

Plundering Egyptian Gold: Christianity and Culture.

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Tertullian in his *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* states, “What hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?” Throughout Church history many have tried to better understand the relationship philosophy has with theology. Some condemn the use of philosophy in theology, and some applaud it. Some use philosophy apologetically, others use it to help formulate a better understanding of the nature of God. This conversation though is one of a larger; the real conversation at hand is how do Christians interact with culture? How does the natural order of the world and its societies, which it produces, interact with Christianity? Tertullian’s question could very easily be changed to say “What has Hollywood (media) to do with Jerusalem?” or “What hath Oxford (modern education) to do with Jerusalem?” Philosophy, although it seeks the purpose of life and desires to know the truth, is still formulated from the natural order of the world. It is developed within the created order, thus, making it a product of nature. Even though philosophy seeks that which is greater than nature, only natural faculties are used. It desires that which is supernatural, but does not involve the supernatural. And this is the topic on hand: How does the triune God and his Church interact with the natural world? How do we engage the cultures which flow from the natural order? Culture is simply the byproduct of the natural order of the world. It is what man does with creation. Culture is, as H. Richard Niebuhr states, “the...secondary environment’ which man superimposes on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values.”<sup>1</sup> Culture thus encompasses much of a man’s life. Thus when approaching this question, we will not ask “what does philosophy, media, education, culture have to do with God?” rather we must ask, “what does God do with culture?” Perhaps Tertullian should not have asked “What hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?” rather he should have asked “What hath Jerusalem to do with Athens?” This is the question at hand.

Today, I will embark to explain the Church Father’s understanding of Christianity and culture. First I will start by explaining five general ways Christians engage culture. These five systems will be provided from H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ in Culture*. After giving these five systems and representative modern examples for each, we will examine the early Church’s formulation, verification, and solidification of the concept known as Plundering or Despoiling the Egyptians. After exploring this principle, I will move to provide two needed distinctions which the modern mind will need to understand in order to apply the principle to his or her life.

Let’s Begin.

Now I must preface this introductory portion on Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*. Unlike Niebuhr, who describes these systems as historical paradigms, I understand these systems as continuous throughout history. I believe that these five ideas on how to approach culture come from a misreading of the Holy Scriptures, and therefore are manifested throughout church history and are not specific to certain historical periods, but have always been prevalent. That being said, I believe that Niebuhr’s five systems are the majority views on the Christian’s involvement in culture and therefore use them as a framework. I

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<sup>1</sup> Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956. Print.

know that Niebuhr's *Christ in Culture* is not the most theologically articulate understanding of the present topic, but his systems are easily understandable and therefore useful for my lecture. That being said, we can move forward.

As stated before, Niebuhr believed culture to be defined as, "the 'artificial, secondary environment' which man superimposes on the natural." Therefore, to Niebuhr, culture is a natural byproduct of God's creative act. Culture is not inherently good or evil, rather it is either corrupted by the evil motives of man or used as a means of good through the nature of God. Niebuhr in his *Christ in Culture* talks of five ways to approach culture: 1. Christ against culture, 2. Christ of culture, 3. Christ above culture, 4. Christ and culture in paradox, and 5. Christ transforming culture.<sup>2</sup> **Christ against culture** views culture as hopelessly corrupt and in need of Christ's return. They aim to keep the church pure and to be separate from the world, for to them this is a direct result of being holy as God is holy. **Christ of culture** views culture and the church as one harmonious system to them Christ and culture are one entity. **Christ above culture** views the good in a culture as a gift from God, but that the ultimate good can only be realized in and through the church. **Christ and culture in paradox** views culture as God's ordaining of societies institutions for the Christian to work in as best as he can. While he works in the society, he also realizes that the kingdom of Christ has already entered the world and is at work. Thus they are stuck in a paradox of living in a culture that they know is inherently tainted by evil and living in the kingdom of God in which morals cannot be compromised. **Christ transforming culture** views every area of society and culture as in need of the transforming power of Christ, that if nothing is outside of Christ's dominion then it must be reclaimed for His name's sake. In order to flesh these ideas out, I will now provide five examples which correspond to the five systems of cultural engagement.

**Christ against culture** can be visualized when one looks to a separatist group like the Amish or Mennonite. Many Independent Fundamental Baptists Churches hold similar views to these separatist groups because all are descendants of the anabaptist movement. Private institutions like Bob Jones University and Pensacola Christian College are seen actually outlawing certain avenues of cultural engagement. The Pensacola Christian College guidebook, *The Pathway*, reads, "Appropriateness in dress is related to the setting and activity. In this Christian college setting, care must be taken to avoid association with companies (Hollister, Abercrombie and Fitch, etc.), lifestyles, and trends that oppose Christian values, including gothic dress styles / nail polish, tattoos, body piercings, and unnatural hair colors." Concerning entertainment, it states, "Any media or form of entertainment including but not limited to books, magazines, apps, computer and video games, which contain violence, sensual or demonic themes, suggestive dress, profanity, or rock music are not permitted. Computer and video games rated above E-10 are not permitted." This is Christ against culture.

