



Gratia Eruitionis

Azusa Pacific University | Honors Program
Volume Four

*From Sacred to Modern:
The Community Roles of
Exiled Tibetan Artists*

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*If Men Were Angels:
Faith, Virtue, and Vice in
the American Founding*

Margarita Ramirez

*Homer's Influence on
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Hannah Steer



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Acknowledgements

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It is also important to note that this project could not have been realized without the support of Dr. Vicky Bowden, Honors Program Director, and Dr. Diane Guido, Vice Provost for Graduate Programs. We are especially grateful to Rachel Hastings, Honors Program Coordinator for oversight and leadership in all aspects of the paper submission process and production of the monograph.

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Foreword

This volume of *Gratia Eruditionis* highlights the winners of Azusa Pacific University's fourth annual Honors Paper Competition on the occasion of the 20th annual Common Day of Learning (CDL). It contains scholarly papers by Ms. Heather Murphy (Studio Art major), Ms. Margarita Ramirez (Political Science major), and Ms. Hannah Steer (Accounting major). These three undergraduate authors were chosen by a faculty review committee from a pool of excellent papers, resulting in the presentation of their research and writing in this publication. I wholeheartedly congratulate them on this accomplishment and thank them for their insights on the Tibetan artists, American founding, and similarities between Homer and Augustine.

This Honors Paper Competition was inspired by a similar event CDL Conference Director Dr. Jennifer Walsh experienced as an undergraduate. She created this opportunity for Honors students to compete with one another and to share their scholarship more broadly both within and outside the APU community. Through this competition, Honors students can pursue a small monetary prize and the chance for their outstanding work to be recognized and published. I remain grateful to Dr. Walsh for her inspiration and leadership in this area; this journal is a testimony to her steadfast commitment to encouraging young scholars in their academic endeavors.

Under the very capable direction of Dr. Vicky Bowden, Azusa Pacific University's Honors Program has grown and flourished, challenging and cultivating scholars with a rigorous curriculum and a series of extracurricular events. I commend her and the entire Honors Council and Honors Faculty for their vital role in teaching and mentoring these promising scholars.

I trust that this publication will enable a wider audience to experience some of the remarkable scholarship at this institution.

Diane J. Guido, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Graduate Programs
March 2012

Past Recipients

2009

Tamara Moellenberg, Class of 2009, English and Philosophy double major
Rushdie and the Real: Migrancy and the Hyper-Real in The Satanic Verses

Tyler Stover, Class of 2009, Business Economics major
Incomes and Compensation in the American Labor Market

Luke Spink, Class of 2009, Business Economics major
Non-Profit or Non-Conscience: The Tragic Divide of American Enterprise

2010

Holly Bream, Class of 2010, Biochemistry major
*Deconstructing Humbert's Mind: Decentering Human
"Consciousness" in Nabokov's Lolita*

Robert Hake, Class of 2010, Psychology major
Happiness: Plato, Epictetus, and Psychotherapy

Jennifer Kemp, Class of 2011, English Literature major
A Modern Cinderella From the Brothers Grimm

2011

Kelsey Faul, Class of 2012, Biblical Studies major and English minor
Discourse Versus Consensus: Gender Relations in Biblical Texts

Marielle Kipps, Class of 2012, Christian Ministries major
*Man Suspended: An Analysis of René Girard,
Shakespeare's Hamlet, and Blasie Pascal*

Andrew Soria, Class of 2014, English and
Spanish double major and French minor
Holiness as Defined by Leviticus 11 Through 26

Honorable Mention

2012

Daniel Atwell, Class of 2012, Cello Performance major
Toward Achieving Ideal Musical Interpretations
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Michael Lee

Matthew Hilderbrand, Class of 2012,
English and Philosophy double major
*The Christian Worldview and Academia: How A Uniquely
Christian Scholarly Enterprise Is Both Justified and Necessary*
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. David Williams

Jessica Luchtenburg, Class of 2013, English major
Mimesis and Art: Material, Form, or Both?
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. David Williams

Annika Mizel, Class of 2014, English major
The Christian Calculus
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. David Williams

Tyler Shattuck, Class of 2014, History major
Signal Mercies: Cromwell's Conquests of Scotland and Ireland
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Brad Hale

From Sacred To Modern: The Community Roles of Exiled Tibetan Artists

Heather Murphy



Heather Murphy is a senior Studio Art major (Crafts emphasis), and a Global Studies minor. She would like to extend her deepest thanks to her host community in Dharamsala for the amazing experiences they offered her during her 5-month stay, and their open participation in this project. She would like to specifically thank her host family, TCV Handicrafts, Dr. Grace Bahng, and Tashi Topgyal for their invaluable roles in this research. Ultimately, she hopes that this paper will open doors into future study of Tibetan art in-exile and its implications for Tibetans across the world.

Abstract

In the last 50 years, the Tibetan people have undergone a complete transformation – from a secluded buddhist nationhood, to an exiled community caught between tradition and modernity. Through a process of nine interviews with Tibetan artists living in exile, as well as collaboration with outside research, this study will examine the contemporary role of Tibetan artists in the exiled community. A thorough analysis of the information has revealed that the exile experience has particularly affected artists, as Tibetan modern art has lost the spiritual themes that were historically present in all Tibetan art forms. As a result of this void, the young Tibetans being brought up in exile today will have no artistic vision for the new spiritual landscape they find themselves in – one that includes influences from the West and India, and addresses the problems of exile. This gap could have a significant impact on the spirituality of generations of Tibetans to come, as they find themselves increasingly distanced from the homeland, spirituality, and art of their forefathers.

Introduction

Tucked high in the Himalayan mountains of India, Dharamsala is an unassuming town with a lot of activity. As the home of both His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile, it serves as an important cultural center for the Tibetan diaspora. My relationship with Dharamsala and the Tibetan people began when I moved there for a 5-month period in February of 2011. I quickly started working with and for an organization – TCV Handicrafts – that provided me an excellent platform from which I could complete this research.

I had already lived and worked in Dharamsala, India, for a few months before I started asking the tough questions of the exiled Tibetan artists I knew. As an art student facing graduation in a little over a year, the slow dawn of my eventual thrust into “real life” started seeping fear and doubt into my mind. Why did I even want to study art? It had all made sense back home, when I was looking at paintings in perfectly white gallery spaces and sipping coffee between classes. But in India, where human suffering seemed more real and tangible than anything else, all the righteousness of art was slipping away from me. So I sought answers in the local experts, my community artists-in-exile. How had they managed to feel like contributing members of the community in their roles as artists?

One of the first people I talked to was the head of the tailoring department at TCV Handicrafts, an organization that seeks to train and employ Tibetans in exile in traditional arts and handicrafts. Lobsang was clear in his conviction that it was “all about the mind.” He said that what was of foremost importance to be an artist was to have deep, great compassion and focus on others. This was a way of talking about art that I had never heard before, and it perked my interest. Several months, many books, and 8 other interviews later, I had a much clearer understanding of how Tibetan artists in the small exile village of Dharamsala, India, could contribute to their community in lasting and meaningful ways. What I was not expecting, but also discovered, was how Tibetan artists in exile were not contributing to their community, and the problems that posed.

The two major dichotomies that I uncovered through research and the interview process were between artists who saw their role in the community as spiritual in contrast to cultural, and traditional in contrast to ushering in a new era. In the past, Tibetan artists were revered because they could create forms that the deities would embody. In exile today,

instead of finding their place as creators of spiritual guides, many artists were finding fulfillment in their continuation of Tibetan culture outside of their homeland. These artists laud the traditional, seeking to re-establish “the old Tibet” in a new land while China systematically destroys much of Tibetan culture and art from within. Other young Tibetans who have been raised in exile seek to update and expand on Tibetan artistic traditions, in face of new realities. The influence of Hindi and Western culture have led them to discover a new definition and purpose for art, which they are rapidly embracing. The growing rifts between spiritual, cultural, traditional, and modern artists highlight the changing generations of Tibetans in exile, and the unique problems that this community faces.

In order to have a more full and complete picture of the multifaceted problems that are facing the Tibetan community in exile today, a brief synopsis of Tibetan exile history post-1959 will be presented. More locally, the social and political realities of Dharamsala will also be discussed, with an emphasis on converging cultures within this new exile community. With this overview in mind, data collected through literature, observation, and interviews will be shared and analyzed. All of the data collected will be used to try and answer the central question of this study: What do Tibetan artists see as their primary community role(s) in Dharamsala, India? After discovering how the research specifically lends itself to this discussion, the perspective will be broadened and the further implications of this study will be explored with future research in mind.

Community Context

When most people think of Tibet, images of high mountain plateaus and wooly yaks come to mind. It is a land almost lost in time, perfectly serene and peaceful, interrupted only by the chanting of monks in their scarlet robes. And while it is true that Tibet was largely ignored and remained untouched by most of the world up until recent history, recent history has changed this “ideal” Tibet in many ways. In 1959, China became the first country to ever invade Tibet, forcing the leader of the Tibetan people, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, to flee to India as a refugee (Gyatso, 2003). Since then, China has undertaken huge reforms in Tibet’s educational, economic, and political spheres. While results such as across-

the-board education and rising living standards pointed to the success of these reforms, a torrent of uprisings and revolts by the Tibetan people against the Chinese government signal that there is much more going on than first meets the eye (Sharlho, 2007). According to insider reports, the Chinese have tried to re-write the history of Tibet, teaching new generations of children only the Chinese language, and that “religion was a wasteful and oppressive system” (Gyatso, 2003). In truth, the Tibetan people under Chinese rule are facing a slow cultural genocide. Signs of dissent, such as 2008’s protests in preparation for the Beijing Olympics, have been met with military crackdowns (Miles & Spencer, 2008).

In order to escape oppression, many of Tibet’s inhabitants have followed His Holiness the Dalai Lama into exile. In 1960, the Dalai Lama set up the Tibetan government in exile in the tiny mountain village of Dharamsala, in order to meet the growing needs of this population (Vehaba, 2009). As the governmental, spiritual, and cultural center of the exiled Tibetan people, Dharamsala provides an important sense of “home” for refugees. In the last 50 years, it has blossomed from a small mountain village into the full-blown town of McLeod Ganj, where Indian and Western tourists alike flock to receive blessings from His Holiness or take a 10-day course on Buddhist meditation. Dharamsala is a place where cultures, languages, and religions collide on an everyday basis. There are the true locals, the original Indian inhabitants of these mountains who have ceded their land and solitude to the constant influx of Tibetan and foreign visitors. Then there are the local Tibetans, who have lived most if not all of their lives in exile and feel at home in Western clothing while listening to Bollywood music. And finally, there is the constant stream of new, tired Tibetan refugees with sunburnt cheeks stumbling into the town after months spent walking over the Himalayas.

