelessly for an end to injustice, to rest in the knowledge that the grace of God has brought us safe thus far, and, at the end of our struggle and tears, that grace will bring us home.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare these three positions. Do you consider them incompatible with one another? If you align more closely with one than the others, what commitments (theological, political, familial, etc.) influence you most?
2. Is it reasonable to assume, as "reconciliation" seems to, that there was ever a harmonious relationship between racial groups? If relationships between individuals from different racial groups are reconciled, how will "impersonal" inequality be affected?
3. Take one of the implicit association tests.[41] If implicit racial bias is *not* conscious racism, is a person morally responsible in the same way? If you took the test, how do you think your results might change your approach to racism?

[39]John M. Perkins, *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race* (Chicago: Moody, 2018), 17.

[40]One does not need to look far for examples. Consider slogans like "Black is beautiful!" Also, the phrase "Asian American" was coined by Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee in the 1960s to empower and organize people of Asian descent for solidarity with the black struggle for dignity and freedom.

[41]See https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

Boesak, Allan Aubrey, and Curtiss Paul DeYoung. *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012.

Chou, Rosalind S., and Joe R. Feagin. *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism.* New York: Routledge, 2016.

Harvey, Jennifer. *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.

Jones, Robert P. *The End of White Christian America.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016.

Rodriguez, Ruben R. *Racism and God-Talk: A Latino/a Perspective.* New York: New York University Press, 2008.

Romero, Robert Chao. *Jesus for Revolutionaries: An Introduction to Race, Social Justice, and Christianity*. Christian Ethnic Studies Press, 2013.

Shin, Sarah. *Beyond Colorblind: Redeeming Our Ethnic Journey.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? A Psychologist Explains the Development of Racial Identity.* 5th ed. New York: Basic Books, 2003.

Wytsma, Ken. *The Myth of Equality: Uncovering the Roots of Injustice and Privilege.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." Peace and Freedom Magazine. July/August 1989.

Miller, Adrian. "It Takes More Than Race to Have a Successful Dialogue About Race." Faith & Leadership. November 3, 2015. www.faithandleadership.com/adrian-miller-it-takes-more-race-have-successful-dialogue-about-race.

Rice, Chris, et al. "Reconciliation as the Mission of God: Christian Witness in a World of Destructive Conflicts." Duke Divinity School. January 2005. https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/cfr/reconciliaton-as-the-mission-of-god.pdf.

Stetzer, Ed. "It's Time to Listen: 'Feeling the Pain Despite the Facts,' a Guest Post by Bryan Loritts." Christianity Today. August 20, 2014. www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/august/its-time-to-listen.html.

Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service. "The Racial Dot Map." University of Virginia. Accessed August 22, 2019. https://demographics.coopercenter.org/racial-dot-map.

### *Media and documentaries*

Conde-Frazier, Elizabeth. "Siempre Lo Mismo: Theology, Rhetoric, and Broken Praxis." YouTube, February 2018. www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mfJfC_Zw2I.

Jennings, Willie James. "Can 'White' People Be Saved? Reflections on Missions and Whiteness." YouTube, February 2018. https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/can-white-people-be-saved-reflections-on-missions-and-whiteness-willie-jennings/.

Moore, Russell. "Black, and White, and Red All Over: Why Racial Reconciliation Is a Gospel Issue." YouTube, March 2015. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ff58OfBgcG4.

Piper, John, Tim Keller, and Anthony Bradley. "Race and the Christian." Vimeo, March 2012. https://vimeo.com/47904072.

Stetzer, Ed, et al. "A Time to Speak." YouTube, May 2015. www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5M1Npm7x_w.

Yu, Charles. "Stairway to Heaven." Vimeo, November 2015. https://vimeo.com/blackhawkchurch/review/147282419/7d9b747d3a.

# 14

# DISABILITY

*Bethany McKinney Fox*

## REAL LIFE

Suzan, a pastor who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, experienced a number of barriers on the journey toward ordination and her beginnings in congregational ministry.[1]

By the time Suzan was ready to begin seminary, she had completed college and another graduate degree. But when she told people in her home church that she felt God calling her to ordained ministry, they were astonished, as if they could not conceive of someone with a disability like hers being a pastor. Still, she followed what she discerned to be God's call and entered seminary. Overall this experience was positive, since her seminary was in a big city with great accessibility. Even so, a wide range of barriers remained, such as a preaching professor who wouldn't offer any feedback on her sermons (as he did for other students); rude comments from fellow students; an administrator who—after two years in the program—said that to continue to provide access they needed paperwork to prove her (visible) disability; classroom chairs being arranged without room for her mobility device (even after she had been a student at the small institution for two years); and many other ways the institution sent a message that as a person with her disabilities, she was not fully recognized or celebrated.

Finding an internship site was a challenge, in part because the congregation where she had already been doing ministry for two years said their church was not accessible enough for her to do an internship there, given her disability. They had

[1]For reasons of privacy and because these issues are present across denominations and locations, this pastor's real name, location, and denomination will not be used.

stairs up to a pulpit from which the pastor was expected to preach, and Suzan needed to preach sitting down. They were not willing to imagine another way preaching might happen in their context, or for it to be different from how it always had been. So Suzan traveled over an hour by train each way to another church for her internship. At this church, people regularly confused her with the only other woman in the congregation who used a wheelchair, even though they were dramatically different in appearance. When she asked to share this with the leadership team to encourage learning, her supervisor would not allow her to do so. Several times the accessible door to the building was locked during events, which meant that both she and any congregants or visitors with disabilities had to find someone to unlock it so they could enter and participate. The community did not expect or plan for people using mobility devices to be present—even though she had already been with them for several months.

Truthfully, her whole professional life has been marked by overaccomplishing just to be recognized (both in her own mind, due to years of experiencing stigma, and by others) as equal and to have a voice at the table. When Suzan began formal congregational ministry, though she completed more than her assigned tasks every week and put in more than the required hours, she was continually accused by some of not working enough—in part because she occasionally needed to structure her time and tasks differently than a pastor without disabilities might.

Although Suzan, like all of us, is limited by the particulars of her specific body, the barriers she encountered on the path to ordained ministry were primarily those of inflexible structures, stigmatizing attitudes, and others' lack of imagination. These limitations are not unique to her, nor just to the journey of a pastor with disabilities.

## REAL WORLD

***A note about language.*** I will be using the language of "disability" in this chapter, simply because it is the current term used in most legal, educational, medical, and academic arenas to describe this large and varied group of experiences. This is not without recognition of the ways this term is imperfect and may not be the preferred term for everyone. Alternative, universally accepted language that is clear and broad enough to encompass the wide range of experiences necessary for this conversation to take place has yet to be found. Yet it remains crucial that this conversation take place, even as terms continue to evolve.

***Disability globally.*** Before we can explore the issue of disability around the world, we need more clarity about what exactly we mean by "disability." This is a complex issue that includes medical and social components, as well as other factors. According

to the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition, "Disability is . . . not just a health problem. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. Overcoming the difficulties faced by people with disabilities requires interventions to remove environmental and social barriers."[2]

Sometimes it is the physical/mental condition itself, while other times it is a lack of resources or social stigma that is most disabling. Often it is a combination of all of these things. Some disabilities lead to poor health, while others do not.

Some people are born with a disability for which there is no obvious biological cause, while others may have been affected through maternal behavior or complications in the birth process. Age (prevalence of disability increases as age increases), disease (infectious or noncommunicable), injury (from accidents or from violence as in war), and chronic health conditions—including mental health conditions like depression and schizophrenia—can all contribute. Some health conditions that can cause disability are influenced by environmental factors like access to satisfactory sanitation, consistency of immunizations, and availability of mineral supplements like iodine.

Even among people with disabilities, there can be a wide diversity of experience based not only on the type and severity of the person's condition but also other factors like class, race, gender, and contextual beliefs about disability. Women experience disadvantages based on gender as well as disability, including the possibility, according to some studies, that they may be less likely to get married (something that in many contexts would lead to greater economic stability).[3] In some contexts, like the United States, the convergence of poverty and racism can result in disproportionate environmentally caused disability for economically disadvantaged people and minorities. As one concrete example among many, minorities, immigrants, and people who speak a language other than English at home are more likely to live next to major highways, and this results in more respiratory illnesses and related disabilities.[4] There is not one "disability experience," because the factors at play in each person's life are distinct and always in flux.

*Economics of disability.* Poverty and disability have what the WHO calls a "bidirectional" relationship, meaning that being poor increases the likelihood of disability, and disability increases the likelihood of being poor. In terms of the former, poverty

[2]"Disabilities," Health Topics, World Health Organization, 2018, http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/.
[3]World Health Organization, "World Report on Disability 2011," 8.
[4]Tegan K. Boehmer et al., "Residential Proximity to Major Highways—United States, 2010," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 62, no. 3 (November 22, 2013): 46-50.

may increase the likelihood of certain disabilities because of factors like inadequate nutrition, low birth weight, lack of access to clean water and sanitation, and potentially unsafe home and work environments that can lead to injury. Further, without financial resources it is more likely that someone with a minor injury or existing condition may not be able to afford the treatment or rehabilitation they need, which can then lead to further complications.[5]

Disability, in turn, can also lead to financial strain or poverty. For one thing, people with disabilities have less access to employment overall, earn less when they do have a job, and face a number of barriers (including transportation, discrimination, and lack of resources) in securing employment. Additionally, in many countries, education is not available for children with certain disabilities, which means they do not receive the training they need for jobs and other financial opportunities. Families that include one or more members with a disability may also face more costs like medical fees, medicine, and other necessary supports.

*Social stigma.* Negative perceptions about people with disabilities affect their lives worldwide. They may be thought to be less capable, and they are sometimes ignored or avoided because of misperceptions about their condition. People with mental health conditions can be especially stigmatized. Stigma can emerge even through actions by nondisabled people on behalf of people with disabilities. Although they intend to be charitable when people without disabilities determine what is best for people with disabilities and enact it on their behalf, this can lead to what some scholars call "marred identity." That is, stigmatized people, like people with disabilities, internalize some of these negative narratives and see themselves as incompetent, damaged, worthless, or without gifts to offer the world. The external becomes internal.[6]

While every culture tends to stigmatize people with what they perceive to be mental or bodily differences, exactly which conditions receive the greatest stigma and how disabilities are perceived can vary widely from one context to another.

*Involvement in faith communities.* Although there is a good amount of medical and economic data about people with disabilities around the world, information about their involvement in faith communities is mostly anecdotal. The words "religion," "faith," and "church" do not appear in the WHO's report on disability, demonstrating how access to spiritual community continues to be a neglected aspect of life and thriving. While there are many stories of people with disabilities being loved and

[5]World Health Organization, "World Report on Disability 2011," 10.

[6]Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 128.

finding a sense of belonging in their churches, these are at least matched by stories of negative experiences. Some people with disabilities report experiencing churches' fixations on their physical healing to the exclusion of any other kind of engagement or support; they also report being criticized if the healing does not take place.[7]

In some contexts, disability is connected to curses and witchcraft, and many communities perceive it as an occasion for personal and familial shame. Many families talk about their whole family leaving church when they cannot find a congregation that welcomes a child with a disability who has been regarded as too "unruly," "needy," or "disruptive." The majority of stories of people with disabilities in churches include some variation on the theme of being regarded as objects of ministry, and even if they are included in the community, it is rarely in a leadership capacity or where they can contribute their gifts in mutuality.

*Growing in voice.* While much of this section describes the real struggles and difficulties people with disabilities face around the world, there are also reasons for celebration and hope. Adaptive technology continues to improve, creating more opportunities for access (for those able to afford it). More than ever, people with disabilities are speaking for themselves, and the rest of the community is paying attention (though there is still a long way to go). Although still relatively small, there are a growing number of Christian theologians and biblical scholars with disabilities offering their voices to conversations in the body of Christ that benefit from their unique gifts and experiences. And more and more churches and communities are beginning to value them as well.

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

A person's assumptions about what disability is, what healing entails, and what constitutes health all impact how they frame the topic biblically and theologically. Several conceptual models of disability can be helpful to understanding the key Christian perspectives and what assumptions are involved in each. I will briefly describe each model in order to highlight how these understandings impact some Christian understandings of disability.

The medical model is the most common way of defining disability in Western society. According to this understanding, the problem lies in the body of the individual with an impairment. Healing from this perspective, then, involves medical treatment and bodily cure. The goal is to eliminate the disability and restore to body and/or mind what society (as framed by medical professionals) considers normal function.

[7]Samuel Kabue, "Disability and the Healing Mission of the Church," *International Review of Mission* 95, no. 376-77 (2006): 112-16 is just one example of this.

In contrast, the social model locates the problem not in an individual's body but in ways society is constructed that are inaccessible or oppressive. This includes inaccessible buildings, stigmatizing attitudes, discrimination, and any other exclusive physical or social structures. So the social model would understand removing these barriers and working toward universal accessibility as the way toward healing. The minority model adds to this, focusing on people with diverse disabilities working together as a defined minority group in order to advocate politically for legal protections, funding, or other civil rights and protections necessary for their livelihoods.

In the moral model and the charity model, disabilities are viewed as problems with the body or mind of the individual, similar to the medical model. But the moral model claims that impairments result from sin or moral failings, either those of the individual or their ancestors or community. So healing in this perspective involves repentance, breaking bonds of generational sin, exorcism, or assistance from a community healer or shaman. In the charity model, disability is considered a personal tragedy, so people with disabilities (and often their families) are thought to be deserving of pity. By eliciting the pity of others, this model creates a culture of "care" where people with disabilities are seen primarily as beneficiaries of the gifts and generosity of others. Healing in this model can include offering special ministries, donations, and charity to people with disabilities.

None of these models is explicitly Christian or non-Christian, and echoes of each can be found in multiple Christian approaches and perspectives on disability. Though most Christians do not name their primary mode of conceptualizing disability, these categories are helpful for seeing ways certain presuppositions about disability are at work in the following positions and how they read Scripture and reason theologically.

**Table 14.1**

| POSITION | VARIABLE: KEY MODEL(S) OF DISABILITY UTILIZED | MAIN HEALING FOCUS | REPRESENTATIVES |
|---|---|---|---|
| Curative | Medical, moral | 1. Body/brain<br>2. Release from sin/bondage | Faith Healing Ministries |
| Spiritual | Medical, charity | 1. Relationship with God<br>2. Body/brain | Joni Eareckson Tada |
| Human Diversity | Social, minority | 1. Exclusive structures and systems (belonging)<br>2. Social, spiritual, embodied relationships | Ben Conner, John Swinton, Amos Yong |

***Curative perspective.*** Key quote: "God wants you well!" (Kenneth Copeland Ministries).

*What constitutes a disability?* The curative perspective draws primarily on the medical and moral models of disability. This perspective understands a disability as something wrong with a person's body or mind: blindness, deafness, missing limbs, autism, paralysis, and even psychological disabilities like anxiety disorders or depression. In terms of why something is a disability, this perspective lines up most with the medical model. It lumps together disease and disability (and even illnesses like migraines, menstrual cramps, and the flu) into one general category of nonwellness. And a key phrase for this viewpoint is, "God wants you well!" So anything that is out of sync with their understanding of full health would be in the same category.

*How did disability come to exist in our world?* For some Christians who follow a curative model, they see the existence of disability primarily originating directly from Satan. As American Pentecostal preacher and forerunner of the Word of Faith Movement, Kenneth E. Hagin, put it pointedly, "Satan is the author of sickness."[8] Often people who hold this perspective describe sickness, disability, or pain as an attack from the enemy that needs to be resisted and health claimed by the power of Jesus. Gloria Copeland, a leader in the charismatic organization Kenneth Copeland Ministries, says, "Only the devil gets glory when our bodies are incapacitated. God gets glory when we have the physical strength and health to be of service to His kingdom and a blessing to others."[9]

There is some overlap between sin and disability at times, too, like the original sin of Adam and Eve that put us under the curse. In terms of individuals' sins, these can be particularly sins of omission that involve someone not doing their part to resist the devil and claim the healing that they already have in Christ, or not having a strong enough faith in God or God's Word to deliver them from their illnesses or disabilities.

*What is God's will regarding people with disabilities?* Those adhering to this position believe it is God's will that all people with disabilities be made well (according to their definition). If God's people were truly walking according to the Scriptures and in faith, they should not be experiencing sickness or disability. Satan may try to attack someone by giving that person an illness or disability, but in the power of God and according to God's Word, a person does not have to remain in

[8]Kenneth E. Hagin, "The Double Cure," Kenneth Hagin Ministries, accessed June 21, 2018, https://www.rhema.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=229:the-double-cure.

[9]Gloria Copeland, "Lies Christians Believe About Healing #1," Kenneth Copeland Ministries, accessed June 21, 2018, http://www.kcm.org/real-help/healing/apply/lies-christians-believe-about-healing-1.

that state but can claim bodily wellness from God. In this position, it is inconceivable that God's will for someone's disability would be anything other than removing it and restoring the person fully to the medically conventional understanding of health.

*What does healing look like for people with disabilities?* Quite simply, healing in this position means that whatever was making a person nonwell would be fully removed. Healing is understood almost exclusively in a physical, bodily sense: it reflects a cure for an individual. In this perspective, God has already done the work of healing, but people need to cooperate with God in order for that healing to take full effect. This moment of believing and taking hold of these convictions, through the person's own faith, is the determining factor for whether someone will or will not experience this healing.

*Key biblical texts and theological themes.* Supporters of this position base their understanding of disability on three key points: first, bodily perfection being equivalent to wholeness/holiness and what is acceptable to God; second, disability as an outcome of sin; and third, physical/bodily restoration as part of the new creation or kingdom of God as described in Scripture.

The first point is based on both the priestly codes in Leviticus and the rules for animals acceptable as a sacrifice to God. Leviticus 21 outlines a number of rules for priests, including a statement that no one with a "blemish" may present food offerings at the altar of the Lord (21:16-23). The reasoning is that if such a person were to approach God's holy altar, he would profane/defile the space. A similar logic is at work when the author of Leviticus repeatedly states that the animals presented for various sacrifices to God also need to be without blemish. They take this to mean that human bodies with any kind of disability or "blemish" (like those described in the priestly codes and other texts) are similarly unacceptable to God, and God only wills and delights in bodily perfection.

They also pay attention to the ways disability is often portrayed as an outcome of sin; that as a result of people's sins (including the original sin of Adam and Eve) and the work of the devil, people are afflicted with "every other malady and affliction" (Deut 28:61). They do not acknowledge the role God plays in causing the diseases/disabilities as punishment in these texts but focus on the rootedness of disability in sin and evil. Equally on the other side, they focus on ways that God's restoration and redemption (particularly in Isaiah, and echoed in Luke 4:18-19) tends to involve bodily healing as a result and mark of the kingdom of God and ministry of Jesus—that it is God's good will for the future.