**Christ of culture** looks like syncretism. Christ of culture sees Christ in culture, but they also tie Christ to the specific culture they are in, as if Christ can only be understood through culture. This reminds one of the liberal Protestantism of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher proposed that Christ can be found through any and all culture. This cause Schleiermacher to compromise his view of Christ. Christ was not a divine human being in the sense of having divine nature, but rather Christ was filled with a divine fire. He was religious leader who tapped the divine essence of God. Christ of Culture seems to take

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pg. 23

the things about Christ that fit their specific culture and use it to promote ethical and social improvement in their culture. Schleiermacher, who was living during the enlightenment and the flourishing of Kantian metaphysics, imposed his culture onto Christ. His culture detested the supernatural, so he stripped Christ of the supernatural. This symbolizes Christ of culture.

**Christ above culture** sees the good of a culture as a gift of God but holds that the good of culture can only be fully realized in the church. This is similar to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. According to the aristotelian metaphysic, the Church is the mediator of Christ to the world. The world finds its ultimate satisfaction or happiness, to use aristotelian terms, in and through the Church who is the nursing mother to her growing children! This was brilliantly expounded upon by Thomas Aquinas.

**Christ and culture in paradox** is seen in Lutheran theology. Lutherans are known to view the world as a true paradox. Lutheran theology talks about this paradox in terms of the kingdom: the kingdom of the left (world/culture) and the kingdom of the right (God/church). The kingdom of the left is ruled by law and government, while the kingdom of the right is ruled by grace and Christ. The Christian is in both kingdoms, but he only serves one king. This friction will sometimes lead to paradox.

**Christ transforming culture** is similar to the work of St. Augustine. Augustine saw the Roman culture as a resource. He used works like Virgil's *Aeneid*, Plato's *Republic*, and Cicero's *Hortensius* as a tool to show the Roman culture the orthodox faith of Christianity. *De Confessiones*, *De Doctrina Christiana*, and *De Civitate Dei* all utilize cultural products whether philosophical or literary for the benefit of Christianity. In Augustine's theology the world was broken; it was in a state of privation of good. Therefore Augustine viewed the world as in need of the triune God who was the ultimate good. St. Augustine saw the greatest treasures of Roman culture as precious gold from which he should take. These gold vessels are manifestations of the culture God gave to the world. The Church is to refine these vessels, because the fallen world corruptedly twisted their good. This leads us to the Church Father's concept of plundering the Egyptians.

The principle of "plundering the Egyptians" was formulated from Exodus 12:35-36 and states that Christians should engage all areas of culture, refining them for the Christian faith. Exodus 12:35-36 states, "35 Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; 36 and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians." It is from this passage that Irenaeus of Lyons will create the illustration of "plundering the Egyptians," which will become a solidified principle of the Church. In his illustration, the Israelites symbolize the Church, and the gold, silver, and clothes of the Egyptians represent culture. Thus it is God's command to the Church to plunder culture for their use. It is later stated in Exodus that the gold and silver of the Egyptians was used as the materials used to create the holy objects of the tabernacle: the gold cups, gold show bread plates, the gold candlesticks, and even the ark of the covenant.<sup>3</sup> According to Irenaeus and the Church Fathers, the Church is to penetrate culture, take its best resources, melt them down, refine them, and utilize them for the benefit of Church and the glory of God. This concept is applied to everything from science, literature, theatre, art, and even holidays, for if God gave knowledge

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<sup>3</sup> Yeo, John Ji-Won. *Plundering the Egyptians: The Old Testament and Historical Criticism at Westminster Theological Seminary (1929-1998)*. Plymouth, U.K.: University of America, 2010. Print.

and thought to all people, Christians are then able to take said knowledge, given by God, and use it for their own benefit. God originally gave the gold, silver, and clothes to the Egyptians, but it was the Israelites that used it for their benefit and God's glory.

