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Full Issue

Abstract

This is the full issue of Volume 2, Issue 1 of Verbum, published in Fall 2004 by the REST Club at St. John Fisher College. Articles from this issue are available as separate PDFs at <http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/verbum/vol2/iss1/>

VERBUM



St. John Fisher College
Religious Studies Department Club

Fall 2004

Verbum 2004

Volume 2, Issue 1

Editor Linda Wert

Layout Courtney Ren
Linda Wert
Jodi Rowland

Submission Review Committee

Dr. Rev. John Colacino, Rev. Lee Chase
Dr. Rev. Michael Costanzo
Dr. Rev. Bill Graf, Dr. Jane Hicks
Dr. Linda MacCammon

Alumni Advisors Jodi Rowland, Class of 2004
Jonathan Schott, Class of 2002
Coordinator of Faith Formation at Church of the Transfiguration,
Pittsford, NY

Faculty Advisor Dr. Rev. Michael Costanzo

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Letter from the Editor

With the commencement of a new year and the arrival of a new president, on both a national and collegiate level, we find ourselves in a time of change when we must learn to adapt. Keeping this adaptation in mind, the Religious Studies Club introduces its third issue of *Verbum*.

This issue will attempt to continue to broaden understandings of other religions and bring a sense of family to the Fisher community. That brings us to the matter at hand—we, at the Religious Studies Club, dedicate this issue of *Verbum* to Dr. Katherine Keough, who has impacted St. John Fisher College in multiple ways.

From touching on daily morality issues to in depth biblical research, this issue strives to reach an inner core of religiosity. These articles will challenge the mind and the spirit of the readers, unlocking the mystery of our world's religious traditions.

In closing, the legacy of Dr. Keough will not cease with her death, but will continue and thrive.

In the end, we thank you, Dr. Keough, for all you have given us, and we shall attempt to carry your values forward to future St. John Fisher students and the surrounding community.

Sincerely,

Linda Wert, Editor
Courtney Ren, Layout Editor
Jonathan Schott, Alumni Advisor
Jodi Rowland, Alumni Advisor

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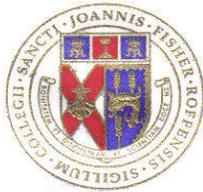
+Prize awarded by Dr. Michael Costanzo

* Prize awarded by Jonathan Schott and Jodi Rowland



In Memory of
Dr. Katherine Keough





OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

March 25, 2004

Fr. Michael Conzano
Religious Studies Department
St. John Fisher College

Dear Fr. Conzano,

It is with pleasure that I congratulate you on the Religious Studies Club's first edition of *Verbum*. Thank you for thinking of me and sending along a copy. This is a fine thing that the Religious Studies Club has started here at Fisher. Our students have shown great leadership and creativity in undertaking this project. Thus far I have only had a chance to read selected sections but have been quite impressed with your students' submissions but look forward to seeing more of their works in the future. With warmest personal regards, I remain

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Katherine E. Keough".

Katherine E. Keough

Faith in Health and Health in Life

by

Sarah M. Piston

It is all too common that people must learn to cope with the knowledge that a loved one is fighting a potentially deadly disease. The advancements of modern medicine, while helping to heal the body, oftentimes neglect the emotional and psychological effects an affliction has on the patient as well as his family and friends. Faith and religion of any sort can be an incredibly effective tool in dealing with such a distressing situation; not as a salve for the physical pain, but in addressing the emotional wounds that may result for both the patient and his loved ones. For example, it is simple to explain the cause of a disease: the mutation of cells or the failure of the immune system. It is infinitely more difficult to explain, and impossible in medical terms, why a certain person was inflicted to begin with. What, in particular, did that person do to “deserve” such misfortune? This is where faith and religion may offer answers, and more importantly comfort, that cannot be found in any physician’s reference book.

In order to address how one can use faith and religion to calm them in times of need, it is necessary to look at different interpretations of faith and how they apply to humanity. This does not mean examining the different types of religion. Rather, this is how a person interprets faith and, subsequently, how they apply it to their outlook on life, regardless of whether or not this outlook has any basis in religious doctrine or practice. One faith-based belief is that of fatalism. Fatalists believe that life has been planned for them and everything that ever has or will happen to them is out of their hands. A fatalist may tend to look at the onset of a disease with the philosophy that “everything happens for a reason.” In sharp contrast, there is an atheistic approach to life; that there is no god or higher power than themselves.

Both fatalism and atheism are extremes, and as such, can prove to be dangerous ideologies if used in an attempt to assuage the fears of both patients and loved ones. An unquestioning belief in fate can cause inactivity and complacency. This might occur in the feeling that fighting to live by actively fighting the disease on all fronts – physically and emotionally - is unnecessary. “Why be proactive? It was fate that the disease appeared in the first place, and it will ultimately be fate that decides if the disease will claim a life, or disappear.” Fatalism is also dangerous because it belittles the definitive characteristics which make us human: reason and, equally as important, the ability to act on reason. As beings with reason, we can choose our destinies. Of course, there are always events, some big, some small, that change our plans. But it is the incredible power of human nature to accept unplanned events, such as cancer, and to continue to fight and push on.

Atheism can also inhibit a person in dealing with a deadly disease of their own, or of a loved one. Since atheism assumes that there is no higher power, it also assumes that humanity, with all of its downfalls, is the height of existence. Unlike fatalism, it gives ultimate power of choice and action to people, but at the cost of one of the most powerful weapons that we, as humans, possess: faith.

But the majority of people do not live in these extremes. The majority of us live in a sort of middle way, believing in a higher power to guide our life, not command it. Of course, this middle path is followed in varying degrees by different people and always varies in degrees in an individual’s lifetime. There are always events which test our faith; oneself or a loved one becoming seriously ill. In such an instance, we are presented with a choice: to abandon faith and face the illness without the hope of divine assistance, or to

draw upon faith, not necessarily to cure, but to make life whole. It was once said that “the only two guarantees in life are death and taxes.” In truth, this somewhat pessimistic statement is not far off. The only two guarantees are birth, which has happened, and death, which inevitably will. It is one’s responsibility, therefore, to make the most of the interim, living life to the fullest extent possible, even in trying circumstances. It is with faith that this “fullest extent” can occur. Faith, while completely intangible, is a force that cannot be denied. As such, it is also difficult to define. But the belief in a benevolent power higher than humanity has existed for thousands of years and remains an incredible force that one may draw upon to face any challenge.

Faith and religion may cause miraculous cures; there have been many recoveries in history that cannot be explained medically. More commonly though, faith and religion play a role, not in prolonging life, for even 100 years is a short time on earth, but in making life worthwhile; in giving us the strength to work towards our goals and dreams, whether that be as the head of a company or as a parent. Everyone has the power and the potential to make life better for themselves and for others, and it is with faith that this potential can be achieved. It is therefore incredibly important for people dealing with the illness of a loved one to incorporate faith into their lives. It can be the source of much comfort, giving us the will to live as well as the will to live well.



Alumni
Corner

Contributions from the Department of Religious Studies Alumni

Featured Article from Jonathan Schott, Class of 2002

Prize for *Brief Essay* Awarded by
Jonathan Schott, Class of 2002 & Jodi Rowland, Class of 2004

Look for future Alumni contributions in upcoming issues



The Reality of Humiliation: A Reflection

by

Jonathan Schott, Class of 2002
Coordinator of Faith Formation at Church of the Transfiguration,
Pittsford, NY

There are many factors that have played a role in the decrease of privacy in the United States today. Since the attacks on September 11, 2001, we as Americans have experienced a widening increase of governmental restrictions, searches, and inquiries that are set in place to insure our future security against terrorist threats. Coupled with this official state entrance into our privacy we also have been subject to deeper invasions privacy from the public sector. We now hunger to see into peoples' personal lives and to live vicariously through them, sometimes fanatically.