A final theological emphasis in this position is the idea and refrain in Scripture, "by [Jesus'] stripes we are healed" (Is 53:3). This position clings firmly to the promise that Jesus' work on the cross was triumphant over sin and any kind of bodily disease or disability. In response to someone who might claim that God desires them to be sick or disabled for some greater glory, Hagin remarks, "What right, then, would God have to put your sickness on Jesus if He wanted you to keep bearing it? There is no need for both of you to bear it. Because Jesus bore it, you are free!"[10]

Some corresponding church practices could include:

1. Persistent prayer for physical healing
2. Memorizing/repeating Scriptures that promise healing
3. Healing services (perhaps including laying on of hands, rebuking Satan, exorcism)
4. Encouraging people with ongoing illness/disability to examine honestly their faith and spiritual life
5. Sharing and repeating stories of miraculous physical healing/testimonies

***Spiritual perspective.*** Key quote: "God will permit what he hates to accomplish that which he loves" (Joni Eareckson Tada).[11]

*What constitutes a disability?* The curative and spiritual perspectives share a medical understanding of what defines a body as either abled or disabled. But whereas the former includes the moral model, the latter is instead nuanced by the charity model. For the spiritual perspective, a healthy, nondisabled body is "a body that works the way it was intended."[12]

*How did disability come to exist in our world?* A main proponent of this perspective is Joni Eareckson Tada, founder and CEO of Joni and Friends International Disability Center, an organization that works with individuals, churches, families, and public policy makers to promote the gospel and the thriving of people with disabilities worldwide. Since a diving accident in her youth, Tada has been quadriplegic and uses a motorized wheelchair. She has been one of the most well-known voices in evangelicalism on the topic of disability and ministry for the past several decades.

In accord with the first position, Tada also sees disability as a result of the curse. As she puts it, humanity's "rebellion against God resulted in death. Disease, sickness,

[10]Kenneth E. Hagin, "Possessing the Promise of Healing," Kenneth Copeland Ministries, accessed June 21, 2018, https://www.rhema.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=232:possessing-the-promise-of-healing.

[11]Joni and Friends, "God Permits What He Hates," updated May 15, 2013, http://www.joniandfriends.org/radio/4-minute/god-permits-what-he-hates1/.

[12]Joni Eareckson Tada, *A Place of Healing* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 38.

and disaster are simply part of that package that goes with death."[13] Disability is included in the mix. She agrees with the curative perspective that Satan is responsible for anything that causes suffering, including disability, but with an important difference. For Tada, even though the curse and/or Satan may be the originator of disability, God is still in control and brings good out of evil. She repeatedly emphasizes: "No trial reaches us apart from God's explicit decree and specific permission."[14] This idea that God would ever permit (or even decree) someone to have an illness or disability would be completely unacceptable to the curative perspective. She talks about her quadriplegia as something God hated but allowed in order to accomplish what he loved—her growing need for him.

*What is God's will regarding people with disabilities?* Can God physically heal people's disabilities? Yes. Does God heal people of disabilities today? Yes. But on the question of whether God wills to heal everyone with a disability and whether that is best for everyone, Tada says no. This is where she departs sharply from the curative position. She is open to the possibility that God could be glorified in and through someone's disability, not simply in the eradication of it.

*What does healing look like for people with disabilities?* Tada describes healing of disability according to the medical model, focusing on the bodily cure of an individual. A person with disabilities is healed when she has a body and mind free of any kind of illness or disability. This is even clearer when she describes how she envisions heaven. She imagines beginning each morning in heaven running up a fifteen-hundred-mile staircase on her brand-new legs and never feeling weak or tired. "I can say with confidence," she says of the New Jerusalem, "that there won't be one wheelchair ramp or set of instructions in Braille or handicapped parking space in the whole city!"[15] She acknowledges that it can still be good to pray for that healing as the Bible commands, because sometimes God does physically heal in this world as well. For this position, spiritual growth and knowing Christ is far more important than any bodily transformation that may take place. For her, "becoming more like Jesus" is "the ultimate goal of healing."[16]

*Key biblical texts and theological themes.* The central theological theme in this position is God's complete sovereignty, and as a corollary, people's need to trust and submit to God in all circumstances. Tada describes at length, with numerous biblical references, that God is ruler over everything that exists. And because God's sovereignty is coupled with a deep trust in God's goodness and love, God being in control is a very

[13]Joni Eareckson Tada, *Unanswered Prayer: Where's My Miracle?* (Torrance, CA: Rose, 2012), 2.
[14]Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Estes, *When God Weeps* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 231.
[15]Tada, *A Place of Healing*, 39.
[16]Tada, *Unanswered Prayer*, 9.

good thing that can comfort us. It also leads to an emphasis on a call for Christians to be humble and trust what God is doing in the world and in our lives as ultimately the best plan there is. She references the story of Joseph, who after being sold into slavery by his brothers and enduring many other profound trials eventually ends up helping the whole nation to survive a famine. Joseph then says to his brothers, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today" (Gen 50:20).

Tada also points to times when Jesus chose to leave a city without physically healing everyone who had been brought to be healed, demonstrating that his need to proclaim the message of the gospel to other cities was his more important work. The works of physical healing demonstrate that Jesus has begun the work to reverse the curse and establish the kingdom of God on earth, but this work will not be fully complete until we are in heaven.

Finally, Tada pays close attention to the Scriptures that explain that Christians will experience suffering in this life. As followers of Jesus, our Lord who endured great suffering in many different ways while on earth, we should anticipate sharing in his sufferings as we follow him. God's best for his followers, according to her, is not to live a life free from pain, suffering, or disability, but indeed, God's best may include these things. As she has experienced in her own life, having a profound disability (and in these more recent years chronic pain) was not something she would have thought to be God's best for her. But God's ways were not her ways, and in the end they have proven to be full of great joy, with many people being brought to Jesus and a life that has brought immense glory to God.

Some corresponding church practices could include:

1. Specialized ministries and programs for people with disabilities (special needs ministries, wheelchair outreach programs, family retreats, etc.)
2. Discipleship for people with disabilities, unrelated to their disability
3. The possibility of prayer for physical healing
4. Strong tone of praise for God in all circumstances (individually and corporately) accompanied by seeking to grow spiritually and submit to God's will for our lives (including our bodies)
5. Encouraging people with disabilities to see how God might want to use them in particular ways in their current situation (maybe especially evangelistically)
6. Sharing and repeating stories of God gifting and using people with disabilities for God's glory

***Human diversity perspective.*** Key quote: "God doesn't make mistakes, and people with disabilities should be appreciated as being uniquely different" (Amos Yong).[17]

*What constitutes a disability?* Though this position does not deny the bodily or neurological aspects of many disabilities, the focus tends to be on the structures and factors at work outside of people's bodies that disable them (more consistent with the social model). Two theologians with disabilities, Nancy Eiesland and Roy McCloughry, point to the contextual nature of disability: that the bodily or mental traits labeled as a disability in any given context will depend on what that particular culture values and what the intellectual and social expectations are in a context. For cultures that greatly value a person's independence and self-sufficiency (like many in the West), a bodily or mental trait that inhibits those would be considered a disability. Disability is (at least) as much a result of how a particular trait is interpreted as the impact of the trait itself. They don't deny the legitimacy of medical impairments or the reality that certain disabilities cause physical discomfort or pain, but they regard this as simply one aspect of a condition and recognize that not all disabilities have these effects.

*How did disability come to exist in our world?* When talking about how a condition affects a person's body or mind, advocates of the human diversity perspective tend to talk about these simply as aspects of God-created diversity in humanity. Just like people are shorter or taller, or have different skin tones and eye colors, so too do people's bodies look and function in many different ways—and all of this is created by God, on purpose, a part of God's good creation. This distances their position from any perspective that believes disability to be a result of sin or the fall, since they do not classify disability as something bad requiring a negative cause.

The other way disability is created in our world is through social construction and stigma. After all, if certain mental or bodily conditions are simply aspects of God-created diversity, then they become "disabilities" only when we set up our world in such a way that people who share in particular aspects are denied access or are undervalued. In that way, much of what disables a person is human made through our own sociocultural systems and perspectives.

*What is God's will regarding people with disabilities?* In a general sense God's will for people with disabilities is not significantly different than for anyone else: that they would be treated with respect, justice, and dignity, and that any obstacles keeping them from being fully included into the community would be destroyed. Then, not

[17] Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 13.

only should they be included, but God's will would be that they be given space to exercise their God-given gifts and recognized as vital parts of the body of Christ.

We should also listen to the varied voices of people with disabilities themselves in determining God's will for them. Among other things this would mean paying attention to their experiences with their minds and bodies and their readings of Scripture, and not letting narratives and theologies about disability be primarily defined by nondisabled people.

*What does healing look like for people with disabilities?* Healing in this position tends to be more social and structural and to deemphasize bodily cure. One aspect of the healing comes through including those who have been excluded into the family of God. In terms of social or relational healing, exclusive social structures would be amended, and people with disabilities would have relationships of belonging. Often the healing is not about changing the individual's body/mind but healing inaccessible communal structures (physical/tangible structures, attitudes of the community, oppressive theological frameworks, etc.).

The Human Diversity Perspective does not take for granted that people with disabilities will stop having those disabilities in heaven. Since bodily and mental differences are aspects of God-created diversity, these would not necessarily be removed when the person is made whole in the new creation. Though the person will be changed, as everyone in heaven will be, it might not be the particular aspects the world calls "disabilities" that undergo transformation.

*Key biblical texts and theological themes.* One theological theme is the body of Christ analogy from 1 Corinthians 12. This text emphasizes unity of the body with all parts working together but also a diversity of gifts. God gives every person gifts to be used for God's glory and for the community. No person exists simply to receive from the work of the other parts; all are gifted and play a role in the whole. Some highlight an appreciation for weakness and vulnerability in the life of a believer, particularly in the epistles. Many point to the *imago Dei* (all people being created in the image of God, from Gen 1) as a way to further underscore that unique aspects of God's image can be revealed through everyone, including people with disabilities.

Several also draw attention to the actual, physical body of Christ. Eiesland points out that after his resurrection, Jesus retained the scars in his hands and the wound in his side. For Eiesland this exemplifies the truth that bodies are not perfected in heaven, according to our medical notions of perfection.[18] Along these lines, scholars also point to the narrative of Zacchaeus (Lk 19) and of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8) as examples

[18]Nancy Eiesland, *The Disabled God* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 98.

of people who encountered Jesus, became transformed people of faith, and yet were unchanged in their bodies. Zacchaeus was still short, and the eunuch remained a eunuch.

In order to break the link others see between sin and disability, many point out Jesus' encounter with the man born blind in John 9. In this account the disciples ask whether it was the man's own sin or his parents' sin who caused his blindness (the main two options at the time). Jesus gives a third response, out of step from what they expect, saying that the man was born blind so that God's glory can be revealed in him.

Finally, a number of proponents notice that in Luke 14, a text often called "The Great Banquet," Jesus describes a man inviting people to a dinner, taken to be representative of the eschaton. The invited guests start making excuses for why they cannot come, so the man instructs the servants to bring in "the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame" who are then included in the feast, without any reference to their being physically cured upon entrance.

Some corresponding church practices could include:

1. Modify church services and structures or create new ones so that people of all abilities can fully participate
2. People with disabilities serving in positions of all levels of church leadership according to their gifts and preferences
3. Create an accessible and welcoming church environment (physically, theologically, socially, emotionally, etc.)
4. People with and without disabilities remaining in community together with opportunity for real friendships of belonging
5. Healing prayer for structures to be more just, and for people without disabilities to be more welcoming
6. Paying attention to what people with disabilities do and do not experience as healing; and not offering prayer for physical healing unless invited to do so

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

Applying the biblical text to contemporary issues is both necessary and complex. It is necessary because we are a people formed and guided by the scriptural witness of our kindred in the faith who have journeyed with God before us. We carefully observe how God was active in the past so we can better notice where God is at work today and participate in that work. At the same time, a modern category like "disability" didn't exist in ancient times. This broad grouping of a very diverse set of people was created for a number of reasons, but in large part as a political group to advocate for

common concerns like accessibility and health care. Also, in Western societies we often default to a medical view of bodies, disability, and illness, which was not the case in the ancient world. It is equally important to keep in mind that the disability community is not a monolith. It can be easier theologically, at times, for someone born with a particular disability or embodiment to understand their body as intentionally created by God as a unique aspect of human diversity than for someone who acquires a disability later in life through illness, violence, or injury. All of this adds to the complexity of how we apply Scripture to a topic like "disability" in our contemporary context. Yet even with the complexity, engaging this issue through the lens of our Scriptures is essential.

It is clear from the three positions that conceptions of disability and ideas about healing are intricately connected. If someone believes the location of disability is in the body/mind of an individual (as in the medical model), then healing would be a physical cure. But if they believe the location/cause of the disability is primarily outside the individual's body, in the physical and social structures that exclude their full value and participation, then healing would be removing barriers and reforming structures and stigmatizing attitudes. All of these kinds of transformation are present in different ways in our Scriptures.

When discussing various bodily impairments, a number of biblical texts in both testaments tend to identify bodily cure as an important aspect of healing. They describe times God worked in someone's life in this way and associate bodily cure with God setting things right in the world (a theme in Isaiah, echoed in Lk 4 and elsewhere). The curative position tends to take these passages as relatively straightforward examples of what healing should be like today. Because of this, they can find the human diversity perspective's deemphasis on bodily cure as demonstrating a lack of faith in God's power to bring complete wholeness or health to someone's body or mind—especially if they have witnessed miraculous physical cure brought about by intercession or other divine intervention in their communities today. In terms of the New Testament, the curative perspective rightly points to the fact that Jesus transforms bodies in his works of healing, and it uplifts those details in the narratives.

But even taking the biblical narratives relatively directly, it is not always the case that encounters with God result in bodies becoming free of impairment, disease, or disability. Jacob acquired a limp *after* his encounter wrestling with God by the river Jabbok (Gen 32). Moses had difficulty speaking, but God did not cure Moses' speech difficulty. Instead, God sent another person with a different set of gifts to be a co-laborer in God's work alongside Moses (Ex 6–7). Jesus retained wounds and scars

in his resurrection body (Jn 20). Paul had a thorn in the flesh that, while unspecified, did lead to greater weakness on a human level. God did not remove this source of human weakness in Paul's body/life, even at his faithful urging (2 Cor 12). Texts like these do not fit neatly within the curative position, which tends to uplift only one divine plan for human bodies (to move them ever closer to conventional notions of health and ability).

Given that as Christians we worship and follow a savior who spent much of his time on earth healing people, the healing way of Jesus is an important source of insight for how we (as followers of Jesus) might think about disability today. When we consider Jesus' activity of healing through the lens of each position, this gives us a more holistic understanding of both disability and healing.[19] Any position that takes healing and curing to be essentially interchangeable does not fully describe what healing is, at least as it is described in the Gospels. If the only thing that mattered in a healing encounter was that a disease or disability was removed from a person's body, then all of the healing narratives could have been about two verses long. But instead, the Gospel writers include a number of other details about the kinds of healing and transformation that take place, how the community reacts, and other details that the spiritual and human diversity perspectives help to reveal.

Since those who hold a curative perspective focus primarily on individual, physical healing, they would readily highlight any bodily transformation (cure) that takes place in an encounter with Jesus. The spiritual perspective, with an emphasis on a person's relationship with Jesus and God's sovereignty, might be particularly drawn to how people in these narratives experience forgiveness, conversion, and spiritual transformation. They may also point to ways these events highlight God's power and Jesus' messianic identity. Those holding the human diversity perspective may especially notice ways these narratives include transformation of the person's community reality, personal identity, and disrupt boundaries that excluded some people from full participation in social and religious life. Based on preconceptions of health and healing, each position naturally gravitates toward some aspects of these events, while paying less attention to (or fully ignoring) others. But all of the aspects are included in the text.

For our understandings of disability and corresponding practices of healing in the way of Jesus to be truly healing today, we have to take into account the fruits they bear in our world. What are the outcomes of each perspective in the lives of people with

[19]I discuss these matters in much greater depth in *Disability and the Way of Jesus: Holisttic Healing in the Gospels and the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019).

disabilities today? Which bear fruit that could rightly be called healing—whether on a physical, social, economic, or broader spiritual level?

People with various impairments, illnesses, or disabilities in the Gospels reacted to their healing encounters with Jesus in overwhelmingly positive ways. So, for our understandings and corresponding practices of disability and healing to be considered faithful to the healing way of Jesus, we would need to make sure the responses of people with disabilities correspond to the reactions of faith, gratitude, and holistic transformation that we see in the Gospels. This becomes much more possible when these perspectives and practices are shaped by people of all abilities, especially those who are most impacted by the positions and the fruit they bear.

To return to Rev. Suzan from the opening section, her path of ministry has been challenging—consistently marked by barriers of attitude (ableism) and lack of access. She served a church in an interim capacity for a while. Some aspects went well, while others were difficult. She ended up leaving the church before her full term was completed, mostly due to much of the congregation never fully respecting her work or her role as their pastor. Her old fear of being unfairly judged for not working hard enough, mostly due to prejudices around her disability, proved to be well founded (though in reality she consistently completed her duties, and then some). She continues to have great love for the church and the people of God, and she desires to use her gifts in local ministry, but the established structures and their inflexibility has made that difficult for the time being. For now, Suzan is doing ministry at a larger denominational level, educating leaders about disability and other experiences and doing moving and powerful advocacy work. Instead of official pastoral work (to which she is both called and gifted), her activity at this point is less formal. Hopefully over time, with continued work and attention, churches across the globe will become places that can recognize and celebrate the gifts she has (and those of other leaders with disabilities) and make space for them to live out the important calls God has placed on their lives. For Suzan it is not her body but these realities that need to be changed.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you are a person with a disability, or if you have a loved one with a disability, which theological position would you hope your church most closely held to, and why?
2. If someone with a disability asked for prayer for healing, what might this prayer include in each of the positions? How would they be similar? What would be different?

3. Compare what each perspective might contribute to a dialogue about aging, realizing that for most people, our bodies change and certain abilities decline as we get older. What would each say about God's presence in the aging process, and how we are called to be present to it?
4. How might each position shape nondisabled people's views on people with disabilities? And how would it shape their actions?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

Black, Kathy. *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

Carter, Erik. *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations*. Baltimore: Brookes, 2007.

Conner, Benjamin. *Disabling Mission, Enabling Witness*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018.

Eiesland, Nancy. *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

Fox, Bethany McKinney. *Disability and the Way of Jesus: Holistic Healing in the Gospels and the Church*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.

García Iriarte, Edurne, Roy McConkey, and Robbie Gilligan, eds. *Disability and Human Rights: Global Perspectives*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Gaventa, William C. *Disability and Spirituality: Recovering Wholeness.* Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018.

Greene-McCreight, Kathryn. *Darkness Is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

McCloughry, Roy. *The Enabled Life: Christianity in a Disabling World*. London: SPCK, 2013.

Melcher, Sarah J., Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong, eds. *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017.

Newman, Barbara. *Accessible Gospel, Inclusive Worship*. Wyoming, MI: CLC Network, 2014.

Swinton, John. *Becoming Friends of Time: Disability, Timefullness, and Gentle Discipleship.* Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016.

Swinton, John, and Brian Brock, eds. *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.

Tada, Joni Eareckson. *Joni—An Unforgettable Story—25th Anniversary Edition.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

———. *Joni & Ken: An Untold Love Story.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.

———. *A Place of Healing: Wrestling with the Mysteries of Suffering, Pain, and God's Sovereignty.* Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010.

Walker, Robert L., ed. *Speaking Out: Gifts of Ministry Undeterred by Disability*. Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2012.

Yong, Amos. *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision for the People of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

American Baptist: "Resolution on the Church and Ministry with Persons with Disabilities." www.abc-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Disabilities-The-Church-and-Persons-with.pdf.

Assemblies of God: "Ministries to People with Disabilities: A Biblical Perspective." https://ag.org/Beliefs/Topics-Index/Ministry-to-People-with-Disabilities.

Evangelical Covenant Church: "Better Together." https://covchurch.org/disability/.

