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## THE SOUL OF A SERVANT

By David P. Teague

The following is a chapter from Dr. Teague's book, *Godly Servants: Discipleship and Spiritual Formation for Missionaries*. For more information visit [www.godlyservants.org](http://www.godlyservants.org). *Kindle* downloads are available.

Once I was the pastor of a church, founded in 1679, that had a fascinating mission history. It sent out some of the very first mission workers to Hawaii, particularly two women named Clarissa Chapman and Sybil Moseley.

Clarissa's Bible teaching caused a large revival to break out in Honolulu in the 1840's. People loved her and her husband, Richard. People also loved Sybil, but not *her* husband. Sybil was married to a very difficult man, Hiram Bingham.

Although Hiram was the initial leader of the mission, he was such a cantankerous man that when he and Sybil were on home leave, his fellow mission workers begged for him not to return. "Please keep Hiram away!" they asked.

Perhaps you have met a few mission workers with a personality like Hiram's. Our strong personalities may help us to endure, but they can also get in the way. Even Barnabas finally parted ways with his strong-willed mission partner, Paul.

It is common knowledge that many mission workers return prematurely to their home countries because of poor relationships with their colleagues. Some statistics have suggested this to be the *primary* reason for premature returns.

All of us — and not just the Hiram's in our midst — suffer from personality defects. We're often very good at concealing these deficiencies when we need to, and especially from our supporters. But inwardly, we may often feel irritable, stretched, tired and quite human.

When mission organizations purposefully promote intentional spiritual formation within the ranks, however, it can change things. I am familiar with one mission that has been conducting a running experiment of intentional spiritual formation for over 30 years. I asked one of their leaders what the results have been. "It has

brought deeper commitment, greater effectiveness and greater retention among our missionaries”, was the reply.

### **Servants with Healthy Hearts**

Consider three leaders from Scripture: Saul, his son Jonathan, and David:

SAUL was distrustful, full of envy and controlled by pride. His decisions lacked basic integrity.

JONATHAN was a wise leader. His actions promoted trust and good relationships. His leadership inspired confidence.

DAVID was a man of integrity who trusted in God instead of taking revenge. He was able to admit his faults.

All three said they were God’s servants, yet Saul could hardly be called *godly*. Although God had called him, anointed him and even caused him to prophesy, Saul lacked authenticity with God. His human frailties affected him too much.

This leads us to ask, “How healthy is my heart? Although I may be serving God, am I truly healthy on the inside?”

We need to ask this question because spiritual formation happens in the heart, not the head. Although we may be well-trained and might even have attended seminary, each of us still needs to have a healthy heart.

Paul once prayed for the spiritual growth of his friends using a wonderful prayer, whose beauty I have tried to capture in the following original translation:

#### **Ephesians 3:16-19**

I pray that God’s beautiful richness will make you strong.  
May you experience the power of his Spirit deep down inside.  
May Christ live in your hearts as you believe in him.  
Rooted and grounded in love,  
may you and all God’s people understand Christ’s love.  
May you sense its width and length and height and depth.  
May you know his love which is beyond knowing.  
Then you will be filled with everything God has for you.

As this scripture explains, spiritual growth happens when Christ changes us gradually “deep down inside.” Also, it does not happen

merely by following rules but by experiencing God within a family of faith. Together, as we share the “beautiful richness” of God, the Spirit works and we become “filled with the fullness of God.”

Godliness is not trying to be perfect. It is growing in grace. This happens only when we are honest about ourselves to God. This is why the Bible never air-brushes its main characters. We see Abraham, afraid and distrustful. We watch both Moses and David commit open murders. David cannot keep his pants on. Peter is a midnight traitor. Scripture colors them in all their faults, because the Story is not about perfection. It is about God’s grace.

We simply do not grow spiritually when we are trying to be perfect. True spiritual growth only happens when we struggle with the darkest aspects of our personalities. “It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick,” Jesus told us (Luke 5:31). The brokenness of our lives is the growing edge of our faith.

### **Our Irrational Side**

For too long we have bought into the notion that our minds hold perfect control over our hearts. We have thought that spiritual growth happens simply by studying biblical principles. Yet, even the Bible tells us to do what the word says and not simply to listen to it. Informing the mind is the easy part. Changing one’s life is a lot harder. Acquiring information alone does not lead to transformation. We have to integrate the information into our lives. This takes time and effort.

Scripture teaches us to be compassionate, yet it took me five years of chaplaincy work — dealing with the dying and daily medical dramas — to become more compassionate. The change did not happen just by reading about compassion. The change happened by facing several thousand people in crisis. Similarly, we will not grow spiritually just by reading this book. We will grow spiritually only as we struggle with the deep things within our lives and experience a gradual transformation there with the help of God.

We have to understand that none of us is completely rational. We’re not logical machines who can will ourselves into godliness by just deciding in our minds to do so. We’re people. And as people,

we have all kinds of inbuilt flaws and mistakes. It's hard to rewire the heart.

The Apostle Paul acknowledged his own irrational side in words that recall a dog chasing its own tail:

**Romans 7:15, 19** I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do ... What I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.

We are more irrational than we may realize. In one famous experiment in the 1970's, Dr. Benjamin Libet found that our brains signal us to perform an action a fraction of a second *before* we consciously "choose" to do the action. This suggests that the irrational, subconscious part of our minds controls us far more than we recognize.

Since the time of the psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875-1961), some have called our irrational side the *shadow side*. The label is meant to describe all the suppressed emotions, unresolved fears, urges and conflicts that linger within our psyches that exert an irrational influence on our behavior.

The shadow side is the repository for our human brokenness. There collects all our sorrows and unsettled pain from the traumas of life we have experienced — including our unresolved grief, failures and abandonments. The shadow side partners with what the Bible calls our sinful nature to influence us.

A great deal of human behavior arises from our irrational instincts, impulses, habits, reactions and raw emotions. It has even been said that only 5% (if that much!) of human behavior is purely rational and planned. This is true even for Christians who were, on last check, still human.

Our irrational side can cause us to:

- Become addicted to pornography
- Save face at any cost
- Turn into a workaholic
- Gossip about others to gain power over them
- Become controlling
- Think that we are superior to others

- Be unable to form deep, lasting relationships
- Feel distrustful or always anxious
- Be too sensitive to criticism
- Be unable to walk away from harmful situations

Human brokenness also affects how we treat each other:

- We don't discuss issues openly or freely
- We communicate through third-parties
- We accept conflict as normal
- We lack empathy
- We don't feel safe around each other
- We practice conditional love and make inconsistent rules
- We fail to respect boundaries
- We remain inflexible
- We always expect perfection

Sometimes our shadow side leads us into truly self-destructive habits and behaviors. It's like the moray eel that lurks in an ocean crevice — all may seem calm and serene until the moment when the eel suddenly lunges and strikes. We may think we are completely in control until the day comes when we find ourselves doing stupid, self-destructive things. Just this last week, I spoke to a Christian man who had begun to binge drink because he is chronically unemployed and depressed. In his hopelessness, his irrational side is beginning to engulf him.

I also once knew a brilliant thoracic surgeon who treated the cancer victims of smoking. He smoked himself to death — dying of the same, painful disease he sought to cure in others. At his funeral, his best friend from their medical school days spoke of this man's incredible mind. But then he said incredulously, "Why did he do it? Why did he smoke? He knew better. It was so irrational."

We may think that we can control our irrational side through brute force, but what we really need is healing, not repression. In fact, psychological researchers have found a high correlation between a repressive religious upbringing and sex offenses. This does not mean that people from caring, Christian homes are going to turn into dangerous sex criminals. What it does imply is that a

reliance on repressive rules alone, no matter how strictly enforced, is inadequate in suppressing the shadow side.

## **Missionaries and our Shadows**

Even missionaries cast a shadow. Although we may not be aware of our own shadow side, others will be. In the Bible, Paul seemed oblivious to his own obtuseness in his conflict with John Mark, but Barnabas was not. Similarly, we seem unable to perceive our deep faults like others can. A few of the more common human frailties among missionaries are narcissism, compulsive working, and a distorted sense of self-identity.

### ***Narcissism***

Some of us wonderful missionaries have a narcissistic tendency! That is, we always have to make ourselves look good. Everything always has to revolve around us!

Narcissism is especially common among leaders. In a survey of more than 1,200 employees, Wayne Hochwarter, a management professor, found that 31% percent reported having a narcissistic boss who exaggerated his or her accomplishments. Hochwarter also found that these leaders created a toxic environment around whom “the team perspective ceases to exist, and the work environment becomes increasingly stressful”. Often, such leaders are unaware of how others perceive them ([vimeo.com/6085134](https://vimeo.com/6085134)).

I knew a physician with a narcissistic tendency. He was aware of this propensity within himself, but found it difficult to overcome. As a child, he had been abandoned and this created an insecurity that drove him to earn the love of others. It was the reason why he rendered extraordinary service as a physician—to win acceptance and praise. He often made himself to be so much the center of attention that it weakened his ability to be a team player.

When we are inclined toward narcissism, it is very important to bathe ourselves in the unconditional love of our heavenly Father. Only God’s love can fill the love hunger within us. Narcissists especially need to cultivate a solid understanding of justification and a devotional life that is immersed in God’s love.

## **Compulsive Working**

Sometimes, God's servants can be compulsive workaholics. When we're like this, we are performance-driven and live under the tyranny of the urgent. Our identities can become so intertwined with our work that we might be reluctant ever to go on a spiritual retreat. We begin adopting scripted roles instead of relating to others in real friendships. We can also forget how to rest and play.

Since the needs around us are so great, it is easy for us to justify working compulsively, but it's a serious spiritual problem. On some level, we have forgotten how to live under God's sovereignty. We do not trust God and feel the need to do everything. This is idolatry.

A good way to begin a different lifestyle is to practice Sabbath-keeping, the spiritual discipline which is designed to keep work from becoming idolatrous. Sabbath-keeping reminds us that God is ultimately the one who is in control.

When we are very young and others are taking care of us, we sense that all is well. This frees us from worry and we can play carefree. In the same way, as God's children, when we keep the Sabbath and rest, we are enjoying God's sovereign care. The Sabbath is meant to free us from worry so we can learn to play again.

## ***A Distorted Self-identity***

Another shadow that is common among missionaries is a distorted self-identity. This is especially true if we occupy an important professional role in a host country, or live on an economic scale that is higher than the people we serve. We might actually start thinking that we are innately more significant than others.

Sometimes, we feel like celebrities! Wherever we go, people always seem to treat us differently. Our church supporters often place us on pedestals while the people we serve might consider us elites. Some of us can be recognized anywhere in a large city or even in a whole country. I was genuinely worried that our young children were beginning to think they were royalty.

Power can also affect our self-identities in very subtle ways. In one research study it was found that whenever we have power, we



immediately begin judging others more strictly and ourselves more leniently. In other words, power tends to turn us into moral hypocrites. Our self-identity excuses us while causing us to hold others to a different standard (Joris Lammers et al., “Power Increases Hypocrisy: Moralizing in Reasoning, Immorality in Behavior” in *Psychological Science*, 2010, pp. 737-744).

In a similar way, when we lose power, such as when we leave a high-profile position, it can take months to feel normal again. We are no longer the important professional. We’re just back to being an “ordinary” disciple like anyone else. It can be easy to forget what it is like to just being a disciple without an important title.

From a spiritual standpoint, we can do several things to correct a distorted self-identity. Of course, we need to remind ourselves of our real identity: that God has adopted us and we belong to him. Besides this, we might also need to do something really radical to rebalance ourselves. For instance, after completing service in a position of power, we might voluntarily take on a position with less power. Instead of always being the important administrator, we might choose to go back to line work.

### **Healing Happens as we Develop Intimacy with God**

As missionaries, we are like actors who play a role. People expect us to be wise, encouraging and visionary and, to the best of our abilities, we try to live up to these expectations.

In reality, though, the public personas we project on stage are quite different from our private lives. As missionaries, we may feel disconnected between what we do and who we really are. Alone, we might find ourselves feeling confused and discouraged, or struggling with self-doubt and resentment. The soul-numbing pressures and demands of our jobs can cause us to grow out-of-touch with ourselves.

Added to this is the inherent capacity at self-deception with which we are all born and which just gets worse when we get busy — a deception that deludes us into thinking that all is well, even while our souls are withering inside us.

Inner healing comes to us through developing intimacy with God. This is another foundational principle of spiritual formation.

The word “intimacy” in English sounds like the words “into-me-see.” It reminds us of those tropical fish that are transparent. You can see all their little bones and intestines inside them. To be intimate with God, we have to be like those fish. We have to allow God to see inside of us. But we don’t like being those little fish. We don’t like having anyone see into us. We only allow ourselves to be vulnerable when we feel absolutely safe.

Zacchaeus in the tree could admit who he was only after he felt that Jesus loved him. It’s the same with us. Until we feel that God loves us and cares for us, we will find it difficult to be honest about ourselves.

So, spiritual formation requires us to be honest with what is inside us, but we will not be honest until we feel safe and loved. That is how spiritual formation works. And that is why spiritual formation writers place so much emphasis on the love of God.

The heart of spiritual formation is not doing spiritual disciplines and going on perpetual retreats. Rather, it is to bathe our souls in the love of God. To grow spiritually, the secret is to dwell on the love of God — filling our hearts and minds with it each day!

Be truly convinced in your heart that God is good and safe and loving. Realize that he understands you like a father or a mother. He knows all our strengths and weaknesses yet still cares for us. You can talk to him freely about anything. When we know that God loves us, it frees us and we can begin to experience inner healing.

### **The Good Side to the Shadow Side**

There is a good side to the shadow side. The deepest pain we feel often becomes the motivation that fuels our strongest drives. The point is not to deny our shadow side, but to have God redeem it so it can be used for his glory.

Our shadow side is intrinsic to us all. Just as we cannot outrun our own shadow on a sunny day, none of us can deny who we are. To do so would be to disown our own humanity. We are who we are, and God knows this. He understands our humanity and providentially shapes our personalities. God does not want us to be false to ourselves. Instead, he desires us to be honest about our

humanity and to allow his grace to transform us into something more honoring to him. God's grace does not change our personalities as much as it sanctifies who we are.

## ST GEORGE'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, TUNIS A BRIEF HISTORY

*Rev Dr Jos M. Strengtholt*

**Abstract:** This article describes some of the history of St George's Anglican Church in Tunis. I have so liberally used the few existent reports and histories<sup>1</sup> that they should be fully acknowledged from the very beginning of article. Given the interesting history of Tunis and its environment, any further, more serious, study of the role of the Anglicans and their mission in Tunis should be encouraged.

**Key Words:** Anglican Communion, Tunis, Episcopal Diocese of Egypt, London Jews Society, LJS, CMJ, ECJME.

### 1 Protestant Graveyard

St George's Anglican Church in Tunis is build on the location of the Protestant graveyard that was established on a plot of land that was supposedly donated to the British Consul Thomas Camption around the year 1645 by Tunis' ruler, Hammouda Bey (1631-1666). Hammouda was



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<sup>1</sup> 'Tunisia Report 2004: An Open Window at St. George's Church', [www.crosbieandwilma.com/tunisiareport.htm](http://www.crosbieandwilma.com/tunisiareport.htm) (20 December 2011); Denys Pringle, 'The Protestant Graveyard in Tunis: A Catalogue of the Inscriptions, 1648-1885', [www.stgeorgetunis.com/images/stories/Church/History/Graveyard-Pringle.pdf](http://www.stgeorgetunis.com/images/stories/Church/History/Graveyard-Pringle.pdf) (20 December 2011); Rt Rev Bill Musk, 'St George's Anglican Church, Tunis: A brief history' (unpublished paper, received 15 July 2011); *Church of England Newspaper* for March 30, 1961; *CMJ Quarterly* for April to June 1971; *North of the Sahara* CMJ Publication, n.d.; Denys Pringle, *An Expatriate Community in Tunis 1648-1885*, BAR International Series 1811, 2008.

given the title *pasha* in 1657 by the Ottoman Sultan, underlining Ottoman Suzerainty over Tunis at that time.

Ivor J Rawlinson, British Ambassador in Tunisia from 1999-2002, called the land grant 'legend' in his 'Historical Reflections on the Centenary of St George, Tunis, 1901-2001'. There are no historical records of the land grant extant. The dimness of our historical knowledge of the origins of the graveyard is underlined by the fact that the supposed time of the land grant predates the appointment of Campion as Consul in Tunis in 1655 by more than a decade.

The oldest tombstone dates from 1648. The first stone commemorates a Samuel [W]ebbe (or Cobbe?); the unfortunate man died when he was 21 years old. On the stone he is described in Latin as a *mercator anglicus*, an English merchant. Thirteen years later

Consul Campion was buried in the same graveyard.

The graveyard was, in accordance with Muslim custom, outside the walls of the medina, at the Carthage Gate. That was fairly close to where the foreign merchants lived. The majority of those buried in the cemetery were under 45 years old when they died. Even the



richest in Tunis were relatively short-lived. The largest contingent of Protestants buried before 1800 were from the United Kingdom, but the gravestones also list deceased from Portugal, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and France.

Those expatriates who lived in 17th century Ottoman Tunisia were used to seeing hundreds of Christian slaves in the city. They were usually brought in from others parts of the Ottoman Empire and converted to Islam. In the city were also the prisoners of the corsairs, sold into slavery in Tunis.

The Mediterranean in the 17th century was largely in the hands of pirates. Robbing European ships provided the Bey of Tunis with

good income. The corsairs ransomed anyone they could take captive. Their Christian prisoners, unless repatriated by Consuls or merchants, were kept in specially constructed prisons. There were several of those in Tunis. What is interesting is that the cemetery was used and accepted by locals as a refuge for escaped English Christian slaves on the run in Tunis. Hence its name in Arabic: “Bled Cheram” (place of refuge). Curiously, illegal immigrants still seek refuge there. The tradition persists.

One of the tombstones’ in St George’s cemetery has a skull and crossbones under the epitaph. These symbols on the grave of Marie Ronling, the Swedish Consul’s wife who died in 1766, do not refer to piracy but to freemasonry. A century later Henry Howard Haylock’s tombstone was erected, so the epitaph says, by his Masonic brethren.

There are 25 tombs from the 18th century when Tunis was slightly calmer and prosperous. A notable tomb from the period is of Richard Lawrence, British Consul General, born in 1668 in Cornwall and who died in 1750 aged 82 having served for no less than 38 years under three British sovereigns. Three other 18th Century British Consuls have their resting-place in the cemetery. One of them had the bright idea to fund the maintenance of the cemetery by demanding a cemetery upkeep tax of five piasters on all English ships arriving in the harbor.



The earliest reference to the cemetery's dedication to St George occurs in 1804 when the consuls of Britain, the United States, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands divided between them the cost of repairing its boundary wall.

Sir Thomas Reade, Consul General from 1824 to 1849, deserves special mention. In the spirit of the abolitionist movement which was sweeping through Europe, he persuaded Ahmed Bey in 1842 as his epitaph says, “to abolish slavery throughout his dominion” and give freedom to every slave. His remains were removed to England in the 1950s but a commemorative plaque in the church porch reproduces his full epitaph. Incidentally, Reade’s son, also called Thomas, took over as Consul from his father.

The most famous American of all commemorated at St George’s is John Howard Payne (died 1852), actor, playwright, poet and twice consul. He is the author of the song “Home, Sweet Home” and he is honoured by a cenotaph over two metres tall. He was given a public funeral, at Ahmed Bey’s insistence, and his coffin was escorted from Manouba to Tunis by a guard of honour. His remains were exhumed and transferred to Washington in 1883 for reburial there.

Nineteenth century Tunis had the largest European colony in the Maghreb in the early 1800s. St George’s cemetery reflects this. Twenty-seven of the 108 tombs are from the period 1800-1850. The last burial, according to the tombstones, dates from 1885, when the French were already in charge of Tunisia. During its last period, the cemetery had been managed by a committee of the British community in Tunis with some financial assistance from the British government.

## **2 St Augustine: First protestant church in Tunis**

According to the Rev Michael Russell, writing in the “History and Present Condition of the Barbary States” in 1835, the relatively few Protestants at that time in Tunis received the sacrament in a Greek church and made use of the services of Greek priests for marriages, baptisms and burials. A few years later, when the missionaries came to convert the Jews in Tunis, divine service was held in the missionaries’ house.