Our nation today is also infatuated with megalomania of biblical proportions. We need bigger, faster, more powerful cars and SUV's; we need that larger HDTV, and how many of us shop at such massive retailers as the wholesale clubs and "marts?" We as Americans believe we have an entitlement to these bigger and better products and services: we are after all the world's most powerful nation. This megalomania has not only filtered through our consumerism, but is now affecting our search for entertainment. What is the product of this need for bigger and better entertainment? The nation's infatuated craze surrounding reality television.

Coupled together our megalomania and our wanton lust for entrance into people's private lives have resulted in reality television's widening array of features. It all began with Music Television's "Real World" over ten years ago. We met real people, living together, managing problems together, and we dealt with real issues like race, same-gender sexual orientation, and in later seasons HIV/AIDS. From here reality television moved more mainstream, with CBS's "Survivor" and other programming like "The Amazing Race." Much like the original "Real World" experience, the CBS programs offered viewers glimpses into real people's lives, who through the objectives of the show,

were thrown into situations that spawned real emotional and physical responses. Our hunger for seeing more and more of these responses—to see people “blow up”—and our greed for bigger and better reality television is causing a moral crisis in the United States today.

I am composing this brief reflection from the Roman Catholic Christian viewpoint. However, it is safe to say that other world religions including Islam and Judaism would also conclude that the megalomania of reality television is drawing into question one of our basic human rights: dignity. I chose to approach this topic after seeing an advertisement for one of the latest installments in the reality market, which comes from NBC. The name of this reality program is aptly titled, “The Biggest Loser.” The premise of this “reality show” is to publicize and market-for-profit the personal and spiritual struggle of obese and overweight persons who have made a commitment to enter into a weight loss regime in the attempt to become healthier Americans. While I agree with the concept: helping Americans with our endemic of obesity, I vehemently oppose the production of this program. This show, one of many such as “Fear Factor” or “I’d Do Anything” focuses on the publicly marketed humiliation of the participants, all for the “enjoyment” of the masses and the pocketbooks of the networks. “The Biggest Loser”—the title itself is a public humiliation of overweight or obese humans—challenges its contestants to lose as much weight as they can to remain on the show and win an eventual prize. However, if they do not lose weight progressively and steadily, they are “fired” from the show, and are subject to the ridicule of our entire nation for not losing weight fast enough, regardless of the risks to one’s personal well-being and dignity. Furthermore, programs like “Who Wants to Marry My Dad” call into question the

sanctity of human marriage, bypassing the discernment of love and reciprocity between the spouses for a quick and “fun” television show that ignores these essential qualities of the human relationship.

We in the Christian community have an obligation to uphold the dignity of the human person. We support the poor, the helpless, and the underprivileged of our world and we are obligated to help and marginalized people who are subject to torment or ridicule at the hands of others. The Roman Catholic community had endorsed this obligation in places like African and Latin and South America, places like Bosnia and Iraq, and now we are called to do the same right here in the United States. We must now defend the dignity of our neighbors. It is homeland security, on the moral level.

I am by no means degrading the concept of reality television. Programs like “The Amazing Race” and “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition” offer us glimpses into people’s lives who are real: real people who need help, real people traveling toward a goal. Shows like these do not publicly humiliate its participants: no one must be submerged underwater until they lose consciousness and no one is forced to fall in “love.” Reality television can offer us a platform for assessing our own lives, to discern who we are and what we stand for.

The megalomania of reality television has caused a rift in our moral stability. The decrease of individual privacy has led to an increase into what can be shown on reality programs. It our own personal moral stability that should determine which types of these programs are “real.”

Brief Essay



Prize for *Brief Essay* Awarded by
Jonathan Schott, Class of 2002 & Jodi Rowland, Class of 2004

All Part of God's Plan?

by

Michael Galpin

My whole life, my parents have always sent me to a catholic school. Ever since I can remember, I have had God in my life. What I was taught when I was young and impressionable, was that God is always with me, looking out for me and making sure I do the right thing, much like a father figure. I received all my sacraments, never asking any questions about the God that I believe in, the God that I was taught to believe in. It might sound naïve, but up until I reached college, I have had an unchanged image of God in my mind. Maybe it was because I had other pressing issues concerning my life, or that I never had an experience to change my idea of God, or maybe what it really came down to was, “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” kind of mentality. Do not get me wrong, I have had experiences that make me ask “God, why did you let this kind of thing happen?” But the easy and simple answer I have heard my whole life is, “its all part of God’s plan, He does things for a reason”.

Religion is at its best when it asks questions. I have never heard that before I took a class with Father Chase. I look back and ask myself why my mother was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Seven years ago, my mother was part of a running club, she volunteered with the church and was probably the most active mother I knew. In seven years, she has gone from a walking stick, to a walker, to a wheelchair, not even able to walk to the bathroom from her bed. Why did God do that to my mother? A mother who was so active in all of my life and still is, but obviously to a lesser degree. She cannot even go into a hockey arena to watch me play because the cold makes her incredibly weak.

During a class, watching a movie about 9.11, someone mentioned “it is all part of God’s plan”. That’s bullshit. All of a sudden, I am asking myself, “Why was my mother

put into a wheelchair? Is this part of God's mysterious plan? Is this a god I want to believe in!?" To be honest, if God wants to keep his followers, he better start answering questions. Deep down, I am a realist. I realize that there are much bigger fish to fry in God's global kitchen. Take a minute, and think about all the other problems God is attending too. All I come up with is where the hell is He? The world is in its worst state of being and things are not looking up in the near future. What happened to the God that is with everybody, looking down on them, being the fatherly figure I had believed in for most of my life?

After all these issues we speak about in class or read in the text, my first thought is that Father Chase had better stop telling people to ask questions, because he might be preaching to an empty church one of these days. I have all these questions, but no answers. Therefore I am forced to believe in a God different than what I have been taught. What irks me even more is that the God that I believe in presently is still not the God I want to believe in.

It is an up-hill battle to have a relationship with this God right now. I realize that I am lucky to be in college, that I have a wonderful family, and great friends, but how much of that is God's doing? The truth is I have no clue. What about the rest of the world? It appears to me that the God that I believe in has taken a lackadaisical approach to making his presence felt. In this world full of 'evil', is it crazy to think that God would want to make a positive impact?

Whatever way I look at it, I know that I have to live my life the way I think is best. The God I want to believe in might be a long way away, or maybe does not even exist. It just seems lately that having too much faith gets you burned.

“Living With Other Gods” Essays



Quratulain Majoka

First Place Winner

“America the melting pot,” how many times have we heard this remark, yet it is so true. It is a diverse melting pot of many people, cultures, and religions. Diversity can lead either to intolerance or to acceptance. It is up to us, as Homo sapiens, or wise humans to accept the latter. This however comes with a challenge, for we are compelled to defend ourselves in the face of ignorance and cruelty. We live in a very complex country and time, yet we face the same problems that humans all over the world and different eras have. Even though we are all humans, it is hard to accept another person at a same level as us, and it is hard to comprehend that those who are different from us, share the same emotions and feelings as ourselves. We are also sometimes afraid to share our life with those who have other gods or a different God. Religion plays an important part in human life and affects millions of people worldwide. This great worldwide variety of religious devotion indicates that for thousands of years, humanity has had a spiritual need and yearning. Man has lived with his trials and burdens, his doubts and questions, including the enigma of death. Religious feelings have been expressed in many different ways as people have turned towards God or their gods, seeking blessings and solace. With the wide diversity of religious expression that has developed around the world over the past 6,000 years, it is at least educational and mind broadening to understand what others believe and how their beliefs originated. After all, all religions try to answer the same questions raised by humankind: Why are we here? How should we live? Where do we go after we die? In many countries now, owing to immigration and population movement, people of different religions share the same neighborhood. Therefore understanding one another’s viewpoint can lead to more meaningful communications and conversations between people of different faiths. It may also decrease some of the hatred

in this world based on religious differences. People may strongly disagree about their religious beliefs, but there is no basis for hating a person just because he or she holds a different viewpoint. The ancient Jewish law stated, ‘You shall not hate your kinfolks in your heart. Reprove your relative but incur no guilt because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love you fellows as yourself: I am Lord’ (Leviticus 19:17-18 Ta). In addition, the founder of Christianity stated, “But I say to you who are listening, Continue to love your enemies, to do good to those who are hurting you...your reward will be great...” (Luke 6:27). The Qur’an, the holy book of Islam, also states a similar principle. “It may be that Allah will bring about friendship between you and those whom you hold as enemies...and Allah is powerful, forgiving, and most merciful” (Surah 60:7). When it comes to worship, God himself should not determine what is and is not acceptable.

