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Full Issue

Abstract

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VERBUM



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Editor Jodi Rowland

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Letter from the Editor

Today, religious studies as an academic discipline is growing and widening at St. John Fisher College. Part of this growth is to pursue scholarship for scholarship's sake; study for the passion of study. It is with this pursuit in mind that the Religious Studies Department Club presents *Verbum*. The publication of this academic journal provides an opportunity for the Fisher community to participate in a scholarly forum where religious traditions of the world are examined and engaged in critical discourse.

This issue of *Verbum* showcases student knowledge and study in Christianity and Sikhism, along with the philosophical and religious concept of humanism. From the interpretation of a Christian film to the understanding of human nature in relationship to religious studies, these articles demonstrate an intellectual foundation for the future of the continued appeal of religious studies at the collegiate level.

Verbum is a bi-annual, student-run publication whose concept generates from the work and dedication of the Religious Studies Club and Department. Thus far, in bringing the idea of religious pluralism outside the classroom, the Religious Studies Club creates an environment that broadens the view of the Fisher community regarding religion. The opportunity to open doors to more possibilities in scholarship is the goal of publishing *Verbum*.

Verbum accepts submissions each semester from classroom projects to individual research. Prizes are awarded to the two outstanding essays in each issue. In this issue, Dr. Costanzo graciously furnished the prizes. We look forward to reading your future submissions and continuing the pursuit of academic achievement in religious studies at St. John Fisher. In the words of our Basilian founders: *Bonitatem et disciplinam et scientiam doce me.*

Sincerely,

Jodi Rowland, Editor
Jonathan Schott, Alumni Advisor

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Orthodoxy vs. Compassion

by

Jayme C. Wintish

Antonia Bird's 1995 film "Priest" illuminates the significance of the humanity of Jesus, as does The Gospel of Luke. The controversial issues of homosexuality, the seal of confession, and the oath of celibacy are examined from a human perspective throughout "Priest." This film makes it apparent that when we apply the humanity of Jesus to these issues, there is a revelation that the Catholic Church acts in opposition to the Jesus represented in Luke. The Gospel of Luke depicts Jesus as a man with compassion for all human beings. Jesus rejects the judgments the religious authorities impose on individuals, and is himself condemned and crucified for disobeying religious doctrines. This film raises the ancient issue of society, valuing orthodoxy over compassion, and more recently, Christianity over Jesus.

Bird's controversial film "Priest" received wonderful reviews from many critics, but was criticized by those affiliated with the Catholic Church. Peter Stack, a staff critic of the San Francisco Chronicle, calls the film "an exceptional movie" (1). This film takes place in inner city Liverpool centered on the story of Reverend Greg Pilkington, played by the British actor, Linus Roache (Stack 1). Stack describes Father Greg as "a dutiful, idealistic diocesan priest assigned to a tough parish to replace an older clergyman who has lost his marbles because of the pressures of working in grim, poor neighborhoods" (Stack 1). The character of this young priest is first exposed when he reacts with strong opposition to the discovery of Father Matthew's long-term, monogamous relationship with the parish housekeeper.

Father Matthew, played by Tom Wilkinson, is kind and welcoming to Father Greg, who has moved into his new home with Father Matthew and the parish housekeeper, Maria (Cathy Tyson). When Father Greg learns of the relationship between

Father Matthew and Maria, his obedience to the Church, above all else, is revealed. Stack describes Father Matthew as “a progressive whose approach is to bend the rules to serve the wild cards of humanity” (1). Stack explains Father Greg as “adamant that church doctrine, however severe, should be followed to the letter in service to God” (1). Bird makes an interesting choice of assigning the liberal view to the older priest and the strict, conservative view to the younger. Although, at first, this seems to contradict a typical depiction of views, according to age, this brings to our attention the human experience of living a religious life and the realities one accepts.

The relationship between Father Greg and Father Matthew throughout the film reveals a great deal about each of their identities. Father Matthew represents a belief in the humanity of Jesus, from the start of the film. Father Greg sees this approach to faith as hypocritical and regards obedience to the Church as a crucial aspect of faith. Ironically, later in the film, this understanding of humanity that Father Matthew possesses is the very reason that Father Greg’s life is saved. The majority of the parish community holds views similar to those of Father Greg; the views that end up condemning Father Greg. Views similar to those held by the community and Church authorities have obviously helped shape Father Greg’s understanding of faith.

The second time during the film that a moral conflict occurs is when Father Greg shamefully changes from his religious attire into a leather jacket and goes out to a gay bar. He spends the night with another man, and for the first time in the film, embraces his own humanity. The scene where Father Greg and Graham (Robert Carlyle) make love exhibits the human need to express love. The interactions between the two men are very

tender and sincere. This scene does not reflect a man falling into the weakness of sin, as Father Greg believes the next morning.