Unfortunately, the Tibetan, Indian, and Western populations of Dharamsala do not always get along. While rarely expressed, undercurrents of tension run deep between local Tibetans and local Indians. Isolated incidents of anti-Tibetan sentiment have led to some riots and even burning of Tibetan shops and homes in the area (Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada, 1999). Even new and old Tibetan refugees find it difficult to unify over their common “Tibetan-ness.” New refugees often look and act Chinese, and do not even speak the Tibetan language,

because of being raised in an entirely Chinese environment. While they have recently come from the homeland that some who were born in exile have never seen, they are considered less “Tibetan” than those who follow the old traditions of Tibet. Learning the language, music, art, and food is increasingly important to the exiles in Dharamsala, especially as they see less and less of the new immigrants coming over with knowledge of these customs. They are keenly aware of the fact that if they do not practice these traditions, no one will.

On the other hand, the deep influence of Western and Indian culture has led many who were born in exile to feel increasingly distant from the “Tibet” that they are taught to know and love. These disillusioned youths find their home in “no man’s land,” where they are neither Indian, Western, nor Tibetan (Gyatso, 2003). Kept from fully participating in Indian or Western culture by their refugee status, yet distant from the imagined Tibet of their forefathers, they are creating a new culture all their own that embraces the global face of their new home in Dharamsala.

Despite the underlying tensions and breaks in unity of the Tibetan people in Dharamsala, they have often been lauded as a “successful refugee group” (Vehaba, 2009). This is because the Tibetan government has created an excellent educational system for Tibetan refugees, as well as provided many job opportunities and training in exile. Since his departure from Tibet in 1959, H.H. the Dalai Lama has travelled the world teaching about Buddhism and spreading the word about Tibet’s plight. As a result, lots of money and volunteers flow from Western countries to Tibetan organizations throughout the diaspora. For this reason, despite their sad history, today the Tibetan people in exile are doing relatively well. While few of them could be considered rich, many of their local Indian neighbors have fared much worse.

Tibetan artists in Dharamsala have also fared relatively well. Because of the constant influx of Western and Indian tourists, Tibetan handicrafts and fine arts have flourished in sales. Outside influence has also exposed Tibetan exile artists to modern Western and Indian art styles. Modern influence has also helped production immensely, providing more quicker and cheaper ways for artists to procure supplies and produce art. It is in light of these facts that we can discuss the realities of Tibetan artists in Dharamsala today, and how they in turn work for the good of their community.

Presentation of Research Findings

Description

Now that a better picture of the culture and community of Dharamsala has been drawn, it is time to discuss how the artists I interviewed saw their influence in this community. This community is clearly highly diversified, so the artists were not only asked how they affected their local Tibetan community, but also the local communities of foreigners and Indians. Important points of differentiation within the Tibetan community have also been taken into account in the interviewee’s responses. For example, recent/young Tibetan immigrants have been identified separately from young/born in exile artists, or older/immigrant artists. Taking into account all these different communities within the local community of Dharamsala is very important in order to have a complete picture of the world these artists come from.

I interviewed nine artists, who could be roughly broken down into three groups: fine artists, the handicraftsmen (and women), and modern artists. Of the total population, 22% were female, and the rest male. The median age of all the participants was 31 years old. One participant was a teenager, four were in their twenties, two in their thirties, and the last two in their forties. Each participant was asked four questions about three main themes that frame the one central question of this study: What do Tibetan artists see as their primary community role(s) in Dharamsala, India? The first question dealt with the artist’s backstory, and sought to determine what influenced the individual’s decision to become an artist. The second two questions were aimed at discovering how the artist thought that their art form contributed to each of the three major societal groups in Dharamsala: Tibetans, Indians, and Westerners. The final question asked what role the artists saw themselves as playing in the artistic process, taking the idea of community contribution from the product to the artists themselves.

The Fine Artists: Spiritual Guides

“In this one painting, there is a story of over 2,000 years and of 6 billion humans.” –Porbu Topgyal, Thangka Painter

Defining the term “art” is an elusive concept for contemporary western aestheticians, but even more so for the Tibetan people in exile. The closest you can get to a translation of “artist” in Tibetan is “depictor of deities” (Stein 1972, p. 281). Therefore, the traditional lines between fine artists and handicraftsmen also becomes more blurred. For the purposes of this study, “fine artists” as a term applies not to artists who defined themselves as such, but to whom Western/contemporary art society would call fine artists – painters and sculptors. It should also be noted that these forms are the oldest and most revered types of Tibetan art in history, considered Tibetan art “classics” much like they are to Western society. The only ancient/classic Tibetan art form which was not included in this category is the art of making prayer flags, which was defined as a handicraft for the purpose of this study, because of its mass production and profit.

The first thing to note about fine artists is that they tended to have chosen their profession based on their own passion for art (rather than taking it simply as a job). This fact is especially important in contrast to the handicraftsmen, who often took their jobs as artists not because they wanted to, but because they had to or their family talked them into it. Considering the much shorter training that these handicraftsmen had before them than the painters and sculptures, this divergence makes sense. Fine artists had more time they had to invest in their study, and therefore had to be passionate in order to dedicate so much of their life to learning and honing their craft. However, it is also important to keep this difference in mind because it means that most of the fine artists will have a deeper sense of meaning and passion for their artistic pursuits. The artists who chose their profession because of passion would have realized what an important purpose artists served in the community, hence their passion for the job. No one has passion for a job that they believe to be worthless. So while both handicraftsmen and fine artists may claim spiritual or cultural roles in the community, those who have a passion for their work will have a greater sense of purpose and may represent their role in the community on a more grandiose scale.

Therefore, it would be easy to guess that the fine artists tended to see themselves as spiritual creators, and in a sense spiritual guides and leaders, in comparison to the other interviewees. When asked what benefit their art could bring to Tibetans, 50% responded by saying that their art was a spiritual tool. The 50% who responded represented a much greater

percentage than in any of the other two groups. It is also pertinent to note that these respondents were generally older than the rest of the interviewees (40+). They agreed that using their art forms as spiritual aids in conjunction with mantras, meditation, and/or scripture made them extremely powerful for the benefit of many Tibetans. Many focused on explaining how their art form could aid in meditation, by providing a visualization and embodiment of the divine for the practitioner to focus on. Porbu Topgyal, a thangka painter, even said that for him, the process of creating a painting is a meditative act because he is “concentrating on the figure so much that it is like they are really here.”

These fine artists also believed that their art forms could positively effect non-Tibetans, including both Westerners and Indians. All agreed that knowing the story and meaning of the pieces would ultimately be better and provide more benefit to the buyer, but they also conceded that the pieces had a power of their own, despite the owner’s religious notions. Just by hanging them on the wall, the paintings were said to have the power to bring happiness, good luck, and good health to the household. Choden Tsering, another thangka painter, commented that she often received emails from foreign buyers after their purchase, when they would tell her that just seeing her painting “brought happiness into their lives.” Some interviewees also cited that buying their art would be a good way for the outsider to remember their trip to Dharamsala and furthermore, the plight of the Tibetan people. In this way, they saw their art as not only spiritually significant, but also culturally significant – for the continuation of the Tibetan people’s fight for true autonomy under China.

The Handicraftsmen: Cultural Emissaries

“We do not want to wear the Indian salwar, we want to wear the Tibetan chupa.”
–Tenzin Dolma, tailor

As mentioned above, differentiating fine artists from handicraft artists was more difficult in Tibetan contexts than it is in the West. For the purposes of this paper, handicraft artists were those who produced traditional art pieces in large quantities for the frequent consumption of tourists and Tibetans alike. These respondents were both tailors and printmakers. In contrast to the fine artists mentioned above, typically these artists did not find any spiritual fulfillment in their work. They most frequently defined themselves as cultural emissaries, those who would continue on the great artistic traditions of Tibet even in exile.

In response to the first question, handicraftsmen were actually split in between those who chose their profession based on passion or just needing a job. However, 50% was the highest percentage of any group that responded that this was just a job for them. It is interesting to note that all of the artists who said this was “just a job” were under 30, and all of them were born in Tibet and came to India recently. For them, it is likely that training in a craft was a desperate bid to find a job in their new home, rather than a lifelong decision that started with training at a young age (like some thangka painters).

Since the handicrafts artists’ main products are clothing, accessories, and Tibetan prayer flags, most of these artists thought their greatest gift to Tibetan culture was helping extend the ancient traditions and symbols to exile. The tailors found a place of pride in being able to continue the tradition of women and men wearing beautiful chupas on festival days. They were also able to help keep the visual culture of Tibet alive by making traditional incense bags, meditation cushions, and more. The printmaker found fulfillment in creating such a characteristic Tibetan item as the prayer flags, but he also mentioned the spiritual role that prayer flags play in Tibetan Buddhism. All of these distinctly “Tibetan” items help draw the lines between Indian culture and Tibetan culture, and furthermore between Tibetan and Chinese culture. These distinctions are particularly important for Tibetans to prove to the rest of the world that they are a unique culture deserving of their own government, separate and free from Indian or Chinese influence.

Much like their fine artist counterparts, the handicraftsmen answered that their art pieces could be of use to both Westerners and Indians, but their primary importance was in the Tibetan community. Many had a instinctive business sense when asked how they could be of benefit to Westerners or Indians, saying that they would work with them to make them exactly what they wanted at a good price. Once I expanded the question to include benefitting them spiritually, culturally, etc, the tailors and printmaker responded by saying that their pieces could help foreigners who wanted to start practicing Buddhism. The printmaker also agreed that if a foreigner hung Tibetan prayer flags or their name was written on one, despite their status as a non-Buddhist, they would still benefit from the flags.

The Modern Artists: Visionaries for a New Era

“According to the exiled community, anything new is not really ‘Tibetan.’”
(Gyatso 2003, p.149)

The modern artists have been separated from the other two classes because of the fact that their motivations and goals were very different. None of their professions – fashion designer, tattoo artist, or modern art gallery curator – exist in Tibetan tradition, so reasons like “extending Tibet’s artistic history into exile” were completely off the menu. It should be noted that although a curator is not technically an artist, as someone who actively played a role in introducing contemporary Tibetan art to Dharamsala, his views on modern art’s importance were taken with the same weight as the other artists’ ideas.

The modern artists were the only group to all answer that they had chosen their pursuit based on a passion for the arts. While it made sense that the long training of fine artists would mean more of them would have a passion than the handicraftsmen, it also makes sense that modern artists would have a passion for their jobs because it is generally looked down upon. Many (particularly older) Tibetans in exile are so intent on trying to preserve the Tibet that they once knew that they see any reform as dangerous to the “Tibetan way of life.” This is particularly difficult because China has marched into Tibet and laid waste to her culture while waving the banner of reform. Younger Tibetans who have been raised in exile, however, are embracing this new movement in art (and music, dance, etc) as a way to express their unique culture that is truly a meeting point of Indian, Tibetan, and Western culture. These new art forms are simply reflections of their new and unique everyday realities. Furthermore, these new forms are more understandable on a global scale, providing a broader platform for these young exiles to share the plight of their people. These young Tibetans are joined by many Westerners and Indians in applauding this contemporary movement of Tibetan art, despite its many critics.

In contrast to our more traditional artists’ jobs establishing an artistic continuum from Tibet into exile, our modern artists were obsessed with establishing a new artistic style in light of the Tibetan people’s new situation. Under the increasing influence of Western and Indian culture, many Tibetan youths are finding that the culture of their forefathers

does not hold up to their everyday experiences. As the fashion designer lamented, many of the new generations “have no interest in the old masters or traditions.” Instead of rejecting these traditions, however, these modern artists are trying to find a way to reconcile the past with their present realities. This is their way of creating a new culture for new generations, one that proudly displays their Tibetan-ness while recognizing the changes that have occurred within themselves and their communities.