I have dealt with many religions living in America. I moved from Pakistan, where the majority of the religion is Islam, when I was seven. Living in America has taught me tolerance but also made me aware of discrimination that I had not dealt with before. I went through constant harassment in elementary and middle school, but my true and difficult battles began the afternoon of September 11, 2001. My sophomore year was going quite well. I was in another school and had made friends. However, one big change was that I had started to wear my “hijab”, or scarf, in ninth grade. I was in the hallway walking to my class when I heard the horrible news and I was suddenly aware of some conscious glances my way. I prayed that people of my religion had not committed this crime, but my hopes crumbled along with the towers as I saw the broadcast and heard the reporters. I went home and cried for those who lost their lives or loved ones, but I also

cried for the uncertainty and hate that would soon brew because of this. My mother was afraid for me because I wore my hijab and encouraged me to leave it off for a few days. I wore it anyway, not wanting to compromise my faith to the ignorance of others. Moreover, it was ignorance that allowed hate to come my way. People would walk on the other side of the hallway, avoiding me if I was the one who had planned this tragedy. No one realized that the extremists and the fundamentalists did not represent Islam; instead, they caused many problems for many who lived peacefully in America. Fear led many to commit hate crimes against Muslim all over the United States, and my Imam of my mosque received a death threat. The fear was understandable, but the extent to which they turned on their Muslim friends or co-workers was cruel. When fear and ignorance lead to confusion and allowed the mingling of truth with rumor, danger increased. Others told me to go back to my country, the Middle East. I am not from the Middle East, which is a region, not a country. It hurt me that some of my peers could not even distinguish right from wrong. My close friends and family supported me as I wrote letters in my school newspaper, telling students how America is my country too and that not all Muslims are terrorists. Every religion has believers who follow another path, a path that many may see as unorthodox and wrong.

Ignorance frustrates me, and I am even more disappointed when “educated” people harbor hate. I understand their reasons for fear, but I have learned to accept diversity and I do not understand why an educated society will not learn to understand the truth. After all, the purpose of education is to make us wise humans, capable of maintaining societies with order and peace. In order to bridge differences and to improve mutual understanding, education is vital. When parents teach their children to accept

diversity and lead by example open-mindedness and acceptance is achieved. Reaching this achievement only happens when a victim forgives their perpetrator and pushes for a common ground between two humans. Through an intense mutual understanding of this world achievement is reached. This world would not be as precious as it is now if there was no diversity; we would be robots living in a bland society. I have always believed in forgiving and moving on through my obstacles. However, I have also believed in preventing these ordeals by education and getting involved with the youth of my community. This month I am coordinating an event to get the Muslim and Jewish youth groups of Rochester to get together and talk and have fun while learning about each other. We are more alike than we are different. It is time we accept this fact openly and show our communities that even small things such as smiling at people can lead to bigger achievements. We should learn to embrace the diversity in America, but also around the world. With education and support, I have learned to be tolerant, respectful, and open to many new ideas.

Now if in this modern era, conflict and mistrust could be put aside, we would see more tolerance and more unification. We would also see that these different religions are more alike than they are different. On the surface, the many religions in existence today seem quite different from one another. However, if we strip them of the things that are mere embellishments of later additions, or if we remove those distinctions that are a result of language, or other factors, it is amazing how similar most of them turn out to be.

Someday I will be able to live my life without prejudice, but for now, I can only prevent it from expanding and hurting another human soul. Millard Fuller reminds us with a cherished idea. "For community to be whole and healthy, it must be based on

people's love and concern for each other." We must reach out and try to eradicate ignorance from the schools, offices, and our thoughts. The first step towards this understanding is by starting to cooperate within our families, then moving on to our schools and businesses and then on to a national level. Small steps can lead to giant leaps across muddy waters and allow us to become a bridge connecting one human soul with another.

Kristina Braell

Second Place Winner

I genuflect in the darkened sanctuary of my church and slide into a cool pew. With a low thud the kneeler hits the floor and I kneel in prayer, concentrating on the blood-red flame of the candle. Christ is in this place, it whispers. Even the silence seems to listen as the answers to my prayers stream through the myriad-colored windows that drench me in richly stained light. I close my eyes, pray for guidance, and just think. God will not mind, and I smile to myself. Outside lies chaos and hatred, but in this place is peace and security. The sanctuary is well named. How can anyone's God be blamed for the evils of this world?

Thousands of miles to the East, the sun beats on the sand and every person is a grain in the vast desert. The great windstorm of three years ago blew across a continent and an ocean. Some deny it, but let them explain why the sand in our eyes has shaken strong nations to tears. A thousand pilgrims mingle at the Dome of the Rock, and in a mystic colony, dervishes swirl and dip in an ecstasy of Allah's Word. There is a great strength in joy derived from sacred obedience.

It is dark in the Ganges banks, and the day's last bathers are emerging from their ablutions. Everywhere is the glitter of colorful saris, and jewels on the foreheads of beautiful women. They are stepping on light and eager feet to Shiva's temple, and ahead lies a night of bright and shimmering celebration. Can they hear the ebb and draw of Buddhist chants? Voices rising as one, with smoke, flames, and wind, which will in return, carry their voices to the world's edge.

And an old neighbor; once I saw him standing uncertainly by the door of a rabbi's office, his clothes immaculate as if to hide the uncertainty within. Yet, there he stood in the rain, one hand on the doorknob, and I saw his shoulders heave once with a great sigh

and step inside. When I went to bed that night I could see that lights still shining in the office. There was a great celebration a year later, and I watched it then too, when a new member joined the temple. Once an atheist, this man was inspired by what he witnessed in the Jewish faith and committed himself to it on that day.

My thoughts fall away from me like a curtain and float into the warm corners, where the scent of incense lingers and generations of memories wait and pray. I gather my coat and kneel once more, my fingers brushing my forehead, heart and shoulders in the sign of the cross. Rising, I depart, shutting the door softly behind me and careful not to break the stillness.

Matt Zheleznyak

Third Place Winner

One

There is one G-d: The G-d of the Earth

There is one people: the people of G-d

There is one pillar for all; the pillar of truth

There is one mitzvah; to do good things

There is one religion; the religion to love

There is one language; the language of truth

There is one land that we all dwell on; the earth

There is one social class; people of the human race

Why do I say all of this?

Because I am a Russian, an African, a Jew, a Christian,

a Jamaican, an Irishman, an Englishman, a Chinaman,

a Colombian, a Muslim, a Hispanic, a Greek, an Italian

—but more importantly I am a resister of racial classifications

I am a painting of different colors

I am the melting pot of my own country

I am a rainbow of the human race

I am a mixed person

I am a person, a person of G-d, a person born on this world with a cause

My cause is to break racism

To break division

To break a future apartheid

To bring unity to people

We all have one blood, it is red.