Plundering the Egyptians is a concept formulated by Irenaeus of Lyons, promoted by Origen of Alexandria, polished by Saint Gregory of Nazianzen, and solidified in Christian culture by Saint Augustine of Hippo. As stated earlier, Irenaeus formulates the concept of plundering the Egyptians, but he does so in order to refute the Marcionites, who said that God commanded evil when the Israelites were told to spoil the Egyptians. Irenaeus creates the concept as a refutation of heresy, but gives it a practical outworking as well. Origen then promotes the concept of plundering the Egyptians but seems to only use it in the context of science and education. Gregory of Nazianzen comes soon after to a practical understanding of the concept of his predecessor, Origen, and defends the Christian practice of Easter and Christmas, which were thought to be pagan. Augustine then takes Irenaeus' formula, Origen's illustration, and Gregory's practical outworking and applies it to all pagan literature, science, theatre, logic, philosophy, and rhetoric. Many other Church Fathers believed similar thoughts on refining culture, but did not use the idea of plundering the Egyptians. These Church Fathers include: Justin Martyr<sup>4</sup>, John Chrysostom<sup>5</sup>, and Ambrose of Milan<sup>6</sup>. The process of creating and embodying the concept of plundering the Egyptians in the Early Church took about 225 years (c. 180 - 405 A.D.), and the labor that was put into this concept should not return void. Rather, this timeless principle can and will produce fruit in any culture, including the modern American culture, as it did in the Early Church.

Irenaeus of Lyons, who was a young disciple of Polycarp who was himself a disciple of the apostle John, is the first to formulate the idea of plundering the Egyptians. Even though Irenaeus formulates the concept as a defense against Marcionism, he still creates the concept and introduces it to the Church. Irenaeus in his *Adversus Haereses* writes:

We are proved to be righteous by whatsoever else we do well, redeeming, as it were, our property from strange hands. But thus do I say, *from strange hands*, not as if the world were not God's possession, but that we have gifts of this sort, and receive them from others, in the same way as these men had them from the Egyptians who knew not God; and by means of these same do we erect in ourselves the tabernacle of God: for God dwells in those who act uprightly, as the Lord says: *Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that they, when you shall be put to flight, may receive you into eternal tabernacles* (Luke 16:9). For whatsoever we acquired from unrighteousness when we were heathen, we are proved righteous, when we have become believers, by applying it to the Lord's advantage.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "Whatever things were rightly said among all men are the property of us Christians" (*Second Apology of St Justin Martyr*, 13:4).

<sup>5</sup> "What great labors did Plato endure, and his followers, discoursing to us about a line, and an angle, and a point, and about numbers even and odd, and equal unto one another and unequal, and such-like spiderwebs; (for indeed those webs are not more useless to man's life than were these subjects;) and without doing good to anyone great or small by their means, so he made an end of his life. How greatly did he labor, endeavoring to show that the soul was immortal! (Homily on 1 Corinthians. 4:4) John seems to frequently use philosophy in his sermons.

<sup>6</sup> Ambrose in his Letter to Simplician states, "Will any one bring forward those verses of Sophocles which say 'Jupiter, and no mortal man is ruler over me?' How much more ancient is Job, how much older is David? Let them acknowledge then that they have borrowed from us the more excellent of their sayings." This shows he believes Sophocles to have truth, and that the Scriptures redeem it for his use.

<sup>7</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons. *Against the Heresies*. New York, NY: Paulist, 1992. Print.

Irenaeus states that whatever pagan beliefs, practices, and habits one has when he comes to Christ are not to be thrown away as useless, but rather they are to be utilized for the glory of God. The redemption of these “pagan” beliefs is an essential for becoming “Christian” for Irenaeus. Irenaeus thus makes his argument stronger by quoting a New Testament verification, Luke 16:9, for his concept. He believes that Jesus commanded the Church to befriend the mammon of unrighteousness, which relates in his concept to the Egyptian idols. Jesus, according to Irenaeus, wishes the Church to befriend the “world” so that when the “world” is destroyed, as the Egyptians were, the Church can then create items of eternal significance from their spoils. With the Church receiving its “exodus” at the cross of Christ, the Church can then take the spoils that come with freedom in Christ.<sup>8</sup> The church is to plunder the Gentiles (culture) as the Israelites plundered the Egyptians.

Origen of Alexandria was an early third century theologian known for his historical theology, *De Principiis*. Origen, although his theology is sometimes speculative and without much evidence, does a brilliant service to the Christian faith by promotes the concept of plundering the Egyptians in his *Letter to Gregory*. This is not to be confused with Gregory of Nazianzen, but rather this is Gregory Thaumaturgus who was bishop of Caesarea.<sup>9</sup> Origen is writing this letter in exhortation of Gregory as he knows he disciplines himself in the study of philosophy, rhetoric, and the sciences. Origen is thus exhorting Gregory to continue his work in these studies in order to rationalize them with Christianity. His letter begins with a praise of Gregory’s work and a charge to continue in his studies:

Greeting in God, my most excellent sir, and venerable son Gregory, from Origen. A natural readiness of comprehension, as you well know, may, if practice be added, contribute somewhat to the contingent end, if I may so call it, of that which any one wishes to practise I am anxious that you should devote all the strength of your natural good parts to Christianity for your end; and in order to this, I wish to ask you to extract from the philosophy of the Greeks what may serve as a course of study or a preparation for Christianity, and from geometry and astronomy what will serve to explain the sacred Scriptures, in order that all that the sons of the philosophers are wont to say about geometry and music, grammar, rhetoric, and astronomy, as fellow-helpers to philosophy, we may say about philosophy itself, in relation to Christianity.<sup>10</sup>

In this exhortation, Origen desires for young Gregory to use his skill set and studies in order to reconcile the teachings of the Church and the Scriptures to the liberal arts and sciences.

Origen after his exhortation then proceeds to give young Gregory a biblical exhortation on why he should accept this task. As stated earlier, Origen uses the story of the Israelites plundering the Egyptians as his primary support for engaging culture. He states,

“Perhaps something of this kind is shadowed forth in what is written in Exodus from the mouth of God, that the children of Israel were commanded to ask from their neighbours, and those who dwelt with them, vessels of silver and gold, and raiment, in order that, by spoiling the Egyptians, they might have material for the preparation of the things which pertained to the service of God.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Book IV.XXX

<sup>9</sup> Origen of Alexandria. "Letter to Gregory." *New Advent: CHURCH FATHERS*. Web. 03 Oct. 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Origen of Alexandria. "Letter to Gregory." *New Advent: CHURCH FATHERS*. Web. 03 Oct. 2013.

For from the things which the children of Israel took from the Egyptians the vessels in the holy of holies were made—the ark with its lid, and the Cherubim, and the mercy-seat, and the golden coffer, where was the manna, the angels' bread.”<sup>11</sup>

If Irenaeus conceived of the idea of Plundering the Egyptians, it is here that Origen gives it its true birth. With this more beautiful explanation of the Exodus account, the concept received a vibrant life in the early church. With this beautiful picture of God’s redemption, Origen was able to exhort the young Gregory to study the liberal arts and sciences. Young Gregory adheres to the advice of Origen and later becomes the bishop of Caesarea, who was known for his philosophical defense against Gnosticism.

Saint Gregory of Nazianzen, who is known as one of the famous Cappadocian Fathers that defended the three distinct persons of the Trinity, also uses the concept of plundering the Egyptians in his defense of Easter found in his *45th Oration*. In this oration Gregory is relating the Pesach to the resurrection thus relating it to Easter. He distinctly examines this seemingly meaningless part of the Exodus, as Origen did, and applies it in his defense of Easter.<sup>12</sup>

What then? Do you come out for nothing and without wages? But why will you leave to the Egyptians and to the powers of your adversaries that which they have gained by wickedness, and will spend with yet greater wickedness? It does not belong to them: they have ravished it, and have sacrilegiously taken it as plunder from Him who says, The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine, (Haggai 2:8) and I give it to whom I will. Yesterday it was theirs, for it was permitted to be so; today the Master takes it and gives it to you, (Matthew 20:14 )that you may make a good and saving use of it. Let us make to ourselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness, (Luke 16:9) that when we fail, they may receive us in the time of judgment.<sup>13</sup>

According to Gregory, it is the responsibility of the Christian to penetrate into culture and redeem practices like Easter. As is popularly known, Easter has its roots in pagan tradition as the pagans celebrated the spring equinox the Sunday after the first full moon of the Spring (the same day Nicaea established Easter to be). They celebrated the “resurrection of life” and the god Attis on this date. When Christians proposed to have a similar celebration on the same day, many believed the church was synchronizing pagan religion and was not remaining “pure.” Gregory, and eventually the Council of Nicaea, did not view the choosing of this date as the synchronization of Christian and pagan religion, but rather as a Christian-refining of a pagan practice. In Gregory’s mind, why would Christians allow pagans to keep holidays and practices that can so easily be used for Christian purposes?

Gregory believes it to be the command of God to take what is being desecrated by idol worshippers, deconstruct it, and rebuild it with the hopes of redeeming it for the Christian cause (saving use). This again shows the common belief in this principle. In the Early Church, many people struggled with these “pagan-like” holidays such as Easter and Christmas. Many church fathers wrote to these confused Christians on the ability the Church has to refine such cultural practices. When defending Easter, Gregory, like many other Church fathers, uses the concept of Egyptian Gold as if it was a known biblical

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Gregory of Nazianzen. "Oration 45." *New Advent: CHURCH FATHERS*. Web. 03 Oct. 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

principle.