The next day a young girl named Lisa, of Father Greg's congregation, reveals, during confession, that her father sexually molests her consistently. Father Greg is torn between intervening to stop this girl's suffering and abiding by the Church's seal of confession. It is at this point in the film that Father Greg begins to question the rules of the Church. He is not only experiencing suffering first hand as a result of Church Doctrine, but he now feels incapable of stopping a young girl's suffering due to Church rules.

Bird's film "Priest" raises pertinent issues in contemporary society that often raise controversy in the Catholic Church. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops regularly reviews films. The review of this film posted on their web page describes "Priest" as a "flawed British drama" ("Film and Broadcasting" 1). It becomes clear why this perspective is stated later in the critique of the film. The critique states that Bird's film:

. . . provides a credible picture of a lonely priest in a busy parish, though its emphasis on his struggle with his own sexuality strangely lacks any notion of sin and the ambiguous ending in an emotionally powerful scene of reconciliation leaves matters unresolved.

"Film and Broadcasting" 1

This comments on the film is latent with irony, considering the blatant importance of a human perspective the film proposes.

This review of the film by the Conference of Catholic Bishops is an obvious display of a lack of insight into the film. The comment that “its emphasis on his struggle with his own sexuality strangely lacks any notion of sin” sounds quite absurd, considering the events in the film. Father Greg attempts suicide because he believes homosexuality to be a sin. The scene at the end of the film shows Father Matthew telling the congregation that everyone is a sinner. This could be interpreted that homosexuality is a sin. The point made is that no one has a right to judge another. It is quite frightening that such an emotional film that focuses on human compassion could leave anyone concerned with something as trivial as sexuality.

It seems that this organization would not have a problem with the film if it clearly concluded homosexuality to be a sin and had an unambiguous ending. Considering that Father Matthew and Father Greg are clearly implicit Jesus characters in this film, this review leads one to question the Catholic Bishops’ view of the humanity of Jesus, as represented in the Gospel of Luke. The question of adopting compassion or man-made religious doctrine is clearly the theme of this film. This review makes it quite apparent that the Conference of Catholic Bishops embraces the latter.

After Father Greg and his lover are taken to the police station for publicly displaying affection, Father Greg’s homosexuality is public. Father Greg attempts suicide, but Father Matthew saves him. Father Greg is sent to a rural parish and is condemned by Church authorities and many of his formerly loyal parishioners. After much persuasion from Father Matthew, Father Greg returns to his church to say mass with his loyal friend.

One of the parishioners gets up and voices his disapproval of the priest's return. The parishioner accuses Father Greg of making a mockery of his faith. A second man also stands up and yells at Father Greg. The second man quotes the Bible in order to defend his opposition to Father Greg's sexuality. Father Greg responds to this irate man citing the Bible as well. These two men converse using only scripture references to defend their positions.

Interestingly, the member of the church cites only quotes from the Old Testament, while Father Greg quotes the words of Jesus. This part of the film clearly parallels the aspects of the Bible that are typically used in society to debate the issue of homosexuality. It is important to consider that Christianity is based, supposedly, on the teachings of Jesus. Throughout the New Testament, people accused Jesus of contradicting the rules of the Old Testament. Jesus always approached these accusations from a rational perspective and attempted to shed light on the most important aspects of being faithful. Clearly, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is far more concerned with having compassion for human beings than he is with obeying religious traditions.

The Gospel of Luke discusses many instances of Jesus breaking religious law due to his human compassion. One instance of this is when the religious authorities are trying to find a reason to accuse Jesus, and they witnessed him healing a man on the Sabbath (Lk 6: 7, 10). Jesus responded to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" (Lk 6:9). It is clear in this passage that Jesus would rather stop a human being's pain than abide by the law.

One of the quotes Father Greg refers to when the parishioner verbally attacks him is found in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus said, "Do not judge, and you will not be judge"

(Lk 6:37). This lesson of Jesus applies to the film “Priest” for a few different reasons. This points out that the Catholic Church, itself, judges others and condones the judgment of others by its stance on homosexuality. Jesus’ words also bring our attention to the fact that even if this man confronting Father Greg views homosexuality as a sin, his judgment of Father Greg proves that the parishioner is the true sinner by passing judgment on another.

The Gospel of Luke continually emphasizes the most important aspect of Jesus’ teachings as those concerning compassion for all of humanity. A man asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responded by asking what his interpretations is (Lk 10:25, 26). The man answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Lk 10:27). Jesus confirmed the man’s opinion, “‘You have answered correctly,’ Jesus replied. ‘Do this and you will live’” (Lk 10:28).

Antonia Bird’s move “Priest” explores the conflicts of obedience in regard to the rules of the Catholic Church. The situations that arise in this film bring attention to the fact that in order to obey Church Doctrine individuals must disobey the teachings of Jesus. Organized religions, such as Catholicism, most often do not encourage members to consider the fact that Jesus was not the founder of Christianity, and was not even alive to witness the beginnings of this religion. It is an important question for all that find faith in Jesus Christ to ask themselves whether Jesus would support the organized religion of Christianity established in his name.

