

January 27, 2015 [Joe Carter](#)

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-auschwitz-and-nazi-extermination-camps/>

Today marks the [70th anniversary of the liberation](#) of the Nazi German concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz. The first extermination of prisoners took place in September 1941, and Auschwitz II–Birkenau went on to [become a major site](#) of the Nazi “Final Solution to the Jewish question.” Here are nine things you should know about the Nazi extermination camps:

1. Hitler’s official plan for genocide was developed at the [Wannsee Conference](#) on January 20, 1942. Fifteen Nazi leaders, which included a number of state secretaries, senior officials, party leaders, SS officers, and other leaders of government departments, held the meeting to discuss plans for a “final solution to the Jewish question in Europe.” (The Nazis used the euphemistic phrases “Final Solution to the Jewish Question” and “Final Solution” to refer to the genocide of the Jews.) In the course of the meeting, Nazi official Reinhard Heydrich outlined how European Jews would be rounded up and sent to extermination camps.

2. The Nazis distinguished between extermination camps and concentration camps. The interchangeable terms extermination camp (*Vernichtungslager*) and death camp (*Todeslager*) refer to camps whose primary function was genocide. Unlike concentration camps, the Nazis did not expect the majority of prisoners taken to the extermination camps to survive more than a few hours after arrival. In the early years of the Holocaust, the Jews were primarily sent to concentration camps (where they would often die of torture and starvation), but from 1942 onwards they were mostly deported to the extermination camps.

3. Genocide at extermination camps was initially carried out in the form of mass shootings. However, the shootings proved to be too psychologically damaging to those being asked to pull the triggers. The Nazis next tried mass killing by blowing victims up with explosives, but that also was found unsuitable. The Nazis settled on gassing their victims (usually with carbon monoxide or a cyanide-based pesticide). Stationary gas chambers could kill 2,000 people at once. Once in the chambers, about one-third of the victims died immediately, though death could take up to 20 minutes.

4. The use of camps equipped with gas chambers for the purpose of systematic mass extermination of peoples was a unique feature of the Holocaust and unprecedented in history. Never before had there existed places with the express purpose of killing people en masse. These were extermination camps established at Auschwitz, Belzec, Chełmno, Jasenovac, Majdanek, Maly Trostenets, Sobibor, and Treblinka. For political and logistical reasons, the [most infamous extermination camps](#) were in Occupied Poland, since Poland had the greatest number of Jews living in Europe.

5. At various concentration and extermination camps, the Nazis conducted medical experiments on their prisoners, which included placing subjects in pressure chambers, testing drugs on them, freezing them, attempting to change eye color by injecting chemicals into children’s eyes, and various amputations and other surgeries that were often conducted without anesthesia. The most

notorious of these Nazi physicians was Dr. Josef Mengele, who worked in Auschwitz. According to one witness, Mengele sewed together a set of twins named Guido and Ina, who were about 4 years old, from the back in an attempt to create Siamese twins. Their parents were able to get some morphine and kill them to end their suffering.

6. All the Nazis' enemies imprisoned at Auschwitz were given [special badges](#) to mark them out: yellow stars for the Jews, a brown triangle for Roma (Gypsies), a pink triangle for gay prisoners, a purple triangle for Jehovah's witnesses, a black triangle for people who were deemed "asocial elements" (mentally ill, pacifists, prostitutes), and many more marking out each minority.

7. About 200,000 inmates of the camp [between 1940-45 survived](#). Out of a total of about 7,000 guards at Auschwitz, including 170 female staff, 750 were prosecuted and punished once Nazi Germany was defeated.

8. The most commonly cited figure for the total number of Jews killed is six million — around 78 percent of the 7.3 million Jews in occupied Europe at the time. Additionally, the Nazis murdered approximately two to three million Soviet POWs, two million ethnic Poles, up to 1,500,000 Romani, 200,000 handicapped, political and religious dissenters, 15,000 homosexuals, and 5,000 Jehovah's Witnesses, bringing the total genocide toll to around 11 million.

9. The silent footage shown in this video is from film that was taken by a Soviet military film crew over a period of months beginning on January 27, 1945, the day that Auschwitz was liberated.



## Last Letters from the Holocaust: 1941

### Końskie Ghetto, Poland— A Letter to Mother

"My beloved mother, I am writing to you. I want to see you..."

Last letter written by 13-year-old Hersch Paluch



Helena Paluch (from right), her young children Sonya and Hersch, and the nanny, Końskie, Poland, 1931.

13-year-old Hersch Paluch wrote these words in his last letter from the Końskie ghetto to his mother Helena in Argentina.

Yaakov-Mordke Paluch, his wife Helena née Wajnrajter and their four children – Israel Leib (b. 1919), Itzik Mendel (b. 1921), Sonya and Hersch (b. 1929) – lived in Końskie, in the district of Kielce, Poland. Yaakov-Mordke and Helena divorced, and in 1935 Helena and her daughter Sonya

immigrated to Argentina. Yaakov-Mordke moved to France and settled in Marseille, while his three sons lived in Końskie with their maternal grandparents, Samuel and Rachel Wajnrajter. Helena remained in contact with her children, and corresponded with them over the years.

After the war broke out, Israel Leib and Itzik Mendel fled to the Soviet Union, and Itzik enlisted in the Red Army. Hersch and his grandparents were incarcerated in the Końskie ghetto.

Desperate to get Hersch out of Poland, Helena succeeded in obtaining an entry permit to Argentina in January 1941 from the Agriculture Ministry's immigration office. Tragically, her efforts failed, as the Argentinian Consulate in Berlin refused to sign the permit. Hersch wrote his last letter to his mother after his grandmother and grandfather had both died of pneumonia in the ghetto and he had been left entirely alone. In November 1942, the Końskie ghetto was liquidated and all the Jews living there were deported to Treblinka. Israel Leib and Itzik Mendel survived.

In 1971, Helena Paluch submitted Pages of Testimony in memory of her son [Hersch](#) and her parents, [Samuel](#) and [Rachel](#). Hersch's last letter was donated to Yad Vashem by Sonya Paluch Pepperling's daughter, Liora Sadeh.