It might be expected that all of our modern artists would be relatively young, and this is true. It certainly contained a younger demographic than the fine artists. However, it is interesting to note that not all of our modern artists were exceedingly young; some were well above 30. This reveals that the modern art movement in exile is not entirely new; it has been growing momentum and members for over 15 years now. Many of its members are young but also were raised in exile. This makes sense because these youths have essentially had the greatest exposure to other art forms and western/modern culture, while young recent immigrants from Tibet will have stronger connections to their homeland and its traditional arts. As mentioned above, many of the young recent immigrants became handicraft artists, and found their purpose in continuing Tibet’s rich tradition and history into exile. In contrast, these young born-in-exile artists find their purpose in creating new references and symbols to explain and provide vision for their new cultural paradigms.

Lobsang Nyima is the fashion designer mentioned above, and he provides a clear example of this new culture-making in process. His primary motivation in seeking to update Tibetan clothing styles is to make them more accessible to the young generations of Tibetans. Tibetan refugee youth are increasingly rejecting the old chupas worn in Tibet, citing them as “difficult” and “uncomfortable.” Lobsang’s designs are distinctly Tibetan in style, while sporting easy substitutions like elastic instead of ties, snap buttons instead of the old knot ones, and zippers instead of drawstrings. In defending his originality, said that “others can do sewing like they have in the past, but I have a big vision for the future.”

It should also be noted that none of the modern artists I interviewed defined their role in the community as spiritual. The aspect of spirituality or sacred-ness in many of the traditional arts seemed to be stripped away in their search for a modern Tibetan style. The power and purity of the old traditions lay in the artist’s ability to imitate the deities with such precision that the deities would actually come and embody the forms.

To make a mistake was to mislead the faithful practitioner who sought to learn the secrets of that deity through the painting or sculpture. In order to get away from these strict guidelines that rule traditional Tibetan art, while still respecting them, modern Tibetan artists have had to essentially exchange the sacred for the stylistic.

**It’s All in the Mind, It’s All in Your Hands:
Exploring Differences in the Artist’s Significance**

“Making money is not as important as having a good mind.” –Choden Tsering, Thangka Painter

The final question every interviewee was asked was searching for how artists themselves felt they contributed to their art form. The previous questions focused more on how their art could be a benefit to the community, while this final question brought the interview to a personal level. Essentially, I asked them how they were different from other artists, and how their personal ethic influenced their finished product(s). The responses in this category came down to two basic beliefs: (a) the artist’s mindset was the most important part of his participation in the artmaking process, or (b) the artist’s technique and skill was the most important part.

This section of data has been separated from the above distinctions – fine artists, handicraftsmen, and modern artists – because the respondents did not answer according to their “artistic type.” The majority of artist, 67%, believed that the artist’s mind was the most important. Their responses suggest a deep and widespread belief in Tibetan community that the mind of someone who is engaging in a practice – whether cooking, art, or selling vegetables – must be clear in order for him/her and those they serve to receive the most benefit. As Lobsang, the aforementioned fashion designer, noted, “What is important is your mind. You have to have compassion and focus on others. This gives you a satisfaction inside, and outside you will have a good result.”

Some of these artists who said that their mindset was important to the final result used this opportunity to contrast themselves against other artists in the Dharamsala region. I was surprised to discover that many of the thangka paintings, woodcarvings, prayer flags, etc, that could be found in Dharamsala shops were not actually made by Tibetans. These art pieces were often created by Indians (Kashmiris), or Nepalis, and shipped here to “little Tibet” at an inexpensive price. The problem with these pieces, as my interviewees saw it, was that they were rushed and not completed with the

right frame of mind. One Thangka painter even referenced that the Dalai Lama “can tell with these paintings, because when he is looking at them he feels that something is wrong and he can’t concentrate.” The fact that these art pieces could lead a practitioner astray because of their ill-minded creation was of foremost concern to the artists I interviewed.

The 33% who did not chose to focus on the artist’s state of mind, but instead focused on how technically proficient they could be, fell over a variety of categories. One was a modern artist, the other a fine artist, and the third a handicrafts artist. What they all did share in common was a lack of spiritual purpose in their art form; none of them had cited anything other than cultural reasons for why their art was a boon to their community. They were also all under the age of 30. Possible reasons for their answers include that they were still quite young in their training and did not yet grasp the nuances that later, more experienced, artists had. In the case of the modern artist, perhaps it was a simple distancing from Tibetan tradition and an embrace of the Western art community’s standards. Either way, these artists seemed to form a small but significant minority of Tibetan artists who are moving away from the Buddhist understanding of a “good artist” and are instead holding themselves to standards of technical proficiency.

Interpretation

Since exile has led to the Dalai Lama’s growing popularity, the world has been particularly obsessed with Tibetan culture – but mainly the old, traditional one, not the new developing one. Most of the literature I read focused on the traditional and sacred arts of Tibet, which are strange and exotic to western ears. While I could not find much research that had been conducted concerning modern Tibetan artists in exile, much of what I could read about traditional and modern Tibetan art supported the data I gathered during my 5-month stay in Dharamsala. The research agreed with my study’s understanding of the spiritual dimension seen in many fine artists, and furthered this role as spiritual creators by expanding on the idea of artistic anonymity. The research also highlights the plight of modern Tibetan artists in tension with the more traditional exile community. In this sense the literature I researched has served as a backboard, from which I could spring to understand the vast implications of the changing art world in Dharamsala.

With the data I collected from interviews and the literature I read kept in mind, finally conclusions will be drawn from this study. Surprisingly, what was revealed from the result of this study was not only that Tibetan artists in exile define themselves according to several different roles, but that in modern exile life there is a growing void that artists have not been able to fill. This gap is the most important finding of this study, as it holds vast implications for Tibetans in exile in the years to come.

The Sacred Arts

“To look at a Thangka is a good deed.” -Chö-yang: The Voice of Tibetan Religion and Culture, No. 3 (as cited by Jones 1993, p. 31)

There certainly is a basis in Tibetan Buddhism for the concept of “sacred art.” In fact, historically in Tibet, art was created either by the monks and nuns themselves, or the creators were considered laymen (Paul 2003). As a creator of religious symbols, the artist “occupies a special place in the community and is revered [. . .] in much the same way as a lama” (Given 1999, p. 637). Chö-yang: The Voice of Tibetan Religion and Culture, in their fifth volume, even encouraged artists to have upstanding character, being “indifferent toward wine and women,” and possessing humility, diligence, and a warmhearted disposition. While their character was important, above all it was imperative that they were “devout follower[s] of Buddhism” (as cited by Jones 1993, p. 35). These distinctions all held true for the ancient arts of Tibet: Thangka painting, woodcarving, and making prayer flags.

Because these art forms were seen as religious tools rather than acts of individual expression, there was historically no room for mistakes or changes in the Tibetan sacred arts. All the “details must be there, in all their precision, to ensure the reality of the divine presence” (Stein 1972, p. 282). Especially if these objects were being used to guide meditation, a simple mistake could easily effect the practitioners who sought guidance from them, leading them in incorrect teachings. This can be difficult to understand because we tend to devalue the appearance in spiritual objects, looking beyond them for deeper meaning and significance. While at first it may seem that these objects are attempting to point us on the path to perfection, Tibetan Buddhism teaches that these objects ultimately show us our own, already present, complete perfection. In this way, the sacred

arts help us switch the object and subject in meditation – “we become them” (Tulku 1988, p. 14). Any mistake in appearance, then, can lead a practitioner to mistake or completely miss their position of complete perfection.

Despite an artist’s ability to create the abode of the divine, the Buddhist belief is that the “essence of the deity resides therein only after the consecration ritual” (Kerin 2000, p. 326). In my interviews, this idea of consecration was expressed by the Thangka painters only. They both said that their paintings were just paintings, until they were blessed by a lama – only then could the deity truly embody the painting. This was another reason why these Thangka painters had such contempt for the low-quality thangkas that were being made by Kashmiris and Nepalis – these paintings did not have the spirit of the divine in them. In the literature I read about old Tibetan culture, however, this idea of consecrating art pieces carried to more styles than just thangka painting. Sculptures, mandalas, and prayer flags were among those mentioned as needing the blessing of a lama in order to realize their full power and efficacy (Kerin 2000; Paul 2003). This is then a discrepancy between the text and my interviewees’ experiences, because the idea of sacredness and the need for consecration was not as wide-spread as it was in the past. In fact, outside of Thangka painters (fine artists), there was no mention of consecration rituals at all.

No Man’s Land

“Betwixt and between” (Kerin, 2000, p. 330)

Although I said above that I did not find much research on the state of Tibetan artists in exile, I did read some which seemed to agree with my research on this point: modern artists are a new breed to the Tibetan exile community, and as such are often met with resistance. The only author I read who seemed oblivious to this tension in the Tibetan artist community was Ben Meulenbeld, who saw Tibetan artists in exile “experimenting to their hearts content,” and “becoming more flexible” (2001, pp. 2, 4). While the experimentation is certainly true of many contemporary artists in Dharamsala, the picture is hardly one of content. Most of these artists have found that “modernism is unacceptable in Dharamsala” (Gyatso 2003, p. 149).

Kerin suggested part of the cause of this tension is that all exiled Tibetans are constantly aware that their culture, religion, and traditions are in a state of liminality, because of their tenuous position as exiles (2000). In their state of constant flux, the Tibetan exile community clings to their traditions and past ways of doing things. New innovation seems dangerous, so most of the community rejects it. Most of the exile community believes that the “Artist has a [. . .] duty to maintain traditional Tibetan culture” (Gyatso 2003, p. 149). This “duty” is completely different from the one most of the western world accepts, which is that “the artists’ social duty is to comment on how a society is imagining itself at any given moment” (Sheehy, n.p.). If we follow this second definition of the artist’s duty, the modern artists are some of the only Tibetan artists who are fulfilling their purpose, because they are addressing the issues of exile life instead of continuing in the traditions of Tibet’s past.

The Void in Transition

“These [modern] artists are remaking Tibetan imagery more relevant and less meaningful.” (Sheehy, n.p)

While seemingly tied down in groups of artists’ experiences, when we step back from examining the data collected on a small scale, this research has much broader implications. We can examine the artistic community of Dharamsala’s state of transition as a maquette of the larger shifts and changes in Tibetan culture from past to present, and from present into the future. What this study essentially shows us is this: Tibetan artists are losing more and more of their position in society as spiritual leaders, leaving many artists in exile to fall back on traditional and cultural values for their sense of fulfillment or purpose. However, at the same time a new generation of artists is rising up that is seeking to create a new culture, specific to exile life experiences, but separated from the spiritual emphasis that Tibetan art held in the past.