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A Look at the Life and Teachings of St. Augustine

by

Jodi Rowland

Introduction

After deciding to research St. Augustine, a long process of digging through the multiple books in the library and the vast amount of articles on the Internet was needed. Sifting through the voluminous load of information was a great task. However, this task supported the reason I initially chose Augustine: to learn about the man who converted, the convert who became a bishop, the bishop who became a saint, and the saint who became how we know Augustine today—as a great theologian and devoted Christian. Within his many writings, we can see how these characteristics previously mentioned are evident. We will do so by looking at a brief section from Augustine’s *Confessions* and *City of God*. In addition, we will examine how various scholars such as Brown, Meagher, and Placher, interpret and understand St. Augustine. Along with this textual research, we will explore a video, *St. Augustine: His Life and Spirituality*, by Fr. Benedict Groeschel. Over all, we will determine the multiple ways Augustine has been interpreted within different mediums—from text to tape—and draw a conclusion to the portrait of who is Augustine, then and now. Who is this man from the fourth Century CE? Perhaps a brief look into the biography of Augustine will begin our search for the mystery behind the man, the bishop, and the saint.

Biography

Although St. Augustine’s life is full of many accomplishments and deeds, to account for them all would be strenuous and beyond our purpose. Therefore, our intention is to cover the major points in his life that lead to who he became. First, we will take a glance at his life before conversion; then we will move forward to Augustine’s work as a devoted Christian and theologian.

Tagaste in 354, the year St. Augustine was born, was a small town in North Africa not far from Hippo. At the time, Tagaste, established nearly three hundred years prior to Augustine, was a part of the Roman Empire. Following custom, Monica, his mother, did not have Augustine baptized when he was born; however, he was a catechumen, which basically meant that he was soon to be baptized (*One Hundred Saints* 122).

Unfortunately, his mother had to pray for most of her life for Augustine and his father's baptism. Monica, a devoted Christian, was married to a pagan man, who on his deathbed converted to Christianity and accepted baptism (O'Donnell 1).

Although Augustine was born into middle class, his ambitions to become a part of, and immersed in, the Roman Empire never ceased. Thus, his schooling during childhood was to prepare him as a Roman lawyer or official. At age sixteen, Augustine's study at Madauros, which was from 365 to 369, stopped when his father could no longer support him and he was forced to withdraw for a year (Placher 109). Within this year, an event, which triggered the start of a long, sought-out conversion, occurred. Along with a group of others, Augustine stole pears from a neighbor's tree. The importance of this seemingly insignificant event shows that Augustine realized his desire to seek evil for the sake of enjoyment. Although this event sent Augustine on a search for wisdom, enlightenment, and truth, eventually this search of philosophy would lead him to conversion.

Returning to his education in 370 at Carthage, Augustine studied rhetoric with a zealous ambition. During this time, his mistress, who he remained with until his move to Milan in 385, bore an illegitimate son named Adeodatus, which means "creature of God." Before his move to Milan, Augustine held his own school of rhetoric in Tagaste and

Carthage. During this time, Augustine still sought knowledge, for he struggled with a philosophical understanding of the world. Augustine joined the Manichees—a religious cult from Persia that infiltrated the Roman walls—and found a soothing relief in what he was taught. This religious cult is not far from Gnosticism: “The world seen by human eyes was the battleground for their cosmic conflict. The Manichees and their followers were the few who were on the side of the good spirit and who would be rewarded for their allegiance with eternal bliss” (O’Donnell 2). After time, the initial soothing of the cult did not satisfy Augustine’s desire for philosophy. Hoping to understand a deeper truth about Manicheism, Augustine met with a spokesman for the cult. However, when the man repeated what Augustine had already heard from his contemporaries, Augustine found that the man was a great orator who lacked the ability to be a deep thinker (Wills 34).

Now with anxiety, at age twenty-nine, Augustine traveled to Rome in search of equals and an outlet for his worries concerning the world around him. While in Rome, Augustine studied Neoplatonism. Eventually, with Monica’s persistence, in hope for his conversion, Augustine moved to Milan where he was welcomed by the bishop, Ambrose. During his time of study under Ambrose, Augustine found enlightenment from Scripture (*One Hundred Saints* 122).

It was thirty-two years living life a pagan, in the midst of the Roman Empire, searching for a philosophical explanation to his worldly desire, before Augustine converted to Christianity. All the venues he searched, prior to his conversion, left Augustine with anxiety to understand the world. His anxieties were settled with the words: *Tolle lege! Tolle lege!* (“Take up and read”) Looking at St. Paul’s conversion, we

can see a similarity: “Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard the voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ He asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The reply came, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting’” (NRSV, Acts 9:3-5). In fact, it was Paul’s epistle to the Romans where Augustine found the wisdom, ease, and guidance he had been searching for so diligently. Augustine heard God’s call while children were playing a game. Thus, he picked up Paul’s letter and read. A serene calmness surrounded him, and within an instant, Augustine had wholly converted to Christianity (*One Hundred Saints* 123). Augustine was ordained at age thirty-six and became a bishop at forty-one. He remained in Hippo as the bishop for thirty-five years, writing and attacking heretics, establishing foundations in Christianity that we still hold today (<<http://www.americancatholic.org>>).