“My beloved mother, I am writing to you.

I want to see you.

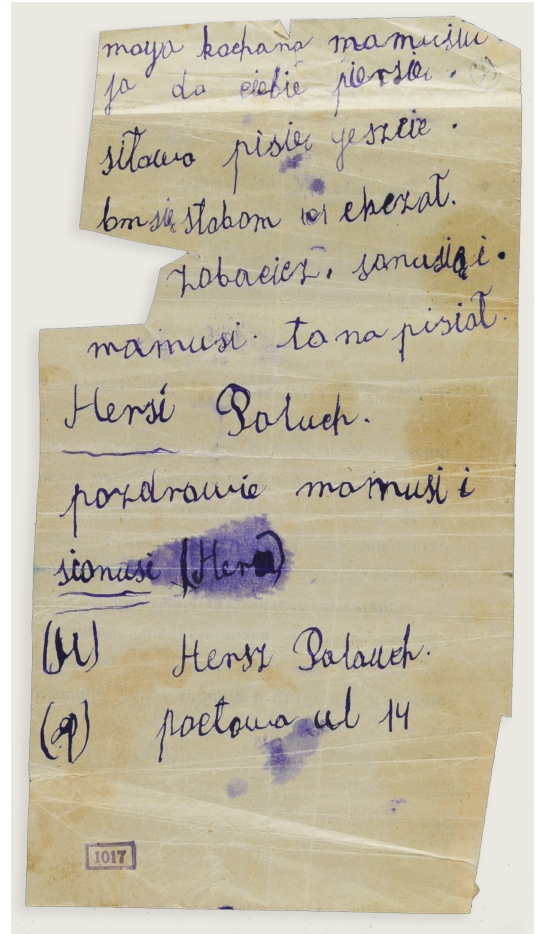
Herschi Paluch.

Love to Mother and to Sonyush.”

Address: Poetowa 14



Hersch Paluch (center) together with his maternal grandparents, Samuel and Rachel Wajnrajter



## November 1941 : Belgrade | "We Shall Meet Again"

### Belgrade, Yugoslavia (today Serbia)

"Today or tomorrow, I shall be taken to the camp. May God help me to overcome this too. I have suffered greatly, but survived because I believed in the good Lord, and because my great love for you, Mutzek, gave me strength."

### Last Letter from Belgrade

Regina Kandt wrote these words to her husband on the eve of her deportation from Belgrade. She entrusted the letter to her Christian neighbor. True to her word, the neighbor kept the letter, and sent it to a member of Regina's family in Israel after the war.



Regina Kandt before the war

In November 1941, some 7,000 women and children from the Belgrade area were incarcerated in the Sajmiste camp and murdered. Among them were [Regina](#), her daughter-in-law [Eva](#), whom she mentions in her letter, and her six-year-old grandson, [Alexander](#) (Sasha). Her husband, Maximilian Kandt, who was a journalist and a diplomat, and her oldest son Rudolf, Alexander's father, had been imprisoned since April 1941 in a camp in an area under Italian jurisdiction. They survived, and immigrated to Eretz Israel (Mandatory Palestine) on the ship "Stefan Batory". Regina's middle son Fredi immigrated to *Eretz Israel* in 1935 and her youngest son, [Reuven Dafni](#) (Milcek), immigrated in 1936 and settled on Kibbutz Ein Gev. He was one of the parachutists serving in the British Army who were parachuted into Yugoslavia in the spring of 1944 in order to rescue Jews, and in later years, served as Deputy Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate.

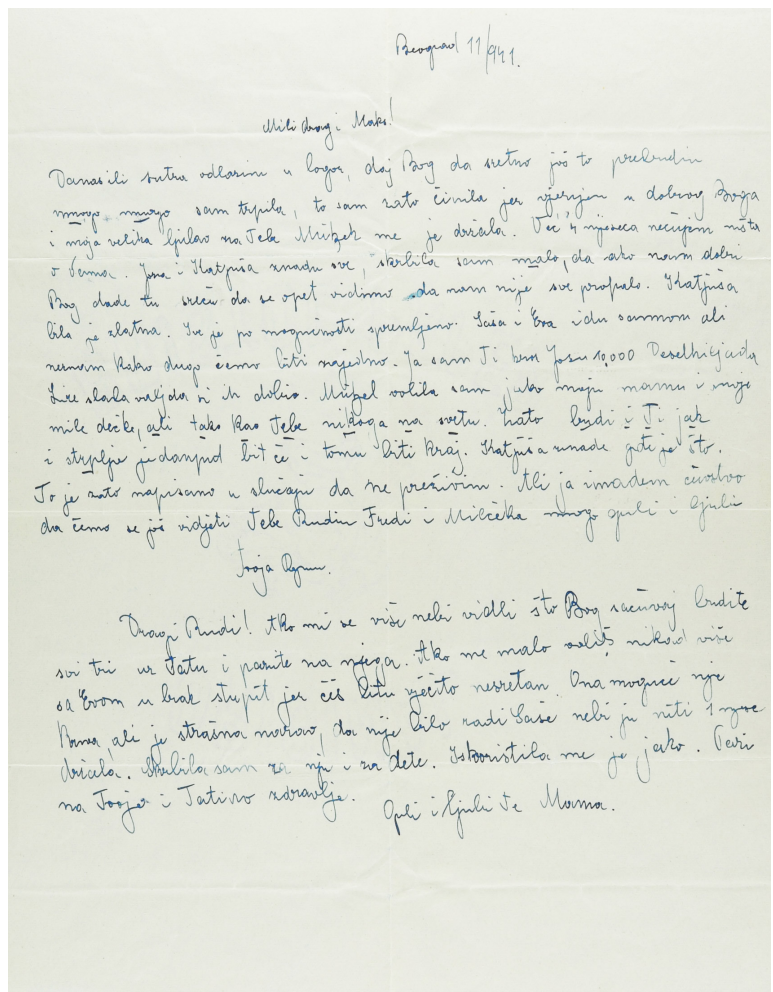
November 1941

“My dearest Max,

Today or tomorrow, I shall be taken to the camp. May God help me to overcome this too. I have suffered greatly, but survived because I believed in the good Lord, and because my great love for you, Mutzek, gave me strength.

