

A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People.

# MISHKAN

Issue 80, 2019



IMAGINATION

## Contents:

C.S. Lewis and Jewish Imagination

Bezalel and God's Gifts in the Old Testament

Imagination and Critique in the Work of Johann Georg Hamann

# MISHKAN

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# MISHKAN

A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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Dear Readers,

We hope you had a happy Hanukkah and a merry Christmas. We apologize for the lateness of the publication due to unforeseen circumstances. This Mishkan issue centers around the power and possibilities of imagination and art in the bible, and in history.

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome our new book reviewer, Stan Meyer, whose reviews will continue to be featured in this space.

May these articles be a source of information, of inspiration, and of encouragement for you in using the gifts He has bestowed upon you.

Wishing you a blessed new year!

*Caspari Center staff*

Jerusalem, January 2019

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# **C. S. Lewis and the Jewish Imagination**

**Andrew Barron with Tirzah Walker**

## **Acknowledgments**

The Wade Center at Wheaton College is a remarkable research center for all things C. S. Lewis. Thank you to Laura Schmidt and Elaine Hooker for their encouragement and enthusiasm.

Thanks to my extraordinary friend Dr. Bev Jamison whose expertise in Mathematics and Statistics makes visible that which seems invisible and ambiguous.

God made man because He loves stories.

Elie Wiesel

Storytelling is the essential human art — it's how we understand who we are.

Bryan Cranston

The only two things that can satisfy the soul are a person and a story, and even a story must be about a person.

GK Chesterton

## Background

I encountered C. S. Lewis in 1981. I was entering graduate school and was proud to be Jewish. I was pompously indifferent to spiritual things. As an astronomy student, the vastness and complexity of the universe both excited and depressed me. I remember wondering, if I was a speck of dust in an otherwise colossal and uncaring universe, did anything matter?

I don't recall the circumstances, but a peer gave me Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, an allegory of Lewis's theological conception of Heaven and Hell. I had never read anything like it before; I was a science student, and allegory was foreign terrain – I became curious.

The narrator in the book finds himself in a city that seems grey and ancient, where he meets people looking to go to another place. Eventually, they find a place that is "dense." When they walk on the grass, they experience pain; a leaf is too heavy for them to lift.

I asked my friend to explain the story. She told me that Lewis was suggesting that our reality is the "Shadowland," or a preparation for an alternate and ultimate reality. Heaven is the real reality: what we experience before is only half-real. Presently, we are caught in a kind of waiting room for home and we are homesick. As a Jew, I was intrigued by this concept — I knew our people's history of exile and homelessness.

I felt oddly warmed by Lewis's writing. He made the philosophical and weighty more accessible. His words were intense and vivid, yet playful. I could relate to what he was saying and felt simultaneously loved and yet unnerved by the way he seemed to be able to tap into my own yearning and loneliness.

As I read Lewis, I found a strange friend.

During this time, I found out that Lewis was married to a Jew who was also a Christian. I didn't know what that meant. Her name was Joy Davidman, and I found her book *Smoke on the Mountain*. Lewis wrote the introduction:

In a sense, the converted Jew is the only normal human being in the world. To him, in the first instance, the promises were made, and he has availed himself of them. He calls Abraham his father by hereditary rights as well as by divine courtesy. He has taken the whole syllabus in order, as

it was set; eaten the dinner according to the menu. Everyone else is, from one point of view, a special case dealt with under emergency regulations.<sup>1</sup>

Reading this only reinforced my ambivalence about him. I was intrigued and repulsed. I had heard that Lewis's *Mere Christianity* was very popular, so I went to the library. I didn't want to be seen on campus with the book, so I just read the first section there among the shelves. I clearly remember this sentence: "There is something above and beyond the ordinary facts of men's behavior, and yet quite definitely real — a real law, which none of us made — but which we find pressing on us."<sup>2</sup>

Around the same time, I picked up the book *God and the Astronomers* by Robert Jastrow. In it, he writes:

For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the Power of Reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the final peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.<sup>3</sup>

I suddenly knew I could not continue to be indifferent to spiritual matters.

I moved for work and another school and was invited to a Bible study where I met Jews who embraced Jesus and still called themselves Jewish. I was incredulous.

Lewis, like me, was struggling to be an atheist while making sense of the world. In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis says that

people who are naturally religious find difficulty in understanding the horror of such a revelation. Amiable agnostics will talk cheerfully about 'man's search for God.' To me, as I then was, they might as well have talked about the mouse's search for the cat.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, introduction to *Smoke on the Mountain: An Interpretation of the Ten Commandments*, by Joy Davidman (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 7.

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1943), 30.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1978), 116.

<sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1955), 220.



Like Lewis himself, I had encountered another reality that I could not ignore. It led me to re-examine my beliefs, read the texts of my people, and eventually see Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world.

Over the years, Lewis's writings have become a faithful companion to me; they still manage to make me feel both at home and homesick at the same time. As McGrath reflects: "Our own story is now seen to be part of a much bigger story, which both helps us understand how we fit into a greater scheme of things, and discover the difference we can make."<sup>5</sup> I see Lewis as a guide, helping me to figure out how my story fits into the grand narrative. He is still a strange sort of friend.

### **Introduction and Purpose of the Project**

Lewis surprised me once again while I was doing research on the beliefs, experiences, and ideals of a group of Jewish people in North America who follow Jesus. From June 1–December 1, 2013, I organized a broad study of Messianic Jews in North America as a follow-up to a similar study done in 1983 by Jews for Jesus (JFJ), the organization for which I work.<sup>6</sup> The 2013 study involved a sample of 1,567 respondents and, like its predecessor, sought to give a picture of the evolving messianic movement.

The quantitative questions I posed to the participants covered age, family background, education, religious observance, and vocation. The qualitative questions I asked addressed experiences in personal journeys and the impact of their individual faith decisions in relation to their friends, families, and communities.

I asked this group, "What books or movies influenced you in your spiritual formation?" The results surprised me. C. S. Lewis was the best-represented author of influence across all the age groups.<sup>7</sup> This led me to wonder why. I wanted to know what it is about Lewis and his work that resonates with the Jewish mind.

The question of Lewis's influence led me to undertake further theoretical and empirical study. I designed and completed a survey of 145 Jewish believers in Jesus in

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<sup>5</sup> Alistair McGrath, "Enchanting Faith: The Chronicles of Narnia and the Power of Myth," ABC Religion and Ethics, 8 Jun 2016, accessed March 12, 2018, <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2016/06/08/4477957.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Barron and Bev Jamison, "A Profile of North American Messianic Jew," *Mishkan* 73 (Jerusalem: Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> See Chart A in Appendix A.

North America, which informed and inspired my theoretical research on the Jewish imagination. These people were responders from the 2013 survey. I surveyed the 1,567 respondents and 145 responded.

From my multifaceted study, I want to suggest that the connection Lewis has with my Jewish people lies in the power of story, remembrance, and imagination. There is something powerfully familiar — a kinship of story — that vibrates deep within the collective imagination of the Jewish people. There is something about Lewis’s writing style and approach that touches this imagination. One respondent was particularly apt: “...there is a similar spirit, a kindred way of thinking, a desire for depth of wisdom, often through allegory, that I find comfortingly familiar.”

In the pages of Lewis’s writings, these Jewish people find a friendly and welcoming-spirit; they find a storyteller who seeks and articulates truth.

To show that the connection between Lewis and my Jewish people lies in the power of story, remembrance, and imagination, this paper will present a theoretical analysis of the Jewish imagination, utilizing the work of Brevard Childs, Rabbi Jill Jacobs, and Jacob Neusner. It will also weave the theoretical investigation of the Jewish imagination together with the results of my empirical survey. The first part will present a summary of my research survey (the full results and methodology of which is recorded in the appendix); the second part will use my research findings as the impetus to examine the Jewish imagination.

### **PART I: Research Study<sup>8</sup>**

Following my initial study of 1,567 Jewish believers in Jesus, I did a follow-up study to further investigate the influence of Lewis. I designed a survey consisting of four questions. The survey had 145 respondents. I used grounded theory. This is a method from Creswell’s *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Thus, as I collected, recorded, and coded the data, I sought to move beyond the data to “generate or discover a theory” beyond the simple description of the respondents’ appreciation of Lewis.<sup>9</sup> I wanted to understand the essence of the respondents’ appreciation of Lewis and provide meaningful language to their experiences. I also wanted to stimulate discussion on how

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<sup>8</sup> Full results available in Appendix B.

<sup>9</sup> Creswell, 63.

to utilize Lewis in communicating faith in Jesus to my people. I hope this research will be the beginning of that conversation.

In my survey I asked the following questions:

1. Age?
2. Was the writing of C. S. Lewis meaningful to you as you considered the Gospel and/or since becoming a believer in Yeshua?
3. If yes, what was it about his writing that moved you or continues to influence you?
4. C. S. Lewis seems to be overrepresented as an influencer among Jewish believers in Yeshua of all ages. Why do you think this is?

The responses to the first two questions revealed Lewis's wide appeal across all ages, both before and after becoming a believer in Yeshua. The respondents ranged in age from 18–65+, with the largest proportion of the respondents coming from the 50–64 age group. While some of the respondents indicated that Lewis was influential while they were considering the gospel (especially the respondents who were in the 18–29, 30–39, and 40–49 age groups), most of the respondents indicated that Lewis became more meaningful after they became a believer in Jesus. *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Mere Christianity* were by far the most commonly referenced of Lewis's works.<sup>10</sup>

While diverse, the responses to the third and fourth questions revealed common themes and significant statements.<sup>11</sup> Respondents found Lewis to be an intellectually serious yet accessible author who can convey deep and meaningful concepts in a way that is understandable and powerful. Many commented on his way of enlivening the imagination through story to communicate truth as part of the reason for his accessibility and popularity.

The results of my survey showed a deep affinity among respondents for the writings of Lewis; there was a connection between Lewis's writings and the way that the respondents saw the world. The connection many identified was based on the way that Jewish people embody and frame their experience in the world through story. We reflect deeply and rationally, and we are bound together by imagination, remembrance,

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<sup>10</sup> See Chart 4 in Appendix B.

<sup>11</sup> See Charts 6 and 7 in Appendix B for a breakdown of thematic answers to Questions 3 and 4 across all age groups. See Charts 8–17 in Appendix B for thematic answers to Questions 3 and 4 broken down by age group.

and story. Thus, the respondents reported finding an associated outlook on the world in the pages of Lewis.

## **PART II: The Jewish Imagination and C. S. Lewis**

### *The Example of Exodus: The Power of Story and Remembering the Story in Jewish Experience*

The story of the Jewish people is a narrative that claims religious truth, thereby shaping what I and others have termed the Jewish Imagination.

Ari Zivotofsky states in his article, "Perspectives on Truthfulness in the Jewish Tradition": "The value of truth permeates the fabric of Judaism both legally and philosophically."<sup>12</sup> And that truth, as others have noted, is primarily accessed and transmitted through the medium of story, which ignites and informs the Jewish Imagination.

In reflecting on this, scholars articulate how narrative patterns work to shape our understanding of the present and what will happen in the future. Reporter Neil Midgley commented ironically that "the Jewish imagination is paranoia, confirmed by history."<sup>13</sup> Thus, past events in Jewish history form a narrative paradigm for present events; the events of the past are a model by which the present is understood and lived. This pattern helps the Jewish people to think appropriately about the present.<sup>14</sup> In other words, stories create a lived paradigm, an Imagination, which is formative and animates life in the present.

In his book *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, Old Testament scholar Brevard Childs defines this relationship between Jewish history, remembrance, and tradition, calling it actualization. He cites the events recorded in Exodus as an example of this relationship:

Actualization is the process by which a past event is contemporized for a generation removed in time and space from the original event. When later Israel responded to the continuing imperative of her tradition through

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<sup>12</sup> Ari Zivotofsky, "Perspectives on Truthfulness in the Jewish Tradition," in *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*. 42.3 (June 1993): 267.

<sup>13</sup> Neil Midgley, "The Story of the Jews, BBC Two, review," *The Telegraph*, September 2, 2013, accessed August 14, 2017. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/tv-and-radio-reviews/10279886/The-Story-of-the-Jews-BBC-Two-review.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Judaism When Christianity Began* (Knox Press: London, 1962), 80.

her memory, that moment in historical time likewise became an Exodus experience. Not in the sense that later Israel again crossed the Red Sea... Rather, Israel entered the same redemptive reality of the Exodus generation. Later Israel, removed in time and space from the original event, yet still in time and space, found in her tradition a means of transforming her history into redemptive history. Because the quality of time was the same, the barrier of chronological separation was overcome.<sup>15</sup>

Childs roots the continuing power of narrative and story in the Old Testament. According to Childs, part of the Jewish Imagination is that the redemptive events in Jewish history do not come to an end; they are contemporary for each generation. Childs argues that these events are not stationary.

An example of this can be seen in Deuteronomy 26:6, when the Israelites are instructed to recall the story of the Exodus, in which they are told to say: "But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labor." The experience of the people in Egypt in the past is made present. By telling the story and remembering the events, Israel enters the experience of the past in the present. The story of the Exodus is to be remembered as a present redemptive reality. It is to be actualized as the past event is made contemporary for present generation.

This actualization does not appear to be accidental. Another example related to the Exodus narrative is from Exodus 13:8: "And thou shalt tell thy son in that day, saying: It is because of that which the LORD did for me when I came forth out of Egypt." The Israelites are intentionally told to imagine that they are being redeemed from bondage and slavery to Pharaoh. The story is to be told personally, as if it happened to us.

The Passover Haggadah says: "In every generation, a man is bound to regard himself as though he personally had gone forth from Egypt."<sup>16</sup> Just as in Deuteronomy 26:6, remembering the Passover is more than an intellectual acknowledgement of something that happened in the past; it is the past brought into the present and made

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<sup>15</sup> Brevard Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 85.

<sup>16</sup> M. Pesachim 116b. Exodus 12:14.

alive as the redemptive reality is encountered. And, thus, it shapes the way the present is to be understood.

The prophet Ezekiel casts his current audience in the same role as the Exodus generation. In Ezekiel 20, the prophet confronts the elders of Israel because “the detestable practices” (20:4) did not end. As Risa Levitt Kohn describes, for Ezekiel, “the current exile does not simply recall the travails of the exodus from Egypt; instead, it is an extension of that initial event.”<sup>17</sup>

The verb “to remember” occurs over 200 times in the Old Testament. And, as Childs says, “The act of remembrance is not a simple inner reflection, but involves an action, an encounter with historical events.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Childs argues that each generation of Jewish people reinterprets the same events in terms of its new encounter. This is where the Imagination kicks in. Thus, the people are called to place themselves in the past where God meets us as we remember. As Childs contends, “memory plays a central role in making Israel constantly aware of the nature of God’s benevolent acts as well as of her own covenantal pledge.”<sup>19</sup> Each generation of Jews is challenged to participate in this unfolding redemptive history; it is in the DNA of Jewish memory.

Thus, in the Old Testament, the past becomes the present through the enactment of the community’s narrative imagination, which then informs the way they imagine (understand) the world. As Jacob Neusner describes the Jewish Imagination, it is “the presence of the past, the pastness of the present.”<sup>20</sup>

In analyzing the power of memory in contemporary Judaism, Neusner interprets this to mean that when we practice Judaism, we identify with that exile and redemption. It is as if “we ourselves were brought out.”<sup>21</sup> Neusner writes that Judaism

found in Scripture’s words paradigms of an enduring present, by which all things must take their measure; they possessed no conception

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<sup>17</sup> Risa Levitt Kohn, “‘As Though You Yourself Came Out of Egypt’: The Ethos of Exile in Ezekiel” *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 3 (2014), accessed August 4, 2017, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267696232\\_As\\_Though\\_You\\_Yourself\\_Came\\_Out\\_of\\_Egypt\\_The\\_Ethos\\_of\\_Exile\\_in\\_Ezekiel](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267696232_As_Though_You_Yourself_Came_Out_of_Egypt_The_Ethos_of_Exile_in_Ezekiel)

<sup>18</sup> Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 88.

<sup>19</sup> Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 51.

<sup>20</sup> Neusner, *Judaism When Christianity Began*, 83.

<sup>21</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Judaism when Christianity was Born* (London: John Knox, 2002), 2.

whatsoever of the pastness of the past. Rabbinic Judaism invented an entirely new way to think about times past and to keep all time-past, present, and future-within a single framework... Not only so, but the paradigm obliterates distinctions between past, present, and future, between here and now and then and there. The past participates in the present, the present recapitulates the past, and the future finds itself determined, predetermined really, within the same free-standing structure comprised by God's way of telling time.<sup>22</sup>

Neusner expands this idea by describing Torah study as a “present tense” encounter with God. It triggers and stimulates the memory of the person reading the narrative. He calls Torah study an activity that is always in the present. It is not historical. In some way when you read the text it is as if you were standing at Sinai when Moses revealed the law.<sup>23</sup> The Imagination is activated.

Similarly, Rabbi Josh Levy, writing in the Jewish News, “As if each of us were brought out of Egypt,” takes this theme one step further as it relates to contemporary Jewish life:

To see ourselves as though we personally left Egypt is also to know that with our freedom came a set of obligations. We have a special concern for the stranger and for the vulnerable in society. To make our Seder a genuine re-enactment is also to use it as an opportunity to help others. If we are to say, ‘Let all who are hungry come and eat’ with integrity, we need to show it in our actions, by donating our chametz to a homeless shelter, or by supporting charities that help to feed the hungry. The enduring power of the Seder lies in our ability to connect with the experience of Exodus.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Jacob Neusner, “Paradigmatic versus Historical Thinking: The Case of Rabbinic Judaism,” *History and Theory* Vol. 36, No. 3 (Oct. 1997): 353–377.

<sup>23</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Judaism when Christianity was Born*, 15–20.

<sup>24</sup> Rabbi Josh Levy, “As if Each of Us was Brought out from Egypt,” Alyth, April 1, 2009, accessed August 14, 2017, <http://www.alyth.org.uk/sermons-writings/publication/article-as-if-each-of-us-was-brought-out-from-egypt/>.

Retelling the story of the outgoing from Egypt is not like reading a newspaper dated 1450 BCE — the process of going down to Egypt and coming out is individual and personal. It is transformative. Through remembering the past, one comes into the present and imagines themselves as a redeemed slave: “Tell your son on that day saying, ‘Because of this God acted for me when I came out of Egypt’” (Exodus 13:8).

In sum, the power of remembrance — which triggers the actualization by which the Old Testament becomes contemporary — is the foundation of the Jewish Imagination today. And what is primarily remembered is narrative. As Childs writes:

Each successive generation rewrites the past in terms of her own experience with the God who meets his people through the tradition. These successive layers cannot be subjective accretions covering the ‘real event.’ The remembered event [in the now] is equally a valid witness to Israel’s encounter with God as the first witness.<sup>25</sup>

This, as Neusner and others have described, is true in contemporary Judaism. We are a people shaped by story; the past is brought into the present and communicates truth.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs summarizes the role of memory well, saying: “Jews are a people of memory. Perhaps more than anything else, what binds Jews together is a shared collective narrative, preserved and developed through stories, teachings, and rituals. This elevates memory to the level of a commandment.”<sup>26</sup>

We know God and one another by sharing this and our story. Rushkoff makes an interesting point about this in relation to current communal practice: “The initiation to adult practice is not an act of faith, but a demonstration of literacy called a bar (or bat) Mitzvah.”<sup>27</sup> The initiation is a demonstration of narrative literacy wherein one demonstrates knowledge of the shared story.

### **C. S. Lewis, Story, and Imagination**

Throughout his works, Lewis harnessed the power of story. Alistair McGrath describes Lewis’s approach:

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<sup>25</sup> Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, 89.

<sup>26</sup> Rabbi Jill Jacobs, “I was Redeemed from Egypt,” *My Jewish Learning*, accessed September 12, 2017, <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/i-was-redeemed-from-egypt>.

<sup>27</sup> Douglas Ruchkoff, *The Truth about Judaism* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2003), xiii.



Lewis often articulates a way of 'seeing things' in terms of a 'myth' – a story about reality which invites us to partake imaginatively. The imagination embraces the narrative; reason consequently reflects on its contents. The appeal is not so much to cold logic, as to intuition and imagination, resting on an imaginative dynamic of discovery.<sup>28</sup>

Lewis understood the power of story and imagination in people's lives, in a way that differed from mere reason. In a letter to a friend, Lewis wrote: "No one is more convinced than I that reason is utterly inadequate to the richness and spirituality of real things: indeed, this is itself a deliverance of reason."<sup>29</sup>

Even in his works that are not strictly story, Lewis drew on common-sense illustrations which release faith from cultural context. He used lively, sensory-based language. His prolific use of imagery was designed to lead people on the road to apprehend meaning. He helps us grapple with concepts of good and evil and suffering and joy by engaging our imagination. Lewis touched people's minds, but he did it first by appealing to dream and fantasy. By this method, he taps into our instincts and feelings as well as our ability to reason, often simultaneously. As Peter Wehner describes, the idea is this, "imagination is the organ of meaning. Let me show you what is good and beautiful and true." He did all this using symbols and imagination. "All our truth," he said, "or all but a few fragments, is won by metaphor."<sup>30</sup>

When Lewis talks about the Trinity, he does not engage in creedal language or excluding jargon, but does so by drawing upon familiar word pictures. He talks about statues that cannot breathe or think. He is trying to engage his readers to think about the difference between begetting and creating. He does not assert creed but things that are already familiar.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Alister McGrath, "Telling the Truth through Rational Argument," *Christians in Parliament*, accessed September 2, 2017, <http://www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/uploads/Telling-the-Truth-through-Rational-Argument.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Wehner, "C. S. Lewis and the Power of Imagination," *Commentary*, November 21, 2013, accessed September 2, 2017, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/culture-civilization/history/c-s-lewis-and-the-power-of-imagination/>.

<sup>30</sup> Wehner, "Power of Imagination."

<sup>31</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1943), 138–9.