Who has the right to say, "You do not belong"

All of us live in this world once

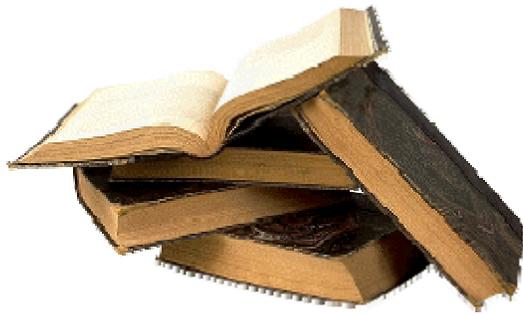
Why would one want to waste his or her time with hatred of other races?

I am here to stop the killing of one man to another man because of race, religion or belief

I am here to stop the 6 million Jews that died, the 1.5 Armenian Christians that died, or the 800,000 Tutsi civilians, 300,000 Bosnian Muslims, the 1.7 million Cambodians killed by Pol Pot

I am here to stop hate. I am here to exclaim my name.

I am. . . .



Research Papers



+Prize awarded by Dr. Michael Costanzo

From Abraham to Jacob:
Promise and Fulfillment

by

Linda Wert

In the Beginning

Since the beginning of time, God has had a special relationship with humans. After the creation of the heavens and the earth, God bestowed the rule of the land and sea to His most favored creation, man. Although Adam and Eve sinned against God, He still bestowed favor on them. He banished them from the Garden of Eden for their sin but gave them clothing (Genesis 3:21). When Cain killed Abel, God banned Cain from the land of his parents but put a mark upon him that he not be killed (Gen. 4:11-16). Even when humanity reached the point of pure wickedness, God could not totally destroy His creation. He entreated Noah to build an ark on which the chosen animals and people of the land would live while the rest of creation perished. After the flood waters subsided, God made a covenant with Noah that “never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood” (Gen. 9:11-12). As a sign of this covenant with man and beast, God promised that if ever the clouds covered the sky, a rainbow would appear in the sky. Following His covenant with Noah, God called a man named Abram asking him to leave the city where he was living and go to the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:4-6). When Abram and his wife Sarai arrived in Canaan, God revealed to him what His purpose was. God had chosen Abram to be the keeper of His covenant with man. Abram was to become the father of all nations; his descendents would number the stars in the sky (Gen. 15:5-6). The custodians of this covenant would follow the blood line of Abram and Sarai to their son, Isaac, grandson, Jacob, and future generations. To mark this covenant, as God had marked the covenant with Noah, God commanded Abram to take all the males of his household and circumcise them. This act would be a sign to God that His covenant was

being kept by man (Gen. 17:9-13). God also changed the names of his chosen ones from Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah (Gen. 17:5, 17:15).

Moving forward, in the following pages, we will explore the covenant between God and humanity, the first keepers of the covenant, and their lives.

The People of the Covenant

When God formed his covenant, Abraham had difficulty understanding how the Lord was going to make his descendents cover the earth when his wife, Sarah, was barren. As was custom at the time, when a man's wife was barren, he would take on one of her female servants to perpetuate his family line. Sarah gave Abraham her servant, Hagar with whom he could have offspring. She did not understand that the will of God would provide for an heir. However, she took it upon herself to see that her husband have offspring, whether it was hers or not. Hagar bore him a son, Ishmael. However, God promised Abraham that though this child would not carry on the covenant, a child Sarah would bear would be his successor (Gen. 17:19-20). Although Sarah believed at the time that the best thing for her husband was to offer her servant to him, it proved to be a source of great tension and tribulation later. Sarah did not understand that God's promise would not go unfulfilled. She did not have to take her own action to provide Abraham with an heir, but in her humanity, she allows another woman into her husband's bed. This decision plagues her on many occasions, causing her to fear for her son's role.

Upon hearing the news that she would be able to bear a child for Abraham, Sarah became worried about the status that Ishmael held. He was the first born of her husband's children but her child would be the chosen son. Sarah's fears were unfounded

because of God's promise that Isaac would be the one who would continue the covenant. Ishmael was blessed by God but was not meant to carry on the covenant. According to Mills, Sarah and Abraham had to have a child together for the covenant to proceed because the child of a slave could not continue the covenant (Mills 28). Why is it impossible for a child of a slave to continue the covenant with God? At the time of Ishmael's birth, slaves were not held in very high regard. But Abraham treated Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, with respect and love.

Sarah, however, still had concerns with Hagar and Ishmael remaining in the house of Abraham. Sarah demanded that Abraham expel his mistress and son, which Abraham did without reproach. According to the Navarre Bible Pentateuch, Sarah exhibits the role of women in the Old Testament (Gavigan 113). Although at that time the role of women was wife and mother, this passage in Genesis indicates a position of authority especially in family dealings. Abraham concedes to this request of his wife even though it causes him great pain to banish his son.

It is unknown why God chose Abraham to be his messenger on earth. The call of Abraham by God originated with his father, Terah. Terah and his peoples were from Ur of the Chaldeans. Terah took his children, Abram and Nahor, and their wives, Sarai and Milcha, and his grandchild, Lot, to the land of Haran bound for Canaan (Gen. 11:31-32). However, before the assemblage reached Canaan, they settled in Haran, where Terah died. From Haran, God called Abraham (then Abram) to "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1-2). The land that God led Abraham to was the same country where his father was attempting to take his family. We can make many assumptions about why Terah decided to take his

family out of Ur to a new and unfamiliar land. The book of Genesis does not divulge why Terah did this but we can make some inferences. Perhaps, like his son later, Terah was influenced by God to come to a new land. Or perhaps it was as simple as a need for fresh farmland. Whatever explanation we assign does not have any bearing on what happened to Abraham. He could have been called by God from anywhere on the earth.

Heeding the Call

Abraham followed the call of God from Haran to Canaan taking with him his family and his possessions. After reaching Canaan, but before settling anywhere in the land, the clan went for a time to Egypt because of famine in the Negeb. While in Egypt, Abraham instructed Sarah to pose as his sister for he was afraid the Egyptians would kill him for Sarah's beauty. Sarah agreed to this request because she loved her husband and did not want to see him harmed on her account. However, the pharaoh of Egypt noticed the beauty of Sarah and took her into his palace. The Lord then struck Pharaoh with plagues because of his courting of Sarah. Pharaoh went to Abraham begging forgiveness and asking why Abraham did not say that Sarah was his wife. Pharaoh sent them out of Egypt on their way to Canaan.

Because of this episode, one scholar has deemed Abraham "an unworthy husband" (Mills 43). Mills states that the way Abraham treated Sarah was not proper of a husband. He put her in harms way to save his own life. Perhaps he had not fully thought out what could happen to Sarah if someone found her attractive but if he thought he might be killed because of her beauty, he should have deduced that someone would try to take her. Abraham did save Sarah before anything improper could happen between her and the pharaoh. However, according to scripture, Abraham benefited from Sarah's

connection to Pharaoh: “On her account it went very well with Abram, and he received flocks and herds, male and female slaves, male and female asses, and camels” (Gen. 12:16-17). We cannot be sure of Abraham’s intentions in this matter but the scripture does not paint a very good picture for him. This situation can also be seen as only a story and not fact because the story is repeated in Genesis 20:1: “While he stayed in Gerar, he said of his wife, Sarah, ‘She is my sister’” (Gen. 20:2-3). However, this narrative takes place in Gerar with King Abimelech. We can infer that this story was created to convey that Abraham, although chosen by God to keep the covenant, is a simple man and not above other people. The stories are meant to portray the image of a normal man with less than good qualities and normal human faults and weaknesses. The story could be used to urge people who read the passage to understand that God chooses all people to follow him, no matter what imperfections they possess.