It's already been months since I heard anything from you both. Yassa and Katiusha know everything. I've hidden some things, so if our kind Lord will give us the good fortune of seeing one another again, not everything will be lost. Katiusha was wonderful. Everything is being arranged according to the possibilities. Sasha and Eva are coming with me, but I do not know how long we shall stay together. I sent you, through Yassa, 10,000 Italian lira; I hope you got them. Mutzek, I greatly loved my mother and my dear boys, but I've never loved anybody in the whole world as much as I've loved you. Therefore you too must be strong and patient, one day this too will come to an end. Katiusha knows where everything is. I am writing this just in case I don't survive, but I have a feeling that we will see each other again.

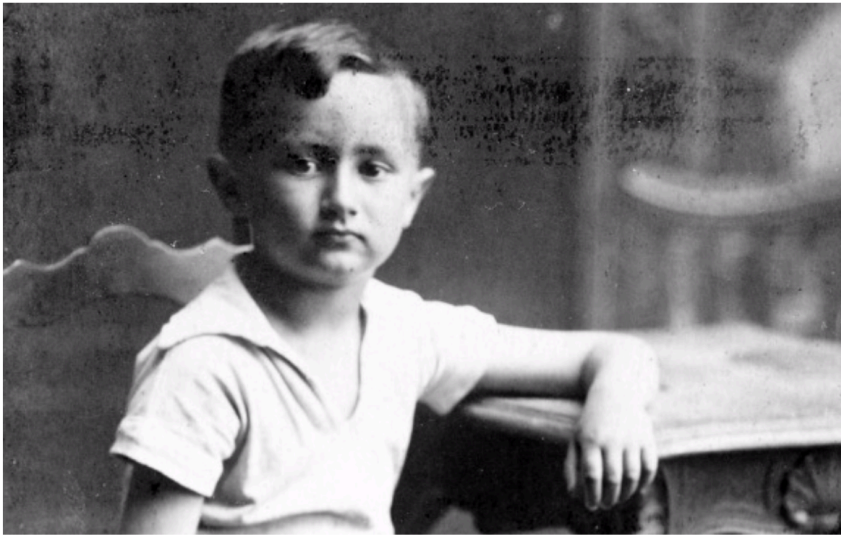
Hugs and love to you, Rudi, Fredi and Milcek, Your Regina”



23 May 1941

### Satanov, Ukraine — Edik's Letter to his Father and Mother

"Dear Daddy and Mummy... I also kiss and hug both of you very tight  
Yours, Edik"



Edward-Edik Tonkonogi

Edik, who had just started learning to write, wrote these words to his parents, Klara and Lazer. That was the last they heard from their seven-year-old son.

Edward-Edik Tonkonogi was born in Satanov, Ukraine. His parents, Klara Mittelman (who kept her maiden name) and Lazer Tonkonogi, were artists in a travelling Russian theater. Their permanent home was in

Odessa. In the spring of 1941 they left young Edik with Klara's parents, Rivka and Gregory Mittelman, and went on tour with the theater.

When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, Edik was living with Klara's parents in Satanov. Lazer was drafted, and served as an artist in the Red Army. Klara, who was in Russia with the theater, couldn't get back to Satanov to be with her family, and was evacuated to Tashkent. Klara and Lazer's incessant efforts to find out what had happened to Edik and their relatives were unsuccessful. Only when Satanov was liberated did they receive a letter that was sent to them from Satanov in April 1944, bringing the devastating news that all but six of the town's Jews had been murdered. Their entire family had been wiped out: their son [Edik](#), Klara's parents [Rivka](#) and [Gregory](#), Klara's grandmother, Malka, and more relatives. Yefim Mittelman, Klara's brother, who had fought in the ranks of the Red Army, survived.

In 1947 Lazer and Klara had a daughter, whom they named Rivka. Lazer Tonkonogi and Klara Mittelman passed away in their 60s in Odessa. Their daughter Rivka Gorenstein immigrated to Israel in 1990, and in 2013 she donated the letters and family photographs to Yad Vashem as part of the [Gathering the Fragments](#) program.

**Letter that seven-year-old Edik wrote to his parents, Klara Mittelman and Lazer Tonkonogi, from Satanov in 1941.**

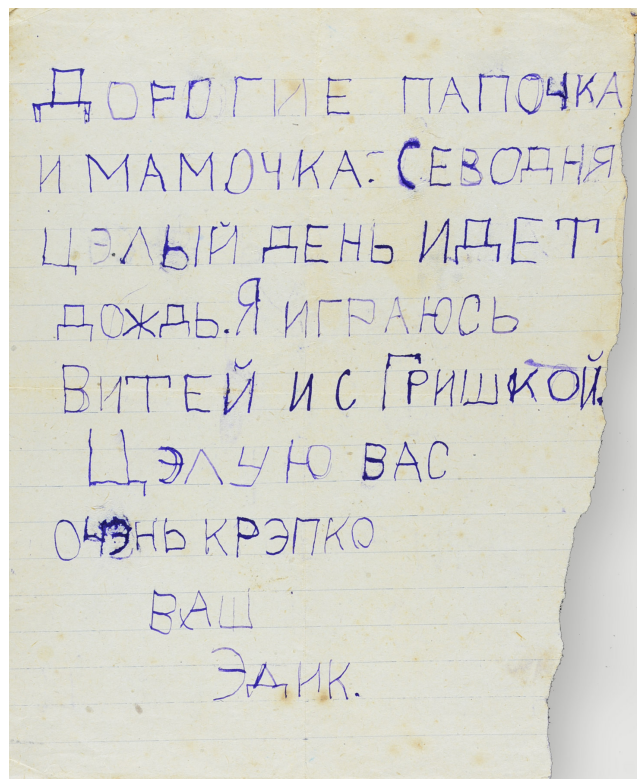
Dear Mummy and Daddy,

Today it has been raining all day.

I am playing with Vitya and Grisha.