Lutheran (ELCA): "People Living with Disabilities." http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/People_with_DisabilitiesSM.pdf.

Presbyterian Church (USA): "Resolution on Disabilities: A Celebration of 'That All May Enter.'" www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/_resolutions/resolution-on-disabilities.pdf.

Southern Baptist Convention: "On Mental Health Concerns and the Heart of God." www.abc-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Disabilities-The-Church-and-Persons-with.pdf.

United Methodist: "Disability Excerpts from the Book of Discipline." www.umdisabilityministries.org/theol/discipline.html.

### *Media and documentaries*

*I'll Push You*. Directed by Chris Karcher and Terry Parish. Emota, 2016.

*Invitation to Dance*. Directed by Simi Linton and Christian von Tippelskirch. Metuffer Films, 2014.

*Lives Worth Living*. Directed by Eric Neudel. Independent Lens, 2011.

*Monica and David*. Directed by Alexandra Codina. CineMia/HBO, 2009.

*My Country*. Directed by Cheryl Green. 1997.

*Sound and Fury*. Directed by Josh Aronson. Next Wave Films, 2000.

# 15

# SOCIAL AND ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA

*Justin Ariel Bailey*

## REAL LIFE

Someone has kidnapped Princess Susannah, the Duchess of Beaumont. They have released a video on YouTube threatening her execution if their demands are unmet. But these terrorists are asking for neither prisoner release nor financial remuneration. Their sole request is that the British prime minister performs a humiliating sex act on live television in prime time. What should be done? What is the responsibility of the public, of the press, and of those in power?

This is the premise of the pilot episode of *Black Mirror*, a British television show developed for Netflix that explores the dark side of our fascination with technology. While it may initially seem like a stretch, the episode's story is driven by media phenomena that make it familiar and believable. The power of smart phone videos. A major story breaking through social media. The struggle to control the story in official media channels. Pundits discussing every angle of the story, using instant polling. YouTube. YouTube comments. New possibilities for entertainment. New possibilities for degradation and shame. And through it all, eyes fixed on screens.

Each episode of *Black Mirror* probes a different angle of the perils and possibilities of life in the age of entertainment. The scenarios are science fiction, yet they are rarely so far-fetched that viewers are unable to imagine similar situations unfolding in contemporary life.

Indeed, when it comes to new media, sometimes truth is stranger than fiction. Consider the 2015 hacking of Ashley Madison, the infamous company with the tagline "Life is Short. Have an Affair." Hackers gave Ashley Madison a month to shut their website down, threatening to release a massive leak of "customer records,

profiles with all the customers' secret sexual fantasies, nude pictures, and conversations and matching credit card transactions, real names and addresses, and employee documents and emails." When their demands went unmet, all the data was released. Chaos ensued, millions of names were exposed, the CEO of Ashley Madison resigned, and concerns about online security and data protection rose to new levels.

The story got stranger, however, when a researcher analyzed the source code and found that more than seventy thousand fem-bots had been created "to send male users millions of fake messages, hoping to create the illusion of a vast playland of available women." In other words, there were vanishingly few actual women among the 5.5 million alleged women (compared to thirty-one million men) boasted by the site. The grand twist of the story is that millions of men were logging on to have racy conversations with Internet bots.[1]

Churches were not unaffected. One researcher estimated that as many as four hundred pastors, elders, and church leaders were expected to step down after being implicated on the list.[2]

## REAL WORLD

***Our ubiquitous screens.*** Incidents like the Ashley Madison hack provoke us to consider some disquieting realities about life in our brave new world, where almost everything has become a matter of public consumption and entertainment. Social and entertainment media sprawl promiscuously across all spheres of life, and we reflect upon our subject as those who are deeply embedded in it, awash in the imaginaries of Facebook, Amazon, and Google.

Parents talk about limiting electronic "screen time" for their kids, especially in light of research that links excessive screen time to a list of ills ranging from obesity to violent behavior. But even once we leave adolescence, screens are almost impossible to avoid. The data measurement company Nielsen estimates that in an average day, Americans spend more than ten hours staring at a screen.[3]

Our screens, after all, offer windows to other worlds. They draw us into an ocean of signification. They chime to remind us of urgent messages to which we must respond. They supply endless distractions to stave off boredom. (To resurrect an

[1]Annalee Newitz, "Ashley Madison Code Shows More Women, and More Bots," *Gizmodo*, August 31, 2015, http://gizmodo.com/ashley-madison-code-shows-more-women-and-more-bots-1727613924.

[2]Ed Stetzer, "My Pastor Is on the Ashley Madison List," Christianity Today Exchange Blog, August 27, 2015, www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/august/my-pastor-is-on-ashley-madison-list.html.

[3]Nielsen, *The Nielsen Total Audience Report: Q2 2017*, 2017, http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2017/the-nielsen-total-audience-q2-2017.html.

already distant advertising slogan: "Bored? There's an app for that!") They function as portals, ensuring that we are always accessible and available to those not immediately present to us.

We may sometimes be disgusted by what our screens present. We may find the content objectionable and choose to consume something else. We may feel paralyzed into passivity. We may retweet a link and feel that our activism is complete. We may do all of this from the comfort of our beds. But we can rarely excuse ourselves from the constant barrage of infotainment fed to us through our myriad screens.

Most of the time we enjoy the possibilities that the digital age affords us. We enjoy staying connected with friends through Facebook, following celebrities through Twitter, posting pictures of our meals on Instagram, and catching up on episodes through Netflix. These technological fixtures have become so commonplace that we usually see them as sites of entertaining distraction rather than serious ethical deliberation.

***Connected? Empathy, slacktivism, and the digital divide.*** Yet all of this screen time is having an effect, for better and for worse. Nicholas Carr has argued that although our Internet use may help us develop skills like multitasking, hand-eye coordination, reflex response, and the processing of visual cues, these gains seem to be coming at the cost of contemplation, attention, memory, and empathy.[4]

Indeed, research has shown a correlation between the social media saturation and social disconnection.[5] The result is paradoxical: "high connectivity for the Wi-Fi generation and low connectivity in terms of emotional concern for others."[6]

Social media has also facilitated a thin version of advocacy, derisively called "slacktivism." Seth Myers captured the phenomenon memorably on *Saturday Night Live* in 2012: "Look, make a Facebook page, and we will 'like' it. It's the *least* we can do. But it's also the *most* we can do." Slacktivists offer token public support, reposting links or clicking "like" to signal their identification with a cause. While some advocacy groups have hoped to raise their public profile through such efforts, research has shown that such token displays are unlikely to generate a meaningful contribution to a cause.[7]

---

[4]Nicholas G. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

[5]Sarah H. Konrath, "The Empathy Paradox: Increasing Disconnection in the Age of Increasing Connection," in *Handbook of Research on Technoself: Identity in a Technological Society*, ed. R. Luppicini (Hershey, PA: IGI Global), 204-28.

[6]Clifford G. Christians, "Evangelical Perspectives on Technology," in *Evangelical Christians and Popular Culture*, ed. Robert H. Woods Jr. (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), 323.

[7]Kirk Kristofferson, Katherine White, and John Peloza, "The Nature of Slacktivism: How the Social Observability of an Initial Act of Token Support Affects Subsequent Prosocial Action," *Journal of Consumer Research* 40, no. 6 (April 1, 2014): 1149-66.

In other parts of the world, connectivity is a currency in limited supply. As of March 2018, just over 54 percent of the world population is connected to the Internet. Researchers speak of "The Digital Divide," which refers to the differing amount of information between the Internet haves and the have-nots.[8] While the have-nots suffer from a lack of access, the haves suffer from paradoxical maladies: too much information, online experiences driven by ads and algorithms, and the triumph of "fake news." In a hyperconnected world, not everyone is connected equally, and this means that the utopia visions of web-driven equality have not been realized.[9]

Nevertheless, the promise and power of connectivity for the developing world should not be understated. Consider the role that social media played in the Arab Spring. In what some have called "Leaderless Revolutions," social media facilitated the rapid sharing and spreading of information, creating a "virtual collective consciousness" that catalyzed a succession of regime changes in these countries.[10] Indeed, social media was so effective that the Egyptian government pulled the plug on digital access. But "hacktivism" cuts more ways than one: the interference of Russian hackers with the 2016 US presidential election shows that global superpowers are no less immune to the power of new technologies. Media has always been powerful, but it has never been so instantaneous, democratized, and spontaneous.

***The dark side: Doxxing, cyberbullying, and technology addiction.*** Yet therein also lurks social media's liability, for hell hath no fury like the Internet unleashed. Often the dark side of social and entertainment media comes with a blurring of the two, for example, when private life (social) becomes a matter of public consumption (entertainment).

Consider the phenomenon of "doxxing," in which hackers publicly post a target's personal information, seeking to humiliate and expose. Andy Crouch argues that doxxing is representative of a shift to a media-amplified "fame-shame culture." Here "fame is a public estimation of worth, a powerful currency of status. But fame is bestowed by a broad audience, with only the loosest bonds to those they acclaim." This

[8]"The digital divide is not indeed a clear single gap which divides a society into two groups. Researchers report that disadvantage can take such forms as lower-performance computers, lower-quality or high price connections (i.e. narrowband or dialup connection), difficulty of obtaining technical assistance, and lower access to subscription-based contents." www.internetworldstats.com/links10.htm.

[9]Safiya Umoja Noble argues that the combination of private interests in promoting certain sites, along with the small number of Internet search engines, leads to a biased set of search algorithms that discriminate against people of color. See Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

[10]For a treatment of the role of social media in protest movements, see Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

means that our sense of self is "constantly endangered, fragile, and desperately in need of protection."[11] When all our most intimate details seem suddenly accessible, we are terrified of being exposed and excluded.

With so much of our lives broadcasted and recorded online, there are unparalleled possibilities for humiliation, blackmail, and shame. Sometimes these possibilities are deeply ambiguous; others are downright diabolical. The World Wide Web often resembles the Wild Wild West, with few marshals to police the shootout in the comments section. Under the immunity of anonymity, things are seen and said that plumb the depths of depravity. It takes little tech savvy for cyberbullies to shame rivals and victims into self-harm and even suicide. Bullying has always existed, but it has never been so seemingly inescapable, easy, and consequence free.

Yet, just as often the pitfalls of media are the traps we fall into ourselves. Certainly, the many media choices (and the powers that produce them!) aim to captivate us. Entertainment is big money, but how we spend often shows us the (not-so) hidden idols of our heart. $22 billion a year on video games. $10 billion a year on movie tickets. $10 billion a year on pornography, which incidentally exceeds the profits of professional football, basketball, and baseball combined.[12]

But pornography addiction is less pervasive than media addiction in general. Similarly, we are less addicted to particular media pieces than to the practices of comprehensive media consumption. We now constantly snack on media, filling up all our time and space with entertainment; innumerable vicarious experiences are available to us with the tap of a finger.

This can be distracting to say the least. But more than our attention is at stake. My interest in the ethical implications of media came into sharp focus during fifteen years as a youth pastor. For my students, screens became irreducible extensions of themselves. I once had a student who told me that his beloved computer had broken early in the week. I asked him if he was bored but was unprepared for the honesty of his answer.

"No," he said. "It's so lonely."

Loneliness and connection. Fame and shame. None of these tensions are new; what *is* new is the sense of possibility that social and entertainment media technologies provide for remaking ourselves and our life together, for better or for worse.

---

[11] Andy Crouch, "The Return of Shame," *Christianity Today*, March 2015, 38.

[12] "Porn Profits: Corporate America's Secret," http://abcnews.go.com/Primetime/story?id=132001. See also "Internet Pornography by the Numbers," www.webroot.com/us/en/home/resources/tips/digital-family-life/internet-pornography-by-the-numbers.

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

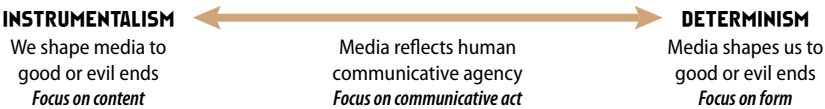
***Ethical response to media: A conceptual map.*** With the increasing ubiquity of social and entertainment media, reflection has proliferated in turn. I first want to sketch a conceptual map, which locates Christian ethical approaches to media in relationship to two diagnostic questions.[13]

*Question one: What is the posture toward media?* Technophobes tend to be suspicious and critical, emphasizing the negative potential power of media to deform us, while technophiles tend to be optimistic, exulting in media as full of positive potential.



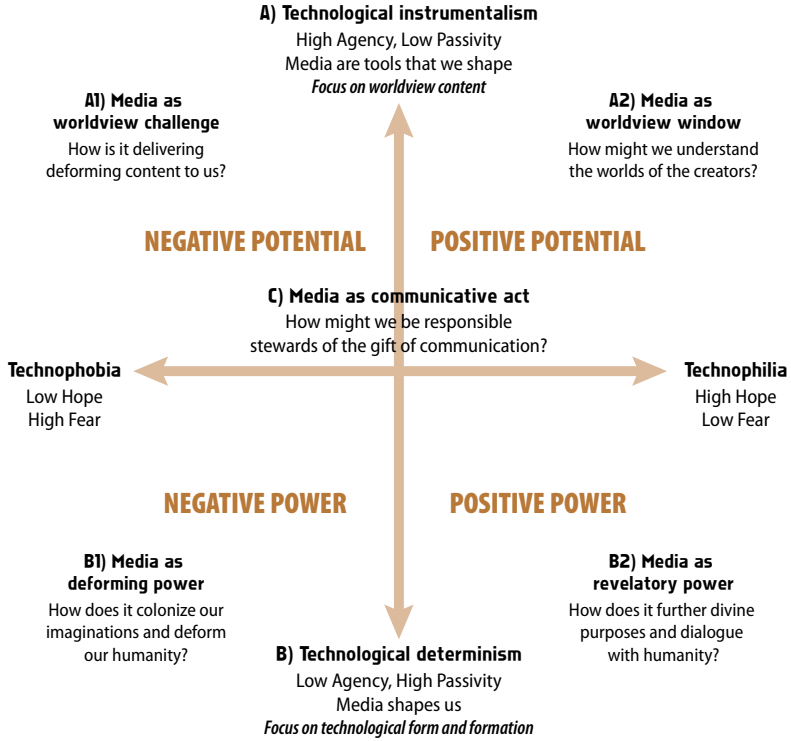

It is very rare to find evaluations of media that are simply one extreme or the other. Nevertheless, the general evaluative posture is usually evident.

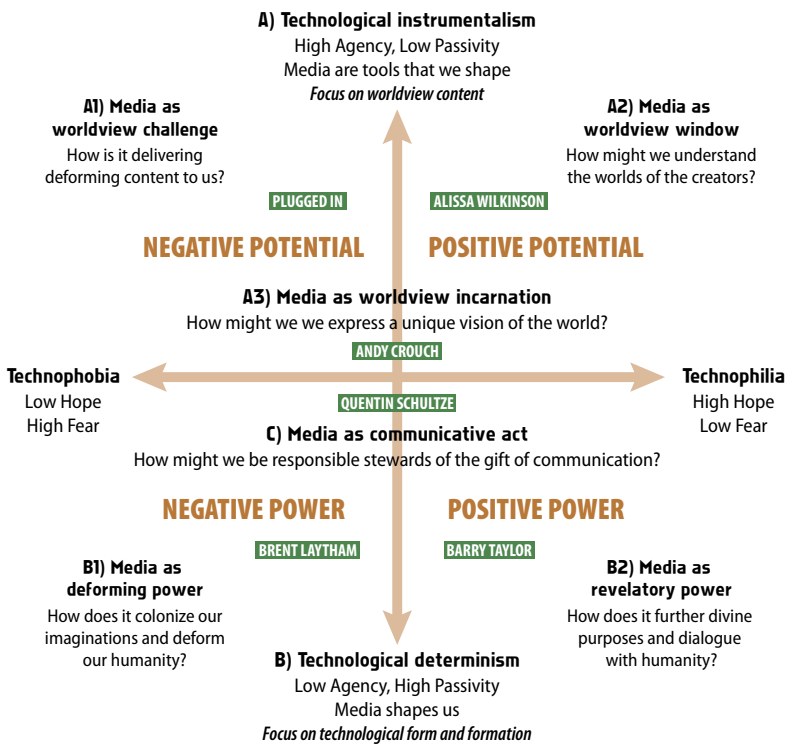
*Question two: What is the understanding of human agency?* Instrumentalists tend to construe media as a tool that we can shape for our own ends, while determinists emphasize the ways that media form us, structuring our interface with the world. The former group emphasizes content; the latter, technology. Mediating between the two is a focus on the act of communicative agency. Within this spectrum, human actors are afforded various levels of agency.




Each approach to media will place itself somewhere between the poles. Most approaches tend to seek a middle way or dialectic between them. The purpose of this map is to sketch a range of responses, as well as ethical emphases that emerge along both continuums.

[13]These framing questions represent an expansion of Ian Barbour's threefold typology. See Ian G. Barbour, *Ethics in an Age of Technology: Gifford Lectures, Volume Two* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993). This section has also been modified from an earlier article. See Justin Bailey, "Braving the New World (Wide Web): Mapping Theological Approaches to Media," *God and Nature Magazine*, American Scientific Affiliation, Fall 2015.


A) Technological instrumentalism
High Agency, Low Passivity
Media are tools that we shape
Focus on worldview content
A1) Media as worldview challenge
How is it delivering deforming content to us?
A2) Media as worldview window
How might we understand the worlds of the creators?
NEGATIVE POTENTIAL
POSITIVE POTENTIAL
C) Media as communicative act
How might we be responsible stewards of the gift of communication?
Technophobia
Low Hope
High Fear
Technophilia
High Hope
Low Fear
NEGATIVE POWER
POSITIVE POWER
B1) Media as deforming power
How does it colonize our imaginations and deform our humanity?
B2) Media as revelatory power
How does it further divine purposes and dialogue with humanity?
B) Technological determinism
Low Agency, High Passivity
Media shapes us
Focus on technological form and formation


A) Technological instrumentalism
High Agency, Low Passivity
Media are tools that we shape
Focus on worldview content
A1) Media as worldview challenge
How is it delivering deforming content to us?
A2) Media as worldview window
How might we understand the worlds of the creators?
PLUGGED IN
ALISSA WILKINSON
NEGATIVE POTENTIAL
POSITIVE POTENTIAL
A3) Media as worldview incarnation
How might we we express a unique vision of the world?
ANDY CROUCH
Technophobia
Low Hope
High Fear
Technophilia
High Hope
Low Fear
QUENTIN SCHULTZE
C) Media as communicative act
How might we be responsible stewards of the gift of communication?
NEGATIVE POWER
POSITIVE POWER
BRENT LAYTHAM
BARRY TAYLOR
B1) Media as deforming power
How does it colonize our imaginations and deform our humanity?
B2) Media as revelatory power
How does it further divine purposes and dialogue with humanity?
B) Technological determinism
Low Agency, High Passivity
Media shapes us
Focus on technological form and formation

In this section, we will look at six basic perspectives on social and entertainment media. Three evaluate media through the lens of content: as a challenge to the Christian worldview, as a window into the worlds of others, or as an incarnation of a unique vision of the world. Two other approaches focus on the way that technology restructures modern life, understanding media as a power that is either deforming or revelatory. Finally, a sixth approach centers on the media as a communicative act, governed by the ethics of virtuous communication.