When Lewis writes about erotic love, he uses earthy and gritty word pictures: sandcastles are invaded by the incoming tide.<sup>32</sup> He talks about Eros like a “sudden twitch that reminds us we are really captive balloons.”<sup>33</sup> He describes the transcendence of passion along with his incredulity that this craving, “like any other appetite, tactlessly reveals its connections with such mundane factors as weather, health, diet, circulation, and digestion.”<sup>34</sup>

Getting back to some of his famous narratives, in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis offers what he called “imaginative welcome” to the Christian faith, telling the story of Christianity through symbolism and metaphor. Reflecting on its power, McGrath describes Lewis as touching a “‘narrative template’ embedded within the human soul as part of the created order.”<sup>35</sup> Lewis knew the power of the imagination and story as a medium through which truth could be told. In the next section, I will give an example that is particularly relevant and resonant to the Jewish people and Jewish experience.

### **The Intersection of Imagination: Joy and Home**

For Lewis, just as for contemporary Jews, story is not merely fantasy, but a medium through which one encounters truth. Lewis uses narrative in the same way the Jewish imagination points to narrative and our place in it as “home base.” And, in grasping truth, the imagination is also shaped by the story, so that it comes to anticipate and live out the truth of the story. Thus, in seeking to understand the intersection between Lewis and the Jewish imagination, it is essential to highlight points of intersection, namely joy and hope. Lewis is not making an argument as much as he is presenting an idea, one that happens to be particularly meaningful to Jews.

First, Lewis presents the idea of joy. In Jewish filmmaker Woody Allen’s *Stardust Memories* there is a telling scene that takes place in the central character’s apartment. He is with his girlfriend. She is reading on the floor as he eats and looks at her. Allen’s character narrates:

It was a Sunday and you knew summer was coming soon. We were just sitting around. I put on a record of Louis Armstrong. I happen to glance

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<sup>32</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), 134.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 142.

<sup>34</sup> Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 142.

<sup>35</sup> Alistair McGrath, “Enchanting Faith.”

over and I remember thinking to myself how terrific she was and how much I loved her. It was the combination of everything. The sound of the music and the breeze and how beautiful she looked to me. For one brief moment, everything seemed to come together perfectly and I felt happy. It was almost indestructible in a way. That simple moment of contact moved me in a very profound way.<sup>36</sup>

There is a deep wistfulness, a yearning in Allen's words, as if he wishes he could get back to that point in time and fears he might never do so.

Lewis described this same unfathomable yearning that is embedded in each of us and seeking its proper object, as a part of what it means to experience joy. Lewis wrote deliberately about joy and ultimately what it points us toward:

The first is itself the memory of a memory. As I stood beside a flowering currant bush on a summer day there suddenly arose in me without warning, and as if from a depth not of years but of centuries, the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery. It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me; Milton's 'enormous bliss' of Eden (giving the full, ancient meaning to 'enormous') comes somewhere near it. It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but desire for what? Before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse... withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased... In a sense, the central story of my life is about nothing else... The quality common to the three experiences... is that of an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction. I call it Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and Pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again... I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power,

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<sup>36</sup> *Stardust Memories*, directed by Woody Allen (United Artists, 1980). For clip see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zXm3z9nrN8>.

exchange it for all the pleasures in the world. But then Joy is never in our power and Pleasure often is.<sup>37</sup>

Lewis writes that “Joy is the serious business of heaven.”<sup>38</sup> He constantly appeals to another home, a place we long for. It is a longing that is deeply embedded in the Jewish Imagination but oriented in a different way. Psalm 137 says, “If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.” We are somewhere other than home. We were meant for another place. There is a tension between a lost place and a place of desired existence — this is the founding myth of my Jewish people.<sup>39</sup>

The crucial point of the Jewish Imagination is also the crucial point of Lewis’ imagination — the idea of home. For Joy Davidman, the American Jewish poet who would later marry Lewis, this homeward longing is what haunted her years as an atheist and drove her to Christianity. She explains:

There is a myth that has always haunted mankind, the legend of the Way Out... the door leading out of time and space into Somewhere Else. We all go out of that door eventually, calling it death. But the tale persists that for a few lucky ones the door has swung open before death, letting them through, perhaps for the week of fairy time which is seven long years on earth; or at least granting them a glimpse of the land on the other side. The symbol varies with different men; for some, the door itself is important; for others, the undiscovered country beyond it—the never-never land, Saint Brendan's Island, the Land of Heart's Desire. C. S. Lewis, whose *Pilgrim's Regress* taught me its meaning, calls it simply the Island. Whatever we call it, it is more our home than any earthly country.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), 16.

<sup>38</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (San Diego: Harvest, 1964), 92–93.

<sup>39</sup> Esther Benbassa and Jean-Christophe Attias, *The Jews and Their Future*. (New York: Zed Books, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> Joy Davidman, *These Found the Way; Thirteen Converts to Protestant Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951).

Our narrative imaginations are a kind of GPS that point us to this land. Meanwhile, we are in the car, repeatedly asking each other, “Are we there yet?” “There” is where joy lives.

Jewish exile and dispersion explain why there is a desire to belong to an ideal community in an ideal place. The feeling we have now is that we do not belong. We are in exile and we yearn to be connected in origin and belonging — this is the crucial point of the Jewish Imagination and what Lewis called joy. This yearning for a homeland has been the constant prayer and identity of my people since the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. The dispersion and the exile are realities which are made present through the stories of the past. Thus, we yearn for home. This yearning persists, for no other reason than Home, in its highest form, is elsewhere.

Home is a powerful theme in many of C. S. Lewis’s stories. Referring to a place in shadow — the sun shone somewhere else, but not here — Lewis identifies the “Shadowlands,” which is the “the waiting room of the world.” This is a preparation for the reality which comes in another world.

Jewish people tell stories so that we can know we are not alone; we tell stories of home while we are in-between. Lewis does not like the “in-between” time any more than we do. He too tells stories of being homeless and lonely. Almost all the children in the Narnia books are displaced or disconnected.

He does not like the spring, the in-between time that is neither hot nor cold — he wants the sun of summer. Lewis speaks powerfully of home as the “Other World” in our world, the Albion within Briton as he puts it in *That Hideous Strength*. He tells us of home (where we came from and where we are going again), but more importantly, he tells us of who was there, who is here and who will be at the end. He draws Old Testament language, thereby igniting the Jewish Imagination. When a Jewish girl reads about Lucy being a “Daughter of Eve,” she is familiar with that language. When Lewis speaks of “horses becoming winged creatures,” the Jewish reader knows that it refers to the notion of standing out, and when he tells us about home — the home promised in the Scripture — he draws our attention to that longing for a place we’ve never been.

As the Jewish Imagination is shaped and formed to inhabit a story, when Jews read Lewis, they enter the story and become active participants. We become Lucy and Edmund at the bully cousin’s house staring at the Narnian ship. We hear the music John hears and recognize the Island he is searching for. And when we read passages like, “all

Joy reminds. It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still about to be,"<sup>41</sup> we are given words to express how the home given to us is still not quite what we hoped for. We still, like all of humanity, long for a true home. In Lewis, we can enter into a story that makes sense, perhaps in a deeper, more tangible way than it does for his other readers. In the end, Lewis takes his imagination and understanding to show there is no better notion of home than Messiah Jesus. And as my research shows, his words have been persuasive and affirming to many Jewish people who have found home in Yeshua.

As Lewis writes at the end of *The Last Battle*:

It was the Unicorn who summed up what everyone was feeling. He stamped his right foot on the ground and neighed, and then cried: 'I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it til now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is because it sometimes looked a little like this.'<sup>42</sup>

### **Conclusion: Imagination and a new reality**

C. S. Lewis experienced an awakening: "Nearly all I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless."<sup>43</sup> It is precisely this "upside-down" awakening that we see reflected in my research. He taps into the conscious or even subconscious Jewish world view — the deepest part of our values — and he tells us to wake up! Jewish people, when they read Lewis are presented with this challenge: the reality of what is in Christ, which is like being in a "bright shadow as people with eyes of the heart enlightened, alert to the mystery of grace in the mundane, awake to God in the ordinary."<sup>44</sup> C. S. Lewis's view of a more real reality is of course found in Jesus' teaching, but whereas Jewish people might be resistant to reading the New Testament, they may readily find truth in Lewis's writings and be moved to find the original source of his stories.

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<sup>41</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), 78.

<sup>42</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Last Battle* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), 196.

<sup>43</sup> Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 170.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/in-bright-shadow-c-s-lewis-on-the-imagination-for-theology-and-discipleship>. Accessed April 26, 2018.

In Judaism the home is the Temple, the Kitchen is the altar, and the meal is the sacrifice. The ordinary tasks and the routines are a reconstruction of heaven on earth. Lewis would say that this is real, but not the real or ultimate reality. “Disciples may live in the shadowlands, but we “walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8), “as he is in the light” (1 John 1:7). To live as a disciple is to live in the bright shadow of Jesus Christ.”<sup>45</sup>

“For Lewis, waking is a way of describing one’s conversion, a coming to new life. The Christian life is all about wakefulness. Theology describes what we see when we are awake, in faith to the reality of God, and discipleship is the project of becoming *fully* awake to this reality and *staying* awake.” For Lewis a life in God was a life of continually waking up and remaining wakeful and attentive to reality.<sup>46</sup>

The concept in Judaism of Tikkun Olam — “repair of the world” or “construction for eternity” — is an aspiration to behave and act fruitfully and constructively. This Jewish value is the highest ideal across the Jewish religious spectrum. Liberal Jews have come to see it as social action. Religious Jews agree that the world needs repair, achieved through religious deeds. The value is the same in most Jewish people even though it is lived and worked out differently. The idea is that Jews bear responsibility not only for our welfare, but also for the welfare of others. As we focus on this repair we remain ambiguous about the big and uncertain questions that are not well developed in Judaism: the problem of evil, heaven and hell. I would venture that these are not considered ‘real’. What is real and what seems to be embedded in the Jewish heart is this longing for justice. We know that the world is not right and we are trying to make it more right. Judaism is the construction of heaven on earth — what is real is ‘The Sanctification of Life.’ Through education and hard work, we make our lives, the lives of others, and the world, what God intended it to be — holy. Judaism is not doctrine, but a labor of construction. Judaism’s imagination is that we are God’s partners in the continuing work of Creation.

Lewis not only embraces this reality, but takes it to a new level that challenges the very foundation of Jewish reality. “‘Make no mistake,’ (He) says, ‘if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Accessed April 15, 2018.

for.”<sup>47</sup> The real reality is our adoption into God’s family and to what is ultimately real: “Now the moment of prayer,” says Lewis, “is for me . . . the awareness, the reawakened awareness that this ‘real world’ and ‘real self’ are very far from being rock-bottom realities.”<sup>48</sup>

This is not unlike the words of Isaiah 52, which begin with the command to “Awake!” and moves into a picture of a new realm of reality.

Lewis’s imagination not only embraces the real, but the “real” real. Lewis’s imagination creates a natural kinship between the two reals. The overlap of imagination and story is seen in *Joy* and the longing for Home, expressed through story, remembrance, and imagination. Lewis knows how to get hold of and challenge the Jewish imagination. I believe that when Jewish people read Lewis he appeals to the center of Jewish experience.

We see a pattern of this among those I spoke to: it is Lewis’s intellectual rigor and accessibility, the way he tells truth through story. It is the way he looks for enduring truth rather than truths that are culturally bound that make his writings a potentially meaningful door to Narnia for my people:

The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things — the beauty, the memory of our own past — are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Lewis, (*Mere Christianity* [Glasgow: Collins, 1955], 158).

<sup>48</sup> Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*, 81.

<sup>49</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1966), pp. 4–5.



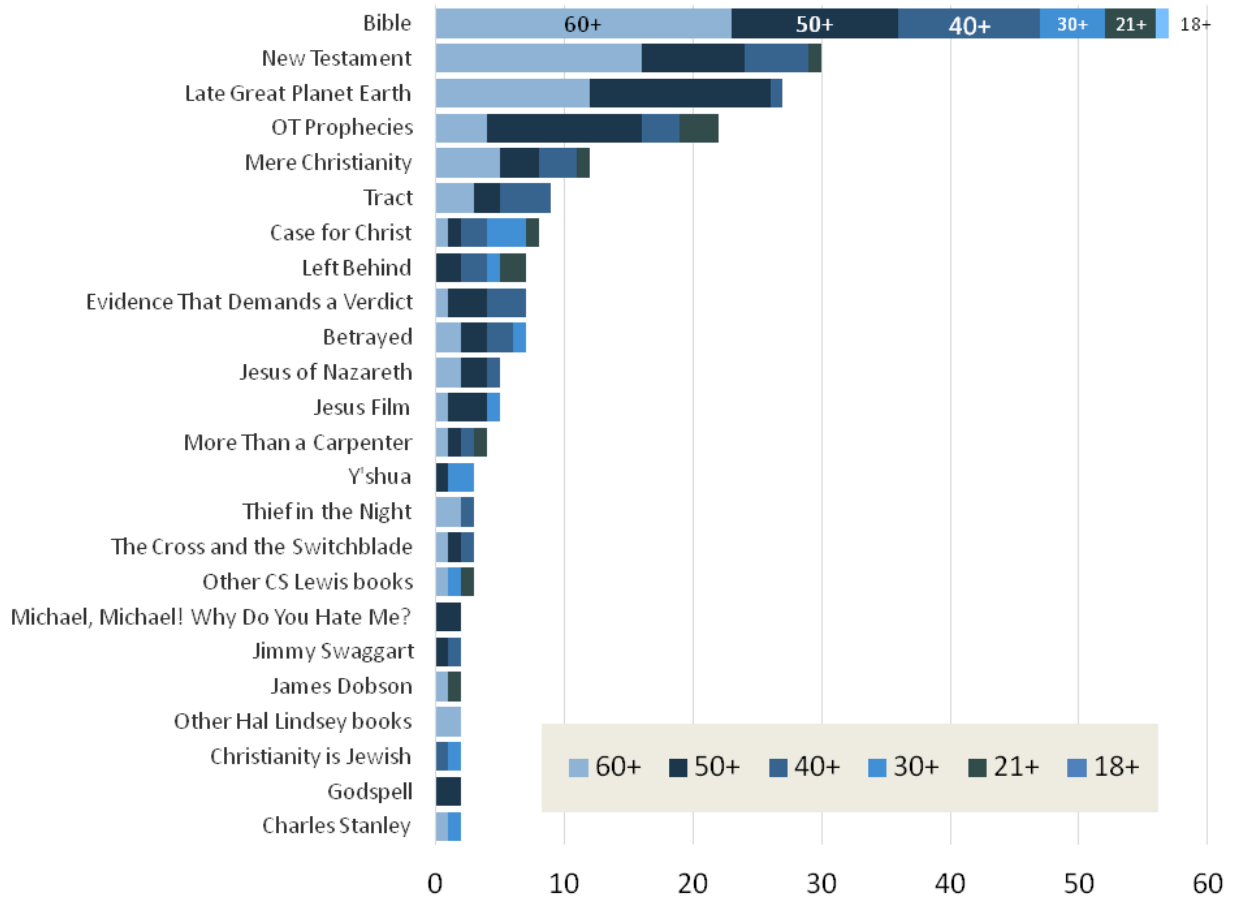
*Testament with him and challenged him to read it. Andrew used to work as a crew activity planner and orbit designer on the early Space Shuttle Missions. Andrew pioneered the work of Jews for Jesus in South Africa from 1989-1996. He can be reached at [andrew.barron@jewsforjesus.ca](mailto:andrew.barron@jewsforjesus.ca).*

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## APPENDIX A

Chart A gives the results from my 2013 study of Jewish believers in Jesus when asked: “What book or movie influenced you in your spiritual formation?”

Chart A



## APPENDIX B

### Research Design

#### Methodology

The methodology of this research study is best classified broadly as grounded theory. This type of methodology draws from John Creswell's *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Phenomenology looks to comprehend and understand the essences of experiences. This is done by collecting data on statements, meanings, themes, [and] general description of the experience. Grounded theory moves beyond this to "generate or discover a theory." I hoped that there would be an emergence of conceptual categories that would help me to understand why Lewis appeals to this group of Jewish people and how this might apply to Jewish people in general.

Since my previous study in 2013 already showed that, in general, the Messianic Jewish community in North America is more like the American Jewish community than the general U.S. population in demographics such as Jewish dispositions, education, and occupation, I wondered if Lewis's appeal could be assumed across both communities. The terminology of preference and religious observance levels among these Messianic Jews indicate an enduring identification with the Jewish people. The diversity of the Messianic Jewish community is akin to the diversity of the larger Jewish community. Messianic Jews are, in their temperaments, dispositions, and activities, part of this wider community. These Messianic Jews often seek out ways to be part of the wider Jewish community and to share in Jewish values.<sup>50</sup>

The theory is grounded in the data from participants who have experienced the writings of Lewis. I designed the survey simply so the data could be surveyed and scrutinized for key themes. As key themes arose, I categorized them. I expected that recurring statements and issues would emerge, while descriptive words would show patterns of beliefs, understandings, and ideals.

Results would then show how this group of people experienced Lewis so that codes and categories could emerge from the data, which would bring the data into a

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<sup>50</sup> Andrew Barron, "A Representation of the Beliefs, Experiences, and Ideals of a Group of Jewish People Who Believe in Jesus" (D. Min thesis, University of Toronto/Wycliffe College, 2017).

relationship with the respondents. I hoped that significant statements and clusters of meaning would occur through an ongoing time of reading, reflective writing, and interpretations.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

I was not attempting to conduct high-level academic research. Instead, these results are for popular consumption, and the results are based on this small sample. I assume that most who would be interested in this research are fans of Lewis's writings and are interested in understanding his influence. I could show that a significant minority were not influenced by Lewis. I was also not able to do similar research on people who are not Jewish and assumed that many of the answers would be similar.

The Jewish people are multifaceted and varied. We form many different natural groupings. My specific research focused on a small group of people and assumed their relation to the greater Messianic Jewish community and the American Jewish community as a whole. I felt that the number of respondents gave me an adequate representation. Those that I pursued for data were known to me and I tried to find a wide demographic. A limiting factor of my research was that I only focused on Jewish believers in Jesus and was only able to survey 145.

### **Research Design**

I asked four questions:

1. Age?
2. Was the writing of C. S. Lewis meaningful to you as you considered the Gospel and/or since becoming a believer in Yeshua?
3. What was it about his writing that moved you or continues to influence you?
4. C. S. Lewis seems to be overrepresented as an influencer among Jewish people of all ages. Why do you think this is?

I received answers from 145 people who defined themselves as Jewish believers in Jesus.

## Results

### Quantitative Results Question 1 and 2

Chart 1 below shows the age groups of the 145 respondents. I tried to find a balance in ages: 43% are under 50 and 57% are 50 and above.

**Chart 1**

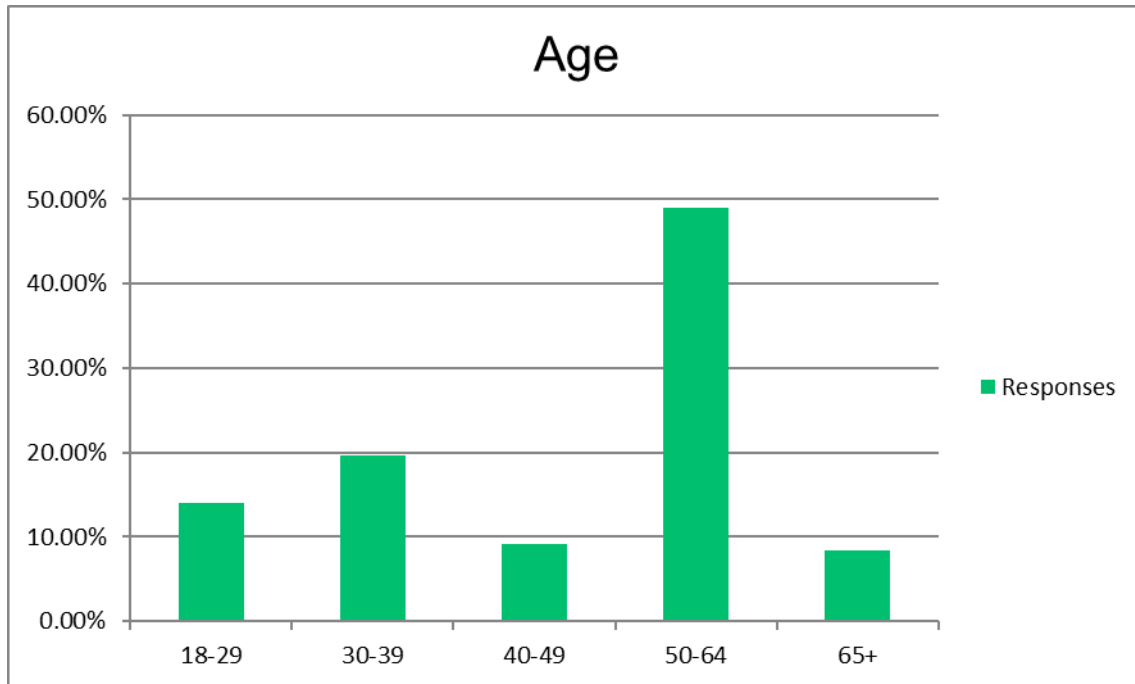
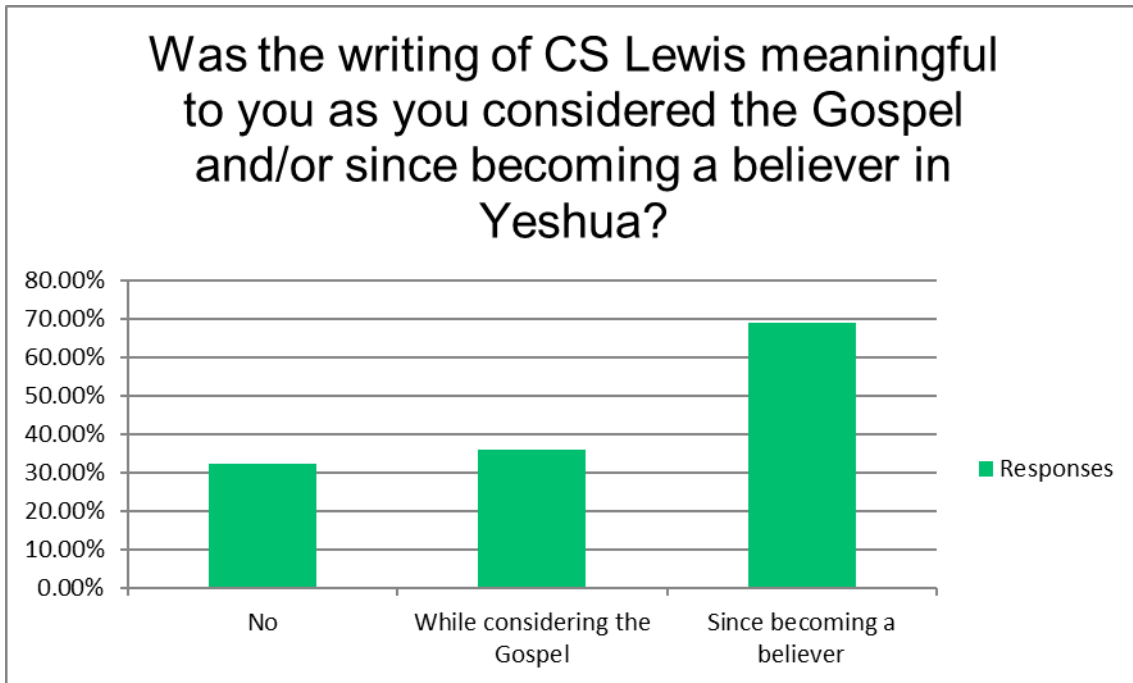


Chart 2 and 3 below asks about the influence of Lewis. Chart 2 shows all ages and Chart 3 gives a breakdown of ages. It is interesting to see the strength of Lewis among those under 40 and the strengthening of Lewis influence in those over 50.

