

# Divine Simplicity and Religious Multiplicity: An Additional Ground for a Christian Theology of Religious Diversity

Nathan Jowers

*This essay will experiment with a new foundation for broadly inclusivist theologies of religious diversity (TRDs) grounded in the doctrine of divine simplicity. I will first engage the Trinitarian TRD of Mark Heim, which I believe to be successful in that it provides a flexible framework for valuing the particularity of other religions, but precarious in that it is grounded in certain contentious Trinitarian positions. I will then suggest reasons why Trinitarian TRDs generally struggle to ground appreciation of concrete religious differences. In contrast, divine simplicity gives Christians the grammar they need to begin grounding this appreciation. Far from being an exclusively metaphysical doctrine, divine simplicity is the original Christian meditation on the one God's relation to created multiplicity, highlighting God's ability to build harmony out of even the sharpest differences. The goal of this project is not to replace Trinitarian TRDs, but to augment them with divine simplicity.*

*Keywords: Mark Heim, divine simplicity, Trinity, theology of religions, multiple religious ends, differential pluralism, evaluative flexibility, harmony, disagreement*

## Heim and Multiple Religious Ends

Mark Heim's most unique contribution to theology of religious diversity (TRD) is his theory of multiple religious ends.<sup>1</sup> This theory can be summarized in two observations. First, many Christians have suspected that the eschaton would look different for each person, and this diversity is part of why salvation is so rich.<sup>2</sup> This is evident in Dante's *Paradiso*.<sup>3</sup> Dante places the blessed in different levels of heaven based on the unique virtues they cultivated in life. Though this system is hierarchical, each level is enriched by the distinct, irreducible goodness of each of the other levels through personal communion. The second observation could also find articulation in Dante. When those in the lower rungs of heaven are asked why they do not envy those in the higher rungs, they simply respond "we long alone for what we have."<sup>4</sup> Desiring the end one achieves is key to that end being true flourishing.<sup>5</sup> Heim's theory of Multiple Religious Ends extends the relevance of these two observations outside of Christian salvation. A Buddhist desires *nirvana*, not interpersonal salvation, so Heim asks "what if they get the end they desire?" Might the eschaton be enriched by an additional variety of eschatological destinations other than salvation matching the desires and practices of different traditions? Could not even salvation be made sweeter by seeing other traditions achieve their own unique relations to God? To establish

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark Heim, "Salvations: A More Pluralistic Hypothesis" in *Modern Theology* 10, no. 4 (1994).

<sup>2</sup> For a description of this position, see Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 272–90.

<sup>3</sup> For the importance of Dante in Heim's thought, see *The Depth and the Riches*, 99–119. Heim focuses as much on the existence of Limbo and Hell as on the diversity internal to heaven. I have focused on *Paradiso* for rhetorical simplicity.

<sup>4</sup> Dante, *Paradiso*, accessed at <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/paradiso/paradiso-3/>. See canto III line 71.

<sup>5</sup> See Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 3–5.

that there might be multiple possible ends, each of which relate to God in a unique way, Heim discusses the Trinity.

It is useful to pause here and clarify. Many recent theologians have seen in the Trinity an affirmation of multiplicity useful for engaging the multiplicity of religious expression on earth, but these proposals take significantly different forms.<sup>6</sup> Many theologians assign different religious expressions to different persons of the Trinity, but Heim explicitly moves away from this approach.<sup>7</sup> Heim's Trinitarian TRD does not focus on the three persons, but on further statements about God that are necessary to make sense of the existence of these three divine persons, of the Trinity's "complex nature" as persons-in-communion.<sup>8</sup> Heim uses the social Trinitarianism of John Zizioulas to establish three distinct dimensions of God's life that can be related to distinctly: the impersonal or transpersonal being, the external unity of God's agency ("iconic" address to world), and the internal communion of the three persons.<sup>9</sup> To repeat, Heim does *not* claim that these three dimensions of the divine life each belong to one person of the Trinity (impersonal being to the Father, iconic address to the Son, and so on). Rather, each of the persons exhibit all three of these dimensions as constituent parts of their interpersonal relations to each other. Christians, as persons seeking an interpersonal relationship with God, must likewise embrace all three dimensions.

Traditions which desire a different relation to God, however, do not need to embrace all three equally. These traditions can seek real dimensions of God's life, even if they deny or downplay one or two of them. Indeed, by limiting themselves to one dimension or the other, other traditions learn to appreciate these dimensions in more focused ways than Christians can, becoming genuine sources of learning for Christians. This gives Heim's theory a great deal of evaluative flexibility. A *limited* understanding of God (denying one of the dimensions) is not directly indexed to *less* insight into God, and may indeed be the source of a tradition's unique insight.

Indeed, the often remarked strength of this TRD is that it can value other traditions without downplaying their distinctive exclusivity claims.<sup>10</sup> Many or all traditions will have unique

---

<sup>6</sup> For a summary, see Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Three-in-One and the Many" in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, Kevin Vanhoozer, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), ix–x.

<sup>7</sup> Though Heim affirms the possibility of particular religious expressions focusing on particular persons of the Trinity, he doubts this is the most useful way to view the actual religious traditions we encounter in the world. See Heim, *The Depth and the Riches*, 183–84 for clarification. On this score, Heim's Trinitarian proposals remains closest to the work of Ninian Smart and Steven Konstantine, *Systematic Theology in a World Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Heim normally ties God's complexity to the complex dimensions of interpersonal salvation, and it is this soteriological and interpersonal complexity that leads to much of his concrete appreciation of other religions. See Mark Heim, "Salvation as Communion: Partakers in the Divine Nature" in *Theology Today* 61 (2004): 322–33. So long as one can affirm that experiences of God evince this complexity, I do not think Heim needs to deny divine simplicity, though he seems to oppose the idea. See Heim, *The Depth and the Riches*, 179. Generally speaking, the claim that we need to see a complexity in God to describe the complexity of earth seems to be based in the metaphysical principle that "like is involved with like." This is a dubious principle when discussing creator-creature relations. See Kathryn Tanner, "Creation *Ex Nihilo* As Mixed Metaphor" in *Modern Theology* 29, no. 2 (2013): 138–149. I see no necessary conflict between a simple God and Heim's positions.