I kiss and hug both of you very tight,

Yours, Edik



ДОРОГИЕ ПАПОЧКА  
И МАМОЧКА. СЕВОДНЯ  
ЦЕЛЫЙ ДЕНЬ ИДЕТ  
ДОЖДЬ. Я ИГРАЮСЬ  
ВИТЕЙ И С ГРИШКОЙ.  
ЦЕЛУЮ ВАС  
ОЧЕНЬ КРЕПКО  
ВАШ  
ЭДИК.

**Letter sent to Lazer Tonkonogi on 22 April 1944, in which he is informed that his family members have been murdered.**

For Mr. Tonkonogi c/o Czelirovksi

Dear Mr. Tonkonogi,

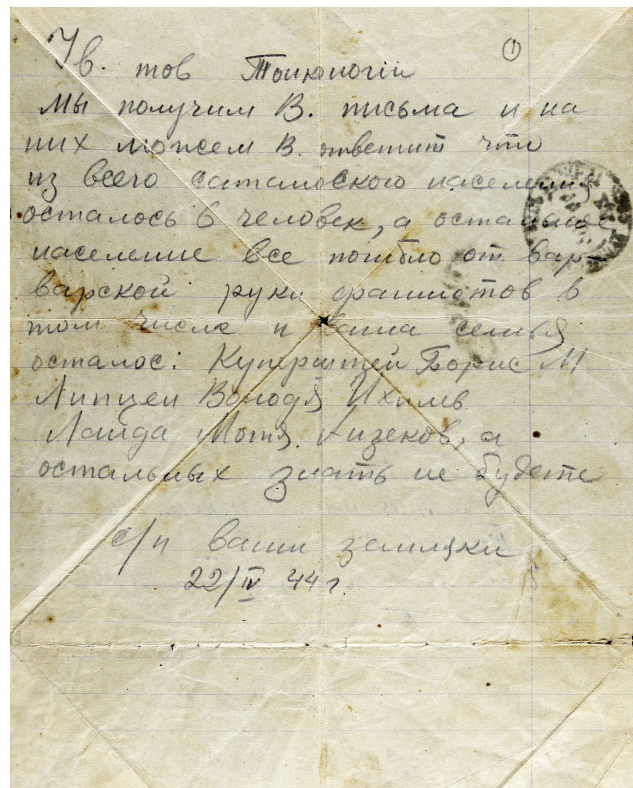
We received your letters, and we have the answers to your questions. Only six people remain out of the residents of Satanov. The rest of the Jewish population, amongst them your family members, were murdered by the fascist barbarians. Boris Kuperstein, Walodia Liptzan, Leida Ichilov and Motya Eizkov survived. You don't know the other survivors.

Your neighbors

22 April 1944

Tashkent, Maxim Gorky St. [...].6

For Mr. Tonkonogi c/o Czelirovksi



Ув. тов. Тонконогий  
Мы получили В. письма и на  
ших вопросы В. ответили что  
из всего сатановского населения  
осталось 6 человек, а остальные  
население все пошло от Варшавской  
руки оккупаторов в  
том числе и Ваша семья  
осталось: Куперштейн Борис, Липтзан  
Валодия, Ичилов Леида, Эйзиков Мотья, а  
остальных знать не будете  
с/и Ваши соседи  
22/IV 44г.

## What Tragedy Teaches Us

I will always remember the summer of 2014 as one bookended by two tragedies that struck close to home. The first happened on the evening of May 30. As 17-year-old Mark Rodriguez was driving home from his Christian school's graduation, he was shot and killed by a madman firing randomly. The madman then killed a police officer and wounded another before being shot and killed himself. That terrible evening in Norfolk, Virginia, seemed particularly tragic for Rodriguez, the son of a pastor and Christian counselor.

What's amazed me in the wake of that tragedy is watching the way Jesus has shone so brilliantly through that young man's life, testified to by his parents as well as [his own writings](#) and photography on his blog, most notably a post on heaven. As his parents grieved in the days after his death, they graciously accepted interviews during which they spoke of their clear hope in the resurrection:

Our son is not dead; he's alive, and we believe we will see him again. Mark wanted nothing more than to be a worship leader. And you know what? He got exactly what he wanted.

### Two Questions

As I sat and watched his family and the local Christian community grieve, find hope, and paint a picture of a young man wholeheartedly devoted to Jesus, I asked myself two questions.

First, how could I live a life like Mark's—completely surrendered, longing for Jesus, true through and through—so that those who know me best could say, as his mom did upon reading his journal, "This person was even better than you thought [s]he was. Not because of [her] goodness, but because of [her] Savior to whom [s]he was surrendered"?

Second, when I'm cut, will I bleed gospel like Mark's parents Carlos and Leigh Ellen did? Their interviews were compelling because of the gospel that flowed out through their pain. They showed that Jesus's life, death, and resurrection anchored their hope.

I follow Mark's parents to find comfort in the God who hates death and sin and brokenness. He hates it so much that he allowed his only Son to be murdered so that the curse would be defeated and we would know that holy love wins through an empty tomb. In the very midst of the broken and the tragic, this hope frees a community to grieve, knowing there is joy to come.

### Another Tragedy

Just two months later, on the afternoon of July 23, tragedy struck even closer to home with the murder-suicide of a mother and daughter from my church community. Only a broken and shocked father and 11-year-old daughter survived. How does life go on? Can it? My husband, a pastor, and I were asked to stand on the front lines with the hurting. We accepted the call to walk onto that sacred ground of deep, life-shattering grief. We witnessed and supported both father and daughter as he recounted to her the news she

couldn't possibly grasp. No wonder, for it's something we adults cannot wrap our minds around either, even we who have been formally and informally trained to walk alongside the suffering and broken in the dark valleys of the shadow of death. How do we walk and not fear evil? We only do so by keeping a steady view of the Good Shepherd who not only walks alongside us, but who has walked through the darkest places ahead of us and for us. He endured the depths of hell, experiencing the abandonment of his Father—even his predestined murder—so that we who walk in the shadow of tragedy would never be abandoned. The Suffering Servant, the intercessor familiar with grief and well-acquainted with sorrows, goes ahead of us so that we can know he is always with us.