***Worldview (content-based) approaches.*** The first approach evaluates media based on how it is used. These *worldview* approaches center ethical use on discerning, consuming, and creating quality *content* that guides individuals and society toward God, virtue, and greater flourishing.

*Media as worldview challenge: Discerning worldview compatibility.* A familiar Christian approach to entertainment media is found in the question, "How much sex, violence, and profanity are in this movie?" Emblematic here is Focus on the Family's *Plugged In* media project.[14] The website, which aims to "shine a light on the world of popular entertainment," provides media reviews through "a biblical worldview filter."

The site warns viewers of sexual content and language, as well as alerting them to possible faith connections. Although reviewers identify positive themes, the reviews tend toward a strong antithesis toward the *world* of entertainment, which provides a foil for the Christian *world*view. Underneath *Plugged In's* approach is a commitment to the preservation of family values. The reviews hope to help Christian families make better choices concerning the media they consume.

Nevertheless, discerning worldview compatibility is often more difficult in practice than in theory. A biblical worldview is not something that we can just go out and get, nor does thinking the right thoughts about reality necessarily entail ethical action.[15] Furthermore, family values are not necessarily synonymous with Christian virtue.[16] Indeed, part of the problem in evaluating media content is discerning *which* vices of modern society are most deforming to our discipleship. Selective focus on sex, violence, and profanity may obscure blind spots such as consumerism, vanity, and prejudice.

*Media as worldview window: Discerning the worlds of content creators.* In contrast to *Plugged In*, entertainment reviews found at *Christianity Today* tend to focus more

[14]"Plugged In," www.pluggedin.com.

[15]See the critique of the concept of worldview in James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

[16]Cameron Lee, *Beyond Family Values: A Call to Christian Virtue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

on artistic quality—not sex, violence, and profanity but storytelling, acting, and cinematography. Instead of seeking to legitimize the Christian worldview, entertainment consumption is an opportunity to view the worlds of others.

Media critic Alissa Wilkinson is representative of the approach.[17] Wilkinson argues that Christians must get beyond the question "Do I agree with this?" and ask instead "What need is the audience looking to fill when they go to see this movie?"[18] Here the ethical responsibility shifts away from an evaluation of the content itself and toward an appreciation of the imaginative vision contained therein. This appreciation may also include an evangelistic impulse to understand and engage our culture's stories with the gospel, following Paul's example at the Areopagus (Acts 17).

Here listening to our culture's stories is an act of love and hospitality, and the ethical focus is on understanding rather than critique. Cultivation of empathy is valuable, but this approach may assume that consumers of media are firmly grounded in their faith and can engage in world viewing without being captivated by a vision of the world that undermines Christian faith.

*Media as worldview incarnation: Content creation as (sub?) culture making.* There is a third variety of worldview approach, one that centers on content *creation*. This perspective argues that Christians must not only be discerning consumers of media but also distinctive creators: we criticize by creating! Andy Crouch is representative, arguing that the only way to change culture is to make more and better culture.[19] Working to leverage new technologies for kingdom purposes, these Christians work to provide quality content and content channels. The question, as Crouch concedes, is what constitutes *better*. Christians have certainly excelled at making more, churning out a massive output of alternative content in keeping with traditional Christian worldview and values.

Yet Christian media offerings have had negligible impact the wilder public. Those who have broken through eschew the "Christian" label that relegates their work to a marginal subculture. With such a heavy focus on content over artistry, Christian entertainment media often comes across as sterile, sentimental, heavy-handed, and moralistic. It remains to be seen if Christian entertainment can escape the tendency

[17] Wilkinson is a professor at King's College in New York and the film critic for *Vox*. Prior to this she was the chief film critic for *Christianity Today*. For an extended example of Wilkinson's approach see Robert Joustra and Alissa Wilkinson, *How to Survive the Apocalypse: Zombies, Cylons, Faith, and Politics at the End of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

[18] Alissa Wilkinson, "Asking Insufficient Questions." *Christianity Today*, March 2015, www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/march-web-only/asking-insufficient-questions.html.

[19] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

to perpetuate sectarian Christian subcultures. Nevertheless, the strength of the content creation approach is that it recognizes the need to offer a compelling alternative vision of human beings and the human good.

***Technology-based approaches.*** Whereas the first three approaches center on content, a second family of response focuses on form: the power of new media technologies themselves. This perspective argues that although Christians should be taught to discern questionable content, fixation on content distracts from the media technologies themselves. These technologies, as partisan powers, arrest our attention, inscribe our imagination, and change our relationship with the world, for good or evil.

*Media as deforming power.* The cautionary posture toward technology is usually drawn from the larger world of media criticism, where Marshall McLuhan's mantra "the medium is the message" remains the central insight.[20] In other words, the way content is communicated (verbally or virtually, in person or online) is meaning-and value-laden, carrying properties that shape the communication regardless of what the communicator wants to say. There is, of course, a difference between getting the message "I love you" by text, email, postal mail, carrier pigeon, or in person. The method of delivery means something.

Technology critics argue that the sheer omnipresence of social and entertainment media has a more profound effect than any specific messages media carry. Media prophets warn of entertainment technology's propensity to breed distracted multitasking, novelty addiction, vulnerability to hype, superficial relationships, inattention to others, and narcissism.

Brent Laytham is representative: he approaches entertainment under the theological category of "principalities and powers."[21] As a created power, entertainment is meant to serve and enrich life. As a fallen power, entertainment has diverged from its purpose, becoming "self-referential and self-aggrandizing."[22] Media shapes the moral imagination, which is "increasingly constrained by corporate scripts" and "limited by capitalistic interventions."[23] Our daughters no longer simply want to be

[20]Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage* (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko, 2001), 8. Appropriations of the McLuhan stream can be found in many astute Christian assessments of media, most notably in Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

[21]Laytham is dean of the Ecumenical Institute of Theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, Maryland.

[22]Entertainment as a power is more than the sum of its individual and institutional parts, and its capacity for malforming us is "greater than the sum total of the human sinners involved." Brent D. Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play: Theological Engagements with Entertainment* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 27.

[23]Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play*, 13.

princesses; they want to be Disney princesses, facilitated by myriad products conveniently made available for parents to purchase. Laytham wants to draw our attention to the unconscious ways these principalities and powers "shape our sensibilities, cultivate our desires, form our feelings, discipline our bodies, pattern our actions, and determine our relationships."[24]

Laytham's engagement with entertainment media as a rebellious power leads him to advocate for an ethic of resistance. This means resisting its idolatrous trajectories, unmasking it as a colonizing principality, and treating it instead as a triviality.[25] Laytham admits this is difficult to practice and prescribes a robust counterformation wherein the rhythms of the Christian story, rather than entertainment technology, determine the shape of our lives.

This school of thought presents an ethical critique that social and entertainment media technologies are embedded with reductive, commodified, and unhealthy visions of personhood, community, and human flourishing.[26] The call for ethical action is usually framed in terms awareness and resistance: an appreciation for the gift of technology along with a refusal to idolize it. Ethical prescriptions within this second category of response emphasize counterformation as well as moderation in the time and space we give to media.

*Media as revelatory power.* Where the former category of response tends to emphasize the deforming power of technology, a second type of technology-based response reverses the emphasis. Although they are willing to note some pitfalls of our hyperconnected world, these thinkers are more interested in the way that technology has created new conditions for God's work among humanity.

Barry Taylor, an artist and theologian, is representative of this position.[27] He calls for Christians to come to terms with the way that technology has changed the game. He writes that the Internet has led to a radical democratization of society: "a less hierarchical and authoritarian exchange of ideas, ethics, information, and just about everything else in contemporary society."[28] Taylor writes that it is not for us to declare

[24]Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play*, 11.

[25]Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play*, 29.

[26]This technological pessimism can also be found in popular mainstream works. See Franklin Foer, *World Without Mind: The Existential Threat of Big Tech* (New York: Penguin, 2017); Jaron Lanier, *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* (New York: Henry Holt, 2018).

[27]Taylor is the artist-in-residence for the Brehm Center at Fuller Seminary and an adjunct professor for the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. He is also associate rector at All Saints Episcopal Church in Beverly Hills.

[28]Barry Taylor, *Entertainment Theology: New-Edge Spirituality in a Digital Democracy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 12.

this new reality good or bad; rather we must simply deal with the facts on the ground. Rather than reacting to the deleterious effects of entertainment, we should embrace the "democratization of spirit" that tech and entertainment culture has produced.[29] He calls this new world spirituality "techno-spirituality," where the static, rigid, dogma of traditional religion is being replaced by a more fluid and vibrant spirituality that abounds with new possibilities.[30]

Taylor is concerned that the Christian church is lagging behind the advances of contemporary culture, unwilling to meet people in the hyperconnected world where they are. Taylor believes that if Christians would venture out into the new world of spirituality, they would meet not just people but God at work in surprising ways.

While the former thinkers sound an alarm over the changes, Taylor calls us to embrace them and to step in to the new reality where God, through his Spirit, continues to be present and active. In any case, this second family of response focuses on media rather than message.

***Communication-based approaches.*** We now turn our focus from content and technology to evaluate social and entertainment media as acts of mass communication. Those who take this approach argue that media should be governed and guided by God's vision for human communication and community.

Quentin Schultze is representative. He argues that as a species of communication, social and entertainment media are "are really extensions of our God-given ability to cocreate culture. . . . [They are] potential resources to help us serve our neighbor by telling the truth and building communities of shalom."[31] Media technologies may alternatively promote flourishing or perpetuate conflict, and each new media technology, Schultze writes, is "both a source of social and spiritual problems and also a reservoir of opportunity."[32]

In emphasizing the potential of media, Schultze understands it terms of its propagation by culture-making social institutions, "communities with their own values, practices, and beliefs."[33] This means that we can evaluate social and entertainment media in terms of: (1) the kinds of communities they engender, (2) how they serve our cultural mythologies ("public expressions of what most people truly

[29]Taylor, *Entertainment Theology*, 17.
[30]Taylor, *Entertainment Theology*, 15.
[31]Schultze is professor of communication arts and sciences at Calvin College. Quentin J. Schultze, *Communicating for Life: Christian Stewardship in Community and Media* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 105. See also Quentin J. Schultze and Jean Elshtain, *Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).
[32]Schultze, *Communicating for Life,* 104.
[33]Schultze, *Communicating for Life,* 101.

believe and value"),[34] and (3) how accurately they represent truth and our shared moral values.

First, we can evaluate media through the lens of community. Entertainment media are designed to engage and amuse, but they also can build community through connecting people who share common enjoyment. It is interesting to note, however, that while the television set redesigned the American living room around a shared viewing experience, the smaller screens of smartphones privilege more individuated media consumption. Similarly, social media arguably exist for little else than connecting people to community. Yet in the center of online communities are not only common interests but also brands. Consumption, not just connection, drives both social and entertainment media enterprises. Surely it can be a boon to connect with others who enjoy the same products and entertainment. The problem is that if this becomes the primary basis for common life, it is a thin substitute for embodied, local communities where thick flourishing can actually occur. In "consumption communities," rather than drawing our sense of identity and belonging from the stories of our faith community, we now draw our identity and belonging from stories told by the brands that we consume.[35]

Second, we can evaluate media by the role that they play in propagating and legitimizing cultural mythologies. Schultze notes that media often fulfills this priestly role by means of scapegoats, demonizing certain individuals and groups and reflecting cultural judgments on the nature of virtue and vice. Media may also function in a prophetic role, challenging existing beliefs, but this prophetic edge is not necessarily virtuous. Powerful institutions control entertainment media, and these institutions stay in power by playing to the broadest possible audience. Entertainment power brokers make carefully calculated moves, paying careful attention to the pulse of a culture. By contrast, social media represents a grassroots approach in which underrepresented stories can "go viral" and become a cultural phenomenon. In this sense, the kinds of stories that go viral can tell us a lot both about our cultural mythologies as well as attempts to subvert them.

Third, we can evaluate media by how authentically they represent persons and groups within our larger society. The practice of "doxxing" mentioned above is rare compared to the more everyday practice of filming people in their worst moments. An embarrassing moment, indiscretion, or angry tirade can be captured on a

[34]Schultze, *Communicating for Life,* 108.

[35]Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Vintage, 1974), 89-90. Cited in Schultze, *Communicating for Life,* 98.

smartphone and instantly uploaded where its shame can live in infamy. Those who delight in this power argue that it holds people, especially public figures, accountable. But we should be cautious: although a short video clip may capture a person in a bad moment, it hardly gives us a comprehensive picture of their character. Schultze argues that virtuous communication requires deep respect for the personal and public reputation of others and a refusal to violate the privacy of a person or organization unless there are "compelling reasons grounded in love."[36]

Even more contested is the question of whether social and entertainment media give a fair and balanced representation of the truth. While mass media has always held out the promise of connection, not all parties are connected equally. Notwithstanding furious debates over "fake news" and "net neutrality," media continue to favor those with power, money, and social standing. Seeking fair representation in social and entertainment media means asking *whose* stories are consistently being told, *which* perspectives are consistently being shared, and *why* other voices are being consistently overlooked and excluded.[37]

A communication-based approach pays attention to the intentional acts of communication in social and entertainment media. Since the goal of virtuous communication is the cultivation of a moral community, ethical criteria tend to focus on how social and entertainment media contribute to or undermine greater human flourishing (*shalom*).[38]

***Summary.*** As we have seen, approaches to social and entertainment media tend to locate their ethical engagement in terms of one of three focal points: the *content* communicated, the *media* that enables the communication, or the *act* of communication the media represents.

To return to the *Black Mirror* scenario that opened the chapter, we might judge social and entertainment media deficient because it contains salacious content (depicting a sex act in prime time), because it addicts us to distraction (dominating all of our attention through myriad content channels), or because it misrepresents a particular group (designating a particular group as likely terrorists). Each of these is a legitimate ground for ethical concern and deliberation, and within each category there is a range of responses bearing a family resemblance. Some might respond by censoring

[36]Schultze, *Communicating for Life*, 126.

[37]Media theorists have long connected the representation of minority groups in fictional worlds as either legitimizing or annihilating a group's social existence. George Gerbner and Larry Gross, "Living with Television: The Violence Profile," *Journal of Communication* 26, no. 2 (1976): 173-99.

[38]Another robust articulation of this perspective, grounded in the field of media studies, is found in Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner, *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

questionable content or producing more wholesome fare. Others might respond by encouraging formative online and offline practices. Still others might investigate the structural conditions, and the way that more voices can be represented in media rather than those that serve the interests of the powerful.

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

How do we navigate between these positions? We should begin by acknowledging that optimism and alarmism over new media is nothing new. In Plato's *Phaedrus,* Socrates recounts the legend of King Thamus of Egypt and the god Theuth, inventor of writing. When Theuth displays writing to King Thamus, declaring that it will "improve both wisdom and memory," Thamus argues that the opposite will be the case.[39] Neil Postman writes that both are "one-eyed prophets" who only see half the picture, either the blessing or burden of technology.[40]

With every new technological innovation—the telephone, the television, the Internet—this scenario plays out afresh. One-eyed technological determinists speak of how the new medium will "change everything" for good or for ill; one-eyed technological instrumentalists maintain that our innovations are simply tools to be used for good or for ill. The challenge for Christians is to appropriate media in a way that avoids the naiveté of instrumentalism and the inevitability of determinism.

Media is neither neutral nor necessary in conditioning of societal change. Take the opening example of Ashley Madison. Websites like Ashley Madison feed on *and* fuel the way that popular culture imagines love, sexuality, and fidelity. New technologies provide new avenues for hiding and cheating even as they provide new ways for hidden things to be exposed and for cheaters to be caught. Even as new technologies and media practices privilege deformative visions of the good life, our ability to realize these new possibilities remains bounded by the fact that we remain embodied persons who are embedded in local communities where our common life is continually negotiated.

It is for this reason that I remain cautiously hopeful as I consider the challenges presented by entertainment and social media (this places me in the bottom right quadrant of my typology). My confidence is rooted in a particular creation structure: our bodies. It is possible, after all, for technology to undermine aspects of embodied life without fundamentally effacing it. It is sometimes necessary to unplug and rediscover offline practices, but it is also important to say that online life is already grounded

[39]Plato, *Phaedrus and the Seventh and Eighth Letters* (New York: Penguin, 1973), 96-97.
[40]Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 5.

and governed *by* our offline practices. We are embodied beings, and bodily interaction continues to give shape to our interaction online. Media culture forms us, but we in turn make something of the culture that made us through "living, on-the-ground, variable practices."[41] In other words, the fact of digital distraction rarely exempts us from regular physical interaction with the people that we see at work, church, school, the gym, or the grocery store. Our responses to each of these embodied domains form us deeply as well, becoming part of a larger narrative in which we pursue a meaningful and integrated life.[42]

Albert Wolters highlights an important distinction between structure and direction to help us with our cultural task. "Structure" refers to "the order of creation . . . the constant creational constitution of any thing," whereas "direction" is the "distortion or perversion of creation through the fall."[43] When we apply this to social and entertainment media, we can affirm the structural good of technology and entertainment as part of the human project of unfolding creation, but we must evaluate and critique the direction in which specific technologies take us.[44] So how might we do this faithfully and fruitfully?

***Reflecting on media habits.*** When evaluating media culture, it is easy to say, "Kids these days!" and miss the invitation to self-examination and (if necessary) repentance. We should start by reflecting on media pathologies in own lives. Whether it is an inability to put down the smartphone or the increased propensity to binge-watch seasons of content on Netflix, plenty of us suffer from media addiction. Furthermore, recognizing that we all have different sensitivities and sensibilities, we should also be aware of what kind of media content dulls us, incites us, energizes us, and positively provokes us.

As Sherry Turkle puts it, "We have to love our technology enough to describe it accurately. And we have to love ourselves enough to confront technology's true effects on us."[45] I would add that we have to love God enough to discern technology's effects

[41] Sherry B. Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 129.

[42] See my argument that the success of social media technologies is always already funded by particular "norms of embodiment" such as corporeality, locality, temporality, and visibility. Our bodies set the parameters for how we engage the world, even in online contexts. Justin Bailey, "The Body in Cyberspace: Lanier, Merleau-Ponty, and the Norms of Embodiment," *Christian Scholar's Review* 45, no. 3 (2016): 211-28.

[43] Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 49.

[44] For an astute application of this, see Derek C. Schuurman, *Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture and Computer Technology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 55-56.

[45] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 243.

on our discipleship and formation, and that we have to love our neighbor enough to discern technology's effects on our practice of love, time, and attention.

At the same time, we can give our attention *to* media and not just in spite of it. Social and entertainment media offer windows into the world that we have been called to love. We can seek to understand the grammar of life made visible there before seeking to critique objectionable content. At some level, this can only be done with a healthy sense of hope that God is still actively engaged in the world and that the Spirit continues to do God's creative work in surprising ways.

***Entertainment media and the church.*** Churches should also reflect on their institutional relationship with social and entertainment media. Many church services have embraced the production values of entertainment culture, emphasizing media excellence and polished presentation. The execution, of course, can come across as staged and sentimental. What is more important, however, than making value judgments about production value (or about the fact that production *is* a value) is intentional reflection on how well these implicit values fit with the explicit values of the church.

Churches also need to consider the ways that the larger culture has been shaped by entertainment media and what that means for the church as a part of the culture (since every church is culturally embedded), as an agent of counterculture (since we are citizens of an upside-down kingdom), and as a missionary agent (since we are working for the advance of the gospel and for the common good).