The English chaplaincy in Tunis started in 1860 by the Rev William Fenner, a missionary working with the Church Mission to the Jews (CMJ), also called the London Jews Society (LJS), who were responsible for the construction of Christ Church inside the Jaffa Gate, in Jerusalem. Anglican worship took place in private houses.

CMJ had begun its work in Tunis in 1833 at the hands of Dr Ferdinand Christian Ewald, a Hebrew Christian, who began a regular Sunday service. Ewald returned, ill, to England in 1841. Rev E. A. Page worked in Tunis 1853 to 1856 when he died of cholera. Rev William Fenner arrived in Tunis in 1860, re-opening a Boys School in 1861 and starting a Girls School 1862. He died of diphtheria in 1874. Rev E.B. Frankel superintended the work in Tunis until his retirement in 1881. Rev H.C. Riechardt followed Rev Frankel until 1888 when he was followed by Rev C. Frederick W. Flad.

By the 1870's the British community had grown considerably and in 1877, despite his Catholic persuasion, Sir Richard Wood obtained a site from the Bey or the municipality where a church structure was built, called St. Augustine. Among the British Embassy papers there is still a translation in English of a letter in Arabic in 1877 to Sir Richard Wood from Mohamed el Arabi Zarrouk, President of the Municipality of Tunis, agreeing to supply one meter of Zagouan water "to the Protestant church situated near the fish market". This was just outside the walls of the medina but some way away from the cemetery. It was on the west side of the Rue d'Espagne according to the map of 1878. Little is known about St Augustine's beyond that it was built with some sort of iron-frame by the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst the Jews—the official name of the LJS. Within 20 years it was demolished and the land was sold.

In the 1880's the municipality instructed Protestants (and Catholics) to use the new municipal cemetery for Europeans outside Bab al-Khadra - so no further burials were made in St George's cemetery from that time.

In March 1891, responsibility for the St George's cemetery and the church of St Augustine was passed to a new committee of St Augustine's church. The new committee consisted of a delegate from the bishop of Gibraltar, the chaplain and a member of the British community. Before taking on responsibility for the management of the cemetery, the committee requested that it first be put into a secure state. The British government made a financial contribution lasting four years. Then, on 4 December 1894, the British consul general, with the authorisation of the British foreign secretary, ap-



pointed three trustees to manage St Augustine's church and St George's cemetery:

Whereas certain persons hereinafter called the subscribers contributed divers sums of money for the building of an English Church at Tunis, named by them on its completion St Augustine's Church; and whereas the subscribers aforesaid expressly stipulated at a meeting held on the 21st May 1877 that the said church so erected by them be maintained and preserved as an English Episcopal Church for the celebration of the Established Church of England and for no other use, object or employment whatsoever [...] *The trustees are given responsibility for St Augustine's Church and for St George's Cemetery and express permission [...] even to sell this said land [the land on which stands St Augustine's Church], on condition, however, that in case of such sale the proceeds would be employed for the erection of a stone church in the grounds of St George's Cemetery or elsewhere.*

In accordance with the terms of the trust, the trustees subsequently sold St Augustine's church and its site and used the proceeds plus other donations to build a new church on the site of the cemetery.

The Embassy papers contain an even more intriguing letter of 14 January 1887 from the Bishop of Gibraltar, writing from Algiers, to the Rev Reichardt which hints at serious problems about the status of St Augustine's and to whom it belonged. The Bishop regrets that there had been friction and ill-feeling between the Consulate and the Rev Reichardt about this. He recognised the value of the vicar's long and gratuitous services, but wrote, "I cannot for a moment admit that you have any personal or exclusive right in the guardianship of the Church or its title deeds. Both of these should be in my possession", or that of the Consul whom the Bishop had appointed as his representative. The Bishop formally requested the vicar deliver over the key and the title deeds to the Consul. He regretted that the vicar had discontinued to hold services in St Augustine's, and said a committee of three trustees should be appointed to regulate the affairs of the church: the Consul, the Chaplain and a member of the congregation. Finally, the Bishop dismissed the vicar's request that the congregation should pay the full wages of his servant.

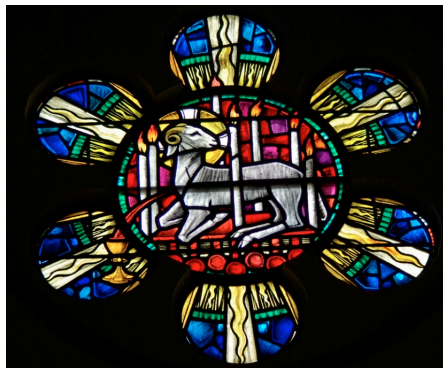
It is not entirely surprising to discover such goings on in the community at this time. The powerful, dominant Sir Richard Wood was a master of intrigue. When he was unceremoniously retired by the Foreign Office in 1879 at the age of 73, his place was taken by Thomas Reade who was described as “weak and negligent, asleep most afternoons outside the cafes” in what is now Avenue de France. Reade evidently had let church affairs slide.

### 3 St George's Church

A manuscript in the British Embassy shows that a stone church in the grounds of St George's cemetery was being considered even in 1894. The building of St George's took place between 1899 and 1901, on the site of part of the old cemetery. The Protestant section of the new European Cemetery at Bab-el-Khadra was already in use. Those tombs at St George's cemetery that had to be disturbed had their headstones affixed to the walls of the cemetery.

Money for construction of the church was raised by the Rev Cameron Flad, the vicar. Born in Abyssinia of German-Scots missionary parents, he lived in Tunis from 1888-1914, employed by the Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews. He raised not only enough money from the sale of the site of St Augustine's and from elsewhere to build the church but also to build two schools nearby, one for boys and one for girls, together with a residence for the missionary-teachers and a residence for himself. He lost both his wife and child in an epidemic before the First World War.

Because of his half-German ancestry, he was forced to leave his church and the area when the First World War broke out. The local authorities were suspicious then about all the work being done by the missionary-teachers and were threatening to requisition the whole Mission. A British successor was quickly found to continue





the Rev Flad's work and the new vicar's first task was to deal with local attempts to sequester the church and the church house.

The new church, of cut stone, was modeled on the English church at Patras, in the Greek Peloponnese. The architect/engineer was a certain J E Baldaull, though the signature on the plan is indistinct. The church, which seats 100, is built of cut stone in Gothic style and consists of chancel, nave, porch and vestry. On raised land well above street level, it is built to last. The foundations are of concrete to a depth of 2-1/2 metres. The height from the ground to the top of the cross on the belfry is 15.8 metres. It possesses a fine belfry but has never had a bell.

The first sermon in the church was the Memorial Service to Queen Victoria who died in 1901. The pulpit, made of local Chemtou marble, was erected in 1902 in memory of three former missionary clergy of LJS (now known as the CMJ).

The five stained-glass windows in the church are of different periods. The two oldest, depicting saints, are in the nave on the side by which one enters the church. No documentation has been seen concerning these windows. Beside them is a window donated by a mother in memory of her only son, Donald Anderson, who died at Medjez El Bab in 1943. This beautiful window is most unusual for its military detail -- mine detector, uniform, etc. It was installed in 1950.

The three splendid windows (triforium) behind the altar were in-



stalled in 1961 and today are perhaps the great feature of St George's. They depict or name leading figures of the first Christian era in nearby Carthage: St Cyprian and St Augustine as well as the two female Christian martyrs, St Felicitas and St Perpetua who refused to renounce their faith and were thrown to the wild beasts in the Roman amphitheatre.

#### **4 The Mission to the Jews and its schools**

The beginnings of St George's were closely linked to the already mentioned London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, aka LJS, aka CMJ. St George's is located right beside the old Jewish quarter (El Hafsia) where a succession of Protestant clergy went about their missionary work from 1833 onwards.

There were an estimated 15,000 Jews in the Hafsia at that time. The two schools were started in 1861 and 1862 in rented buildings before moving into purpose-built premises in Place des Potiers in 1910. The building is still a school and there is still a residual link with St George's. The schools were founded by the Rev William Fenner. He did not have an easy time of it. His tombstone at St George's records "his peculiarly trying missionary labours amongst the House of Israel". Teachers today would find the conditions imposed on their predecessors at the Missionary schools unbelievably harsh. A 1931 contract form in the St George's archives shows that if the teachers did not learn Arabic or French "within a reasonable time" they were dismissed. They could not change their accommodation without the agreement of the Head of the Mission. Permission to marry had to be sought from the Mission and anyone who married without permission would be considered as having resigned. After four years a teacher would qualify for a return to Britain for the summer holidays, second class! An average of 200 children at a time were taught in their own special Judeo-Arabic language and French and Hebrew until the Six-Day War of 1967 when most Jews left Tunisia.

There was a Bible Depot adjoining St George's from which bibles and brochures were freely distributed until it was burned by a mob in 1967. The vicar had to lead his wife and children to safety through the same mob. First, however, he buried a quantity of bi-

bles in the churchyard where no doubt they still are. This was the time when the British Embassy not far away in Place de la Victoire, was attacked and set alight by angry crowds forcing the staff to flee across the rooftops. The Church Mission to the Jews finally withdrew from Tunisia in 1970.

## **5 Second World War**

The church records show that St George's had to close from November 1942 to May 1943 during the German occupation of Tunis. The English and Jewish connections made St George's, the Mission, and those who worked there too easy a target. The vicar at the time, the Rev Isaac Dunbar, went into hiding. However, after the liberation of Tunis the church was much used by the British Armed Forces, to the extent that it acquired the title "The Westminster Abbey of North Africa". Rev Dunbar acted as chaplain to the British Forces and did great work for which he was awarded the MBE in 1944. Some 300 men were confirmed there during those years. Many memorials line the walls of the church placed there by British regiments that saw action and lost men in what was to be the last part of the North African campaign and the turning point of the war.

The RAF and the First Army have their own plaques. The roll call of army regiments is sonorous and still very meaningful to many veterans -the Hampshires, the First Parachute Brigade, the Coldstream Guards, the Scots Guards, the Royal Artillery, the Royal Tank Regiment, 4th Indian Division, the Household Division, the Queen's Lancashire Regiment, the Grenadier Guards, the Welsh Guards, the Yorkshire Light Infantry, the Royal Armoured Corps, the Irish Guards, Sixth Armoured Division. Veterans of the Second World War still come in pilgrimage to the battlefields and the eight war cemeteries in Tunisia where 9,702 Commonwealth war dead are commemorated.

Remembrance services, usually officiated by the vicar of St George's, are held at one of the Commonwealth War Graves Cemeteries in the open air. For the past years the Remembrance Services have been attended by over 500 people each time. There is no way that that number of people would fit into St George's. Services have

been held at St George's commemorating the lives of Kings (George I and George VI), Queens (Victoria), Presidents (Eisenhower and Kennedy) and a Prime Minister (Sir Winston Churchill) as well as the Princess of Wales.

## **6 Finance and status**

St George's depends almost entirely on congregational offerings for its upkeep, preservation and the maintenance of the vicar or pastor. There is no endowment or accumulated fund. The land was gifted to the British Crown and both it and the Church building are technically the property of the British Government who, however, accepts no financial responsibility for either. The Church House is a separate property owned by a company registered in Tunisia. The British Government has vested its responsibilities, including possession of the property and its proper use, in trustees, one of whom is the British Ambassador or his nominee. There are, or can be, up to five other trustees including, of course, the vicar or pastor and the Chairman of the Parish Council. In practice today it is the Parish Council that takes day-to-day operating decisions. The trustees meet if needed for decisions within their responsibility. Two small shops and an apartment in Rue Mongi Slim also belong to St George's and produce a very small rental income.

## **7 St George's today**

Since the last World War, there have been one or two periods when St George's has been without a vicar and when the congregation has dwindled. This is not surprising. Most of the congregation today lives ten miles or more from the Church and finds it difficult to get to. Indeed, for a time services were held in the American School outside the city. Presently, the congregation of about 250 adults consists mostly of African worshippers.

St George's is Anglican and comes within the diocese of Egypt with North Africa, Ethiopia and Somalia, but the church congregation comprises a kaleidoscope of believers. Many have young children for whom there is a Sunday School in Church House on Sunday mornings. And there are, of course, other regular and ad hoc activities throughout the year.

The Right Reverend Mouneer Hanna Anis is the bishop of the diocese, and as such he represents the diocese and all the Episcopal or Anglican churches under his jurisdiction before the governments of the countries of this region, including St George's in Tunis. Property and church buildings belonging to the Episcopal or Anglican Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa are administered by the diocese which is legally responsible for such properties before the legal authorities in each country. Serving under Bp Anis as assistant bishops are the Rt Rev Bill Musk, who is also the pastor of St George's, and the Rt Rev Grant Le Marquand, who was ordained bishop on April 25<sup>th</sup> of 2012 in Cairo. Le Marquand will have responsibility over the diocesan churches and institutions in the Horn of Africa.

This diocese itself is one of four dioceses that form the Anglican province called The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East. The other three dioceses are the Diocese of Jerusalem, the Diocese of Iran, and the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf States. In 1974 The Sudan became its own province within the world-wide Anglican Communion.

### **8 Chaplains/Ministers of St George's Anglican Church**

1901-1914 Rev Cameron Frederick W. Flad  
1914-1933 Rev H.C. Burrough; 1933-1936 Rev L.F. Rice  
1938-1956 Ven Isaac Dunbar  
1960-1967 Rev Ron W. Oswald  
1968-1969 Ven Isaac Dunbar  
1970-1971 Rev Basil Pitt  
1972-1978 Rev Derek Eaton  
1978-1982 Rev Russell Avery  
1982-1986 Rev Dan Sealy  
1987-1992 Rev Patrick Blair  
1992-1993 Rev Don Church (interim)  
1993-1995 Rev Paul-Gordon Chandler  
1997?-1998 Rev Howard Morton  
1999-2000 Rev Geoff Holt  
2000-2007 Rev Gerald Brulotte  
2008- Rt Rev Dr Bill Musk



## THE SONG AT THE SEA: A HEBREW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE ON OTHER RELIGIONS

*By Salaam Corniche*

At the March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Evangelical Missions Society meeting, a paper was presented by Mark Harlan where he approvingly quoted another scholar who stated, “Abraham remained within the Canaanite religious system.”<sup>1</sup> Further proof for this statement came by suggesting that the “patriarchs worshipped at or near traditional Canaanite shrines.”<sup>2</sup> These quotes were a part of Harlan’s stated objective to “offer fresh perspective from the angle of an Old Testament theology of religions, so as to discover theological foundations that might support insider movements among least-reached peoples.”

In a word, Harlan’s paper would lead one to believe that he has adopted a view of religions that sees them as rather harmless. Harlan is not alone in this view, as it has been widely adopted by pluralists, inclusivists and proponents of the Insider Movement. A common theme through these writings is appeals to the likes of Abraham, Melchizedek, Jethro, Rahab, and Naaman as champions of the view that the “Old Testament infers that there are some constructive things that Israel could appropriate or learn from these religions.”<sup>3</sup>

In this paper I would like to challenge Harlan’s position by using “The Song at the Sea” from Exodus 15 as an example. This song which has been called the “earliest victory psalm” will be

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Harlan, “Old Testament Foundations for Insider Movements,” presented to the Evangelical Missions Society at Biola University, March 16, 2012, p. 6. Here he is citing Carroll Stuhlmueller’s *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 3. For another view on Abraham and his relationship to Canaanite religion see “The Call of Abraham: Beginning of a pilgrim movement (part I)” in the *St Francis Magazine* 7:5 (Dec 2011), pp. 1-28 by this author. There it is asserted that building altars to Yahweh in proximity to Canaanite altars constituted a declaration of war on them.

<sup>3</sup> Harlan, Ibid, p. 1.



shown to be a commentary on the uniqueness of YHWH, an in-depth portrayal of other religions—both Egyptian and Canaanite—and a source of identity formation of the newly liberated children of Israel.

As much as the word “polemic” has gone out of vogue, it will be the finding of this paper that the first 15 chapters of Exodus constitute an extended polemic against Egyptian religion, and this serves as a model for a Biblical view of other religions.

### 1. Polemical Theology

The Egyptologist and Bible scholar, John Currid, in his commentary on Genesis helps us to understand that, just because a Near-Eastern thought form has been used by a Biblical writer, he has not necessarily espoused the philosophies behind it. ‘Au contraire,’ says Currid. The writers had quite another agenda, and he calls this “polemical theology.” This is done, he suggests by “the act of the biblical author in using thought-forms and stories common in ancient Near-Eastern culture and filling them with radically new meaning.”<sup>4</sup> Examples that Currid shows from the Biblical writers include the creation account, the rod and snake incident in Exodus, as well as the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, the phrase “thus says YHWH” and the “strong arm.”<sup>5</sup> Each of these is used to demonstrate, as Currid relates, “the essential distinctions between Old Testament teachings and those of the ancient Near East.” Although we could multiply examples of other polemics such the creation story against Marduk of Bablylon, the story of Dagon in I Samuel and the confrontation of Elijah and the Baal prophets, this paper will only examine those found in Exodus.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John D. Currid. *Genesis 1:1-25:18*. (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2003), p. 43

<sup>5</sup> The writer is aware that “the King of Egypt” is more precise description than is the word Pharaoh but this paper will use the two interchangeably.

<sup>6</sup> See Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu. *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*. (Grand Rapids, MI : Zondervan, 2007), S. 177, 374, 546, 695, 746

## 2. Examples from Exodus

James Hoffmeier, another Egyptologist, carefully examined many of the Biblical texts in Exodus and made the cogent observation that the writer had made extensive use of “Hebrew derivations or counterparts to Egyptian expressions that symbolized Egyptian royal power” for polemical use. “What better way” he asks, was there to describe “God’s victory over Pharaoh?”<sup>7</sup> These statements serve to illuminate the declaration of YHWH to show his absolute and unique sovereignty when he told Moses in Exodus 12:12:

“For I will pass throughout the land of Egypt during this night, and I will slay every firstborn throughout the land of Egypt—from man to beast; and upon all of the "gods" of Egypt I will [continually, frequently, re-continue to] execute judgments. I am the LORD [Ex. 12:12]<sup>8</sup>

This was not just a declaration of bravado. It happened, for we read retrospectively in Numbers 33: 3-4 that:

“The Israelites set out from Rameses on the fifteenth day of the first month, the day after the Passover. They marched out boldly in full view of all the Egyptians, who were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had struck down among them; for the LORD had brought judgments upon their gods.”

It was this very judgment that had caused the fear of YHWH to reach to the surrounding nations, and which we will observe in the latter part of Exodus 15. It was Rahab herself who declared:

"I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the wa-

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<sup>7</sup> James K. Hoffmeier, "The Arm of God versus the Arm of Pharaoh in the Exodus Narratives," *Biblica* 67 (1986), p.387.

<sup>8</sup> Robert K. Kilpatrick, "Against the gods of Egypt: An examination of the narrative of the ten plagues in the light of Exodus 12:12" (PhD: Discs. Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1995). See his pp.67-71 for his defense of the verb having a frequentive or continuative force. Interestingly Terence Fretheim observes that in the plague narratives the word "all," (Heb k<sup>l</sup>) is pervasive and is used over fifty times in his "The plagues as ecological signs of historical disaster," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 110 no 3 (Fall 1991), p. 386.

ter of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." (Jos 2:8-11)

Each of the above verses highlights "the LORD" or YHWH as supreme. Four examples from the early chapters of Exodus will highlight this declaration.<sup>9</sup>

### ***2.1 "Thus says..."***

In Exodus 5:1 Moses, as Yahweh's authorized spokesman, says to the King of Egypt, "Thus says... the LORD, the God of Israel..." As innocuous as it might sound to modern ears, this was an invitation to a contest of sovereignty by Moses speaking for Yahweh. The Egyptians were well familiar with similar words from the *Book of the Dead* where Atum, the father of the gods, frequently said, "Thus says Atum..." The Pharaoh, who was said to be the "Son of Atum" and his incarnation on earth, knew exactly what Moses was saying.<sup>10</sup>

His response in v. 2 is predictable. "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go." Further to that, he adds in v. 10, "Thus says Pharaoh..." In his arrogance which will be recounted at the Song by the Sea (15:9) he is telling this 'intruder' Yahweh, who is the God worthy only of slaves, that he can 'take a hike.' His words will come to haunt him as like it or not, he will come to "know" who Yahweh is.