**Chart 2**



**Chart 3**

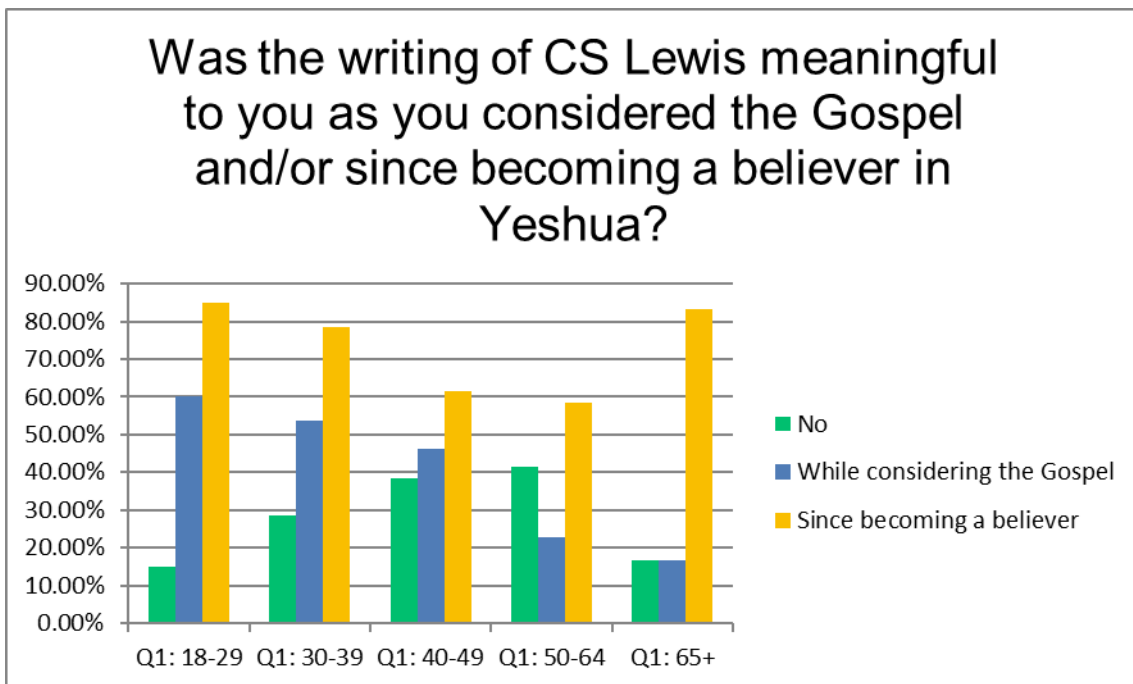
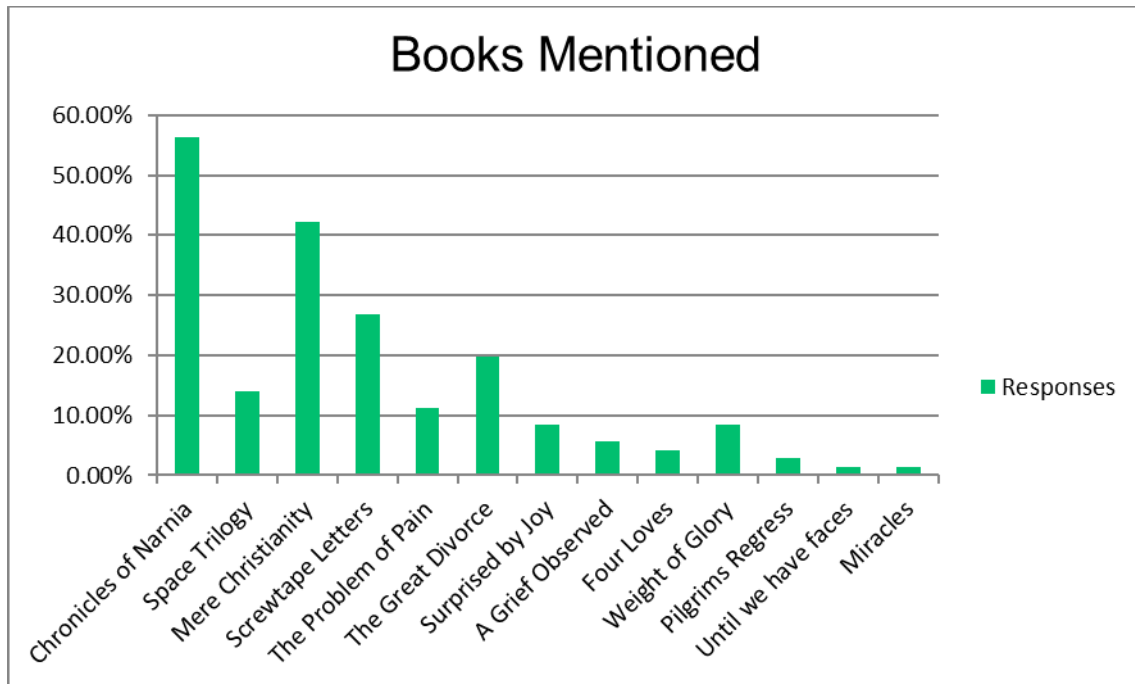


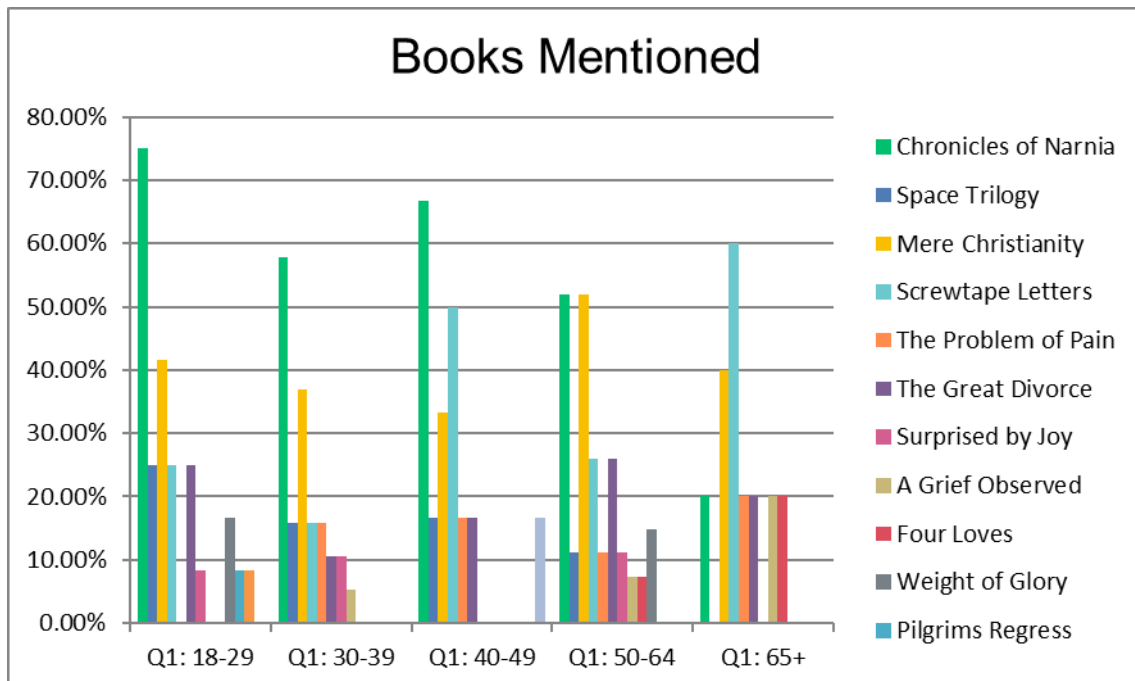
Chart 4 shows the specific influential writing of C. S. Lewis mentioned across all age groups. Chart 5 gives the same data broken down by age groups. *The Chronicles of*

*Narnia* are more popular in the younger group and *Mere Christianity* more popular in the older group.

**Chart 4**



**Chart 5**



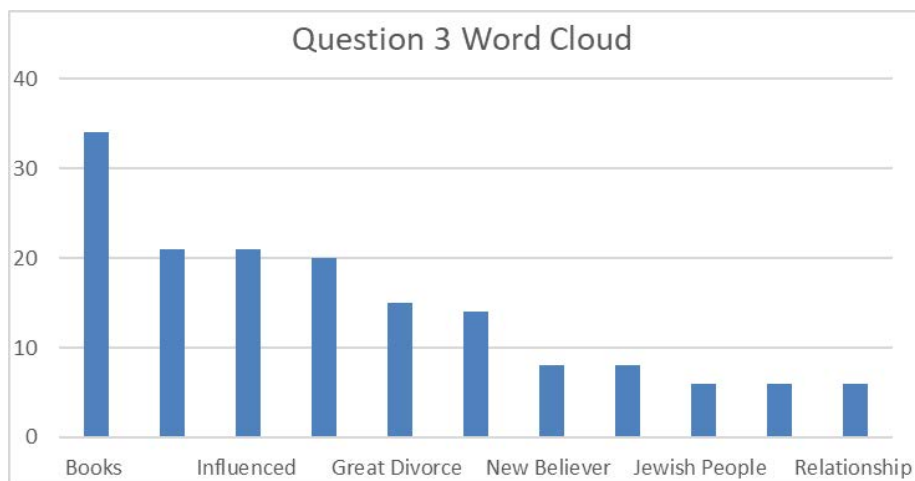
## Qualitative Results

### Question 3 and 4 Themes

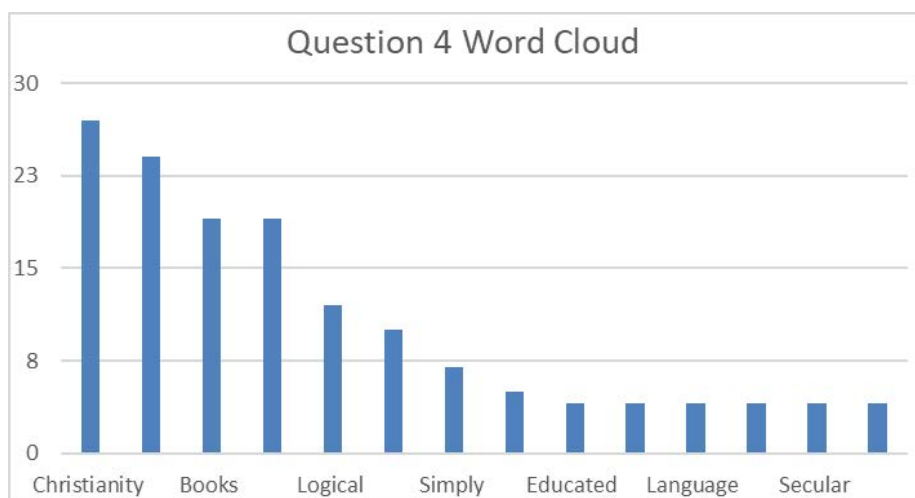
The final two questions are qualitative. Question 3 asks, “What was it about his writing that moved you or continues to influence you?” Question 4 asks, “C. S. Lewis seems to be over-represented as an influencer among Jewish people of all ages. Why do you think this is?”

Chart 6 and 7 show the thematic answers to Question 3 and 4 across all age groups. Charts 8-17 show thematic answers broken down by age group.