Upon leaving Egypt, Abraham and his family went back to the Negeb and then on to Bethel. There the family stayed until quarreling broke out between the herdsmen of Abraham and the herdsmen of Lot, his nephew. Lot and Abraham knew they could not occupy the same lands because of the vast amount of livestock and possessions they each had. Abraham stayed in Canaan and Lot and his people traveled across the plain of Jordan to Sodom.

The Family Continues

God’s choice of Abraham to be the father of a nation meant that his descendents would be chosen to continue the covenant. Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah, was deemed by God as the custodian of the covenant bestowed upon Abraham. From the beginning of his life, Isaac was subjected to the dictate of God. As a test of faith, God

told Abraham to take his only son to Moriah. He was to offer Isaac up to God as a holocaust. Abraham was obedient to God and took his only son to offer him as a sacrifice to God. As Abraham and Isaac walked to the site for the offering of the sacrifice and Abraham prepared the altar, an angel of the Lord called to him to spare his son. In the end, the heir to the covenant was saved. The faith shown by Abraham is undeniable.

It is difficult to understand why God would ask such a sacrifice, but the fact that Abraham was to kill his only son and that he was about to do so without apparently questioning God shows his undying trust in God's promise. Although Sarah had conceived and given birth to Isaac after being thought barren, Abraham had no way of knowing if he would have a successor had he offered Isaac as a sacrifice to God. His other son was Ishmael, but he was not the son of Sarah and not the one promised by God. However, to understand this story, we must first understand what was customary at the time of Abraham. It was customary among certain religions that the first born male of the family was to be sacrificed to the god, El. Because God had not revealed himself to Abraham like he does later to Moses, Abraham has no way of knowing that this god, El, is not his god. This could be why Abraham does not protest to God's request to sacrifice Isaac. Especially considering Abraham's great faith, who believed that God would give him a rightful heir even in Sarah's old age; and God provided. So why would He not provide another heir if Isaac were to be sacrificed as an offering to Him? This interpretation concludes that because the god, El was not the true god, an angel of God was sent to stop Abraham from committing the sacrifice and thus ending the genealogical line of the covenant.

Another interpretation, which I have discussed in Introduction to Judaism, of this passage, concludes that the “voice of God” that spoke to Abraham and instructed him to sacrifice Isaac was the voice of the devil. Abraham is made to think that it is God’s will and that Isaac is not meant to continue the covenant. Abraham obeys but at the last minute an angel of God tells Abraham not to kill Isaac. This accounts for the contradiction in the passage, which presumes that if God had truly called Abraham to kill Isaac, He would not have recanted his request. However, we can also infer that perhaps it was the will of God that Abraham be tested by the devil.

With the ordeal Abraham goes through on account of Isaac as a sacrifice, we see a continuing trend. He seems to be unwavering in his faith and trust in God through many trials. Not only does he agree to sacrifice his only heir (only heir sent by God) but he does this without question. Abraham silently obeys God. Often in Genesis, beginning with his move from his homeland to Canaan, to God’s promise of Sarah’s pregnancy, to the sparing of Isaac at the altar we are given a proof of this. Abraham also trusts that God will keep his covenant even though he never sees his descendants “number the stars” (Mills 31).

Isaac and the Covenant

Isaac grew in the favor of God and served his father well. When he became of age, Abraham sent out a servant to the city of Nahor to find a bride for Isaac. Abraham did not want his son to marry a Canaanite but instead a woman from his homeland (Gen. 24:2-5). The servant had been “shown” a woman for Isaac who was the daughter of Abraham’s nephew. When he saw Rebekah with a water jar, the servant immediately knew that she was the one for Isaac. Rebekah’s family gave her to the servant to take her

to Abraham and Isaac. Some time after the marriage of Isaac to Rebekah, Abraham died. After Abraham's death, God blessed Isaac and renewed the covenant with him. Although Isaac is the chosen descendant to continue the covenant, he is subjected to the same temptations as his father. In Genesis 26:1, Isaac is in a similar situation as Abraham in which he poses as the brother of Rebekah instead of her husband. Isaac also claims that he will be killed for being married to Rebekah because she is so beautiful and the king would want to have her. The story, just as Abraham's, conveys that Isaac is also just a man, who has imperfections. We can question what motivates these men to have the same fear of dying because of the beauty of their wives. Was it a common occurrence for leaders to kill men for their beautiful wives? In the situations with both Abraham and Isaac, we can assume that pharaohs and kings of the time had more than one wife and many female servants. Why would these two men assume that their wives would be noticed by the most powerful men of the land? Were these women truly so beautiful that their husbands' lives were at risk? Perhaps this is also an embellishment of the story to make it more desirable to read. Later generations who would hear these stories and then later, read them, would be more apt to listen to the stories if they are embellished.

Once again, the lineage was threatened when it was discovered that Rebekah was sterile. Isaac pleaded with God to allow her to bear children. This can be considered Isaac's test from God. He is faced with the ceasing of his family line and, unlike his father, Isaac does not have any other children by another woman who could continue the covenant. However, God heard his plea and Rebekah became pregnant with twins. Jacob and Esau began as rivals in the womb even before their birth. Esau, the older of the two, was a hunter and outdoorsman. Jacob, on the other hand, was the crafty one.

Because Esau was the elder, he was the heir to Isaac and the covenant; however Jacob in his craftiness bargained with Esau for the birthright in exchange for sustenance (Gen. 25:19-34). In another cunning act Jacob was able to fool his father into blessing him as his heir. Jacob disguised himself as Esau to dupe his father, who knew Esau was the first born. Isaac was elderly and Jacob was deceptive and covered himself in animal skins to simulate the hair that Esau had on his arms. Isaac was deceived and granted a blessing on Jacob, "Let peoples serve you, and nations pay you homage; be master of you brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be those who curse you and blessed be those who bless you" (Gen. 27:29-30).

Even though Jacob had deceived his father, Isaac did not go back on his blessing. Jacob would be the chosen one to continue the covenant with God. With the blessing of his father, Jacob leaves his family to find a wife. During his journey, Jacob stopped to camp for the night in a place called Luz. During the night, Jacob dreamt of a stairway that the messengers of God were climbing up and down. The Lord appeared to him saying He was the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac; "Know that I am with you; I will protect you wherever you go, and bring you back to this land. I will never leave you until I have done what I promised you" (Gen. 28:15-16). When Jacob awoke, he set up a memorial and renamed the place Bethel and vowed to return all things to God (Gen. 28:20-22).

Jacob's dream can and is interpreted as God's way of sanctifying His covenant with Jacob after Isaac blessed him. In this passage of Genesis, one can infer that even though Esau was first born and, according to birthright, the next to receive the covenant, God's purpose was to have Jacob be keeper of the covenant. Although Jacob received

the covenant in a deceitful manner, God still sanctified the covenant. It can also be implied that because of his covenant with God, Jacob became less deceitful. It can also be inferred that, after all Jacob's years of being devious, he is deceived by his uncle, Laban.

Jacob and Laban

When Jacob reached Haran, he fell in love with Rachel, Laban's second daughter. Laban promised that after seven years of labor, Jacob could marry Rachel. However, Laban cheated Jacob by giving him Leah, his eldest daughter as his bride. Once Jacob realized he had been misled, he demanded to have Rachel as his bride as well. Laban agreed to give both his daughters to Jacob in return for seven more years of service.