And Jesus was there, in that worst of moments, as this father shared the worst of news with his bewildered and brokenhearted daughter, telling her that her mother and sister were dead. As they wept, the father preached the most powerful sermon I've ever heard. Through wracking sobs, he said: "Remember, we are Easter people. . . . We live on this side of the resurrection." It was a holy moment, for I saw into the depths of sorrow unimaginable and also the equally undeniable presence of a God who is there, who is always there, and who will be there as this family and our church continues to weep and mourn. It's the only way any of us can expect to carry on and jump back into a routine that feels forever altered by the intrusion of tragedy.

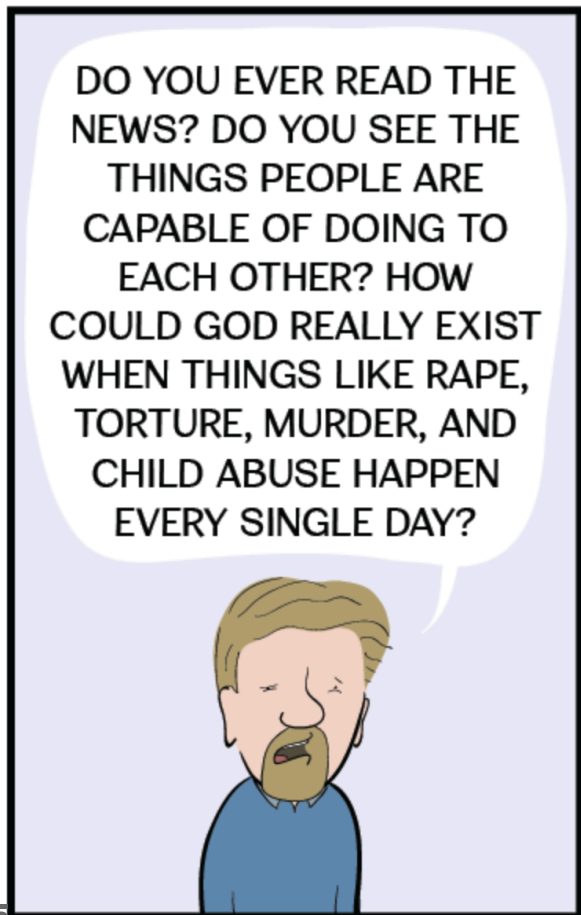
## **Forever Changed**

Tragedy does not—cannot—leave those who witness it the same. Life returns to "normal," for it must, but for us touched by tragedy (and who isn't in a broken world?), we will be changed forever. We will either become bitter, unbelieving, despairing people, or we will become those who hope against hope in the reality of a God who brings life after and out of death. Truth be told, we will be both on different days. I've been angry, confused, and overcome by the paralysis of a grief that cannot ever be "processed" properly.

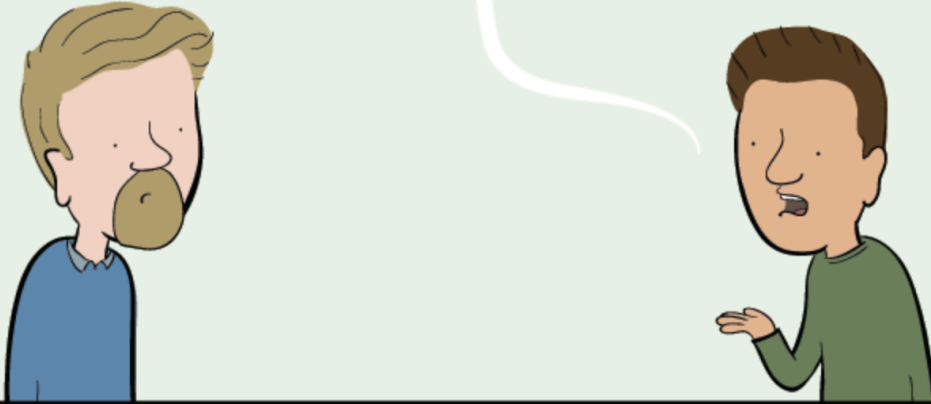
I've had days of sadness, days I wished for cleansing tears of sorrow. And I've had moments with my Savior when he's met me with his Word and given me exactly what my heart was desperately searching for—not answers but presence, comfort, hope, and life.

"For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted" ([Isa. 49:13](#)).

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-tragedy-teaches-us/>



BUT GOD IS THE ONLY POSSIBLE SOURCE OF OBJECTIVE MORALITY. IF THERE IS NO GOD THEN WHAT WE KNOW AS "MORALITY" IS NOTHING BUT A BIOLOGICAL ADAPTATION AIDING US IN OUR STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL. IT HAS NO FOUNDATION; IT'S AN ENTIRELY-SUBJECTIVE PRODUCT OF EVOLUTION WITH NO MEANING WHATSOEVER BEYOND PROLONGING THE EXISTENCE OF OUR SPECIES.



IF THERE IS NO GOD, THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS REAL EVIL, BECAUSE THERE IS NO STANDARD BY WHICH WE CAN CALL ANY HORRIFIC ACTS OF MAN OBJECTIVELY *WRONG*. IF WE ARE JUST CARBON BLOBS MEANDERING THROUGH AN ACCIDENTAL AND UTTERLY MEANINGLESS EXISTENCE...



...THEN MORALITY IS JUST A SET OF OPINIONS PEOPLE IMPOSE ON EACH OTHER.

LIKE NIETZSCHE SAID...  
*OH, HOW EXACTLY DID HE PUT IT...?*



**MY DEMAND UPON THE PHILOSOPHER IS KNOWN!**



...THAT HE TAKE HIS STAND BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL AND LEAVE THE ILLUSION OF MORAL JUDGMENT BENEATH HIMSELF. THIS DEMAND FOLLOWS FROM AN INSIGHT WHICH I WAS THE FIRST TO FORMULATE: THAT THERE ARE ALTOGETHER NO MORAL FACTS. MORAL JUDGMENTS AGREE WITH RELIGIOUS ONES IN BELIEVING IN REALITIES WHICH ARE NO REALITIES. MORALITY IS MERELY AN INTERPRETATION OF CERTAIN PHENOMENA-- MORE PRECISELY, A MISINTERPRETATION. MORAL JUDGMENTS, LIKE RELIGIOUS ONES, BELONG TO A STAGE OF IGNORANCE AT WHICH THE VERY CONCEPT OF THE REAL, AND THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN WHAT IS REAL AND IMAGINARY, ARE STILL LACKING.