This requires a constant dialectic between discerning adoption and discerning resistance. Restraint and reflection are critical: we can become obsessed with innovation and fail to see the relevance of anything or anyone moving at a slower pace. Churches must find creative ways to remain conversant with culture while celebrating history, embodied presence, the limitations of locality, and the wisdom of experience.

***Social media and the church.*** Since the Internet first began connecting computers, it has been a place for connecting people. Zadie Smith's profile of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg reports that Zuckerberg uses the word "connection" the same way that a Christian uses the word "Jesus," as if it were sacred in itself.[46]

Although Smith argues that these connections tend to be weak and superficial, it is difficult to argue that the impulse to connect is ill-conceived. Humans deeply desire connection with others. Christians must begin by admitting that many seek online community because they have not found it in churches.

[46]Zadie Smith, "Generation Why?" *New York Review of Books* 57, no. 18 (2010).

We would do well to discern what longings lie beneath new media technologies. Social media in particular trades on visibility: "Here I am. See me. Take me seriously." Our appropriation of Facebook, for example, should include not just a wariness of its tendency to waste our time but also a willingness to take seriously the faces of those who are visible there.

And yet, virtual community can never really replace embodied fellowship. Some of our most important ecclesial practices (like the sacraments) require physical, flesh-and-blood presence. Indeed, research into online religious practice has found that despite fears of disembodied spirituality, most online "congregants" were also significantly involved in offline communities. Online community served as a "supplement, not substitute" for offline church involvement.[47] The success of social media (in all its iterations) is a call to build robust local communities, where social media serves as a salutary supplement rather than superficial substitute to embodied common life.

Indeed, superficiality thrives in the absence of mutual trust that usually comes from commitment to local, visible, embodied communities. Our hypermodern condition is one of oversaturation and overstimulation. Media makes more information available to us that ever before: it is quite literally fed to us through our myriad "feeds." The glut of information facilitates the opportunity to feed on information and feel emotion without having to take meaningful, committed action.

C. S. Lewis wrote that the more humans grow accustomed to feeling without action, the harder it becomes to act, and finally the harder it becomes to feel.[48] Our endless options so often catalyze our emotion but paralyze our action. When this happens, we grow numb.

The only antidote for this is a community of committed action, where flesh-and-blood connection can take place between hurting bodies. Media culture threatens to drown us in the twenty-four-hour news cycle. Yet thoughtful and engaged presence among the least of these can give us all a healthy glimpse of what is real. There is simply no substitute for this.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where on the "conceptual map" would your own understanding and use of media fit?

[47]See Heidi A. Campbell, "Understanding the Relationship Between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2012): 69.

[48]C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 67.

2. How many hours do you spend each day using social and entertainment media? How does it fit within, compete with, or otherwise affect the rhythms of your life (e.g., family, work, studies, service, worship)? How can you develop and maintain life-giving rhythms of media use?
3. How does time spent online integrate with our offline lives? How might embodied presence in local communities of trust create opportunities for more holistic formation and discipleship across online and offline contexts?
4. In a culture of instantaneous outrage, concerns over doxxing, cyberbullying, and invasion of privacy abound. How do we create structures that safeguard the privacy and reputation of others? How do we distinguish between exposing injustice and public shaming?
5. What role do social and entertainment media play in shaping our moral and social imagination? How does unequal representation in media influence our perception of reality? What might be done to create inclusive platforms for more diverse voices?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

Alter, Adam. *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked*. New York: Penguin, 2018.

Callaway, Kutter, with Dean Batali. *Watching TV Religiously: Television and Theology in Dialogue*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.

Campbell, Heidi A., and Stephen Garner. *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.

Detweiler, Craig. *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2013.

Gay, Craig. *Modern Technology and the Human Future: A Christian Appraisal.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018.

Lanier, Jaron. *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now*. New York: Henry Holt, 2018.

Noble, Safiya Umoja. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: New York University Press, 2018.

Schultze, Quentin J. *Communicating for Life: Christian Stewardship in Community and Media*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000.

Schuurman, Derek C. *Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture and Computer Technology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013.

Shatzer, Jacob. *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.

Tufekci, Zeynep. *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.

Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic Books, 2012.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

Campbell, Heidi. "Understanding the Relationship Between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2012): 69.

Gentzkow, Matthew, and Jesse M. Shapiro. "Ideological Segregation Online and Offline." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126, no. 4 (2011): 1799-1840.

Gerbner, George, and Larry Gross. "Living with Television: The Violence Profile." *Journal of Communication* 26, no. 2 (1976): 173-99.

The Nielsen Company. "The Nielsen Total Audience Report." www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights.html.

Smith, Zadie. "Generation Why?" *New York Review of Books* 57, no. 18 (2010).

### *Media and documentaries*

*Black Mirror*. Created by Charlie Booker. Netflix, 2011.

*Generation Like*. Written and produced by Frank Koughan and Douglas Rushkoff. Frontline, 2014.

*Her*. Directed by Spike Jonze. Warner Brothers, 2013.

*Social Animals*. Directed by Jonathan Ignatius Green. Conscious Minds Productions, 2018.

*The Social Network*. Directed by David Fincher. Columbia Pictures, 2010.

*Terms and Conditions May Apply*. Directed by Cullen Hoback. Variance Films, 2013.

*We Are Legion: The Story of Hacktivists*. Directed by Brian Knappenberger. FilmBuff, 2012.

*We Live in Public*. Directed by Ondi Timoner. Independent Release, 2009.

# 16

# PUBLIC EDUCATION

*Ryan Michael Huber*

## REAL LIFE

Ryan Conrad was raised by a single mother, along with his older brother, Gabriel, in Broward County, Florida. They lived paycheck to paycheck for most of his life, struggling to make ends meet. Because of their school district, Ryan was able to attend one of the best public elementary schools in Broward County. Life changed when Ryan was in second grade and his mother had a salvation experience at a local evangelical megachurch.

Ryan's grandfather passed away and left the family some money, and his mother, fueled by her newfound faith, sent her sons to the private Christian school affiliated with the church they attended. The money quickly dried up, though, and Ryan's family was soon not able to afford the tuition anymore. The school did provide Ryan and his brother a scholarship for several years, allowing his mother to ensure her boys received a Christian education.

Attending the Christian school gave Ryan a chance to hear about Jesus and a personal relationship with God. For his mother, a teacher in an inner-city school, it was an opportunity to see her boys raised with Christian values, morals, and relationships. Ryan became surrounded by a culture of Christianity, both at church and at school. He often felt out of place in a school with many wealthy students; he had to catch two city buses to get to school, and sometimes he did not know what he would eat that night, while some of his friends were driving Mercedes. During his sophomore year, Ryan began to realize the importance of God's grace in his life, which brought him to dislike the façades that students put up to be accepted in a moralistic Christian school environment.

Through an urban neighborhood outreach program at church, Ryan started to form friendships with local kids who attended Blanch Ely High School, formerly named Pompano Negro Grammar School and then Pompano Colored School. Today, the school is legally integrated, but is still composed of over 80 percent black students and 96 percent minority students in total. Over 75 percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and most students at Ely score at the Basic or Below Basic levels on math and reading skills.[1] On Fridays, Ryan would go with a group of students, teachers, and pastors to play basketball, share snacks, and form relationships with kids from Ely and the surrounding neighborhood.

The kids from Ely were in some ways more relatable for Ryan, as they shared their economic and life struggles. Ryan began to feel even more distance from his private school friends. He had been working hard to help pay his tuition, even with some scholarship help, and often he could only afford one uniform. At the end of his junior year, he began to question whether he belonged at his Christian school at all. His house was zoned for Ely. Neither his pastor nor his mother thought that Ryan attending Ely was a good idea.

Ryan's mother began to reconsider over the summer between his junior and senior years. Meeting people who worked at Ely changed her mind. The staff and faculty seemed to truly care about doing good and caring for the students, even in the midst of a culture that most Christians Ryan knew considered immoral and dangerous.

Ryan felt God tell him that Ely was where he belonged. He wanted to bring some light into a school that housed truly hungry kids, such as young women who had been raped or who were pregnant, and in which drugs were seemingly everywhere. God's grace was revealed to Ryan at Ely High School through the authenticity of his fellow students, who openly shared childhood abuse, suicidal thoughts, and more. Ryan saw how much freedom schoolteachers and members of the black community surrounding the school had to share God's love with students. Ryan kept participating in the church's Friday basketball outreach, but now he was an Ely kid.

Although Ryan respects people who choose to send their kids to Christian schools, and he realizes that his experience at Ely is not for everyone, he believes that if Jesus were living as a student today, Jesus would go to public school. Above all, he believes that Christians need to know themselves and trust the voice of God in their lives as they discern how to pursue an education while bearing witness to the love of God for each and every student, regardless of what school they attend.

[1]See www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/florida/districts/broward-county-public-schools/blanche-ely-high-school-4722/.

## REAL WORLD

***History.*** For the past thousand years, education in the West has been for the most part explicitly Christian. Literacy in North America was driven in part by Christians' (particularly Methodists') efforts to write, print, and pass out tracts, magazines, journals, and Bibles to as many people as possible in the young but ever-growing nation.[2] One major force that shaped education in the United States in the 1800s was the Sunday School movement: "Before the growth of mass public education, Sunday Schools supplied basic education for lower and middle-class students."[3] As recently as 150 years ago, most education in North America was Christian education.

More recently, people inspired by the Enlightenment pushed for education divorced from any religious beliefs or practices. From 1870 to 1930, universities in the United States were increasingly well attended, publicly funded (mostly through land grants), and secular. Wealthy businessmen, German academic influence, and the rise of belief in the power of science (especially the theory of evolution) helped make higher education less religious, more technical, and less concerned with issues of character than it had been in previous centuries.[4] This secularization in higher education, which influences culture and trains new teachers, inevitably trickled down to primary and secondary education. Richard Osmer argues that the best of this public education "has cultivated the virtues of citizenship requisite to active participation in public life . . . playing a crucial role in teaching the intellectual virtues of open inquiry and moral virtues like tolerance, respect, and sacrifice."[5]

The last two centuries have witnessed conflict between those who want education to stay explicitly Christian and those who argue for the Enlightenment vision of education, prioritizing secular virtues of rational thought, democracy, and individual freedom. When Protestantism started to split between liberal and fundamentalist camps in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these tensions intensified. Those liberal Christians and secularists who pushed for the elimination of religion from public schools are the forerunners of Christians who in some ways accept and seek to transform public education today. Those fundamentalists who opposed this

[2]Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 227.

[3]Noll, *History*, 229.

[4]Noll, *History*, 365-66.

[5]Richard Osmer, "The Teaching Ministry in a Multicultural World," in *God and Globalization: Volume 2, The Spirit and the Modern Authorities*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse and Don S. Browning (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2009), 52-53.

secularization of public education would come to launch homeschooling movements or join Roman Catholics in competing with public schools as Protestant fundamentalists —and later, Protestant evangelicals breaking from fundamentalism—established their own private religious schools. By the last decades of the twentieth century, diverse Christian communities were engaged in efforts to transform public education for the common good.

***Contemporary overview.*** In the United States of America today, more than a quarter of students fail to graduate high school in four years, and less than 25 percent of graduates are ready to attend a college or university. This is also a system that promotes social inequality and therefore economic and racial injustice: schools in the United States are twice as likely to pair poor and minority students with brand new teachers, while "fewer than one in five African-American fourth graders is proficient in reading and Latino eighth graders are less than half as likely to be proficient in math as their white peers."[6] Issues of poor student outcomes and racially correlated resource gaps are accompanied by a general feeling among many that public schools, to a large degree, are failing to educate the whole person, even when students do receive adequate job preparation. Furthermore, leaders in black communities in the United States are divided over whether or not school choice movements and policies such as those advocated by current secretary of education Betsy DeVos are the answer to improving public education for students of color.

As of 2015, about 25 percent of K-12 schools were private, and roughly 10 percent of US students (5.75 million children K-12) were enrolled at a private school.[7] Around 80 percent of these private school students attended a religiously affiliated school. Private school students, on average, score better than public school students in a host of subject areas.[8] Private schools expanded in the United States partially in response to the secularization of public schools (including the removal of prayer and Bible reading from the curriculum, especially through Supreme Court decisions in 1962 and 1963).[9]

---

[6]See www.studentsfirst.org/EducationCrisis.

[7]National Center for Education Statistics, "2016 Digest of Education Statistics," https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/.

[8]See www.capenet.org/facts.html. These facts are based on data from National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports from the National Center for Education Statistics, https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard. See, for example, the NAEP 2013 Reading and Math Report Cards, www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2013/#/.

[9]These two paragraphs appeared in my article for Relevant Magazine, "The Key to Fixing Income Inequality That Not Enough People Are Talking About," February 27, 2018, https://relevantmagazine.com/current/key-fixing-income-inequality-not-enough-people-talking.

Meanwhile, according to Brian D. Ray, homeschooling, "that is, parent-led home-based education," may be the fastest growing form of education in the United States and has been growing around the world in many other nations. As of 2017, there were about 2.4 million home-educated students in the United States, and "it appears the homeschool population is continuing to grow (at an estimated 2% to 8% per annum)."[10] Reasons families choose this option include customizing the curriculum for each child, accomplishing more academically, providing a safer environment for children, and imparting a particular set of values and beliefs.

Globally, access to and quality of publicly available education varies widely. The United Nations Human Development Reports shows former British Commonwealth nations, European nations, and economically developed Asian nations populating the top thirty countries, while the bottom thirty (out of the 187-nation data set) consist of mostly African nations and small island states like Haiti.[11] The quality of public education on a global scale seems generally and unsurprisingly linked to economic development, democratic governance, and (post)colonial factors. Indeed, it seems that the general state of inequality in the United States system of public education (lower quality education for non-white students, higher in white or Asian communities) plays out even more dramatically on the global stage.

Countries that restrict access to education for girls and young women have predictably lower rates of schooling, economic weakness, and cycles of poverty correlated to this restriction. According to the World Bank, "Girls who complete primary and secondary education are likely to earn income, have fewer unwanted pregnancies and break the cycle of poverty," and "over the past three decades the ratio of girls to boys enrolled in school has risen at all levels. Still, major gaps remain between boys and girls."[12] This global state of educational affairs is even more alarming in light of arguments like Richard Osmer's about the *increasing* importance of education: "The advent of a global economy has made education a more important resource than ever in a country's economic well-being . . . [which depends] on a nation's ability to sponsor high levels of literacy throughout the population and to provide affordable pathways through secondary and higher education."[13]

---

[10]See Brian D. Ray, "A Systematic Review of the Empirical Research on Selected Aspects of Homeschooling as a School Choice," *Journal of School Choice*, 2017. See also www.nheri.org/research/research-facts-on-homeschooling.html.

[11]See http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/education-index.

[12]See www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/girls-education.

[13]Richard Osmer, "The Teaching Ministry in a Multicultural World," in Stackhouse and Browning, *God and Globalization*, 50.

In the United States, politicians and activists of both major parties from across the political spectrum have dubbed education as "the Civil Rights issue of our time."[14] This is because education is recognized by a broad consensus of thinkers and leaders as the key to social mobility, escaping poverty, and breaking cycles of oppression or marginalization in historically disadvantaged communities. Christian ethicist Ronald J. Sider summarizes this consensus succinctly: "Quality education is the best way to empower the poorest, most disadvantaged children. Educational opportunity is the new civil rights struggle."[15] Because of its importance to social and economic justice, Christian communities and families should carefully consider why they oppose, compete with, or want to transform public education.

## RANGE OF RESPONSES

The three major approaches Christians are taking toward public education today can be summarized as *opposition, competition,* and *transformation*. These stances roughly line up with H. Richard Niebuhr's positions of "Christ against culture," "Christ above culture," and "Christ transforming culture" in his book *Christ and Culture*.[16] None of these types perfectly capture the people or positions they describe, but types are helpful in getting a handle on how Christians generally disagree on this complex topic.

Opposition to public education involves seeing public education as a worldly or potentially corrupting influence on children of Christian families to be actively opposed by homeschooling, support of Christian private schools designed to protect children, or otherwise seeking to mitigate the effects of secular public education. Parents opposing public education often do so because of their understanding of biblical commands addressed to Israel and early Christians to teach their children the ways of the Lord, so they seek to integrate general education with specifically religious teaching.

Christians competing with public education, most significantly Catholic Christians, see education as an extension of the church that lies above culture. They don't see

[14]Barack Obama, John McCain, Donald Trump, and the Bush family have all recognized this. See Emma Brown, "Obama Also Called Education 'The Civil Rights Issue of Our Time,'" *Washington Post*, February 28, 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2017/live-updates/trump-white-house/real-time-fact-checking-and-analysis-of-trumps-address-to-congress/obama-also-called-education-the-civil-rights-issue-of-our-time/.

[15]Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 156.

[16]H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (Harper & Row, 1975). No major approach to public education by Christian communities appears to align with Niebuhr's "Christ and culture in paradox" position, so this type has been omitted from this analysis.

public education as necessarily evil but rather not as good as a Christian education that forms students into not just citizens or good workers but faithful members of the church. The virtues of public education are real, just not as virtuous as the work of Christian education, which imparts higher truths than individual freedom, democracy, or rationality.

Transforming public education involves Christian teachers, parents, and students intentionally participating in and seeking to change public education for the common good. They don't believe that public education is inherently bad, but they want to make it better. Many Christians see involvement in public education as an opportunity for outreach and evangelism. Others see the necessity of some kind of religious education in public schools for the formation of citizens and for striving toward a more holistic vision of the common good.[17]

**Table 16.1**

| RESPONSE (VARIABLE: CHRISTIAN POSTURE TOWARD PUBLIC EDUCATION) | MAIN CLAIM (THEOLOGICAL BASIS) | REPRESENTATIVE (MINISTRY) |
|---|---|---|
| Opposition | "Teach your children the Lord's ways" (Deut 6) | Stanley Hauerwas and Brian Ray (South Florida HEAT) |
| Competition | "Be formed into a city on a hill" (Mt 5) | Thomas Groome (Cristo Rey Network) |
| Transformation | "Seek the welfare of the city" (Jer 29) | Nicholas Wolterstorff (Memphis Teacher Residency) |
| Multi-Type | "Be formed . . ." and "Seek the welfare of the city" | Allen Verhey and Ron Sider |

***Opposition.*** *Overview.* Christians who oppose public education may protest the "secular" perspectives schools teach on topics like religion, science, and history, but much of their energy, resources, and time is devoted to educating their own children in private or homeschool settings. They don't agree with the curriculum in public

[17]A fourth position, *acceptance*, seems at first to be the default position for many Christians who send their children to public school in the United States. *Acceptance* of public education is a more passive approach, aligning with Niebuhr's "Christ of Culture" type, in which Christian parents see school as an enriching and positive expression of culture that is not at odds with their Christian faith. These families may tend to support public school because of the advantage it grants their children in a world of economic competition and democracy or accept it because, living in underprivileged communities, they see no possible alternative. However, for most Christians this formal public education must be supplemented by informal Christian education in the home and church. Therefore, many families and communities would choose *opposition*, *competition*, or *transformation* if they had the resources, or already do in various supplemental ways despite sending their children to public school. And since *acceptance* tends to be a passive approach that reinforces the status quo, it will not be treated as a full-fledged position under consideration here.

schools, so they have opted out of the system altogether. Past battles over curriculum have been major factors in pushing many Protestant (especially evangelical) Christians to oppose public education.[18]

The lack of moral or religious instruction in the classroom, discouragement of prayer in school settings, and concerns over student safety in some public schools are some major reasons Christians who oppose public education decide to opt out. It threatens to hurt or corrupt children rather than help them. James C. Carper and Brian D. Ray argue that homeschooling families have taken particular issue with the effects public education can have on children's character: "The main reasons for home schooling include teaching family values and morals that are Bible-based and God-centered and wanting the Bible or Christian teaching to be an integral part of the curriculum. . . . most parents . . . think the public schools impose on children an ungodly, humanistic philosophy and too many negative influences."[19]

An important concern for many Christians who oppose today's public education is that in countries like the United States, they still have to pay for it. For the most part, local property taxes pay for schools in the United States, so Christians who own homes pay taxes to support district schools regardless of whether their children attend. In terms of justice and the common good, homeschoolers contribute to public education through taxation without drawing any benefit from it, saving the state money and increasing the funding available for students who do attend public schools.

