

Letter

communities, including the scientific community, process life's challenges and form expectations for the future. We must not only repeat the stories from scripture, but also participate in the formation of the cultural narratives as ambassadors of Christ. While *Science Fiction* does not discuss the role of religion in storytelling, the discussion of our ambitions and expectations for the future is ripe for a Christian discussion.

Vint describes sf as a navigational tool for the rapid changes occurring in the world. *Science Fiction* references many titles that illustrate the different roles sf has played at historical points and that continue to form culture narratives. While some pages can feel like a dense list of titles, it is largely a book expressing excitement about the power and indispensability of sf. I would recommend this book for those who want to think about interactions between fiction, science, and culture, or learn about major themes of sf, as well as those interested in broadening the horizons of their sf reading.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Koning, graduate student in the Department of Computer Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL 61801. ▼

Letter

“Unformed” and “Formed”

In the June 2022 issue of *PSCF*, the editor James C. Peterson noted, in his helpful survey of different views of personhood (“Recognizing the Presence of a Person,” *PSCF* 74, no. 2: 106–11), a list of Church Fathers culminating in Aquinas who made the distinction between “unformed” and “formed” (p. 108). One of the reasons these Church Fathers sometimes gave for this distinction was the Septuagint’s translation of Exodus 21:22–23.

Exodus 21:22–23 speaks of two cases involving a fight which injures a pregnant mother. The Hebrew text is difficult to interpret. One interpretation (for example, the RSV and NRSV) holds that in the first case, if a miscarriage occurs with no harm to the mother, then monetary compensation is required. In the second case, if the woman is harmed the rule of *lex talionis* is invoked. Some argue that this stereotyped phrase was not to be taken literally, but that the one who hurt the woman had to compensate her husband for the death of either his wife or his baby.

The Hebrew text can also be interpreted, as in the NIV, to mean that in the first case a premature birth of a healthy child occurs with no harm to the mother or child, and that in the second case one of them is harmed.

The Greek translation (the Septuagint) reads quite differently from the Hebrew:

When men strive together and hurt a woman with child so that the woman miscarries an unformed child (*mē exeikonismenon*), he shall pay according to the husband’s account. If the child is formed (*exeikonismenon*), he shall give life for life. (Exod. 21:22–23)

The distinction between an “unformed” and a “formed” child may have been influenced by the views of Aristotle.

Aristotle held that the fetus receives a “vegetative or nutritive soul” at the moment of conception, an “animal or sensitive soul” at a later stage, and a “rational soul” as the moment of birth draws near. In his *History of Animals* 7.3, he expressed the belief that the first movement occurred on the 40th day for males and on the 90th day for females.

Stoics, in general, held that the fetus was merely part of the mother’s body, and that its life began with its first breath. Though Augustus passed legislation to promote marriages and procreation, Roman law adopted the Stoic view that the fetus was not yet a person. The emperors Septimius Severus (193–211) and Caracalla (211–217) prescribed banishment for a divorced woman who had an abortion contrary to the will of her former husband, and the death penalty for those who provided an abortion drug which caused the death of the woman.

Augustine, following the Septuagint of Exodus 21:22–23, held that the destruction of an “unformed” fetus, though immoral, was not murder. The codification of the laws under Justinian simply listed abortion as grounds for divorce.

Edwin M. Yamauchi
ASA Fellow ▼