### ***2.2 The rod and snake incident***

Into the court of the King of Egypt walk Moses and Aaron. On his crown was the symbol of the 'uraeus' or the spitting cobra representing the goddess Wadjet who was the source of his power, and

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<sup>9</sup> Space does not permit a discussion of the polemical nature of the 10 plagues.

<sup>10</sup> For example the King of Egypt, Tutankhamen's name means "*the Living Statue of Amun*"—a supreme Egyptian deity like Atum.

ability to strike terror into the heart of his enemies.<sup>11</sup> With a symbolism that could only be interpreted as ‘throwing down the gauntlet’ Moses throws down his rod and it turned into the symbol of Pharonic power. As much as the Egyptian magicians replicated the feat by their magic arts, they could not have anticipated the final symbolic act where the serpent-like rod of Moses swallowed up the serpent-like rod of Pharaoh. In a word, this was a declaration of war in a land where, as Currid observed, “the deity with the most magic was regarded as the supreme god.”<sup>12</sup> Would it be YHWH or the gods of Egypt incarnated in Pharaoh who would be sovereign?

The irony of the story is all the more potent when one realizes that the Hebrew word for swallow used in Exodus 7:12 is the same word that the Song by the Sea (Exodus 15:12) uses for the sea swallowing up the Egyptian army. The proud “eater” who said he would “fill his appetite” with his prey (Ex. 15:9) gets eaten. The exodus motif of swallowing is not lost on Paul who speaks of death being swallowed up in victory (I Cor 15:54—where the same word is used in the Gk translation of Ex. 7:12, 15:12). The same rod which God used to persuade a dubious Moses of his calling (Ex 4:2) is used to declare YHWH’s sovereignty in the court of Pharaoh and is raised just before the inundation of Exodus 14. Little wonder it is called “the staff of God” (Ex. 4:20).

### ***2.3 The strong arm***

When Amenhotep II (1447-1421 BC), a possible Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus, described himself for time immemorial he called himself “Horus [one of the gods of Egypt] of Gold; Carrying off and gaining power over all lands; King of Upper and Lower Egypt; the Son of Re [the Sun God]; Lord of the Strong Arm; Amenhotep-the God-Ruler of Heliopolis, given life forever...like Montu [the god of war] adorned with his equipment...”<sup>13</sup> The epithet

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<sup>11</sup> John D. Currid, ‘The Egyptian Setting of the “Serpent”: Confrontation in Exodus 7, 8-13’ *Biblische Zeitschrift* ns 39 no 2 (1995), pp. 203-4.

<sup>12</sup> Currid, *Genesis*, p. 45

<sup>13</sup> James Pritchard. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Related to the Old Testament*. Princeton University Press, 1974, p. 245. “The Asiatic Campaigning of Amen-hotep II. It is outside of the scope of this paper to enter into the debate of a mid 1400’s BC

“strong arm,” as James Hoffmeier observes, figured strongly into the Pharonic self-descriptions. Amenhotep II describes a victorious battle in which “not a single one was with his majesty, except for himself with his strong arm.”<sup>14</sup>

Examples throughout Egyptian history could be multiplied. The upraised arm of a victorious Pharaoh subduing his enemies is a common pictorial scene.<sup>15</sup> Even in the Armana letters (written to the Pharaohs Amernhotep III and Akhenaten between 1390-1340 BC)<sup>16</sup> the king of Jerusalem sees that his power is derivative, namely that it came from the “strong arm of Pharaoh.”

After the exodus, Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, makes an observation that is frequently seen in the Pentateuch. Yahweh’s arm is the most powerful. He states:

Blessed be Yahweh who rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh. Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all the gods (Ex 18:10-11).

This image of the “strong arm” (cf. Ex 3:19-20; 6:1; 7:4; 15,16; etc.) is a figure for both judgment and salvation in the Song by the Sea. Yahweh’s arm destroys his enemies (vv 6, 12), intimidates his foes (v 16) and builds up his people (v 17).

## ***2.4 The hardened heart***

The *Papyrus of Ani* gives us insight into the importance of maintaining a heart which was light in weight when approaching the final judgment. A certain Ani’s heart was to be weighed in the balance

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(i.e. 1447/6) or later date (ca. 1270-1260 BC) for the Exodus. That it happened, and why it happened will be the focus of this paper. A search for articles authored by Bryant Wood, Douglas Petrovich, and James Hoffmeier will yield a wealth of arguments for and against each date. Perhaps the most nuanced treatment can be found in J.H. Walton’s “Exodus, The Date of” pp. 258-270, in T. Desmond T. Alexander and David W. Baker eds. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003). Also see Charles Dyer, “The Date of the Exodus Reexamined,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (1983), pp. 225-43.

<sup>14</sup> James K. Hoffmeier, “The Arm of God versus the Arm of Pharaoh in the Exodus Narratives,” *Biblica* 67 (1986), pp. 378-387.

<sup>15</sup> See [www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/history18-20.htm#Amenhotepii](http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/history18-20.htm#Amenhotepii) with images of Rameses II and III subduing their enemies.

<sup>16</sup> According to Hoffmeier

against a feather's weight of truth and righteousness and, if it failed, Ani was to be sent to the goddess named "The Devouress."<sup>17</sup>

John Currid has shown that the Egyptian words for hardening a heart and making it heavy have a relationship not unlike what we would see as a "heart of stone" being more heavy than a live heart.<sup>18</sup> Thus he concludes that the making heavy of Pharaoh's heart by Yahweh was a double-whammy. First, it showed that Pharaoh was merely a pawn in the hands of a much greater power and secondly, to the Egyptian reader, it foreshadowed certain destruction for the Pharaoh in the after-life.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.5 Summary

Only one versed in the manners and customs of Egypt (Acts 7:22) as Moses was, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, could craft such a polemic against the deities of Egypt using their own thought constructs. This does not even account for the polemical nature of the plagues which showed beyond a doubt that Pharaoh, the upholder of balance in the created order—called Ma'at—had failed miserably; the fact that the drowning of the Egyptians took place at "the break of day" (14:27) when Re was said to be at his strongest due to his resurrection after the night, and the fact that the destroying angel was sent on his commission at midnight (11:4) just at the time when according to Egyptian mythology "the judgment of souls took place."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Currid, "Snake," pp. 218-219.

<sup>18</sup> John Currid, "Why Did God Harden Pharaoh's Heart?" *Bible Review* 9 no 6 (1993) pp. 48-49. Also Dorian Coover Cox, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Its Literary and Cultural Contexts," *Bibliotheca sacra*, 163 no 651 (Jl-S 2006), pp. 292-311. In the Bible sin is seen as heavy (Isa. 1:4; 24:20) and the Lord weighs hearts (Prov. 21:2; cf. 16:2).

<sup>19</sup> Matthew McAfee describes the various verbs used to describe the process whereby "Pharaoh or Yahweh makes/causes the heart to become strong/stronger, heavy/heavier, or hard/harder" in his "The Heart of Pharaoh in Exodus 4-15," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20 3 (2010), pp. 353.

<sup>20</sup> E.A. Wallis Budge, a prolific writer on Ancient Egypt, noted that "according to the *Book of Gates* and the *Book Am Tuat* the judgment of souls took place at midnight each day, and those who had treated the god [in this case Osiris] with contempt during their lives and had been his declared enemies, then received their punishment," in his *A Short History of the Egyptian People: With Chapters on Their*

### 3. The Song at the Sea<sup>21</sup>

#### 3.1 General overview of Exodus 15:1-21

At what some have called the mid-point of the book of Exodus, we find a song or 'shirah' which ties both halves of the book together. The first part of the song serves as a retrospective of the events of the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt (vv. 1-12), then there is a hinge verse (v. 13), and then the rest of the song anticipates the movement of the chosen people towards the Promised Land (vv. 14-21).<sup>22</sup> The key figure is Yahweh, who is shown in the first part by his power to save and in the second part by his power to lead his people. Both halves of the song also serve as a polemic against foreign gods, as we will see. Finally, the song also serves to encapsulate the beginning of the accomplishment of the promises to the patriarchs, and an anticipation of a yet fuller completion. Robert Shreckhise diagrams it in the way as shown on next page.<sup>23</sup>

#### 3.2 A closer look

Prior to examining the song in more detail, it should be noted that the song has been subjected to rigorous analysis from many vantage points. Its genre, whether poetry or psalm or victory song, has been discussed.<sup>24</sup> Its structure and relationship to other Near-

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*Religion, Daily Life, Etc.* (1914, reprinted by Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2007), p. 176.

<sup>21</sup> This description of the song is suggested by Robert Shreckhise who is convinced that the song was a spontaneous act of worship at the sea-side just after their miraculous deliverance in his "'I Will Sing unto the Lord": A Rhetorical-Narrative Analysis of the Poem in Exodus 15.1-21 (PhD dissertation, Concordia Seminary, St Louis, 2006). He follows the titles of Jewish scholars such as Judah Goldin (1971) and Alan Mintz (1981) and who use the same phrase in the titles of their respective works.

<sup>22</sup> The writer is well aware of the scholarly discussions as to whether v. 18 marks the formal end of the song.

<sup>23</sup> Shreckhise, p. 196.

<sup>24</sup> As for genre, the song has been characterized as a hymn (Fohrer), enthronement psalm (Mowinckel), litany (Beer, Muilenburg), victory psalm (Cross-Freedman), hymn and thanksgiving psalm (Noth). Cited by Richard D. Patterson, "The Song of Redemption," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 57 no 2 (Fall 1995), p. 454. Patterson concurs with Hauser who noted five common features to Exodus 15:1-18

Eastern texts has been suggested.<sup>25</sup> Its authorship, age, and relationship or supposed non-relationship to the surrounding narrative material has been examined. Translation issues of verb tenses for the song have been wrangled over, and the meanings of individual phrases and key words have formed significant studies.<sup>26</sup>

This paper will limit itself in many ways by focusing on the rhetorical nature of the song, and will follow the suggestion of Shreckhise whose thesis examines the song as a whole, in the context of Exodus, and in the context of the Pentateuch. Additionally, however, we will continue the theme of allusions to Egypt, and to a smaller degree to Canaan which figures in the second part of the song and show its polemical nature.

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and Judges 5 in demonstrating that both are victory songs: "(a) a focusing on the specific name of Israel's God, (b) the application of specific terms or phrases to God and or a description of God's role in the victory, (c) a description of God's use of the forces of nature to give Israel the victory, (d) the mocking of the enemy, and (e) a description of the enemy's fall," in his "Victory at sea: prose and poetry in Exodus 14-15," *Bibliotheca sacra*, 161 no 641 (Ja-Mr 2004), p. 48. It has been noted by Peter Jung-chu Wu that themes common to "new song" psalms [33, 40, 96, 98, 144, and 149] and the song of Exodus 15 include: "singing," "joy," "war," "redemption," "creation," "victory," "judgment," and "ascription of divine attributes" in his "Worthy is the lamb: The new song in Revelation 5:9-10 in relation to its background," (Phd Diss: Westminster Seminary, 2005), p. 103.

<sup>25</sup> Structurally it has been declared to have four (Kaiser), three (Cassuto, Freedman, Muilenburg), or two (Childs, Howell) stanzas. Some have found allusions to Ugaritic texts and the Baal Cycle songs within, but not all are convinced.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Shreckhise, "The problem of finite verb translation in Exodus 15.1-18," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 32 no 3 (Mr 2008), pp. 287-310 identifies the use of the Prophetic Perfect, the Sinai Provenance and the Dual Perspective Model. Casper Labuschagne's study identifies the song as the first of 10 examples of "embedded poetry" outside of the Psalms and notes key words such as water and YHWH, reviews the literature on structure, and provides word count analyses in his "The Song at the Reed Sea in Exodus 15 — Logotechnical Analysis (2007). [www.labuschagne.nl/1.exod15.pdf](http://www.labuschagne.nl/1.exod15.pdf) (Accessed 2012/03/04); also his "Embedded Poetry" [www.labuschagne.nl/intro.embed.pdf](http://www.labuschagne.nl/intro.embed.pdf) (Accessed 2012/03/04)



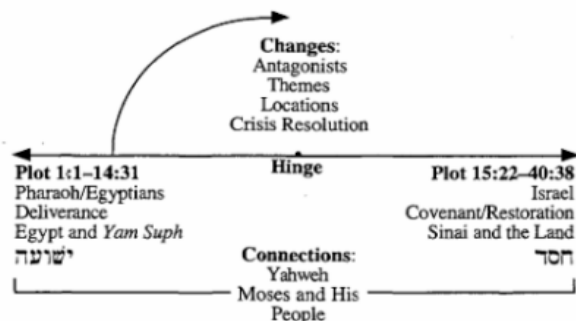


Figure 26. Bipartite Character of the Narrative

### 3.3 *Promises made, promises delivered*

With a dramatic foreshadowing, the author of Exodus introduces us to a Pharaoh “who did not know Joseph” and who worries about the demographics of his Israelite visitors.<sup>27</sup> He says, “....if war breaks out, [they] will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country” (Ex 1:10). What he failed to realize is that Yahweh the mighty warrior would join the Israelites to become an enemy to Egypt (cf. 14:14), as we have seen with the serpent-rod confrontation that Yahweh would fight for them, and that they would leave the country. It was a later generation of hand-picked warrior Egyptians, whose chariot wheels were getting bogged down in the mud, who knew they were out-gunned and said: “Let's get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt” (Ex. 14:25).

The Egyptian observation showed that Yahweh had been true to his promises which he had spoken to Moses and to the patriarchs before him:

"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being

<sup>27</sup> Also called the “Pharaoh of the oppression” and opinions on his identity range from Sesostri III, Amuntotep I and so forth.

slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.” (Ex 6:6-8)

### 3.4 *The main idea*

Following the narrative of Exodus 14 which is a climax of a demonstration of Yahweh’s mighty power to judge Egypt, and its confidence in its deities, and to save a rag-tag bunch of slaves for His own glory only, we come to the song of worship. As with any song or poem put to music, we will be careful to note that it serves more to encapsulate a main idea than it does to give us line by line news reporting of the facts as they happen. The main idea comes from the song itself with the words: “The LORD will reign for ever and ever” (Ex 15:18).<sup>28</sup> That is to say, He is a King who is in covenant with His people, with the name I AM WHO I AM, and with an eternal rule. (cf. Deut. 33:5; Pss. 47:6; 99:4; 100:3; 145:1; Isa. 40:10; 43:15; 44:6; 52:7-10).<sup>29</sup> As a consequence He is beyond comparison with any ruler including Pharaoh and the Canaanite princes, and any of their so-called deities. Patrick Miller put it this way: “The

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<sup>28</sup> Recall the self description of many Kings of Egypt who described their rule as forever: Amenhotep II—“Amen-hotep-the God-Ruler of Heliopolis, given life forever”; Thutmose III—“Enduring of Kingship, like Re in Heaven...Majestic of Appearances, Mighty of Strength... living forever” Ramesses:



” The good god, great king, son of Re, Ramses, living forever. One of the Pyramid texts (Hymn 571) describes the so-called immortality of the King of Egypt: “the King is an Imperishable Star, son of the sky-goddess who dwells in the Mansion of Selket. Ra has taken this King to himself to the sky so that this King may live, just as he who enters into the west of the sky lives when he goes up in the east of the sky.”

<sup>29</sup> Philip C. Stine in his article, “Biblical Poetry and Translation” suggests that the main theme(s) of this poem is, “I will praise the Lord greatly because he overthrew the forces of Egypt in the sea with great power, thereby saving his people whom he then lead to the promised land and established in the sanctuary he created,” in *Meta: Translators' Journal*, vol. 32, n° 1, (1987), p. 72.

hymns of Israel stand in service of the central theological claim of the Old Testament, that the Lord of Israel alone is God and requires the full devotion of all creation..."<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. A sketch of the song

Richard Patterson proposes a structure for the song which serves to demonstrate that Yahweh the Invincible is the theme of the song, and this is demonstrated by repetition, puns on words, irony, and themes of upward movement ascribed to Him, and downward movement ascribed to His enemies. In two words, it is about power and victory.

##### I. Prelude (1b-2)

###### A. Exordium (1b)

###### B. Opening confesion/praise (2)

##### II. Singing the Song (3-16)

###### A. First movement: The victory at the Re(e)d

###### Sea (3-5)

\*\*Hinging refrain—in praise of Yahweh's invincibility (6)

###### B. Second movement: The vindication of God's sovereignty (7-10)

###### 1. Over his enemy (7)

###### 2. Over the enemy's plans (8-10)

\*\*Hinging refrain—in praise of Yahweh's incomparability (11)

###### C. Third movement: The vigor of God's activity (12-16a)

###### 1. As a powerful God of redemption (12-13)

###### 2. As a fearsome God of rebuke (14-16a)

\*\*Hinging refrain—in praise of Yahweh's intervention (16)

##### III. Postlude (17-18)

###### A. Promise: God will return his people to his land and theirs (17)

###### B. Praise: May God (God will) reign forever (18)<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Patrick D. Miller Jr., "Enthroned on the Praises of Israel": The Praise of God in Old Testament Theology," *Interpretation* vol 3-9 no. 1 5-19 (January 1985), p. 19.

With just a slight modification as to the center hinge point, Robert Shreckhise provides a diagram to show the overall structure of the song.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4.1 *The text of the song*

Robert Shreckhise's translation of the text is in bold letters with explanatory words non-bolded.<sup>33</sup> Comments have been kept to a minimum to let the power of the text speak for itself.

v. 1 **Then**, that is to say, just after the miraculous deliverance portrayed in chapter 14, and as a consequence of that, **Moses and the Israelites sang this song to Yahweh**<sup>34</sup> **and they said**, 'I am about to declare my intention to the fact that I **will** indeed **sing** both to and about the exploits **of Yahweh**. **For**<sup>35</sup>, or on account of the fact that **he has certainly prevailed**.<sup>36</sup> **Horse**, that is the war horses pulling the chariots, **and its rider** or driver, **he has cast**, or thrown or hurled with a downward movement, **into the sea**.<sup>37</sup>

v. 2 **My strength and song**, or my strong song **is Yah**,

<sup>31</sup> Patterson, p. 453.

<sup>32</sup> Shreckhise, *Thesis*, p. 199.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. pp. 53-113. Gives credit where credit is due with a noted admiration for William Propp's close reading of the text and keen sense of observation for plays on words, puns, ambiguities, assonance etc. in his *Exodus 1-18* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

<sup>34</sup> This is the first of 11 occurrences of the Divine name in the song (1a, 1b, 3a, 3b, 6a, 6c, 11b, 16f, 17d, 18a, 19b).

<sup>35</sup> Also known as a motivation clause, this small word 'for' is a cue for a hymn that will follow. Compare Psalm 33:3-4 (...Sing to Him a new song...for the word of the Lord is upright); Ps 96:1-2, 4-5; Ps 98:1, 9; Psalm 149:4; Isa 44:23; 49:13; 52:9 and 54:1 cf. Revelation 5:9

<sup>36</sup> The NET Bible suggests the following possibilities: "he is highly exalted" or "he has done majestically" or "he is gloriously glorious." Propp renders this phrase as "for he acted exaltedly, exaltedly!" (p. 463). Maribeth Howell renders the same as "he is gloriously triumphant" in her "Exodus 15:1b-18: a poetic analysis," *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses*, 65 no 1 (1989), p. 17.