<sup>9</sup> Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 168–97.

<sup>10</sup> Though, Heim is sometimes critiqued precisely on this score. People argue that by offering a detailed Trinitarian framework, he has in fact violated the particularity of other religions by understanding them Christianly. John G. Flett, "In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: A Critical Reflection on the Trinitarian Theologies

value *precisely where they would be judged most wanting* by other traditions, for those differences are where they branch off into different desired ends. Heim can thus claim that his theory is “more pluralist” than pluralist options, all while maintaining a standard Christian commitment to Christ as the most desirable and inclusive form of relation to God. *Pace* John Thatamanil, this general “superiority” need not to imply self-sufficiency, for in actuality forms of limitation result in intensifying insights that benefit the whole.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, I worry that Heim requires the reader to accept too many speculative theological commitments before he can establish the practical contours of his TRD. Heim’s social Trinitarianism, and the extension of social Trinitarianism into a complex deity with multiple dimensions of life, are often contested. Dissent from Heim’s speculative Trinitarian ontology may lead to dissent not just from multiple religious ends, but from his more practical conclusions about the value of religious distinctives. As it stands, my project could be read as a reinforcement of Heim’s position against such objections. I will put forward divine simplicity as an alternative ground for the practical contour of Heim’s position: Christians should value other religious traditions even in the particulars in which they diverge from Christianity. Working together, Trinitarian TRDs and TRDs built on divine simplicity could help triangulate Christian attitudes toward religious others. Before I develop this alternative ground, however, it will be useful to state more pointedly the limitation of Trinitarian TRDs. Why look for outside support at all?

### What Can Trinity Ground?

Inclusivist and “differentially pluralist” TRDs are pinned between two substantially different tasks, each indexed to largely different communities. On the one hand, these TRDs aim to supply their Christian co-religionists with confidence in positively evaluating and learning from other traditions. To complete this task, TRDs must *ground* their open disposition toward other religions in Christian revelation and plausibly orthodox interpretation of Christian doctrines. On the other hand, TRDs aim to facilitate truth-seeking with their inter-religiously inclined interlocutors. To be vindicated in *this* task, TRDs must generate a framework for discussing claims that do not fit in the Christian tradition. These two tasks generate an internal tension in Christian TRDs that, while potentially fruitful, does make Trinitarian TRD turbulent waters. Heim’s TRD in particular succeeds at the second task, while having difficulty with the first.

---

of Religion of S. Mark Heim and Gavin D’Costa” in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10.1 (2008): 89. This is to misunderstand the role of Heim’s framework within his larger inter-religious project. Heim cannot put forward this framework as a definitive, exhaustive, or even adequate statement of the truths of other religions. That would violate the “exclusion principle” of his orientational pluralism. Heim, *Salvations*, 344, and Heim, “Orientational Pluralism in Religion” in *Faith and Philosophy* 13.2 (1996): 204. Rather, this framework is part of his apologetic project. The most inclusive religion will be able to give identifiable—if not adequate—expression of the truths of other religions within its own theological grammar. See Heim, “No Other Name: The Gospel and True Religions” in *Can Only One Religion Be True? Paul Knitter and Harold Netland in Dialogue*, Robert Stewart, ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2013), 80-85. Some reduction of other traditions is inevitable, but it is precisely that reduction that gives other traditions their chance to respond, affirming their distinctives and building their own “integrative principles.” See Mark Heim, “Differential Pluralism and Trinitarian Theologies of Religion” in *Divine Multiplicity: Trinities, Diversities, and the Nature of Relation*, Chris Boesel and Wesley Ariarajah, eds. (New York: Fordham, 2013) 133-34.

<sup>11</sup> See John Thatamanil, *Circling the Elephant: A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity* (New York: Fordham, 2020), 215.

For example, a common critique of Heim's TRD is that it is not the *Trinity* in which he grounds his theory, but elaborated metaphysical descriptions of tri-unity. His argument requires not only *social* Trinitarianism, but an unique reading of that doctrine to establish a "complex" divine nature. Such an argument might show that Trinitarianism can be construed in a way which is *compatible* with a positive evaluation of religious distinctives, but it does not show that Trinitarianism itself *teaches* such an evaluation, as Heim claims.<sup>12</sup> There are too many steps between the basic affirmation of God as Father, Son, and Spirit and Heim's proposals to be convincing to anyone who is not already knocking on his door.<sup>13</sup>

This particular critique is backed by wide-spread Christian epistemic practices. The doctrine of the Trinity was developed to make sense of Jesus' claims within the gospel narratives.<sup>14</sup> While this does not rule out the possibility of alternative economies and insights into God, it does mean that one is fighting an uphill battle when one wants to see *evidence* for such economies in Trinitarianism.<sup>15</sup> For many theologians, the warrant for Trinitarian claims rests in their ability to make sense of the gospel story. We know what it means to call God Father, Son, and Spirit only because it helps us say that "God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19). Christian discussions of the three persons are often yoked to this salvation-centered epistemic norm, and it is difficult enough to build consensus on Trinitarian claims within this narrow scope. Claims about the Trinity aimed to explain realities outside of the economy of salvation are often dismissed outright as non- or pseudo-Trinitarian.

In this vein, Heim's TRD has been critiqued for being *inadequately* Trinitarian because it abstracts away from the particularity of the three persons. According to John Flett, "The Father, Son and Spirit *as* Father, Son and Spirit have no bearing in Heim's proposal. . . . The phrases 'persons-in-communion' and 'communion-in-difference' result in a neutered abstraction. . . . His position, in other words, is both formally and materially non-Trinitarian."<sup>16</sup> In light of what I just argued, some kind of abstraction is inevitable. What we take to be the *particular* character of each

---

<sup>12</sup> So, Heim's strongest claims for his TRD are an overstep: "It is impossible to believe in the Trinity *instead* of the distinctive religious claims of all other religions. If Trinity is real, then many of these *specific* religious claims and ends must be real also." Mark Heim, "The Depth of the Riches: Trinity and Religious Ends" in *Modern Theology* 17, no. 1 (2001): 22.