**Chart 6**

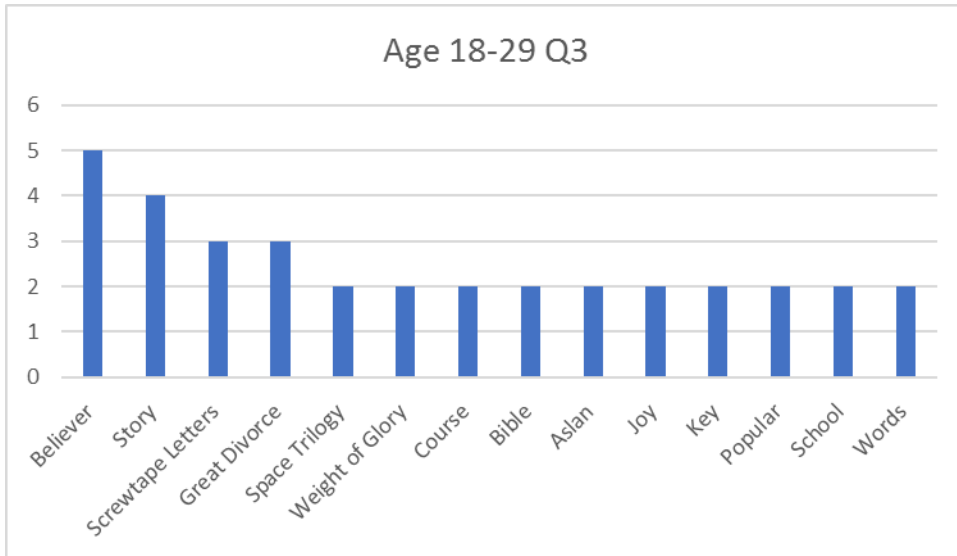


**Chart 7**

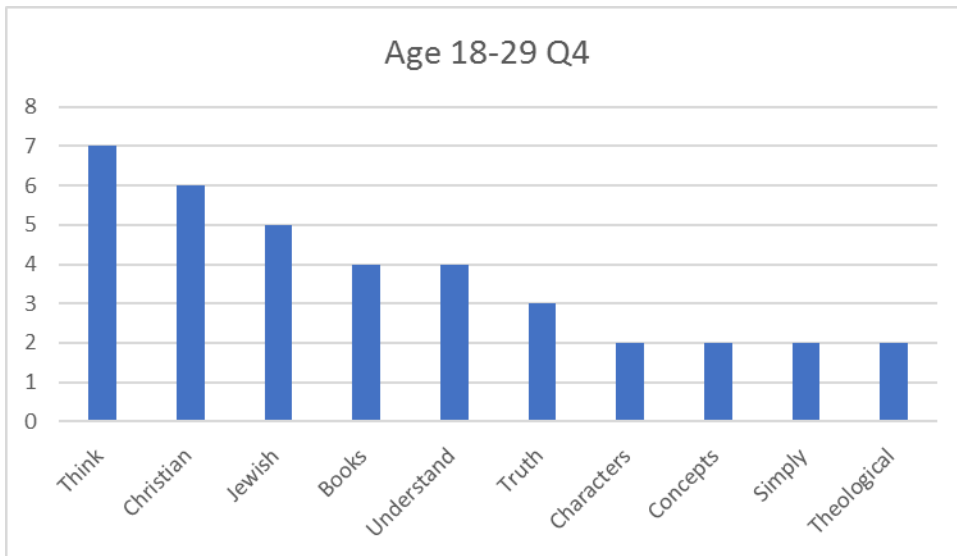




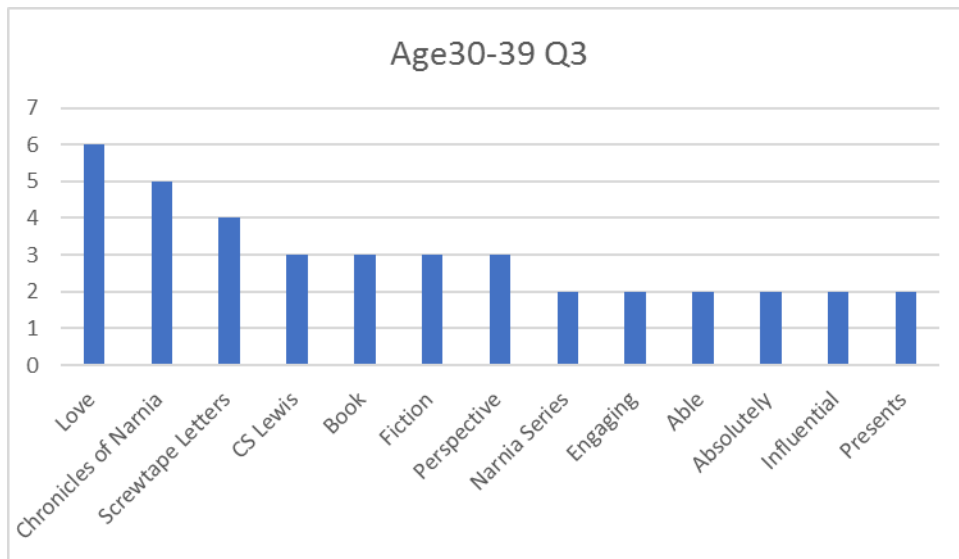
**Chart 8**



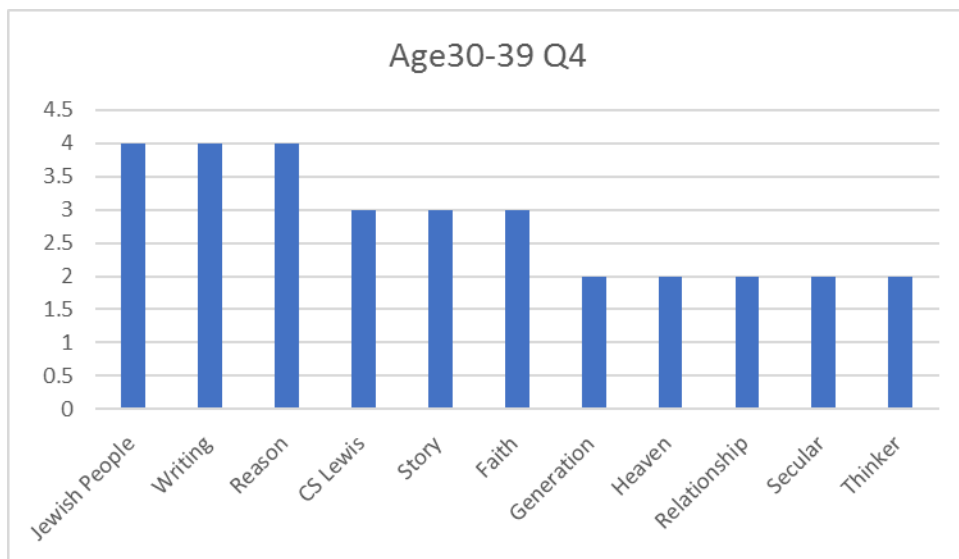
**Chart 9**



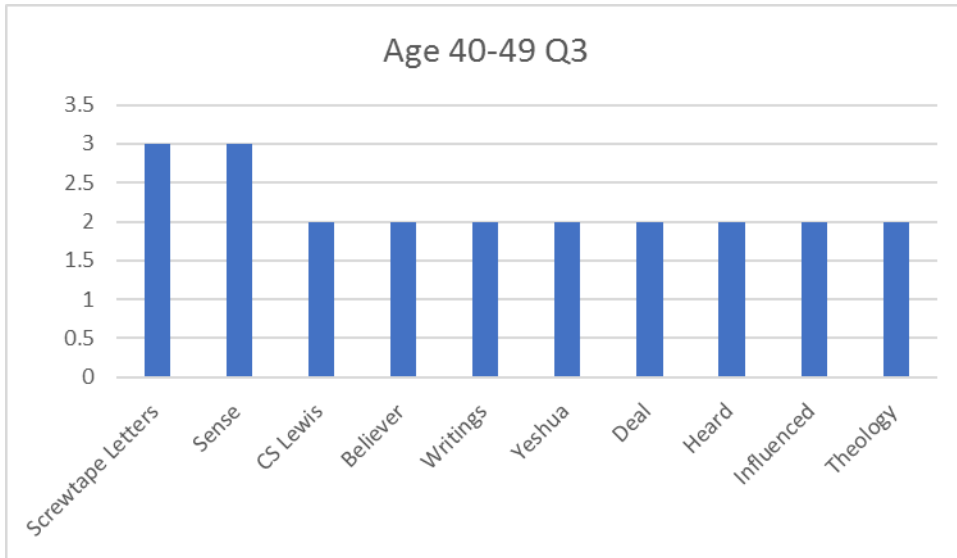
**Chart 10**



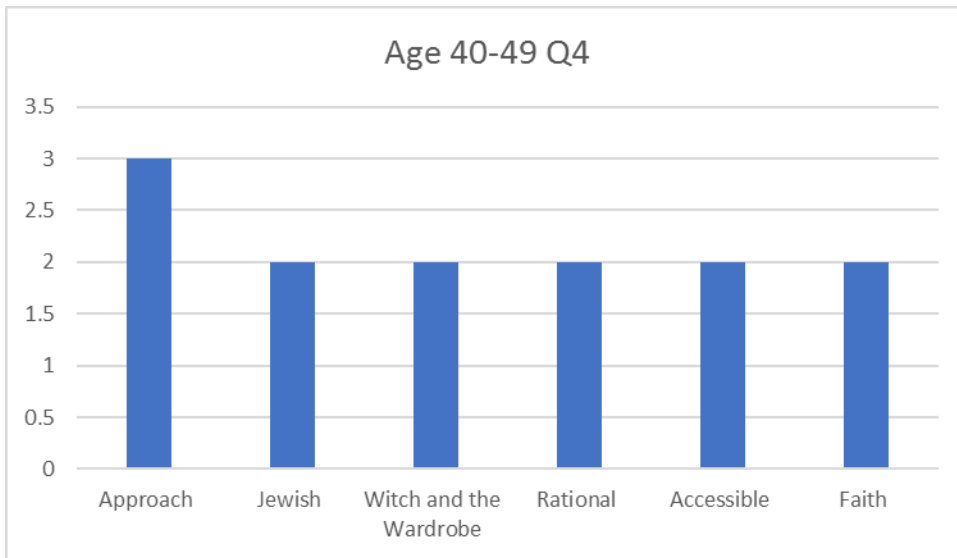
**Chart 11**



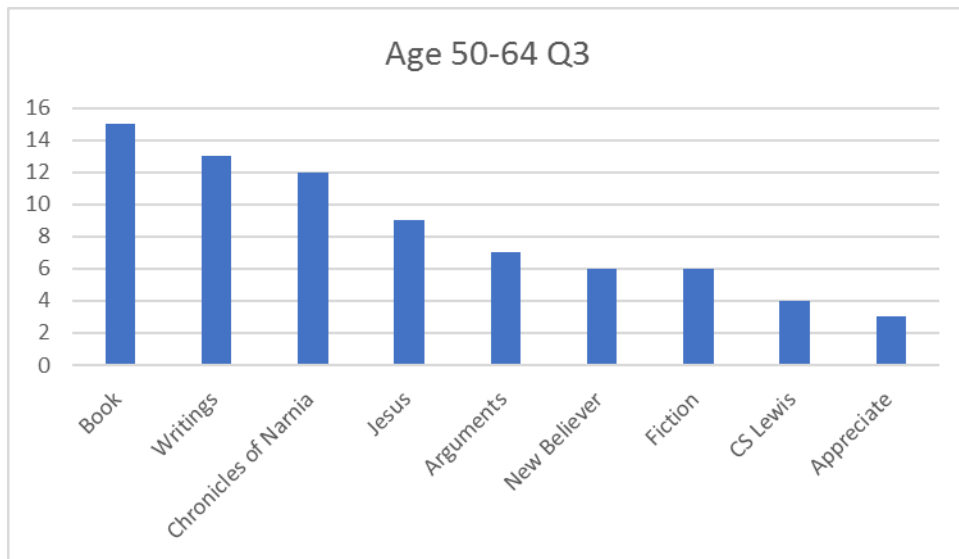
**Chart 12**



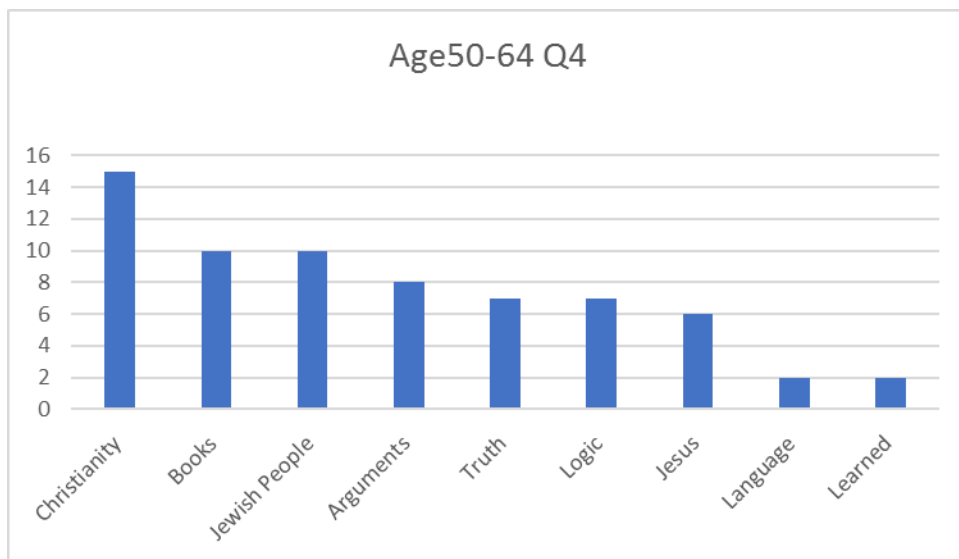
**Chart 13**



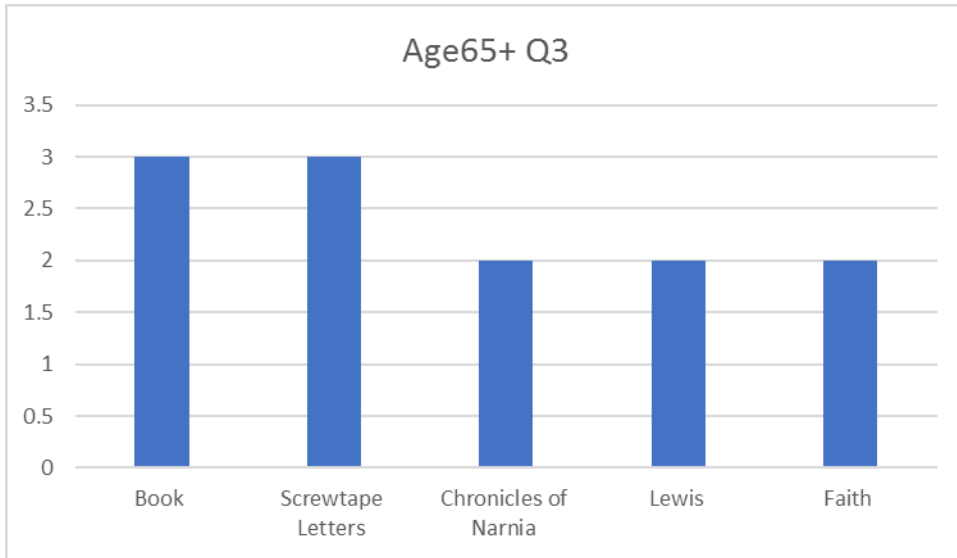
**Chart 14**



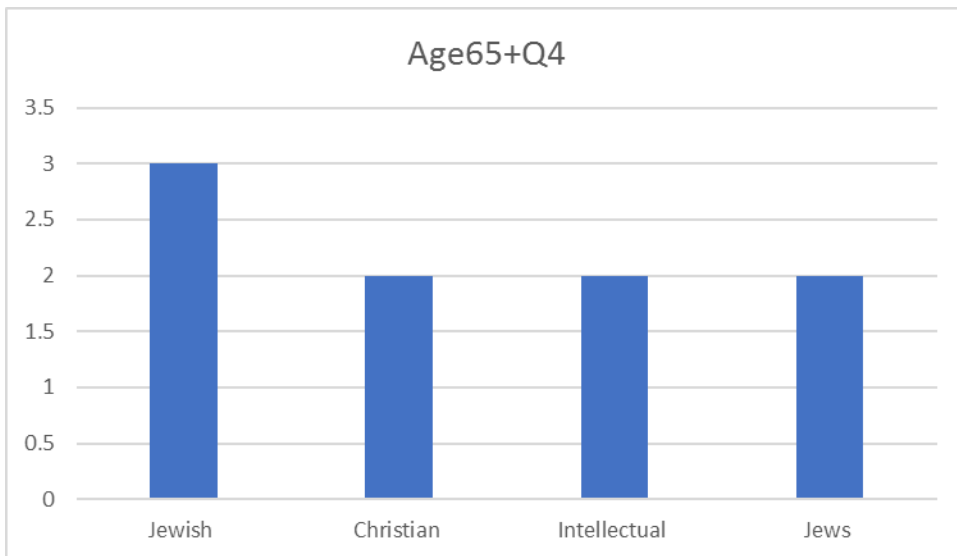
**Chart 15**



**Chart 16**



**Chart 17**



## Qualitative Results Narratives

The narratives often overlapped, but common themes and significant statements kept intensifying.

Question 3: "What was it about his writing that moved you or continues to influence you?"

- I appreciate having intellectual validation.
- He works on my imagination.
- He bridges the gap of information between the very complex to the simple.
- His writing is down to earth and practical and based on keen observations of the human condition that reflect biblical truths, rather than starting from high theology.
- He's a literary author and can present his topics in creative allegory that's both more accessible and penetrating.
- Literature that's not "religious" and cuts to the heart. Down to earth and real to life flawed yet lovable people characters.
- His ability to pierce my facade and get to my heart of deceit is unmatched.
- His lack of cliché.
- He persuades drawing upon common sense.
- There is enough meat to stimulate intellectual interaction and the seasoning of life.
- His novels reflect the character and nature of God in a loving and compelling way.
- Intellectual heft.
- Relatively accessible, contemporary and intelligent.
- The depth and simplicity of his writing.
- A solid logical approach to explaining the reasonability of faith.
- His insights into the mystical.
- His imagery has been really helpful to me in thinking about foundational truths in new ways.
- His understanding of the big picture of God's purposes in the world, and also how it relates to my own struggles.
- His application of the imagination to God.

- He sees clearly what I see fuzzy.
- He looks for timeless truth rather than those that are culturally bound.
- He looks for common human nature and a sense of justice.
- Traditional language has no clear meaning to today's audience.
- He argues as the reader discovers something about himself.
- Reason doesn't prove anything but he offered me the most probable explanation.
- I was like a tin soldier coming alive.
- He tells a story that speaks to the deepest needs and longings.

Question 4: "C. S. Lewis seems to be overrepresented as an influencer among Jewish people of all ages. Why do you think this is?"

- Jewish people like his intelligence, his scholarship, his notoriety, and his brilliance.
- We have a storytelling mindset that speaks to the soul with questions.
- Jewish people are thinkers.
- He appeals to a Jewish rationale. He doesn't over-spiritualize nor is he anti-intellectual. His language is not entrenched in Christian imagery or overt doctrine.
- He seeks to persuade drawing upon common sense rather than relying on authority.
- He always reasons from a place of common sense rather than proof text.
- He is a delightful storyteller and his reasoning compelling.
- The logic of his arguments. The thoroughness of his examination of human thought and reasoning.
- He uses the imagination. His stories resonate as truth not as trying to prove things.
- His focus on the mythical and ancient stories is something that the Jewish mind is drawn to.
- Something to do with his consideration of the Jewish present and not merely looking at Israel in a "people past" perspective.

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# Bezalel as Biblical Artist

By Gene Edward Veith

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[**Note:** What follows are two chapters from my book *State of the Arts: From Bezalel to Mapplethorpe*, published by Crossway Books in 1991, reprinted here with their permission. This material, in turn, was adapted from my very first book, *The Gift of Art: The Place of the Arts in Scripture*, published by Intervarsity Press in 1983. A discussion of art and the Bible must also include the prohibition of idolatry and “graven images.” I take up that topic in the chapter that follows the two reprinted here, again working from a specific Biblical figure: “The Idolatry of Aaron.” *The State of the Arts* takes up other theological and aesthetic topics, including how to understand a work of art, a survey of classic and modern artists, and readings of Christian art. If I were writing this book today, I would make some changes, particularly in making my handling of Scripture more “Lutheran,” a tradition I had just been catechized in as I was writing *The Gift of Art*. But I think the material, which many Christian artists have found helpful, holds up well. And now Bezalel is much better known than he used to be.]

## The Vocation of Bezalel

Not only does the Bible have a great deal to say about the arts, but it gives a rather detailed description of a particular artist and his ministry. Bezalel is not so well known as Moses, Daniel, or Paul, but his significance as a Biblical model for the arts is recognized within the Jewish tradition. (The major art museum in Israel is named after him.) Bezalel was the grandson of Hur, who, with Aaron, held up Moses’ arms during the battle with the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8–13) and was one of Moses’ trusted aides (24:14). According to Jewish tradition, Hur was the husband of Miriam, Moses’ sister, which would make Moses Bezalel’s great-uncle. In order to make the works of art God planned for the Tabernacle, Bezalel was given a special calling and special gifts.

When the children of Israel had been redeemed from slavery in Egypt, the Lord led them to Mount Sinai. Here God gave them the moral law in the Ten Commandments. Nearly every aspect of life came under God's sovereignty, as Moses received the social law for the theocratic community and the ceremonial law detailing the worship acceptable to God. In this context, Moses was told of the calling and empowering of artists (Exodus 31:1–11). Later, Moses recounted to the people what God had said:

And Moses said to the people of Israel, "See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with ability to do every sort of work done by a craftsman or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of workman or skilled designer. Bezalel and Oholiab and every able man in whom the Lord has put ability and intelligence to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the Lord has commanded."

And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every able man in whose mind the Lord had put ability, every one whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work. (Exodus 35:30-36:2 RSV)

### **Biblical Principles for the Arts**

This passage suggests several principles about art. First, art *is within God's will*. The Tabernacle, designed to glorify God and to instruct His people, was to involve "artistic designs." God did not want to be worshiped outdoors or, as we say, in nature. Worship in the woods or on the mountains, as in the pagan nature religions, was specifically forbidden (Deuteronomy 12:2–5). Nor was the true God to be worshiped in a bare, unfurnished tent. Rather, the Israelites were to "make the Tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim worked into

them by a skilled craftsman” (Exodus 26:1). The furnishings were to be of pure gold, delicately carved wood, and precious stones (Exodus 25).

The Lord’s specifications for the Tabernacle and later for the Temple take up a good part of the Old Testament, as those who resolve to read through the entire Bible find out to their dismay. The details of how many hooks to place in the curtains, how many cubits the frames must be, what to cover with beaten gold, and what to make from bronze are tedious to modern readers and have caused the abandoning of many a well-intentioned Scripture-reading project. But it pleased God to include such details in His holy Word, not only for Bezalel but for us. God, the designer and maker of the universe, clearly places great value on details of design, construction, and artifice.

Why was everything to be so lavish? The Lord tells Moses that “you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty” (Exodus 28:2 RSV). The priestly vestments—the gold filigree, the twisted golden chains, the emeralds and sapphires and diamonds, the golden pomegranates and bells, the woven coat, the embroidered sash (28:39)—all were to be made “for glory and for beauty.”

God was to be glorified. Only the finest, the best that human beings have to offer, is appropriate to glorify the Lord. The glory of the Tabernacle seems to have been intended as a reminder, a faint copy, of heavenly glory (Hebrews 8:5). Those dazzled by the sublimity of the Tabernacle were perhaps experiencing a glimpse of the much more dazzling grandeur of the infinite God enthroned on “as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness” (Exodus 24:10 RSV).

Besides manifesting glory, Aaron’s garments were to be made “for *beauty*.” Beauty is thereby an appropriate end in itself. The inventor of colors, of form, of textures, the author of all natural beauty, clearly values the aesthetic dimension for *its own sake*. According to the clear statements of Scripture, art has its place within the will of God.

The Bezalel passage also indicates that *being an artist can be a vocation from God*. “See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah” (Exodus 35:30 RSV). The term *vocation* means “calling.” We think of people being called to the ministry or to the mission field, but the Reformation stressed that even secular occupations can be true, God-given callings, suitable for the service of God and our neighbor. The Bible here clearly states that God “called” Bezalel for the work of constructing and adorning the Tabernacle. This calling was not generalized, addressed

to everyone. It was personal, a special calling—the Lord called Bezalel by name. This suggests that a person may be called by God to be an artist.

The passage further indicates that *artistic ability is God's gift*. “And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every able man in whose mind the Lord had put ability, every one whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work” (Exodus 36:2 RSV). All who wanted to help make the Tabernacle, “whose heart stirred him up to do the work,” did so because the Lord had “put ability” in their minds. Artistic talent is not to be thought of as some innate human ability, or as the accomplishment of an individual genius, but as a gift of God.

### **The Gifts for the Artist**

The passage not only states that artistic talent is from God, but it goes on to detail the specific gifts needed by an artist. The analysis of what artistry involves is so incisive that it deserves our close attention.

These gifts should not be thought of as some miraculous zap from Mt. Sinai which changed a bumbler with ten thumbs into an artistic genius. Bezalel was probably already a skilled craftsman in the normal course of things before he received this divine commission. Moses' task, as the bearer of God's Word, was simply to tell Bezalel what he was to do. Ancient Egypt is renowned for its magnificent art, and although it glorified the Pharaohs, much of the actual labor was done by slaves. Perhaps Bezalel had been forced to adorn a pyramid. The Lord speaking to Moses indicated that He had given these gifts to Bezalel prior to the Sinai revelation. Furthermore, He states that He gave similar ability to others who would be helping Bezalel. (“I have called . . . I have filled . . . I have given to *all able men* ability.”) The implication is that these gifts apply not only to one miraculous commission, but that they apply to all artists.

“*He has filled him with the Spirit of God*” (Exodus 35:31). This is the first gift given to Bezalel, and the most important for the Christian artist. Bezalel is the first person described in the Scriptures as being filled with the Holy Spirit. According to the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is given to all Christians and bears fruit in many areas of life (Galatians 22–23; Ephesians 5:9). In the Old Testament, before the Resurrection and before Pentecost, the Holy Spirit seems to have come not as a permanent presence in the lives of the faithful, but as a temporary empowerment. The Spirit of God came upon someone who thereby became a prophet (Judges 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 1 Samuel 10:5–6). In other words, the Holy Spirit enabled the prophet to proclaim the Word of God. The

Spirit of God here empowers Bezalel “to devise artistic designs.” The implication is that the works of Bezalel will express, in the medium and in the language of art, the Word of God. Bezalel’s conception of the Tabernacle came not from any inner vision, but from the external Word of God; the detailed instructions given to Moses, who relayed them to Bezalel, who then followed them to the letter (Exodus 39:42-43).

Bezalel’s possession of the Holy Spirit means that he was a man of faith. A Christian artist must, above all, be a Christian. The first priority must be a relationship to God through Christ, a work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. In all of these senses, the Spirit of God filled Bezalel and inspired him in the making of the Tabernacle.

*“He has filled him . . . with ability”* (35:31). The second gift given to Bezalel was talent. Not everyone is able to paint or carve or weave. Not everyone can write great poetry or act or sing or play the violin. The potential to do so, the aptitude, the “ability” is God-given.

One of the greatest pleasures I find in the arts is to be astonished at human ability. When I look at a painting, I like to peer closely at the brush strokes. These dabs of color, with the lines of the paintbrush bristles still visible, were controlled so carefully that when seen from a greater distance, they can create the illusion of reality itself. From the almost microscopic precision of the miniscule illustrations in an illuminated manuscript to Van Gogh’s thick slabs of paint that seem ripped out of his soul, I am dumbstruck at what human beings can do.

I studied piano only enough to learn how hard it is. I will laboriously plunk out a tune, my eyes looking up and down from my music to my hands on the keyboard, losing my place, hitting the wrong keys, and trying again in a herky-jerky rhythm that sends people out of the room. A real pianist, though, can play smoothly through a score that is black with chords and thirty-second notes. Every finger is called upon to do something different; the mind must keep track of flats and sharps and nuances of tempo. Then, as if the technical demands were not enough, the musician’s heartfelt expression can animate every note. It all seems so effortless, so fluent and graceful. Such a spectacle of gratuitous talent incites me, not only to praise the artist, but to praise God for giving such ability to human beings.

*“He has filled him . . . with intelligence”* (35:31). The third gift is intelligence. A person may have talent, but that alone is not enough for great or God-pleasing art. God gave Bezalel a measure of understanding, of reason, of common sense. The popular

image of an artist today is of someone completely intuitive, passionate, and even irrational. We assume that beauty and reason are opposed to each other (which would surprise the ancient Greeks). We take a simple (and not fully proven) physiological hypothesis about the different functions of the “right brain” and the “left brain” and use it to classify people and drive yet another wedge between our minds and our emotions. Art, at least the best art by the best artists, addresses the entire mind, thereby engaging the faculty of intelligence.

To build the Tabernacle, Bezalel needed not only inspiration and talent but also intelligence. Solving the practical problems of making art requires a clear mind and a rational temperament. Designing a sculpture that will not tip over, managing the laws of perspective and geometry in painting, deciding how to choreograph a play, planning the logistics of an exhibition or a performance—being a successful artist requires a pragmatic and almost mathematical way of thinking.

Intelligence implies a way of looking at life. Great art is always incisive, the work of a mind that sees through false perceptions and stereotypes. The popular image of the creative person notwithstanding, the great artists that come to mind—da Vinci, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Bach—all display this keen, analytical frame of mind. When we were studying *The Divine Comedy*, one of my students, an agnostic, wrote how impressed he was by Dante’s “intelligence.” Such a tribute is appropriate for one of the most passionate of all poets.

*“He has filled him . . . with knowledge”* (35:31). The fourth gift is knowledge. Whereas intelligence involves the faculties of the mind, knowledge refers to what is in the mind. Bezalel, in addition to talent and mental acuity, needed to *know* certain things. He needed to recognize and know how to prepare acacia wood. He needed to know how to cast bronze and how gold can be beaten to microscopic thinness without tearing. Besides knowing his materials, he had to know his subjects—both the natural (the structure of almonds, flowers, and pomegranates) and the supernatural (the appearance of the cherubim and the meaning and function of the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant).

Some artists scorn education. Their gifts are “natural,” they think, a function of their inner creativity that they need only express without inhibition, without tradition, without knowledge of anything outside of themselves. The Scriptures, however, say that knowledge of things beyond the self is critical for an artist.