After the end of the seven years, Jacob and his two wives had started a substantial family. However, Jacob desired to return to his homeland. Although Jacob makes no claims as to why he wants to leave Haran, supposition can be made about why Jacob would want to return to Canaan. Speculations have been made as to why Jacob would decide to go back after fourteen years. In Genesis, as supported in the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, it is indicated that Laban had a change in attitude toward Jacob that may have incited the move (Brown 32). Another speculation for the move is divine intervention (Brown 32). Jacob had been visited by an "angel of God" in a dream before, telling him of his relationship with God and the covenant; perhaps he was visited again. Either way, Jacob, his wives, and children leave Haran to return to the place of his birth, Canaan. On the journey, Jacob and Laban once again have an entanglement. When Jacob took his family and left Haran, he failed to tell his father-in-law. This enraged Laban

because he had recently found out about Jacob's breeding practices with the sheep herd. Laban went after Jacob seeking retribution for this weakened flock. However, before Laban reached Jacob, he had a dream in which God warned him not to harm Jacob: "Take care not to threaten Jacob with any harm" (Gen. 31:24-25). This again can be viewed as God solidifying his choice of Jacob as covenant keeper. Laban did not harm Jacob and eventually allowed him to go on his way. On the flight from Haran, Jacob stopped at a place for the night. In the night, Jacob took his wives, family, and possessions, across the Jabbok River. Then Jacob was left alone. During the night, Jacob wrestled with a mysterious man until the break of day. Jacob fought hard and the man could not win, so he struck Jacob in the hip causing a permanent limp. The man then blessed Jacob saying, "You shall no longer be spoken of as Jacob, but as Israel, because you have contended with divine and human beings and have prevailed" (Gen. 32:29-30). Thus began the people Israel, which is how the Jewish people are referred to today.

The obvious interpretation of this passage is that Jacob wrestled with God, or a messenger of God, who was sent to test Jacob. It is also clear that anyone who is entrusted with the covenant will be tested in some way by God. Just like his father and grandfather before him, Jacob is no exception to being tested. This is understandable considering the magnitude of responsibility involved in the keeping of the covenant. However, Jacob's test is somewhat different from the tests of Abraham and Isaac. Whether Jacob really wrestled with someone or if it was a perception, he was still injured by the experience. This served as a symbol to him for the rest of his life. The comment made by the man in the above quote sparks some inquiry. Jacob has wrestled with divine

and human beings, indicates Jacob's struggle with God and with Laban and Esau (Brown 34).

In the End

The covenant between God and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has continued throughout the generations of Israel. This promise formed a nation of people whose has kept the covenant for thousands of years. Although Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were chosen by God, they were simple people just like their descendents. Even in the simplicity of humanity, the covenant with God stood. The keepers of the covenant overcame many obstacles to fulfill the promise of a new nation. Abraham followed God through the command to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham and Isaac both felt the pain of their wives sterility but kept faith that the family line would continue. Jacob overcame a struggle with God that left him crippled for the rest of his life. Each of the chosen wives also overcame trials involving poor choice and infertility. Even with these problems, the covenant continued. The covenant continues to evolve and flourish with each new generation of "keepers" from the tribes of Israel. From a Christian perspective, we can appreciate the covenant that God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because of the self-sacrifice of the Jesus event which we can now understand (as Christians) as the embodiment of the evolving covenant.

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The 10 Commandments

by

James L. Smith, Jr.

In the Qur'ān, there is not a list of commandments such as we see in the Bible; however, there are many injunctions throughout the text of the Qur'ān. From these, Caesar E. Farah extracts a list of 10 “commandments” in his book, *Islam*. When comparing these Islamic commandments with the Judeo-Christian 10 Commandments, we can see some obvious similarities, some subtle differences and some commandments that don't even compare.

For this comparison, we will take the commandments in the Jewish Bible in the order they appear and compare them with the corresponding commandments found in Farah's book.

The first and second commandments state: *You shall have no other gods before me and You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.* These two commandments, taken together, say that you should worship only the one God and no others, nor use any form of idol worship. These correspond with Farah's first commandment: *Acknowledging there is no god whatsoever but God—“Thy Lord hath decreed, that ye worship none save Him...”* (Notice the use of capitalization, when God refers to the one God it is capitalized, in all other instances it is lower case, showing God's superiority.)

The third Biblical commandment states: *You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.* In other words, do not blaspheme or take the Lord's name in vain. This shows God's demand for respect and worship. There is no corresponding commandment in Farah's list.

The fourth Biblical commandment states: *Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the 7th day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.* Again, there is no corresponding commandment on Farah's list. This may be because Muslims are required to perform ritual prayers five times a day. Islam does have a day of Sabbath, which occurs on Friday. The traditional Jewish Sabbath is on Saturday and the Christian Sabbath is on Sunday.

The fifth Biblical commandment states: *Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.* This corresponds with the second commandment on Farah's list which states: *Honoring and respecting parents- "And lower unto them the wing of submission through mercy, and say: My Lord! Have mercy on them both as they did care for me when I was little."* These are both pretty straightforward. They say honor your parents, for your own benefit so you may live, and because they earned your respect by caring for you when you couldn't care for yourself.

The sixth Biblical commandment states: *You shall not murder.* The corresponding Islamic commandment (#5): *Avoid killing except for justifiable cause- "Slay not the life which Allah hath forbidden save with right. Whoso is slain wrongfully, We have given power unto his heir, but let him not commit excess slaying."* The Islamic commandment expands a little further than the Biblical commandment, as to what constitutes murder and how justice should be distributed (by the victim's heir).

The seventh Biblical commandment states: *You shall not commit adultery.* This corresponds with the sixth commandment on Farah's list: *Committing not adultery- "And come not near unto adultery. Lo! It is an abomination and an evil way."* Both are very straightforward, don't commit adultery, it is evil.

The eighth Biblical commandment states: *You shall not steal*. There is not a directly corresponding commandment on Farah's list, but there are two that stealing would be considered a violation of. Commandment #3 states: *Respecting the rights of others- "Give the kinsman his due, and the needy, and the wayfarer...But if thou turn away from them, seeking mercy from the Lord, for which thou hopest, then speak unto them a reasonable word."* Stealing is obviously a violation of the rights of others, specifically property rights. Commandment #8 would also be violated by stealing. It states: *Dealing justly and equitably- "Fill the measure when ye measure, and weigh with a right balance; that is meet and better in the end."* Deception or trickery in trade is a form of stealing, and outright thievery is certainly not dealing equitably.

The two final Biblical commandments don't have Islamic counterparts on Farah's list. Number nine is: *You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor*. The tenth and final commandment states: *You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor*.

There are four commandments on Farah's list that do not appear in the Bible. Number four states: *Being generous but not a squanderer- "...squander not (thy wealth) in wantonness. Lo! The squanderers were ever brothers of the devil, and the devil was ever an ingrate to his Lord. And let not thy hand be chained to thy neck nor open it with a complete opening, lest thou sit down rebuked, denuded. Lo! Thy Lord enlargeth the provision for whom He will, and straiteneth (it for whom He will)."* The Bible does not comment on the squandering of wealth.

Commandment number seven on Farah's list states: *Safeguarding the possessions of orphans- "Come not near the wealth of the orphan save with that which is better till he come to strength; and keep the covenant. Lo! Of the covenant it will be asked."* The Bible has no commandments regarding the wealth of orphans.

The final two commandments on Farah's list involve personal characteristics a Muslim should attain and live by. Again, the Bible has no such injunctions. Number nine states: *Being pure of heart and mind- "Your Lord is best aware of what is in your minds. If ye are righteous then lo! He was ever Forgiving unto those who turn (unto Him)."* The tenth and final commandment on Farah's list states: *Being humble and unpretentious- "And walk not in the earth exultant. Lo! Thou canst not rend the earth, nor canst thou stretch to the height of the hills... and follow not that whereof thou hast no knowledge. Lo! The hearing and the sight and the heart- of each of these it will be asked."*

We can see that for the most part the Biblical commandments focus on social regulations, whereas the Qur'ānic commandments also give guidelines for one's personal and spiritual life. As we have seen some of the commandments are very alike while others are not. Each have offered basic rules for its followers and have served them well for centuries.