<sup>13</sup> This might not disturb Heim, since he is clear that a good part of his position comes from personal experience, prior to any Trinitarian convictions. See Mark Heim, "Barth's Dreams: Religions as Scandal and Parable" in *Karl Barth and Comparative Theology*, eds. Martha L. Moore-Keish et. al. (New York: Fordham, 2019), 258. Heim's theology is trying to "catch up" with his lived experience. "[It] is only when the distinctive content of other traditions is viewed in a sufficiently positive light that theologians think to ground that content in the Trinitarian nature." Heim, *Differential Pluralism*, 125. Hence, his positive evaluation of others comes before his Trinitarian theology. His theology, however, cannot necessarily justify his position to those who are uncommitted to this positive evaluation.

<sup>14</sup> This is true both historically, and as a description of the modern theological turn toward narrative. We can point to the Catholic philosopher Eleonore Stump's preferencing of narrative knowledge in relation to God, as well as a theologian like Robert Jenson, to see the broad scope of this turn. See Eleonore Stump, "Theology and the Knowledge of God" in *New Models of Religious Understanding*, ed., Fiona Ellis (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2017). So also, Robert Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> See a stronger form of this judgement from Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions*, 150.

<sup>16</sup> Flett "In the Name," 82. Flett needs to give more explicit criteria for where we should draw the line between "Trinitarian" theories and those that are "non-Trinitarian." The claim that God is one in three persons already uses the generic concept "person" to abstract from the particular character of the Father, Son, and Spirit, but certainly such a claim counts as Trinitarian!

of the three divine persons extends from their role in the Christian story. To quote Miroslav Volf, “The only way we can know the identity of each [person of the Trinity] is by discerning their ‘biographies,’ following the story. . . of creation, redemption, and consummation in the Holy Scripture.”<sup>17</sup> The Trinitarian persons do not witness to “the Trinity” as a metaphysical entity, as a model for navigating otherness, or even as a “unique solution to the problem of one and the many.”<sup>18</sup> Rather, they witness to *each other* as actors within the story of God’s people.<sup>19</sup> Some level of generalization is necessary to turn that witness into propositions that have any significance to those outside this economy. Without clear criteria for what counts as a legitimate extension of these Trinitarian claims, these abstractions will always be suspected of distortion.<sup>20</sup> This by no means shows that such Trinitarian theories are false, but it does mean that they will have difficulty grounding conclusions for their Christian co-religionists.

By way of contrast, TRDs that stick rigorously to concrete claims Christians make about the three persons find that they are able to say comparatively little about other traditions.<sup>21</sup> What can be said tends to focus on the universality of the Spirit.<sup>22</sup> The Spirit blows where it wills, preventing the Church from believing it encompasses the whole of God’s activity. In seeking to follow the Spirit, the Church is led to engage beyond itself.

Well enough, but we should ask what these affirmations add to monotheism. How is the Trinitarian claim that it is the *Spirit* at work outside the Church more informative than the claim that the one Creator God will exceed any one created community? First and foremost, this Trinitarian language lets theologians connect this claim to other doctrinal loci about the history of God with the world. This most notably includes Christology, ecclesiology, and soteriology—precisely where Christianity is at its most particularistic and exclusive.<sup>23</sup> These loci then wield a determinative theological interest, inflecting the range of claims we can confidently make about the Spirit’s activity back toward the Church. To quote Gavin D’Costa, “[The] Spirit, both inside and outside the church, is related to the single issue of making the church more Christ-shaped.”<sup>24</sup> Though framed as an affirmation of God’s universal action, pneumatology functions *uniquely* to restrict the range of claims we might make about God’s historical activity to those that reference Christians and the Church.

---

<sup>17</sup> Miroslav Volf, “Apophatic Social Trinitarianism: Why I Continue to Espouse ‘a Kind of’ Social Trinitarianism” in *Political Theology* 22, no. 5 (2021): 414. Though he treats claims beyond these biographies as legitimate, he nonetheless calls them “abstractions,” and yokes those abstractions to their ability to speak of the biblical story.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, “Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religion: On Angling in the Rubicon and the ‘Identity’ of God” in *Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 57.

<sup>19</sup> See Vanhoozer’s reading of Jenson on God’s narrative and covenantal identity in Vanhoozer, “Does the Trinity Belong,” 48-51; 64-67. “[The] name of God and the narration of his works belong together.”

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Williams presses the criteriological point in Stephen Williams, “The Trinity and ‘Other Religions’” in *Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, 28–29.

<sup>21</sup> This is similar to Kärkkäinen’s judgement of the methodology of Gavin D’Costa, which sticks close to the accepted statements of Roman magisterial documents. Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, 77.

<sup>22</sup> “What seems to unite pluralistic Trinitarian theologies of religion is the role of the Spirit as a universalizer.” Vanhoozer, “Does the Trinity Belong,” 62. Though D’Costa is not a pluralist, Vanhoozer can discuss him in the same breath on this point. Flett makes a similar point using the resurrection. Flett, “In the Name,” 88.

<sup>23</sup> This is, for some theologians, the point. For D’Costa, the universality of the Spirit and particularity of the Son form a generative dialectical tension preventing pre-mature epistemic closure on both sides. See, for example, Gavin D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 200), 152.

<sup>24</sup> D’Costa, *Meeting of Religions*, 114.

The challenge of Trinitarian TRDs can thus be expressed as a tension along a spectrum. First, using the Trinity to value the particulars of other traditions abstracts the doctrine beyond the accepted context in which the three persons are made known, making it difficult to be confident in practical conclusions based on these abstractions. Gospel-centered Christian epistemic practices will dismiss these theories as practically non-Trinitarian or as aggressively speculative, reducing their value as *ground* for inter-religious engagement. Second, it does not seem like the doctrine of the Trinity *sans* this kind of abstraction can say much at all to other traditions. Without abstraction, we only know how to identify the voice of the Spirit when it is speaking to the Church.