THAT. THANKS,  
BIG NEECH.



SO TO SAY YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN GOD BECAUSE OF ALL THE EVIL IN THE WORLD, YOU'RE USING *EVIL* AS A JUSTIFICATION FOR ADOPTING A WORLDVIEW IN WHICH *EVIL ITSELF DOES NOT ACTUALLY EXIST...*



107

AND FOR REJECTING THE ONLY WORLDVIEW IN WHICH IT CAN EXIST.

LIKE I SAID...  
KINDA IRONIC.





<https://adam4d.com/evil-world/>

AlbertMohler.com

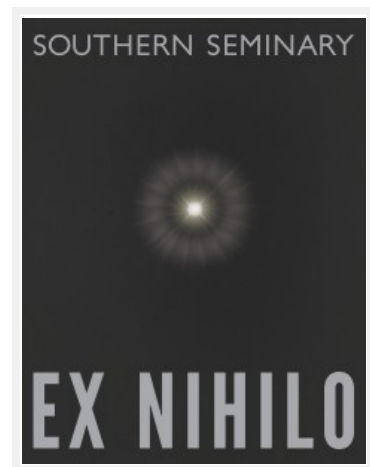
# Creation vs. Evolution — The New Shape of the Debate

This is the new shape of the debate over evolution. We now face the undeniable truth that the most basic and fundamental questions of biblical...

TUESDAY • *February 1, 2011*

The debate over Darwinism rages on, with almost every week bringing a new salvo in the Great Controversy. The reason for this is simple and straightforward — naturalistic evolution is the great intellectual rival to Christianity in the Western world. It is the creation myth of the secular elites and their intellectual weapon of choice in public debate.

In some sense, this has been true ever since Darwin. When Charles Darwin developed and published his theory of natural selection, the most obvious question to appear to informed minds was this: Can the theory of evolution be reconciled with the Christian faith?



The emergence of evolution as a theory of origins and the existence of life forms presented a clear challenge to the account of creation offered within the Bible, especially in the opening chapters of Genesis. At face value, these accounts seem irreconcilable.

There were a good many intrepid and honest souls in the nineteenth century who understood the reality that, if evolution is true, the Bible must be radically reinterpreted. Others went further and, like the New Atheists in our time, seized upon evolution as an intellectual weapon to be used against Christianity.

There were others who attempted to mediate between evolution and Christianity. In the

most common form of the argument, they asserted that the Bible tells the story of the *who* and the *why* of creation, but not the *how*. The *how* was left to empirical science and its theory of evolution.

In more recent years, this argument has been made from the evolutionary side of the argument by the late Stephen Jay Gould of Harvard University, who proposed that the worlds of science and religious faith were completely separate, constituting “non-overlapping magisteria.” In effect, he argued that religion and science *cannot* conflict, since they do not address the same questions.

The problem with this argument is obvious: Darwinism and Genesis *do* clearly overlap. The Bible does not merely speak of the *who* and the *why*. It also makes explicit claims concerning the *how*. Likewise, even a cursory review of the evolutionary literature indicates that evolutionary scientists routinely make assertions concerning the *who* and *why* questions. It is just not intellectually honest to argue that evolutionary theory deals only with the mechanisms of the existence of the Cosmos and that the Bible deals only with the meaning of creation.

Another approach had been taken by some Christian theologians in the nineteenth century. In their own way, even some among the honored and orthodox “Princeton Theologians” attempted to argue that there was no necessary conflict between Genesis and Darwin. They were so convinced of the power of empirical science and of the authority of Scripture that they were absolutely sure that the progress of science would eventually prove the truthfulness of the Bible.

What these theologians did not recognize was the naturalistic bent of modern science. The framers of modern evolutionary theory did not move toward an acknowledgment of divine causality. To the contrary, Darwin’s central defenders today oppose even the idea known as “Intelligent Design.” Their worldview is that of a sterile box filled only with naturalistic precepts.

From the beginning of this conflict, there have been those who have attempted some form of accommodation with Darwinism. In its most common form, this amounts to some version of “theistic evolution” — the idea that the evolutionary process is guided by God in order to accomplish his divine purposes.

Given the stakes in this public controversy, the attractiveness of theistic evolution becomes clear. The creation of a middle ground between Christianity and evolution would resolve a great cultural and intellectual conflict. Yet, in the process of attempting to negotiate this new middle ground, it is the Bible and the entirety of Christian theology that gives way, not evolutionary theory. Theistic evolution is a biblical and theological disaster.

The mainstream doctrine of evolution held by the scientific establishment and tenaciously

defended by its advocates does not even allow for the possibility of a divinely implanted meaning in the Cosmos, much less for any divine guidance of the evolutionary process. There has been an unrelenting push of evolutionary theory deeper and deeper into purely naturalistic assumptions and an ever-increasing hostility to Christian truth claims.

On the other side of the equation, the injury to Christian convictions is incalculable. At the very least, the acceptance of evolutionary theory requires that the first two chapters of Genesis be read merely as a literary rendering that offers no historical data. But, of course, the injury does not end there.

If evolution is true, then the entire narrative of the Bible has to be revised and reinterpreted. The evolutionary account is not only incompatible with any historical affirmation of Genesis, but it is also incompatible with the claim that all humanity is descended from Adam and the claim that in Adam all humanity fell into sin and guilt. The Bible's account of the Fall and its consequences is utterly incompatible with evolutionary theory. The third chapter of Genesis is as problematic for evolutionary theory as the first two.

The naturalistic evolutionists are now pressing their case in moral as well as intellectual terms. Increasingly, they are arguing that a refusal to accept evolution represents a thought crime of sorts. They are using all the tools and arguments at their disposal to discredit any denial of evolution and to marginalize voices who question the dogma of Darwinism. They are working hard to establish unquestioned belief in evolution as the only right-minded and publicly acceptable position. They have already succeeded among the intellectual elites. Their main project now is the projection of this victory throughout popular culture.