Saint Augustine of Hippo seems to be the champion of the concept of plundering the Egyptians and the principle of refining culture for Christianity. *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine's preaching manual, records Augustine's thoughts on the grammar, logic, and rhetoric of preaching and teaching homilies. A large portion of this book uses the thoughts of Cicero, Plato, and other "pagan" teachers. Augustine does not see these as detrimental to his faith, but rather they are beneficial for his understanding and the teaching of his congregation. Augustine writes of the plundering the Egyptians concept, stating:<sup>14</sup>

If those . . . [pagan writers] have said things which are indeed true and are well accommodated to our faith, they should not be feared; rather, what they have said should be taken from them as from unjust possessors and converted to our use. Just as the Egyptians had not only idols and grave burdens which the people of Israel detested and avoided, so also they had vases and ornaments of gold and silver and clothing which the Israelites took with them secretly when they fled, as if to put them to a better use. . . . In the same way, all the teachings of the pagans contain not only simulated and superstitious imaginings . . . but also liberal disciplines more suited to the uses of truth, and some of the most useful precepts concerning morals. Even some truths concerning the worship of one God are discovered among them.<sup>15</sup>

Augustine, borrowing from Origen and his *Letter to Gregory*, implements the concept of Egyptian Gold. Augustine states, more beautifully than Origen, that when the Israelites left bondage they took with them the very gold and silver idols that had held them in bondage. God did not see it wrong for them to use the melted down pagan idols as the material used to make the "holy tabernacle." With this same logic and beautiful imagery, Augustine shows that we can use this same principle with pagan literature and teaching, for the silver and gold were not evil but rather it was the way the Egyptians used them that was evil. Similarly, it is not the truths that are evil it is the way the pagans used the truths that is evil. Augustine in *De Doctrina Christiana*<sup>16</sup>, *De Civitate Dei*<sup>17</sup>, and *De Confessiones*<sup>18</sup> continually points to the use of pagan literature, philosophy, rhetoric, and science as a means of approaching the culture and society he lives in, and now he has become the foremost theologian in Church history. Perhaps Augustine is so connected with culture, history had no choice but to preserve his works and contemplate his thoughts.

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<sup>14</sup> Augustine also seems to be using the work of Gregory of Nyssa, a Cappadocian Father, and contemporary of Gregory Nazianzen. "*The loftier meaning [of the Israelite's plundering the wealth of Egypt] is therefore more fitting than the obvious one. It commands those participating through virtue in the free life also to equip themselves with the wealth of pagan learning by which foreigners to the faith beautify themselves. Our guide in virtue commands someone who "borrows" from wealthy Egyptians to receive such things as moral and natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, dialectic, and whatever else is sought by those outside the Church, since these things will be useful when in time the divine sanctuary of mystery must be beautified with the riches of reason.*" (*Life of Moses*).

<sup>15</sup> Augustine, and D. W. Robertson. *On Christian Doctrine*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958. Print. Sec. 40.60

<sup>16</sup> Page VI. Paragraph II.

<sup>17</sup> "If, then, Plato defined the wise man as one who imitates, knows, loves this God, and who is rendered blessed through fellowship with Him in His own blessedness, why discuss with the other philosophers? It is evident that none come nearer to us than the Platonists. To them, therefore, let that fabulous theology give place which delights the minds of men with the crimes of the gods" (*The City of God*, Book VII.V)

<sup>18</sup> "In the ordinary course of study, I lighted upon a certain book of Cicero, whose language, though not his heart, almost all admire. This book of his contains an exhortation to philosophy, and is called *Hortensius*. This book, in truth, changed my affections, and turned my prayers to Yourself, O Lord, and made me have other hopes and desires." (*The Confessions*, Book III.IV)

The concept of plundering the Egyptians has little to no opposition from other Church fathers. The large majority of the Church Fathers seem to support this principle, but Tertullian and the *Apostolic Constitutions* seem to be the only two Early Church sources that discourage such actions as reading pagan literature. Tertullian writes, “If again, we despise the teachings of secular literature as being foolishness in God's eyes, our duty is plain enough. . . . What you reject in deed, you are not to welcome in word.” Tertullian seems to reject philosophy and pagan writings, because most of the heresies he is writing against come from Platonic and Stoic schools of thought. It is from this friction that Tertullian harbored a disdain for the philosophers as he famously quipped, “What hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?”<sup>19</sup> It is easy to see why Tertullian would not have been partial toward the philosophers, but the context Tertullian should be understood in is that young, unlearned Christians were leaving the faith for gnostic and heretical teachings that used Greek philosophy for support. He is angered at philosophical discussion which reasons away ideas without contemplating the faith needed for those beliefs, for Tertullian, when he is addressing philosophy, he always pairs it with heresy.<sup>20</sup> Philosophy is a gate, which can lead to truth or it can lead to destruction and false teaching. Tertullian saw it most as a gate to destruction, thus he warned his readers to stay away from such writings and ways of thought. One must understand Tertullian in this context.