*Theological framework.* The kind of instruction found in Deuteronomy 6 and Proverbs 22 is interpreted by families who oppose public education as a mandate to take the education of their children into their own hands (homeschooling) or trusted others to help them train up their children in the ways of the Lord (Christian schools).

> Now this is the commandment . . . that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe . . . so that you and your children and your children's children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life. . . . Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you. . . . Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. 7 Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. (Deut 6:1-7)

Thus, opponents of public education tend to place the onus for education on parents and families rather than on society as a whole, arguing that this has been the norm

[18]James C. Carper and Brian D. Ray, "Religion, Schooling, and Home Education: Past and Present," in *Religion, Education, and the American Experience*, ed. Edith. L. Blumhofer and Martin E. Marty (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 228-31.

[19]Carper and Ray, "Religion, Schooling, and Home Education," 232.

for the vast majority of human history.[20] By taking care of their own families and communities in a way that they believe pleases God, opponents of public education believe they are obeying God, protecting their children, and providing a witness to non-Christians.

Christian ethicist Stanley Hauerwas has argued for an approach to social justice that seems to align with an opposition position to public education: "I am in fact challenging the very idea that Christian social ethics is primarily an attempt to make the world more peaceable or just. Put starkly, the first social ethical task of the church is to be the church—the servant community. . . . As such the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic."[21] Church communities must form (young) people according to their own narratives and practices, presenting a distinct alternative to a watching world.

Hauerwas's approach does support the opposition position but may also support aspects of the competition position as well, potentially even leaving some room for supporting a kind of transformation of secular education: "Must we build separate schools? Perhaps. But such schools will be of no use. . . . Until our teaching reflects the witness we are called to make to the story of Christ, we will simply be wasting our effort. Such a witness can happen as easily at 'secular' schools as at religious ones."[22] Because of his approach to social ethics more generally, though, Hauerwas's theological framework here is best suited for bolstering the opposition approach and, to a slightly lesser extent, the competition approach. Indeed, Hauerwas provides a valuable reminder that Christians are called to be a distinctive people who are formed in particular ways.

*Ministry profile.* Although homeschool families are perceived as withdrawing from the public sphere, that is not necessarily true. Homeschooling groups that pursue issues of justice alongside relational evangelism and the moral development of the homeschooled students themselves include the South Florida HEAT (Home Education Athletic Teams), a "not-for-profit organization working with homeschooling families toward growing tomorrow's servant-leaders through learning and applying life-lessons available from the competitive interscholastic athletic arena." The HEAT focuses on areas such as leadership, teamwork, respect for others, and community service,

[20]Brian D. Ray, "A Systematic Review of the Empirical Research on Selected Aspects of Homeschooling as a School Choice," *Journal of School Choice*, 2017, 1.

[21]Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 99.

[22]Stanley Hauerwas, "On Witnessing Our Story: Christian Education in Liberal Societies," in *Schooling Christians*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and John H. Westerhoff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 233.

utilizing athletics "to engage in service projects that positively impact some of our community's most significant needs" including "services for the infirmed, underprivileged, and addressing the animal overpopulation problem here in South Florida."[23] Through organizations such as the HEAT, homeschooled Christian students embrace public and private school athletes and form relationships that help contribute to the building of community and civic-mindedness, thus engaging rather than withdrawing from the public sphere.

***Competition.*** *Overview.* Christians who choose to compete with public education (or provide a better alternative) don't think public education is inherently bad, they just think the education they can provide through private Christian schools is better. Catholics were some of the first Christians in North America to approach education from this alternative perspective (initially as a result of anti-Catholic bias in Protestant-dominated common schools), and the Roman Catholic Church has encouraged the development and maintenance of schools as an alternative for Catholic families.

One of the major reasons Christians of all kinds choose private schools that compete with public schools is so their children can be better formed in the moral habits, character, and worldview associated with the faith of the community that founded the schools. The point is not, contra other opponents of public education, that public schools will corrupt children but rather that, given the chance, children will simply be better off learning from curriculum and teachers that reflect one's beliefs.

In the United States, Christian schools have historically received little or no funding from the government. Many Christians believe that since most schools are funded by taxes, their alternative systems of education should receive funding alongside public schools. Australia, for example, has historically funded Catholic and other private schools at about half the rate it funds public schools.[24] Campaigns for voucher systems to provide parents more choices, including religiously grounded private and charter schools, have been underway in many US states and other nations. Much-criticized secretary of education Betsy DeVos has long supported these kinds of reforms, arguing in 2017 that "providing choices to parents . . . empowers them to seek out the schools and services that best meet their children's unique educational needs—no matter their ZIP code, the color of their skin, their family's income, or their own educational backgrounds."[25]

[23]See www.sfheat.org/about-us/.

[24]See www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jan/28/private-schools-do-not-deserve-a-cent-from-our-public-funds.

[25]Betsy DeVos, "Statement on the U.S. Department of Education Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Request," June 6, 2017, www.appropriations.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/060617-DeVos-Testimony.pdf.

Currently, though, Christians who compete with public education often do end up paying more to educate their children.

*Theological framework.* Boston College professor Thomas H. Groome, perhaps the most respected voice in Catholic religious education, argues that Christian education should be more than just a matter of knowledge; it should also be a matter of being. He argues that the "incarnational principle that stands at the heart of Christianity demands a pedagogy that is grounded in and shapes people's ontic selves—their identity and agency in the world."[26] Many who choose Christian private schools do so because they agree with Groome that education should and does shape who people are. Additionally, Catholic educators like Groome draw upon the Thomistic tradition, which emphasizes that grace does not destroy but instead perfects and works through nature. Hence, though secular public education may not be viewed as negatively, Christian education improves upon it through creating an environment in which God's grace can be experienced more fully.[27]

For Christians competing with public education, Christian formation is often paired with the theological idea of witnessing to the world as a "city on a hill," as Jesus puts it in Matthew 5:14, where Christ's followers are told to shine their light so the world can see.[28] Although this principle applies to the opposition and transformation positions in some ways, the competition position is unique in that Christians who compete with public education through establishing private or religious charter schools establish separate, publicly visible, religiously motivated institutions that perform parallel tasks to public schools in order to form their own children (and often others' children as well) in a particularly Christian way. These schools are more publicly visible than homeschooling, providing a differentiating example to the broader culture of a distinctly Christian education.

*Ministry profile.* One example of Christians competing with public education is the Cristo Rey Network: "The Cristo Rey Network comprises 30 Catholic, college preparatory high schools for underrepresented urban youth. Through rigorous academics, coupled with real world work experience, Cristo Rey students graduate high

[26]Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 8.

[27]Thomas H. Groome, "What Makes a School Catholic?" in *The Contemporary Catholic School: Context, Identity, and Diversity*, ed. Terence McLaughlin, Joseph O'Keefe, and Bernadette O'Keeffe (Milton Park: Falmer, 1996), 110-11.

[28]United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Renewing Christian Witness: Reflections on Catholic Schools as Instruments of the New Evangelization," accessed June 2018, www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catholic-education/upload/Renewing-Christian-Witness.pdf.

school prepared for success in college and in life."[29] These schools are established in the midst of neighborhoods that have little economic life and failing public schools, and the results are staggering: "For the Class of 2013, 88% of Cristo Rey graduates have enrolled in college. For our graduating class of 2008, 32% have earned a bachelor's degree, which is twice the average college completion rate of low-income high school graduates. An additional 5% of the Class of 2008 have attained associate's degrees." This is one way that Christians have engaged problems with public schooling by offering alternative options to underserved students and communities.

***Transformation.*** *Overview.* Christians who seek to transform public education do so for various reasons. More conservative Christians who have the time and power often try to influence the curriculum of the public schools near them in order to make it friendlier to their Christian worldview (especially in majority Christian regional cultures).[30] They may combat evolution or promote certain history textbooks that are more pro-Christian than others. More liberal Christians may seek curriculum change, especially minority populations that feel their history or heritage is being unfairly represented in the public school curriculum.

Many Christians who seek to transform public education want their children to have some form of faithful expression or formation on public school campuses. They may support evangelism groups, prayer at the flagpole or sporting events, or some form of character education. Parents may send their children to public school specifically to witness to other students or to help their children to learn to live with people who are different from them. Ministers (such as those working with Young Life)[31] may visit public schools to eat with students, lead after-school Bible studies, or coach sports teams.

Christians who want to transform public schools sometimes become teachers, or they politically support movements or candidates seeking to change the way teachers are hired and compensated. Some even start charter schools as publicly funded alternatives to public schools, though these may not be explicitly religious schools. They participate in Teach for America or similar programs, or they train Christian college students to become public educators rather than private Christian school teachers. Some teachers who seek to transform public education by participating in it may find themselves required to promote curriculum with which they disagree on theological grounds, such as state-mandated positions regarding sexual orientation.

[29]See www.cristoreynetwork.org/.
[30]See Carper and Ray, "Religion, Schooling, and Home Education," 230.
[31]See www.younglife.org/Pages/default.aspx.

These Christians may protest how funds are collected and distributed for the operation of public schools but for unique reasons. They see the injustice of poorer communities sending their children to schools that are failing and underfunded due to lower property values and taxation. These Christians want to reform the unjust way public schools are funded or provide families in these neighborhoods with other options, such as charter schools, or may fight for accountability for underperforming public schools.

*Theological framework.* A biblical foundation for the transformation approach is found in Jeremiah 29, where God tells the Jewish diaspora in Babylon to "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer 29:7 ESV). In this view, Christians seek the welfare or common good of the community in which they live through working to transform public education, particularly its unjust distribution.

Historian Martin E. Marty has argued that the study of religion and morality in public schools would contribute to the common good, as "studying religion helps achieve the goal of public schooling: students will learn a more accurate picture of the world around them. . . . A picture of the moral dimensions of life painted without religion is incomplete."[32] Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff has likewise argued for the appropriateness of some kind of inclusion of religion in public school curriculum.[33] These Christians seek to transform public education by advocating for a space for some form of religious education within it.

*Ministry profile.* One way that Christians are seeking transformation in public schools is through the Memphis Teacher Residency (MTR) program. The MTR is, according to the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA), a teacher training program that asks the question, "What if instead of building schools we recruited and trained teachers and put them back into the public schools?" MTR knows that "Urban schools have a unique set of challenges . . . MTR residents spend their first year in an internship, paired with another teacher, in addition to completing a masters in urban education. Post-residency, residents are committed to teaching in Memphis for 3 years in one of MTR's partner neighborhoods."[34] Programs like MTR are models of how Christian communities seek to transform public education into a more just and equitable system.

---

[32]Martin E. Marty, *Education, Religion, and the Common Good* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 64-65.

[33]See Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Neutrality and Impartiality," in *Religion and Public Education*, ed. Theodore R. Sizer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), 3-21.

[34]See www.ccda.org/blog/12-blog/499-memphis-teacher-residency-changing-the-narrative-of-equal-education.

Additionally, churches such as Reality LA choose to meet at public schools in order to support those public schools with funding and form relationships with the administration, faculty, and students, meeting other needs such as school supplies and athletic costs through church donations and giving. Suburban schools can "adopt" underserved urban or rural schools in their region both financially and relationally. The National Church Adopt-a-School Initiative, spearheaded by Dr. Tony Evans, is dedicated to this kind of activism.[35]

***Multi-type approaches: Competition and transformation.*** *Overview.* Some ethicists have advocated for Christian approaches to education that would make room for more than one of these basic positions, as types do not perfectly reflect the views, divisions, or varied responses among Christians on such complex issues. These include Allen Verhey and Ronald J. Sider, whose theological and ethical frameworks can be used to support both the competition and transformation positions. Such multi-type approaches hold concerns for the particular education of Christians in tension with concerns for the cultivation of the common good of the pluralistic society in which Christians participate.

*Theological framework.* Christian ethicist Allen Verhey has argued for a theocratic approach to public issues in our pluralistic context, meaning that Christians will "engage in discourse, deliberation, and discernment about the politics of the city and the nation in which they live" and that "the cause we must serve politically and the cause the nations must serve is God's cause."[36] He is not advocating a religious legal system (hierocracy) but a system that is encouraged toward the rule of God by persuasive advocates of God's causes in the public square.

Verhey's position on public education is rooted in the belief that our society has an obligation to encourage the virtue or moral formation of our children regardless of what schools they attend.[37] This vision of the common good is more expansive than simple economic justice or equality of educational opportunity, and it could support the establishment of private Christian or charter schools, or the strengthening of public schools. Verhey's reservations about communitarian retreats from public engagement seem to eliminate opposition, leaving the competition and transformation options as the most viable ones.

Ronald J. Sider, founder of Evangelicals for Social Action, argues that any truly just Christian approach to public education must include: (1) demands for equity so that

[35]See churchadoptaschool.org/.

[36]Allen Verhey, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 469, 477.

[37]Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 506-7.

all children have the opportunity to realize their God-given abilities, (2) allowance for families to choose what kind of education their children will receive, (3) respect for freedom and pluralism in regards to religious, philosophical, and moral perspectives, and (4) promotion of the common good, especially with regard to educational opportunity and equitable funding for all schools and children.[38] Sider's goals for education reform are grounded in biblical notions of justice, the importance of the family, freedom from coercion, and the common good. This framework is especially important for helping those in society who lack the resources to oppose and/or compete with public education in significant ways. Sider would seem to affirm both the competition and transformation positions as legitimate options for families and society in general, but a significant difference between Sider's and Verhey's approaches involves Verhey's focus on virtue and moral formation versus Sider's more economic focus on equity of opportunity and the common good. Despite their different emphases, these multi-type approaches recognize the importance of both forming the Christian "city on a hill" (Mt 5) and seeking the welfare of the larger city in which the people of God live (Jer 29).

*Ministry profile.* Because Sider's and Verhey's views can be used to support multiple types, no single ministry easily fits this type; rather, multiple ministries reflecting either competition or transformation fit within their framework, such as the Memphis Teacher Residency and the Cristo Rey Network of schools.

## AUTHOR'S OWN RESPONSE

***Communal and civic formation for the common good.*** *Overview.* I affirm approaches that leave room for families and communities to make the best available choices for the formation of their own children while also advocating that Christians stand in compassionate solidarity with others who take a different approach or who cannot afford to oppose or compete with public education on their own.[39] My response advocates both education for spiritual formation within Christian communities and engagement of public education for the formation of citizens for the common good.

My position is informed by Hauerwas's claim that Christian communities should pursue education in particular ways that provide a witness to the world, Verhey's contention that pursuing God's rule means advocating for the moral formation of all children,

[38]Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity*, 161.

[39]I borrow this phrase from David Hollenbach, *The Global Face of Public Faith* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003). Compassionate solidarity involves real friendship with and sympathy for others that leads to personal and social action on their behalf.

and Sider's argument that working for the common good necessitates pursuing equitable funding and access to quality education for all children. This position is also undergirded by three major theological principles and calls for concrete social action.

*Theological framework.* As Allen Verhey has argued, diverse communities of Christians are called to "instruct one another," that is, to participate in moral conversations about what should and should not be done.[40] This is congruent with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's argument that our first duty to fellow Christians is to listen to one another.[41] This instruction also means attending to the spiritual and moral formation of our own children, as Stanley Hauerwas advocates and as many readings of Deuteronomy 6 support.

Additionally, Christians must resist seeing the world through the perspective of our family, tribe, or culture *alone* (Mk 3:33-35). Much of the discussion regarding public education in Christian communities focuses on *my* family or *our* choices, but as David Hollenbach has argued, we should pursue an "ethic of compassionate solidarity" where real friendship with and sympathy for others lead to concrete action on their behalf.[42] This means extending our interests beyond our own communal context, in contrast to how some proponents of the opposition and competition positions frame the issue of public education. We cannot ignore or simply oppose public education but engage systems of education outside of our immediate communities in order to encourage the formation of citizens for the common good in alignment with the commands found in Jeremiah 29.

Last, we must realize that our answer to a given problem might not be the best answer in every context. Sider and Verhey are right in advocating approaches to education that allow for a variety of context-informed solutions. Christians should display the kind of epistemological humility that the apostle Paul urges in Romans 14, that Augustine teaches regarding biblical interpretation, that Hollenbach argues for, and that Sider displays in listening to diverse political voices and proposals for reforming education.[43] This kind of humility is an important aspect of the witnessing community that Jesus calls his disciples to be in Matthew 5.

*Concrete action for Christian communal and civic formation.* I agree with concrete proposals like Sider's that two options in particular be considered: a massive good-faith test of voucher systems for poor families to provide alternatives to failing urban public schools and a reform and reinvestment project in the public system to

[40]Verhey, *Remembering Jesus*, 34-39.
[41]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 98.
[42]Hollenbach, *Global Face of Public Faith*, 64-65. See also Philippians 2:4.
[43]See Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), 4.1-2.

implement some of the most promising research-backed methods of school improvement.[44] Both of these options represent concrete manifestations of compassionate solidarity with the poorest among us trapped in failing public schools. They provide more opportunities to Christian parents and leaders both to see that their own children are spiritually formed (through expanded access to Christian education) and to help form citizens for the common good when explicit Christian moral education is not plausible in our pluralistic society.

For example, pioneering civil rights leader T. Willard Fair argues that charter schools and other school choice reforms represent the best hope for poor black children in failing public schools. Fair and hundreds of other African American leaders have chosen "to advocate for giving parents the power to pursue better options for their children" rather than pouring more money into public education "failure factories."[45] Public reform, experimental voucher programs for private schools, and charter schools should all continue to be tried and tested. In any case, compassionate solidarity calls for challenging the status quo of public education, especially for underserved communities.

Another concrete way that Christians can respond to issues of justice and public education is by intentionally desegregating their lives, both publicly and privately. Segregation is still a reality for many school children in countries like the United States. If Christians refuse to avoid people of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, choosing instead to attend schools that offer the opportunity to reverse the "voluntary" segregation of the past thirty years, then public education will inevitably become more just, especially regarding issues of funding and taxation. In other words, "separate but equal" is not an option for pursuing educational justice and civic formation for the common good.[46]

***Conclusion.*** If Christian churches are to respond to God's call for justice in the sphere of public education, we must be willing to listen and to act both on our own behalf and for the common good of the society in which we live. Even though the approach our own family or community takes may not be the best option for others, as Christians we have the duty of humbly listening to other communities and coming alongside one another in compassionate solidarity. For example, if we choose to oppose public education for our own children, that does not relieve us of an obligation to support Christians seeking to transform it. This is especially true of Christian

[44]Sider, *Just Generosity,* 163.

[45]T. Willard Fair, "School Choice Will Lift Up Black Community," *USA Today*, May 17, 2017.