Although this transition process is natural for a culture undergoing as much change as the Tibetan exile community, this research highlights one area in particular where this quick and immense growth has left a void. Because of Tibet’s ancient and sacred arts which demanded complete perfection from the artist, modern artists have not been able to discuss spiritual subjects in their art without fear of being sacrilegious. As traditional Tibetan artists are losing their place as spiritual guides in the

exile community, there is no growing replacement from the young and modern artists of Dharamsala. Spirituality, while such an important part of every Tibetan Buddhist's life, has had to be completely forgotten in the new artistic movement, in order to avoid seeming disrespectful through experimentation.

This void has huge implications for the young population of Tibetan exiles, because as they grow and mature they will not have any visual references for their spirituality. The combination of spiritual truth and visual aides has always been a deep and beneficial part of Tibetan culture, but this is a partnership which is dying. As Tibetan Buddhism continues to grow and develop in exile, and as young Tibetans continue to grapple with their religious beliefs in the face of Western and Indian influence, there is no new art being created to provide a voice to these new spiritual experiences. The modern Tibetan art movement has sought to provide a voice to the young exile population, but it has limited itself to only the cultural, social, political, and economic spheres, leaving out what some claim is the most important: the spiritual sphere.

The Unaccounted and the Unanswered

What this study has not accounted for are those few Tibetan exile artists out there who are trying to address spiritual issues through modern art. Although not a part of our research pool and not mentioned in the literature, I do know that there are artists out there trying to grapple with this void. In my many trips to Peak Art, the only modern art gallery in Dharamsala, I saw a lot of cultural and political art come and go. There was only ever one artist's work in that gallery that I saw attempting to fuse art with spirituality. At the time, I tried to get ahold of this artist for an interview, only to find that he was out of the country for six months. In order to flesh out the gap pictured in this study, however, further research would need to be conducted with these artists who are trying to bridge the gap. Understanding their struggles and how they have been received will help us determine if this void is something temporary, or the beginning of a long struggle for young Tibetans in exile.

Summary/Conclusion

This project began from a place of personal searching for purpose in the art world, yet in the end revealed something much more telling than whether I had chosen the right major. It even became more than just the research or interviews, more than just a list of facts, and transformed into an insightful look at a problem in the Tibetan exile community. After 5 months of interviews, observations, and discussion in the small mountain town of Dharamsala, the research revealed a frightening gap in the transitioning Tibetan art culture, between "sacred art" and art with no spirituality at all. This gap finds its basis in the long history of Tibet, but has large implications for Tibet's future.

The two predominant approaches to the Tibetan exile experience – clinging to tradition and forging a new culture – are part of why this void in spiritual Tibetan art has occurred. The issue of "Tibetan-ness" is of paramount importance, as exiles are acutely aware that their culture is dying in China, and they are the only ones who will carry the tradition on. At the same time, many young Tibetans born in exile are wrestling with new realities and Indian and Western influence, leading them to create a unique Tibetan exile culture. The basis for this gap is supported by both the literature and interviews that I collected.

All of this research came together to point out a very startling conclusion: that in the development of Tibetan modern art, there was a significant lack of spiritual themes that have historically been present in Tibetan art. This void had occurred because of the sacred arts' traditionally strict guidelines in experimentation, which kept modern artists from discussing spirituality in their work without seeming disrespectful of these ancient rules and religious practices. Therefore, the young Tibetans being brought up in exile today will have no artistic vision for the new spiritual landscape they find themselves in – one that includes influences from the West and India, and addresses the problems of exile. This gap could have a significant impact on the spirituality of generations of Tibetans to come, as they find themselves increasingly distanced from the homeland, spirituality, and art of their forefathers.

For further study, it would be beneficial to survey a large quantity of artists (more than 9) on the questions addressed above, as well as new ones that have arose because of this research's conclusions. Some new questions that may be good to ask include: Do you think Tibetan youths in exile are losing the deep spiritual faith of their forefathers? How does your art form address the contemporary issues of Tibetans in exile (or can it)? Do you think it is important to address modern issues in art? Do you think Tibetan youth are still interested in the Tibetan traditional arts? And, can the sacred be combined with everyday experiences without it being disrespectful? Potential populations to include in further study could be found by interviewing monks, nuns, and lamas on their views of modern art, and whether they consider the combination of spirituality and modern art to be sacrilegious. Future researchers could also interview traditional Tibetan fine artists, who still retain some of their spiritual authority, on if or how it might be possible for modern artists to discuss spirituality in their work.

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If Men Were Angels: Faith, Virtue, and Vice in the American Founding

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Margarita is a senior Political Science major. This paper is a synthesis of her academic passions: political philosophy, American identity, and the American Founding. She would like to thank the Department of History and Political Science at Azusa Pacific for the preparation, mentorship, and knowledge they have given her. She would especially like to thank Dr. Jennifer Walsh for her questions and guidance on this paper, and for her daily example of faith and scholarship.

Abstract

Discussions of faith in the American Founding often fall under two perspectives: the liberal view would have it be a secular event, while the conservative view would have it be a Christian Founding, by Christian people. But common ground can be found when looking at the elements of virtue and vice in the Founding. This paper examines the role of faith in colonial society and the faith of the Founding Fathers to find how that faith influenced their view of virtue and vice. Most importantly, this paper looks at how virtue and vice influenced and shaped the government created at the Founding, and the civil religion that would preserve it.

Introduction

Today, every discussion and interpretation of the American Founding wrestles with the role and influence of religion on the people and events of the time. The conservative perspective would have the Founding to be a deeply religious event, inspired and led by Christian men whose religious education gave them the foundation for their later claims of independence and sovereignty. On the other hand, the liberal interpretation views the Founding as a strictly secular event, leaving out God and the Bible from some of the major documents, and trying to restrain religion and religious establishment. Both, to some extent, are correct. Religion did influence the Revolution and the Founding, but it did not cause it; most of the Founders were not Christian, but they also did not reject God or resent religion. The common ground of these two interpretations can be found in the role of virtue and vice in the Founding. Religion in colonial America repelled vice and encouraged a commitment to virtue, and that commitment created a separation of mind and faith between the colonies and what they saw as the vices of the Monarchy. Though the Deist faith that most of the Founders held did not agree with some of the established conventions of religion at the time, they agreed that vice can destroy society and that private virtue can promote public good. Those ideas of virtue and vice, common in colonial America and essential to the faith of the Founders, were incorporated into the government they meticulously created. It can be seen through the mechanisms in the federal government, their establishment of a civil religion, and their promotion of virtue for the preservation of the nation. The Founders understood the danger of vice in society and were committed to creating a virtuous citizenry.

Religion in Colonial America

It is important to understand the role of religion in the colonies during the time of the Revolution and the Founding because it provides insight into the motivations and context of the Founders. Most of the colonies, especially those in the North, were founded by religious groups. Colonies like Massachusetts, New Hampshire, North and South Carolina, New York, Virginia, and Georgia had official colonial religions. Other colonies, like Rhode Island, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey did not have an established religion, though there was a large Anglican population in each of those states.¹ The colonies without an established religion were also home to a variety of smaller denominations. In all colonies, including those that did not have an official religion, the church was deeply involved in education, local governance, and nearly every aspect of society.² The governing laws in the colonies were based on religious conventions and standards of behavior.

Scholars have questioned the commitment of the colonists to religion and faith. Church attendance records indicate that only two out of every ten people formally belonged to a church.³ Nevertheless, the laws of the colonies were focused on institutionalizing morality, religious participation, and acceptable behavior. Colonial historian John Butler has claimed that the laws governing behavior and establishing religious practices were necessary only because the people themselves were not fully committed to piety or to the Christian faith.⁴ In Butler's observation, the colonial laws compelled Christian attachment, but they did not measure Christian commitment. Ezra Stiles, a famous eighteenth-century clergyman from Connecticut, supported continuing the establishment of the Congregational Church in Connecticut because he felt there was already too much atheism, too much indifference, too much immorality in the state, and to remove the Christian attachment would only erode morality further.⁵ However, the importance of religion in colonial

¹ John Butler, "Why Revolutionary America Wasn't a Christian Nation," in *Religion and the New Republic: Faith in the Founding of America*, ed. James H. Hutson (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 191.

² *Ibid.*, 189.

³ Alan Wolf, and Ira Katznelson. "Reflections on Religion, Democracy, and the politics of Good and Evil," in *Religion and Democracy in The United States: Danger or Opportunity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 411.

⁴ Butler, 191.

⁵ Butler, 196.

America and the moral laws it affected cannot be diminished. With or without a personal commitment to faith, Christianity was an inseparable part of the laws and social mores of the colonies. Whether it was deeply spiritual conviction for some, or simply an established social convention, the role of religion in the colonies cannot be denied.

That role was drastically strengthened during the mid eighteenth-century revivals called "The Great Awakening" and the "New Light Stir" of the late eighteenth century. The Great Awakening of the 1730's and 1740's reached most of the colonies, and was especially strong in New England. It was characterized by a new focus on improving the faith of members of the church, instead of the evangelical character of other revivals.⁶ The revival, led by clergymen like George Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards, instilled a new self-awareness in colonial Christians that strengthened their commitment to piety and good behavior. The new emphasis on personal faith and conviction led some contemporaries to conclude that the period of revival was the greatest outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the land.⁷ According to Butler the church was so strengthened by the revival, that 85 percent of congregations in the colonies were established during or after the revival.⁸ A continuation of that "First Great Awakening" took place in the North American colonies between 1776 and 1782. Called the "New Light Stir," this smaller revival began, in large part, as a response to a combination of events that led people to believe the end of the world was near. A lunar eclipse, immediately followed by a darkened sky that was caused by a forest fire convinced many that Christ's return was eminent and near.⁹ From this event arose a new sense of fervent evangelizing and passionate preaching. Congregations, especially Baptists, experienced unprecedented growth. In Massachusetts alone, the number of Baptist churches went from fifty-three to eighty nine in just four years.¹⁰ According to Thomas Kidd, the revival created an environment that fostered the value of morality and virtue,

⁶ Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), xii.

⁷ Kidd, xix.

⁸ Butler, 190.

⁹ George A. Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit: religious revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), 46.

¹⁰ Thomas S. Kidd, "Many thought the Day of Judgment was Come': The New Light Stir of 1776- 1783," in *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 313.

since it was a revival so focused on personal salvation and rectification of behavior in preparation for Christ's return.¹¹

Virtue and Vice Within the Colonies

With laws that established Christian standards of behavior, and with the passion of the revivals, the colonial churches at the time played an important role in promoting virtue and discouraging vice. In the years leading up to the Revolution, religion and religious instruction reinforced popular arguments about virtue and morality in society and politics.¹² According to Gordon Wood, the churches in the colonies promoted the ideas of private and public virtue because they feared that private vice could and would destroy public virtue and erode the social mores.¹³ Both laymen and the leading clergymen of the time believed that religious instruction would help direct people's behavior and therefore create a better society. The clergy constantly repeated that the laws had to be followed for "conscience's sake, not wrath [or fear of judgment]."¹⁴ The church, therefore, was the strongest and most prominent advocate of virtue in both private and public life.