Among the theistic evolutionists, the issues are becoming clearer almost every day that passes. Proponents of theistic evolution are now engaged in the public rejection of biblical inerrancy — with some calling the affirmation of the Bible's inerrancy as an intellectual disaster and "intellectual cul-de-sac." Others now openly assert that we must forfeit belief in an historical Adam, an historical Fall, and a universal Flood.

Thus, the vise of evolutionary theory is now revealing the fault lines of the current debate. There can be no question but that the authority of the Bible and the truthfulness of the Gospel are now clearly at stake. The New Testament clearly establishes the Gospel of Jesus Christ upon the foundation of the Bible's account of creation. If there was no historical Adam and no historical Fall, the Gospel is no longer understood in biblical terms.

This is the new shape of the debate over evolution. We now face the undeniable truth that the most basic and fundamental questions of biblical authority and gospel integrity are at stake. Are you ready for this debate?



# SBC LIFE

JOURNAL OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

October 2009

## Man ~ Made in the Image of God

by Don Dunavant

The Palmist asks, *What is man that You remember him, the son of man that You look after him?* (Psalm 8:4). Today's culture does not take a high view of man, and answers to the question "What is man?" would vary, depending on whom you ask. But the biblical answer to this question is that men and women are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Thus, to truly comprehend what it means to be human, we must understand *imago Dei*, the image of God in man.

The study of the doctrine of *imago Dei* must address four questions. First, what does it mean that man and woman have been created in the image of God? Second, how was the image of God in man marred or affected by the Fall? Third, how is the image of God in man restored in salvation? Fourth, how is this truth significant to us today? This article will focus on the first three questions by looking at the theological aspects of the image of God. Then it will take up the fourth question by exploring the practical applications of *imago Dei*.



### Theological Aspects of the Image of God

That we are created in the image of God says something awesome about God in His creative purposes. It also says something wonderful about the uniqueness of humans in God's grand design. But what does it mean? The theological challenge in *imago Dei* is the fact that the Bible does not define explicitly what it means that humanity is made in the image of God.

Three authors provide helpful theological direction for us. Wayne Grudem pointed out that the words used in Genesis 1:26-27, "image" (*tselem*) and "likeness" (*demut*) in the Hebrew "refer to something that is similar but not identical to the thing that it represents or is the 'image' of."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, Genesis 1:26, "would have meant to the original readers, 'Let us make man to be *like* us and to *represent* us.'"<sup>2</sup> Bruce Ware noted that "the image of God in man involves God's creation of divine representations (images of God) who, in relationship with God and each other, function to represent God (imaging God) in carrying out God's designated responsibilities."<sup>3</sup> Anthony Hoekema wrote that the image of God "describes not just something that man *has*, but something man *is*."<sup>4</sup> Building on these observations, a theological construct for *imago Dei* begins to crystallize.



### The Meaning of the Image of God

Several characteristics in the uniqueness of humanity help us understand the meaning of the image of God in man. While this is not an exhaustive list, the following seven characteristics reflect *imago Dei*.

- **We are *spiritual* beings.** We are created to represent and worship our God who is Spirit. Human beings are not merely material beings. When God created the first man, He *breathed into his nostrils the breath of life* (Genesis 2:7), making man a living soul and giving to him spiritual life. Only humans are able to relate to God in worship and communication. A vital component of this spiritual nature is immortality — human beings that will never cease to exist but will live forever.<sup>5</sup>
- **We are *personal* beings.** We are created by a personal God, and our personhood reflects that aspect of God. He created humans with personality, as unique individuals with self-consciousness and purpose. While every man and woman share common characteristics, no two people are alike. Since each individual is stamped with the image of God, each human life has significance before God.
- **We are *moral* beings.** God is holy. He created humanity with a moral compass, a conscience that gives each of us an inner sense of the difference between right and wrong. The conscience may be deadened or seared by sin, but it remains hardwired in man. The hardest question for both atheists and evolutionists is how to explain the moral nature in the human race, in every culture, in every people group, and even in every religion. Moreover, man's moral capacity makes him accountable to God for his actions.
- **We are *relational* beings.** God reveals the relational nature of the Trinity in this phrase: *Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness* (Genesis 1:26). God created us with the capacity to relate both to God and to others. Humans were not made to live in isolated individualism. Thus, the image of God is involved in how we relate in marriage and in the fellowship of the church, and how we relate to others in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission (see Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19: 1-12; Galatians 3:26-29).
- **We are *rational* beings.** God is a God of knowledge. While our knowledge is limited, God created us with the capacity to think, to know, and to learn. Christianity is not a mindless faith. Just the opposite. The intellectual aspect of *imago Dei* means that our minds are a vital part of how we are to love God (Matthew 22:37), that we are to cultivate our minds (Ephesians 4:23), and that we are to renew our minds for transformation (Romans 12:2).
- **We are *emotional* beings.** We are made in the likeness of God who Himself is love. It is the emotive facet of our makeup that allows us to experience intimacy with those close to us, to feel compassion for others, and to know the deep awe of God that causes us to delight and find soul satisfaction in Him.
- **We are *creative* beings.** God is the Creator. His glory is displayed in His creation. We have an insatiable desire to create, whether producing a piece of art, starting a business, writing a book, or landscaping the yard. While our creativity is different from God's, who made everything from nothing, the linkage of the image of God in man in creation to the cultural mandate in Genesis 1:26-27 speaks to our creative responsibility. Nancy Pearcey observes that the first phrase, be fruitful and multiply, may mean: "to develop the social world: build families, churches, schools, cities, government, laws." She suggests the second phrase, subdue the earth, means: "to harness the natural world: plant crops, build bridges, design computers, compose music. This passage ... tells us that our original purpose was to create culture and build civilizations — nothing less."<sup>6</sup>

### The Image of God and the Fall

The characteristics listed above are how we have historically understood the image of God in original creation. The question now is how did the Fall affect the image of God in men and women since? The first response is that the entrance of sin did not eradicate or destroy *imago Dei*. The clearest demonstrations of this are God's communication with Noah after the flood establishing the death penalty for murder because "God made man in His image" (Genesis 9:6) and James 3:9 which indicates we have retained the likeness of God.