[46]This paragraph appeared in my article for Relevant Magazine, "The Key to Fixing Income Inequality That Not Enough People Are Talking About."

communities with more resources and educational opportunities. To be truly just, each approach to public education must remain in conversation and solidarity with others and may need to be supplemented by the other positions. As argued above, this can take the form of intentional desegregation, school tax reform, expansion of parental school choice for poor families, experimental voucher programs, service initiatives like the Memphis Teacher Residency, or the adoption of underserved public schools by well-resourced churches.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of the four major positions (opposition, competition, transformation, multi-type) do you feel most closely reflects how your own family or faith community engages this set of issues? In light of the theological voices and ministry examples surveyed in this chapter, how has your perspective been challenged or expanded?
2. What goals do you think that public education should prioritize: academic information, critical thinking, moral formation, technical training, and/or something else? What problems do you see resulting from the prioritization of only one of these pursuits at the expense of others?
3. Moral formation takes place most effectively through substantive interaction with quality mentors. How might churches equip and empower Christian teachers to foster the moral formation of students in the pluralistic context of public schools?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *Books*

Gerson, Michael, et al. *Unleashing Opportunity: Why Escaping Poverty Requires a Shared Vision of Justice.* Beaver Falls, PA: Falls City Press, 2015.

Groome, Thomas H. *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*. New York: Crossroads, 2001.

Holmes, Arthur F. *The Idea of a Christian College.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.

Robinson, Ken, and Lou Aronica. *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*. New York: Penguin, 2015.

Tough, Paul. *Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America.* New York: Mariner, 2009.

### *Articles, statements, and reports*

Center for Education Reform. "Charting a New Course: The Case for Freedom, Flexibility and Opportunity Through Charter Schools." June 2017. www.edreform.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Charting-a-New-Course.pdf.

The Center for Public Justice. "Christians Investing in Public Education." March 2013. www.cpjustice.org/public/capital_commentary/article/399.

Christian Reformed Church. "Christian Education." Accessed June 2018. www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements/christian-education.

Craig, Rev. David, et al. "Letter to NAACP Board Members from Black Leaders on Charter School Moratorium." September 21, 2016. https://dfer.org/shavar-jeffries-joins-black-education-leaders-call-naacp-reconsider-charter-moratorium/.

ExelinEd. "Advancing Opportunity, Innovation, and Quality in Education: 2017 Annual Report." www.excelined.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/ExcelinEd.2017AnnualReport.pdf.

United Methodist Church. "Public Education and the Church." 2016. www.umc.org/what-we-believe/public-education-and-the-church.

### *Media and documentaries*

Canada, Geoffrey. "Our Failing Schools. Enough Is Enough!" TED Talks Education, 2013. www.ted.com/talks/geoffrey_canada_our_failing_schools_enough_is_enough.

*Freedom Writers.* Directed by Richard LaGravenese. Paramount Pictures/Double Feature Films/MTV Films, 2007.

Hannah-Jones, Nikole. "The Problem We All Live With." *This American Life*. 2015. www.thisamericanlife.org/562/the-problem-we-all-live-with-part-one.

*Stand and Deliver.* Directed by Ramon Menendez. American Playhouse/Olmos Productions/Warner Bros., 1988.

*Waiting for Superman.* Directed by Davis Guggenheim. Electric Kinney Films/Participant Media/Walden Media, 2010.

*The Wire.* Season Four. Created by David Simon. Blown Deadline Productions/HBO, 2006.

# AFTERWORD

## *Personal Convictions, Social Ethics, and Public Policies*

*Tim A. Dearborn*

In this study we've looked into divergent responses to the most divisive issues of our day. The gospel compels us to deal with these pressing concerns. Millions of people's lives, the future of the planet, and the credibility of both the church and the Christian faith are impacted by what positions we take as well as how we act on those convictions. Our goal is that through this study you have grown in empathetic understanding of diverse views and developed your own convictions on solid theological and empirical bases. This can protect us from falling into the traps of being either silent or shrill about our ethical convictions.

Corporate silence has strong appeal. Motivated by the conviction that the gospel is personal and spiritual, some assert that churches should not engage with issues of racism, immigration, poverty, climate change, income inequality, mass incarceration, and the like. The church in its preaching and its corporate action should stay silent on these issues. Instead, wise biblical teaching should equip individual Christians to embrace positions that are consistent with the will and way of God. Other churches, motivated by the legitimate desires to be tolerant and accepting, and to heighten their appeal so that the maximum number of people can hear the gospel, choose to be silent. They want the church to be a "big tent" that welcomes everyone and excludes no one because of their ethical convictions. However, silence by default endorses the ethical policies of those who exert the most influence on society. At the other end of the spectrum are those who are highly vocal in their effort to shape public ethics according to their own convictions. However, their strident voices can at times sound judgmental and shrill. This often produces offensive and divisive consequences. Both silence as well as harsh criticism of

other positions can risk discrediting the gospel of God's sovereign grace and unquenchable love.

There is a different path other than to be silent or shrill. We believe God is calling the church to become a community that embodies prophetic love. Rather than either ethical silence, or ethical shrillness, the church is called to demonstrate creative moral solutions that further the good of all people (and all creation) in response to the critical ethical controversies we face today.

Hak Joon Lee ended the introduction with the recognition that "Christian ethics has political implications." Because as followers of Christ we believe in a God who is sovereign over human life and who reigns in justice, mercy, and love, our faith has to do with issues of power and justice. In fact, in the truest sense, the Christian faith is unavoidably political.

One definition of politics is the use of power to attain particular objectives. All power belongs to God. Therefore, according to this definition, serving God involves politics. God is the God of justice, and justice is the use of power to rectify the harm that results when some people misuse power in ways that hurt other people and creation. As followers of the God of justice, how do we allow God to exert power through us in ways that contribute to all people flourishing—especially when this places us in opposition to how others are using power to attain their own objectives?

The early church was well aware of the use and misuse of power. Christians lived under the tyranny of the Roman Empire. Silence would have been a safe response. Being shrill in denouncing the evils of Rome would be a natural impulse, but it would have led to a swift dead end. Rather than being silent or shrill, the early church engaged the political realities of their day as communities of prophetic love. Amidst the abundant historical evidence supporting this assertion can be found some fascinating clues in their clandestinely confrontational adoption of Greco-Roman political terms to describe their own movement. They took common political terms and filled them with a radically new meaning. Their use of these terms expressed their theological convictions about the relationship of Christ's kingdom to the political rulers of the world. They illustrate the politics of prophetic love and how to develop and live Christian social ethics in ways that contribute to the common good. Consider, for example, the following words and their implications for how we personally develop and publicly live our ethical convictions.

***Basileia*** ("kingdom"). This was the term used to describe the empire by Rome. In contrast, the church adopted it to describe the reign of God on earth. In choosing this

word, the church asserted that the gospel impacts every aspect of our lives and our world. Christian discipleship is not merely personal and private. Life in Christ shapes our corporate and public behaviors. Therefore, as we seek to develop ethical convictions, we recognize that God does indeed have a will for all of the issues we have explored in this study.

***Euangelion*** ("gospel"). This was a pronouncement by the Roman Empire that a battle had been won or an heir to Caesar had been born. For the church, it is the news announced that Christ has triumphed over sin and evil in his death and resurrection. In choosing this word, the church proclaimed the good news that the power of God to bring health and wholeness to every dimension of society has won the victory. Therefore, in our ethical reasoning, we are always and only seeking to live out the good news of God's sovereign love; we do not merely criticize or condemn those who hold differing convictions.

***Ekklēsia*** ("church"). This was the public assembly of all the citizens of the empire in a region to discuss and take action on local political concerns. Scandalously, Christian leaders used this to describe their gathering as Christians to conduct the affairs of God's kingdom. The scope of Christians' concern when they gathered was far broader than merely the empire of Rome. It extended to the kingdom of the God who had authority over heaven *and* earth. They gathered not only for praise and personal piety but to conduct the business of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, who has far more authority and power than Caesar. Therefore, as we gather in our church communities, we help develop and express our ethical convictions through worship, prayer, study, corporate discernment, and shared action. Christian communities are those called by God to engage in the concerns of God's kingdom, concerns that impact every dimension of our life in the world.

***Koinōnia*** ("fellowship"). This was the common term for a homogenous gathering of likeminded citizens segmented by gender and socioeconomic status. In radical contrast, the church used it to describe the heterogeneous gathering of Christian men and women of all ethnicities, social classes, and economic backgrounds. The church's clandestine confrontation with the ways of Rome was particularly subversive in the appropriation of this word. The Christian fellowship was unlike any found in the empire, and it directly challenged all the racism, sexism, systems of slavery, ethnic prejudices, and social hierarchies that controlled the lives of others. Therefore, in our ethical convictions, if we are to call ourselves a fellowship of Christians, we will in our very being oppose and overcome every attitude and action that marginalize, exclude, or stigmatize others.

***Sacramentum*** ("sacrament"). This was the oath of loyalty taken by a soldier upon enlisting in the Roman military, declaring no higher authority in the person's life than Caesar and no greater loyalty than to the empire. In a direct challenge both to empire and the Roman Legion, the church declared that when people engaged in its central ceremonies, especially baptism and communion, they were taking sacraments as visible signs of God's commitment to us and of our commitment to God. As a result, no political loyalty or ideology can supersede, supplant, or be identified with the will and way of God. In fact, people had to renounce their sacrament to Caesar before they could take the sacrament to the Lord Jesus. Therefore, as we develop and live out our ethical convictions, we must continually ask if we're allowing any other loyalty or interest to take precedence in shaping our position.

***Proskynēsis*** ("worship"). This was the act of bowing in submission before the ruler or emperor. For the church, it is worshiping the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As a result, for the early church, even worship was highly political. In worshiping Christ as Lord, Christians subordinated the authority and influence of Caesar. Likewise, in our ethical positions, we are called to make sure that we are not bowing our knee to any political party, social ideology, national loyalty, or personal self-interest.

***Parousia*** ("presence" or "coming"). This was the great celebration that surrounded the coming of Caesar to a town, and especially his return to Rome. The church lived in anticipation of a far greater *parousia*, the return of the Lord Jesus to usher in the kingdom in all its fullness. The church refused to place its hope for the future on a political leader, a political movement, or a particular ideology. Nor did it idolize its own effort, arrogantly assuming it brought in the reign of God. Rather, the church lived with unshakable, fearless hope in the ultimate triumph of God's will and God's ways. As a result, we do not set our hope on any political leader or regime. Therefore, as we develop our ethical positions, we are not motivated by fear or anxiety, tribal loyalty or party interests. We are motivated by confidence in the ultimate triumph of God's goodness and grace on earth, as it is in heaven.

***Sōtēr*** ("savior"). Caesar Augustus was the *sōtēr* whose rule ended chaos in Rome. In contrast, for the church, Jesus is the savior who has redeemed, healed, and liberated the world from sin and evil. For the church, the impact of the savior extended far beyond the power of Caesar. Therefore, our social ethics are to be shaped by our encounter with the life of Christ and express his healing, redeeming, liberating love for everyone. If in our lives, and thus in our social ethics, we are not lifting up the life and love of our Savior, we are discrediting the gospel.

***Kyrios*** ("lord"). This was the title for Caesar as the supreme ruler. In a direct challenge to Caesar and to the hegemony of loyalty to the empire, the church declared instead Jesus is *kyrios*. He is the one who reigns over heaven and earth. "Jesus is Lord" is the most concise, life shaping, and scandalous affirmation the early church could make. Therefore, when we develop and live out our ethical convictions in society, we reject being ruled by fear, selfishness, or enmity. We have only one Lord. All other powers that seek to order (or disorder) our lives are dethroned.

These nine words have profound implications for our development and promotion in society of responses to ethical issues. The gospel of Christ compels concern for people who are without power, excluded from community, victims of injustice, abused by those in authority, and identified as unworthy or undesirable. Loyalty to Jesus requires that in our lives and witness we care for the marginalized, the oppressed, the aliens, and the strangers—and we challenge, even if necessary, subversively, any use of power that thwarts human flourishing and the flourishing of all creation.

A professor at a Christian university recently asked students who they thought had said the following words: "He has scattered the proud. . . . He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." The students debated back and forth for a few minutes, trying to identify the words with some revolutionary in history. They were dumbfounded when the professor put on the screen the rest of the passage from Luke 1:46-55—Mary's Magnificat, as she praised God for the birth of her Son—and the clear social implications of his birth.

The urgent issues of our day demand a clear and compelling response from the church. May our Christian communities become places of deep dialogue and prayerful reflection about the call of God. May we participate in the Messiah's work of lifting up the lowly and filling the hungry with good things. May our congregations embody a *koinōnia* shaped by God's grace so that all people, whether rich or poor, high social class or low, well-educated or with little formal education, and regardless of skin color or ethnicity are drawn by the Spirit into the life of Christ. What a day it will be when once again society will be scandalized by the embracing, inclusive love of Christ embodied by the church.

Just as with the early church, God is calling us to be empowered, wise followers of Christ who live and lead at the convergence of *proskynēsis* (worship) of the one *Kyrios* (Lord), declaring the *euangelion* (gospel) of the one *Christos* (messiah), affirming through the *sacramentum* (sacraments) that there is no higher loyalty or authority in our life than Jesus, and participating in the justice, mercy, and love of God's *basileia* (kingdom) coming now to earth as it is in heaven.

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Justin Ariel Bailey** (PhD, Fuller Seminary) is assistant professor of theology at Dordt University. He is on the editorial board and a regular contributor to the online journal *In All Things*, and has recently published articles in journals such as *Christian Scholars Review* and the *International Journal of Public Theology*. His forthcoming book, under contract with IVP Academic, is titled *Reimagining Apologetics*. Having served as a minister in a number of settings, his research explores the intersection of Christian theology, culture, and ministry.

**Joshua Beckett** is an adjunct instructor and doctoral candidate in Christian ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary. In addition to publishing articles in periodicals like *Christianity and Literature* and *Journal for Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*, he contributed a chapter on singleness in *Breaking the Marriage Idol*.

**Nicholas R. Brown** (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is a clinical assistant professor and director of the bioethics minor in the Bioethics Institute at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, CA. He is author of *For the Nation: Jesus, the Restoration of Israel and Articulating a Christian Ethic of Territorial Governance*, and a contributor to *Reproductive Ethics*, *Rooted and Grounded: Essays on Land and Christian Discipleship,* and *The Future of Drone Use: Opportunities and Challenges From Legal and Ethical Perspectives.*

**Jacob Alan Cook** (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is assistant professor of religion and events and programs coordinator for the Apprentice Institute at Friends University. He is currently finishing his first book, *Evangelicals and Identity Politics: Renouncing False World-View Security*, and has authored several articles and book chapters on peacemaking and Christian identity. Jake regularly teaches classes on Christian responses to divisive moral issues at Chapel Hill United Methodist Church in Wichita, Kansas.

**Tim A. Dearborn** (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is a retired Presbyterian Pastor and has served on the faculties of Fuller Seminary, Regent College, Seattle Pacific University, the University of Aberdeen, and the French Evangelical Seminary as professor of pastoral theology, ethics, and mission. He served for ten years with World Vision International as director of faith and development. He is the author or editor of a dozen books including *Business as a Holy Calling?, Beyond Duty, Making Life Right,* and *Short Term Mission Preparation Workbook.*

**Bethany McKinney Fox** (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) serves as founding pastor of Beloved Everybody Church, an ability-inclusive church in Los Angeles, California, and is adjunct professor of Christian ethics at Fuller Seminary. She is the author of *Disability and the Way of Jesus: Holistic Healing in the Gospels and the Church* and several articles and church resources on disability and Christian practice.

**Ryan Michael Huber** (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is adjunct professor of Christian ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary living in Nashville, Tennessee. He is the author of the forthcoming Fortress Press/Lexington Books volume *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Ethics of Formation* and the chapter "Singular Community: The Changing Significance of Friendship for Spiritual Formation in Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought," in *Christian Humanism and Moral Formation in "A World Come of Age": An Interdisciplinary Look at the Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Marilynne Robinson*.

**Matthew Jones** is pursuing a PhD in theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, where his research focuses on the intersection of aesthetics and ethics in contexts of violence and oppression. He has published on and spoken at numerous colleges about contemporary sexual and community ethics, and his presentations at American Academy of Religion conferences (regional and national) have focused on environmental racism, poetry and protest, and the aesthetics of fascism.

**Jessica Joustra** (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Neo-Calvinist Research Institute of the Theologische Universiteit Kampen and a visiting scholar in Reformed ethics at Redeemer University College. She is an editor and translator (with John Bolt, et al) of Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics: Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity* and Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics: The Duties of the Christian Life.* She is also coeditor (with Robert Joustra) of

*Introducing Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* and serves as an associate editor of the *Bavinck Review*.

**Hak Joon Lee** (PhD, Princeton Theological Seminary) is the Lewis B. Smedes Professor of Christian Ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary. Lee has published several books, including *Intersecting Realities: Race, Identity, and Culture in the Spiritual-Moral Life of Young Asians, Shaping Public Theology: The Max L. Stackhouse Reader*, *The Great World House: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Global Ethics*, and *We Will Get to the Promised Land: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Communal-Political Spirituality.* For over a decade, he has been deeply involved in curriculum projects for pastors and Asian American youths with a view to furthering church renewal and intergenerational bridge-building in a pluralistic society.

**Seung Woo Lee** (PhD Candidate, Fuller Theological Seminary) is an adjunct professor of Christian ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA. He has presented several papers at annual meetings of the Society of Christian Ethics, including "Jesus' Sermon in Nazareth and Human Development: A Theological Reading of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach," "A Christological Interpretation of the *Imago Dei* and Human Well-Being," and most recently, "Communication and Symbiosis: Toward a Christian Ethics of Deliberative Democracy."

**Jeff Liou** (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is the national director of theological formation for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA. He is also adjunct assistant professor of Christian ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary. He contributed to *Intersecting Realities: Race, Identity, and Culture in the Spiritual-Moral Lives of Young Asian Americans* and has authored several articles exploring Christian theology, ethics, and the concept of race.

**Jennifer McKinney** (PhD, Purdue University) is professor of sociology and director of women's studies at Seattle Pacific University. Jennifer is coauthor (with Martin Lee Abbott) of *Understanding and Applying Research Design* and has published articles in *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, The Sociological Quarterly*, *The Journal of Youth Ministry, The Chronicle of Higher Education,* and *Christianity Today*.

**John Mustol** (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is adjunct professor of Christian ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary. A former physician and missionary, he served eight years in the Comoro Islands. He is the author of *Dusty Earthlings: Living as Ecophysical Beings in God's Ecophysical World*.

**Laura M. Rector** (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is affiliate assistant professor of Christian ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary and an adjunct instructor for Mercer University. She has authored numerous articles and book chapters on gender justice, children's rights, and Christian ethics.