The virtue and vice of colonial America was a mixture of understanding in religious and classical terms, combining the cardinal virtues and vices of the historic Catholic Church and the broader understanding of virtue from ancient Greece. The cardinal virtues and vices had been a part of church tradition for many years, and they influenced ideas of behavior and righteousness throughout the centuries. Vices and virtues are defined as acquired moral qualities, or character traits.¹⁵ The traditional virtues of the Christian faith are faith, hope, charity, practical wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance.¹⁶ The traits characterized as vices by the church, often called the Seven Deadly Sins, include envy, vainglory, sloth, avarice, anger, gluttony, and lust.¹⁷ The vices

¹¹ Kidd, "The Day of Judgment," 315.

¹² John Butler, "Religion and the American Revolution," in *Religion in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 124.

¹³ Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York: Norton, 1972), 69.

¹⁴ Wood, 67.

¹⁵ Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

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are not simply opposites of the virtues; nor do they function in polarity, with the good and bad traits pitted against each other in the human soul.¹⁸ Rather, they exist simultaneously in the person.

Robert Adams has a broader explanation of vices as character traits that fall into different categories, with "structural vices" being the most prevalent. These include vices of wickedness, which are characterized by cowardice and a deficiency of strength that does not allow a person to govern themselves, and vices of excess that involve an excessive or idolatrous attachment to something like avarice and lust.¹⁹ Virtues that correspond to those two categories of vice are "structural virtues." These virtues, like courage and self-control, involve "being excellently able and willing to govern one's life in accordance with one's own central aims and values."²⁰ The people of the colonies would have been familiar with this religious understanding of virtue and vice in religious terms as a way to promote righteous behavior.

Another view of virtue came from the Greeks, who saw virtue as encompassing various aspects of the person, including intellect, will, capacity, and skill. For them, the good habits were called virtue and the bad habits were called vice.²¹ A vice, as understood by the Greeks was a passion of the spirit—the pride of life and desire for power or self-sufficiency (or as Michael Novak calls it, the desire to be like God).²² The four cardinal virtues in Greece were temperance, fortitude, practical wisdom, and justice.²³ The role of virtue was to order the human mind and will in a way that would cause men to act with excellence and to become a good person.²⁴ Aristotle believed that the private virtues were not so much personal as they were for the purpose of edifying the *polis*.²⁵ According to Philippa Foot, the best source of understanding of virtue in the American Founding came from Thomas Aquinas, who blended the Christian and Aristotelian understanding of virtue to include not only morality, but also excellence of intellect and skill.²⁶ The intellectuals in

¹⁸ Robert Merrihew Adams, "Wickedness and Vices," and "Virtue and its Benefits," in *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 36.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁰ Adams, 37.

²¹ Michael Novak, "The Cultural Roots of Virtue and Character," in *The Content of America's Character: Recovering Civic Virtue*, ed. Don E. Eberly (Lanham: Madison Books, 1995), 48.

²² *Ibid.*, 50.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁶ Philippa Foot, "Virtues and Vices," in *Virtue Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp and Michael A. Slote

America at the time, including the Founders, would have been familiar with such ideas and interpretations of virtue.²⁷

The promotion of virtue was not the only role religion played in the colonies, and virtue was not only used to justify moral laws. In fact, the church helped to promote the cause of the Revolution, and the ideas of virtue helped to separate the mind and character of what would be America from British society. Certainly, religion did not cause the American Revolution, but it provided invaluable support for the cause. An observer in Philadelphia noted that the ministers there “thunder and lighten every Sabbath with anti-English sermons.”²⁸ Religious leaders and clergymen promoted the cause of the Revolution from the pulpit. In America the Whig Party was also known as “the Christian Party,” because they were emphatically protestant, advocated ideas of morality and righteous government, and they advanced the ideas of political liberty by presenting arguments grounded in the Bible.²⁹ Michael Novak explains that the Christian arguments for liberty were especially important in America because so many Americans took religion seriously, and because of religion’s importance in the civil and moral education in the colonies.³⁰ The churches, therefore, helped to advance the causes of the Revolution. But the role of religion went further, because the emphasis on virtue and morality that had characterized the colonial churches also impacted the Revolution. According to Gregg Singer, the separation from the British Crown could not have happened without the social and religious separation that first occurred in the colonies during the previous decades.³¹ Perhaps because of their Christian mores and the churches’ constant advocating of virtue, the colonists saw themselves as more religious, and indeed more righteous, than the British. Giving a sermon to the Massachusetts State Assembly, Samuel Langdon called attention to the “general prevalence of vice” that characterized Britain’s governance of the colonies through self-interest and greed.³² The colonists also began to see a contrast between themselves and the immorality of English society in the English soldiers who were in the colonies during the French and Indian

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 163.

²⁷ Ibid., 56.

²⁸ Butler, “Religion in American Revolution,” 126.

²⁹ Ibid., 161.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Singer, 24.

³² Samuel Langdon, “Government Corrupted by Vice and Recovered by Righteousness,” in *Puritan Political Ideas 1558-1794*, ed. Edmund S. Morgan (New York: Bobbs Merrill Company, 1965), 361-362.

war. John Cleveland of Massachusetts complained, “Profane swearing seems to be the naturalized language of the regulars.”³³ Here we see how religion at the time impacted the Revolution, and how the context it created for an understanding of virtue and vice helped to dissolve the bonds with the Monarchy and promote separation.

Faith of the Founders

Once the Revolution brought a separation from Britain, the fate of the new nation was in the hands of the political leaders, the Founding Fathers. Gary Scott Smith, in his account of faith in the early presidency, says that Americans in the early years of the nation, including the Founding Fathers, were strongly influenced both by Enlightenment Deism and traditional Protestantism.³⁴ The Protestant tradition was infused into the founding by men like John Jay, who was a devout Episcopalian.³⁵ Jay was a significant figure in the Founding; he served as president of the Continental Congress, secretary of foreign affairs, Supreme Court Chief Justice, governor of New York, and co-author of the Federalist Papers. He was also an important figure for religion in the northeast, as founder of Bible societies and churches, a donor to religious associations, and a deacon in his church.³⁶ An influential and beloved figure of the Founding, the epitaph on Jay’s tomb reads that he was “an example of the virtues, the faith, and the hopes of a Christian.”³⁷

Samuel Adams was equally devout to traditional faith, and is often called “the Last of the Puritans” because of his orthodox faith.³⁸ Adams served as governor of Massachusetts, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and a delegate to the First and Second Continental Congress. He was born to religious parents and raised as an orthodox Congregationalist. Adams said grace before meals, held prayer and morning devotionals in his home, and walked to church every Sunday

³³ Butler, “Religion in the American Revolution,” 124.

³⁴ Gary Scott Smith, “George Washington and Providential Agency,” in *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 13.

³⁵ David L. Holmes, “The Founders and Deism,” in *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 155.

³⁶ Holmes, 157.

³⁷ Walter Stahr, *John Jay* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2005), 388.

³⁸ Holmes, 144.

for as long as his health allowed.³⁹ His views of Christ were clear in his correspondence and writings, continually appealing to “our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” and he believed that part of our relationship with God involved upholding a covenant of morality.⁴⁰

Less well known than the other Founders, but equally important was Elias Boudinot. Boudinot served as president under the Articles of Confederation, was a signer of the Treaty of Paris that ended the Revolutionary war, an author of religious books, a president of the American Presbyterian Church governing body, and founder of various Bible societies in the Northeast.⁴¹ Having been greatly influenced by the Great Awakening during his early years, Boudinot maintained a deeply personal faith focused on prayer, his church, and morality. Like Adams, he believed in the divinity of Christ and spoke of it often. Boudinot was a public voice against Deism, even writing *The Age of Revelation*, in which he refuted what he called the “infidelity” of Thomas Paine’s Deist manifesto, *The Age of Reason*.⁴² Like John Jay and Samuel Adams, Elias Boudinot played an important role in representing orthodox Christianity in the American Founding.

Indeed, most of the men who signed the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution did belong to a Christian denomination, primarily Anglican, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist.⁴³ Yet, as David Holmes points out, religion had a social and business function during this time, therefore their church membership did not exactly mean that the Founders were orthodox believers. In fact, many of the Founders were Deists, and they infused the Founding with ideas of nature and revelation. Deism was never organized into sects or congregations, but it was common among scholars and intellectuals.⁴⁴ Influenced by Enlightenment ideas, Deism had become popular⁴⁵ in America among intellectuals like the Founders. Deism had its roots in the rationalism and philosophy of Descartes, Diderot, and Rousseau, but it was mainly advanced by John Locke, with his promotion of empiricism, and by John Newton, whose

³⁹ Ibid., 144.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 146.

⁴¹ Ibid., 150.

⁴² Ibid., 151.

⁴³ Mark David Hall, “Did America Have a Christian Founding?” Lecture, Heritage Lectures May 13, 2011.

⁴⁴ Holmes, 135.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 39.

discoveries pointed to the infallibility of natural revelation.⁴⁶ During their education, the leading figures of the Revolution and the Founding learned about John Locke and Isaac Newton at the height of their popularity in the Enlightenment.⁴⁷ Most of the Founders, therefore, had an education that was deeply rooted in Enlightenment ideas. Locke believed the test of truth of any religious belief was whether it made sense to human reason.⁴⁸ This is visible in the Deism of the Founders, who saw reason and observation, not the constraints of religious tradition, as the foundation for their faith in the God of Nature. The basic tenets of their faith can be traced to Lord Herbert Cherbury’s 1625 declaration on Deism: there is one God and he ought to be worshipped; virtue, morality, and piety are the main way one worships; we must repent and turn from our sins; God rewards good behavior in both this life and the next.⁴⁹

Deists in America believed in God—not necessarily the God of Abraham, but the God of Nature who could be known through reason and observation. Most of the American Deists believed in God as the “Supreme Architect” of the world, a conviction that came from a reverence for nature. In the Founders’ understanding, just like a watch’s working mechanism points to the existence of a watchmaker, so nature and creation points to God.⁵⁰ To American Deists, like the many of the Founders, the Bible showed the evidence of too much human hand and effect, but nature was a divine revelation.

Although Deism was not atheistic, it was also not Christian in the sense that Christianity is understood today. In their view, people had no need to be a part of religious ceremonies; what really mattered was virtue and morality.⁵¹ Deism’s belief in Jesus was based on this same tenet of the importance of morality. Deists in America did not believe in the divinity of Christ, since they had no way of proving it with reason, but they saw him as a moral teacher. As Holmes explains, “The tendency of Deists was to emphasize ethics and justice.”⁵² Only a view of Christ as a moral teacher would be consistent with their beliefs.

Because Deism was a set of personal beliefs and not an established religion, the Founders differed on the specifics of their faith. A survey of

⁴⁶ Singer, 26.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Holmes, 40.

⁴⁹ Singer, 25.

⁵⁰ Holmes, 44.

⁵¹ Ibid., 47.