Seeing how full and engaging Augustine’s life was prior to his conversion, we can only expect his Christian life to be that much more fulfilling. This is similar to the parable of the Unjust Judge, where Luke allegorizes that if an unjust person can give, than God will give more than any human. How much more did Augustine give as a Christian? Looking at two of his most famous works, out of five million, we will see how much Augustine offers to Christian history, and how many foundations are based on his words and deeds.

Confessions

St. Augustine’s *Confessions* is one of the most profound, recognized, and widely read books in Christian history, possibly, other than the bible. The relevancy Augustine wrote in his book is still predominately found in the social customs and world affairs

nearly sixteen hundred years later. Later, we will dabble into *City of God*, which is still pertinent today. For now, we will look at his poetic, philosophical, and loving language found threaded in his work that has touched Christians and non-Christians alike for centuries.

The *Confessions* of St. Augustine have been considered his autobiography and memoir. However, neither of these genres captures the true light in which Augustine wrote, nor in the way we read *Confessions*. Augustine's work was a complete losing of oneself to God. Giving up completely all of worldly possessions, including bodily and mind possession, such as emotions and intellectual thoughts. *Confessions* is a prayer lifted up to God; one of praise, understanding, and adoration. After looking at a few of the theological and philosophical ideas presented in book ten, we will attempt to interpret their meaning and influence.

First, we will begin with a passage that states the intention Augustine held in writing *Confessions*. "I wish to act in truth, making my confession both in my heart before you and in this book before the many who will read it" (207). By carefully dissecting this statement, we can clearly understand the devotion Augustine placed in God and in writing this devotion for others to understand. The definition Augustine holds of truth is one that is completely within God. At this point in his life, Augustine had come to know God as the sole redeemer, truth, and righteousness. Within the tenth book of *Confessions*, Augustine stated: "You are the Truth which presides over all things" (249). Therefore, when he made the assessment that he is writing in truth, Augustine meant that he is writing in God; the Grace of God inspired his words. Next, Augustine established that God already hears Augustine's confession within his own heart. Perhaps viewing a

passage from the book of Psalms will help identify exactly what Augustine meant: “I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you” (119:11). Clearly, the psalmist, like Augustine, understood that God is already within the walls of his body. Thus, Augustine wrote his confessions for others to read. Not only did Augustine portray his adoration and praise for the Grace of God, he showed that there is potential for even the utmost sinner to be loved in the eyes of God.

Second, we will look at how Augustine viewed the five senses and memory. Within the following poetic statement, Augustine showed his love for God and stated that we experience God through our senses: “You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me; you put my blindness to flight. You shed your fragrance about me; I drew breath and now I gasp for your sweet odor. I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am inflamed with love of your peace” (232). By appreciating our senses as a mediator between the divine and human, as Jesus Christ is a mediator between God and human, we come to fullness, on this earth, with God. However, the fullness we encounter on earth is not the complete unity we desire with God. Until we reach that unity—the salvation promised with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ—we hunger for more of God: “for the price of my redemption is always in my thoughts. I eat it and drink it and minister it to others; and as one of the poor I long to be filled with it, to be one of those who *eat and have their fill*” (Augustine, *Confessions* 252).

By the same token, Augustine spoke of memory: “Where and when, therefore, did I experience a state of blessed happiness, so that I am enabled to remember it and love it and long for it?” (Augustine, *Confessions* 228). Augustine spoke of memory as a file

within the mind. He stated that he has searched every file in his mind, including his memory, but cannot remember the first time he heard of God. From his questioning, he reveals that God has always been inside him, which is similar to the aforementioned passage from the book of Psalms. God was constantly there; before his conception (see John 1:1-5), during Augustine's conversion, at his death, and throughout his eternal union with God. Although our interpretation of Augustine's *Confessions* merely "scrapes the surface" of the deep theological importance of the book, we will move forward to another of his great texts revered by Christians: *City of God*.

City of God

Within *City of God*, Augustine claimed that there are two cities: one of humans and one of God. Viewing a few passages from book nine of *City of God*, we will attempt to understand and interpret what Augustine stated. Before we venture further, it is important to have a background of what the two cities represent:

Since the beginning of time, he [Augustine] said, humanity has been divided into two cities: the city of [hu]man[s], whose history is traced in the rise and fall of empires, fame, wealth, and human accomplishments, and the city of God, the company of those who love and serve God. It is the character of their love that divides people into these two cities.