This critique of Trinitarian TRDs is not meant to dismiss them. I am only seeking to say why the practical conclusions of Heim's TRD will seem tentative to many Christian interlocutors without outside support. There is great value in careful parsing of Trinitarian claims for TRDs, and Heim's work is rich precisely for this reason. Nevertheless, it is telling that there is no consensus on what counts as a "Trinitarian" TRD, nor on where the value of such a Trinitarian theory lies: the multiplicity of the persons? Their complex communion? Just the roving Spirit? In the end, the connection between the "Father, Son, and Spirit" and non-Christian traditions is not obvious, prompting speculative extensions of the doctrine. This speculation is legitimate, valuable, and rich, but it is not stable epistemic ground. That is an unfortunate trait in a theory that seeks to motivate constructive engagement for Heim's fellow Christians, who may yet be undecided on the basic tenor of their relations to religious others. Trinitarian theology is already profoundly dark water, and Trinitarian TRDs must dive deeper. It might be wise, then, to look to other doctrines for a little light along the way.

### **Divine Simplicity**

At first blush, divine simplicity would not seem a good candidate for an additional starting point for TRD. Divine simplicity, some say, is unabashedly metaphysical, disconnected from creation, and too focused on *oneness* to address the "the many and the one" dilemma. This section will respond to these objections by showing how many Christian acceptations of the doctrine modifies it toward valuing multiplicity. The metaphysical claims different Christian theories of divine simplicity make about God are diverse, but their construal of Creator/Creature relations generally push toward valuing creaturely multiplicity in a way that is fruitful for TRD. Though a more granular TRD would have to pick between the different metaphysical pictures of divine simplicity, I have tried to avoid any such commitment for the sake of this sketch, focusing on claims that are common to many versions of the doctrine.

So, the doctrine of divine simplicity first came into the Christian tradition through Irenaeus, predating Tertullian's articulation of the Trinity.<sup>25</sup> At its core, divine simplicity is a negation of a certain creaturely mode of existence for God. Divine simplicity first affirms that creaturely beings are composed of parts: spatial parts (arms/legs), temporal parts (childhood, old age), and even metaphysical parts (attributes, essence). These parts can be separated, put back together in different arrangements, and even conflict with one another. Divine simplicity then

---

<sup>25</sup> See John Behr, "Synchronic and Diachronic Harmony: Irenaeus on Divine Simplicity" in *Modern Theology* 35, no. 3 (2019).

negates this creaturely mode of existence for God. For most commentators, this meant that God does not have spatial and temporal parts. For others, the emphasis was on the fact that God’s many perfections are not *separable*. This makes divine simplicity also an important axiological concept, for it implies that the many separable perfections/goods that we see in this world are, in fact, unified when predicated of their source in God. For others still, simplicity meant that God did not have metaphysical parts. Debating the meaning of this last claim has occupied the medieval and modern discussion of divine simplicity, centered around the identity thesis—God’s attributes are identical to God’s essence.<sup>26</sup> Many modern interlocutors who disagree with simplicity are really just disagreeing with this identity thesis, yet this positive metaphysical statement is not the sole function of the doctrine.<sup>27</sup> For many Church Fathers, this doctrine helped prove the monotheism of the three Persons and the full divinity of Christ.<sup>28</sup> This is true even of those like Gregory of Nyssa and Basil of Caesarea, who demurred from the identity thesis.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, they all have this in common; creatures have separable parts, God does not.<sup>30</sup>

For some of its philosophical originators, this negation of parts in God was paired with a negative judgement of creaturely parts. They counted the variegation of creation against it.<sup>31</sup> Simplicity was not just a metaphysical theory about God, then, but also about Creator/creature relations. It made a normative suggestion for creaturely multiplicity based on God’s simplicity; simplify and homogenize. A creature became better and more beautiful the fewer or more homogenous parts they had. This normative scheme made sense in an emanationist world-view, insofar as creation was viewed as a ladder extending down from an impersonal divine principle. The higher beings were “closer” to God than the lower precisely by being less divisible into parts. Because the higher levels were the causes of the lower levels, they could also be assumed to contain and formally define all the excellences of the lower levels. The lower levels were simply redundant. Numerical oneness and homogeneity were thus viewed as the best, or exhaustive, creaturely approximations of God’s simple oneness. In short, divine simplicity was aligned against the intrinsic multiplicity of parted existence.

Christian doctrines of divine simplicity were also meant to make normative suggestions for creatures, but many of them modified this philosophical acceptance of the doctrine to change how creaturely parts and God’s simplicity were related. These changes are important for Christian TRD. Taken together, they introduce a great evaluative flexibility into the doctrine, as well as a positive judgement of created multiplicity.

---

<sup>26</sup> *Summa Theologica*, Ia q3; q4 a2. See Also Mark K. Spencer, “The Flexibility of Divine Simplicity: Aquinas, Scotus, Palamas,” in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (2017): 123.

<sup>27</sup> On modern disagreements, see Ortlund, *Divine Simplicity*, 438, 442.

<sup>28</sup> Ortlund, *Divine Simplicity*, 439. See also Anselm, *Proslogion* 23, in *Anselm: Basic Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 94.

<sup>29</sup> See Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> See Ortlund, *Divine Simplicity*, 438.

<sup>31</sup> Ancient philosophical views of simplicity were also quite complex, and this treatment does not do justice to aspects of it. Nevertheless, it is true that most saw the whole universe as a graded descent from God as the world became composed of more redundant parts. See Paul L. Gavriluk, “Plotinus on Divine Simplicity” in *Modern Theology* 35, no. 5 (2019): 450.

First, Christians often flattened the emanationist ladder of increasingly “simple” creatures by emphasizing the Creator’s transcendence over even the highest creature. One could not really picture God at the top of a pyramid of increasingly fewer parts, for God and creatures do not exist on a spectrum. Even a two-parted creature is infinitely different from a God with no parts. Moreover, it was no longer the case that the higher beings were the creators of the lower; God was immanently and immediately present to all. It was no longer obvious, then, that the higher creatures were meaningfully “closer” to God, or that their less-divisible construction made them meaningfully better approximations of deity. This made creaturely homogeneity and numerical oneness less direct analogies for God’s simple unity.<sup>32</sup> Even the “simplest” creatures were composite, even the most “complex” were products of divine will. Though it was still the creaturely task to reflect God’s simple perfection in the organization of their parts, the relation between creaturely multiplicity and divine simplicity was often more complex than a negation of creaturely parts.