All good artists do, in fact, tend to be open to knowledge. They are interested in learning about their art, its history and traditions. They are interested not only in their own work but in that of others, especially the great masters of their craft. The best artists want to know things besides art—physics, geography, anthropology, history, politics. They read books. They tend to agree with Samuel Johnson that they would rather know something about a subject, no matter how trivial, than to remain ignorant about it. They seek knowledge not only to find subjects for their art, although wide reading certainly increases the scope and depth of their work, but because openness to the outside world is a hallmark of genuine sensitivity, the prerequisite of an artist.

A common modern assumption about artists is that they must experience all of life in order to know it fully and render it in their work. Many would-be artists experiment with drugs, expose themselves to physical danger, and play with moral degradation so that their art will have scope and depth, and so that it will reflect “real life.” Stephen Crane advocated this principle in his writings and practiced it in his short life. His greatest work, however, was *The Red Badge of Courage*, a vivid evocation of combat during the Civil War. Veterans of the war praised its accuracy, its re-creation of what war felt like. Actually, the twenty-four-year-old author had never seen a battle. He simply imagined what it would be like. Great art is a matter of imagination more than experience.

To be sure, a wide range of experiences can be valuable for an artist—working in a steel mill, traveling, first-hand research. If the pursuit of experience leads to sin, however, the result is not knowledge. Scripture says that sin has a way of “suppressing the truth” (Romans 1:18). Sin hardens the heart, making us less—rather than more—sensitive to the truth. I have known of would-be artists who think they are exquisitely creative, and yet an alcoholic haze keeps them from being productive. Illicit love affairs, hedonistic indulgence, and vicious infighting can turn a promising artist into a vain, cynical, unfeeling caricature of a human being. Real knowledge, in contrast, is God’s gift for art.

“*He has filled him with . . . all craftsmanship*” (35:31). In addition to talent, intelligence, and knowledge, an artist needs craftsmanship, the mastery of technique. Craftsmanship involves skill at working with one’s medium, whether words or paint or stone, causing that medium to do one’s bidding. In artistic craftsmanship, the human dominion over nature, bestowed at the creation, is at its highest.



The artist's dominion over matter involves intimacy and commitment, not tyranny or exploitation, as the object through infinite care and effort begins to conform to the artist's will. Scripture goes so far as to portray artistic craftsmanship in the recurring figure of the potter and the clay as an analogy of the relationship between God and His people (Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 18:6; Romans 9:21).

*"And he has inspired him to teach"* (Exodus 35:34). Not only was Bezalel given the gifts necessary to build and adorn the Tabernacle, but he was further empowered to transmit these gifts to others. (The RSV translation of the Bible uses a wonderfully appropriate term for the teaching vocation: He was "inspired" to teach.)

Since art depends upon such intangible and inherent qualities as talent and craftsmanship, many question whether artistry can really be taught at all. While agreeing that art involves extraordinary gifts, Scripture indicates that it can. God's gifts, including the gift of salvation, are given and brought to fruition through human instruments. An aspiring artist may have many innate talents, but those talents normally come to fruition only through the efforts of a teacher.

Conversely, artists who are teachers can pass their gifts on to their students. This does not mean that the students' abilities are any less dependent on God's gifts or that a good teacher can automatically teach anyone to be an artist. It simply means that teaching and learning are the normal means by which God develops His gifts—ability, intelligence, knowledge, craftsmanship—in those He has chosen for the artistic vocation, to "every one whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work" (Exodus 36:2). This Scripture, by the way, suggests that the desire to be an artist may be a sign of one's potential. Those who want to take art lessons may have potential that a good teacher can draw out.

Many, if not most, artists find themselves teaching. Aspiring novelists or poets end up teaching in a university writing program. Musicians give piano lessons. Painters teach art classes in a public school. Many artists are disappointed that they cannot support themselves solely by their work, that they must teach to make a living. Scripture, however, suggests that teaching is as much related to art as craftsmanship or any of the other gifts. Whether one teaches in a college, a public school, an arts and crafts shop, or in the time-honored relationship of master and apprentice, teaching is by God's design part of the artistic vocation.

## The Biblical Artist

Ability, intelligence, knowledge, craftsmanship, and teaching were all necessary for Bezalel and his colleagues “to devise artistic designs” (Exodus 35:32). Some secular theories about artistry emphasize innate talent; others emphasize training; others emphasize technique. Some think artistic ability is hereditary, part of one’s genetic code. Others think artistic ability is a “learned behavior.” Secular theories tend to be narrow and partial, reducing human complexities to a simplistic formula. It is characteristic of Scripture (and of truth in general) to be comprehensive and complex.<sup>1</sup> The Bible says that ability *and* intelligence *and* knowledge *and* craftsmanship *and* teaching all work together to make an artist.

Bezalel’s gifts provide simple criteria for evaluating a work of art: Does this work show ability? intelligence? knowledge? craftsmanship? Recognizing such qualities is not the same as agreeing with the implicit message in a work of art or even understanding what it is all about; it simply means recognizing its artfulness. By these standards, a sculpture by Michelangelo or a painting by one of the Dutch masters clearly measures up. Picasso too, although his works may seem baffling, exhibits extraordinary talent, intelligence, and technical skill. Duchamp’s *Bicycle Wheel*, which is simply a bicycle wheel displayed as a sculpture, shows no particular talent on the part of the artist (although other of his works do). Its craftsmanship is that of the factory worker who made it, not the artist. André Serrano’s photograph of a crucifix immersed in his urine shows no ability or craft. All the artist did was to urinate and photograph the results. Other examples, such as Andy Warhol’s prints of Brillo boxes and Campbell Soup cans and Jackson Pollock’s experiments in the random patterns made by paint flung onto a canvas, might exhibit some cleverness, I suppose—as in, whoever would think to do such a thing?—but no real intelligence or knowledge. Some artists may demonstrate knowledge but no craft, or ability but no intelligence. The best artists will exhibit all of Bezalel’s gifts.

We should perhaps not draw too much from the example of Bezalel. The Tabernacle with its animal sacrifices has been fulfilled and superseded by Christ,

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<sup>1</sup>For the comprehensive scope of Christian thought, see G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973). See also my book *Loving God with All Your Mind* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1987), pp. 131–41.

through whom God “tabernacled” with us (the literal translation of John 1:14). Elaborate and gorgeously ornamented church buildings are not necessary for New Testament Christians, who worship “in spirit and in truth” (see John 4:20–24). Bezalel was called for a specific purpose; artists sometimes have other purposes that may be more problematic. Nor was Bezalel, the desert craftsman, in the “high art” tradition. He was not creating for art museums, nor did he have the same consciousness about art that we have in our culture. As we shall see, Scripture has other things to say about art, including the danger of idolatry.

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that “artistic design” and the purposes of “glory and beauty” are sanctioned by the Word of God. Anyone who rejects the aesthetic dimension in principle or who denies that art can be an appropriate vocation for a Christian does so against the clear statements of Scripture.

The account of the calling of Bezalel gives an authoritative model of the artistic vocation, describing in surprisingly comprehensive detail the gifts that God makes possible for artists. Now we should examine what Bezalel made.

### **The Works of Bezalel**

Having called and empowered Bezalel with artistic gifts, the Lord went on to specify what sorts of art He desired for the Tabernacle and later for the Temple. In chapter after chapter, the Bible describes God-ordained works of art.

Francis Schaeffer has observed that the making of the Tabernacle involved “almost every form of representational art that men have ever known.”<sup>2</sup> Here we can see specific positive examples of how various types of art—abstract, representational, and symbolic—can function to the glory of God and the benefit of His people.

### **Abstract Art**

When we read the Scriptural accounts of the Tabernacle, the Temple, and their furnishings, the imagination soon fails. The details of wooden forms inlaid with gold and bronze, the “ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn” (Exodus 26:1), the gold filigree and twisted chains become difficult to picture in our minds. The colors and forms called for are dazzlingly various, the textures and shapes extraordinarily complex. Much of what Bezalel made can perhaps best be appreciated in

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<sup>2</sup>Art and the Bible in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1982) 2:378.

terms of abstract art, that is, of pure design, which most essentially represents the “artfulness” of art.

By abstract art I mean art that represents nothing outside of itself. Forms and colors are arranged in designs that are not representations of anything; rather they are beautiful in themselves. As we have seen, much contemporary abstract art consists of studies in randomness, experiments in “minimalism,” and arid conceptual statements drawn from impoverished worldviews (although some modern abstract art does show concern for pure design in the older sense).

When I refer to “abstract” art, think not so much of Jackson Pollock, but of a Persian tapestry or the margins of a medieval illuminated manuscript. The designs are beautiful—highly ordered, incredibly intricate—reflecting the lush, intertwined complexity of existence as orchestrated by a sovereign God. The problem with so much contemporary abstractionism is that it is so simplistic, void of complexity and of design. Monotheistic abstractionism, on the other hand, fosters images that represent nothing outside themselves but are beautiful, just as a tree or a flower represents nothing outside itself and is beautiful.

Consider “Jakin” and “Boaz,” the two freestanding columns that were to stand just outside of the Temple:

He [Hiram] cast two bronze pillars, each eighteen cubits high [twenty-seven feet] and twelve cubits around [eighteen feet]. . . .A network of interwoven chains festooned the capitals on top of the pillars, seven for each capital. He made pomegranates in two rows encircling each network to decorate the capitals on top of the pillars. He did the same for each capital. . . . The capitals of both pillars, above the bowl-shaped part next to the network, were the two hundred pomegranates in rows all around. He erected the pillars at the portico of the temple. The pillar to the south he named Jakin and the one to the north Boaz. The capitals on top were in the shape of lilies. And so the work on the pillars was completed. (1 Kings 7:15-22)

These gigantic bronzes, standing about thirty-three and a half feet high (counting the capitals) with a diameter of about five and a half feet, are examples of abstract art. As Schaeffer has observed, “they supported no architectural weight and had no

utilitarian engineering significance. They were there only because God said they should be here as a thing of beauty.”<sup>3</sup>

This is not the sort of sculpture many of us prefer. It was not a statue of Moses with the Ten Commandments or Joshua riding a horse. Representational sculptures were very prominent in pagan temples and in pagan art. Occasionally, realistic statues would be placed in the Temple by blaspheming kings (2 Kings 21:7; see also, in the Apocrypha, 1 Maccabees 1:54 for a Greek statue being placed in the Temple). Such images were condemned as the most monstrous abominations. These sculptured pillars, on the other hand, were not idolatrous. Imposing in size, yet intricate in their fine detail, their only purpose was glory and beauty.

This is not to say that such abstract art is totally without meaning. Abstract art can present abstractions—power, order, beauty, glory—without representing a creature found in the world. In the case of the pillars, they were given names. Captions or titles of works of art are ways of attaching words, and thereby meaning, to visual images. Jakin means “he establishes.” Boaz means “he comes in strength.”<sup>4</sup> The qualities of the bronze monoliths, their stability and their imposing presence as they stand in empty space, strong but supporting nothing that can be seen, recall the establishing work of God and His strength. Jakin and Boaz do not represent God, but they do call to mind and illustrate the work of God. The present tense of the Hebrew names testifies to God’s continuing action, that God is still establishing and still coming in strength. These truths would come to mind every time the people saw the monuments.

### **Representational Art**

The pillars Jakin and Boaz bore carvings of pomegranates and lilies. The sacred lampstands were to feature almond blossoms (Exodus 25:31–35). The Temple’s ten stands of bronze were engraved with lions, oxen, and palm trees (I Kings 7:2–37). The debacle of the golden calf notwithstanding, the bronze laver for ceremonial cleansing was to be supported by twelve metal bulls (7:25). Not only were representations of nature prominent in the Tabernacle and Temple, but representations of supernatural beings, the cherubim, were everywhere—carved on the furnishings, woven into the veil of the Holy of Holies (Exodus 26:31), and sculpted on the central shrine of the invisible

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 381.

<sup>4</sup>According to the notes in the NIV.

God, the Ark of the Covenant itself (1 Kings 7:29, 36; Exodus 25:18–20). Clearly, representational art is also acceptable to God.

Archaeologists in Jerusalem have recently discovered an art object that they believe was actually used in Solomon’s Temple. It is a likeness of a pomegranate, a luscious many-celled fruit, which for some reason was especially favored in Hebraic art. Scholars have determined that this tiny artifact, only 1.68 inches high, was fastened to a staff held by a priest. On it is the inscription, “Belonging to the Temple of the Lord Yahweh, holy to the priests.” This graceful, delicate figure, according to scholars, “is the only sacred object. . . that survives from the Temple built by Solomon” (Fig. 7.1).<sup>5</sup>

The piece is simple, yet intricately crafted, especially for such a tiny object. The Bible says that the hem of Aaron’s garment was adorned with pomegranates (Exodus 28:33–34), as were the pillars Jakin and Boaz (1 Kings 7:42). Gazing at this exquisite piece of ivory, we see an object that was actually there, present when the glory of the Lord dwelt in His house, when the sacrificial blood was poured on the Ark of the Covenant, when Nebuchadnezzar finally razed the Temple to the ground—a staggeringly tangible witness to the factuality of the Bible.

The art of the Temple specifically avoids representing God Himself, in marked contrast to the art of the pagan temples. Rather the emphasis is on the works of God, the designs that He made in creating the universe. This is why the Temple was so filled with representations from the natural world—lions, palm trees, floral designs, and pomegranates. Adorning God’s house with images of His own works was a way to offer praise.

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<sup>5</sup>André Lemaire, “Probable Head of Priestly Scepter from Solomon’s Temple Surfaces in Jerusalem,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 10 (January/February 1984), pp. 27, 29.

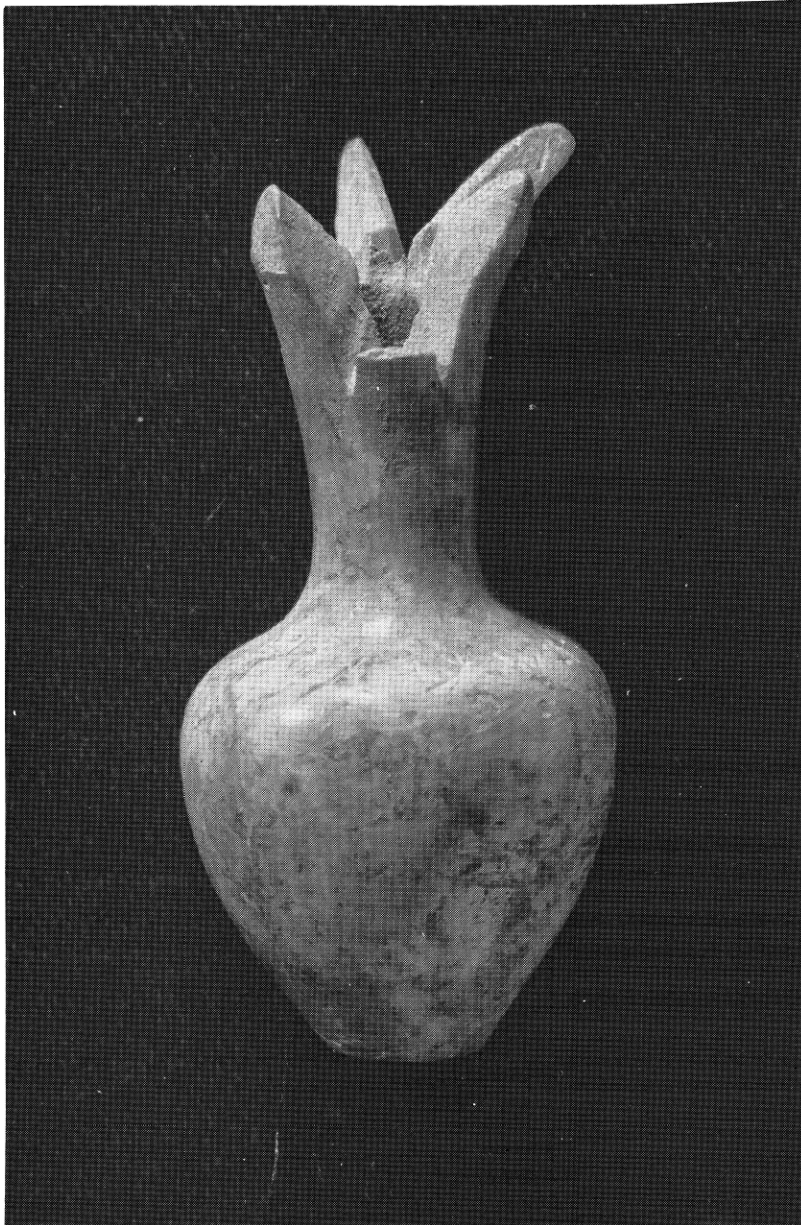


FIG 7.1 *Ivory pomegranate from priest's staff, Solomon's Temple*

### **Representations of the Spiritual**

Not only is nature, particularly plants and animals, featured in the art of the Tabernacle and Temple, but the supernatural is also represented. In the figures of the cherubim, spiritual beings are represented by means of tangible, material images. A cherub is not the cute winged baby of conventional religious art. The cherubim are angelic beings whose spiritual form, when manifested to the senses, overloads our finite imaginations. Ezekiel, granted a more-or-less direct vision of angels, records that "this was their appearance":

... they had the form of men, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: their wings touched one another; they went every one straight forward, without turning as they went. As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man in front; the four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle at the back. Such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above; each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. And each went straight forward; wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. . . . And the living creatures darted to and fro, like a flash of lightning. (Ezekiel 1:5–12, 14 RSV)

Ezekiel's vision of such beings is unimaginable. In a sort of divine Cubism, they are apparently revealed to him from all dimensions, from four sides at once, and they are simultaneously covered by their wings and disclosed to him in detail. Such a spiritual encounter, which should help keep us from anthropomorphizing the heavenly realm, is impossible to visualize fully or to represent pictorially.

Later, Ezekiel describes how representations of these living creatures were carved into the wall of the Temple:

... And on all the walls round about in the inner room and the nave were carved likenesses of cherubim and palm trees, a palm tree between cherub and cherub. Every cherub had two faces: the face of a man toward the palm tree on the one side, and the face of a young lion toward the palm tree on the other side. They were carved on the whole temple round about; from the floor to above the door cherubim and palm trees were carved on the wall. (Ezekiel 41:17–20 RSV)<sup>6</sup>

What we have here is a simplified and stylized depiction of the beings Ezekiel saw, a two dimensional bas-relief. The concept of "accommodation" is helpful here.

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<sup>6</sup>The Temple in Ezekiel's vision is not necessarily identical with Solomon's Temple, which had been destroyed. The prophet is describing the restored Spiritual Temple.



Ezekiel's vision defies static pictorial depiction. The artistic images are schematic diagrams, accommodated to the limited capacities of human beings, who can perceive only in terms of the senses. In fact, Ezekiel's vision was also an accommodation whereby spiritual, nonmaterial beings were manifested to a human being, limited and bound by merely physical senses.

Images of cherubim were everywhere in the Tabernacle and the Temple. Bezalel was commanded to adorn the tapestries of the Tabernacle "with cherubim skilfully worked" (Exodus 26: 1 RSV). Solomon's Temple included two colossal statues of cherubim, each with a fifteen-foot wingspan, in the Holy of Holies (2 Chronicles 3:10–13). Cherubim also figured in the construction of the most important and significant work of art in the Old Testament—the Ark of the Covenant.

And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. . . . The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark; and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you of all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel. (Exodus 25:18–22 RSV)

The significance of these details is heightened again by Ezekiel's vision. Above the real cherubim, he glimpsed something even more staggering:

And above the firmament over [the cherubim's] heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form. And upward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were gleaming bronze, like the appearance of fire enclosed round about; and downward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. Such was the appearance of

the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face.  
(Ezekiel 1:26–28 RSV)

Ezekiel's vision is necessarily full of similes and comparisons to earthly analogues. In the theophany that he experienced, Ezekiel dared not say that he was looking on God; rather he was seeing "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (1:28). What he sees is four levels removed, established by concentric prepositional phrases, from the Godhead. Throughout his description he sees not a throne but "the likeness of a throne"; the phrase "as it were" is repeated over and over again. Gazing upon "the glory of the Lord," he perceives "a likeness as it were of a human form." What he is perceiving is the image and likeness that God shares with human beings from the creation (Genesis 1:26) and, more profoundly, the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, whose human nature is ever subsumed into the Godhead.

Ezekiel was seeing something real but accommodated to his limited human faculties. No mortal can look on God and live (Exodus 33:20). The merest glimpse is enough to make Ezekiel fall on his face. Yet the infinite God deigns to reveal Himself to mortal flesh, making Himself known in tangible form fully and completely in Jesus Christ, but also in copies and shadows (Colossians 2:17) fitted to the different capacities of human beings, "expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words" (1 Corinthians 2:13).

A vision of God such as Ezekiel's was not rendered artistically on the Ark, of course. Above the cherubim and the mercy seat, Bezalel made nothing, although from that empty space God's presence and God's word were present in a special way (Exodus 25:22). The Tabernacle is revealed to have been "a copy and shadow of what is in heaven" (Hebrews 8:5). The Ark represented in an artistic image the actual court of God, which through grace He was establishing on earth with His chosen people, dwelling in their midst in a desert tent. The Ark as imaging the very presence of God speaks to us also of Christ, the incarnate God, who "became flesh and dwelt among us," who, translated literally, "tabernacled" with us (John 1:14).

The point is, art can portray spiritual realities. The highest and most ineffable, the very presence of the Deity with His heavenly hosts, God commissioned Bezalel to represent in the Ark of the Covenant. Art can represent spiritual reality, expressing the invisible in terms of the visible (Romans 1:20). Such representations are never exhaustive of their subject matter; rather they accommodate themselves to the human imagination.

The difference between the images made by Bezalel and those forbidden by the commandment against graven images is that the former communicate what God reveals. They do not receive worship, but point beyond themselves to the true object of worship. They do not pretend to contain the infinite God, only to praise Him and communicate His reality to others (1 Kings 8:27–30).