Placher 118

In book nine of *City of God*, Augustine countered the Platonist idea of gods. Platonists proposed that demons act as an intercessor between gods and humans, that gods never interact with humans and vice versa. Augustine wrote, "On the other hand, they hold that 'gods never have direct contact with men [humans]' and therefore suppose that these demons are established midway between men [humans] and gods, to carry men's [human's] requests to the gods and to bring back the benefits the gods have

granted” (343). After this statement, Augustine continued to dispute the various ideas associated with this thought. Taking a look at two, out of the multiple statements, we will see a glimpse at the masterful way Augustine opposes the unorthodox views presented by certain groups, such as the Platonists and Manicheans.

1. “Are there any good demons who might assist the human soul to attain felicity?” (Augustine, *City of God* 344). Within the following passage, Augustine stated that since these men believe demons act as mediators between them (humans) and gods, since they count on *demons* to reach gods, those humans will only be led astray from the one true God. For only through God, and God alone, can the soul of humans attain felicity.

2. “The opinions of Peripatetics and Stoics about the passions” (Augustine, *City of God* 345). These philosophers felt that to describe the states of the soul one would have to call them disturbances, affections, or passions. In addition, every human, including those who are wise, are subject to passions. Basically, Augustine discussed the ways in which these groups understood passions, as inducement to sin. Then, in the next section, Augustine explained that passions, according to Christians, lead to virtue. “Scripture subjects the mind to God for his direction and assistance, and subjects the passions to the mind for their restraint and control so that they may be turned into the instruments of justice” (*City of God* 349). In this passage, Augustine reversed the philosophical understanding that all bodily things are evil and any act—around sexual intercourse—is wrong. This was to the extreme that, literally, any act of the body regarding sexual relations, whether in marriage or out, was considered sinful because the body is of humans and humans are of evil. However, Augustine drastically contradicted this

thought, declaring that it is not necessarily the action that is sinful, but the motive behind the action. An example would be having intercourse to fulfill a burning lust (sinful), versus having intercourse in a married, loving relationship physically to manifest one's love for God (not sinful). Perhaps this is one of the reasons why we would consider Augustine a contemporary in our day-in-age, even though he lived in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Although we only briefly discussed *City of God*, it is important to know that Augustine maintained an important theological insight in this book. Attacking many heresies, he established the two cities, and where our priorities of *love* should be set. If we are in the city of God, then we love the world, for God created the world, but before we love these possessions, we love God. Therefore, the world is not an evil place itself; however, the actions, or motivation behind the actions of humans, create sin. When humans live within the city of humans, they have no concrete concept of true virtue, passions, and justice. These humans will be lead astray from God by their *demons*, their temptations, for they do not communicate with God alone—their demons talk for them.

St. Augustine: His Life and Spirituality

In a ninety-minute video, Fr. Benedict Groeschel journeys through the life and accomplishments of St. Augustine. Dividing this exploration into three parts, Fr. Groeschel captures the essence of Augustine. Briefly, we will give a synopsis of each part that Fr. Groeschel presented.

First we will start with the part called: Convert. Within the thirty-minute part of the video, Convert, Fr. Groeschel gives a condensed biography of Augustine. Fr. Groeschel reflected on the main portions of his life that led Augustine to conversion and

the accomplishments after he became a Christian. Since we already covered a summary of Augustine's life, we will not expand any further on this portion of the video.

Next, there was another thirty-minute presentation called: Theologian of Christian Scripture. Mostly, within this portion of the video, Fr. Groeschel talks about Augustine's writings, such as *Confessions*. In fact, a large portion of the thirty minutes is devoted to understanding the theological and philosophical ideas presented in *Confessions*. Seeing as how we already explored, in a minimal way, the *Confessions*, we will not expand much further on what Fr. Groeschel presented. However, it is beneficial to note that Fr. Groeschel explains that Augustine questioned important ideas in order to reach his reflection of God.

Finally, the third portion, another thirty-minutes of the video, was called: Spiritual Director. Within this part, Fr. Groeschel spoke about the accomplishments that Augustine made as a bishop. Examples would be Augustine's practice of faith, his hope in God, and starting the Servants of God monastery. Also, Fr. Groeschel mentioned the heretics Augustine was battling as North Africa was falling to barbarians. Previously, we mentioned a few of these heretics and their notions in the section of *City of God*. Over all, the video was an informative experience with insights into the life of St. Augustine.

Conclusion

We seem able to know only what we have made; and what we have made, of ourselves or of our world, is cast always adrift upon a sea of what we have never made. We claim vast power; and, to be sure, the forces in which we meddle are vast. However, to possess power is not only to be able to summon it forth but to call it home as well. The truest sign of power lies not in troubling the seas but in calming them. The weakest child may turn a forest into an inferno; but only fools would call that true power. We may yet show ourselves capable of bringing about a last day, but can we bring about a first day? Our power is

derivative. We mediate forces which we did not and cannot call forth from nothing. We are not primarily creators but knowers; and to knowers a degree of humility is essential. Here too Augustine is a true teacher.