Second, because God was immediately responsible for all levels of creation, it became easier to affirm all levels of creation had value, indeed, *unique* value. The highest creatures no longer had a monopoly on the excellence of the lower, rendering them redundant. True, some Neo-Platonist Christians like Augustine continued judging value by formal and hierarchical principles like oneness and homogeneity, but this modified view of creation complexified even those value judgements.<sup>33</sup> Augustine, for example, increasingly claims that the most excellent aspect of creation is not the highest creatures considered in themselves, but the lower and the higher considered as part of a whole system.<sup>34</sup> Because this system has more parts and more complexity than any one creature, such an affirmation questions any strict connection between creaturely excellence and a lack of multiplicity.<sup>35</sup> Seeing creation’s witness to God’s one simplicity requires more than observing just the highest, most monadic creatures. One must rather see the unity of creation within its multiplicity. This makes Augustine’s evaluative system rather flexible. He is able to retain judgements about “greater” and “lesser” individual creatures, but calling a creature “greater” no longer implies the redundancy of the lesser creature, nor the higher creature’s independence from the lower.<sup>36</sup> Augustine still tries to distill all creaturely goodness down to some generic concept of “oneness,” but it is now clear that creatures can witness to God’s oneness in many ways other than reducing their own parts. Rather than positing

---

<sup>32</sup> Indeed, this sometimes extended to affirming kinds of multiplicity in God. Theologians as diverse as Meister Eckhart and Karl Barth could both affirm not only creaturely multiplicity, but forms of multiplicity in God. Mariel Mazzocco on Eckhart: “Thinking of simplicity implies first and foremost a reflection of the abundance contained in simplicity.” Mariel Mazzocco, “The Secret Dynamism of Divine Simplicity” in *Modern Theology* 34, no. 3 (2018): 435. See also Barth’s doctrine of simplicity, where “God’s multiplicity is his simplicity.” Keith L. Johnson, “Karl Barth and the Purification of Divine Simplicity,” in *Modern Theology* 35, no. 3 (2019): 536.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, this exploration of Augustine’s aesthetic theory based on “oneness.” Hayes, *Beauty’s Resting Place: Unity in St. Augustine’s Sensible Aesthetic* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> For example, Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 476–78, 504. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar’s description of Augustine at his best, especially the emphasis on the love that creates the parts it unifies. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Volume 2: Clerical Styles* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1984), 129–30.

<sup>35</sup> This is the source of the much commented tension between Augustine’s “ascensional aesthetics” and “incarnational aesthetics.” For a favorable view of this tension see Marianne Djuth, “Veiled and Unveiled Beauty: The Role of The Imagination in Augustine’s Esthetics” in *Theological Studies* 68 (2007).

<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Augustine will argue that even a degraded instantiation of a particular nature—a sinful human or fallen angel—will add some unique value to add via their proportional relation to the other, more actualized members of their kind. This seem to be the import of *Civ.* 11.18 read in the context of 11.16–19.



a single generic relation between divine simplicity and parts, then, the Christian doctrine of simplicity often requires that God has abundant, diverse, and particular relations with God’s creatures.<sup>37</sup> None of these relations are, in turn, quite reducible to the others. Each relation is an excellence that points to God in a different way. The harmony of two notes, the complementarity of two colors, and the interdependence of an ecological system might all participate in God’s simple unity, but all in richly different ways.

This brings us to the third and final modification of divine simplicity. Simplicity always had implications for divine-creature relations, but the doctrine became increasingly about the consistency of God’s relations to God’s creatures, even in their diversity. This can itself be tackled in two dimensions. The first is about the unified nature of God’s economic relations. The second is about the effects those relations bring about in creation.

Karl Barth’s doctrine of divine simplicity is about God’s trustworthiness in relation to God’s creation.<sup>38</sup> For Barth, God’s many perfections can be said to be identical with God’s essence, precisely because we see that those perfections are inseparable in God’s historical acts. God is never either just or merciful, either transcendent or immanent, but always wholly both. The one God’s multiple perfections always act together, because God is always true to God’s full character. God is, in other words, always self-consistent in God’s economic relations. This stands in contrast to creaturely act and excellence, which must always be expressed in parts and in part.

This inseparability in God’s character, however, does have a creaturely mirror. Just as God’s goodness is not a maximal version of creaturely goodness, but the cause of a creature’s good, so God’s simplicity can be reframed as a power which unifies creatures. As John of Damascus says, God is “the principle of simplicity for those turning toward simplicity, point of unity for those made one.”<sup>39</sup> This simplicity cannot be understood as a numerical oneness, nor a homogeneity, but rather as a harmony between parts. Though creaturely excellences are separable, God is the one who makes them work together in mutually enriching wholes. This is perhaps clearest in the work of Pseudo-Dionysius and John of Damascus,<sup>40</sup> for whom divine simplicity has a soteriological edge. Christ, like a great musician, is able to draw all of creation’s diverse parts into an excellent harmony.<sup>41</sup> He is able to do this because he is the one, simple God. Moreover, because this dimension is about the power of God’s simplicity made evident in its effects, God’s simplicity is most clearly evident when the two most *unlike* creatures are made to

---

<sup>37</sup> James Dolezal argues this in his *God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God’s Absoluteness* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), xvii–xviii, 29–30.

<sup>38</sup> See Keith L. Johnson, “Karl Barth and the Purification of Divine Simplicity,” for an account of Barth’s doctrine. This Barthian doctrine seems especially promising for a more fleshed-out TRD based on divine simplicity.

<sup>39</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colin Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 51.

<sup>40</sup> See John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* 1.14 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2012), 17. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colin Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 51–52.