⁵² Ibid., 44.

the faith of some of the most prominent figures in the Founding shows how their faiths differed and how their belief in God informed their ideas of human nature. Thomas Paine had perhaps the most atheistic views. He believed that Deism was superior to Christianity because it “honors reason as the choicest gift of God and the faculty by which man is enabled to contemplate the power, wisdom, and goodness of God.”⁵³ Paine explicitly declared his belief in God and his commitment to the religious duties of doing justice, loving mercy, and making the lives of fellow humans happy.⁵⁴ Yet, as a left-wing Deist, he found the Bible to be superstitious, irrational, and full of bloodthirsty ethics, and he believed the doctrine of Christ’s atonement for man’s sin was so outrageous that no sane person should believe it.⁵⁵

Thomas Paine’s strong antagonism toward faith was not representative of all the figures of the Founding, however. For example, unlike Paine, Benjamin Franklin believed in God’s divine intervention and providence.⁵⁶ Though he was not a consistent churchgoer, he believed it was important to foster religion, and he in fact suggested, in the midst of conflict at the Constitutional Convention, that the delegates begin their daily conversations with prayer. He quoted the Bible in some of his speeches to the Convention, and used the example of the Tower of Babel as a warning against trying to build a city without God.⁵⁷ Franklin’s religion rested on the premise of morality and virtue. He defined a “good Christian” as someone who is “a good Parent, a good Child... a good Neighbour or friend, a good Subject or citizen.”⁵⁸ For Franklin, both worship and salvation had their root in morality and virtue.

Unlike Franklin who grew up mostly removed from religion, Jefferson grew up immersed in the Bible and Anglican liturgy, but he rejected many of the doctrines of established religion, including the divinity of Christ.⁵⁹ He said he was a Christian in the only way Jesus wished for anyone to be, “sincerely attached to his doctrines... and ascribing to [Jesus] every

⁵³ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁵ Holmes, 47.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ John G. West, “Religion and the American Founding Revisited,” in *The Politics of Revelation and Reason: Religion and Civic Life in the New Nation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 19.

⁵⁸ Holmes, 56.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

human excellence” as a moral teacher.⁶⁰ In a letter to Charles Thomson, Jefferson describes how he physically cut out sayings of Jesus from the Bible and arranged them in a blank book by subject to create the “most beautiful or precious morsel of ethics” he had ever seen.⁶¹ Jefferson’s faith involved his mind more than his heart, and he believed that “everyone is responsible to God who planted reason in his breast and light for his path.”⁶² Jefferson believed that Christian ethics, coupled with reason, provided the best model for directing human and civic relations.

While Adams and Jefferson wrote extensively about faith, James Madison’s writings on faith are scarce. He was born to devout parents, baptized in the Anglican Church, and received his entire education from conservative protestant schools, including the very orthodox College of New Jersey.⁶³ Though he was an ardent supporter of religious freedom, Madison rarely wrote or spoke about his personal faith. He was never confirmed in any denomination, and there is no clear record of his church attendance, though as president he was known to sporadically attend services at St. John’s Episcopal Church in Washington.⁶⁴ He was known to have expressed “high regard for Unitarian principle,” a branch of the Congregationalist Church that rejected the Trinity for a belief in a single God, similar to Deism. His writings on faith mention Nature’s God, but he omits references to Jesus, the Bible, and church tradition.⁶⁵ Though there are few accounts of faith directly from James Madison, these views are consistent with the Enlightenment Deism of the time.

George Washington represented a form of Deism that was less detached from, and more friendly to religion. Washington was baptized, married, and buried according to Anglican ritual. Though he was a Deist, he did not agree with the idea that God had created the Earth and left it alone. In fact, he had a deep belief in God’s hand of providence upon his life and the nation.⁶⁶ Though Washington encouraged piety and involvement in religious ceremonies among his troops, he was never

⁶⁰ Robert Baron, “Jefferson on Religion and Religious Freedom,” in *Thomas Jefferson In His Own Words* (Golden, Co.: Fulcrum Publication, 2009), 76.

⁶¹ Ibid., 82.

⁶² Gary Scott Smith, “Thomas Jefferson and the Separation of Church and State,” in *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 58.

⁶³ Ibid., 92.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 94.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 96.

⁶⁶ Smith, “George Washington,” 27.

committed to a denomination and he did not take communion.⁶⁷ Like Franklin and Jefferson, Washington thought that conduct, more than belief, made people acceptable to God, and that “no person who is profligate in his morals can possibly be a true Christian.”⁶⁸ In Washington’s faith we again see a Deist belief in God that was manifested in a commitment to virtue and morals, but that did not necessarily mean a complete rejection of tradition faith.

With an even deeper commitment to faith, John Adams wrote much about his beliefs, which can be characterized as “Christian Deism.” Adams was a Unitarian, and therefore held a strong belief in a single God, and rejected the idea of the Trinity or of Christ as an equal with God, though he believed Christ to be the greatest moral teacher. Adams was a member of his local Unitarian Church (a branch of the Congregationalist Church that was composed of mostly upper class and intellectuals), a regular churchgoer, and a deep believer in God’s providence and life after death.⁶⁹ For Adams, some Deists, like Thomas Paine, had gone too far in their rejection of the Bible and Christianity. Adams thought it essential that the nation follow the moral teachings of Jesus, and as president he declared days of fasting and prayer in order to refocus on faith and on the Christian religion, which he believed to be “the brightness of the glory and to express portrait of the eternal... benevolent... creator.”⁷⁰ For John Adams, faith and religion provided a sense of purpose and a compass for morality. For the Founders and other Deists of the time, the main role of Christianity, and Christ for that matter, was not to provide salvation but to provide the best standards for morality. Though the Founders’ Deist faith may have differed from that of most citizens at the time, they agreed on the necessity for virtue in public and private life. As we have seen, the faith of the Founders had at its core serving the God of Nature through a commitment to morality and virtue. The Deist faith was a break with religious tradition, and as Holmes explains, “the idea of reason as a liberator from the shackles of repressive religion and tyrannical government won widespread acclaim [among colonial intellectuals].”⁷¹ This liberation gave the colonists a foundation for a faith that was not based on rules and ceremonies of “repressive religion,” but

⁶⁷ Smith, 27.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁹ Holmes, 77.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Holmes, 49.

in fact encouraged them to shed the repressive government of the British Monarchy.

Deism also shaped the Founders’ view of human nature, and gave them an understanding of politics that was based on “a true map of man” that recognized “the dignity of his nature and the noble rank he holds among the works of God.”⁷² Man, therefore, having been created free and dignified by the God of Nature, could be sovereign and independent among fellow men. These ideas of man as free and sovereign were opposed to the conventions of puritan religion and monarchical rule. According to Gregg Singer, Deism, with its rejection of the establishment and its focus on man, provided the political philosophy that produced the American Revolution. The separation from Great Britain was not only meant to create a political democracy, but it was a step in creating a new democratic way of life and brining about a revolution of society as a whole.⁷³ This new society would not be dominated or governed by fear of the laws, but by reverence to the law, with the social fabric supported by public virtue. In the words of John Adams, “now we can allow a citizen to be wise, virtuous, and good without thinking of him as a deity.”⁷⁴ That public virtue did not mean perfection; as Ellis Sandoz points out, the Founders never intended to create a perfect system that depended on flawless people, only virtuous ones.⁷⁵ They understood that while man was created free, his nature should not be trusted. James Madison expressed that “the degree of depravity in mankind... requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust.”⁷⁶ Deism taught the Founders that man was not perfect, but he could get closer to the God of Nature and Creator through righteous and virtuous living.

Virtue and Vice in the Founding

The Founders’ view of human nature and their aspiration for a virtuous electorate can be seen in the government they created. We see this from the beginning of the revolutionary endeavors in 1776. The

⁷² Ellis Sandoz, “Power and Spirit in the Founding: Thoughts on the Genesis of Americanism,” in *A Government of Laws: Political Theory, Religion, and the American Founding* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 115.

⁷³ Singer, 29.

⁷⁴ Sandoz, 107.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 121.

⁷⁶ Charles W. Dunn, “Theological Tension and the Founding of American Government,” in *American Political Theology: Historical Perspective and Theoretical Analysis*, (New York: Praeger, 1984), 12.

Declaration of Independence, explained Jefferson, “was an expression of the American Mind.”⁷⁷ That document, with its claim of the self-evident truth that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights” shows an understanding of God as the Creator who has made man sovereign and free, and a religion based on reason and “self-evident” revelation. The claim that Nature’s God endowed man with rights is key in claiming independence, and the God of Nature that Jefferson put into the Declaration is the same God the Founders believed should be revered through virtue and morality. Indeed, trusting man to be sovereign in government required that he also be, to some degree, good. As Charles Kesler explains, to be worthy of the rights of self-government, people must be capable of governing themselves and their passions; for this, moral virtues provide a standard to distinguish good from bad citizenship.⁷⁸ And that is what they wanted, good citizenship, not perfect. In Robert Goldwin’s analysis, the Framers knew it would be fruitless to strive to create a spotlessly moral nation, and if they had been given the choice, they would have rejected it in exchange for liberty.⁷⁹ The Framers of the Constitution kept their view of imperfect human nature in mind during the Constitutional Convention. James Madison believed government to be the greatest reflection of human nature, and his distrust of that nature is seen in his famous declaration that:

If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.⁸⁰

That was the understanding of the Founders as they set out to create the government of the new nation: to create a government that could help govern the vices of the people, and its own. In an account of the

⁷⁷ Meacham, “None Shall be Afraid,” 66.

⁷⁸ Charles R. Kesler, “Character, Citizenship, and Constitutional Origins,” in *The Content of America’s Character: Recovering Civic Virtue*, ed. Don E. Eberly (Lanham: Madison Books, 1995), 103.

⁷⁹ Robert Goldwin, “Of Men and Angels: A Search for Morality in the Constitution,” in *The Moral Foundations of the American Republic*, ed. Robert Horwitz (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 6.

⁸⁰ James Madison, “Federalist 51,” in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Charles Kesler and Clinton Rossiter (New York: Penguin, 2003), 319.

Constitutional Convention by one of his contemporaries, Gouverneur Morris was described as constantly “inculcating the utter political depravity of men and the necessity of opposing one vice with another.”⁸¹ That is precisely what the Framers did. They understood that the vices of pride and envy lead men to desire more power and wealth. Because “ambition must be made to counteract ambition,” the Constitution established a design that separated power among the branches of the federal government and between the national and state government. Yet, that ambition also provided the dynamic interplay between the executive and legislative branch, making ambition as important as separation of powers in order for the government to function properly.⁸² The Bill of Rights secured the rights of the people against a government whose tendency for ambition and growth would be at risk of encroaching on the rights of citizens.

Against the vice of greed, the Founders created safeguards for property. As Hofstadter points out, though the Founders knew that man was a creature of ambition and self-interest, they wanted him to be free to use and acquire property.⁸³ Violations of their right to property and excessive taxation from the British Monarchy had been some of the catalysts for the Revolution. To limit that danger, the Framers created a system of taxation accountable to the people by placing the power to tax in the House of Representatives, the house closest to the people. The vice of greed also played a role in the discussion regarding compensation for the president. In *the Federalist Papers*, Alexander Hamilton explained that any man in the office of the president would be controlled, to some degree, by monetary self-interest. Congress, therefore, should not be allowed to alter a president’s salary, during their term in office. If Congress had the authority to reward the executive for certain behavior, it would “corrupt his integrity by appealing to his avarice.”⁸⁴

Evidence of the Framers’ distrust of the vices of wrath and passion is also seen in the Constitutional design they created. They understood

⁸¹ Richard Hofstadter, “The Founding Fathers: An Age of Realism,” in *The Moral Foundations of the American Republic*, ed. Robert Horwitz (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 77.