<sup>37</sup> Propp (p. 510) notes the alliterative effect of the Hebrew text:

gā-'ō(h) gā-'ā(h) 'acted exaltedly, exaltedly ...  
rōk'eb rā-mā(h) his driver he hurled. '

**and he has become, Salvation for my advantage or for me.** <sup>38</sup>

**This,** that is to say “THIS ONE” and no other **is my God**  
**and I will praise,** that is to uplift or adorn with praises **him,**  
**my father's God and I will exalt or extol him.**

v. 3 **Yahweh is a man of war** or a warrior,

**Yahweh is his name** or the way he identifies himself

v. 4 **Pharaoh's chariots and his army,**

**He threw into the sea.**

**And his select** or handpicked troops or **officers**  
**were sunk in the Suph Sea**<sup>39</sup>

v. 5 **The deeps were covering them,**

**they went down into the depths**<sup>40</sup>

**like a stone.**<sup>41</sup>

v. 6 **Your right hand, O Yahweh,**

**glorious in strength.**<sup>42</sup>

**Your right hand, O Yahweh,**

**shatters**<sup>43</sup> **the enemy.**

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<sup>38</sup> This is similar to usage in an adoption formula. “I will be your God, and you will be my people” [Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; and Ezek 36:28]. Michael L. Barré renders the verse, “Yahweh is my guardian deity, he has become a savior to me” in his “My strength and my song” in Exodus 15:2, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 54 no 4 (O 1992), p 637.

<sup>39</sup> Suph Sea or Sea of Reeds are roughly equivalent. The Egyptian phraseology of this verse has been noted by Peter C. Craigie in his “Egyptian expression in the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:4),” *Vetus testamentum*, 20 no 1 (Ja 1970), pp. 83-86.

<sup>40</sup> Deeps [Heb. tēhōmot] and depths [Heb. mōtōlot] rhyme and are roughly synonymous.

<sup>41</sup> Compare Nehemiah 9:11, “You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters.”

<sup>42</sup> Commentators have noted that v.6 begins direct address to Yahweh as well as purposeful ambiguity in this verse that can be rendered, “Your right hand, O Yahweh who are glorious in strength” or “Your right hand, O Yahweh, is glorious in strength.”

<sup>43</sup> DBL Hebrew: (רָצַח) **destroy**, formally, shatter, i.e., to defeat another by making a decisive and ruinous, even deadly, action as a figurative extension of a crushing or shattering impact (Jdg 10:8, cf Psalm 89:10). Other renderings: “smash in pieces,” “crush,” “broke the enemy to pieces.” See page 20 for the idea of obliteration of competitors to Yahweh.

v. 7 **Even by the instrument of the greatness of your pride,**  
that is to say your majesty, eminence, highness, exaltation;  
**you overthrow those who rise against you.**

**You send out your burning anger,**  
**it consumes them like chaff.**

v. 8 **And,** that is added to that, **by** means of  
**the breath** or angry snorting **of your nostrils**<sup>44</sup>  
**waters piled** or heaped up  
**Floods stood like a heap,**  
**deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.**

v. 9 **The enemy said,**  
**I will pursue,**  
**I will overtake,**  
**I will divide spoil.**  
**My throat** or my appetite for blood lust **will be filled of**  
**them,**

**I'll draw my sword, my hand of hostility will plunder**  
v. 10 **You simply blew with your breath,**  
**the sea covered them.**

**They sank like lead**<sup>45</sup> **in the mighty waters.**

v. 11 **Who is like you among the gods,**  
**O Yahweh?**  
**Who is like you, glorious in holiness?**<sup>2 46</sup>

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Compare the description of the strength of Yahweh as a warrior to an inscription on the war chest of King Tutankhamun which describes his strength to subdue his enemies as: "Horus... Perfect god, Image of Re, Possessor of a *strong arm, crushing* the Nine Bows [the enemies of Egypt]; the King of Upper and Lower Egypt."

<sup>44</sup> Howell renders this phrase, "With a blast of your anger ... the waters" (p. 26)

<sup>45</sup> For the use of lead in Egyptian metallurgy, see: Herbert Garland and Charles Olden Bannister. *Ancient Egyptian Metallurgy* (London: C. Griffin, Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott, 1927), pp. 31-32, and Paul T Nicholson and Ian Shaw *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 168-169.

<sup>46</sup> Shreckhise, *Thesis*, p. 63 gives two alternate renditions, "Who is like you (who are) glorious in holiness?" or "Who is like you (who are) glorious among the Holy (ones)?" Stine (pp. 73-74) also offers two similar renditions showing the incomparability of Yahweh which read: "Lord, you are unique among the gods; you are majestically holy, awesomely glorious, and a worker of great acts," and "Yahweh,

**Venerable** or to be revered **in** or with respect to **praises**  
you the ‘worker of wonder’ are the one **doing wonders?**

- v. 12 **You stretched out your right hand,**  
**the grave was swallowing them.**

Hinge Point:

- v. 13 **You led** like a shepherd **by** means of **your steadfast** cove  
nantal **love** <sup>47</sup>  
**the people whom you have redeemed.**  
**You guided** like a shepherd **by your strength** <sup>48</sup>  
**to your holy dwelling.** <sup>49</sup>
- v. 14 **Peoples have heard, they shudder and tremble.**  
**Anguish** or convulsions **seized the inhabitants**  
**Of Philistia.**
- v. 15 **Then were terrified, the bull-like chieftains**  
**of Edom.**  
**As for the ram-like rulers of Moab,**  
**Trembling seizes them.**  
**All the inhabitants of Canaan melted** as they lost their  
nerve.
- v. 16 **Upon them falls terror and dread.**  
**By the greatness of your arm**  
**they become still** or petrified **like a stone.**  
**Until your people pass by,**  
**O Yahweh.**  
**Until the people whom you acquired pass by.**

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you are unique among the gods; of all the holy beings, you alone are majestic, you alone have an awesome glory, and you alone can work wonders." Cf. Ps 86:8-10; 111:2-4; 113:5; Jer 10:6-7a; Rev 15:3-4.

<sup>47</sup> A key verb in the song is *esed* which, when translated, embodies covenant love, loyalty, loving-kindness, faithfulness. All of its occurrences in Exodus (20:6; 34:6-7) describe the character of Yahweh. Nahum Sarna in his commentary on Exodus describes the word as one of Yahweh's "supreme attributes" characterized by "express conduct conditioned by intimate relationship, covenant obligation or even undeserved magnanimity" (p. 80).

<sup>48</sup> See Psalms 23:3; 77:21; 78-52-53.

<sup>49</sup> Or 'dwelling characterized by your holiness.'

v. 17 **You will bring them, and  
you will plant them  
on the mountain of your inheritance.  
The place for your dwelling,  
that you made, O Yahweh.  
The sanctuary, O Lord,  
that your hands formed.**

v. 18 **Yahweh reigns forever and ever.**

Closing Frame or reason for the song:

v. 19 **For Pharaoh's horse with its  
rider and with his horsemen went  
into the sea, then Yahweh brought upon  
them the waters of the sea, but the  
Israelites walked on dry ground in  
the midst of the sea.**

Miram's antiphonal singing:

v. 20-21 **Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a  
tambourine in her hand, and all the women fol-  
lowed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam  
sang to them:  
"Sing to the LORD,  
for he is highly exalted or powerfully ascendant.  
The horse and its rider  
he has hurled into the sea."**

First impressions: "Who is like unto thee?" Resounding answer: "No one". Labuschagne makes the observation that the most powerful device in the rhetorical arsenal of the writers of the Hebrew Testament was the rhetorical question that demands an answer from the hearer (cf. Ps. 35:10; 71:19; 89:6-8; Isa. 40:18,25; Mic . 7:18). He observes that such questions were used by them to express "the absolute power, uniqueness, singularity and incomparability of a person, especially of YHWH." The compelling power of this device, he suggests, lies in the fact that the audience is compelled to "frame the expected answer in his mind" and as a conse-



quence “becomes a co-expressor of the speaker’s conviction.” <sup>50</sup> Thus the song delivers the concept of the absolute incomparability of Yahweh with responses as:

**“ONLY”....**

“Yahweh is worth singing about”

“Yahweh is powerful”

“Yahweh is greater than all”

“Yahweh is victorious”

“Yahweh is majestic”

“Yahweh has an awesome glory”

“Yahweh can work wonders”

“Yahweh is a Redeemer”

“Yahweh is personable”

“Yahweh is kind to his people”

“Yahweh terrifies his enemies”

“Yahweh is incomparable”

These statements tie back into the fact that Yahweh has said that he will deliver Israel with a “mighty arm” (6:6) and that he would “execute judgments on all of the gods of Egypt (12:12), and that he would “redeem his people” (6:6; 15:13) from their slavery and their slave mentality to give them a new home, a new name, and a new place to live with Him. He promised. He delivered. Thus we read: “Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians, and the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses” (Ex. 14:31). Israel could not help but worship.

## **5. A few polemical observations**

### **5.1 Irony**

Whereas we expect charioteers to die on land when they are thrown off their chariots, the song tells us that they along with their war equipment are thrown into the sea where sailors usually die. <sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Labuschagne, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> As observed by Propp.

Whereas the Egyptians thought they could hand-pick and throw the “best” of the Israelite children into the Nile without impunity, Yahweh has the last word as the bodies of the “hand-picked officers” (15:4) are seen floating (Ex. 14:30) on the shore of the Sea.

Whereas the Pharaohs puffed themselves up with all of their epithets of greatness as incarnations of the gods, engraved—so they thought for time immemorial—on stone monuments, the song talks about the finest war machines and personnel of this super-power sinking to the bottom of the sea “like a stone” (v. 5). The very metallurgy that was put to use to enhance the Pharaoh’s greatness—think of the 22kg gold death mask of Tutankhamun—is now used to describe their plunge to the depths like a lead sinker (v.10).

Whereas Pharaoh flatly and repeatedly refused to release Israel (Heb. shalakh) Yahweh “releases”—same verb—his wrath (v.7) on the Egyptians.

Whereas the enslaved Israelites were forced to build up the cities of Pithom and Rameses with bricks formed with stubble (Ex 1:11; 5:12) the song tells us that Yahweh literally demolishes or pulls down (v. 7) the Egyptian forces and burns them up like stubble (v.7). In contrast to incinerated stubble, Israel is said to be planted (v.17) by Yahweh Himself (cf. Ps. 1:3-4).

Whereas the nameless enemy of verse 9 with his egotistical first-person pronoun, “I will,” uses his breath to boast of all he will do, the true God simply exhales and his enemies are inundated (vv 8, 10).<sup>52</sup> Might this taunt and sarcasm be a direct dig at the likes of Amenhotep II who boasted after returning from a battle, “His strength is so much greater than (that of) any king who has ever existed, raging like a panther when he courses through the battle-field; there is none fighting before him, . . . trampling down those who rebel against him, instantly prevailing against all the barbarians with people and horses?” Or might it reflect the bloodlust of

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<sup>52</sup> It has been noted that that for the five Pharonic “I will’s” there are five actions attributed to Yahweh. “Thou didst blow with Thy wind” etc. (Exod. 15:10); “Thy right hand, O Lord, shatters the foe” (Exod. 15:6); “And in Thy mighty exaltation Thou overthrowest them that rise up against Thee” (Exod. 15:7); “Thou sendest forth Thy wrath, it consumeth them as stubble” (ibid); “Thou stretchest out Thy right hand” etc. (Exod. 15:12)

Sethi, named after the god of violent destruction, Seth, who “exults at beginning the battle...his heart is gratified at the sight of blood...more than the day of rejoicing he loves the moment of crushing [the foe].?”<sup>53</sup> Howell observes the irony: “the enemy speaks about what he will do for himself, which amounts to nothing but words, the psalmist sings of what Yahweh has done for His people.”<sup>54</sup>.

Whereas the Egyptians’ magicians used execration rites to figuratively smash their enemies, the true Warrior (v.3) and owner of the whole earth (Ex. 9:29) needs no such magic. He simply commands creation to do his bidding and his enemies [literally: the uprisers v.7] are subjugated with a panoply of verbs of downward movement...hurled, cast down, sank, shattered (v.6), covered, swallowed.<sup>55</sup> The war gods of Seth, Montu and Onouris (Anhur) are nowhere to be seen.

Whereas Rameses II, the self-declared ‘champion without peer’ had the subjugated Hittites declare in effect, “Who is like you among the gods?” and come groveling to him on their bellies as they declared to him, “You are Seth, Baal in person,” Yahweh declares his eternal (v.18), holy (v. 13), majestic (v.7) and universal (Ex 9:15) reign.<sup>56</sup> Generations to this day and beyond can still say with the Psalmist: “You are the God who works wonders; you have displayed your might among the peoples” (Ps. 77:14) and sing the Song of Moses and of the Lamb in the Apocalypse (Rev. 15:3ff).

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<sup>53</sup> In John Ashton and David Down *Unwrapping the Pharaohs* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2007), p. 166.

<sup>54</sup> Howell, p. 29.

<sup>55</sup> Scott B. Noegel, “Moses and Magic: Notes on the Book of Exodus,” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*, 24 (1996), pp. 45-59. Propp comments that “Egypt descends —literally from shore to Sea to underworld, metaphorically from glory to ignominy —while Israel ascends —from slavery, Egypt and the Sea to secure habitation on Yahweh's mountain” (p. 510).

<sup>56</sup> Rameses own words were: “Then the vile Chief of Khatti [i.e. the Hittites] wrote and worshiped my name like that of Re, saying: “*You are Seth, Baal in person*; the dread of you is a fire in the land of Khatti.”

Whereas the 'Great Cairo Hymn of praise to Amun-Re' extols the sun god as the "Unique king, like whom among the gods;" the "Father of the father of all the gods;" "enduring in all things;" "Great of strength, lord of reverence;" "more distinguished in nature than any (other) god, In whose beauty the gods rejoice;" "The lord of fear, great of dread, Rich in might, terrible of appearances;" etc., it is Yahweh who reigns forever (v. 18), is incomparable (v. 11) and who has the last word.<sup>57</sup>

Whereas the rulers of the nations of Philistia, Moab, Edom and Canaan describe themselves with lofty terms such as Moabite "rams," in order to flaunt their power (v.15), with their gods of war and storm in their retinue like Chemosh of the Moabites, Quas/Qos of the Edomites and Baal of the Canaanites; when they hear of the living Divine warrior (v. 3) who has whipped up the stormy sea (v. 8) and caused it to crash down on the Egyptians (v. 10), they succumb to becoming stone-like in paralysis just like the gods that they serve.<sup>58</sup> Not only that, they stand, as it were, at frozen attention as God's liberated slaves, now royal children, pass by them.

Whereas the Pharaohs treated the Israelites like their property, to be used and abused as they saw fit, Yahweh is said to have a people which he redeemed like a kinsman redeemer (v. 13, 16) rescues as a first-born son, treats with loving-kindness (v.13) and leads like a shepherd (v. 13).

Whereas the Egyptian and Canaanite deities were used by their rulers to give themselves status and thus enslave their peoples,

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<sup>57</sup> R. K. Ritner, "The Great Cairo Hymn of Praise to Amun-Re" in W. W. Hallo and Younger, K L (eds). *The Context of Scripture. Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*. Vol. I. (Leiden: Brill, 1997, pp. 37-40. Also "The Incomparability of Deities in the Egyptian Religion" (pp. 58-62) in C. I. Labuschagne. *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. I. Brill, 1966)

<sup>58</sup> Wayne T. Pitland, "Edom" p. 63 in Michael D. Coogan and Bruce M. Metzger. *The Oxford Guide to People & Places of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 63. Propp (p. 534) notes Lofink's paradoxical and ironically humorous statement, "The other flocks are struck still when the great and good shepherd passes by with his flocks. They stand alongside the processional route like stone sphinxes."

Yahweh redeems his people with his power, liberates them, and brings them to Himself. The contrast could not be stronger.

To summarize, the words of the Jewish commentator Umberto Cassuto are very apropos of what has just happened: “In the pagan odes of triumph, the glory of the victory is ascribed to the conquering king, but here there is not a single word of praise or glory given to Moses; these are rendered to the Lord alone.”<sup>59</sup>

## **6. A retrospective on Israel’s response to their deliverance**

In order to grasp more fully the Biblical view of other religions, one must examine the showdown of Yahweh vs. the gods, and we have done so using the Egyptian gods as an example. Secondly, it will be necessary to analyze the texts which give a commentary on Israel’s relationship to foreign deities, and Yahweh’s response to such. To do this we will work in a reverse chronological fashion using highlights from a range of Biblical texts. No treatment will do justice, however, if the introduction to the Decalogue is not examined first.

### **6.1 The Decalogue**

At Sinai, the covenant keeper Yahweh sets out the house-rules with his ‘new-bride’ Israel for whom he has paid a bride price of redemption, and is now taking her to his own house to be in exclusive relationship with Him. Thus He recaps where she has come from and a number of expectations for their relationship by saying:

[20:1] And God spoke all these words, saying,

[2] “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out [literally ‘caused to go out’] of the house of slavery.

[3] “You shall have no other gods before me.

[4] “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

5] You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God... ESV)

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<sup>59</sup> Umberto Cassuto. *A commentary on the book of Exodus*. (Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1967), p. 174.

Simply put, this jealous husband, the incomparable Yahweh, would not tolerate any competition from any so-called deity because of his exclusive claim on his bride. Let us examine how she did through the voices of a number of Biblical reporters.

**Stephen:** In his summary of Israelite history in Acts 7, Stephen demonstrates the power of God to save “by wonders and signs” (v.36), and the fickleness of Israel in tragic terms. A people who had been rescued by a promise-keeping God, who were described as an assembly [Gk *ekklēsia*] in the desert and who had received “living oracles” (v.38) from this God, who assured them that His presence would go with and before them, launch the ultimate insult by suggesting to Aaron (v. 40), “Make for us gods who will go before us.”<sup>60</sup> Rather than rejoicing in the works of God’s powerful arm, they “rejoiced at the works of their own hands” (v. 41). Quoting Amos, Stephen drives his message home with the words, “You took up [Gk. *analambanō*] the tent” [literally ‘the tabernacle’] of Molech.<sup>61</sup> The very people who were to carry the symbol of God’s presence among them as a husband would bring his wife back to his own tent and be present together, are carrying the tent of another God. If that was not enough, Stephen speaks of what is likely a Coptic rendition of the god Saturn, namely Rephan, as “*your* god” - echoes of Exodus 20:2, “I am the LORD *your* God.” So much for “having no other gods before me [or literally before my face]” (Ex. 20:3)!

**Ezekiel:** With a great sense of paradox Ezekiel reports on the fact that “the Sovereign LORD” says that he will destroy the Egyptian idols and “put an end to the images in Memphis” which was where the temple to the Egyptian god Ptah was located (30:13). Yet His own people Israel have a twisted love relationship with the same.

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<sup>60</sup> Compare this to Deuteronomy 6:13-15, “Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; for the LORD *your* God, who is among you, is a jealous God...”

<sup>61</sup> The word *analambanō* denotes “the *taking up* and *carrying along* of pagan cultic objects as signs of idolatry” (EDNT). “To take up in order to carry...” (BDAG).

Some elders of Israel came to Ezekiel and asked that he inquire of the LORD for them. The response likely shocked them. After a survey of His own promise-keeping track-record Yahweh reports on what He insisted Israel do, apparently before the exodus: "Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God." (20:7). The result? "They rebelled...would not listen...did not get rid of the vile images...nor forsake the idols of Egypt" (v. 8). Then for the sake of His own name (vv. 9, 14, 22) Yahweh delivered them from Egypt and kept them alive in the desert in spite of the fact that "their hearts were devoted to their idols" (v. 16) and "their eyes lusted after their fathers' idols" (v. 24). These are words of a jilted lover; Yahweh remind us of similar language in Hosea.

**The narrator of 2 Kings 17** - The narrator gives us a divine perspective on why Israel was exiled, in the manner of a reverse exodus, to Assyria. This report is given in the context of the fact that the LORD "who brought you up out of Egypt with mighty power and outstretched arm, is the one you must worship" (vv 7,36). Their long-term response? Sadly, it is the recurrent theme of refusal to listen, lack of trust, obduracy, disobedience and covenant breaking, summarized by the fact that "they followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless" (v. 15). Their detestable practices of imitating (v. 15) the nations around them are recounted (vv. 16-18); solemn warnings are disregarded and the narrator concludes:

"They would not listen, however, but persisted in their former practices. Even while these people were worshipping the LORD, they were serving their idols. To this day their children and grandchildren continue to do as their fathers did." (vv. 40-41)

## **6.2 Summary**

The injunction to "choose this day whom you will serve" to a people whom Paul describes as having "been baptized into Moses"—or went through a 'death to the old' inundation experience at the Red Sea (I Cor. 10:2)—received a standing ovation and crashed down with a thud. All of the injunctions to "throw away the gods your

forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:14) were simply ignored and Yahweh the jealous lover could not but respond.<sup>62</sup> The three examples cited demonstrate beyond the shadow of a doubt that Israel had a divided heart and, although physically had been delivered from Egypt, in reality its heart was still there and still served "the gods ... [their] forefathers served beyond the River" (Joshua 24:15).