Notice that representational art does not necessarily mean “photographic realism,” itself largely a product of scientific materialism. To paint the cherubim as described by Ezekiel in hard-edged visual detail in a style of naturalistic realism would be aesthetically ludicrous and theologically misleading. The cherubim would seem more like science fiction monsters rather than spiritual entities, whose shifting appearances point to their unfathomable trans-sensory dimensions. (This is a mistake of many contemporary illustrations of the book of Revelation.) A schematic or expressionistic style would be more appropriate, conveying a sense of mystery and sublimity.

Even paintings of the natural world need not be photographic. Francis Schaeffer has observed that some of the pomegranates that adorned the garments of the priest were blue, a color that never occurs in natural pomegranates.<sup>7</sup> This is the sort of thing one associates with Chagall or Matisse. Painting an apple blue instead of red, depicting nature in new ways by experimenting with color and form, helps us to see the object in a new way, not as inevitable and ordinary, but as the creative handiwork of God.

Artists have always enjoyed painting still lifes and landscapes; depictions of flowers, fruits, trees, and animals seem universal in both Western and Eastern art. There is also the impulse to go beyond nature, whether to create blue pomegranates or to represent the most sublime spiritual truths in visible form. Both kinds of art, as well as art that represents nothing at all, had their place in the Holy of Holies, commanded by the very Word of God.

### **Symbolic Art**

Art can adorn by its beauty of design; it can represent entities in the world. It can also teach by embodying and communicating ideas. In other words, art can be symbolic. Such art was prominent in the Tabernacle and the Temple, where its purpose was not only to glorify God but to build the faith of the worshipers.

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<sup>7</sup>Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible*, p. 380.

Consider again the design of the central object in Israelite worship, the Ark of the Covenant. A gilded wooden chest about four feet long, two feet wide, and two feet deep, it contained the tablets of the Law, an urn of manna, and Aaron's rod (Hebrews 9:4). On its lid of pure gold (the name of which is variously translated as "the mercy seat" or "the atonement cover"), the two cherubim faced each other, looking down. Once a year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), in a solemn drama, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies, the ark obscured by a cloud of incense, and sprinkle the blood of the scapegoat on the mercy seat as atonement for the sins of the people (Leviticus 16).

What is symbolized here is the very gospel itself, the central mystery of salvation through which the Old Testament saints and we ourselves are reconciled to God. Coming between the presence of God, in His terrifying holiness, and the tables of the Law, broken by human sin, is the blood of atonement. The heavenly cherubim look down and see not the Law but the sacrificial blood, which covers all sins. These symbols look ahead to and have their fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29):

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect Tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. . . . How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (Hebrews 9:11–12, 14)

On the Day of Atonement it was not the blood of the goat that took away sins (Hebrews 10:4); rather the symbolism of the ark, the ritual, and the sacrifices were designed to provoke faith. As "copies of the heavenly things" (Hebrews 9:23), they were to instruct and prepare God's people for the fulfillment of the promise that was to come in Christ. The Old Testament saints were saved, never by works, but by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). For us, Christ's death is in the past; for them, Christ's death was in the future. But Christ's atonement spans eternity, covering the people of the Old Testament also, although they knew it only by glimpses, prophecies, and symbols.

Many other artifacts described in the Old Testament were also symbolic. Consider the bronze “sea” supported by the twelve bulls (1 Kings 7:23–26). The bulls were symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel. The huge laver they supported was used for the ceremonial cleansing necessary for Temple worship. This practice looks forward to Christian baptism and the cleansing power of the Word of God, which rests upon the foundation of the apostles (twelve disciples; twelve tribes; twelve oxen) and the entire history of Israel (Ephesians 2:20). A wooden table was to be covered with gold and adorned with complex moldings (Exodus 25:23–30). On it was to be kept at all times the “bread of the Presence” (Exodus 25:30), calling to mind the truths of God’s nourishment and intimate presence with His people that finds its Christian expression in Holy Communion. The golden lampstand, the lavers, the altars, all have a teaching purpose besides being beautiful and ritually functional.

The holy garments of the priest, for example, were to be adorned with twelve different jewels—ruby, topaz, beryl, turquoise, sapphire, emerald, jacinth, agate, amethyst, chrysolite, onyx, and jasper—all set in gold filigree, each carved with the name of one of the tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:15–21). “Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastplate of decision as a continuing memorial before the Lord” (Exodus 28:29). Thus, whenever Aaron or the high priest brought the sacrificial blood into the Holy of Holies and poured it upon the Ark of the Covenant, he did so on behalf of all of God’s people. The jewels symbolize more than the tribes being brought before God. They also suggest God’s love for His people. To Him, each tribe is a precious stone, different from each other, but each full of value and light as with the redeemed in Heaven (Revelation 21:9–21).

Dorothy L. Sayers makes a useful distinction between “conventional symbols” and “natural symbols.”<sup>8</sup> A conventional symbol has only an arbitrary connection to the idea it symbolizes. Language is based on conventional symbols. The word *lion* in English stands for a particular animal that has other names in other languages. As long as everyone in the language group agrees that a certain sound will refer to a particular concept, communication can take place. It does not matter whether the golden-maned creature is called *ari* (Hebrew) or *Löwe* (German) or *lion*. When the word is written down by means of squiggles on paper, which symbolize sounds, language again makes

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<sup>8</sup> See Dorothy L. Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante* (London: Methuen, 1954).

use of conventional symbols.<sup>9</sup> A lion can also be used as a symbol for Great Britain—this would be another conventional symbol, deriving from ancient heraldry rather than any actual association between England and jungle cats.

A lion, though, can also be used as a symbol for strength. The connection here is not arbitrary. A lion actually is strong, and in contemplating a lion, one can make discoveries about the qualities it exemplifies. The lion's strength can be terrifying and dangerous, yet at the same time compelling, even beautiful. The lion can teach us about strength in general, its sublimity as well as its danger. Contemplating the symbol is a way to explore the idea. Symbolism in which the sign has a real connection to the idea is called "natural symbolism."

Whereas conventional symbols have the virtue of clarity, since they can be defined with the utmost precision, natural symbols are richly evocative and can bear many levels of meaning. They appeal to the imagination as well as to the intellect. Interpreting a natural symbol demands more than finding a one-to-one literal correspondence; it demands and offers a meditative process.

Scripture uses the lion as a symbol for both the devil and Christ. This is by no means a contradiction. Different aspects of the natural symbol are used to illustrate different ideas.<sup>10</sup> The Bible describes the devil as a "roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Here the passage focuses upon the ferocity and cruel hunger of a ravening lion, qualities that reveal the nature of our spiritual enemy. Elsewhere, the Bible describes Christ as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5). Here we are to think of the sublimity of a lion, its power and regal splendor. An artist can take a natural symbol and delve into its depths. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis symbolizes and thereby explores the person of Christ by means of the lion Aslan.

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<sup>9</sup> The connection between the "signified" and the "signifier" may be arbitrary, but, contrary to many contemporary theorists, it is nevertheless real.

<sup>10</sup> The Reformers had some useful advice in interpreting Biblical symbols: Scripture must interpret scripture. Medieval Catholics interpreted the story of Esther as symbolizing and therefore giving evidence for the intercession of the Virgin Mary. The Reformers insisted that no symbolic meaning can be valid unless it is affirmed literally elsewhere in the Bible. Because the doctrine of Mary's intercession is nowhere stated in the Bible, Esther should not be read as symbolizing it. The Temple rituals, on the other hand, do symbolize the work of Christ because the book of Hebrews says that they do.

Two intersecting lines perpendicular to each other make up a cross. This sign can serve as a conventional symbol for the mathematical process of addition or for the twentieth sound in the alphabet. The cross as a natural symbol can stand for death (as in an obituary) and for health (as in the Red Cross); for suffering (as in “bearing one’s cross”) and for faith (as in the crosses of a church). These wide-ranging meanings and their emotional implications are held together because there is a real connection between the symbol and its meanings. The cross of the historical Jesus was a means of execution and the basis for salvation. It exemplifies death, health, suffering, faith, and more—defeat and victory, judgment and love, the eternal intersecting time, God intervening into human history. In Christianity’s most potent symbol inheres the inexhaustible mysteries of the faith.

### **Art and Culture**

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City has excavated and restored on its grounds an ancient Egyptian temple. While walking through it and thinking about Moses and the children of Israel, I noticed with a thrill of recognition that this temple built to a pagan god consists of three inner chambers, exactly like the plan of the Tabernacle and the Jerusalem Temple. In fact, the threefold structure of the Temple was common throughout the ancient world, as were portable “arks,” tents of worship, certain details of ritual, and even what seem to be figures of cherubim. Archaeological research and Old Testament scholarship have uncovered many parallels in Hebrew life and worship to various Egyptian, Syrian, and Canaanite practices.

Liberal theologians make much of these connections, using them to minimize the uniqueness of God’s special revelation and relationship to the Jews. However, the connections have nothing to do with theological truth but with the relationship between art, culture, and religion. Art is, by its very nature, open to and a function of human culture, so that sacred truths can be expressed through a wide variety of culturally conditioned art forms.

The Hebrews, schooled in the commandment against graven images, knew that art is not sacred. Its meaning or use may be sacred, but art in itself is not, nor can it contain or limit the infinite God. Solomon understood this point. He distanced himself from his pagan neighbors when he dedicated the Temple: “The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27). In fact, when the people began to use the Temple and the Ark of the Covenant in

an idolatrous, faithless way—trusting in holy objects while neglecting what God desired, namely, holiness in their lives—God ordained their destruction (Micah 3:11-12).

The artifacts, while instituted by God's command, were made by and for human beings. Therefore, by God's gracious accommodation, these would agree with the assumptions and the imagination of the people who used them. When the Hebrews thought of a temple, they thought of a three-part division, as in all the other temples they had seen. That is fine. God's Word can be heard in a building with that sort of architecture. The Hebrews could not build a Gothic cathedral. They had neither the technology nor the culture for it; they would not have understood it. But Gothic cathedrals are not sacred either, although again God can use them to make Himself known.

The Canaanites, on the other hand, did believe in sacred places and sacred images.<sup>11</sup> The Philistines identified the Ark as the Hebrew God (1 Samuel 4:7); for them, what was happening to the image of Dagon was happening to Dagon himself (5:1-7). However, the Biblical view holds that since God alone is sacred, the special places and the particular styles of art do not really matter.

When the Temple was to be built, Solomon simply turned to the best artists he knew, the Phoenicians: "You know there is no one among us who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians" (1 Kings 5:6 RSV). So Solomon sent to Hiram, the king of Tyre, asking him for material and workmen. Notice that Solomon, wishing to glorify God, was concerned first with excellence, not doctrinal purity in the artists. Although complimentary to Israel's God in his correspondence with Solomon, Hiram was not one of God's chosen people and almost certainly was not a believer. (The Sidonians worshiped the goddess Ashtoreth, according to 1 Kings 11:5.) The actual craftsman sent by King Hiram to supervise the construction of the Temple was Hiram (in some translations rendered Hiram like the name of his king). In the words of King Hiram's letter to Solomon,

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<sup>11</sup> For the differences between the Hebrews and their neighbors, see Herbert N. Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).



I am sending you Hiram-Abi, a man of great skill, whose mother was from Dan and whose father was from Tyre. He is trained to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone and wood, and with purple and blue and crimson yarn and fine linen. He is experienced in all kinds of engraving and can execute any design given to him. He will work with your craftsmen and with those of my Lord, David your father. (2 Chronicles 2:13-14)

Hiram, the craftsman of the Temple, was thus the counterpart to Bezalel, the craftsman of the Tabernacle. Hiram's mother was a Hebrew and his father was a Phoenician. He would have been considered a Jew, since he was the child of a Jewish mother (assuming the Jews then followed their present definition), although his mixed parentage would have scandalized orthodox Israelites. Surely his mother, the widow of an Israelite before her marriage to a Phoenician, had taught him about the true God of Israel despite his thoroughly pagan environment. His father was also a "craftsman in bronze," from whom, no doubt, Hiram learned his trade (1 Kings 7:14). The art of the Temple, therefore, must have been Phoenician, in accordance with the training that he had received.

The Bible makes clear that unbelievers were also employed in the construction of the Temple. Solomon set the "aliens" in the land to work on the Temple, both as laborers and overseers (2 Chronicles 2:17-18); these were remnants of the Canaanites, who continually tempted the Israelites towards idolatry (Joshua 23:7; Judges 2:2-3). Nevertheless, the Temple and its art pleased God and was made an instrument of His purpose (2 Chronicles 7:12-16).

The implication is important for a Christian perspective on the arts. Because a painter is not a Christian, that does not mean that his paintings cannot be enjoyed or even imitated by Christians. To be sure, any thematic content must be scrutinized very critically through the lens of Scripture, but aesthetic design is essentially neutral.

Was the person who made my shoes or cooked for me in a restaurant a Christian? Or the scientist who discovered penicillin? Or Beethoven? I may never know. I should pray so for the sake of the person, but even if he or she was not a Christian, I am not harmed spiritually by my clothing or my meal, by taking medicine or listening to a symphony. Art is a part of human life, on the same order as food, clothing, scientific knowledge, and social customs. All of these are valuable gifts of God in His creation,

essential parts of our humanity created by sinners in need of Christ's redemption but who may or may not know Him. For aesthetics, although not for theology, a Christian may "go to the Sidonians."

Always a function of human culture rather than divine revelation, no particular style or type of art ought to be sacralized or made into an absolute.<sup>12</sup> The history of art shows continuous change. This is partially because cultures change through technology, the facing of new problems, and the accumulation of different kinds of ideas and experiences. Art also has an inherent tendency to change for aesthetic reasons. If art exists to heighten experience, to help us notice and appreciate what we are so used to that we ignore, an artistic style itself will tend to become so familiar that it no longer startles us with fresh perceptions. It fades into the background, into the decor. We no longer pay any attention to it. Art must be in a continuous process of change to remain alive and effective. Unlike human culture, however, Jesus Christ does not change (Psalm 90; Hebrews 13:8). The infinite God, who is never limited by finite forms or human works, can bear His testimony through a multitude of forms, as the history of religious art makes strikingly clear.

It follows that Christians need not be overly scrupulous in regard to types of art. Abstract, representational, and symbolic art all have prominence in the Scriptures. Certainly the content of art, the underlying assumptions and messages conveyed, must be examined with wariness and Scriptural discernment. Anti-scriptural content is not always merely an intellectual idea that can be analyzed and dismissed. Scorn for "ordinary people," moral permissiveness, the habit of mockery, self-pity, voyeurism, the sense of how terrible life is—all these attitudes and feelings can be more poisonous spiritually than any propositional statement, and they can be absorbed easily through art. Aesthetic excellence in itself is good, but as Augustine has pointed out, it can be a seductive lure to falsehood.

Pure questions of form, though, are basically indifferent spiritually. Christian freedom enables believers to pursue or to enjoy any formal mode of art they find congenial. It is the secular aesthetes who take artistic movements and manifestoes with

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<sup>12</sup> See Schneidau, *ibid.*, who argues that our Western culture is open to change precisely because our Biblical heritage prevents us from making any cultural form absolute, in marked contrast to civilizations based on "myth."

such dogmatic seriousness. Christian artists have worked with classical, Romantic, realistic, and Modernist styles. Christian painters or art patrons can create or enjoy abstract art if they want to (actually, it is probably the safest for those who fear the commandment against graven images), or photographic realism or Expressionism or whatever style they please, as long as it is congenial to a Christian worldview.

Since art is a function of history and culture, Christian art may also be contemporary. To be deliberately old-fashioned in our tastes, returning to earlier styles that seem “more Christian,” may be an empty gesture. One style is not “more Christian” than any other. Christianity is not merely a nineteenth- or sixteenth-century religion, a faith that has nothing to say to the contemporary imagination. Throughout the psalms it is a *new* song that is to be offered to the Lord.<sup>13</sup>

### **Manifold Works**

The Tabernacle and the Temple offer concrete examples of artistry commanded and employed by God. Not only are abstract, representational, and symbolic art given prominence, but also music in all of its forms—instrumental (1 Chronicles 23:5; Psalm 150:3–5), vocal (1 Chronicles 9:33; 15:16, 27), and dance (2 Samuel 6:14; Psalm 149:3; 150:4).

When the Temple was completed, “the priests stood at their posts; the Levites also, with the instruments for music to the Lord which King David had made for giving thanks to the Lord—for his steadfast love endures for ever—whenever David offered praises by their ministry” (2 Chronicles 7:6 RSV). Here the purpose of the instruments is to give thanks to God for His steadfast love. That musical instruments are a means of nonverbally “giving thanks” is a profound statement of the religious value of art. Here art is described as a human response to God’s blessings, an offering of beauty to the Designer and Creator of existence, the ultimate source of all blessing and all beauty.

This Scripture indicates moreover how the audience is involved. When the trumpets, psalteries, harps, and cymbals were playing, David “by their ministry” could also “offer praises.” The picture is of a person praising God by means of the music performed by others. Music is described as a ministry. What is true here of music is true of all the arts. They can be a response to God and a ministry to other human beings, valuable both as an expression of the artist and as a catalyst for the audience.

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<sup>13</sup>See Psalms 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1. See also Luke 5:36–39.

There are many types of aesthetic forms. What Bezalel made for the Tabernacle and his counterpart Hiram the Sidonian made for the Temple were not, of course, museum pieces. The practice of isolating beautiful objects away from their contexts in ordinary life is a modern invention and would have been incomprehensible to someone like Bezalel. Still, there is a connection between the works of Bezalel and those of artists in the high art tradition of our modern culture. In both cases great skill is expended in making aesthetic designs. Whether these designs are made to function in worship or to be contemplated in a museum, whether they are part of the texture of ordinary life or assigned a special status, the same gifts are involved in their making.

In the Old Testament, God commanded that certain designs be created for glory and beauty, but they were also to express in a compelling way His nature and love for His people. The aesthetic and expressive dimensions of art are thus sanctioned by Scripture. Moreover, nearly the whole range of the arts can be found in God's Word. This is true not only of the visual arts and of music; in literary art, poetry is exemplified in the psalms, fiction in the parables, drama in the street theater of the prophets (2 Kings 13:14–19; Jeremiah 19; Ezekiel 4:1–3). Just as God's works are "manifold" (Psalm 104:24 RSV), that is, incredibly diverse, so are the works of human beings made in His image.

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# Imagination and Critique in the Work of Johann Georg Hamann

Knut Alfsvåg

## Introduction

Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) is a fascinating person. He was well trained in languages and literature, but had no formal position at an institution of learning. Still, he was well known and respected among his contemporary intellectuals and had close personal relationships with many of them. He was fluent in English, a rare gift among 18<sup>th</sup> century Germans, and he was for that reason familiar with Enlightenment philosophy as performed on both sides of the English Channel. For his own part, however, he remained convinced that the biblical and Lutheran convictions he had appropriated in his youth were the more consistent world view. He was thus able to engage Enlightenment philosophy from a deeply held Christian conviction in a way that still makes sense today.

The leading Jewish Enlightenment philosopher in Germany was Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), the grandfather of the great composer. Hamann and Mendelssohn knew each other well and had quite a close relationship. That did not stop Hamann from publishing a rather sharp critique of Mendelssohn's book *Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judenthum* (*Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism*), which was published in 1783. The content and implications of this critique is the main subject of this article. Before looking at the book Hamann wrote against Mendelssohn, however, I will present an outline of his thought, particularly focussing on his understanding of the role of the imagination.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> For presentations of the thought world of Hamann, see John R. Betz, *After Enlightenment: The Post-Secular Vision of J. G. Hamann* (Malden, Mass; Oxford; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Oswald Bayer, *A Contemporary in Dissent: Johann Georg Hamann as Radical Enlightener* (Roy A. Harrisville and Mark C. Mattes, trans., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Knut Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique: On the Relation between Christ, Creation and Epistemology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 53–107.

### **The London experience**

The decisive spiritual experience in Hamann's life occurred in London in 1758. Poor and alone in his lodgings with the Bible, he read it extensively, and discovered to his astonishment that it told a story in which he found himself included.<sup>65</sup> In this book it was told how the eternal God, Creator of heaven and earth, had condescended to the level of humans to reveal his love and mercy, and how he had chosen the Jews for this purpose. However, despite being singled out in this way as the object of God's love, the Jews had repeatedly rejected God and chosen their own way. It was above all this that gave Hamann his flash of recognition; this was exactly how he had behaved himself. The story about Cain in Gen 4 seems to have made a particularly deep impression on him, and he found himself to be guilty of his brother's blood in the same way as Cain. The consummation of the biblical story of divine love is the story of the death and resurrection of Christ, and in rejecting this proof of divine love, Hamann had behaved toward his brother Christ as Cain behaved toward his brother Abel. When he had admitted this, however, he felt how the Spirit made the mystery of divine love a living reality for him.<sup>66</sup>

Hamann emphasizes that in order to appreciate the biblical story in this way, one must apply imagination ("Einbildungskraft") for the sake of placing oneself as close as possible to the position of the author. Only then will it be possible to appropriate the perspective of the author as one's own. For Hamann, this is a general rule that applies to all literature, but it is particularly important when reading the Bible. A text will only capture its readers when it captures their imagination. If it does not, it will only

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<sup>65</sup> Hamann wrote quite extensively on his London experience. See "Gedanken über mein Lebenslauf", Johann Georg Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke* (Josef Nadler ed., 6 vols., Wien: Verlag Herder, 1949–1957), hereafter referred to as N, vol. 2, 11–54 and Johann Georg Hamann, *Londoner Schriften* (Oswald Bayer and Bernd Weissenborn ed., München: C. H. Beck, 1993) (BW), 313–349; an English translation of the most important passages is found in Ronald Gregor Smith, *J. G. Hamann: A Study in Christian Existence* (London: Collins, 1960), 139–157. See also "Über die Auslegung der Heilige Schrift", BW 59–61 and N1:5–6, and "Biblische Betrachtungen eines Christen", BW 65–311 and N1:7–249, partly translated in Smith, *Hamann*, 118–138.