⁸² Goldwin, 10.

⁸³ Hofstadter, 84.

⁸⁴ Alexander Hamilton, “Federalist 73,” in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Charles Kesler and Clinton Rossiter (New York: Penguin, 2003), 413.

that man, in his imperfect nature, is guided by “restless and malignant passions,” as Washington called them.⁸⁵ The Constitution put safeguards in place to prevent those public passions from usurping the government and to provide a reasonable temperament. Senators, for example, would be elected by the state legislatures, and not by the people, so as to provide a counterbalance to the people’s house, the House of Representatives. As *the Federalist Papers* explain, the Senate was meant to be a “temperate and respectable body” that would check the misguided passions of the people until they could regain their sense of reason and justice.⁸⁶ Because they knew that man, and therefore any government he formed, would be susceptible to passion, the Framers created a Constitution that took vice into account and tried to prevent it.

The prevention of vice and the promotion of virtue were key in the Founding, for the Framers believed that a virtuous electorate was the only way to preserve the nation. In his farewell address, George Washington asserted that it is “substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government,” and to that end he called religion “indispensible” in the promotion of virtue.⁸⁷ Though many of the Founders were not members of organized religion, they felt that religion was the best source for morality. John Adams thought that governments were grounded on “reason, morality, and the Christian religion.”⁸⁸ For that reason, the Founders were concerned with preserving freedom of religion and creating the political circumstances that would allow it to flourish.⁸⁹ The American Revolution was not like the French Revolution because it did not seek to cast off religion. On the contrary, the American Revolution and the new American government depended on religion and its advancement of faith in order for the nation to thrive. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 declares “Religion, morality, and knowledge,” spread by education, to be “necessary to good government and the happiness of

⁸⁵ Smith, “Washington,” 31.

⁸⁶ James Madison, “Federalist 63,” in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Charles Kesler ad Clinton Rossiter (New York, Penguin, 2003), 372.

⁸⁷ Michael Novak, “The Influence of Judaism and Christianity on the American Founding,” in *Religion and the New Republic: Faith in the Founding of America*, ed. James H. Hutson (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 176.

⁸⁸ Sandoz, 115.

⁸⁹ Isaac Kramnick, and R. Laurence Moore “The Godless Constitution,” in *Protestantism and the American Founding*, ed. Thomas S. Engeman and Michael P. Zuckert (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 140.

mankind.”⁹⁰ According to Jon Meacham, “The great good news about America—the American gospel—is that religion shapes the life of the nation without strangling it.”⁹¹

Without a “strangling” or “repressive” established religion, morality in the nation would be encouraged by an American civil religion of responsibility, citizenship, and virtue. The law of the land, aided by religious instruction, flourished with freedom and became a civil religion. According to Catherine Albanese, the creed of the American civil religion was established during the Founding, and it viewed the United States as chosen to embody and promote republican government.⁹² That calling meant that both the citizens and the leaders must be virtuous. The laws, therefore, function as the language of moral discourse in the nation, offering a definition of who we aspire to be as a nation, as well as guidance and motivation for achieving it.⁹³ The American civil religion did not replace Christianity, rather, it advocated for the same virtue and morality in slightly different terms.

The American civil religion was especially important to the Founders at the advent of the new nation because they believed that society could only be preserved through virtue. In fact, they waged the survival of the new nation, the greatest experiment of freedom the world had ever seen, on the virtue of the people to preserve it. George Washington said in his first inaugural address, “the destiny of the republican model of government depends on Americans practicing a high level of public and private morality.”⁹⁴ Herein was the key to the success of the new nation. Samuel Adams believed that without sound moral habits *taught by religion*, a free republic could not survive.⁹⁵ For him, as for the other Founders, religion was key in promoting virtue. According to Thomas Jefferson, “happiness is the aim of life, but virtue is the source of happiness.”⁹⁶ Therefore, a

⁹⁰ Stephen Mansfield, “What the Founders Founded,” in *Ten Tortured Words: How the Founding Fathers Tried to Protect Religion in America-- and What's Happened Since* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 14.

⁹¹ Jon Meacham, “And None Shall be Afraid: The Revolution, the Constitution, and the Creation of the Presidency,” in *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Random House, 2006), 5.

⁹² Smith, “Washington,” 16.

⁹³ Robert E. Rodes, “On Law and Virtue,” in *Virtue, Public and Private: Essays*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1986), 42.

⁹⁴ Smith, “Washington,” 17.

⁹⁵ Novak, “Immoral Man,” 62.

⁹⁶ Smith, “Jefferson,” 62.

government that at the outset sought to preserve man's natural right to pursue happiness could only do so through virtue. John Adams expressed this conviction best when he wrote that no government can contend with human passions if they are unrestrained by morality and religion, "avarice, ambition, revenge, gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution... our Constitution is made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."⁹⁷

The American Revolution and Founding are seen as great experiments of liberty, and the role of religion in those events has been fiercely debated. What is missing from the discourse is an account of virtue in the Founding. The Founders indeed were committed to liberty, but their understanding of human nature and distrust of human vice led them to conclude that liberty could be preserved only through virtue. Vice would erode society, but private virtue would lead to public good and would create the necessary conditions for the survival of the new republican government that depended so much on man. Though many of the Founders were not members of the mainline Christian denominations of the time, their belief in God through Deism inspired a deep commitment to virtue and morality. In creating a new government, they instituted religious freedom that would allow faith to flourish, because they believed that the Christian religion was the main way to promote virtue among the people. Men, indeed, are not angels. But men, indeed, are created free and sovereign with the right to self-government, life, liberty, and happiness. The preservation of those rights in a republican government depends on virtue—virtue of the people, the laws, and the leaders. Today, our political discourse is saturated with talk of rights, freedom, liberty, and sovereignty, and we look to the Founding to provide a basis for those claims. What we miss, however, is that the talk of liberty and rights is empty without a rejection of vice and a commitment to virtue. Understanding virtue as a key component of the Revolution, the founding documents, and of American character and civil religion is fundamental for a complete view of the Founding.

⁹⁷ Novak, "Immoral Man," 71.

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Homer's Influence on Augustine: A New Look at the Return Home

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Abstract

Homer, as the first recorded poet, had a profound impact on the rest of history. Homer based his *Odyssey* around the theme of nostos, or the return home. Odysseus wants to get home, but he faces the obstacles of captivity, diversion, and a disobedient crew. One thousand years later, St. Augustine explores the same theme of nostos in his *Confessions*. But here, the return home is not to a physical location, as it was in the *Odyssey*, but to a place of mental rest. Augustine faces the same obstacles as Odysseus, but adds new meaning to them according to his culture. Like Odysseus, Augustine found his home to be a difficult place. He questions Christian doctrine in the last half of the *Confessions*, postulating on the problem of evil and the nature of time and memory. Augustine's *Confessions* is best understood through the lens of Homer's *Odyssey*.

The Bible is an authoritative text that has immeasurably influenced the The influence of the Greek poet Homer extends far beyond his own era. Homer's arguments are so significant that other authors of history and literature imitate them consciously or unconsciously. Saint Augustine, author of the *Confessions*, lived nearly 1000 years after Homer. Both Homer and Augustine base their works on the theme of nostos, or the return home. Homer's Odysseus returns to a physical home, but Augustine searches for a place of mental rest. In this paper I will offer a reading of the *Confessions* using Homer's *Odyssey* as a lens. Homer's Odysseus faced many obstacles on his journey home. Odysseus faced the obstacle of captivity, the temptation of diversion, and the challenge of captaining a disobedient crew. Saint Augustine faced the same obstacles on his journey home, but adds new levels of meaning to them in his *Confessions*. Both Augustine and Odysseus return home after a difficult journey, and both discover that the return home is not easy.

The *Odyssey* concerns the decades of struggle for the hero Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, to return home following the Trojan War, a desire which Homer calls nostos. The Trojan war lasts for ten years, but fate prevents Odysseus and his crew from returning for an additional ten years. Odysseus desperately wants to get home, but he meets challenges at every turn. Calypso's island proves to be the most difficult obstacle to overcome. He arrives there shipwrecked and alone. For the next seven years Calypso, a sea nymph, holds him hostage. The reader first meets Odysseus when he is weeping on the beach of the island. Zeus has just commanded Calypso to release Odysseus, and she goes to tell him the news. "She found him sitting where the breakers rolled in, / His eyes were perpetually wet with tears now, / His life draining away in homesickness."¹ Odysseus desperately wants to return home, but without a ship, he is helpless to leave until Calypso offers her assistance. The most difficult obstacle Odysseus must overcome is captivity.

Another obstacle Odysseus must overcome is the temptation of the Sirens. These singing creatures lure men to their island by their great beauty and song. Odysseus wisely ties himself to the mast of the ship and plugs his crew's ears with wax to prevent shipwreck. The Sirens' song flatters Odysseus, reminding him of his success in warfare. "Come

¹ Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 74.

hither, Odysseus, / glory of the Achaeans, / Stop your ship/ So you can hear our voices./ No one has ever sailed/ his black ship past here/ Without listening to the honeyed / Sound from our lips. / He journeys on delighted / and knows more than before.”² They tempt him to dwell on his success of the past. Throughout his work, Homer refers to Odysseus as a great tactician. Odysseus must ignore the Sirens’ call to revel in his brilliance, but it is his quick thinking that allows Odysseus to overcome obstacles throughout his journey. Odysseus must find a balance between using his intelligence and allowing intellectual pride to overcome him. The Sirens offer Odysseus the chance to add a side trip to his journey home. Odysseus must escape the temptation of diversion.

Finally, Odysseus has to deal with a disobedient crew. After an already difficult journey, Odysseus and his crew arrive at Aeolia, where the wind king Aeolus offers his assistance. He corrals the winds into a bag, and leaves out only the one that will send Odysseus’ ship towards Ithaca. “For nine days and nights we sailed on. / On the tenth day we raised land, our own/ Native fields, and got so close we saw men/ Tending their fires. Then sleep crept up on me, / Exhausted from minding the sail the whole time.”³ While Odysseus sleeps, the crew conspires, thinking there is treasure in the bag. “‘Aeolus has lavished these gifts upon him. / Let’s have a quick look, and see what’s here, / How much gold and silver is stuffed in this bag./ All malicious nonsense, but it won in the end, / And they opened the bag. The winds rushed out / And bore them far out to sea.”⁴ For their curiosity and disobedience, the crew adds years to the journey. But the crew does not learn from this mistake, and the next time they disobey, the consequences are fatal. They arrive on the island of Helios, where Odysseus forbids them to eat the Sun God’s cattle. “But swear me a great oath, every last man: / If we find any cattle or sheep on this island, / No man will kill a single cow or sheep / In his recklessness, but will be content / To eat the food immortal Circe gave us.’ They swore they would do just as I said.”⁵ But while Odysseus is gone, the crew disregards his instructions and feasts on Helios’ cattle. For their crime, Zeus destroys

² Ibid., 183.

³ Ibid., 142.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 186-7.

the ship and the crew, leaving only Odysseus alive. Odysseus wishes to go home, but he cannot control his men. Their disobedience prevents him from achieving nostos and returning home.