Meagher 292

St. Augustine was a man of great importance and faith. Due to his achievements, in his works where he battled heretics, like in *City of God*, and because of the complete revealing of himself within *Confessions*, Augustine is renowned and remembered for being a strong Christian in faith and practice. Many of the doctrines of the Church find root in Augustine's writings, including his notion of the trinity, which can be found in *The Trinity*. Also, the establishment of the *just war theory* is deeply founded from Augustine's theological influence. Many of his ideas and thoughts match those of our contemporaries. Not only do Augustine's teachings transcend time, not only were his theological and philosophical understandings of God *before his time*, his mystical union with God has impacted the lives of many Christians throughout centuries; whether those Christians are aware of Augustine and his ideas or not. Augustine is a piece of the foundation. He is another rock on top of the first. "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Mt. 16:18-19).

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Sikhism: The Religion of the Gurus

by

Megan Tiernan

The understanding of the scriptures within a religion is often imperative to the understanding of that religion as a whole. The content of the scriptures, as well as their origin and the message that they represent, are all very important aspects of learning about a religion. The religion of Sikhism is no exception to this idea. The understanding of this Indian religion derives from the comprehension of the complex sequence of development and current usage of its scriptures, commonly known as the Adi Granth.

1. Who are the Sikhs?

A. Basic Background

The Sikhs are a religious group of people centered in Punjab, India (Voorst 121). Due to their often persecuted, minority status within India, they form a close-knit group of followers that uphold a strong sense of community (Wilkinson 45). Sikhs believe in one God, with their lifelong goal being “to move through five spiritual stages to achieve a favorable rebirth or liberation from the cycle of rebirth” (Wilkinson 51). This belief in rebirth, and the lifelong desire to be freed from it, is similar to other world religions such as Buddhism or Hinduism. Yet, Sikhism is unique from these religions based on its strong, central belief in the one God—a monotheistic characteristic that can be found in some of the other well-known religions, including those of Islam or Christianity.

B. Followers of the Gurus

The Punjabi word Sikh means learner (Bowker 76). The way in which Sikhs learn of their one God and how to be like Him is extremely distinctive of their religion. “Sikhism is based on the religious teachings of ten spiritual leaders” (Bowker, J. ed. 66). These Sikh leaders have evolved over many years and are known as gurus. “In the religious sense, a Sikh is someone who believes in one God, Sat Guru, or ‘true teacher,’

and follows the Gurus who reveal his teachings” (Bowker 76). Much as Christianity follows the teachings of Jesus, or Islam follows the rules of Mohammed, Sikhs look to the ten gurus as a connection to the one God within their religion. “Gurus in Indian religions are spiritual guides. The word ‘guru’ means ‘weighty one’ and gurus are those who bear the weight of wisdom and knowledge” (Bowker 80). This wisdom and knowledge affects all aspects of the Sikh way of life. “The Gurus do not simply teach and guide individuals; they are community leaders as well” (Bowker 80).

2. The Ten Gurus

A. The Founding Guru

The first guru, or spiritual leader, of Sikhism, is known as Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak formed the religion of Sikhism from a personal experience, which directed his sacred calling in life. This is the story of his awakening:

In 1499, while he was bathing in the Bein River, he experienced the call of God. He was given a cup filled with amrit and commanded, ‘Nanak, this is the cup of devotion of the Name: drink this...I am with you, and I bless you and exalt you. Whoever remembers you will receive my blessing. Go, rejoice in My Name. Let this be your vocation.

Bowker 78

This mysterious revelation is the starting point for the Sikh religion. Nanak’s choice to follow the advice presented to him helped to spread and develop the religion. “[Nanak] became a wandering preacher, teaching that everything is created by God, and the way to come close to him is through devotion and meditation, not ritual” (Bowker 80). In other words, Sikhism began to form on the foundations of inner peace and contemplation,

rather than by encouraging outward displays of worship, such as ritualistic sacrifices or daily offerings practiced by many of the other world religions. “Guru Nanak did not regard other religions as worthless, but he did believe that their attention to the detail of ritual and outward observance was a severe impediment to a relationship with God, who can be found better within” (Bowker 77).

Guru Nanak also helped form the foundations of Sikhism by enforcing other main ideas such as, “that God created all things, and that all things are dependent on God’s will or hukam” (Bowker 76). Therefore, the Sikhs were taught to believe in creationism, and God’s power. This founding guru’s obedient decision to spread the word of the one God through his divine experience taught Sikh believers that “God does not become manifest in the world but his will becomes known through the Gurus” (Bowker 76). A final lasting impact that Guru Nanak had on the evolution of Sikhism was the action he took to prolong its survival before his death. “In designating one of his followers, Lahina, to be his successor as Guru, the Sikh movement thus continued beyond his death with a succession of Gurus” (Bowker 78). This important decision created a pattern for the next nine gurus and thus also helped the religion to flourish and grow.