<sup>41</sup> Musical metaphors and connections to soteriology from Behr, “Synchronic and Diachronic,” 440–41. It is observations like this that encourage Christians to affirm Christ as the final touchstone for creaturely unity. I would argue that such an affirmation does not mean that we have to say that other traditions are reduced to or subordinated to Christ or to salvation, only that Christ is the most balanced anchoring center, as is true of Heim’s picture of a salvific relationship with Christ enriched by and enriching other ends. We might also mention the traditional claim that the suffering of the damned increases the felicity of the blessed. Though grotesque, this claim requires that the unity of Christians in Christ can be enriched by the existence of those outside of Christ. Multiple religious ends is certainly a more merciful version of this!

benefit each other. Just like we see a musician's skill most when they play the most difficult pieces, so Christ's simplicity is clearest in "breaking down the dividing wall of hostility" between the most unlike creatures. We might quote Heim here, "The stronger the complexity, the enormity, the weirdness of our universe, the greater the variety that *can be made one*."<sup>42</sup> A faithful doctrine of divine simplicity will affirm both God's unity and his multiplicity without collapsing the one into the other. The one God is simple in the diversity of his perfections.

Divine simplicity in many of its Christian acceptations, then, is as much about God's activity among creatures as it is about God *a se*, touching both sides of the Creator/Creature divide in a way that is not reducible to the salvific economy. It forces us to see that no parted creaturely good has a monopoly on God's whole goodness, but that the separable goodnesses of God's creation ultimately belong together, for their source in God cannot be parted. Finally, creation witnesses to God's simplicity best when it allows the activity of that simplicity to unify its most unrelated or opposed parts. Though theologians may debate the interrelation of the three modifications I have laid out (and not all theologians would accept all), the three all nonetheless point in the same direction—a God that values creaturely multiplicity. For that reason, they can provide a fruitful alternative ground for the fundamentals of a TRD.

### **Sketching a "Simple" TRD**

I want to begin sketching my TRD with examples outside of the realm of religion. If divine simplicity can be used to value created diversity in general, we might suspect positive evaluations of religious diversity will follow a similar pattern, insofar as both are species of the "one and many" problem.<sup>43</sup>

So, most forms of created excellence are complementary in abstraction. In theory, being both wise and self-controlled allows one to live a better life than if one were either just wise or self-controlled. This is what we should expect if these two separable excellences are ultimately unified in and by God. Practically, however, one has to spend parts of their time to increase either excellence. While the attributes accompany each other for a while, because they have to express themselves by organizing finite parts, powers, and abilities, they will eventually come into conflict at a high level of excellence, requiring separation and specialization. No one created being is liable to monopolize the highest degrees of both. The wisest and most self-controlled must work together, trying to show that their divergent ways of life are themselves mutually enriching. In doing so, they become better witnesses to God's unifying perfections than either could be on their own.

This point can be made more concrete. Take the example of a student of music. The student can spend either an hour studying musical theory, or an hour practicing performance. Early in their education, an hour with a musical theory textbook may produce similar gains in their performance as an hour of practice. If, however, the student wants to be the best performer they can possibly be, the time will come when they must shift the balance of their effort away from study towards practice. At a high level of excellence, musical performers and musical theoreticians specialize. They will always share a symbiotic relationship because the excellences

---

<sup>42</sup> Heim, *Salvation as Communion*, 331. Emphasis mine.

<sup>43</sup> I am influenced here by Thatamanil's genealogy of "religions," and so am generally suspicious of any hard boundary between religious and non-religious arenas. See Thatamanil, *Circling the Elephant*, 108–29.

they pursue are related and complementary, but nonetheless separable. At some point, having parts of oneself dedicated to bits of theory will conflict with those parts being arranged more optimally for performance.

In this example, musical theory and musical performance are equal paths. Yet, work at the highest level of musical performance will often require sacrifices somewhere else in life. A music student who chooses to have many committed and loving relationships may not go as far as a student who sacrifices having some relationships for their career. I think I can safely say that deep relationships of love are more excellent than whatever marginal increase in musical performance may be gained by their sacrifice. Nonetheless, the second musician will rightly become more worthy of study for *any* person wanting to add a level of musical excellence into their life. Those living balanced lives will, quite frankly, benefit from the unbalanced life of the musical fanatic, for he provides the world a level of musical excellence that would otherwise be lacking.

In many ways, the life most excellent as a whole would be an unremarkable life. There would be better people to learn music from, better people to learn art from, family life from, and so on. Indeed, the most excellent person themselves would benefit from the existence of less excellent, but more specialized people like the musical fanatic, for they would represent special constellations of excellences she desired to incorporate into her own life, and therefore invaluable sources of learning. To call her life the *best* then, is not to call it self-sufficient, nor to suggest that other forms of life are reprehensible, having nothing to offer her. Their unique excellences are themselves witnesses to God’s ability to unify in diverse ways, and the most balanced life is a witness that those diverse excellences can themselves be unified into an enriching, single whole. God’s simplicity is witnessed dynamically in layered harmony, specialization, and balance.

This is only possible because created expressions of God’s uncreated goodness are not arranged on an emanationist ladder with a linear increase toward a God at the end of the spectrum. If it were so, the most balanced, excellent life would render more specialized lives redundant. But no creature can actually emulate the inseparable, partless way God holds God’s perfections, so some kind of specialization is likely or even inevitable. While it may still be true that goods can be ranked “vertically,” called more or less absolutely good, that ranking does not exhaust the informative dimensions along which we can evaluate an excellence taken in the context of the whole. We can speak about whether a good is balanced or specialized, novel or already present, a twist on another good or contrastive to it, and so on. Each of these options represents a great flexibility in the way creatures can evince God’s simple goodness in relation to each other. Again, this is possible because God’s part-less simplicity is not witnessed just in one creaturely property, like a paucity or indivisibility of parts, but in the complex relations of those parts both internal to and between creatures. This enables the existence of many different creaturely goods that, when they come together, witness to the one simple goodness of God.