Faculty Essay



Fire in the Soul of Zurga:
Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers* and Male Sati

by

Dr. Lori Dabbagh

Although in recent years Georges Bizet's "other" opera, *Les Pêcheurs de perles* (*The Pearl Fishers*), has been performed on occasion, scant attention has been paid to it, compared to his world-renowned masterpiece *Carmen*. Even those who are not avowed opera goers have at least heard of the *Habañera* (*L'amour est un oiseau rebelle*) and more so, the ever-popular *Toreador Song*. Bizet penned *The Pearl Fishers* at age 25, and enthusiasts of this early work praise the "freshness of inspiration" which contributes to its "perennial success." (9). *The Pearl Fishers* takes place on a "wild, arid beach on the island of Ceylon [modern-day Sri Lanka]" (10), where bold divers brave death every year (18). It is a French Orientalist opera, as is *Carmen*, although there is not yet the mezzo-soprano to embody the "exotic" seductress (in the case of *Carmen*, the Andalusian Gypsy). We only have the pure coloratura soprano, the opposite end of the narrow spectrum allotted to female characters who do not come from "our" world. The late Dr. Edward Said bases his main argument on the distinction between "our" world and the inaccessible "Orient": "Indeed, my real argument is that Orientalism is – and does not merely represent – a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (12).

Bizet and his librettists do not set out to accurately represent this "Orient" known as Ceylon, but the esthetic result is both pleasant and compelling. Bizet constantly switched locations for the opera; one of its settings was supposed to be Mexico before he decided on the South Asian island whose inhabitants are ostensibly Hindu. None of the main characters' names are of Hindu or Sinhalese origin. In fact, the High Priest Nourabad's name contains the Arabic word for light, *nur*, while he is ironically a dark force. The soprano Leila's name is Arabic for night, and the bulk of the opera's action

takes place during the night when the religious power of Nourabad and the political rule of the tribal chief Zurga are undermined. Zurga's name might be a variant of the Arabic word for blue, *zurqa* (Moroccan and Gulf Arabic pronunciation would be *zurga*) which connotes water and pearl diving. Finally, the tenor Nadir bears a name which means strange or rare, since his love for Leila is like a rare pearl for which he risks his life. Bizet's librettists might have picked these names for their musicality as well as their meaning, mixing the Arab world and the Indian subcontinent in their effort to create "their Orient."

The booklet which accompanies the recording of the opera directed by Manuel Rosenthal further substantiates the Orientalist idea. The orchestral introduction which introduces all the main themes is described as follows: "We are in Ceylon seen through the eyes of a Parisian composer in the reign of Napoleon III. (9)." The bass baritone Zurga (in French *noir* or dark baritone) is a foil for Nadir, who is described as "a typical French tenor with a high-pitched, fresh voice (9)." Of the two, Zurga is the more "exotic" and he is undone by jealousy (as was the "dark" Othello) and *hubris* or excessive pride (as was Oedipus Rex). He rises to the rank of tribal chief at the beginning of the opera and his downfall is as sudden as the storm which breaks over the Gulf of Mannar, where the real-life pearl fishery is located.

Against the backdrop of the romance between the young huntsman Nadir and Leila, the priestess, Zurga emerges as a tormented soul, doubly betrayed by the friend of his youth and the woman he vowed to give up as a promise to Nadir. Through several changes of heart- cries for vengeance, pleas for forgiveness, outbursts of jealous rage, expressions of remorse- Zurga ultimately sacrifices himself on a fiery altar of his own

making. He “becomes a sati” in a way, whether through the traditional definition of immolation or in the broader sense of self-sacrifice in the name of love and honor.

The Hindu concept of sati always involves female self-sacrifice. The most common interpretation consists of the burning of the widow on her husband’s funeral pyre. Aside from a few isolated cases, men hardly ever “commit sati” (immolate themselves) and never “become a sati” (posthumously ascend to the heights of deification after thus perishing). The seldom-used masculine form of the word is *satu*, plural *sata*. An Indian journalist, Sakuntala Narasimhan, provides a definition of the Sanskrit root word as “a virtuous or chaste woman.” (Foreword). This meaning would apply to the virgin priestess Leila in Bizet’s *The Pearl Fishers*, who pleads with Zurga to spare the life of her beloved Nadir “to help her die” as she alone is burned at the stake. She has sworn to remain veiled and to shun all company except that of the High Priest Nourabad during her ritual blessings of the pearl fishers. Nadir, the young man who loved her many years before, reappears, declares his love for her, and thus violates the sanctity of the grounds where she keeps watch. This “sacrilegious love,” though chaste, is punishable by death.

Narasimhan breaks the word sati down even further and explains,

“The word sati is derived from *sat*, meaning truth, and a sati was a woman who was ‘true to her ideals.’ Since Indian tradition holds chastity, purity and loyalty to the husband (*pativrata*) as the highest ideals for women, there appears to be an inexorable logic behind a decision to give up one’s life on the death of the husband as proof of chastity or the ultimate expression of a wife’s ‘fidelity.’” (11)

This is how the link with ritual widow-burning came about. However, “the original Sati of mythology was not a widow and did not immolate herself on her husband’s pyre.” (11) The wife of Shiva, who forms a trinity with Brahma and Vishnu,

Sati was reduced to ashes after she invoked a “yogic fire” (11) because of a blatant insult to her husband by her father, Daksha. Sati’s father purposely excluded his son-in-law Shiva from a sacrificial ceremony he was officiating, and Sati’s immolation was viewed as an expression of wifely loyalty. Narasimhan asserts that “in the modern interpretation, this has been twisted around into a belief which holds that if a woman gives up her body by burning, like the original Sati, she deserves to be venerated and honoured.” (11)

But not all satis immolate themselves. According to Narasimhan, “Women like Savitri, Arundhati and Anasuya of Indian mythology were all exalted as *pativratas* or paragons of connubial dedication. None of them ‘committed sati’ in the sense in which the word is used now.” (12) A devoted wife in modern India is commonly called a “Sati Savitri” after the woman who convinced the God of Death to spare her husband, and even the wife of Mahatma Gandhi was affectionately dubbed “Sati Kasturba” (12).

Kasturba was so faithful to her husband’s cause of Satyagraha (truth-force) that she followed him to prison several times, eventually dying in a Poona jail on February 22, 1944, after sixty-three years of marriage to him (Wolpert 208). She was married to him when they were both only thirteen. In 1908, during the campaign against the Asiatic Act, which stipulated that all Indians should carry passes in South Africa, Gandhi feared that Kasturba would die in a Johannesburg jail. His “rare letter” to her shows his degree of devotion:

“(. . .) If you keep the courage and take the necessary nutrition, you will recover. If, however, my ill luck so has it that you pass away. . . there would be nothing wrong in your doing so . . . I love you so dearly that even if you are dead, you are alive to me. . . I will not marry again.” (Gandhi, qtd in Wolpert 71)

Not only does Sati Kasturba, who gave her life for the cause of Satyagraha (notice the word *sati*, or truth, at its root), deserve her honorific nickname, but Mahatma Gandhi is unique in his adoration of his wife and his vow as a young man never to remarry.

Narasimhan, a feminist scholar, quotes the Mahatma himself on sati:

“Commenting on a sati incident in 1931, Mahatma Gandhi traced the genesis of self-immolation of wives to male chauvinism. “If the wife has to prove her loyalty and undivided devotion to her husband, so has the husband to prove his allegiance and devotion to his wife. Yet, we have never heard of a husband mounting the funeral pyre of his deceased wife. It may therefore be taken for granted that the practice of the widow immolating herself at the death of the husband had its origins in superstitions, ignorance, and blind egotism of man.” (Gandhi qtd. In Narasimhan, 57)

The Mahatma might have approved of Bizet’s choice of presenting Zurga as a rare male sati, even if he does not sacrifice himself for a spouse. Zurga’s decision to immolate himself in the fire he set (or, in alternate endings, his death by stabbing, even if it is not Zurga who stabs himself) could be regarded as a combination of Hindu sati and Japanese hara-kiri, for Zurga’s vindication of honor is also at stake. As far as his duties as tribal chief are concerned, the High Priest Nourabad condemns him as a traitor for failing to carry out Nadir and Leila’s death sentence. On a personal level, both the friend of his youth and the woman he loved are lost to Zurga. He might have escaped along with the couple he delivered, but by the end of *The Pearl Fishers* Zurga has lost his *raison d’être*. He therefore, as described in the booklet essay by Valencia, which accompanies the 1960 recording, resolves to “run towards death by saving them both” (54).