<sup>66</sup> BW 343–344; N2, 40–41; Smith, *Hamann*, 153.

transmit information, and important as that may be, information alone never changes or creates anything.<sup>67</sup> Faith will only be established and nourished when one finds oneself in the biblical story, and this requires imaginative reading.

In reflecting on biblical authorship, Hamann thinks of the Bible as a canonical unity with the Holy Spirit as the author. The merely historical approach to the Bible, which Hamann later came to know through the works of Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791) and Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768), he found shallow and unsatisfactory.<sup>68</sup> The point of the Bible is that it gives us the story of how God reveals himself by addressing humans at their own level, thus opening the possibility for the readers to find themselves in the story. Isolating elements of the biblical narrative from this context and looking at them as mere historical facts detaches the readers from the story and subverts the biblical text as the source of faith.

In emphasizing the biblical story as something that captures its readers by engaging their imagination, Hamann shows himself to be a disciple of Luther to a greater extent than he probably was aware of himself. Luther's rediscovery of the significance of the biblical text was carried by a deep appreciation of classical rhetoric and its emphasis of how an orator or a text could change the basic *adfectus* or attitude of its listeners or readers by letting them see the realities of the story in their mind.<sup>69</sup> The Enlightenment preoccupation with facts and rationality did not have much time for these perspectives,<sup>70</sup> but Hamann knew from his own conversion experience how decisive they were. To change the attitude, and thus the behaviour of a human, one must engage his or her imagination, and address the human on an emotional level.

For Hamann, the biblical text is primarily important as it brings us God as actively present today in transmitting his love and mercy to humans. However, divine presence is not limited to the book. Already in his London writings, Hamann also

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<sup>67</sup> BW 66, 27–33; N1:29–35.

<sup>68</sup> Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique*, 74–75 and 85–86.

<sup>69</sup> See Knut Alfsvåg, "What no mind has conceived: On the significance of Christological apophaticism" (*Studies in Philosophical Theology* 45, Leuven, Paris, Walpole: Peeters, 2010), chapter 7.4: Metaphorical language as the presence of Christ (on Luther).

<sup>70</sup> On the outcome of this development, which Hamann tried to resist, see Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Pr, 1975).

describes how we also should look at nature as the area for God's wise involvement. This presupposes, however, that we abandon the idea of eternal laws of nature; this notion is for Hamann as unacceptable as the understanding of the Bible as a record of mere facts. Hamann has already at this early stage in his development appropriated David Hume's (1711–1776) critique of the idea of natural laws and placed it in the service of his own theological project.<sup>71</sup> To look for something eternal within the area of the created is for Hamann a contradiction; only God is eternal, but he may show his merciful wisdom by giving the world a certain stability and predictability. For Hamann, God is the Lord of nature, not a servant of its laws.<sup>72</sup>

To an astonishing degree, all the main topics of Hamann's later works are present in his London writings. In his later writings, he developed and reemphasized aspects of this thought as he found it necessary when engaging with his Enlightenment contemporaries.

### **Imagination in Hamann's polemical writings**

When Hamann returned to his native Königsberg after his visit to London, he found that he had to defend his newfound faith in revelation against the attacks of his friends, the most important of whom was Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). This he did by making Socrates the central figure of his short book *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* (1759).<sup>73</sup> Socrates was a hero for Hamann's Enlightenment opponents, but in Hamann's view, they did not understand him; they were disciples who betrayed their master. The starting point for Hamann's understanding is that Socrates's father was a sculptor who created his image by taking away what did not belong to it. Socrates adopted his father's work, but what he took away were illusions of knowledge. Socrates knew that he did not

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<sup>71</sup> Hume was important for Hamann, who is the one who transmitted his thoughts to Kant and thus enticed him to write *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781). On Hamann's relationship to Hume, see Thomas Brose, *Johann Georg Hamann und David Hume: Metaphysikkritik und Glaube im Spannungsfeld der Aufklärung* (vol. I and II, Frankfurt a M; Berlin; Bern; Bruxelles; New York; Oxford; Wien: Lang, 2006).

<sup>72</sup> Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique*, 59.

<sup>73</sup> N2, 57–82. Translated as *Socratic Memorabilia* in Gwen Griffith Dickson, "Johann Georg Hamann's Relational Metacriticism" (*Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann* 67, Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 375–400.



know and was therefore never burdened by deceptions as in the same way as both his and Hamann's contemporaries.

Hamann explores this perspective more precisely by means of the difference between *Empfindung* (perception) and *Lehrsatz* (doctrine); the former is the appropriation of the fact that we do not know the essentials of our existence, and this opens the possibility for faith.<sup>74</sup> On the contrary, doctrines are established by proof and logic, and while there are limited areas of research where this may be relevant, none of the important elements of a world view are among them. Even here, Hamann refers to Hume as one who got this right. Philosophers trusting their reason and poets trusting their imagination equally go wrong; life must be lived on a foundation of faith, the source of which can never be found in the human itself, neither in its reason nor its imagination.<sup>75</sup> For all his emphasis on imagination as indispensable in appropriating the wisdom of both the Bible and literature in general, Hamann does not endorse a view of the imagination as an independent guide to truth.

As the *Lehrsatz*-approach is clueless concerning the essentials of life, the attempt at following its guidelines leaves one rudderless on the sea of existence. One may then as well philosophize according to the expectations of the public, and this is what Enlightenment philosophers usually do.<sup>76</sup> At least they are rational insofar as by following the view of the majority they cater to their own well-being.<sup>77</sup> What they will never grasp is the paradox of revelation, according to which the essentials are revealed

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<sup>74</sup> This arguably is Hamann's appropriation of the distinction between νοῦς/*intellectus* and δίανοια/*ratio*, which is essential in Platonic thought, and defined by Plato in the line parable in *Republic* 509d–511e. In Kant, it resurfaces as the distinction between *Vernunft* (reason) and *Verstand* (understanding), and thus serves a quite different purpose from what it does in Hamann. See Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique*, 95.

<sup>75</sup> N2, 74.

<sup>76</sup> As Hamann emphasizes in later writings, e.g., in the one against Mendelssohn, they may alternatively play to the tune of the powerful, but this is not a part of the argument in *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*.

<sup>77</sup> The fact that Hamann and Kant remained on good terms even after the former had publicly criticized the latter in this way, demonstrates quite a profound friendship. On the relationship between the two, see further Oswald Bayer, *Vernunft ist Sprache: Hamanns Metakritik Kants* (Stuttgart; Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2002), 23–26.

by the poor and despised. Both Socrates and Jesus confirm this pattern.<sup>78</sup> What we need, therefore, according to Hamann, is a tutor who can teach us to read the patterns of history in the same way as Francis Bacon taught us to read the patterns of nature.<sup>79</sup> That is the only way to avoid a superstitious trust in merely alleged knowledge.

In 1762, Hamann published *Aesthetica in Nuce*, where he develops his epistemology even further.<sup>80</sup> *Empfindung* is here closely related to the divine light of creation; it is the appreciation of creation as revelation both in the context of history and nature. To interpret creation as a divine address is no easy thing, though; it demands a creative imagination even on the side of those receiving the revelation. One will then see both history and nature as transparent for transcendence. Concerning the hermeneutics of reading the book of nature, Hamann is very critical of the Gnostic abstraction that reduces senses and passions to mathematical equations.<sup>81</sup> In this respect, he is criticizing Descartes as the origin of modernity for doing violence towards nature in a way that anticipates 21<sup>st</sup> century ecological concerns in a very interesting way. It is essential for Hamann that our relationship with nature should not be reduced to explanation and computation; even in this context, the essential thing is to read imaginatively.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Hamann's most important 19<sup>th</sup> century disciple, Søren Kierkegaard, also explored the difference between Socrates and Jesus. Hamann is more concerned with the parallels between the two.

<sup>79</sup> On Hamann's appreciation of Bacon, see Sven-Aage Jørgensen, "Hamann, Bacon, and Tradition," *Orbis Litterarum* 16 (1961), 48-73.

<sup>80</sup> N 2:195–217. There are English translations of this work both in Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, 409–431, and in Johann Georg Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language* (Kenneth Haynes trans., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 60–95.

<sup>81</sup> Hamann thus anticipates an important part of the argument in C. S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* (1943).

<sup>82</sup> The significance of this aspect of Hamann's thought was emphasized already in Erwin Metzke, "Hamann und das Geheimnis des Wortes," in *Coincidentia oppositorum: Gesammelte Studien zur Philosophiegeschichte* (ed. Karlfried Gründer) (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1961), 271–293. For an updated version of the same emphasis, see Ulrich Moustakas, *Urkunde und Experiment: Neuzeitliche Naturwissenschaft im Horizont einer hermeneutischen Theologie der Schöpfung bei Johann Georg Hamann* (Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 114, Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2003).

The understanding of creation as an address from God to humans even informs Hamann's understanding of language, which he developed in a critique of the position of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). Hamann is critical both of theories that find the origin of language in direct divine intervention and of theories that find it in the development of an inherent human capacity (Herder's position). In his view, language is what occurs when God addresses humans in a way they can understand and articulate. Language is thus divine and human at the same time, and that is what enables divine-human communication as the key to the understanding of the world. For Hamann, this is nothing but the application of the idea of *communicatio idiomatum*, the communication of (divine and human) properties, which originally was developed in the context of Christology, on the understanding of the work of the Creator.<sup>83</sup> In a similar way Hamann also explores marriage, particularly in its sexual aspect, as an example of divine-human communication.<sup>84</sup>

Hamann was thus not afraid of criticizing the prevalent positions among his contemporaries even when they were defended by the best and the brightest. He even took on Kant in a critique of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* that, despite remaining unpublished in Hamann's lifetime, is a substantial critique that makes sense even today — the postmodern catchword “metacritique” was coined by Hamann on this occasion.<sup>85</sup> He was thus well prepared for a discussion with Mendelssohn when *Jerusalem* appeared in 1783.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Hamann develops his understanding of the origin of language in *Des Ritters von Rosencreuz letzte Willensmeynung über den göttlichen und menschlichen Ursprung der Sprache* (1772), N3:25–33, translated in Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, 461–469, and in Hamann, *Writings*, 96–110. On the significance of *communicatio idiomatum* in the thought of Hamann, see Friedemann Fritsch, *Communicatio idiomatum: zur Bedeutung einer christologischen Bestimmung für das Denken Johann Georg Hamanns* (Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann, vol. 89, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998). On Hamann's view of language, see further Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique*, 81–83.

<sup>84</sup> Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique*, 83–84.

<sup>85</sup> On Hamann's metacritique of Kant's critique of reason, see Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique*, 95–105.

<sup>86</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften* (vol. 8, Bad Cannstatt: Fromman-Holzboog, 1983), 99–204. It is published in English as Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or On Religious Power*

### **Hamann's critique of Mendelssohn**

Moses Mendelssohn was born in Dessau in Saxony in 1729 and educated himself to such a degree that he was considered among the leading German intellectuals. His father's name was Mendel, and young Moses Germanized his name to avoid the problems that might be associated with being called Ben Mendel. In 1762, he won a prize essay in metaphysics at the Berlin Academy; the runner-up was no less than Immanuel Kant. In spite of being a Jew, he was granted permanent residence in Berlin, and published a work on the immortality of the soul in the style of Plato's dialogues. In a debate with the Christian theologian Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801), he defended the idea of religious tolerance, maintaining that he would remain a Jew, but had no intention of converting others to his religion. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), who was a close friend of Mendelssohn's, found in Mendelssohn both a confirmation and a stimulus for his own views on religious tolerance.

From the 1770s, Mendelssohn's main project was to draw his fellow Jews into the mainstream of German culture, while at the same time promoting religious tolerance for all, including Jews. An important expression of the first part of the project was to translate parts of the Tanakh into German; an important expression of the second part was his book *Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism*. In his argument for religious tolerance in this book, he draws heavily on mainstream Enlightenment philosophy. Religion is important for the state as a foundation for the moral of its citizens; the doctrinal differences between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are, however, of less importance and should be left to the discretion of the subjects. Mendelssohn thus defends the public significance and support of rational religion as far as it conforms to and strengthens a socially accepted morality, but leaves all aspects of revealed religion to the private sphere. Religious doctrines should be tolerated, but no religions should receive governmental preference. Mendelssohn is therefore explicitly critical of theocracy both as traditionally maintained in the biblical history of the Jews and as materialized in the Lutheran state church in Prussia. He obviously has to accept the latter, but considers its dismantling a both desirable and inevitable outcome.

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*and Judaism* (Alexander Altmann trans., Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1983). Both Fritsch, *Communicatio idiomatum*, 243–246 and Betz, *After Enlightenment*, 262–270 give useful summaries of Mendelssohn's argument.

This was at odds with Hamann's understanding of the significance of revelation at almost every point. He therefore felt it necessary to write a refutation, which he published under the title *Golgotha und Scheblimini*,<sup>87</sup> the latter word being a transliteration of the Hebrew expression *shev limini*,<sup>88</sup> "sit at my right hand!", a quotation from Psalm 110:1. According to a saying of Jesus recorded in Matt 22:44, these words are addressed to the Messiah. The title thus refers to both the humble and the exalted state of The Anointed One.

Mendelssohn's defence for religious tolerance rests on his understanding of humans as independent moral beings with inherent rights from an alleged natural state before the establishment of human society. Hamann finds this to be but a repetition of the idea of human autonomy inherent in Herder's understanding of the development of language, and he finds both to be variations of a Pelagian anthropology maintaining the idea of a pure nature to which grace is later added as an embellishment.<sup>89</sup> For Hamann, there is no pure nature; the understanding of human identity as a gift from God implies that divine-human communication is the basic reality of human existence. As Hamann understands it, nature is therefore always graced.<sup>90</sup>

Since the theory of the natural state lacks a firm foundation,<sup>91</sup> it will, like Enlightenment rationality in general, always serve the powerful.<sup>92</sup> Hamann always insists on the relationship between the foundation of knowledge and social power structures. Since resisting prevalent positions from a loosely founded epistemology is like building on sand, those with a poor foundation for their thought will therefore tend to support the establishment. He is also critical on Mendelssohn's attempt at developing

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<sup>87</sup> N3, 291–320. English translation in Hamann, *Writings*, 164–204.

<sup>88</sup> יָשֵׁב לִימִינִי

<sup>89</sup> Hamann thus even anticipates the critique of *natura pura* which was so important for parts of 20<sup>th</sup> century Roman-Catholic thought (Fergus Kerr, "Henri de Lubac", in *Key Theological Thinkers: From Modern to Postmodern* [eds. Staale Johannes Kristiansen and Svein Rise; Farnham: Ashgate, 2013], 201–212, 204).

<sup>90</sup> N3, 293.

<sup>91</sup> Hamann creates the word psilosophy, from ψιλός, bare (N3, 316) to describe this kind of argument. Psilosophy is naked reason unsupported by faith or evidence.

<sup>92</sup> N3, 294. Cf. note 76 above.

a theory of rights; for Hamann, this seems to be nothing but an endorsement of Augustine's *civitas terrena* with concupiscence as its main characteristic.<sup>93</sup>

Hamann then devotes the second half of *Gogotha und Scheblimini* to the task of defending traditional Judaism against what he considers Mendelssohn's attack on it. In Hamann's view, Mendelssohn's idea of rationally accessible, eternal truths is as foreign to Judaism as it is to Christianity. Both insist on historical events as manifestations of revelation, and for both, this notion is essential.<sup>94</sup> Admittedly, Christians insist on the significance of revelatory events that the Jews reject, and Christians even insist that these revelations uncover what is hidden in the Bible of the Jews. Still, as a Christian, Hamann has a deep respect for the traditions of the Jews, and he is quite sharp in his critique of Mendelssohn for selling out on this point, even calling him "an uncircumcised sophist."<sup>95</sup> Imagination, which is essential for establishing faith, cannot work with the abstractions that follow Mendelssohn's idea of the natural state. It is thus as destructive for traditional Judaism as it is for traditional Christianity.

Mendelssohn finds the essence of the Mosaic Law in promoting obedience toward the state. Hamann could not disagree more. He is aware that the church is used by the established authorities in this way, but this is a contradiction of its essence. The church builds a kingdom that is not of this world and should therefore not be co-opted by the state for the purpose of building earthly kingdoms.<sup>96</sup> Mendelssohn and the Lutheran state church authorities agree on the primarily moral significance of religion, while Hamann disagrees with both. This is a radical critique of the state church, and one may wonder why the Prussian state censorship allowed him to publish it.<sup>97</sup>

Antisemitism was quite strong in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, even among intellectuals.<sup>98</sup> Voltaire was "an extreme case,"<sup>99</sup> but he is not the only one. Mendelssohn's appeal for

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<sup>93</sup> N3, 299. The connection is underlined by Betz, *After Enlightenment*, 275.

<sup>94</sup> N3, 305.

<sup>95</sup> N3, 308.

<sup>96</sup> N3, 312–131.

<sup>97</sup> Kierkegaard's critique of the state church thus arguably represents a radicalization of what he already found in Hamann.

<sup>98</sup> See Adam Sutcliffe, "The Enlightenment, French Revolution, Napoleon", in *Antisemitism: A History* (eds. Richard S. Levy and Albert S. Lindemann; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 107–120.

tolerance is therefore easily understandable. There is, however, no such understanding to be found in Hamann's *Golgotha und Scheblimini*. On the contrary, he turns the tables to the extent that he maintains that it is Mendelssohn who represents a covert attack of the very religion for which he is promoting tolerance by building his demand for tolerance on principles that are incompatible with Judaism as traditionally interpreted. Far from promoting antisemitism, Hamann therefore, as a Christian, finds it necessary to defend Judaism against the covert attack by one its own highly respected representatives.<sup>100</sup> For Hamann, this is necessary both because he finds Mendelssohn's argument to be inconsistent, because he has learned from the apostle Paul that Christians should respect Jews (cf. Rom 11:18–24), and because he finds the significance of revelation through particular historical events to be a common emphasis among Jews and Christians.

Hamann is not burdened by the history of Christian discrimination against Jews in a way that forces him to step carefully when he enters into his debate with Mendelssohn. On the contrary, he does not mince his words when speaking out against what he finds to be inconsistent in Mendelssohn's argument, and that is quite a lot. Still, his critique is exemplary in not containing a single trace of antisemitism. It is rather carried by a deep appreciation for the religion of the Jews and its significance for Christians both concerning the elements the two traditions hold in common and where their ways part. Religious tolerance is arguably as important for Hamann as it is for Mendelssohn. However, he is deeply suspicious of the kind of "tolerance" that insists that religions should conform to a predefined pattern as a condition of the state's "tolerance" of them. Living at the other end of a history that has taught us more about the problems inherent in this kind of "tolerance" than Hamann could dream of, we should be able to see that he has a point worth considering.

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<sup>99</sup> Sutcliffe, "The Enlightenment", 111.

<sup>100</sup> However, in 1785 Mendelssohn was drawn into a controversy over the alleged pantheism, by many considered equal to atheism, of his close friend Lessing, which made Mendelssohn into a target of attack from all sides. Hamann's critique had nothing to do with this debate. On this debate and Mendelssohn's role in it, see Fredrick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 92–108.

### **Imagination and critique in the thought of Hamann**

One of the striking features of Hamann's thought is his deep appreciation of British empiricism in the tradition of Bacon and Hume. For Hamann, empiricism serves a double purpose. He insists that a consistent world view will have to appreciate the world as it is experienced within the realms of both history and nature; unfounded speculation never carries much weight for Hamann. At the same time, he appreciates how empiricism, particularly in Hume, is unfolded as a deconstruction of all kinds of rationalism; here Hume in Hamann's view serves as a John the Baptist among the philosophers, paving the way for faith.<sup>101</sup> Admittedly, Hume did not quite understand that himself, applying his critique of reason also in the area of faith. In Hamann's view, this is such an obvious category error that he is willing to overlook it. The error may have stopped Hume himself from entering the Promised Land, but he certainly was able to show us the way.<sup>102</sup>

This tells us that the dismantling of rationalism in itself does not suffice. The reason is that the real significance of history and nature as areas of divine presence, the revelation of divine condescension, does not correspond to the understanding of the divine as preconceived by humans. Empiricism that does not expect revelation to establish patterns of divine action that differ from human expectations are therefore in Hamann's view not sufficiently empirical. Imagination is essential for Hamann in making out the real content of divine revelation and applying it one's own life, but even imagination is from the outset determined by the one-sidedly human to the extent that it on its own will not capture the essentials of revelation. It will have to be exposed to, and thus determined by, the traditions of revelations that show us the paradoxality of divinity under the cover of the apparently humble and insignificant.<sup>103</sup> In appropriating these revelations and making them the foundation of life as lived by humans today, imagination is indispensable. It is thus imagination on the part of the human that corresponds to and appreciates both history and nature as the area of divine presence.

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<sup>101</sup> See John R. Betz, "Hamann before Kierkegaard: A systematic theological oversight," *Pro Ecclesia* 16 (2007), 299–333, 315.

<sup>102</sup> On Hamann's critical appreciation of Hume, see further Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique*, 67–68.

<sup>103</sup> The classic text on this topic in Lutheran theology is Luther's Heidelberg Disputation from 1518. On Hamann's appreciation of this text, see Brose, *Hamann und Hume*, 1:171–174.



Hamann is not limiting the world of relevant revelation to the biblical tradition. Even in this respect anticipating aspects of the thought of C. S. Lewis, Hamann finds revelatory significance in all religious traditions, both pagan, Jewish, and Christian, even if he as a Christian is not in doubt that it is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that sets the pattern according to which all revelations are to be interpreted. His main objection against Mendelssohn is that the latter interprets revelation according to the rules of reason. For Hamann, it is reason that should be governed by revelation as interpreted and applied by imagination, and this principle is what governs his polemic against Herder, Kant, Mendelssohn, and other Enlightenment thinkers. He knew from his own experience that mainstream Enlightenment thought was too limited to be able to capture the heights and depths of human existence. For that purpose, the imaginative identification of oneself with the figures of the biblical story was much better starting point.