Christian acceptations of divine simplicity thus make possible a dynamic evaluative grammar for creaturely excellence that values not only the absolute degree of any given excellence, but the way that excellence can enrich other distinctive excellences—for that is a harmony that itself witnesses to unity. Moreover, divine simplicity provides a motivation toward preserving as much diversity and distinctives as is possible within a unified creation, for such difference is an opportunity for God’s simplicity to be witnessed as a power connecting what

seems most unrelated or at-odds. Still more, divine simplicity gives us a grammar for describing creatures that emphasizes the contingency of their parted-ness. There just is no one self-sufficient parted expression of God's part-less simplicity. There will always be alternative possible arrangements of creaturely goods, which, though more limited in themselves, nevertheless enrich the whole. Finally, because all these alternative arrangements are related to God's one simplicity, divine simplicity generates the expectation that these various arrangements will be connected and complementary in the end. Indeed, the specialization and divergence of creaturely excellence is just the other side of the coin of their deep mutual enrichment.

The contention of this TRD is this same flexible evaluative grammar can be applied to religious diversity. The value of any religious tradition (its distinctive excellences) ought to be complementary in the same way other excellences are. Christians (and others who agree with this use of divine simplicity) could view their own religious tradition as the best and most inclusive expression of excellence, while recognizing that the other traditions exhibit unique ways of organizing life that are nonetheless excellent in their own way, and therefore can enrich Christian life by their very uniqueness. To claim a kind of general superiority would be to claim a particularly balanced and interconnected form of excellence (something like Heim's salvific communion), but such a claim would also generate the expectation that one is not particularly remarkable in any given respect. The tradition's own goods could be expressed more intensely elsewhere, and there will always be other possible goods in relation to which Christianity must express its own. The "best" then, will be preponderantly that community which must listen to and learn from its more specialized peers. Indeed, this would be another way to display God's simplicity. To show that Christian theology can learn from what is most unlike it (say, Buddhist philosophy and secular thought) is itself a witness to God's activity to bring about mutually enriching harmony in difference. The divergence and specialization of the different traditions is not an obstacle to mutual value, then, but more than likely its source.

A final point is needed to round out this sketch. Though one may agree that created excellence normally works like this, they may be reticent about applying these patterns to religious traditions, especially when it comes to ultimate truth claims. It is not just that religious traditions are deliberative options between different excellences, like a student choosing whether to pursue musical theory or performance. Rather, they make materially contradictory claims, contradictions which cause disagreements even about the procedures for recognizing excellence. Unlike multiple competing excellences, then, one might expect such contradictions to be prohibitive of value. How shall I respond?

First, divine simplicity is often taken to have epistemological ramifications. Our noetic faculties are not divine; they are creatures too. Our concepts are thus composite like any other creature, always intrinsically capable of being broken apart and rearranged. Many Christian thinkers and philosophical proponents of divine simplicity recognized that the parted-ness of our concepts has implications for our ability to cognize God. For example, Maximus the Confessor connects simplicity to God's unknowable hiddenness. Since our concepts will always be implicitly complex, there can be no question of their strict correspondence to a simple God (nor, for that matter, of us articulating *exactly* the way in which they fall short).<sup>44</sup> This lack of strict

---

<sup>44</sup> Brian E. Daley, "Contemplating the Monad that Saves Us: Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus on Divine Simplicity" in *Modern Theology* 35, no. 3 (2019): 472. Similar themes occur in Plotinus. See Gavriluk,

correspondence does not immediately imply multiple valid approaches to the truth, but it does significantly complicate what we mean by a contradiction. Understanding knowledge as intrinsically parted, always rearranging to be more adequate to a reality that remains unexhausted, brings knowledge much more in line with the preceding discussion of excellences. Two truth claims may be mutually exclusive in our parted noetic faculties, but that does not imply that their insight cannot be reconciled in God any more than the existence of two mutually exclusive excellences implies an incompatibility in the God who is the source of both.

Of course, most religious disagreement is not directly about the one simple God, and it is unwise to rest a theory on a scantily explored metaphysics of knowledge. So, let us assume the worst. Suppose that we are confronted by two religious positions that we can confidently say are mutually exclusive, to the point that we believe one of those positions are in significant *error*. What, if anything, might this imply about the value of the erroneous position?

I have suggested that God’s simplicity—like the skill of a musician with a difficult piece of music—is clearest when the most unlikely combinations of parts enrich each other. If this is correct, then perhaps even error can be an opportunity for simplicity to display itself in making mutually enriching wholes out of contradiction and disagreement. It might be useful here to return to the music students. The music fanatic in my example *could* have chosen to pursue musical excellence knowing full well that deep relationships are more excellent. In real life, however, our beliefs predispose us to certain loves, and *vice versa*. The musical fanatic may very well believe that musical excellence is more valuable than deep relationships, and by that error be led to the very forms of excellence she achieves. This example is similar to religious disagreement, for the musical fanatic and the person living a balanced life would differ not only in the excellence they express, but even in the evaluative frameworks they use to recognize excellence. The balanced life seems *less excellent* to the musical fanatic, and that is an evaluative error. Nevertheless, that error grows to facilitate not only her own musical excellence, but the musical excellence of more balanced lives around her. Error and disordered loves, then, are not *always* as disastrous as we might think. While we can say that error would never increase the “absolute” excellence of one’s life, it may well catalyze a kind of excellence that is valuable for its very uniqueness and focus, enabling it to enrich the lives of those around it. For parted creatures, error in belief can lead to limitation in devotion, and limitation can mean a more intense arrangement of our parts.

This is easiest to see within a single religion. For example, I, as a paedobaptist Episcopalian, am inclined to believe that my adult-baptism Mennonite friends are in grave error. Nonetheless, adult-baptism can encourage a certain focus on adulthood commitment that is lacking in the Episcopal Church, a commitment which I admire. By recognizing, affirming, and learning from that excellence, we become an emblem of God’s simplicity, for even our disagreement becomes a way that God accomplishes our mutual enrichment. Though various religious traditions are likely to feel that the errors of the other traditions are even more fundamental than this, we have no *prima facie* reason to assume that should prevent their achieving special excellences borne from their unique loves. Christians may never be able to say that others benefit in a “vertical” sense from denying Christ’s divinity, but such a denial may

---

“Plotinus on divine Simplicity,” 446–48. What follows may be another way of metaphysically grounding Heim’s orientational pluralism, which is intensely interested in the limitations of our perspectives.

predispose one to loves (say, for God's unicity or covenantal commitment to the descendants of Abraham) that organize lives for unique excellences. These excellences are, in turn, valuable to others because they are unique.

