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Bible as Literature

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The Modern Bible

Time is only a concept used to try and keep track of human consciousness. But to transcend the bounds of time the allegorical potency of the bible shines through like a ray of light does through a cloud. The messages sent out sometimes are only partially received but it is enough to grasp the light— the true essence of biblical messages. The film *The Ten Commandments*, reveals an account of Exodus that reintroduces transcendent messages because these lessons are now portrayed in a movie. Moses, a potential prince turned slave, exiled to the desert, came back to teach his people about his spiritual awakening. These words are written in history as the first account of the bible. However, they don't really mean that much to someone at face value as they once did so the rendition of his message in a film-style format provides an actually understandable portrayal of his views. To guide one's life in the optimal direction it's important to use all possible tools to accomplish this goal. Exodus has incredible allegorical relevance that is rejuvenated in the modern portrayal of *The Ten Commandments*, lessons that regardless of religion can find truth in every person.

Atop a mountain Moses finds a small, reserved opening where he is confronted by an old shrub emitting psychedelic beams of energy and a compelling man's voice booming from it (2:10:00). The mysterious beauty from the scene contributes to further

understanding of the bible because it makes the viewer feel like they are observing Moses. What better way is there to make someone understand something than to show them? The mind-bending waves of light, an ominous yet powerful voice echoing through the cascade of rocks, Moses shrouded in clothes of the past all contribute to a newfound interpretation of Exodus. What the scene is centered around is when God said, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people : for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (Exodus 19: 5-6). These words are indisputably archaic, no one says "ye" or "shall" anymore so there is a feeling of disconnect reading the passage. But what if there was a way to create a voice that sounded just like God. Reading those words in a person's reading voice is one thing: but hearing a depiction of an entity booming those words is a whole different animal (or entity). The Ten Commandments did just that, combining Demille and Heston's voices and then slowing and deepening it, providing a remarkable experience (Orrison, Pg 171). In the 1950s it was extremely difficult dealing with voice modulation and getting it right. In a very non-Christian manner, it was exclaimed "The voice of God is all fucked up again!" many times through post-production. But once the voice was developed the "word of the lord" really did sound like it was coming from the lord. The sensation one has when hearing lightning crackle through the sky is the best way to describe what it sounds like. At times it is almost like a gurgle of words spewing from an inner consciousness from the Earth. It is an ominous, deep, riveting, intrinsic, and familiar yet commanding tone that completely changes the interpretation of Exodus. Now when

hearing God speak, even in the archaic text presented, a grander sense of attentiveness is required. Even though the depiction of Exodus does showcase a literal interpretation of the bible it does not remove the ability to find allegorical meaning. There are still interesting examples like God being a beacon of light. Shining through the shrub and dancing on the rocks surrounding Moses it feels like the symbolism is blatant: God is with us wherever we are as he surrounds us on all fronts when we listen to him. So at this point if you are reading this you could be thinking “Ok I don’t really care I didn’t come here to get forced into a Christian perspective” and I would think back “But I’m not even religious!” and we would have a telepathic fight about religion. But a more effective and communicative means of displaying the allegorical significance would be to detail who and what God really is.

In the brisk night air, a silhouette of mountains serves as a backdrop to Moses as he cries to God, wondering what else he has to do to find his people stability and peace. Then all of a sudden the surrounding particles in the air start to swirl, condensing into a tornado of fire leading to God's voice resounding in a booming gurgle (think the grain of Kurt Cobain's voice mixed with the orotund acoustics of Morgan Freeman's voice) (3:37:00). To understand what God is, it is important to analyze this scene because it details the basic principles of what Christians believe– the renowned “Ten Commandments.” The first commandment being, “Thou shalt have no other gods before: me” (Exodus 20:3). God whips these words into a rock slab, igniting it and spraying smoke and sparks everywhere. That scene is not a very convincingly accurate historical reenactment of what happened but director Cecil B. Demille “felt that the