### **7. A response to Mark Harlan's paper**

Recall that Mark Harlan set out to "offer fresh perspective from the angle of an Old Testament theology of religions, so as to discover theological foundations that might support insider movements among least-reached peoples" in his March 16, 2012 paper at the Evangelical Missions Society. I would like to suggest that the "fresh perspective" regarding an Old Testament theology of religions is that Mr. Harlan has freshly ignored the Biblical evidence. Consider the following:

A. Stephen, Ezekiel, and 2 Kings are all consistent in their denunciation of any kind of alliance between followers of Yahweh and other gods. They present a unified voice in linking the incomparability of Yahweh in the exodus deliverance and his demands for exclusive worship. Their sentiments reflect the exact posture of the Song at the Sea as well. The surrounding chapters of Exodus, look backwards at Egyptian religion (ch. 1-14) and forward to the Decalogue of Exodus 20. The prohibition in Ex. 23:13 to even invoke the names of other gods, along with the order to destroy them utterly (v. 24) or face the consequence that "they will be a snare for you" (v. 33), evidenced by what actually happened when the children of Israel "prostitute[d] themselves to their gods" (Ex. 34:16).

In light of this data, how one can glean that the "Old Testament infers that there are some constructive things that Israel could appropriate or learn from these religions" defies logic.

B. As much as this paper has focused on Egyptian religion, examples could be multiplied as data for Canaanite religion. Leila Leah

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<sup>62</sup> See also Deut. 7:18-26; 29:16, Jos 24:14; I Kings 9:6



Bronner has done extensive work on the polemical role of Elijah/Elisha against Baalism<sup>63</sup>. Iain Provan, in an extended quote worth citing at length, demonstrates the polemical nature of the books of Kings. He states:

...as the only God there is, the LORD demands exclusive worship. God is not prepared to take a place alongside the gods or to be displaced by them.... Much of Kings therefore addresses the problem of illegitimate worship. The main interest is in the *content* of worship, which must not involve idols or images nor reflect any aspect of the fertility and other cults of “the nations” (1 Kings 11:1–40; 12:25–13:34; 14:22–24; 16:29–33; 2 Kings 16:1–4; 17:7–23; 21:1–9). There is subsidiary concern about the *place* of worship which is ideally the Jerusalem temple and not the local “high places” (1 Kings 3:2; 5:1–9:9; 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kings 18:4; 23:1–20). The book is also concerned to describe the moral wrongs that inevitably accompany false worship. For as the worship of something *other* than God inevitably leads to some kind of mistreatment of fellow-mortals in the *eyes* of [his] God (1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 16:1–4; 21:1–6), so true worship of God is always bound up with obedience to the law of God.<sup>64</sup>

Again, to approvingly quote Stuhlmueeller who suggested that “Abraham remained within the Canaanite religious system,” as evidenced by the fact that he and other patriarchs “worshipped at or near traditional Canaanite shrines,” is to completely miss the point. To the patriarchs and Israel, just as with the example of Aaron’s rod swallowing Pharaoh’s, this is a declaration of war, with the advance of the kingdom of Yahweh.

Archeological evidence, in fact, shows that when the Israelites were obedient in following the rules of conquest set down in Deut 7:2,5 of utterly destroying their enemies, they were to “break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire.” Both Jericho (Jos 6:21–24) and Hazor were burnt according to the Biblical and archeological records. Joshua 11:10–12 says that he “took Hazor, and

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<sup>63</sup> In her *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemics Against Baal Worship*. (Leiden: Brill, 1968) as cited by Waltke and Yu, p. 746.

<sup>64</sup> Iain W. Provan. *1 and 2 Kings*. [NIBC] (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), p. 12.

smote its king with the sword: for Hazor formerly was the head of all those kingdoms. Everyone in it they put to the sword. They totally destroyed them, not sparing anything that breathed, and he burned up Hazor itself.. Israel did not burn any of the cities built on their mounds - except Hazor."

At Hazor, the Jewish archeologist Yigael Yadin discovered evidence for the violent destruction of the Canaanite Orthostats and Stelae Temples along with numerous cultic statues that were intentionally decapitated, some bearing chisel marks showing how this had been done.<sup>65</sup> "This," according to another Jewish scholar "was a systematic annihilation campaign, against the very physical symbols of the royal ideology and its loci of ritual legitimation."<sup>66</sup> The archeologist Hoffmeier notes that this "intentional desecration of shrines and cults objects is a practice unique to Israel" and he links it to the same at the temple of Dagon in I Samuel 5:2-5. Curiously, whereas Harlan would have us believe that Canaanite religion was innocuous, the chief god of the Philistines and the so-called father of Baal is found decapitated and dismembered by the warrior Yahweh. Little wonder that Exodus 15: 14, likely with the prophetic perfect, (i.e. reporting the future as if it has already happened), reads "anguish seized the inhabitants [or rulers] of Philistia."

C. Harlan joins others in a general definition of insider movements as those people who remain within the religious community where they are found, even though they might be said to belong to a new religion. He suggests that this is a viable alternative for "the most unreached peoples." Is it? Our survey of Biblical history would suggest that the problems Israel had were due largely to the

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<sup>65</sup> James K. Hoffmeier, "What is the biblical date for the Exodus? A response to Bryant Wood," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 50 no 2 (Je 2007), pp. 245-246.

<sup>66</sup> Douglas Petrovich, "The Dating of Hazor's Destruction in Joshua 11 Via Biblical, Archaeological, and Epigraphical Evidence," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 51 no 3 (S 2008), p 491, citing Sharon Zuckerman, "Anatomy of a Destruction: Crisis Architecture, Termination Rituals and the Fall of Canaanite Hazor," *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 20:1 (June 2007), p. 24.

remnants of former religious practices and devotion in their lives, and their unwillingness to part with them completely.

Additionally, in the Apocalypse which liberally uses exodus imagery, the writer gives directives to the people of God, newly constituted in Christ, with unmistakable echoes of the separation of the Israelites from Egypt. He writes:

"Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues..." (Rev 18:4)

Alliance with the gods of the Rome or those of Canaan or Egypt would guarantee the same result: the judgment of the plagues.

Globally, whereas the Biblical account from Exodus to the Apocalypse positively associates language of Exodus with "go up," "go out," "up from," it always has negative associations with the language of "go down to"—i.e. staying in Egypt (cf. Gen 37:25; 39:1 (2x); 42:2-3, 38; 43:4, 5, 7, 11. )

D. Reaching unreached peoples was part of the 'raison d'être' of the exodus. Joshua reported that the Lord "dried up the waters" of the Red Sea expressly so that "all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty" (Josh 4:23, 24). This fame, as we noted, reached the Midianites (Exod 18:1), the Moabites (Numbers 22-24), the Canaanites (Josh 2:10; 5:1), the Gibeonites (Jos 9:9) and the Philistines (1 Sam 4:8). Is a modern-day contrivance needed to help along the fame of His Name?

## 8. Conclusion

We return to the main idea of the Song at the Sea: "The LORD will reign for ever and ever." All of the Canaanite and Egyptian gods were shown to be phantoms. The rhetorical question asked of this ever-reigning monarch is and was, "Who is like unto thee?" The response then and now is, "Absolutely no one." This answer necessarily leads to the next question: Who will Israel serve exclusively? Who will present day believers serve exclusively? Will it be Yahweh known as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit alone? Mr. Harlan would appear to indicate that this is negotiable. Biblically speaking it is not.

The Biblical account debunks the brash, almost Pharonic attitude of Finkelstein in his text, *The Bible Unearthed*, with his words, “The historical saga contained in the Bible—from Abraham’s encounter with God and his journey to Canaan, to Moses’ deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage...[is] a brilliant product of the human imagination.”<sup>67</sup> It does the same with the Insider Movement’s “brilliant product of the human imagination” that approvingly states that “Abraham [as a representative of Old Testament believers] remained within the Canaanite [as a representative of Egyptian/Moabite/Philistine and Edomite] religion.”

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<sup>67</sup> Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. (New York: Free Press, 2001), p. 1.

## ST PAUL'S THEOLOGY OF MISSIONS IN CONTRAST WITH THE INSIDER MOVEMENT

*By Rev. Bassam Michael Madany*

### Abstract

Following World War II, Evangelicals held congresses and consultations to address plans for Christian missions in the new post-colonial era. Unfortunately, some began with the presupposition that Christian missions in Muslim lands have failed, for lack of contextualizing the Gospel. It was a misleading evaluation of a work that had begun early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and had accomplished great things throughout the Middle East.<sup>1</sup>

Having spent thirty-six years in broadcasting the Gospel in Arabic over several international radio stations, and communicating with tens of thousands of Muslim listeners, I found it quite strange

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<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Stott and Robert Coote, Eds., *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, Eerdmans, 1980, p. viii. Again, the Stott influence on the Lausanne Continuation Committee has been manifest in subsequent Lausanne-sponsored consultations and conferences. He served, for example, as Chairman of the 1978 Willowbank Consultation on "The Gospel and Culture" which fully endorsed the contextualized approach to the Gospel proclamation. Indeed, in his Foreword to the Willowbank papers he states: The above quotation is taken from a paper, "Neo-Evangelicalism and Its Impact on Missions: An Historical Overview" that was read by the late Dr. Fredrick W. Evans, Jr. at a meeting of some concerned Evangelicals who met at Four Brooks Conference Center, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, between July 9 and 11, 1985. The meeting was called to discuss the spread of a new theory of missions known as Contextualization. At the end of the meeting, A STATEMENT OF MISSIONARY CONCERN was adopted. Because of the brevity of the STATEMENT, Dr. Evans was asked by the signers of this document to write a fuller explanation of its purpose and interpretation of its contents. More than two decades have passed since the issuing of this STATEMENT, but its relevance has not diminished. Rather than pay full attention to the Biblical givens regarding missions and the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion, certain voices are still clamoring for some type of contextualizing the Christian message in order to facilitate conversions of non-Christians, especially of Muslims.  
[www.levant.info/MER061.html](http://www.levant.info/MER061.html)

to hear the claims of the Contextualization Movement assuring us that if only missionaries would adopt their methodologies, some if not all the obstacles to missions in the Muslim world would disappear!

However, by studying these novel missions theories that have been advanced lately, I've come to the conclusion that missiology has lost its connection with the older theological disciplines. So it should not be surprising that an extreme form of contextualization has morphed into the Insider Movement.

### **St Paul's Theology of Missions: in Contrast with the Insider Movement**

The basic *motif* or impulse of the Insider Movement is to facilitate the conversion of Muslims to the Christian faith. To that end some within it support the translation of the Bible into Islamic languages with changes in those terms considered to be offensive to Muslims. Such words as "Father" when associated with God, or referring to Jesus Christ as the "Son of God," are no longer found in these Muslim-friendly translations [also known as "MIT": Muslim-idiom Translations] with substitute terms considered acceptable to Muslim sensibilities being used.

As much as one may laud the purpose of Christians engaged in the difficult task of missions to Muslims, there are certain Biblical principles which must not be ignored. It is evident that the Insider Movement has located the difficulty in converting Muslims in the inspired nomenclature of the Bible, and not in the Muslim mind and tradition. This goes against some important Biblical principles which are part and parcel of the Pauline missionary tradition.

When Paul and Barnabas were sent by the Church in Antioch with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, they were properly prepared for their missionary task. Paul was born in Tarsus Cilicia, Asia Minor, where he received his early education in the Hellenistic culture. His parents, being devout Jews, sent him to Jerusalem to complete his formation at the school of Gamaliel, where he became an expert in Rabbinic Judaism. Barnabas, a native of Cyprus, was at home in

Greek culture, and was equally equipped to deal with Jewish and Gentile objections to the Gospel of the Cross.

Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel without any dilution or compromise. For example, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul reminds the new believers in Corinth (who were of Jewish or Gentile backgrounds) that he had made no concessions to their prejudices when he first came to their city to proclaim the Good News.

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>but</sup> to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." (I Corinthians 1:18-25) ESV

"And I, when I came to you, brothers I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (I Corinthians 2: 1-5) ESV

"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. 'For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ." (I Corinthians 2:14-16) ESV

It is evident from the above quotations that Paul, with full awareness of the Jewish and Greek objections to his message, did not hesitate for one moment to declare the saving message of a crucified and risen Messiah. As a former Pharisee, he had believed in the ability of being right with God, by fulfilling the demands of the Law. And being familiar with the Hellenic mind, he knew that the *kerygma* sounded like nonsense to the Greeks. Still, he brought to Corinth exactly what they needed, and not what they wanted. The real problem existed in the Rabbinical and Hellenistic minds, and not in the core of his message!

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul returned to discuss the subject of the receptivity of the Gospel, by explaining why the Jews missed the meaning of the Messianic passages of the Old Testament:

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3: 12-18) ESV

The Old Testament Scriptures’ main emphasis was on the saving message that was first proclaimed by God in the Garden of Eden to our first parents, Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15). This promise was made specific to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and reiterated to David. Unfortunately, even though the Prophets like Isaiah and the Psalms spoke of the coming Messiah as a redeemer from sin, Rabbinical Judaism, as it developed during the Intertestamental era, formulated the doctrine of salvation by observing the deeds of the Law. This doctrine became a “veil” over the minds of the religious leaders in Israel that prevented them from welcoming the Redeemer Messiah. Equally, it became the firm belief of the Jews in the Diaspora, which



explains why many of them did not welcome Paul's message. They expected a political Messiah who would liberate their nation from Roman imperialism.

Thus far, I have dealt with the objections to the message of the Gospel, by both Jews and Greeks, during the time of Paul. My point has been to show that the impediment to the reception of the Gospel resided in the minds of the Jewish and Greek receptors, and not in the vocabulary used by Paul. However, I was not implying that there was no hope or way to convert Jews and Gentiles, seeing that their minds had insurmountable obstacles to the message of the Good News. My purpose was to show that God had, in fact, provided a way to overcome their resistance to the Gospel offer. Paul put it this way in I Cor. 1:21: *"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe."* ESV

The expression *"the folly of what we preach"* refers to an important formula that summarized the essence of the apostolic proclamation known in Greek as the **κηρυγματος**. In God's plan, the instrumental cause of salvation is the proclamation of the Gospel, while the efficient cause of salvation is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and his resurrection, as actualized by the work of the Holy Spirit.

This Pauline teaching about faith in Christ occurring within the context of hearing the proclamation of the Gospel is taught in Romans 10. Paul's heart yearned for the salvation of his people. He acknowledged their tremendous "zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." (2-4) ESV

This attempt to establish one's own righteousness has remained the major obstacle to the reception of the Gospel, to Jews and Muslims alike. Both systems of belief are thoroughly legalistic. Man, in Rabbinical Judaism and in Islam, possesses the ability to please God by doing the deeds prescribed by the Law!

Furthermore, notwithstanding the strong criticisms that have been levelled by Muslims against the Bible's authenticity, the Trini-

Trinity, the deity of Jesus Christ, and His crucifixion, their greatest objection is to Biblical anthropology. Whereas the Christian view of man's predicament is marked by recognition of the drastic results of the Fall, the Muslim view of man's present condition is very optimistic. It may be described as a thoroughly Pelagian point of view. This was articulated well in a 1959 article appearing in the quarterly *The Muslim World* in which the Islamic doctrine of man was discussed. It contained a quotation from a paper read by a Muslim professor in 1957, at a gathering of some Christian and Muslim scholars that was held in Morocco. The Muslim professor said:

"The possibility of man's deliverance and the way to follow have been indicated by the Qur'an in its address to sinners, fathers of the human race: 'Go forth all of you from hence and if there comes to you guidance from Me then he who follows my guidance shall have nothing to fear, nor shall they know distress.'" (Surah 2:38) By this solemn affirmation God Himself takes action for the salvation of man in the path of right. Islamic tradition then has the means to lead man to final perfection, the effect of which is liberation from the fear and from the sadness which prevent man from attaining the eternal blessedness which is life in God and for God."

In commenting on the paper, Edwin Calverley, the then editor of *The Muslim World* wrote:

[This] exposition of Muslim theology and its concepts of man and his salvation raises several deep questions. The Christian must always be perplexed about its ready confidence that **"to know is to do," that man's salvation happens under purely revelatory auspices and that through the law given in the Divine communication is the path that man will follow once he knows and sees it.** The whole mystery of human recalcitrance and "hardness of heart" seems to be overlooked.' [Emphasis mine]

The true way of salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul continued to expound the way people are saved, regardless of their religious background, in verses 5-17:

For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will

ascend into heaven?” (that is, to bring Christ down) ‘or “Who will descend into the abyss?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. ESV

In this passage, Paul repeats what he has taught in I Corinthians about how saving faith is born: So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. In the Greek original it reads: “ἀρα ἡ πίστις ἐξ ἀκοῆς ἡ δὲ ἀκοὴ διὰ ῥήματος χριστοῦ” “The Word of Christ” may be translated as “the Preaching of Christ,” which is equivalent to the term κηρυγματος used in I Corinthians 1: 21:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?

Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Galatians 3:1-6 NIV

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive

the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?

Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?—just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” 3:1-6 NKJ

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? 3:1-6 ESV

This emphasis on the role of preaching the Kerygma as a means of salvation is found in Paul’s polemical Letter to the Churches of Galatia. In remonstrating with the new believers in Galatia, he contrasted “salvation by works,” with “the hearing of faith” or “hearing with faith” or “believing what you heard.” In the Greek original, it reads: *τουτο μονον θελω μαθειν αφ υμων εξ εργων νομου το πνευμα ελαβετε η εξ ακοης πιστεως. ο ουν επιχορηγων υμιν το πνευμα και ενεργων δυναμεις εν υμιν εξ εργων νομου η εξ ακοης πιστεως.*

The Greek term “*εξ ακοης πιστεως*” (literally, the hearing of faith) originates from Isaiah 53, where the prophet began the section of his prophecy dealing with the suffering and death of the Messiah with two questions:

Who has believed what he has heard from us? (Or who has believed what we have heard?) And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ESV

The message of “*what we have heard*” is none other than the message of the Gospel; it is not mere news, it is Good News that originates from God’s eternal plan of salvation; therefore it is accompa-

nied by God's dynamic power in the third person of the Trinity that eventuates with the salvation of the hearers.

The Insider Movement that substitutes God-breathed words of the Bible with "inoffensive" terms to Muslims fails to listen to the teachings of the Bible regarding the conversion of unbelievers to Christ. The offence, or obstacle, is not in Biblical vocabulary, but in the hearts of unbelievers. To overcome this obstacle, God has ordained the proclamation of the Gospel as the way of salvation.

By minimizing the importance of this proclamation/teaching/preaching process, those in the IM movement promoting "Muslim-idiom Translations", place too much emphasis on their proponents' well-intentioned desire to simplify human communication; yet this crosses the line by removing an essential pillar of our faith. The Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of Christ may be a "*skandelon*" for our Muslim neighbors, but a robust faith in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring *metanoia*, is the remedy.

We must never forget that the Lord Jesus Christ gave the missionary mandate to His Church. As we have noticed earlier, it was the church in Antioch that commissioned Paul and Barnabas, to preach the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. After they had finished their First Missionary journey (Acts 13 & 14), they returned to Antioch and gave a report to the assembled church, about the Lord's blessing on their labors. When disputes arose about Gentile converts and their submission to the Mosaic Law, the problem was resolved at an official church assembly as recorded in Acts 15. The Bible and the Church belong together in missions, as well as in the life of established churches. Bible translation agencies need the cooperation and the blessing of the church, and must not ignore the long tradition of Bible translations down through the ages: from the Peshitta, the Vulgate, Wycliffe, Tyndale, the King James, all the way to the present day.

It is my fervent hope that Christians desiring the conversion of Muslims heed the Words of the Scriptures, rather than listening to the wisdom of cultural anthropologists, or linguistic specialists who have not submitted their minds to the Mind of Christ!