This question of error requires more exploration than I can give it in this sketch. The point, however, is to indicate the resources within divine simplicity for thinking about such questions. Creatures exist in parts even in their noetic faculties, no arrangement of parts can claim to capture the simple God, and an error in part can lead to a novel rearrangement of the whole that expresses novel value, a whole which may well witness to a truth about God that would not be available without it. Simplicity can give us the language to say why contradictions between truth-claims are not always as value-prohibiting as the all-or-nothing, either/or overtones of "contradiction" might make it seem. Even someone who wanted to claim that Christian orthodoxy was fully true, and other traditions erroneous precisely insofar as they do not correspond with this orthodoxy, would not be able to rule out the presence of unique insight arising precisely in the midst of error. Moreover, the ability to listen to and benefit from that insight would be a witness to God's simplicity at work, bringing harmonies out of difference and even division. Indeed, by focusing on simplicity as an attribute with economic expression, we are able to say this: the God who can bring good out of evil can also bring novel insight out of error and novel unity out of division. Christians always have reason to search for unique value in the midst of difference, long before we can say what that value might be, because God's simplicity never rests from creating deep systems of mutual enrichment.

### **Conclusions: Simplicity and Trinity**

I have so far avoided the question of whether other traditions can achieve non-salvific religious ends. A TRD built on simplicity alone is thin. It can say little about other religions' particular claims without extra theological commitments, only affirming that *some* value likely exists in those claims. This isn't necessarily a weakness. Recognition of the particular value of other traditions should follow from concrete engagement with those traditions. Divine simplicity cannot decide the issue ahead of time. Especially in the case of eschatological predictions, interreligious engagement will always be a complex theological labor involving many doctrinal commitments and personal experiences. In such contexts the elaborated Trinitarian commitments of TRDs like Heim's are valuable, allowing more granular theological engagement than this rather generic expectation of "some" unique value can generate.

What is unique about divine simplicity, however, is that it already includes within itself a characterization of all creaturely existence—we are variably arranged parts—and God's relation to those parts. Though this relationship has soteriological implications, it is not yoked to the story of salvation in the same way the narrative identities of the Father, Son, and Spirit are. God is the one who brings the great diversity of creation's parts together into a harmony witnessing to the surpassing unity of God. This is not achieved by making creatures more homogenous, but by affirming God's activity to make our grand differences harmonious, even in specialization and divergence. To lean deeply into divine simplicity is to cultivate a disposition that sees creaturely multiplicity as good, and to trust in God's ability make those differences fruitful. This ought to inform Christian dispositions toward other traditions.

Of course, there are forms of difference that are not good in themselves, like error and sin. The thorniest questions still facing this TRD revolve around our attitudes toward those negatives and how to respond when we perceive them in ourselves and others. I have tried to argue that divine simplicity gives us a grammar that can affirm new value even in the midst of error. There are Christians who will deny this, maintaining that non-Christian religions are nothing but idolatrous sin. Though I doubt whether such a raw error is possible, the creaturely task in such a situation would still be to live in the greatest forms of harmony available. That harmony could take many forms: the challenge of iron sharpening iron, co-belligerence for justice, or something else entirely. In the end, no one doctrine can make that determination by itself. Divine simplicity will need Trinity and *vice versa*.

Perhaps what is needed, then, is a call to move beyond building TRDs that focus on just one doctrine. Any adequate TRD will be a web of doctrinal commitments and evaluative dispositions, all reinforced by concrete experience of other traditions. The strongest TRDs will be able to use multiple doctrines to triangulate their recommendations. The goal of this paper was to offer divine simplicity as a new, unique node in this mutually implicative web. Simplicity gives us a grammar for describing the many and the one of God-world relations in a way that is not directly indexed to the Christian economy of salvation. Divine simplicity’s discussion of parts also gives us a flexible evaluative grammar that explains why limitations—even error—might lead to intensifying insight. The economic form of the doctrine then gives us reason to expect that God is generating that insight in others in ways that will be mutually enriching. Simplicity can help defend many of the practical instincts that Heim’s Trinitarian TRD had to go most out of its way to establish, like this admirable evaluative flexibility.

Working together, then, divine simplicity and Heim’s Trinitarianism help triangulate a TRD that values attention to the unique contributions of other religious traditions, especially where their respective exclusivity claims seem to put them most at odds with Christian doctrine. Even if Christians must ultimately conclude that certain elements of these other traditions are error, Christians ought not turn away. Rather, the grammar given by divine simplicity holds open the possibility of a unique arrangement of creaturely parts that witnesses to its own, intensified good, even in the midst of erroneous limitation. Whether a tradition’s unique good is best described by that tradition’s own self-understanding is a much more complicated question awaiting more granular engagement. What Christians must suspect, however, is that a tradition’s particular good is encouraged by that self-understanding, even if we think that understanding is a limitation or an error. The proper disposition, then, is one that listen and learns for insight into God, precisely with those in whom Christians might least expect to find it.



*Nathan Jowers is a Master of Divinity student at Yale Divinity School (New Haven, Connecticut). He holds a B.A. in Bible and Ministry from Abilene Christian University, with a focus on text and languages. He currently works at the Yale Center for Faith and Culture as a communications and research assistant. Questions of human diversity, the doctrine of God, the theology of time, and the dialogue of theology and other academic disciplines are important to his research. His writing, including poetry, has appeared in various small journals. He is currently in the process of applying for doctoral programs in religious studies.*

The views, opinions, and positions expressed in all articles published by the *Journal of Interreligious Studies* (*JIRS*) are the authors' own and do not reflect or represent those of the *JIRS* staff, the *JIRS* Board of Advisors, or *JIRS* publishing partners.