However, the image of God in humans was deeply marred or distorted by the Fall. Men and women died spiritually. Humanity's relationship with God was ruptured, as well as interpersonal relationships. Moral purity was lost, replaced by a sinful nature. Personality was corrupted, producing an array of psychological problems. Knowledge was degraded by false philosophies and vain imaginations. Emotions were turned to selfish desires. Creativity was despoiled by evil purposes and pursuits (Romans 1:18-32; Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:24-32). The uncorrupted image of God was replaced by the fallen image of the fallen Adam (Genesis 5:1-3).

### The Image of God and Salvation

However, the Good News of Scripture — the central message of God's revelation — is that in redemption we are made a

new creation and the firstfruits of the new creation (Colossians 3:12). Through sanctification, the believer in Jesus Christ progressively grows in godliness, conforming more and more to the likeness of God (2 Corinthians 3:18). This on-going process of spiritual growth involves both a response on our part to God's purpose in our salvation and the deep work of God in our lives. Our response is seen in such passages as Colossians 3:10 where we are exhorted to put on (an act of conscious commitment) the new man, *who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of his Creator*. The work of God is His providence operating in all our life situations to conform us to the image of His Son (Roman 8:28-29).

That which started at salvation will be completed when Christ returns. *Imago Dei* will be restored because, when He appears we will be like Him (1 John 3:2).

## The Practical Applications of the Image of God

There are profound implications and applications of *imago Dei* for the Christian and the church. John Piper highlights the significance it gives to us as human beings offering this definition: "The *imago Dei* is that in man which constitutes him as *he-whom-God-loves*."<sup>7</sup> Regardless of how the image of God may be distorted by sin, the fact that men and women are still bearers of the image of God shapes our view and action toward others. Six critical areas of application stand out.

- **Evangelism and Missions.** The image of God in every man and woman everywhere gives emphasis to the priority of evangelism and missions. Since humans were created in the image of God and yet are fallen sinners, they miss out on their ultimate purpose in life — to glorify God by reflecting Him, loving Him, and worshipping Him. Evangelism and missions is God's appointed means to restore us to our original purpose. Moreover, the immortal aspect of *imago Dei* underscores the urgency of reaching out to those who do not know the Lord Jesus. Their eternal destiny is at stake.
- **Sanctity of life.** No issue since slavery has so divided our nation as abortion. The reasoned voices for life must be heard. Nothing emphasizes and promotes the sacredness and preciousness of life more than *imago Dei*. It goes to the core of the meaning of life. It means that human life is to be revered and respected. Our stand against abortion is grounded in the fact that abortion is a sin against God as the creator of life and against the human life of the unborn (whether embryonic, fetal, or viable) as those who bear His image.
- **Dignity.** Inherent in *imago Dei* is the dignity or worth of each individual. This has a profound impact on how we see, relate to and treat others. C. S. Lewis stated it well, "There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal."<sup>8</sup> Clearly, the image of God in man condemns any type of bias toward, discrimination against, or exploitation of anyone on the basis of skin color (racism), gender (sexism), economic status (classism), ethnic origin (ethnocentrism), or age (ageism) as sin. James 3:9 highlights the dignity accorded to man by pointing out the contradiction of using our mouths to bless God on one hand and on the other to curse people *who are made in God's likeness*.
- **Sexuality.** The high Christian view of sex is based on the fact that God created man and woman in His image as sexual beings with a commitment to marriage (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:21-25). The sexual union of a man and wife is created for intimacy, fidelity, and faith. The intimacy of marriage also represents the Trinitarian relationship of God and man's intimacy with God. Marital fidelity — one man and one woman as one flesh for one lifetime — is used throughout the Scripture to represent the people of God and their fidelity to Him. By faith, we trust that God's provision for our wellbeing — and our best — restricts sexual intimacy to the bonds of marriage. The implications go to the heart of biblical sexual morality in a world plagued by pornography, premarital sex, extramarital sex, and homosexuality. One, it distinguishes man from the animal kingdom, for whom sex is merely a biological function devoid of any spiritual meaning, committed attachment, or moral parameters. Two, it warns us of how we dishonor God when we fail to reflect His image by taking sex outside the wonderful and ennobling relationship of marriage. Three, it is a positive guide to flourishing in marriage to the glory of God.
- **Compassion toward others in need.** When we look at other people through the lens of being bearers of the image of God, it is impossible to close our hearts to those who are suffering, poor, or marginalized. In His earthly ministry, Jesus healed the sick, fed the hungry, and delivered those held captive by the demonic. While He was moved with compassion by the temporal needs, He saw that meeting those needs was a bridge to meet the greater need and bring people to salvation. And so it is for us — Gospel-driven ministries of mercy are viable visual representations of the mercy of God and grace of the Lord Jesus.
- **The Church.** Jesus Christ is the image of God (Colossians 1:15); there is a sense in which the church, as the Bride of Christ, is the image of God in Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). The church, as God's new humanity, represents the image of

God by living with one another in *shalom* (peace), by loving our neighbors as ourselves, and by passionately sharing the Gospel with a lost world.

## Conclusion

A robust view of *imago Dei* is an essential component of a biblical worldview. It informs our understanding of both the purposes of God for us and what it truly means to be human. In a culture that increasingly diminishes the value of man, concluding that the human is merely one more animal produced in a random evolutionary process, it is critical that Christians embrace the biblical account and treat others accordingly, both inside and outside the community of faith.

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1 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 442.

2 Ibid., 444.

3 Bruce Ware, "Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God" (The Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood Journal, [www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-7-No-1/Male-and-Female-Complementarity-and-the-Image-of-God](http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-7-No-1/Male-and-Female-Complementarity-and-the-Image-of-God)).

4 Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 95.

5 Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 446.

6 Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 47.

7 John Piper, "The Image of God: An Approach from Biblical and Systematic Theology" (*Studia Biblica et Theologica*, March 1971, [www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1971/22271](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1971/22271)).

8 C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays* (San Francisco: Harper, 1976), 46.

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