According to Narasimhan, a woman who was dissuaded from becoming a sati in 1985 is “now worshipped as a ‘living sati’ by the people of the area” (12). Thus, Bizet’s Leila who escaped death but was willing to sacrifice herself for Nadir might be called a

“living sati.” As a child, she hid a fugitive in her family’s hut and calmly refused to divulge his whereabouts, even though several men held her at knifepoint. At the time, she did not know the man was Zurga. So Leila has offered her life for both men on different occasions. Zurga recognizes the necklace she wears as his token of gratitude to the dauntless young girl she once was and in turn delivers her and Nadir.

Even more compelling than the lovers who are redeemed is their savior, Zurga, whose story is as thorny and serpentine as the path by which Leila and Nadir escape. He first meets Leila as a child of about ten or twelve and we can surmise that the next time he sees her as a priestess in the sacred Kandy temple she is a teenager. Zurga obviously does not make the connection between the brave girl who helped him escape mortal danger and the “goddess” both he and Nadir fall in love with during one of their many travels. Leila is now heavily veiled as the Brahmins call the faithful to prayer. Zurga and Nadir catch a furtive glimpse of Leila’s face as she makes her way through the kneeling prayer goers. “*O vision, ô rêve!*” [What a dream-like vision!] (22) is what Zurga exclaims many years later as he and Nadir, on the “wild, arid beach in Ceylon,” recall this moment when the veil lifts. The two men have vowed not to let their mutual infatuation with the priestess tear them apart: “*Soyons unis jusqu’à la mort!*” [Let us remain united until death] (24). Every time Leila appears or is invoked in the opera, as the love objects Zurga and Nedir, the “goddess theme” is heard; the famous tenor-baritone duet “*Au fond du temple saint*” [Deep inside the sacred temple] provides the leitmotiv.

The third time Zurga sees Leila, she is most likely in her mid-twenties and has agreed to live without friends, husband or lover as she sings to protect the pearl fishers

from evil spirits. Zurga has not seen Nadir for several years, and he does not identify Leila because of her veils. Nadir, whose character has been immortalized by the tenor with bell-toned clarity, Nicolai Gedda, in the 1960 recording, boasts of daring life experiences as a huntsman who has tracked down the tiger, the jaguar and the panther. He has also followed Leila's tracks, as well as those of the beasts of the savannah and the forest. Nadir embodies the epithet Sinhalese, or lion-slayer. He appears to have returned to the island out of friendship for Zurga, but he knowingly commits an act of treachery by concealing the fact that he has followed Leila and intending to break the pact with him to whom he has sworn eternal friendship.

After the vessels of the pearl fishers have safely returned to shore, Leila's mission has been carried out and Nourabad plans to leave her in the ruined temple for the night. This is when Nadir scales the cliff and, despite Leila's protests, pledges his love to her. As he tries to escape, Nourabad sends his fakirs after Nadir and rouses the entire village, who interpret the sudden storm and the churning waters as a manifestation of Brahma's wrath. Zurga is prepared to let his friend and the veiled priestess leave, thus overruling Nourabad's injunction that they must be put to death. But when the High Priest tears away Leila's veil, Zurga recognizes her and cries, "Avenge yourselves! Avenge me! May they be cursed!" (44) At his orders, Nadir and Leila are led off separately to await their doom.

As poet Robert Frost might have put it, Zurga's "inner weather" is reflected in the "outer weather": "The storm has subsided and the winds have died down," (46) is how Zurga's recitative begins in Act III. "And like them, my wrath has quieted." In one of the most lyrical arias for baritone, Zurga, alone in his tent, admits the rashness of his act and

pleads for forgiveness (“*pardonnez les transports d’un coeur irrité*”). Horrified at what he has done, he admits that he is the guilty one. He is even prepared to spare Leila as she comes to him and begs for mercy, but she asks him to pardon Nadir, the erstwhile friend who is now his rival. Zurga to flies into a jealous rage: “By believing you can save him, you will lose him forever! (49)” At the top of her vocal register, Leila screams her hatred for Zurga and prepares to die in Nadir’s arms.

What saves both Nadir and Leila is the necklace she gives to a young pearl fisher to bring to her mother after she is dead. Once again regretting his impulsivity, Zurga grabs the necklace from the pearl fisher and declares that he will repay his debt to her. This is when he sets the sacrificial fire and becomes a *satu* like the rare warriors and servants chronicled by Narasimhan:

“On the death of King Ballala in AD 1220, his minister and the general Kuvaralaskhma killed himself along with his wife. In Kashmir, in AD 902 and AD 1081, male servants gave up their lives on the death of the ruler. In Gujarat and Rajasthan likewise, slaves sometimes became *satu*- in 1818 when the maharaja of Jaipur was cremated, eighteen slaves are said to have burned. An attendant of Sawai Jagat Singh also burnt to death on the death of his master in 1819.” (112).

Let us note that Narasimhan has to go back quite far in history to find examples of male self-sacrifice- the most “recent” occurring in 1819- and the ones she mentions happen in the context of the death of a ruler. She asserts that examples of *sata*- “men ending their lives on the death of their wives- are not unknown, though the number is exceedingly small.” (112). But women who commit sati and have temples raised in their honor continue to do so throughout the 1980s, the most publicized case being that of eighteen-year-old Roop Kanwar in 1987. It must be noted that the British outlawed sati in 1829, but a certain “feminine mystique” has been created to incite even modern Hindu

women to burn themselves on their husbands' funeral pyre. Widows are seen as "ill-starred" and a financial burden on the family and they must undergo stringent rituals such as sleeping on the floor and being all but excluded from society. With such a bleak future in store for them, sati might seem the only alternative.

So Zurga's decision to become a *satu* must be foregrounded as an all-encompassing and redemptive instance of male self-sacrifice. He realizes, too late, that he can not decide for Leila whom she may or may not choose as a lover, any more than he can impose Brahma's law of abstinence on her. Leila flouts divine law in the name of love and Nadir is ready as well to defy the outraged pearl fishers who have been stirred into a frenzy by Nourabad. After breaking the chains that bind Leila and Nadir with a hatchet, Zurga pauses and leads the brief trio "*O lumière sainte*" [O holy light] (54) during which he resigns himself to undying love of Nadir and Leila, as well as to his own impending demise. "Only God knows the future," he says as he shows the lovers an escape route known only to him, and they ask him if he will follow.

In some versions of the opera, Zurga leans against an idol of Brahma and burns to death as he watches the terrified Indians escape through the forest with their children in their arms. The 1960 recording of *The Pearl Fishers*, in which Zurga was sung by French baritone Ernest Blanc, as well as the performance conducted by Rosenthal, uses an alternate ending. Alerted by the High Priest Nourabad, four armed Indians stab Zurga in the back, leaving him to die on the "savage coast."

Zurga becomes a *satu* but will have no temple erected in his honor, nor will he be worshipped, because such a "privilege" is reserved for women who cease to live after the deaths of their husbands. But his dying words will remain engraved in the minds of the

listener: “My task has been carried out. I have kept my promise. She lives; he is saved (55).” Slowly suffocating and burning in the fire he has set to allow the lovers to escape, or crawling toward the spot where Nadir and Leila fled as the lifeblood drains out of him, it is only death that will extinguish the fire in the soul of Zurga.

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