## THE *LETTER TO DIOGNETUS* AND THE CHURCH'S MISSION TO MUSLIMS TODAY

*By Jacques Hebert*

*The Letter to Diognetus* (TLD) is one of the earliest apologetic writings.<sup>1</sup> Written by an anonymous author, he is popularly called Mathetes. The purpose of the letter was to demonstrate that Christians were not a danger to the city and Roman Empire. The anonymous writer is by no means the last to make such an argument. Almost exclusively, this letter has been used in scholarly discussions only for its lexical contributions to understanding the Greek New Testament.<sup>2</sup> Although Mathetes was writing in a different place and time, many of his insights are missiologically relevant and instructive for missionaries today. Consider the author's description of early Christian cultural integration and engagement:

For Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs. They do not live in cities of their own; they do not use a peculiar form of speech; they do not follow an eccentric manner of life. This doctrine of theirs has not been discovered by the ingenuity or deep thought of inquisitive men, nor do they

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<sup>1</sup> Geisler and Nix place the date around 150 [Geisler, N. L., & Nix, W. E. *A General Introduction to the Bible*, (Chicago: Moody Press. 1996) 100.]. Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe date the letter at 130 [A. Roberts, J. Donaldson & A. C. Coxe (Eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume I: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 23].

<sup>2</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, *The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, and *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* are just a few examples of works which use TLD predominantly for lexical analysis. Schaff's *History of the Christian Church* and Paul Enns' *The Moody Handbook of Theology* are among the minority in their analysis of TLD on the basis of theology. Perhaps Ray Bakke in his *A Theology as Big as the City*, is among the first to address, albeit briefly, the missiological implications of TLD.

put forward a merely human teaching, as some people do. Yet, although they live in Greek and barbarian cities alike, as each man's lot has been cast, and follow the customs of the country in clothing and food and other matters of daily living, at the same time they give proof of the remarkable and admittedly extraordinary constitution of their own commonwealth. They live in their own countries, but only as aliens. They have a share in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land. They marry, like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring. They share their board with each other, but not their marriage bed. It is true that they are "in the flesh," but they do not live "according to the flesh." They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, but in their own lives they go far beyond what the laws require. They love all men, and by all men are persecuted. They are unknown, and still they are condemned; they are put to death, and yet they are brought to life. They are poor, and yet they make many rich; they are completely destitute, and yet they enjoy complete abundance. They are dishonored, and in their very dishonor are glorified; they are defamed, and are vindicated. They are reviled, and yet they bless; when they are affronted, they still pay due respect. When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; undergoing punishment, they rejoice because they are brought to life. They are treated by the Jews as foreigners and enemies, and are hunted down by the Greeks; and all the time those who hate them find it impossible to justify their enmity.<sup>3</sup>

The argument in this letter reflects the tone of those seeking to gain legitimacy as a minority within a larger group. Evangelistic approaches developed in majority settings focus on geographical separation, political dominance, and strict observance of the new *overculture's* particular religio-cultural taboos' contra-arguments developed in minority settings which reflect a more conciliatory and contextual tone. Majority setting apologists are more focused on demonstrating the theological differences and uniqueness of Chris-

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<sup>3</sup>This translation is taken from John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. van Deusen, *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol I. *Early Christian Fathers* ed. Cryil C. Richardson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press). This work can be accessed in its entirety at [www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.x.i.ii.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.x.i.ii.html).

tian belief, values, and structures as a subculture—or *overculture*—and calling the non-Christian world to leave the lower world to become part of the separatist movement. The majority community seeks to demonstrate its faith based on adhering to separatist distinctives which often marginalizes minority communities.

In contrast to majority approaches, apologetic approaches from the times and places where Christians are in the minority take on a dramatically different tone from the approaches developed when Christians are in the majority. Evangelistic approaches from TLD focus on living exemplary lives in harmony with the larger culture, hospitality, materialistic detachment, and community regeneration. Arguments developed in minority settings demonstrate that Christianity seeks to redeem the community through identifying common goals, lives, and values. The emerging community was not seeking to build anything new, but to transform what was already there. Emerging communities seek to demonstrate their faith by internal transformation while still adhering to broader cultural norms when possible.

Applying TLD to the Islamic context may lead the reader to cry foul as the common perception is that the Islamic world is decidedly religious while the Greco-Roman world was somehow neutral. One might believe that the freedom with which Mathetes integrates Christian thought and practices is not applicable to practising Christian faith in Islamic contexts. This view, however, elevates Islamic theology to the extent to which it informs the broader Islamic culture while at the same time reduces the extent to which Greek philosophy and religion informed broader Greco-Roman culture. A word of caution is due, however, as the letter was written descriptively and this article uses the letter prescriptively. This article is the reasonable application of TLD to ministry in the Muslim world without taking into consideration social propriety or security issues. It also does not question the accuracy of Mathetes' claims concerning Christian life and practice in his context. There are four points of application to consider in TLD.

First, missionaries and native Christians should participate in the host culture. Christians in the west are notorious for setting up their own spaces and copycat structures, arts, and forms. Mathetes



argues to Diognetus that the early believers were externally indistinguishable from their fellow citizens. They spoke the same language and followed the same customs. They wore the same clothes and ate the same food. National believers and foreign missionaries alike are often prone to view the cultural externals of the Muslim world with suspicion and aversion. This has resulted in dual vocabularies regarding not only religious topics but even down to the way that people greet or offer comfort to one another after a sneeze. This has also resulted in the use of particular names for children and styles of dressing (not covering the hair, cross tattoos, gold jewelry, etc) so as to demonstrate their separation. If those in the broader culture can ascertain a person's religion by watching them walk down the street or hearing them introduce themselves then, according to TLD, we have erred on minutia rather than on essential Christianity. Christians should be free to use common vocabulary and similar clothing as a way of cultural adaptation and participation. The defining mark of believers is not in how they talk and dress, but in how they love.

Participation does not only have to do with personal externals, it also addresses where and how one chooses to live. Christians in Mathetes' community were marked by cultural normalcy; they were not "eccentric". The early emerging community in the letter chose to live among the "barbarian" cities. They did not separate themselves from those who were of questionable reputation and lifestyle. They were not interested in carving out their own space in the city that belonged to their sub-community. When Paul visited the overly-religious city of Athens, he noted that God does not live in buildings built by human hands. This proclamation was undoubtedly a relief to the Athens County Commissioner. Close location to the heathen was of vital importance since they stressed sharing their houses, lives, and wealth with those around them. It is hard to have a ministry built on hospitality and respectable living when one lives in a Christian ghetto. On the negative side, Christians have been prone to gather together as opposed to spreading beyond their geographic and cultural comfort zone. On the positive side, those who practice life together among the non-Christians as those in Mathetes' day did will have new opportunities to model the king-

dom lifestyle in a language, culture and social space that makes sense to non-Christians and makes it accessible to them.

Second, missionaries and native Christians should fully stake their lives in their host community. Mathetes' emerging community married and had children and planted their lives there among non-Christians. There was no claim to "fatherland" and no despair in living in the "foreign" world. One attitude that has continually plagued the church is the Platonic notion that God is not concerned with the here and now, but is simply concerned with the eternal business of saving souls. While there is always the weight of eternity, God loves the here-and-now nonetheless. He is seeking to restore all things to himself. Just like the exiles in Jeremiah's day were instructed to plant their lives, so lived the early Christians.

Third, missionaries and native Christians should not claim their rights in the culture. Although this may appear to be contradictory to point two it is not. While early believers were fully vested in their cities, they were at the same time aliens.

Content with their status as exiles and foreigners, they did not seek the proverbial place at the table. Strategically speaking, this mindset is freeing. Christians are always

They are...	In return they...
Put to death	Bring life
Poor and destitute	Make people rich and enjoy abundance
Dishonored	Bring glory from dishonor
Reviled	Pay due respect
Good	Punished for evil

free to do as they please in any context; however, they must be willing to pay the price for freely following the will of God. The emergent community worked as if they were the cornerstone of the community, lived lives in excess of the law's demands, loved all men, and shared their homes with anyone in need. The human nature's instinct of entitlement cringes at what they received in return: they were blamed as foreigners, their riches were passed on to others and they were persecuted as evildoers. They did all of this without developing a martyr's complex. Many of the clashes between local Christians and Muslims in the country where I served focused more on political and social rights and actions rather than

the offensive nature of the Gospel. Christians often were persecuted for converting their community centers into churches. While they were allowed to perform all of the functions of church in their community, they chose to convert them into churches (this requires the construction of a dome and the proper usage of crosses on the exterior of the building) in spite of not having official permission. More often than not, these events ended in bloodshed and embittered Muslims and Christians towards each other.

Fourth, missionaries and national Christians should take up their crosses and die. Mathetes argues that his community of Christians lived giving everything they had to the community and people where they lived. Not only did they refrain from developing a political strategy to try to prosper from all of the good will they had earned, they received just the opposite. While unjustly receiving the opposite for all of their sacrificial efforts, they maintained a Christ-like humility. They were not there to take over; they were not there to win. They were there to follow Christ through the way of the cross: death. While many believers are pushing for legal status and protection—and who can blame them—the work of Christ is not halted by the laws of man so long as the body of Christ has the mind of Christ.

Many people would argue that to make such social concessions is somehow compromising in any culture, much less in Islamic cultures. This sentiment is partly due to the fact that in western Christianity, particularly evangelicalism and fundamentalism, Christianity is defined primarily by what its followers do not do and what they are against.<sup>4</sup> The believers from TLD were primarily defined by what they chose to do and sacrifice. This is a Christian ethic in and of itself which follows the pattern of Christ. Jesus was continually getting into trouble with the religious leaders simply because he did not observe the same cultural minutia as they did. The beauty of Christ's work is not what he chose not to do, or with

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<sup>4</sup> A common adage is that "Christians don't smoke, drink or chew [tobacco] and they don't go out with folks that do." In religious-political circles, evangelicals are known primarily by what they are against: abortion, alcohol, gambling, gay marriage, etc.

whom he chose not to associate, but what he chose to sacrifice. In addition to what they did practice, and what they sacrificed, they did in fact stand up to the culture on two points. They refused to commit infanticide and although they shared their homes and belongings in every way, they did not commit adultery.

TLD provides a lot of license culturally that would make the gatekeepers of modern evangelicalism and fundamentalism nervous. They are nervous simply because at some point the church accepted Platonic dualism in practice over biblical holism; they rejected people, places and practices until they were willing to come out and be part of the majority community.<sup>5</sup> This has been somewhat common in the West. Churches in the southern states in America started the Color Guard who was responsible for denying entrance to African Americans. Similarly there were many churches who later denied entry to hippies because of their unkempt hair, slovenly appearances and deviant cultural practices. In the Middle East the issues are complicated by local laws which prohibit conversion and require

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<sup>5</sup> Platonic dualism was at the root of many early church heresies relating to the person of Jesus. They saw a problem with Jesus being both fully God and fully man if he had to take on evil matter. To fix this dilemma they argued that he either was not fully God or was not fully man. While these theological battles over evil matter and its implications on the hypostatic union are mostly a thing of the past, modern evangelicalism and fundamentalism have revived Platonic dualism as it relates to ethics. These movements drew on their puritanical roots and lived as if the material world was spiritually damaging. Vignettes of this can be seen in John Bunyan's description of the city of Vanity Fair in *Pilgrim's Progress*. Carl F. H. Henry opposes these views in his work *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* where he questions the legitimacy of Christians who will argue over social practices such as rook and cards but completely omit true social atrocities from their theologizing. In secular thought, Freudian psychology asserted that sin and guilt were a result of culture and upbringing. Contra Platonic dualism and Freudian explanations for sin, biblical holism asserts that the whole world was created good and though it is now fallen is not completely corrupted (eg. intrinsically evil). Thus, sin is not a result of external—material—corruption but of a fallen human nature. Francis Schaeffer is a champion of this view throughout his works in general, but most specifically in *True Spirituality*, *The Mark of the Christian*, and *The New Super Spirituality*. In this view, Christians should boldly speak to and live in all parts of culture. Christians should invade arts, politics, education and all other sectors to bring them under the lordship of Christ rather than drawing a line in the sand dividing the sacred from the secular.

religious identification on drivers' licenses. These laws often support social attitudes which require Christian converts from Islam to change their name and never receive full standing in the church. If the modern church goes back to an older approach to Christian living, it forces Christians out of their Christian comfort zones and into the world in sacrificial and dangerous ways. All of this is how TLD defines being "in the flesh" and not "according to the flesh"

Most western countries are experiencing cultural transformations wherein long-vested Christian establishments are finding themselves on the fringes of influence, power, and respectability. Many Christians in the Muslim world, who are already in a minority status, desire Western-style freedoms, particularly after the Arab Spring. Political power will forever be the seduction of the Church. Modern Christians must always remember that they are not the first to tread these grounds. There is much to be gained by refusing to fight for control and influence through human means. Christians should make their faith proactive and positive rather than simply reactive and negative. By setting aside the struggle for majority status and recognition Christians are able to focus on the calling to be incarnational. Mathetes paints a truly beautiful portrait of what a Christian minority looks like when they incarnate into the majority culture.

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## ST. CONSTANTINE THE GREAT: AN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE

*By Marina Shelly Havach<sup>1</sup>*

**Abstract:** The policies and person of Roman emperor Constantine I are often seen as having played a negative role in the development of church-state relations. On the other hand, Orthodox Christians venerate him as St. Constantine the Great, Equal to the Apostles. This essay elucidates the Orthodox view of Constantine by engaging with the historical literature to answer some of the most common charges made against him.

**Key terms:** Constantine I, Constantinianism, anti-Constantinianism, Constantinian shift, Eastern Orthodox Church, sanctity

### 1 Introduction

Much has been written of late on Roman emperor Constantine I's role in the history of church-state relations. Some, including prominent theologians John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas, believe that his policies had a very negative effect on the development of Christianity, a change they call the "Constantinian shift." In extending his imperial endorsement to a once persecuted group, Constantine is said to have sold out the Church, with far-reaching implications.

But was Constantine really as bad as his detractors claim? Even more, was Constantine himself a Constantinian? As I will show, the charges commonly leveled against Constantine do not hold up under historical scrutiny.

Constantine was neither a cynical crypto-pagan, nor did his policies corrupt a once-glorious Church of martyrs. He was just another sinner trying to answer the age-old question: what does it mean to follow Christ *right now*? In Constantine's case, that meant

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combining the duties of a Roman emperor with the demands of a new faith.

My aim in writing this article is to present the viewpoint of a young Orthodox Christian laywoman. I am neither a theologian nor a Church historian, having instead received training in philosophy and comparative literature. That said, along with other Orthodox Christians, I consider Constantine to be a saint, and I pray for his intercession to God.

This assessment of Constantine emphasizes above all the fact of his holiness, and only secondarily his apostolic service to the Church as the first Christian emperor. Neither denying nor diminishing his many questionable actions, I shall present them as part of a greater story that ended with Constantine's justification.

## **2 The Charges against Constantine**

I shall now address the most common charges made against Constantine, responding to each with historical arguments and examples.

### ***2.1 That Constantine was not really a Christian***

A view of Constantine as a cynical manipulator of popular religious sentiment predominates in secular Western opinion, not in the least due to *The Da Vinci Code*. In the medieval period, Constantine had been promoted in both East and West "as the standard against which medieval rulers were measured," but the 1576 rediscovery and translation of pagan writer Zosimus' negative characterization gave Renaissance humanists ammunition against the traditional hagiographic picture.<sup>2</sup>

Later scholars continued in a similar vein: in his classic 1853 study (still in print), German historian Jacob Burckhardt scoffs at the possibility that Constantine could have believed in anything at all. "In a genius driven without surcease by ambition and lust for power," writes Burckhardt, "there can be no question of Christianity and paganism, of conscious religiosity or irreligiosity[;] such a man is essentially unreligious."<sup>3</sup> Not only was Constantine not a Chris-

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<sup>2</sup> Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 273–4.

<sup>3</sup> *The Age of Constantine the Great*, 292.



tian, Burckhardt and others argued, he did not care for anything but power.<sup>4</sup>

All of this changed in 1929 with Norman Baynes' seminal lecture *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*. As Peter J. Leithart notes,

At least since Norman Baynes...there has been a growing consensus among English-speaking scholars on some central questions about the first Christian emperor...Today, few specialists in the period question the fact that Constantine was a "real" Christian, and those who want to dispute the accounts of his conversion do so because they think he grew up a Christian.<sup>5</sup>

Leithart's assertion is well founded. Major works on Constantine describing him as a committed Christian include Andreas Alföldi's *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome* (1948), Timothy Barnes' *Constantine and Eusebius* (1982), Charles Matson Odahl's *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (2004), and most recently Paul Stephenson's biography *Constantine: Roman Emperor, Christian Victor* (2009). For better or worse, these scholars conclude, Constantine believed in Christ.

There remains much speculation concerning Constantine's conversion. Some think it occurred after his victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge in 312; others believe it happened gradually over the course of many years. The traditional hagiographical literature<sup>6</sup> (along with some modern scholars)<sup>7</sup> asserts the former, but many modern writers hold the latter position.<sup>8</sup> Regardless of the circumstances, the important thing is that Constantine converted and was eventually baptized into the Church.

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Gibbon, author of the influential *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, also considered Constantine to be an opportunist, if perhaps an earnestly "Christian" one.

<sup>5</sup> *Defending Constantine*, 9–10.

<sup>6</sup> Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 82; Dimitry of Rostov, "Zhitiie," 903.

<sup>7</sup> "In 312 [Constantine] experienced a religious conversion which profoundly affected his conception of himself." Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 275; also see Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 79–82.

<sup>8</sup> "Conversion is never a momentary phenomenon," asserts Stephenson; "it is only held to have been upon reflection and with hindsight." *Constantine*, 168.

The popular claim that Constantine was simply riding the wave of greater religious trends for personal gain does not find support in the facts, either. Constantine's ambition and political acumen were not tarnished by the cynicism we associate with these qualities today.

Like other Roman leaders before him, Constantine sought divine aid and protection for himself and his subjects.<sup>9</sup> A committed monotheist, he had been taught from childhood to honor the *summus deus*, or "supreme god."<sup>10</sup>

Constantine continued to search for this God throughout his life.<sup>11</sup> When one day he envisioned a cross with the words: *en touto nika* ("in this, win"), Constantine was stunned. Some Christian soldiers interpreted this vision as being of their God. Convinced of the sign's power, Constantine ordered that it<sup>12</sup> be inscribed on all shields before marching against Maxentius. And he won.

Following this victory, Constantine realized that the Christian God was indeed his long-sought *summus deus*. "[Constantine's] conversion [in 312] was not the final decision in a long internal search for moral regeneration and personal salvation; but it was not a momentary act of pure political expediency either," explains Odahl. "His revelatory experiences convinced him that the God of the Christians had answered his sincere prayers."<sup>13</sup> Thus did Constantine begin his journey in Christ.

Constantine refused to make the traditional pagan sacrifice upon his victorious entry into Rome,<sup>14</sup> instead offering prayers of thanks-

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<sup>9</sup> As a Roman emperor, he held the traditional title of *pontifex maximus*, or highest priest: the health of the empire was linked with religious devotion. For more on this, see Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 245; Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 327.

<sup>10</sup> Stephenson, *Constantine*, 167.

<sup>11</sup> Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 80.

<sup>12</sup> There is some debate as to whether the "sign" was initially a cross, a Chi-Rho, or a similar symbol, but the details are not particularly important. All were explicitly Christian symbols; all contained a cross.

<sup>13</sup> *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 91–2.

<sup>14</sup> Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 328.

giving to the God who had given him victory.<sup>15</sup> In 313, he issued the Edict of Milan, ending nearly three centuries of persecution.

Coming years brought Christianizing legislation, such as the eventual outlawing of gladiatorial games and all other forms of blood sacrifice. Constantine wanted to replace them with the unbloody sacrifice of the Eucharist.<sup>16</sup> He built a new city in Byzantium entirely free of pagan temples, and he gave explicitly Christian sermons to people in his court.