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# **Report on the 2018 Conference for the Association for Jewish Studies**

**Stan Meyer**

The Association for Jewish Studies (AJS) is an academic organization composed of scholars and educators in the area of Jewish studies representing North America, Europe, Israel, and the English-speaking world. Its annual meeting hosts papers, panel discussions, and sessions covering topics ranging from Jewish history, higher education in Jewish studies, film studies, anti-Semitism, Contemporary Judaism, Biblical interpretation, Jewish identity, Israel Studies, and the Jewish social sciences, to name a few subjects. The 2018 annual meeting was held in Boston, with 1,215 attending and 215 papers presented. For the last three years I have had the privilege of attending the conference, my own area of research being Contemporary American Judaism and the social sciences. I have learned valuable material for those of us in Jewish ministry or the Messianic Jewish movement as I've observed significant changes within the Jewish community. This article is a brief report on some of the take-homes I found at the 2018 annual meeting.

## **Reconsidering *Who is a Jew***

The Pew Research Institute, the North American Jewish Data Bank (NJDB), and other organizations that survey Jewry traditionally exclude from their findings those who report being Jewish and Christian. For example, in the 2013 Pew Research study, they included those with one or more Jewish parents, those with family backgrounds who reported being Jewish but not being religious, and those with no Jewish family backgrounds who reported converting to Judaism. However, they excluded 1.4 million participants with at least one Jewish parent who reported being Christian. Moreover, they excluded 100,000 respondents who described themselves as Christian and Jewish (i.e. Christian-Jews). One sociologist at Hebrew Union College reported on his findings, asking the question, why don't we include them? He carried out his own study of those he called Christian-Jews reporting that of those he studied he found Christian-Jews to be

more Jewishly engaged than most non-religious Jews who were included in past studies. He posed to the session that the Jewish community may need to reconsider, as it looks toward inclusivity, embracing Christian-Jews as part of American Jewry. Furthermore, he pointed out that the 2013 Pew report found that 34% of American Jews believe a person can be Jewish and believe in Jesus. Surprisingly, his argument was well received among the small group of sociologists and scholars in the room including a number of faculty from other institutions.

### **Jewish Studies in an Age of Trump, White Nationalism, and Israel**

It may not surprise many in Jewish ministry that the American Jewish community has been increasingly concerned since 2016 with the government administration, and specifically President Donald Trump. Most American Jews associate the emergence of new white nationalism in America and anti-Semitism with this current administration. The sense of many American Jews is that the blunt nationalist rhetoric coming from the administration is unleashing white nationalism that was hovering below the surface prior to 2016. Moreover, many American Jews associate Evangelicalism with this new white nationalism. This perspective has a number of implications for those of us in Jewish ministry.

For over two decades the American Jewish community has become divided over their perspective on Israel and her policies. The current administration has led some to be more critical since 2016. In a session titled *Jewish Studies in the Trump Era*, one panelist explained how they believe Trump's support of Israel is founded in racist ideology. In his understanding, the association of white race with American nationalism is consistent in associating Jewish race with Israel. It is the association of blood and soil. The US government alliance with American Evangelicals in their support of Israel raises concerns and suspicions among many American Jews. They feel the support is founded in a racist ideology and underlying interest in converting the Jews. For these reasons, most American Jews are not impressed with the US administration's decision to move the embassy to Jerusalem at this time, nor their pro-Israel rhetoric. All of this may seem counterintuitive to most Evangelicals, those in the Messianic Jewish movement, or those of us involved in Jewish ministry, especially outside the US. It is valuable for us to recognize that conveying Evangelical support of Israel to many American Jews often raises more suspicion than sympathy.

Another important trend emerging since 2016 is the trend away from seeing American Jews as *white*. Historically, Jews were not identified as racially white in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, nor in America in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, as Jews immigrated to the US between 1880 and 1920, competing with other nationalities for privileged status, Jewish assimilationists appealed to American society to be considered racially white. As the Civil Rights era gathered momentum, Jews were identified as white. However, as one scholar pointed out, many American Jews feel caught in the middle and are not sure they want to be considered white. He reported many American Jews enjoy white privilege as far as the Black Lives Matter movement sees them, but not white enough as far as the new white nationalists believe. As Jewish scholars debate the question, “are Jews white?” and as Jewry become racially diversified through intermarriage, conversion, and immigration of non-Ashkenazi Jews into the US, many are asking that the question be put back on the table.

## **Jewish Millennials**

### ***Gloom and Doom***

If the Evangelical language of support for the Jews and Israel raises more concerns than sympathy, the language of *gloom and doom* among Jewish leaders is not faring much better. It was 1997 when Dershowitz published his controversial book *The Vanishing American Jew*, in which he argued that the American Jewish community was dying a death by assimilation and intermarriage. Moreover, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported that 2018 had the highest numbers of anti-Semitic incidents in the US since WWII. A sociologist from Brandeis studying Jewish Millennials reported that gloom and doom does more to drive Jews in their 20s and 30s away from Jewish engagement than draw them in. He pointed out that Millennials do not share the collective memory of the founding of the state of Israel in 1967, or the ethnic pride movement. They are two generations removed from the Holocaust and World War II. Many view the reports of — as he described — gloom and doom, as serving the purpose of fundraising and artificially seeking to galvanize American Jewry through coercive rhetoric. His reports parallel recent reports over the last decade on Jewish Millennials.

### ***Rejecting Circumcision: The Brit Shalom Ceremony***

Many young Jewish couples uncomfortable with the circumcision ritual are opting for a Jewish ritual that does not involve cutting. One scholar reported that this trend is particularly true among young intermarried couples wrestling with competing family pressures. She reported that some have innovated a ceremony they call Brit Shalom. This ceremony dedicates the Jewish male baby to the Jewish community but does not include cutting. Most American rabbis reject this as an option. However, a growing number of independent and progressive rabbis have embraced this ceremony as an option.

### ***Farming, Feminism, and New Jewish Frameworks***

Urban Adamah began in Connecticut, on the American East Coast, as a movement that seeks to connect Judaism with the land. It is a Jewish Millennial response to the historic Yishuv movement in Israel in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: a secular, politically liberal social movement that sees Jewishness as culturally engaged. Today, over fifty Jewish farming communities have developed across the United States, including several in California, such as Coastal Roots in San Diego, Urban Adamah in Berkley, and Netiyah in Los Angeles. One ethnographer discussed the emergence in Jewish feminism among these communities. Women leaders are seeking equality in a movement begun the early 2000s. They connect earth Judaism with aspects of feminism. While these communities are new, they are well connected with liberal Judaism. They find financial support from local congregations, provide summer camps for Jewish children, support sustainability and renewable agriculture, and provide community programming. They are becoming significantly influential within American Jewry.

The Jewish Healing movement and Jewish Feminism have long been associated together since the Healing movement began in the 1970s. In a presentation on the Healing movement, one scholar traced the development of the Mishebeirach prayer in the contemporary synagogue liturgy. This prayer that has become ubiquitous in Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and even some modern Orthodox services, is recited during or after the Torah service and is a prayer for healing. Normally, the rabbi asks those requesting prayer for healing to stand up. He/she either looks over at the person, or in some cases elders come over to the person to lay hands upon them. In one synagogue I attended, the rabbi formed a circle and prayed individually for the person. This is the only prayer today recited personally and individually for a person in

contemporary worship. Its development is quite interesting. Judaism historically rejected prayer for personal needs as being self-serving, instead focusing on corporate prayer. In the 1980s, at the height of the AIDS epidemic, Jews in San Francisco wrestled with grief losing partners or themselves being diagnosed with AIDS. The LGBT Reform synagogue in San Francisco, Sh'har Zahav, adopted the healing ritual from the Jewish Renewal Movement's healing circle. Healing had developed among New Age Jews and the Renewal Movement in the 1970s as a private ritual. This synagogue adopted it into the Shabbat liturgy. Songwriter Debbie Friedman composed music for the prayer, *Mi shebeirach*. The song and prayer ritual quickly spread across North America and today it is one of the most popular, touching prayers that involve worshippers in personal prayer in the Shabbat service.

### **Implications for Those in Jewish Ministry**

There are a few take-homes for those of us ministering in North America or English-speaking communities. First, the Jewish community continues to adapt and transform. American Jewry is particularly evolving. It is becoming racially, ethnically, and culturally diversified, and values an inclusive approach. As Jews intermarry, are raised with multiple heritages, and bring these cultures into their Jewish homes, American Jews value inclusion. For those ministering to Jews, they should reconsider which Jewish culture is appropriate for their setting. They should recognize that traditional Ashkenazi, European Jewish cultural symbols and celebrations may alienate rather than attract those we try to engage. Second, as the community becomes more inclusive, we may find open doors to engage the community from within. Those of us serving in Israel are currently aware of insider opportunities extended to us. However, those of us in the diaspora are finding more opportunities to engage the Jewish community as insiders as well. Third, new frameworks such as the Jewish Healing service and Jewish farming may provide new structures to engage Jews in our ministry. Consider the Tu B'shvat ceremony of planting a tree as a possible community event to invite inquirers to and how important sustainability is as a Jewish value. The Jewish Healing service provides an accepted ceremony whereby those ministering to Jewish people can consider ministering to inquirers.

Fourth, it is important for Evangelicals and those in the Messianic Jewish Movement to recognize that among many Jews in North America the language we use describing support of Israel and the Biblical claim to the land often raises more



concerns than sympathy. It can raise suspicion and engages a deep concern in the forefront of Jewish minds as they are concerned over the connection between blood and soil, Christian Zionism, and Christian missionizing. However, the subject should not be off limits. Rather, it is important to ask questions, listen, and allow those we wish to engage to express their concerns, views, and confusion in our effort to engage Jewish people with the gospel.

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## **Review: *Hollywood's Chosen People***

**Stan Meyer**

Murray Pomerance, Daniel Bernardi, and Hava Tirosh-Samuelsan, eds. Keith Peters, narrator. *Hollywood's Chosen People: The Jewish Experience in American Cinema*. Audio Edition. Fort Wayne, IN: Wayne State University Press, 2017. (9h 55mm, \$13.97 US)

Few books rival Neil Gabler's (1988) seminal work, *An Empire of Their Own*. In it, Gabler argued that a handful of Jewish immigrants who grew up within 500 miles of each other came to Los Angeles and constructed on screen the narrative that became known as the American Dream. These moguls imputed Jewish social values and aspirations into moving images and sound, creating what became America's self-image. In *Hollywood's Chosen People*, Pomerance, Bernardi, and Samuelson move ahead to explore the ways Jewish identity has been depicted in cinema, from the pre-war years to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, they discuss the complex relationship between Jews, film, and American culture.

*Hollywood's Chosen People*, first published in 2016, was republished in audio format in 2017 by University Press Audiobooks and is performed by Keith Peters. Peters is a professional voice actor who has narrated several historical and historical fictions for audio. Murray Pomerance is professor of sociology and film at Ryerson University. He has published numerous volumes on film history. He performed on Broadway in *The 39 Steps* (2005). Daniel Bernardi chairs the Department of Cinema and is director for the Documentary Film Institute at San Francisco State University. His field of study is race, gender, and sexuality in American film. Hava Tirosh-Samuelsan is professor of Modern Judaism and History and chairs the Department of Jewish Studies at Arizona State University (p. 245). This anthology is composed twelve individual essays written by leading scholars exploring the relationship between Jews, film, and culture. The chapters are organized chronologically from Hollywood's origins to today. Writers discuss depictions of Jewish identity in American cinema, negative and positive stereotypes, the ways in which depictions reflect the evolution of American Jewish identity from film's beginnings to the present, and how these depictions shaped American Jewish self-identity.

## Summary

In the introduction, the editors build upon Gabler's (1988) foundation, describing the "influential way [Jewish filmmakers were] concerned with the construction of the American Dream." They explain that "this book sets out to mark a new...path to the understanding of the role of Jews and their experience in Hollywood filmmaking" (p. 1). The first chapter provides a brief history of Jewish involvement in American film from their founding of the industry. They ask these questions: What is the Jewish involvement in Hollywood and what is their presence on the screen? How has Hollywood depicted Jewish culture and identity, and how has cinema influenced popular culture through Jewish presence? "Has America become exceptionally open to...Jewish ideas and cultural sensibilities? To what degree has American mass culture become Jewish?" (p. 17).

In the first essay, Friedman tells the story of a forgotten masterpiece, *His People* (1925). This silent film told the story of the iconic Jewish immigrant family torn asunder by conflicting loyalties between Jewish tradition and ambitions of American integration. Portuges' essay, "Jewish Immigrant Directors and Their Impact on Hollywood," describes the influence of European refugee filmmakers arriving in 1938, at a time when European cinema was well advanced. These directors were less timid than their American counter-parts in depicting Jewish experience on the screen. They introduced film noir, and pushed the boundaries with experimental and avant-garde productions such as *The Spiral Staircase* (1945), *The Dark Mirror* (1946), and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1958). Moreover, in an era when American Jews sought to maintain low profiles, they sought to confront Nazism, expose fascism, and address social justice through such films as *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), *Casablanca* (1942), and *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961).

Dixon's essay describes institutionalized anti-Semitism that expressed through Hollywood's production code — the content censoring framework prior to the establishment of the film rating system. This institution was dominated by Joseph Breen, a Catholic anti-Semite, whom Dixon says dominated the industry holding Jewish filmmakers in suspicion as socialists and anarchists. Leaving the Hollywood's Golden Age behind and moving into the turbulent 1960s, Kozloff considers the interrelationship between the Jewish moral conscience and camp. Camp is described as the playful attempt to articulate through film a serious moral issue in a way that disarms cultural

prejudices. Camp engaged many social controversies through its disarming manner. Camp is “a solvent of morality...[that] neutralizes...indignation, sponsors playfulness” in promoting serious moral sense (p. 112). She writes that at times camp is a very Jewish strategy, appearing both moral and amoral in its appeal to the American conscience. However, she despairs that there is a fine line between camp films and ones that are just bad films. “Many serious films cannot even be redeemed as camp love objects...The reason a movie like *On the Beach* (1959) ... are bad to the point of being laughable, but...not [enough to be] enjoyable” (p. 119).

Jewish filmmakers began depicting the Holocaust late, almost two decades after the war's conclusion. Even then, it was not depicted as a Jewish tragedy. Beginning with the TV miniseries *The Holocaust* (1978) and Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), filmmakers began unpacking the tragedy. It was the generation born after World War II who gathered the courage to take on this event on screen. Oskar Schindler, who lived destitute in South America for a time, was unable to find interest among directors for his story. After his death Spielberg accepted the challenge to tell the controversial story of a dedicated Nazi who broke with his nation in the end to save Jews.

In “Representing Atrocity,” Sterrit criticizes the carelessness of filmmakers in appropriating the Holocaust to depict subsequent tragedies such as September 11. In comparing the two events, he argues that these are different kinds of tragedies. The Holocaust was perpetrated on the Jews with the goal to annihilate the race. However, the Holocaust and September 11 each deserve dignity, and each are disrespected when appropriated by an agency for its political ends (p. 157).

In “Boy-Man Schlemiels” and “Who Was Buddy Love,” essayists Brook and Pomerance explore changing Jewish identities on the screen from the 60s to the present. Jerry Lewis, Ben Stiller, and Adam Sandler epitomize the nebbish Jews. They express Jewish social awkwardness on the screen as they aspire to be accepted by American culture. Each pursues blond-haired *shiksas* and masculine personas, falling short in the end. In *The Nutty Professor* (1963), Lewis is an awkward Jewish professor who transforms himself into a hot stud named Buddy Love. In *You Don't Mess with the Zohan* (2008), Sandler is transformed into an attractive hunk who courts the likes of *shiksa* goddesses. Stiller, in *Along Came Polly* (2004), cycles between waspy Jennifer Aniston and Jewish Debra Messing as he wrestles with his Jewishness. The writers criticize the depiction of the super-nebbishes who prefer blond gentiles to brash Jewish

women. Brook points out that films emerging in the 1990s begin to depict multicultural and inclusive images of Jews. In *Independence Day* (1996), Judd Hirsch wearing a kippah forms a prayer circle consisting of African-American children and invites a white man to join them. "I'm not Jewish," the official says. "Nobody's perfect," he retorts, quoting the gay character in *Some Like It Hot* (1959) implying that "Jews' multicultural embrace extends to gays [and] people of color" (p.188).

In the final essay, Sobchack caustically criticizes Barbara Streisand's depictions of Jewish women asking, "Why do so many people...in our culture *hate* Barbara Streisand?" (p. 211). She argues that Streisand depicts the negative stereotypes of Jewish women from the self-absorbed Jewish American Princess and the meddling Jewish matriarch, to the annoying over-the-top New York behaviors. In the end, she feels Streisand is herself insecure in her Jewishness, and all of her too-much is really not enough. "Despite all her admirable 'chutzpah'...the star is also a disappointment, even an embarrassment...her 'too much' is a sham—and far too little" (p. 227).

### **Evaluation**

*Hollywood's Chosen People* charts new territory in the story of Jewish filmography. Building upon Gabler's account of Hollywood's Jewish beginnings, this book transports us ahead into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Gabler selectively constructed a film history around his thesis: Jewish filmmakers created the American Dream. This anthology involves a community of critical essayists who each bring different lenses to bear upon Jewish influence, relationship with, and depiction on the screen. The book describes the changing relationship in time: It contrasts the influence of European refugee filmmakers from the assimilationist moguls who preceded them. It describes bold filmmakers in the 1960s and 70s who confronted injustice on the screen. It concludes with multicultural Jewish depictions emerging in the 1990s to the present. Writers are unafraid to criticize filmmakers and actors, express righteous indignation over negative stereotypes and misrepresentations of Jews. They contribute the untold and forgotten stories, such as that of *Our People*, the story of Oskar Schindler, and how Jewish morality came to be conveyed through camp.

However, anthologies can be confusing and disconnected. While the chapters were loosely organized by chronological subject matter, they felt unrelated. This disorganization led me to feel a bit lost. I felt like I had asked Siri to direct me from Burbank over Laurel Canyon to Hollywood, but she took me on a grand tour of Los

Angeles. Some chapters were concise and clear, while others overly academic, assuming knowledge of critical theorists whom I was unfamiliar with (e.g. “Notes on Sontag and ‘Jewish Moral Seriousness’”). Other chapters should have been omitted because their stories did not significantly contribute to the general purpose of the book (e.g. “Stardom, Intermarriage, and Consumption in the 1950s”). Finally, Sobchack was over the top in her caustic attack on Streisand, a beloved film favorite of American Jews who represented the emergence Jewish ethnic pride in America.

Finally, Keith Peters’ performance was acceptable as an audiobook narrator. However, I felt that an actor telling the story of film should perform with the same drama and excitement filmgoers anticipate as they sink in their seats clutching a bag of popcorn and soda. Nevertheless, I recommend *Hollywood's Chosen People* to anyone interested in learning how Jewish filmmakers and actors have shaped American culture. It provides a window into changing American-Jewish identities over the course of 100 years, and it describes how Jewish identity and expression, depicted in film, shaped American Jews’ conception of our own identity.

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## **“RAK IVRIT” – From the Israeli scene**

I am sitting at a café on Ben-Yehuda’s pedestrian zone waiting for a friend to join me for a cup of coffee. While waiting I was looking at all the different people passing by. I was paying attention to all the different languages being spoken in this melting pot of a city like Jerusalem, but most of all I heard Hebrew. And it was as natural as it should be. Hebrew is today in Israel as natural as Norwegian is in Norway or English in the US. So who is on a daily basis considering the miracle, a language which was dead for almost 2000 years has become resurrected.

After the “kaffe hafuch,” the coffee, my friend and I went to Emek Refaim to the protestant cemetery of Jerusalem. Maybe you will think that this was somehow a strange place to go? But this cemetery has become an attractive place for many people to visit, due to its beautiful paintings. The American artist Patricia Solveson has painted histories from the Bible on the wall surrounding the cemetery; known histories from Genesis to Revelation. Many Israelis are visiting the cemetery to have a look at the paintings, including those from the New Testament. The day we were visiting, a Jewish family had come all the way from Tel Aviv. They stood looking at the risen Messiah who had a ring on his finger where it was written two Hebrew letters: ALEF and TAV — in Greek, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

### **Dola Ben-Yehuda**

After the paintings we went looking at the different tombs. We stopped in front of one and read: DOLA BEN-YEHUDA WITTMAN. The name of Ben-Yehuda was undeniably familiar. We had just a while ago finished our coffee on Ben-Yehuda Street. The street was named after Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the father of Modern Hebrew. But who was Dola Ben-Yehuda? We didn’t know. She was born in 1902 and died in 2004 according to the inscription on her tomb. She lived a very long time. The guard of the cemetery passed by and he could explain that Dola indeed was the daughter of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858-1922), the father of Modern Hebrew. He was known for the expression “Rak Ivrit,” or “Only Hebrew.” He wanted all Jews in the Promised Land to speak only Hebrew, at home and in the streets. And this of course was long before the modern state of Israel came

into being. People used to call him “the meshuga” or the crazy one, and they laughed about his project of reviving the old Hebrew language. But Eliezer Ben-Yehuda continued his laborious work to create a Modern Hebrew language from the biblical and the Mishnaic Hebrew. He spoke only Hebrew to his wife and two children. His son died young, but his daughter lived for a long time. And here we stood by her tomb. Dola was one of the first to have Modern Hebrew as her mother tongue. She was also at the time of her death the world’s oldest native speaker of Modern Hebrew.

But then we asked: “Why was she buried here in a protestant cemetery”? Dola was not only among the first to have Modern Hebrew as her mother tongue, she was also among the first in the modern state of Israel to believe in Yeshua as the Messiah. Old tombs can tell many interesting stories, and a cemetery can hide many secrets.

By sunset we left the cemetery, and each took a different direction home. We greeted each other with “Lehitraot,” to see each other again. And I sent a thankful thought to Eliezer Ben-Yehuda for having had the courage and vision to fight for the resurrection of the Old Hebrew language.

TODA RABA — Thank you!

Elisabeth Eriksen Levy

CEO, Caspari Center