The *Apostolic Constitutions* also quotes against the use of pagan culture stating, “Abstain from all pagan books. For what have you to do with such alien discourses, laws, or false prophets? For these subvert the faith of the unstable.”<sup>21</sup> The context of the *Apostolic Constitutions* is very similar to Tertullian. The end of the quote stated, “For these subvert the faith of the unstable.” It seems that most of the disdain for philosophy is drawn from weak Christians being “lead astray” from the faith. It is interesting to see that the *Apostolic Constitutions* later states in Section II, “Propose to yourself to distinguish what rules were from the law of nature, and what were added afterwards, or were such additional rules as were introduced and given in the wilderness to the Israelites after the making of the calf; for the law contains those precepts which were spoken by the Lord God before the people fell into idolatry, and made a calf like the Egyptian Apis from gold— that is, the ten commandments.”<sup>22</sup> An example is given of using the “plundering the Egyptians” for the creation of idols. This is interesting to note, for when approaching this passage the author of the *Apostolic Constitutions*<sup>23</sup> does not ask whether if the gold is bad itself, he only references how it is used for evil.

This then leaves us at a crossroad. This opposition does not seem to be saying that the “gold,” pagan culture, is itself evil, but rather that it is used for evil with weaker Christians. This then pushes one to believe, that according to Tertullian and the *Apostolic Constitutions*, using culture is a matter of spiritual conscience.<sup>24</sup> This is similar to Romans 14, when Paul speaks on food offered to idols. One must

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<sup>19</sup> Tertullian, John Kaye, and Peter Holmes. *The Writings of Quintus Sept. Flor. Tertullianus*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; 1869. Print. Sec. 3.87

<sup>20</sup> “Indeed heresies are themselves instigated by philosophy. From this source came the Aeons, and I known not what infinite forms, and the Trinity of Man in the system of Valentinus, who was of Plato's school.” Tertullian. *On Pagan Learning*. ch. 40

<sup>21</sup> "Apostolic Constitutions (Book I)." *New Advent: CHURCH FATHERS*. Web. 03 Oct. 2013. Sec. 2.6

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Author of the *Apostolic Constitutions* is unknown.

<sup>24</sup> Romans 14. It seems that Tertullian and the *Apostolic Constitutions* conclude that a Christian should abstain from philosophy and pagan literature because it is a stumbling block to new and young believers as the food offered to idols. Just as all things are



abstain from philosophy because what it leads to, not what it is. Thus it can be concluded that the large majority of the Early Church supported the concept of plundering the Egyptians, and that those who most opposed it, did so for the sake of those who were weak in their faith being led astray by heresies.

But in order to fully understand the concept of plundering the Egyptians we must understand certain theological constructs in which the early church, particularly Augustine, understood the world. These theological concepts are accepted both by the majority of Protestants and Catholics and will help us better understand the idea of plundering the Egyptians.

The Church realizes that God created all things good, but that man fell in his wanting to be God. When man fell, he could not have committed the fall out of an absence of good, cause that would logically lead to either 1. God creating evil or 2. God being dualistic in nature being as both good and evil. So if man did not fall in absence of good, how did he fall. As referenced earlier, Man fell in a twisting of that which is good. Evil is thus a privation of good. The world is then to be understood in the revelation of this knowledge.

Man has received from this fall a sinful nature. His knowledge is in a sense dimmed. It cannot know God, for it traded God for the created objects. Again, it twisted that which was created good and worshiped it. Man is broken, and it knows it. Even the Disney movie Frozen recognizes this truth. The movie depicts love, not as a wonderful experience devoid of hurt and pain, rather it depicts it as sacrificing for one another constantly, knowing that they are, in the words of Christof's troll family, a fixer upper! Man is broken, in need of fixing.