B. A Succession of Gurus

The second guru after Guru Nanak is known as Guru Angad. Guru Angad was important because he was chosen as the first successor in the progression of the gurus. The fact that Guru Angad was chosen based on a cognitive decision as opposed to a hereditary obligation is also important to the Sikh succession of gurus. “By choosing a follower rather than a son, Guru Nanak set a pattern for Guruship based on devotion rather than kinship” (Bowker 81). In other words, Guru Nanak chose a successor that he

felt would be the best to further communicate his teachings and continue the true messages of God through the understanding of his Sikh faith.

Each guru helped to contribute an important characteristic to the Sikh religion. The third guru, Guru Amar Das, was known for the certain types of observance that he created for the religion: “And introduced Sikh rituals for birth and death that were distinct from existing Hindu ones” (Bowker 81). Since some of the main Sikh ideas are similar to those of the Hinduism faith, such as the idea of rebirth, it is significant for specific rituals and practices to be incorporated in the Sikh religion, making it more distinctive and unified. The fourth guru is known as Guru Ram Das. “Guru Ram Das built the ‘pool of Nectar,’ or Amritsar, hence the place of that name with the Golden Temple near it, the major place of Sikh devotion” (Bowker 77). In other words, the fourth guru had a holy lake made around the Golden Temple—the original Sikh gurdwara that serves as a prominent place of Sikh worship (McLeod 30).

Interestingly enough, the next guru, Guru Arjan, built this temple as well as contributing to the organization of the Sikh scriptures. “He collected the hymns of the previous gurus, and, with his own 2,216 contributions, prepared the Guru Granth Sahib...He also built the Golden Temple, which was to house the holy book” (Bowker 81). This holy book would become an official part of the Sikh religion later on in the progression of gurus, however the process of its formation is important to note, as influenced by the fifth guru.

The sixth guru was actually the son of Guru Arjan; however, as stated before, his appointment was not based around this fact. Guru Hargobind “proclaimed that the Guru must be a military leader as well as a spiritual leader” (Bowker 81). This demand was

made as a result of some of the political skirmishes that the minorities of Sikhs were facing within their Indian homelands. The seventh guru was the grandson of Guru Hargobind. An interesting fact about the eighth guru was that he became guru at age five (Bowker 81).

The ninth guru is an especially important leading figure for Sikhs, due to the extreme amount of conviction that he held for the Sikh faith. Guru Tegh Bahadur can be seen as a martyr for he was “beheaded in Delhi in 1675 after refusing to convert to Islam” (Bowker 80). The tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh was the last human guru. “Guru Gobind Singh was the second most important Guru and the founder of the khalsa, the foremost institution of the Sikh community” (Bowker 80). The tenth guru is also important because after him, the next and final guru was designated as the Sikh scriptures rather than another male follower.

He is believed to have announced that after his death Guruship would be embodied by the Panth (Sikh community) and the scriptures. The volume is known respectfully as Guru Granth Sahib since Guru Gobind Singh instructed his followers to regard it as their Guru.

Bowker 69

3. The Guru Granth Sahib

A. Purpose of the Adi Granth

The Guru Granth Sahib marked the end of the succession of the gurus. The Guru Granth Sahib was the final embodiment of the gurus of Sikh tradition (Bowker 83). Most of all, these scriptures were said to hold the complete messages of God for the Sikh community. “It is the most important of all Sikh scriptures and is primal in the sense that

Sikhs believe it uncovers the truth about God, the Primal Being, which has been true for all eternity” (Bowker 83). Each of the previous gurus helped to contribute to and share these messages, but the Guru Granth Sahib represents the final product, a lasting representation of all that Sikhism stands for.

“Guru Granth Sahib initiates a disciple on the path of spiritual progress and guides him at the various stages of his journey to God” (Cole 251). Therefore, it is understood that just as Sikh followers in the past looked to the human gurus for guidance and direction to the one God, Sikh followers now become familiar with the Adi Granth as their source of leadership. It is important to remember that Sikhs believe that both the human and written gurus are entirely created through God’s power. “According to the Sikh faith, it was God alone who inspired the human gurus and the Sikh holy book...It is for this reason that God is called the ‘Sat Guru’ or ‘true guru’” (Wilkinson 50).

B. Format of the Adi Granth

As previously mentioned, the Adi Granth was being compiled many years before it was named the final guru, mainly by Guru Arjan. The Adi Granth consists of “hymns of varying lengths, mostly conveying the message that spiritual liberation comes through a belief in the divine name, or Nam, not through external ritual” (Bowker 83). It can then be understood that the Sikh scriptures are intimate elaborations of the one God, which help to define the depths of the Sikh faith. Sikhs have their specific traditions and way of treating things, such as where and how to store the scriptures; however, it is essentially not practiced as a religion based around outward acts of worship or rituals. The fact that these ideas can be revealed through the scriptures is a strong example of why it is

important to understand the scriptures of a religion in order to accurately comprehend the beliefs and ways of its followers.