Homer’s *Odysseus* speaks of a hero who goes through many obstacles in order to return home. Homer’s Odysseus returns to an actual home after facing physical obstacles. One thousand years later, Saint Augustine of Hippo echoes the theme of nostos, the return home. Unlike Homer, who tells the story of a national hero, Augustine tells his own story, in the first recorded autobiography. And unlike Homer’s Odysseus, Augustine’s return is not to a physical home, but to a mental place of rest. Augustine records his lifelong yearning for purpose, and the unrest he felt before he found it. Like Odysseus, Augustine faced many obstacles on his journey home. Augustine faced the obstacle of captivity in his journey home. Augustine tried to find purpose in religion. For many years he ascribed to the beliefs of Manichaeism, a religious cult of the second century. Looking back, he realizes that he yearned for purpose from God, but Manichaeism couldn’t supply it. Manichaeism held him captive. “Truth, truth: how in my inmost being the very marrow of my mind sighed for you!... To meet my hunger, instead of you they brought me a diet of the sun and moon, your beautiful works- but they are your works, not you yourself ... The dishes they placed before me contained splendid hallucinations.”⁶ Augustine knew that Manichaeism lacked the depth of understanding he desired, but he was enamored by it.

In seeking for you I followed not the intelligence of the mind, by which you willed that I should surpass the beasts, but the mind of the flesh... I had stumbled on that bold-faced woman, lacking in prudence, who in Solomon’s allegory sits on a chair outside her door and says, ‘Enjoy a meal of secret bread and drink sweet stolen water’ (Prov 9:17). She seduced me.⁷

Augustine was a slave to “the mind of the flesh”⁸ Like Homer’s Odysseus; Augustine was trapped, not by a sea nymph, but by false religion. But, as Augustine learned more about Manichaeism, he became

⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 41.

⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁸ Ibid.

disenchanted with it. His growing discontent escalated and peaked when he met Faustus, a highly respected Manichee. Augustine expected Faustus to be able to answer his questions of faith, and was disappointed when Faustus failed to do so. It was not until Augustine heard the preaching of Ambrose, a Catholic bishop, that he realized what Manichaeism lacked.

“I was led to [Ambrose] by you, unaware that through him, in full awareness, I might be led to you. That ‘man of God’ received me like a father and expressed pleasure at my coming with a kindness most fitting in a bishop. I began to like him, at first not as a teacher of the truth, for I had absolutely no confidence in your Church, but as a human being who was kind to me. I used enthusiastically to listen to him preaching to the people, not with the intention which I ought to have had, but as if testing out his oratorical skill to see whether it merited the reputation it enjoyed or whether his fluency was better or inferior than it was reported to be.”⁹

Augustine soon discovered that Ambrose’s fame was not unsubstantiated. “My pleasure was in the charm of his language. It was more learned than that of Faustus.”¹⁰ What first attracted Augustine to Ambrose was his kindness and intelligence. As a teacher of rhetoric, Augustine appreciated Ambrose’s oratorical skill even when he denied the bishop’s message. Homer’s Odysseus needed the help of his captor Calypso to escape and return home. Similarly, Augustine needed the help of his captor to escape the bonds of Manichaeism. God made Augustine with a propensity for rhetoric, and Augustine could not believe a religion whose rhetoric could not stand up against another argument. Counter-intuitively, Faustus helped free Augustine from Manichaeism, and sent him on his journey home. Ambrose, simply through brilliant rhetoric, demanded Augustine’s attention and respect. Homer wrote of a hero who needed to go on a journey to escape captivity. This idea cemented itself in the western mind, permeating every manifestation of captivity, especially the concept of mental captivity, as seen in Augustine’s *Confessions*.

Augustine, like Odysseus, also faced the temptation of diversion. Before he was a bishop, Augustine was a teacher of rhetoric. “In those years I used to teach the art of rhetoric. Overcome by greed myself, I used to sell the eloquence that would overcome an opponent.”¹¹ In addition to

⁹ Ibid., 87-88.

¹⁰ Ibid., 88.

¹¹ Ibid., 53.

his occupation as a teacher of rhetoric, Augustine entered competitions. “We pursued the empty glory of popularity, ambitious for the applause of the audience at the theatre when entering for verse competitions to win a garland of mere grass, concerned with the follies of public entertainments and unrestrained lusts.”¹² God made Augustine to be skilled in the art of persuasion, but Augustine misdirected his skills and used them to gain temporal glory. His success distracted him from his journey home to a place of rest. He tried to find satisfaction, purpose, and joy in rhetoric, but failed. However, God did not give Augustine a passion for rhetoric without purpose. It was Ambrose’s great rhetoric and oration that first drew Augustine to the message of the gospel. Once convinced of the truth of Christianity, Augustine did not forsake rhetoric, but redirected his skills. He began to preach and became a bishop. He wrote *Confessions*, detailing his journey of faith. Like Odysseus, the thing that brought distraction also drew him closer to home. Augustine could not find purpose solely in rhetoric, but God used rhetoric to bring Augustine to a place of peace and rest in the message of Christianity.

Finally, Augustine, like Odysseus, faced the obstacle of having a disobedient crew in his journey home. Odysseus faced the external disobedience of a literal crew on a ship, but Augustine faced an internal disobedience, the obstacle of sin. Throughout his life, he was a slave to sin, even when he desperately wished to escape it. At the beginning of *Confessions*, he recounts that as an adolescent, he stole pears from a neighbor’s tree with his friends. He did it to find pleasure, but failed. “I wanted to carry out an act of theft and did so, driven by no kind of need other than my inner lack of any sense of, or feeling for, justice. Wickedness filled me. I stole something which I had in plenty and of much better quality. My desire was to enjoy not what I sought by stealing but merely the excitement of thieving and the doing of what was wrong.”¹³ Augustine experienced the thrill of disobedience for its own sake. “We carried off a huge load of pears. But they were not for our feasts but merely to throw to the pigs. Even if we ate a few, nevertheless our pleasure lay in doing which was not allowed.”¹⁴ Augustine outgrew his propensity for theft with age, but he continued to search for pleasure in sin. Augustine

¹² Ibid., 52.

¹³ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴ Ibid.

was most frustrated with his problem of lust. He never married, but had a concubine. “In those years I had a woman. She was not my partner in what is called lawful marriage. I had found her in my state of wandering desire and lack of prudence. Nevertheless, she was the only girl for me, and I was faithful to her.”¹⁵ As Augustine was moving towards Christianity, he realized that sin could not satisfy him. He wanted to stop sinning but at the same time wanted to continue. “I was an unhappy young man, wretched as at the beginning of my adolescence when I prayed you for chastity and said: ‘Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet.’ I was afraid you might hear my prayer quickly, and that you might too rapidly heal me of the disease of lust which I preferred to satisfy rather than suppress.”¹⁶ Augustine faced the same hesitation in giving up sin as he did in accepting the truth of Christianity. “I was refusing to become your soldier, and I was as afraid of being rid of all my burdens as I ought to have been at the prospect of carrying them. The burdens of the world weighed me down with a sweet drowsiness such as commonly occurs during sleep. The thoughts with which I meditated about you were like the efforts of those who would like to get up but are overcome by deep sleep and sink back again.”¹⁷ Augustine knew that his time had arrived to shake off the entanglements of sin, but he could not convince himself to do it. Homer’s Odysseus wanted to get home, but his progress was slowed because of the disobedience of his crew. Augustine faced an internal disobedience. He could not control the sin in his life like Odysseus could not control his crew. The lure of sin distracted Augustine from his goal, a life with peace and purpose.

Homer’s Odysseus finally returns to Ithaca, only to discover that Ithaca has changed. Odysseus expects to find rest when he returns to Ithaca, but instead finds his house in an uproar. The suitors exploit his absent hospitality while they court his wife Penelope. Odysseus faces one final challenge to ensure that he truly returns home. Odysseus restores some of the tranquility of home when he defeats the suitors and reveals his identity to his wife, but even then he cannot rest. The gods decreed that Odysseus must go on one more journey. In Book 11, Odysseus visits

¹⁵ Ibid., 53.

¹⁶ Ibid., 145.

¹⁷ Ibid., 140-141.

the blind prophet Tiresias in the underworld. Tiresias warns Odysseus about the suitors and continues, “Then you must go off again, carrying a broad-bladed oar, / Until you come to men who know nothing of the sea, / Who eat their food unsalted, and have never seen / Red-prowed ships or oars that wing them along. / And I tell you a sure sign that you have found them, / One you cannot miss. When you meet another traveler / Who thinks you are carrying a winnowing fan, / Then you must fix your oar in the earth / And offer sacrifice to Lord Poseidon.”¹⁸ Odysseus cannot truly rest until he leaves home again. But Tiresias offers a promise of hope at the end of his prophecy. “And death will come to you off the sea, / A death so gentle, and carry you off / When you are worn out in sleek old age, / Your people prosperous all around you. / All this will come true for you as I have told.” Nostos, the return home, is difficult. It takes patience and endurance. The reward, however, is to die in peace.

Saint Augustine discovered that his homecoming was difficult as well. He recounts the events leading up to his conversion. He grew more and more frustrated with his tension of beliefs. Finally, he came to a point of brokenness. He went to his garden and wept. As he cried, he heard a voice saying, ‘tolle lege,’ ‘take and read.’ He picked up the New Testament, and let it fall open. It opened to Romans 13, saying, “Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts.” (Rom 13:13-14). Saint Augustine recounts, “I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.”¹⁹ Augustine finally discovered that, “You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”²⁰ Augustine achieved nostos; he arrived at a place of rest. But he soon learned that the return home is difficult. There are unanswered questions about God. He questions Christian doctrine in the last half of the *Confessions*, postulating on the problem of evil and the nature of time and memory. He answers these questions as best he can. It is his final journey before he can return to a

¹⁸ Homer, *Odyssey*, 161-2.

¹⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 153.

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

state of peace and rest. Odysseus had to journey inland before he could return to Ithaca to rule as king; and Augustine had to answer difficult questions before he could fully surrender to the truths of Christianity. Both Odysseus and Augustine know that they can die in peace as Tiresias promised.

Homer, as the first recorded poet, had a profound impact on the rest of history. His first poem, the *Iliad*, recounts the Trojan War and the challenges that faced the nation of Greece. The *Odyssey* represents a change of focus. Instead of studying the history of the group, Homer focuses on one famous hero of Greece and the individual struggles he faced. Homer gave future historians the permission to concentrate on the individual instead the group. Homer's theme of nostos encapsulates the universal longing to return home. Perpetual travelers grow weary of their journeys. Saint Augustine, although he lived nearly 1000 years after Homer, understood the idea of nostos, and the importance of the individual. Augustine wrote the first autobiography, because he was the one most qualified to tell his own story. Saint Augustine reinvents the theme of nostos, turning it into a journey of faith. Odysseus' goal was his homeland, his wife, his family and his kingdom. Augustine's goal was that city whose builder and maker is God. Hebrews tells us that we are aliens and strangers on this earth, and that by acknowledging this truth, we learn to seek for a better country – a heavenly one (Hebrews 11:16). In the end, therefore, both achieved nostos – the return home – but only Augustine found the permanent home that God prepares for those who love him.

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