The story of Scripture thus informs us of the redemptive work of Christ. Christ's revelation as the incarnate logos in the world is the lens through which we view the harmony of human and divine nature. This is why one looks to the Scriptures to inform himself of the understanding of culture, media, philosophy, etc. Thomas Aquinas, the Eternal Father of the Catholic church stated in his *Summa Theologica*, "It was necessary for man's salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God besides philosophical science built up by human reason. Firstly, indeed, because man is directed to God, as to an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason: "The eye hath not seen, O God, besides Thee, what things Thou hast prepared for them that wait for Thee" (Is. 66:4). But the end must first be known by men who are to direct their thoughts and actions to the end. Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation."<sup>25</sup> Aquinas begins his *Summa Theologica* with understanding divine revelation, which he says is necessary to understand all else. The Holy Scriptures then are the lens through which we know how to understand the world, how we understand philosophy, how we understand media, and how we understand the whole of culture. Thomas later states in the *Summa*, "But sacred doctrine makes use even of human reason, not, indeed, to prove faith (for thereby the merit of faith would come to an end), but to make clear other things that are put forward in this doctrine."<sup>26</sup> Again, according to Aquinas, Human reason is to clarify what is

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permitted for Paul to do, such as eating food offered to idols according to Romans 14, he does not do all things for the sake of others.

<sup>25</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas. *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*. London: Burns, Oates & Washburne, 1920. Print. Question I. Article I.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Question I. Article VIII.

put forward in the Holy Scriptures, but it is not to be used prove faith.

Therefore from this we must understand that culture, philosophy, media are not tools used to prove the existence of God to the world. It is not an avenue to spread faith, rather it is used to show the world the triune God. This is the apologetic: God's triune work in the world. We understand that Sin is a privation of good. We understand that in order for fallen man to understand God, Divine revelation is necessary. Then from this we can see that with Divine Revelation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, one can thus act in a restored manner. Those who find their redemption in the Triune God realize that those things which they did in rebellion against God, they can now do in allegiance to him. By entering into a union with Christ they receive the guidance to understand the world and the things of it. This I believe is the Christian apologetic: acting in union with the Triune God.

When the Church Fathers speak of plundering the Egyptians, there is always one continuous theme: that through the Spirit we better understand and use the culture or natural order of the world. This tracks well with Irenaeus' recapitulation theory. The story of man's reconciliation back to God is a story of man receiving back that likeness which he first had in Adam yet lost with the fall. As man fell in the Garden of Eden, losing the Spirit which allowed fellowship with God, so the Savior, beget of the Father, became incarnate, lived a perfect life as the perfect image and exact likeness of God, died, and rose again from the garden tomb reconciling man and restoring fellowship and the Spirit to mankind. This theological construct is thus called recapitulation. Recapitulation is the idea that the entirety of human history and God's sovereignty is to bring humanity back to its original state of perfection, and even more than that grow humanity into something greater. This is at the core of Irenaeus' theology. Adam, who was formed by the hands of God, fell, but God took him as a child and used his fall as a means of growth, formation, and the receiving of true life. As Irenaeus frequently stresses, God's creative hands did not stop their work after man was formed, but they continued and still continue in the work of justifying, sanctifying, and one day glorifying man.<sup>27</sup> Thus the Triune God's hands are still at work in us the Church. His work is not done.

We know that in salvation, the Spirit is given to man as the down payment. The Spirit was thus given to mankind to magnify the Son to those who have faith, for as John 15 states, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." Thus the Spirit magnifies Christ, and Christ displays the nature of the Father. We know that the Son is the exact image and likeness of the father, and through the Spirit we are being made into that image. We have the faculties now through the Spirit to be in union with the Father. Thus all things which we do have a new life; they have a renewed life. That which was broken in a privation of good before our salvation, now become a means of grace and goodness in our life. There is no sacred and secular, there is only sacred. A new nature received through the Spirit encapsulates the entirety of one's life. There is then no division between spiritual and unspiritual.

Thus we can see that those idols which we served before Christ are melted down and are to be rebuilt through the Spirit. As in the Exodus account we read, "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *manner of* workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all *manner of* workmanship." This is the first time the Bible records the Spirit indwelling a servant of God. This is beautiful, for it shows that when the Israelites found their

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<sup>27</sup> Wingren, Gustaf. Man and the Incarnation: A Study in the Biblical Theology of Irenaeus. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959. Print.

salvation from the Egyptians, the gods which caused their bondage were then used to worship Yahweh. When the Israelites plundered the Egyptians, the Spirit and divine revelation of God was necessary to understand how to use the plundered gold correctly. This is our apologetic. We have the Scriptures, we have the Spirit, now let us go into culture and do things in the way they were intended to. Those things which help us in bondage, those things which were our idols, can now through the Spirit be used to worship the Triune God. In light of this, the apologetic to engage culture is not to try and prove our faith through culture, rather it is show a fixed or redeemed humanity; a humanity that utilizes nature for its intended purpose through the Spirit. There truly is no way to prove faith, as Aquinas stated, we can only strengthen faith. Thus when we give an apologetic through culture, the apologetic is simply doing those things a culture does in the correct way. While those who do not have the Spirit, do cultural things with a broken nature, those with the Spirit do things with a fixed nature. Lewis explains this in his essay “Christian Apologetics,”