Timothy Barnes summarizes his reign thus: “After 312 Constantine considered that his main duty as emperor was to inculcate virtue in his subjects and to persuade them to worship God...He believed sincerely that God had given him a special mission to convert the Roman Empire to Christianity.”<sup>17</sup> As it turns out, not only was Constantine a Christian — he was a missionary.

## ***2.2 That Constantine wanted to make Christianity compulsory***

Some, however, misinterpret the means by which Constantine tried to spread faith in Christ. Constantine did not establish Christianity as the state religion of the Empire: this was done long after his death by the emperor Theodosius in 380. Whether or not establishment was a good move on Theodosius’ part I leave to further consideration.

The point I wish to make here is that Constantine was, by fourth-century standards, surprisingly tolerant of other religions.

In his toleration of paganism, Constantine took after Lactantius, a Christian apologist and teacher of Latin rhetoric who became one of his closest advisors.<sup>18</sup> An edict issued to the Eastern provinces following Constantine’s victory over Licinius in 324 (reproduced in Eusebius’ *Life*) states his views on toleration most explicitly:

For the general good of the world and of all mankind I desire that your people be at peace and stay free from strife. Let those in error, as well

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<sup>15</sup> Dimitry of Rostov, “Zhitie,” 903.

<sup>16</sup> Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 328–9.

<sup>17</sup> *Constantine and Eusebius*, 275.

<sup>18</sup> Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 110.

as the believers, gladly receive the benefit of peace and quiet...May none molest another; may each retain what his soul desires, and practise it... let no one use what he has received by inner conviction as a means to harm his neighbour. What each has seen and understood, he must use, if possible, to help the other; but if that is impossible, the matter should be dropped.<sup>19</sup>

Constantine accepted the truth of Christianity, but he did not believe that the “easy” yoke of Christ (Matt 11:30) could or should be imposed by force: “It is one thing to take on willingly the contest for immortality, quite another to enforce it with sanctions.”<sup>20</sup> Pagans continued to occupy important government positions, and “Constantine extended the same tax exemption to synagogue heads and other Jewish leaders that he offered to Christian priests.”<sup>21</sup>

Constantine made no secret, however, of his allegiance to Christ as the “only-begotten Son of God” (Nicene Creed), nor did he hide his disdain for those who did not agree, especially pagans. He passed laws “prohibit[ing] Jews from attacking converts to Christianity” under pain of burning,<sup>22</sup> and greatly limited the pagan practice of divination.<sup>23</sup> This open (and sometimes brutal) promotion of Christianity on Constantine’s part runs contrary to today’s sensibilities, informed as they are by the Lockean conception of religion as a strictly private matter.

Leithart makes a good case for the coherence of Constantine’s position over Locke’s which, he concludes, “pretends to offer a level playing field” but really favors religions that make no claims other than over one’s own Sunday morning.<sup>24</sup> One may well take issue with Constantine’s methods, but one wonders whether it is even possible, let alone desirable, for government officials to disregard their closest-held beliefs when making decisions of state.

Many Westerners, including a good number of Christians, are uncomfortable with the idea of a society promoting Christianity as

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<sup>19</sup> Qtd. in *Life of Constantine*, 113–4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>21</sup> Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 132.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 52.

<sup>24</sup> *Defending Constantine*, 144.

the one true Faith. Witch burning, the Inquisition, and the Crusades immediately come to mind. Orthodox Christians, however, have not traditionally been so wary of explicit promotion of Christianity on the part of state leaders. As Timothy Ware (now Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia) writes in *The Orthodox Church*,

There are many today...who sharply criticize the Byzantine Empire and the idea of a Christian society for which it stands. Yet were the Byzantines entirely wrong? They believed that Christ, who lived on earth as a man, had redeemed every aspect of human existence, and held therefore that it was possible to baptize not human individuals only but the whole spirit and organization of society.<sup>25</sup>

The Orthodox ideal is one of *symphonia*, of a harmony between Church and State, rather than an artificial division between the two. Successive Byzantine emperors often overstepped their bounds, meddling in affairs best left to conscience. But Constantine did not see himself as arbiter of all things sacred: instead, he deferred to bishops, and ultimately to God. In Leithart's words, he "knew...[that] neither society nor social space, neither public life nor the space in which it takes place, can be religiously neutral."<sup>26</sup>

### ***2.3 That Constantine thought of himself as head of the Church as well as head of state***

Constantine's policies are often seen as leading to the overt caesaropapism of later regimes, East and West. Bishops of the time saw the first Christian emperor as a natural adjudicator, and Constantine reluctantly accepted this role — but only to a point. He interfered in the Donatist controversy of the African Church, and he summoned the first Church council at Nicaea.

In both cases, it should be noted, he had been called upon by bishops and others to become involved. "If anyone is to blame for starting a process that subordinated the Church to the emperor," writes Leithart, "it is not Constantine but the Donatists. He was *invited* to sit...Rather than accepting the appeal [of a Donatist bish-

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<sup>25</sup> *The Orthodox Church*, 50.

<sup>26</sup> Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 145.

bishop] directly, Constantine deflected responsibility to the bishops who were to be assembled at Rome.”<sup>27</sup>

One must keep in mind that the Church was an entirely new sort of institution, and thus it represented a stumbling block to generations of Roman emperors. This “new Israel, an independent ‘nation’ *within* the empire without ethnic or social or geographic boundaries” was “unprecedented.”<sup>28</sup> Under Constantine, a precarious balance was established between the emperor and the episcopacy that was later to be tilted. Through the centuries, however, it has helped to have the Creed as a guide — a direct result of imperial interference.

#### ***2.4 That Constantine did a lot of un-Christian things***

The final charge I will consider is one often made of Christians: namely, that they do not live up to their principles. Constantine was a military leader as well as a Roman emperor, and it can be assumed that he personally killed a number of people, as well as giving orders to kill. Torture was still widely used during his reign, and harsh punishments persisted.<sup>29</sup>

Amongst all the evil things of which Constantine is accused, the deaths of his son Crispus and wife Fausta stand out. Whatever the reasons for these alleged executions, they are certainly a sordid affair.<sup>30</sup> We must remember, however, that our Lord did “not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matt 9:13). There is a long history in the Church of sinners, even murderers, answering this call: St. Moses the Black, a fourth-century Ethiopian desert father, started life as the leader of a violent gang of bandits, and the twentieth-century Russian saint Silouan of Mt. Athos once nearly killed a man with a blow to the chest before beginning his own path of repentance. “Wondrous is God in His saints,” declares the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>30</sup> For more on the deaths of Fausta and Crispus, see Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, 180–3; Stephenson, *Constantine*, 219–23; Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 228–30. Eusebius and other hagiographers either gloss over these events or (like Dimitry of Rostov) do not mention them at all.

Psalmist (Ps 67:35).<sup>31</sup> In them, we see the “crooked...made straight” (Luke 3:5) and fallen human nature redeemed. Constantine was not perfect, but in the end, claim the Orthodox, he pleased God.

### 3 Epilogue: St. Constantine the Great

The most serious problem with attacks on Constantine is the confusion of Constantine with “Constantinianism.” The first is a man who lived in time and space, a human being called to be the first Christian emperor. The second is a set of abstractions, a collection of critiques largely based in modern anxieties about living an authentic life in Christ.

One is a unique person loved by God; the other is merely a useful construct for the testing of conscience. We must be careful of the Church, but we must always remember that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). God’s ways are not our ways. He provides in a manner we cannot fathom. In the Orthodox view, it pleased Him that His Church be permitted to spread and prosper on ground prepared by the blood of the martyrs.

Anti-Constantinians are concerned about trying to serve both God and Caesar, and they challenge Christians to live by their conscience. These are serious concerns — Constantine himself shared them. In his final days on Earth, he is said to have doffed the imperial purple for the simple white of baptism: like all the saints, he finally rejected sin and “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). He did not resume his imperial duties and spent his last days in repentance.<sup>32</sup>

“Constantine,” writes Leithart, “seemed to believe that there was a basic incompatibility between being an emperor and being a Christian, between court and church, warfare and prayer, the purple

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<sup>31</sup> Here I follow the Septuagint numbering, according to the Orthodox tradition. The translation is from the *Psalter According to the Seventy* published by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Boston.

<sup>32</sup> According to Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 178. Dimitry of Rostov repeats an account from the medieval *Acts of the Blessed Silvester* (“Zhitie,” 904–6), according to which Constantine was baptized much earlier under dramatic circumstances. Leithart believes this account to be spurious (*Defending Constantine*, 299).

and the white.”<sup>33</sup> His conscience clean, Constantine reposed in the Lord. Along the way, he brought a great many people to Christ, bravely attempting to live his faith as the leader of a vast empire. For this reason, Orthodox Christians venerate him as “equal to the apostles.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Defending Constantine*, 300.

<sup>34</sup> In Orthodoxy, the title “equal-to-the-apostles” (Greek: *isapostolos*; Slavonic: *ravnoapostol’nyi*) is traditionally given to those saints who have greatly contributed to the spread of Christianity, such as St. Nina, enlightener of Georgia, and SS. Cyril and Methodius, missionaries to the Slavs.



## AUGUSTINE: LESSONS IN CONTEXTUALISATION FROM HIS LIFE AND MINISTRY

*By Carlyle Danford<sup>1</sup>*

Of all visible things, the world is the greatest; of all invisible, the greatest is God. But, that the world is, we see; that God is, we believe.<sup>2</sup> (Augustine of Hippo)

We rarely read old books. We tend to limit ourselves by era, tribe, and category. We read books written in our day, by people just like us, and that can be placed in one or two limited genres. But this sort of epistolary reductionism is to our detriment - the older books are precisely the ones that will help us to escape the limitations of our current era, learn from those who are not a part of our local tribe, and transcend the categories to which we have become accustomed.<sup>3</sup>

Ashford's comments are very true of modern society and particularly of Christianity. Christian books have become big business and there are millions of titles of varying degrees of quality and usefulness. The work of the early church fathers is increasingly seldom read by those outside of seminary courses.

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<sup>1</sup> Carlyle Danford completed his undergraduate degrees in humanities, fine arts and education before completing a Masters in Educational Theology. He has taught religious education and other subjects in church schools for several years while in roles which also included oversight of pastoral care, curriculum development and worship. His research on the place of worship in church schools and its relationship to mission has been published in peer reviewed journals and highlights his keen interest in the role of worship and the Word of God as means for the Holy Spirit to bring faith. He also presents regularly on the importance of recovering our contemplative tradition in order empower Christians to serve faithfully across the world in difficult circumstances. He is currently serving cross culturally by lecturing in theology and education at a tertiary level while consulting with local schools on issues of pastoral care, religious education, teacher education and curriculum construction.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, Edited by Philip Schaff, Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d., p 480.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Ashford. "Augustine for the 21st Century: why we should read old books", April 14, 2012. [betweenhours.com/2009/08/19/augustine-for-the-21st-century-1-why-should-we-read-old-books/](http://betweenthehours.com/2009/08/19/augustine-for-the-21st-century-1-why-should-we-read-old-books/).

As the Arab spring has erupted across the Middle East and northern Africa, it is time to pause and perhaps look back to a time when Christianity dominated this area. We remind ourselves of a time when the fathers Clement, Origen, Athanasius and Cyril wrote from Alexandria in Egypt, Tertullian and Cyprian worked in Carthage, now a suburb of modern Tunis (in Tunisia) and Augustine was bishop of Hippo (now modern day Algeria). These men ministered in countries which are now in the revolutionary process. These regions produced foundational theological concepts that continue to form the base of church belief many centuries later.

These men concerned themselves with ensuring the gospel was taught correctly and was integrated into the lives of the followers of Jesus. We know from several sources, not the least of which are Paul's letters to the various churches, that the Christian message was lived out slightly differently across the Mediterranean. Paul himself presented the gospel differently to different communities depending on their cultural backgrounds and needs.

This process of making a message understood in a new context is called the process of contextualisation. Contextualisation in the church is 'the various processes by which a local church integrates the Gospel message (the text) with its local culture (the context)'.<sup>4</sup> The text and context must be blended into that one, God-intended reality called the Christian life.<sup>5</sup>

What did contextualisation look like in the early church? How was it practiced by the early believers? In this paper we focus on the life of Augustine of Hippo, a father of the early church born to a Christian mother and a Pagan father, who adopted Manichaeism before a profound conversion to Christianity took place. His life and ministry provide a rich treasure of insight that remains relevant for contextualising the message today. By looking back and outside of our own culture and time we can equip ourselves better for under-

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<sup>4</sup> Louis J. Luzbetak. *The church and cultures: new Perspectives in missiological anthropology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988, p 69.

<sup>5</sup> Harrower, John. "What is contextualisation?" Address given to Mission Australia, 2001.

standing our own culture and equipping ourselves for cross-cultural work.

## 1 The life of Augustine

My discovery of Augustine, I will admit, was by my training as a theologian and teacher in the Lutheran tradition. The reformation caused many of the reformers, not just Luther but others such as Calvin, to recall the work of Augustine in reforming church practice and teaching. Luther calls Augustine the ‘most trustworthy’ interpreter of Paul’s writings.<sup>6</sup> And the similarities between Paul and Augustine are many as we will discover.

Both Paul and Augustine were concerned with the transmission of thoughts across cultural and societal boundaries. Paul preached to the Greeks and Jews as a Roman while Augustine, a Christian with a Pagan and Manichaeist past, ministered to a disintegrating Roman Empire enchained by Platonism and Paganism.

Born in Thagaste (in modern day Algeria) to middle class parents in 354 AD, Augustine was schooled in Christianity as a young boy by his devout mother Monica. Augustine’s father was a low ranking Roman official who carried on the pagan religion of the empire.

His homeland was on the outskirts of the Roman Empire and the region was of little importance Rome itself. It was a backwater. This seemed to have played on Augustine’s mind. As academically gifted young Augustine was supported to pursue further study in Carthage, ‘[he] set out to make himself more Roman than the Romans and to penetrate to the centre of the culture from which he found himself alienated by his provincial birth.’<sup>7</sup>

There he took up house with a young woman who would bear him a son and he seemingly enjoyed the hedonistic lifestyle. There he encountered and began following Manichaeism, a quasi Christian

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther. *Luther’s works vol.31: career of the reformer 1*. Edited by Harold J. Grimm, General Editor Helmut T. Lehmann. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957, p 39.

<sup>7</sup> James O’Donnell. “Augustine the African”, April 15, 2012. [web.archive.org/web/20030402073020/ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/twayne/aug1.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20030402073020/ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/twayne/aug1.html).

sect which preached the duality of light and darkness. The light was knowledge, soul and spirit, while darkness was ignorance, matter and the body. This system of thought taught salvation through the attainment of special knowledge and abstinence from some earthly pleasures.

After returning home briefly to teach, he moved back to take students in Carthage and then finally onto Rome. Showing obvious potential he was appointed professor of rhetoric for the imperial court in Milan – the most prestigious academic position in the Latin world at that time.

Despite his success, Augustine remained troubled. He had to dismiss the mother of his child to take a society marriage in Milan arranged by his mother. While waiting for his fiancée to come of age he took up with yet another concubine. He also began to question Manichaeism through acquaintances encouraging him to see it as illogical and discovering that even the greatest teachers of the sect were unable to answer his deepest questions.<sup>8</sup>

Augustine had dismissed the Christian faith of his mother for two main reasons. Firstly, 'If God was supreme and pure goodness, evil could not be a divine creation. And if, on the other hand, all things were created by the divine, God could not be as good and wise as Monica and the church claimed.' Secondly, from the point of view of rhetoric, the Bible was a series of inelegant writings which contained inconstant style. How can a book, so full of violence and humanity, be the word of God?<sup>9</sup>

One of the turning points of Augustine's journey to truth was hearing the renowned Bishop Ambrose of Milan speak. Augustine first came to simply hear Ambrose as a great orator. As Gonzalez writes, 'his initial purpose was not to hear what Ambrose had to say, but to see how he said it.'<sup>10</sup> Ambrose taught many passages that concerned Augustine as allegory, thus eliminating Augustine's con-

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<sup>8</sup> John Bowen. "Evangelism in Augustine's confessions: ancient light on a contemporary subject" 14/04/2012. [institute.wycliffecollege.ca/2007/03/evangelism-in-the-augustine%E2%80%99s-confessions-ancient-light-on-a-contemporary-subject/](http://institute.wycliffecollege.ca/2007/03/evangelism-in-the-augustine%E2%80%99s-confessions-ancient-light-on-a-contemporary-subject/)

<sup>9</sup> Justo L. González. *The story of Christianity: the early church to the reformation*. New York: Harper One, 2010, pp 244-45.

<sup>10</sup> González p 245.

cerns about the legitimacy of the Word of God due to its brutal, ill-written and earthy elements. Ambrose spoke of Christianity in such an academically rigorous manner that Augustine's objections on academic grounds fell away also. Augustine also saw that man's free will and original sin were the cause of evil, and not God himself. He began to see his mistaken ideas of Christianity and grasp the mystery of God.

But still, Augustine was a 'spiritual mongrel' whose conversion was not yet complete.

Raised a Catholic by his mother, he became a catechumen in Ambrose's church—but initially at least, this was probably no more than a move of expediency made by many up-and-comers. At the same time, he was well-acquainted with the Punic paganism of his late father, and technically was still a Manichean, though he seems to have pressed the borders of that faith and moved beyond it. Also...Roman paganism [was] paying his bills.<sup>11</sup>

The oft heard story, of Augustine's epiphany in his garden, hearing the words "take up and read" float over his garden wall, highlights the key moment in his journey. He had put down a manuscript of the apostle Paul's writings and when he returned to it after hearing these ethereal words on the wind he read Romans 11, 'let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.'<sup>12</sup>

It was medicine to Augustine's ears and assurance that he should indeed turn from his previous life of seeking earthly pleasure and assurance through attaining salvation through one's own power. Augustine writes of his journey extensively in his *Confessions*, 'And thus by degrees I was led upward from bodies to the soul [which]

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<sup>11</sup> Randy Peterson. "Augustine's life and times." *Christian History*, 2010. [www.chinstitute.org/index.php/chm/fifth-century/augustines-life/](http://www.chinstitute.org/index.php/chm/fifth-century/augustines-life/).

<sup>12</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989.

cried out that the unchangeable was better than the changeable.<sup>13</sup> Augustine's attraction to the pure ethics of Christianity was one he shared with many converts to early Christianity.<sup>14</sup>

He realised that his objections to Christianity were misunderstandings of the message.

For, as to those passages in the Scripture which had heretofore appeared incongruous and offensive to me, now that I had heard several of them expounded reasonably, I could see that they were to be resolved by the mysteries of spiritual interpretation. The authority of Scripture seemed to me all the more revered and worthy of devout belief because, although it was visible for all to read, it reserved the full majesty of its secret wisdom within its spiritual profundity.<sup>15</sup>

Augustine's turning point was through being immersed in solid scriptural study based on the preaching of Ambrose and his own reflection. Of this he writes:

I was also glad that the old Scriptures of the Law and the Prophets were laid before me to be read, not now with an eye to what had seemed absurd in them when formerly I censured thy holy ones for thinking thus, when they actually did not think in that way. And I listened with delight...<sup>16</sup>

While many took baptism during this time for career or societal advancement, this was not case for Augustine. At this realisation of the truth of Christianity, Augustine abandoned his life and high position in society. He was baptised, sold much of his possessions and returned to Thagaste to set up what one could consider the forerunner of a modern monastic community.

The story of Augustine becoming a minister is famous. Augustine was visiting the church in Hippo when the Bishop Valerius, after spotting the now notable Augustine in the congregation, preached that God would send shepherds for the flock and

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<sup>13</sup> Augustine of Hippo. *Confessions*. Translated by Albert C. Outler. Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n. d., p 111.

<sup>14</sup> William C. Weinrich. "Evangelism in the early church." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45, January-April, 1981, p 70.

<sup>15</sup> *Confessions* p 85.

<sup>16</sup> *Confessions* p 83.

asked the gathered assembly to pray if there was one present in the congregation at that very moment to pastor them. Augustine was identified, promptly ordained and as custom went, was 'chained' to the same church until his death in 430.

Augustine spent the remainder of his life focussing on the needs of the believers in front of him. For him worship was the heart of the Christian's life and his ministry. He was particularly aware of the society Christians who would pack his church each week to hear his sermon to ensure their social status and he saw his chief duty to awaken them to the truth and mystery of the gospel.