**Rebecca Horner Shenton** (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is adjunct professor of Christian ethics in the School of Divinity at Gardner-Webb University. Her published work has appeared in *Sources of Light: Resources for Baptist Churches* and *Rooted and Grounded: Essays on Land and Christian Faith* as well as the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* and *American Baptist Quarterly.*

**Brian White** (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is senior pastor at Seymour Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI. He has written and presented on issues of life ethics, intercultural dialogue, and human rights, and his work appears in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue.*

# AUTHOR INDEX


Achard, Frederic, 18
Ahn, Ilsup, 75, 80-82
Alexander, Michelle, 223, 228-30
Althusius, Johannes, 46-47
Asmus, Barry, 39-40
Atwood, James, 205, 210-11
Augustine, 184, 187, 190, 205, 312
Ballor, Jordan, 64
Barbour, Ian, 282
Baucham, Voddie, 245-47
Bauckham, Richard, 21-22, 26
Bavinck, Hermann, 64-65
Beisner, E. Calvin, 21-22
Bell, Daniel, 205
Berkhof, Hendrik, 210
Bolz-Weber, Nadia, 131-32
Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, 195-96, 312
Brubaker, Pamela, 33
Butterfield, Rosaria, 148-50, 156
Cahill, Lisa Sowle, 93-94, 95, 96-98, 100, 103-4, 188, 206
Callahan, Sidney, 113, 118-20
Camosy, Charles, 122
Campbell, Heidi, 290
Carnegie, Andrew, 38
Carr, Nicholas, 277
Carroll R., M. Daniel, 75, 78-79, 82
Carter, J. Kameron, 252
Castles, Stephen, 74
Chang, Robert, 254
Claiborne, Shane, 57-58
Clapp, Rodney, 140
Colson, Chuck, 223-25, 231
Conn, Harvey, 53-54
Copeland, Gloria, 264
Copeland, Warren, 38, 42
Corning, Peter, 35
Cornwall, Susannah, 136
Cox, Harvey, 33
Crouch, Andy, 281, 283, 285
Davis, Mike, 52-53
DeFranza, Megan, 127, 141, 154-55, 156
Eareckson Tada, Joni, 263, 266-68
Edin, Kathyrn, 34
Eiesland, Nancy, 269-70
Emerson, Michael, 244, 248, 251
Fausto-Sterling, Anne, 127
French, David, 205-07
Gagnon, Robert, 134
Garner, Stephen, 290
Gilder, George, 39
Gornik, Mark, 55-56, 61
Goudzwaard, Bob, 34
Graham, Franklin, 245-46
Groome, Thomas, 303, 307
Groothuis, Douglas, 178
Grudem, Wayne, 39-40, 170
Gushee, David P., 10, 21, 36, 194, 212
Haddad, Mimi, 169
Hagin, Kenneth, 264, 266
Hauerwas, Stanley, 120-21, 186, 188, 192, 303, 305
Held Evans, Rachel, 132, 135
Hessel, Dieter, T., 24
Hill, Wesley, 151-53, 156
Hoffmeier, James, 75-77, 83
Hoksbergen, Roland, 37
Hollenbach, David, 311-12
Hollifield, James, 72-73
Hollinger, Dennis, 4, 253
Houghton, John, 20
Huntington, Samuel, 185
Isasi-Diaz, Ada Maria, 177
Jackson, Harry R., 75
Jacobsen, Eric, 54-55
Jennings, Willie, 252
Joustra, Robert, 64
Kaczor, Christopher, 113
Katoppo, Marianne, 177
Keller, Timothy, 62
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 41-42
Koser, Khalid, 70
Kroeger, Catherine, 173-74

Krugman, Paul, 36
Laytham, Brent, 286-87
Lee, Cameron, 284
Lewis, W. Arthur, 45
Lu, Rachel, 205, 207-08
Marshall, Christopher, 223, 226-28
Martin, James, 137
Marty, Martin, 309
Masson-Delmotte, V., 19
McBride, Michael, 231
McClendon, James, 180, 183-84, 187
Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia, 21-22, 24-26, 29
Moltmann, Jurgen, 40-41
Mouw, Richard, 65
Mulder, Mark, 53
Myers, Bryant, 261
Niebuhr, H. Richard, 302, 303
Noll, Mark, 299
Novak, Michael, 39
Ortiz, Manuel, 53-54
Perkins, John, 59-60, 250-51, 253, 255
Perkins, Tony, 75, 132
Piper, John, 132-33, 170-71, 247
Pope Benedict XVI, 95
Pope Francis, 41, 49, 71, 84, 95, 105, 134,
Pope John XXIII, 41
Postman, Neil, 291
Powlison, David, 172
Radford Ruether, Rosemary, 24
Rae, Scott, 94, 100-102, 104
Rasmussen, Larry, 47
Ray, Brian, 303, 304
Reich, Robert B., 35
Roberts, Vaughn, 134-35
Sachs, Jeffrey, 33, 35-36
Salter-McNeil, Brenda, 251
Sandel, Michael, 33
Schlesinger, Kira, 113, 116-18
Schorr, Lisbeth and Daniel, 42
Schuck, Peter H., 73-74
Schultze, Quentin, 288-90
Schussler-Fiorenza, Elizabeth, 176
Shaefer, Luke, 34
Sider, Ron, 37, 41-44, 302, 303, 310-13
Smith, Christian, 244, 248, 251
Smith, James, 284
Spohn, William C., 47
Stassen, Glen H., 10, 36, 188, 193-95, 213, 253
Stevenson, Bryan, 218-19
Swinton, John, 263
Taylor, Barry, 287-88
Toly, Noah, 62-63
Tripp, Paul, 172
Tucker, Ruth, 173
Turkle, Sherry, 292
Van Heemst, David, 34
Vander Vennen, Mark, 34
Verhey, Allen, 97-100, 103, 303, 310
Walzer, Michael, 36, 45, 188
Weber, Max, 37-38
Wellman, David, 241
Werntz, Myles, 192
West, Traci, 178
Wilkinson, Alissa, 285
Will, George, 39
Williams, Delores, 176
Wilson, William J., 54-55
Wink, Walter, 204, 210
Wolters, Albert, 292
Wolterstorff, Nicholas, 40, 212-13, 309
Wright, Christopher, 40
Yarhouse, Mark, 132, 137-39, 140
Yoder, John H., 188, 210
Yong, Amos, 263, 269-71

# SUBJECT INDEX


addiction, 1, 280, 281, 286, 292
alien. *See* stranger
authority
  government, 76-79, 83, 111, 171, 190, 246
  male, 170-71
  moral, 3, 5-7, 28
Bible
  authority, 149-50, 153-55, 156, 176-77
  hermeneutic, 104, 151, 152, 157, 176, 233
  interpretation, 3, 7, 28, 43, 117, 156, 169, 177-79, 193, 206, 228, 232, 248-49, 265, 270-71, 304, 312
Black Lives Matter, 239, 253
capitalism, 20, 21, 33, 37-39, 45-46, 100-102
child marriage, 166
Christian Community Development Association, 59-61, 245, 250-51, 253, 309
Christians for Biblical Equality, 169
church
  community, 56-59, 62, 64, 82, 122, 138, 140, 152, 158-59, 179. 187, 191, 230, 261, 268, 271, 294, 305
  crisis, viii, 141, 168
  identity, vii, 63-65, 79
  and public policy, 61-62, 105, 121-22, 151, 153, 186, 187, 192, 247, 263, 317
  and politics, 13, 21, 27, 126, 192, 318
common good, 8, 44, 56, 96, 188, 293, 300, 303, 304, 309-13, 318
complementarianism, 169-72, 176
Conference of Catholic Bishops, 36, 37, 41, 109, 208, 307
Council for Biblical Equality, 173
Council for Biblical Manhood, 172
Covenant, 104-5
culture war. *See* polarization
DACA, 69-70
death penalty, 117, 147, 206, 215
Denver Statement, 131, 135-36
dialogue, viii, ix, 6-9, 160, 251, 321
double effect, 115-16
egalitarianism, 173-75
environmentalism, 22-23
family values, 44, 134, 136-37, 140, 284
feminism, 96, 188, 119, 175-76
Focus on the Family, 133, 172, 284
globalization, 1, 24-25, 27, 35, 73
greenhouse gases, 18-23
hospitality, 74, 76-79, 80-82, 120-21, 201, 285
human rights
  and abortion/life, 113-14, 119
  economic, 41, 45-46
  and education, 302
  and gender identity,128-29
  gender violence,166
  health care, 93, 101
  migration, 76
  same-sex marriage, 146-47
identity. *See* image of God
image of God, 30, 78, 114, 134-35, 137, 139, 140, 149, 178, 270
income inequality, 35-36, 254, 300, 313, 317
individualism, 37-38, 39, 47, 140
Inner City Christian Federation, 61-62
intersectionality, 157, 169, 170, 175-77, 181
justice
  abortion, 121
  climate, 25, 31
  economic, 43-45
  and forgiveness, 80-81, 174, 194
  health care, 98-99
  immigrant, 76, 80-82
  and self-defense, 205-07, 212-14
  and sexual identity, 158
  war, 185, 188, 189
liberation theology, 96, 131-32, 135-37, 139-42
lifestyle
  nonviolence, 191
  simplicity, 57-58
MeToo, 166, 170
migration, 52, 54, 70-75, 81-82, 84
Nashville Statement, 131, 132-33, 137, 148-51, 156
National Association of Evangelicals, 245, 247-48
nativism, 1, 75

patriarchy, 119, 169, 170, 177, 179, 250
polarization, 2, 144, 152, 158, 185
prayer, 56, 57, 58, 84, 179-80, 227, 266-68, 300, 304, 308
Prison Fellowship, 223-25, 232
prosperity gospel, 38
Protestant work ethic, 37-39
public policy. *See* church
racism, 43, 81
  defined, 241
  and education, 300, 313
  and health care, 92
  and incarceration, 219-20, 222, 228, 229
  and media, 239
  and politics, 220, 242
  and redlining, 54, 250
  and segregation, 55 , 229
  and white flight, 53
restitution, 82, 226, 227
Simple Way, 57-58, 63
social safety net, 40, 94, 95, 97
stranger, 74, 76-80, 82
structural change, 42, 191, 251
structural evil/injustice, 24, 26, 156
subsidiarity, 207, 209
trust, 1, 21, 22, 251, 267, 294

# SCRIPTURE INDEX


**Old Testament**

**Genesis**
1, *154, 270*
1:26, *22, 23, 25, 29, 40*
1:28, *24*
2, *138*
2:18, *169*
3, *196*
4:9, *80*
9:6, *206, 215, 232*
15:13, *85*
17, *85*
21, *169*
21:8, *176*
23:4, *85*
32, *272*
34, *179*
47:3, *76*
50:20, *268*

**Exodus**
6–7, *272*
12, *85*
12:43, *76*
12:45, *85*
12:48, *76*
20:10, *79, 85*
21:12, *77*
22, *82*
22:2, *206*
22:21, *85*
26–27, *40*

**Leviticus**
19:9, *40*
19:10, *79*
19:18, *25*
19:33, *76*
19:34, *79*
21, *265*
22:10, *85*
24:19, *232*
25:35, *42*

**Numbers**
15:15, *76*
15:15-16, *85*
20:14, *76*

**Deuteronomy**
5:14, *85*
6, *303, 304, 312*
6:1, *304*
6:5, *25*
6:7, *44*
10:19, *200*
15:3, *76*
17:15, *85*
19:14, *83*
23:21, *40*
24:14, *76*
24:19-21, *85*
25:13, *40*
27:17, *83*
28:43, *85*
28:61, *265*
30:3, *228*
32:35, *233*

**Joshua**
20:1, *77*

**2 Samuel**
22:45, *85*

**1 Chronicles**
22:2, *85*

**2 Chronicles**
30:25, *85*

**Nehemiah**
4:14, *207*
9:2, *85*

**Esther**
9:5, *207*

**Job**
39–41, *27*

**Psalms**
37:28, *65*
72, *42*
78:4, *44*
102:19, *226*
104, *27*
139, *117*
147:7, *228*

**Proverbs**
6:6, *37, 101*
22, *304*
24, *104*
29:7, *29*
31, *140*

**Isaiah**
1:17, *29*
10:1, *29*
29:5, *85*
53:3, *266*
56, *85*
56:7, *250*
60:10, *85*

**Jeremiah**
2:25, *85*
22:3, *85*
29, *303, 309, 311, 312*
29:7, *63, 84, 309*

**Lamentations**
5:2, *85*

**Ezekiel**
18:30, *28*
34:23, *42*
44:9, *85*

**Daniel**
2, *63*

**Hosea**
5:10, *83*

**Joel**
1:3, *44*

**Amos**
5:24, *65, 228*

**Micah**
6:8, *29, 63, 180*

**Zechariah**
7:10, *85*

**New Testament**

**Matthew**
2, *79*
3:8, *82*
5, *303, 311, 312*
5:14, *307*
5:21, *193*
5:38, *227, 233*
5:39, *191, 205*
5:44, *191*
5:47, *140*
10:37, *140*
12:18, *65*
16:3, *8*
18:21, *227*
19, *154*
19:5, *151*
19:11, *136*
19:14, *120*
22:36, *25*
22:39, *190*
23:23, *29, 121*
25, *96*
25:40, *234*
25:45, *234*

**Mark**
3:31, *140*
3:33, *312*
11:17, *250*
12:31, *63*

**Luke**
1:46, *321*
4, *272*
4:18, *265*
6:27, *227*
6:29, *205*
6:46, *171*
9:51, *227*
10, *79, 97*
10:25, *180*
10:38, *140*
14, *271*
14:26, *140*
19, *270*
20:25, *83*

**John**
1:14, *59*
3:8, *8*
4, *79*
8:32, *230*
9, *271*
15:13, *190*
15:15, *58*
20, *273*

**Acts**
2:42, *66*
4:19, *79*
4:32, *66*
4:34, *57*
6, *249*
8, *270*
8:26, *136*
15, *7*
17, *285*
19, *250*
26:20, *28*

**Romans**
1:18–3:31, *228*
5:1, *228*
12, *79*
12:2, *7*
12:15, *122*
12:17, *233*
13, *79, 80, 83, 188*
13:1, *77, 171, 207*
13:4, *188*
13:8, *23*
14, *312*

**1 Corinthians**
7:3, *173*
11:2, *169*
12, *230, 270*
12:25, *83*
12:26, *104*

**2 Corinthians**
5:18, *248*
8:13, *58*
12, *273*

**Galatians**
3:28, *173, 176*
4:3, *190*

**Ephesians**
2, *249*
2:2, *190*
4:16, *6*
5:18, *173*
5:21, *171, 173*
5:22, *169, 171, 173*
5:22–6:9, *176*
5:28, *173*
6:1, *171*

**Philippians**
2:4, *312*
3:20, *79*

**Colossians**
1:16, *190*
2:20, *190*
3:13, *173*
3:18, *169*
3:18–4:1, *176*
3:19, *173*

**1 Thessalonians**
5:12, *101*

**2 Thessalonians**
3:10, *171*

**1 Timothy**
2:11, *169, 176*
3:2, *79*

**Titus**
1:5, *169*
1:8, *79*
2:2, *176*

**Hebrews**
11:13, *82*
12:28, *84*
13:2, *79*
13:3, *224*
13:14, *79*
13:17, *171*

**James**
2, *247*

**1 Peter**
1:1, *79*
2:11, *82*
2:16, *173*
3:1, *169*
3:7, *173*
3:9, *79*

**Revelation**
5:11, *211*
21:4, *65*

# PRAISE FOR *DISCERNING ETHICS*

"An excellent introduction to the most urgent contemporary ethical issues. Discerning Ethics demonstrates methodological sophistication, honest discussion of divergent views, and a solid biblical commitment. Highly recommended!"

**Ronald J. Sider,** distinguished professor emeritus of theology, holistic ministry, and public policy, Palmer Seminary at Eastern University

"This volume of essays is exactly what we need in the classroom today, both in seminaries and college theology courses. Leaving practically no social issue uncovered, these diverse authors engage in moral analysis that is theologically rigorous but also genuinely humble. It is this humility that makes these essays especially worthwhile. This book demonstrates that Christians can indeed engage in communal discernment of what God wills for all of creation without falling into the temptations of our present-day, lamentably polarized political discourse. What we have here is a model of theological ethics that all Christians must learn from."

**Ki Joo Choi,** chair of the Department of Religion and associate professor of theological ethics, Seton Hall University

"If American Protestants have been polarized between progressive-liberals on the 'left' and conservative evangelicals on the 'right,' Lee and Dearborn and their colleagues have broken through this either-or, not merely in pointing out that the middle is a much more expansive spectrum than just another stance, but in showing that both commitments to biblical and theological orthodoxy and attentiveness to the contemporary world and its complex realities require the virtuous practice of spiritual discernment, one that is faithful to the gospel rather than beholden to any ideology or tradition."

**Amos Yong,** dean of the School of Theology and the School of Intercultural Studies, Fuller Seminary

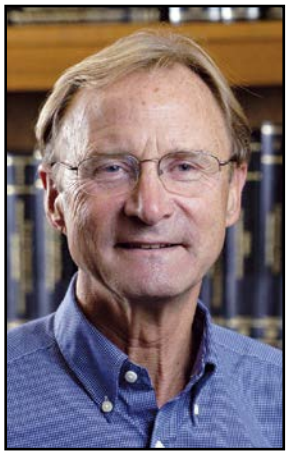
"As many leave the local church because of the conflation of Christianity with partisan politics, one related danger is the reflexive replacement of their former ethical commitments with secular ideologies of another stripe. *Discerning Ethics* is a helpful tool for those who are deconstructing their faith and looking for thoughtful theological reflections on key issues such as immigration, mass incarceration, racism, and education."

**Robert Chao Romero,** associate professor in the departments of Chicana and Chicano Studies and Asian American Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**Hak Joon Lee** (PhD, Princeton Theological Seminary) is Lewis B. Smedes Professor of Christian Ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is the author or editor of several books, including *Intersecting Realities: Race, Identity, and Culture in the Spiritual-Moral Life of Young Asian Americans*, *The Great World House: Martin Luther King Jr. and Global Ethics*, *We Will Get to the Promised Land: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Communal-Political Spirituality*, and *Covenant and Communication: A Christian Moral Conversation with Jürgen Habermas*.



**Tim Dearborn** (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is the former director of the Lloyd John Ogilvie Institute of Preaching at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is the author of several books, including *Short-Term Missions Workbook*, *Business as a Holy Calling?*, and *Beyond Duty: A Passion for Christ, a Heart for Mission*.

---

*Please visit us at ivpress.com for more information about Hak Joon Lee and Tim Dearborn and a list of other titles they've published with InterVarsity Press.*

# Discover more titles from InterVarsity Press

***Click to view the newest and trending titles in***

**Academic Texts & Reference**
**IVP Academic** covers disciplines such as theology, philosophy, history, science, psychology, and biblical studies with books ranging from introductory texts to advanced scholarship and authoritative reference works.

**Culture, Mission, and Christian Life**
Our books are deeply biblical and profoundly practical, discussing topics like Christian spirituality, prayer, evangelism, apologetics, justice, mission, and cultural engagement.

**Bible Studies & Group Resources**
IVP provides Bible studies and small group resources for you and your church, helping individuals and groups discover God's Word and grow in discipleship.

**Spiritual Formation**
**Formatio** books follow the rich tradition of the church in the journey of spiritual formation. These books are not merely about being informed, but about being transformed by Christ and conformed to his image.

**Church Leadership**
**IVP Praxis** brings together theory and practice for the advancement of your ministry using sound biblical and theological principles to address the daily challenges of contemporary ministry.

*Click below to view more books in these categories*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Apologetics | Discipleship | Philosophy |
| Biblical Studies | Family, Children & Youth | Psychology |
| Career & Vocation | Fiction | Race & Ethnicity |
| Church & Culture | Justice/Peace | Science |
| Church History | Spiritual Formation | Theology |
| Commentaries | Missions & Missiology | Youth Ministry |

*For a list of IVP email newsletters please visit* ivpress.com/newsletters.

Sign up for Books & Deals