What we want is not more little books about Christianity, but more little books by Christians on other subjects — with their Christianity latent. You can see this most easily if you look at it the other way round. Our Faith is not very likely to be shaken by any book on Hinduism. But if whenever we read an elementary book on Geology, Botany, Politics, or Astronomy, we found that its implications were Hindu that would shake us. It is not the books written in direct defence of Materialism that make the modern man a materialist; it is the materialistic assumptions in all the other books. In the same way, it is not books on Christianity that will really trouble him. But he would be troubled if, whenever he wanted a cheap popular introduction to some science, the best work on the market was always by a Christian. The first step to the re-conversion of this country is a series, produced by Christians, which can beat the *Penguin* and the *Thinkers Library* on their own ground.<sup>28</sup>

Lewis here is making the statement that Culture is at the disposal of the Christian. He wants Christian apologists to realize that the greatest way to bring people back to Christ is by engaging the culture. He desires for the great Christian minds to not only write on theology but to write on all subjects such as science, math, geology, history, astronomy, etc. Lewis was himself converted, not through great apologetic works, but from the children’s fiction of George Macdonald. Lewis was engaged as a young atheist in his field of literature, by a man who was the best at what he did, by a man who was a Christian. Lewis was drawn to Christianity by a Christian who had engaged culture, and this is what Lewis believed to be the key to Christian revival. Lewis’ stepson, Douglas Gresham, stated Lewis’ vision for Christianity and culture this way, “Jack (C.S. Lewis) never wanted *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to be presented or thought of as a ‘Christian book.’ Jack said that we don't need more people writing ‘Christian books,’ what we need is more Christians writing good books. I think he was absolutely right’ and we don't need more people making ‘Christian movies.’ What we need is more Christians making good movies.”<sup>29</sup> This advice depicts a beautiful image of what Christianity should look like. Christianity today, and when the Church Fathers lived, has always adhered to a set of core doctrines and beliefs. It is then the duty of a Christian to engage the culture as a man dressing himself. A man’s personhood does not change based on what he wears, but what he wears allows him to engage with those he calls his friends. If a Christian loves science, let him dress himself in observation, hypothesis, and experimentation to engage the scientific community; if a Christian finds interest in movie production, let him dress himself in cinematography as a means of engaging Hollywood, and if a Christian loves fiction, let him dress himself in a rich plot, intricate characters, and beautiful scenery in order to approach the minds of teenagers.

With this knowledge, let us return to Niebuhr’s systems. I believe the Church Fathers and the Scriptures do not promote Christ against culture and Christ of culture as viable options for church growth

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<sup>28</sup> Lewis, C. S. *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970. Print.

<sup>29</sup> "A Literature Lesson from Professor Lewis." *Crosswalk*. Web. 05 Nov. 2013. <<http://www.crosswalk.com/11624036/>>.

and a vibrant faith. Although, there are certain times the church should be against culture, perhaps the same way Tertullian was. Christians should be against culture when they know it will cause a brother to sin. If my young brother in Christ was an alcoholic before finding Christ, I should not think it good for me to invite him to a wine tasting. But again, this is easily done by knowing the weaknesses of those you call brothers. This sensitivity again starts with the Spirit, who is our Guide.

Christ of culture as stated at the beginning of the lecture allows culture to dictate Christ. This radically opposes the story of the Bible and the theology of the Church Fathers. God, through the Spirit and the illumination of His Word, determines the true faith, the orthodox faith. The person of Christ cannot be contingent on culture, for when we do this we lose Christ. Like Schleiermacher and many of his contemporaries, we will lose an orthodox faith, if we have a Christ of culture.

Therefore, I believe that the only viable options for growth and a vibrant faith are Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ transforming culture. Perhaps it is all of these. Christ is above culture, Christ is in paradox with culture, and yet Christ transforms culture as well. All these systems are viable, because one thing is true. Divine Revelation and the work of the Spirit is necessary to truly understand culture. Again, the purpose of engaging culture is not to prove faith, but to show faith. It is not to actually to fix the entirety of culture, but to show culture fixed humanity. This is what God has revealed to us, this is the Gospel: that the triune God works in and through us to bring us unto Himself. We do not work to Him, He has come down to us. Christ has redeemed humanity, let us thus show this in all we do. Let us join with the Church Fathers in one Spirit, in one Faith, and plunder the gold which is our Father God's. Let us through the work of the Spirit build a beautiful tabernacle in the city of God. And let the world see redeemed humanity. Let the world see God in us.

Thank You.