Augustine stressed the utter fallenness of humanity and the inability of humans to do any good without God's help. Augustine read Romans 9-11 and applied Paul's words about the calling of Israel to the salvation of individual men and women. Our salvation, he reasoned on this basis, is entirely God's work...'17

While he was seemingly tucked away in the fringe of the empire and of Christianity, his influence would live on for centuries to come through his extensive writing. While parts of Hippo were destroyed following his death in 430, some 100 books, 240 letters and in excess of 500 sermons survived and continue to provide worthy study for Christians today.

## **2 Augustine's response to popular religious thought of his day**

One who reads Augustine's sermons notes easily that he was a man dearly concerned with the lives of his congregants. He was not a man simply interested in academic Christianity. Augustine was primarily a pastoral theologian and was concerned first with the public preaching of the word. He only concerned himself in wider debate when outside influences interfered with this congregation. As a shepherd, there were many movements that threatened his flock.

The first of the ideas that threatened his congregation was the Manichaeism with which he himself aligned years earlier. It held

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<sup>17</sup> Campbell, Ted. *Christian confessions: a historical introduction*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996, p 68.

that eternal salvation was found by separating the light and dark from the human life in order to prepare the soul for salvation through one's own power. As Augustine had led many to Manichaeism, he felt a particular call to minister to these people. His prime response was to argue that the will that was created by God is inherently good in itself but humanity chooses evil. One's nature is a continual battle that is only resolved by Christ. While Augustine did not give a great deal of attention to Christology, his thoughts on salvation through grace alone are clearly seen echoed in the work of the protestant reformers. The release of people from the bondage of paying dues to pagan gods and the fear of trying to save oneself was a prime driver in his work.

Augustine later encountered the Donatists who questioned the validity of sacraments (baptism and communion) administered by bishops of poor character. Augustine argued that the validity of the rights performed by these bishops did not depend on their personal power but on the Church universal. The impact on the congregation here is obvious and could lead to crises of faith. Is the communion valid? The baptism? The forgiveness of sins?<sup>18</sup> Augustine extends his previous teaching against Manichaeism and argues strongly that if the work of God is dependent on our work then we are doomed for failure. It again reaffirms the teaching of grace. Augustine clearly argued that the church was a place for sinners and saints. 'The validity of the church's ministry and preaching did not depend upon the holiness of its ministers, but upon the person of Jesus Christ'<sup>19</sup>

Pelagianism taught that as the will is free, humanity can choose to overcome sin and therefore achieve salvation without the work of Christ. It was a movement that drew on the teaching of a British ascetic monk named Pelagius who held that human beings were able to take the lead in their own salvation. Augustine argued that the human will is not that simplistic and sin can take hold of it. Also, by

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<sup>18</sup> Gunton, Colin E. *The Christian faith: an introduction to Christian doctrine*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2004, p 130.

<sup>19</sup> Alister E. McGrath. "The Patristic period", In *Christian theology: an introduction*. Chichester, West Sussex, U.K: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, p 30.



affirming the doctrine of original sin, he maintained that humanity cannot take the initiative in salvation. As McGrath summarises the thoughts of Augustine, 'Nothing that a man or woman could do was sufficient to break the stranglehold of sin.'<sup>20</sup> Again, Augustine comforts the hearers by affirming the work of Christ as key to salvation. Much of Augustine's later years were spent on writing the *City of God* which was written against the backdrop of the sacking of Rome in 410 AD by the Visigoths. This event led to a resurgence of Pagan beliefs and some saw it as punishment for the empire turning to worship this new Jesus instead of the gods of Rome. Many Roman refugees moved into North Africa and into Augustine's congregation. He took this opportunity to show his flock, as God had showed him through Ambrose, that earthly history and work are simply a poor reflection of God's ultimate history and work.

His core argument was that society can be divided into two cities - the City of Man (based on the love of idols) and the City of God (based on the love of God). We are faced with a choice between the cities but we are drawn to what we truly love. Ultimately we love God or ourselves. Salvation is found through a God who seeks us out in both cities. There are eternal consequences for taking up residence in either city - life for those in the City of God and death for those in the City of Man.<sup>21</sup> Augustine clearly presents God's grace in seeking out humankind where we reside and offering salvation through the person and work of Christ only.

The Heavenly City [(of God)] outshines Rome [(The City of Man)] beyond comparison. There, instead of victory, is truth; instead of high rank, holiness; instead of peace, felicity; instead of life, eternity.<sup>22</sup>

We can see from facing challenges that Augustine's prime argument was always for the prime importance of God's plan for salvation through Christ. His Christianity is argued strongly and has a firm focus on grace. The concept of grace was a counter cultural

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<sup>20</sup> McGrath p 33.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce Ashford "Augustine's argument in the City of God." 14/04/2012. [betweenthetimes.com/2009/08/21/augustine-for-the-21st-century-2-what-is-augustines-argument-in-the-city-of-god/](http://betweenthetimes.com/2009/08/21/augustine-for-the-21st-century-2-what-is-augustines-argument-in-the-city-of-god/)

<sup>22</sup> Bowen np.

concept for a Roman society in a myriad of works' theology systems of thought.

### **3 The implications of Augustine's ministry and theology for today**

#### ***3.1 The best bearers of the message are those of the culture itself***

Augustine's ministry is so very similar to Paul's words in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9:20-23

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

In *The City of God*, Augustine is a teacher of Truth who is a Roman and was schooled from a young age in the dominant religious philosophies of the region. He was both Christian and Pagan and this meant he could speak the discourse of both. He had keenly felt the strain of the pressure of being part of religious systems which relied on personal achievement for grace to be attained. Like Luther would rediscover many centuries later, Augustine understood fully the welcoming comfort of Ephesians 2:8-9, 'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast.' He had suffered what Christians, Romans and outcasts had suffered. This is why themes of grace are so prominent in his works and why his ministry had such an impact. He was of the cultures he served. Augustine writes:

For if two men, each ignorant of the other's language meet, and are not compelled to pass, but, on the contrary, to remain in company, dumb animals, though of different species, would more easily hold intercourse than they, human beings though they be. For their common nature is no help to friendliness when they are prevented by diversity of language from conveying their sentiments to one another; so that a

man would more readily hold intercourse with his dog than with a foreigner.<sup>23</sup>

Those that are not already embedded in the culture must work, as Paul did, to become part of the culture at the deepest of levels and be able to speak the entirety of the cultural discourses of language, custom and so forth.

### ***3.2 The message needs to be sent in a manner consistent with ways of the culture***

Augustine suffered for a time from a misconception of Christianity that did not make cultural sense. Brown writes:

The great Platonists of this age...could provide them with a profoundly religious view of the world, that grew naturally out of an immemorial tradition. The claim of the Christian, by contrast, lacked intellectual foundation. For [Romans] to accept the Incarnation would have been like a modern European denying the evolution of the species; he would have had to abandon not only the most advanced, rationally based knowledge available to him, but, by implication, the whole culture permeated by such achievements. Quite bluntly, the pagans were the 'wise' men...and the Christians were 'stupid'.<sup>24</sup>

Augustine encountered a set of religious teachings in Christianity which were not academic in nature nor observed the rules of classicism. It was against his nature to put his faith in something so seemingly vulgar and his process of coming to faith was unfortunately a process of unlearning the Christianity that had been given to him. This is not an experience foreign to us in the church and Bowen likens Augustine's experience to people who attend the famous 'Alpha type'<sup>25</sup> courses.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *City of God* p 924.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Brown. *Augustine of Hippo: a biography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, p 302.

<sup>25</sup> Alpha courses have been run across the world in various guises in the last 30 years. Originally from England, the course focuses on exploring the claims of Christianity in a relaxed atmosphere which encourages attendees to ask questions and explore misconceptions about Christianity.

<sup>26</sup> Bowen np.

Augustine's rejection of Christ was due to a misunderstanding of the gospel gained through his interaction with Christians of his day. His conclusions were reached by acting against what they taught about God, not what God Himself taught.

I blushed that for so many years I had bayed, not against the Catholic faith, but against the fables of fleshly imagination. For I had been both impious and rash in this, that I had condemned by pronouncement what I ought to have learned by inquiry.<sup>27</sup>

When Ambrose taught the message in a manner in which Augustine could understand it in the context of his culture, he was changed and he used this technique to reach others.

In *City of God*, Augustine attempts to reach the last followers of paganism through using Roman methods of argumentation, utilising Roman literature and history.<sup>28</sup> He challenges the perfection of the pagan gods and of Rome itself, and in doing so transforms the Roman view of their own history.<sup>29</sup> Augustine invites them into the mystery of God's city – he doesn't tell them they are wrong. He puts forward a solidly constructed thesis for a society that valued sound logic and argumentation. In preparation for this work he reread the great works of the classical tradition and returned to his roots as a classical orator of the highest level.

'And thou saidst unto the Athenians by the mouth of thy apostle that in thee "we live and move and have our being," as one of their own poets had said.'<sup>30</sup> Augustine noted that Paul used the local culture's specific search for truth as recorded in Acts 17:16-34 as an avenue to contextualize the message of the risen Christ. Just as Augustine reinterprets the history of Rome, Paul reinterprets the religiosity of the Athenians.

Augustine understood all philosophy to be a search for the ultimate reality.<sup>31</sup> In *City of God* he begins with the narrative of the

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<sup>27</sup> *Confessions* p 83.

<sup>28</sup> Brown p 305.

<sup>29</sup> Brown p 310.

<sup>30</sup> *Confessions* p 107.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine of Hippo. *On Christian doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d., p 65.

host culture, in this case, Roman culture and Paganism. Using the knowledge gained through his education, he carefully and rigorously points out how the seeming argument between Paganism and Christianity isn't actually about religion; it is about power. Augustine does not attack the opposing religion itself; he exposes how that religion was being used to distort the narrative, distort the truth. He encourages the Romans to question their own beliefs themselves – rather than condemn their belief. This approach has much to commend it to us in our work today.

### ***3.3 Preach a message containing the mystery of Christ and not the cultural Christ***

Augustine's prime goal was to draw people further into the mystery of Christ and what the Father was doing through the Holy Spirit in this life. This idea culminated in his concept in *The City of God* when he speaks at length of a city that we cannot see but is so very real and important. His Christianity is an invitation into wisdom and mystery, of certainty in uncertainty, and into seeing the reality of God's story. It isn't a message that demands people follow certain cultural practices surrounding Christianity.

A wonderful teacher of contemplative Spirituality and social action, Richard Rohr writes

In [the Gospels] Jesus is constantly presented as inclusive. Here he is a Jew, but he's always including the Gentiles, the outsiders, foreigners, prostitutes, drunkards, the tax collectors, the Roman centurion, the Syrophenician woman. So it's very hard to think that this Jesus, who in his human life, is so consistently inclusive, would then create a religion in his name that was exclusive, or exclusionary. That was never his pattern. And so it forces us to interpret that line, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," in a different way than "My religion is better than your religion," or "I have the only true religion." Now, one way I think it could well mean that is, again, if we understand the Christ as this eternal mystery of the co-existence of matter and spirit – which we call the mystery of the incarnation – that's Christianity's trump card.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Rohr, Richard. "The heavens and the earth declare God's glory", 14/04/2012. [maes-seekgodfirst.blogspot.com/2011/02/richard-rohr-on-mystery-of-christ.html](http://maes-seekgodfirst.blogspot.com/2011/02/richard-rohr-on-mystery-of-christ.html).

It is not that we begin to preach universalism. 'To affirm the unique decisiveness of God's action in Jesus Christ is not arrogance; it is the enduring bulwark against arrogance of every culture to be itself the criterion by which others are judged.'<sup>33</sup> This is the mystery that Augustine speaks of with great reverence. Augustine was very clear that Christ ruled the city of God but he made it clear humbly and through inviting others to question about their own world view.

To preach the cultural Christ is to preach the Christ we think we know, the one that makes people go to church every Sunday morning and participate in strange rituals like the passing of the peace and fellowship after service. Let us not bind Christ up to be only what our own culture believes him to be. Preach the mystery across cultures. Non-western cultures often deal better with the concept of mystery than the so called 'developed' church of the West does.

### ***3.4 Understand that we are workers in God's fields and bear a message belonging to Him***

In a personal conversation with Richard Rohr, Rohr remarked that his greatest prayer is for God to help him stay out of the way of what God was doing in this world; to keep the 'me', the 'self', the 'ego' and my 'culture' from stopping the magnificent glory of God's love being proclaimed to the nations.<sup>34</sup> How often our own attempts to share this glory have not been a process of allowing but one of forcing, making, improving, quantifying and pushing.

The evangelization of Augustine is certainly not a single activity: it is spread over many years, and involves a wide variety of friendships, difficulties, conversations, prayers, encounters, readings, disagreements, self-examinations, mentors, false starts, scripture, and (in the end) a dramatic conversion. 'Farming' and 'education' might indeed be suitable metaphors for this process.<sup>35</sup>

Augustine was very aware of how God works through various people and events to bring about faith. He talks at length about the

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<sup>33</sup> Lesslie Newbigin. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989, p 166.

<sup>34</sup> Personal conversation with Richard Rohr, New Mexico, USA, April 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Bowen np.

influence of Ambrose of Milan's preaching, the faith of his mother and those that questioned his commitment to Manichaeism.

Augustine writes of Ambrose '...to Milan I came, to Ambrose the bishop, famed through the whole world as one of the best of men, thy devoted servant...That man of God received me as a father would, and welcomed my coming as a good bishop should. And I began to love him, of course, not at the first as a teacher of the truth, for I had entirely despaired of finding that in thy Church—but as a friendly man.<sup>36</sup> Ambrose was a man who was prepared to disciple this young man and help him answer the questions he held deep inside.

Augustine's *Confessions* [and his story of coming to faith] provides a salutary corrective for a contemporary theology and praxis of evangelism. In particular, the *Confessions* point us away from any sense that evangelism is a matter between the individual and God alone, that the key is in an existential and instantaneous "decision", or that the church's activism will bring it about. In fact, what the *Confessions* offers is a pre-modern corrective to a modernist distortion of evangelism - an understanding that will, ironically enough, equip the church for evangelism in a postmodern world.<sup>37</sup>

Augustine's understanding of humanity participating in God's work built on an early understanding of church missiology. Weinrich points out: 'The early Church did not understand mission as a merely human action done in response to the good things God had done. Mission was perceived christologically — as God acting for the salvation of fallen mankind, but God acting only in union with mankind. The early Church understood mission to be the very expression of the Lordship of Christ in the Holy Spirit.'<sup>38</sup> There is a strong sense of the sharing of God's love being a community endeavor. We are only workers in God's fields and God does the work. Augustine records:

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<sup>36</sup> *Confessions* p 77.

<sup>37</sup> Bowen np.

<sup>38</sup> Weinrich p 62.

O Lord, little by little, with a gentle and most merciful hand, drawing and calming my heart, thou didst persuade me that, if I took into account the multitude of things I had never seen, nor been present when they were enacted--such as many of the events of secular history; and the numerous reports of places and cities which I had not seen; or such as my relations with many friends, or physicians, or with these men and those--that unless we should believe, we should do nothing at all in this life.<sup>39</sup>

### ***3.5 Understand that there are very real implications of the uptake of the Christian message***

Upon his conversion, Augustine quit his position as a teacher of high standing in Milan and returned home intending to live a communal quiet life of contemplation. He completely changed his way of life and desires to follow the mystery of the risen Christ. He gave up a position of prestige and power to serve God.

As the Vandals invaded North Africa towards the end of his life, Augustine would have heard of the persecutions and torture of Christians in their wake. Brown makes a point of Augustine's prayers and preparation of his congregation to deal with an attacking force that would quite likely oppose the church violently.<sup>40</sup>

The history of the Christian peoples of the Middle East is well documented and need not be explored here in detail but we must always remember that there is often a cost for following the mystery. All those engaged in this work must be prepared to support those who upon hearing the message, like Augustine, feel called to completely change their life and begin to counter the dominant culture.

### ***3.6 Do not be afraid to teach a rigorous Christianity based on scripture***

'God intends to convert the mind as well as the heart and body, and therefore apologetic, argumentation, and dialogue were important instruments in the early Church's missionary endeavours.'<sup>41</sup> It was

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<sup>39</sup> *Confessions* p 84.

<sup>40</sup> Brown p 425.

<sup>41</sup> Weinrich p 73.



very central to Augustine's thinking that Christianity be considered a logically and academically defensible faith. McGrath claims that the greatest of the contributions of Augustine to the church, is his development of theology as an academic discipline which allowed him to defend Christianity from its critics and clarify central aspects of its thinking as defence against heresy.<sup>42</sup>

The epistemology of truth was not something a young Augustine was concerned about but it was through the works of the great orator Cicero that he became convinced that one must also seek truth.<sup>43</sup> This search brought about his rigorous theological engagement. This academic engagement was the first time that Christianity would be regarded as academic by the wider empire. 'Augustine had reached out from his provincial city of Hippo Regius to present a plausible sounding challenge to the stiff-necked empire of Pagan Rome.'<sup>44</sup>

Augustine used the entire gambit of basic Christian teachings to critique the opposing narrative. Not just using one doctrine, he spoke of creation, redemption, sin and most importantly, grace. He did this so that the Romans could see clearly the depth of the difference between the two world narratives – one of God as ruler and the other as human ruled.

Augustine's exegesis, seen now in the completeness of his theory, is wholly self-effacing. Exegesis has no ultimate worth, nor is a career as exegete something to be aspired to in itself. Only if interpretation ends by removing itself from between the reader of the sacred text and his God is it successful. If it remains, it is as a barrier rather than an instrument and contributes nothing to the happiness of either interpreter or audience.<sup>45</sup>

A right understanding of scripture was the lynch pin for Augustine's journey and we must always remember the power of the

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<sup>42</sup> McGrath p 18.

<sup>43</sup> González p 242.

<sup>44</sup> Neil B. McLynn, "Augustine's Roman Empire", *Augustinian Studies*, 30:2, 1999, p 44.

<sup>45</sup> O'Donnell, James. "Augustine: elements of Christianity", April 15, 2012. [www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/twayne/aug2.htm](http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/twayne/aug2.htm).

the Word of God taught responsibly. One of the key strategies for sharing the mystery is to ensure the Word is preached culturally appropriately by suitable people, while also ensuring scripture is available for all to “take up and read,” in order for all to see the truth of the message we send.

#### 4 Closing remarks

Augustine and the early church fathers did not talk at length of missiology or contextualisation. They simply lived in their context, worshipped God and loved God’s people inside and outside of the church community.

In recounting the final days of his mother’s life, Augustine writes so beautifully: ‘We opened wide the mouth of our heart, thirsting for those supernal streams of thy fountain, “the fountain of life” which is with thee, that we might be sprinkled with its waters according to our capacity and might in some measure weigh the truth of so profound a mystery.’<sup>46</sup>

Many, such as Augustine, were drawn to the moral code of Christianity and its focus on the other. This was seen through almsgiving, support of widows and orphans, and care for the sick and infirm, to helping the unemployed, caring for slaves, and providing burial services to the poor. Weinrich comments that ‘active charity is the very stuff of the Christian life, and with great probability works of charity provided the early Church its best opportunities for mission.’<sup>47</sup> This is still true for us today as our best contextualisation of the gospel is to live it.

Augustine constructs his own journey to faith as a play that has many acts and players. It was not without pain and desperation, but through it all God was working and calling him home. In the opening book of his *Confessions*, Augustine writes ‘for thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee.’<sup>48</sup> And he constructs the Christian experience as a restless journey as we walk through the city of man into the city of God guided by the

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<sup>46</sup> *Confessions* p 145.

<sup>47</sup> Weinrich p 72.

<sup>48</sup> *Confessions* p 13.

shepherd. Yes, there is a role for us to play in discipling, but it is ultimately God's work.

"God said, Let there be light, and there was light. And God saw the light that it was good." If, then, we ask who made it, it was "God." If, by what means, He said "Let it be," and it was. If we ask, why He made it, "it was good." Neither is there any author more excellent than God, nor any skill more efficacious than the word of God, nor any cause better than that good might be created by the good God.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *City of God* p 502.

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