“The standard length of the book is 1,430 pages” (Bowker 83). The hymns that make up these pages are then further organized into thirty-one sections following musical scales, called “ragas.” These ragas are then further distinguished by the guru that they are associated with, referred to by the correctly corresponding number of “mahalla”, the word that is used to replace the formal naming of each guru (Bowker 82). This system of categorization within the Adi Granth is somewhat complex; yet it is logical to its pattern of development through the succession of gurus.

C. The Gurdwara

The gurdwara is the name for the Sikh temple, the center of Sikh life. “The gurdwara houses the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture, which is a focus of reverence within it” (Bowker 77). Much like a Christian church keeps the Bible, it is the same with the Sikh gurdwara and the Adi Granth. Since the Guru Granth Sahib is being honored as if it were a human guru, certain respectful practices accompany it. “It is kept under a canopy and on top of a throne, and is laid to rest at a special place at night, covered in rumalas, or decorative cloths” (Bowker 82). It is important to remember, though, that it is not the book itself that is being worshipped by the Sikhs, it is the messages of the one God within it that are being respected.

Any knowledgeable Sikh is permitted to read from the Adi Granth; however, it is a duty reserved for Sikh officials when it comes time for worship and meeting in the gurdwara (Bowker 82). The regulations for being a Sikh official are quite open. “Unlike many other religions, both men and women can officiate at Sikh ceremonies and either

can read the Guru Granth Sahib” (Bowker 82). This open approach, once again, reinforces the fact that the Sikh religion is one that focuses on the individual understanding and appreciation of the relationship with the one God, rather than ritualistic restrictions.

It was interesting to discover how a normally assumed human leadership role of faith could be passed down to a book of scriptures, and still be regarded almost as if it were human. The way that the Sikh faith focuses strongly on personal growth and understanding, rather than ritual, is a respectable aspect of their system of beliefs; especially in a time where it seems as if too many people in this world get caught up in going through the motions of their religion, while not really striving to understand their faith.

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Humanism and Religion: How to use one to understand the other

by

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Humanism is a concept that was more realized than discovered during the Renaissance era (cultural awakening) in Europe during the fourteenth century. Since then, it has developed in the way we look at, not only the arts and architecture, but also the way we view religion. It helps incorporate ideas and ethics of human action to how we focus on the belief, values, and morals we derive from religion. If anything, humanism has helped the spiritual form of religion to grow. However, it is not in any way, shape, or form limited to people who have an expressed religion, for it may also pertain to those who claim that they are of a different persuasion, such as Atheist.

The intellectual movement placed an emphasis on the individual worth of a person rather than focusing on the religious aspects of society prevalent in the medieval period of Europe. Humanism not only celebrated the dignity of persons, but also encouraged the study of classical works. Humanists, during the Renaissance, undertook cultural feats in the arts, politics, and sports. These scholars began to question traditional thoughts and ideas that had previously institutionalized religion as the dominant form of educational supremacy.

Through this inquiry, humanists sought to reintroduce the classical Greek values to educate the public. Therefore, ancient Athens and its philosophers, historians, artists, and so on, became prime examples for the development of European society. Languages, such as Greek and Hebrew, were studied to aid in the understanding of religious notions and philosophies. The latter gives an indication of how humanism helped inspire understanding of religious scripture, through which people were able to derive spirituality rather than just a code of what is right or wrong or both.

According to Corliss Lamont, in his paper *The Affirmative Ethics of Humanism:*

Humanist ethic and that of Christianity and the traditional religions is that it is entirely based on happiness in this one and only life and not concerned with the realm of supernatural immortality and the glory of God. . . . Christian insistence on the resurrection of the body and personal immortality has often cut the nerve of effective action here and now, and has led to the neglect of present human welfare and happiness.

In other words, happiness can be achieved through logic and reason. Also, Lamont has expressed that humanism has helped shape the beliefs of individuals, without the constant burden of having to place religious morals before contentment of the soul, which allows more room to experience the life given to people in a more active manner (hence, the arts). This is unlike a pattern that calls for strict devotion and obedience to laws highly regarded, but otherwise, less understood. Such laws are understood to be dogma of religion. Dogma, according to *Webster's Dictionary*, is a code of principle of beliefs.

Humanism has no such tenet simply because it is a philosophy of human interests and values. This may be seen as one of the distinguishing key factors between how we perceive the liberal system of ideas and the doctrines of religion. According to *Humanism: Philosophy vs. Dogma*, another aspect that differs greatly between the two is that the principles of humanism are tentative with time, while religious dogma, specifically that of Christianity, has not changed for over 2000 years. This brings us to the understanding that humanism helps incorporate patterns of our lives to comprehend fully what is not only around us, but what is also within us. It does not make one unethical; yet it makes one more responsibly aware, when deciding the actions he or she

might take. Also, religion is not meant to be negative. In fact, the notions and ideas of humanism may have a significant impact in determining and realizing religion through new expression, leading to spirituality that connects the mind, body, and soul.