prologue of the original film dated much less than the modern story because of the timelessness of its moral lessons” (Eyman, pg.923). The film was seriously considered to have been a modernized interpretation of the bible before Demille realized the purpose of the bible is its allegorical nature. That by changing the vessels that delivered the word of the lord would only provide unnecessary work. So using Moses instead proved the right decision and in the depiction of the Ten Commandments, the viewer has to question their nature. It’s clear that Moses was a very smart man, he knew that there is a reason why one person of power represents empires and not the faces of many. Pharaohs and Kings exist because people like placing their belief in a reliable source of power that they can rely on for all their needs. In Egypt (where Moses grew up after being thrown down the Nile River) there was a god for just about anything. Having that many gods could lead to some confusion and the power levels of each god would be challenged. Switching to a monotheistic system it would be much easier to pray and connect to a central being. No need for memorization of different powers, just one prevailing god that could answer to any challenge. So did he even believe in God? Or was he just using the concept of god to strategize his new society of people? Looking further into the film it’s stated, “Thou shalt not commit adultery...Thou shalt not steal...Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor... Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house” (3:41:00). These are direct quotes from Exodus where God has apparently delivered his righteous onslaught to Moses. However, it is utterly stupid to believe that God exists as a flaming tornado that speaks. Rather, looking at God from an allegorical perspective it is clear to see what “he” really is: the personification of positive energy. In the film, Moses is seen talking to and receiving information from an

invisible force in the air. To make it more cinematic the invisible force gathers together to become a swirling pillar of fire but before it did it was thin air (3:41:00). The way that God can be all around everyone is because God is positive energy. The intangible properties of energy allow for an all-encompassing property. All righteous thinking, all good deeds, all actions that take place for the betterment of society and the betterment of oneself are positive things. Tapping into positive energy “the law of attraction,” a phenomenon that all humans involuntarily follow, becomes very obvious. The law of attraction is highly linked to the Christian religion. Some may not realize it but praying is a manifestation of positive energy and brings forth higher energy (or vibration) for people who pray. Following something like, “thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor (3:41:00) is not important because some man in the sky said to. But because an energy force in the air, that all humans are subconsciously connected to, rewards those who do the right thing. While those who disobey the word of the lord, or in actuality are emitting negative energy, are punished for their negativity.

With countless followers, Moses strikes his staff into the sand turning and leading his people away from a barrage of white sphinxes in pursuit of a better life. Not coincidentally these scenes mirror American history because DeMille wanted to use his platform to share his political views. It was noted that “DeMille wrote in his autobiography that when Moses stood before the Pharaoh and said the ‘divine demand’, it was a depiction of the same forces that ‘confront one another in the world today” (Orrison, pg.1258). The movie was created in 1956, a time when the cold war was a huge scare to all Americans. Marxist ideas felt the need to create a communist regime

to provide peace. The Americans were not having it. A nation founded on freedom does not easily fall to the ideals of those who want the subjugation of all people. But there is an irony to that statement. America was also very racist in the 1950s as African Americans were having an uprising to fight for their own freedoms. The white Americans practicing the Christian faith, a religion founded on freeing the enslavement of millions, were now being used by people who supported slavery. These conflicting ideas of freedom while still in support of slavery are an example of the ample interpretations of the bible. Certain ideas may be highlighted while others are ignored. But the most universal idea of the American people is in a very peculiar location. At the very end of the film, Moses looks god-like with a sprawling white beard and his arms in the air with a welcoming yet authoritative presence. He announces for all to, "go proclaim liberty throughout all the lands unto the inhabitants thereof," (3:44:00). These very words are derived from Leviticus 25:10 but the importance of these words is related to the origin of the United States of America. These are the words inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. It is a treasured relic of the American Revolution because on 8 July 1776 it was rung to announce the adoption of the Declaration of Independence (Krbrianton). A direct connection between the struggles of the Israelites and the American War of Independence is a concept Demille provides emphasis on throughout his film and makes it obvious at the end. The entire purpose of the movie was to allow Demille to subdue a political statement through the timeless lessons of Exodus. A statement of the need for freedom from the bonds of oppression and the rejection of slavery. A very powerful message in 1956 in terms of slavery and communism.

Works Cited

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