

## ***Faith Communities***



**Michelangelo's Moses - San Pietro in Vincoli**

Martin Buber, renowned Jewish thinker, wrote that Judaism is not an abstraction or metaphysical idea, nor a moral ideal, or a projection of a psychic or social image. It is not anything at all created by, or developed within, man. Instead, Judaism is a phenomenon of religious reality. It is something that takes place between man and God, that is, in the reality of their relationship, the mutual reality of God and man.

Buber also writes that a great event in their history molded the Jews into a people. It was when the Jewish tribes were freed from the bondage of Egypt. In an allegorical way, Dante writes in Canto II of the *Purgatorio*: *In exitu Israel de Aegypto*, prefiguring Christ's resurrection from the dead, representing liberation from the slavery of sin. This reinforces the connection between the Exodus and the Resurrection and between the faith communities of Jews and Christians, both of whom are formed into a people by the work of God.

Rome, too, is a kind of religious reality. It is the framework that gave birth to the body of Christ, the geographical empire representing power and authority where the humble Christian church was fashioned and is still a central voice of influence throughout the world. It represents the

center of Christian visual and musical arts as celebrated by Michelangelo and DaVinci as well as Gregorian chant, the music of Catholic Mass and the counterpoint of Bach.

Rome is the site of persecution and bondage of the early Church as seen in the Coliseum and the Catacombs. At the same time, it gave life to Christian theology through the work of the Italian Renaissance. Thus, Rome is a defining focal point in history for both Christians and Jews. It blends both the pagan and the sacred. Augustine wrote about this dichotomy in his *City of God*, a dichotomy that Dostoevsky echoes in the *Brothers Karamazov* when he has Dmitri reflect that the (Roman) world is home to both Sodom and Madonna. This dichotomy is manifested in two ways for every human. We are bound to human and earthly institutions as well as holy and sacred communities as we live our lives on earth as followers of God. The binary of human and divine is also a part of our lives in internal ways as we reside in spiritually light and dark places within our own minds and hearts.

I have taught in the Seaver College Great Books program since 1994. Our four semester reading list spans over 3000 years of western literature, philosophy, and theology. There are many works that ask central questions of both Christianity and Judaism. These include several works that deal with some of the Great Ideas, noted, in part, below:

Milton's *Paradise Lost*

Sin, Forgiveness, Good, Evil, Law, Free Will, God's Nature, Desire, Temptation

Augustine's *Confessions*

The Sacrament of Confession, Scripture (Sacred Text), Obedience, Temperance

Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*

Justice, Happiness, Providence, Fame, Wealth, Eternity, Virtue, Wisdom

Virgil's *Aeneid*

Rebirth, Destiny, Fate, Courage, Nation

Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*

Slave Morality, Nobility, Ressentiment, Poverty, Guilt, Redemption

Buber's *I and Thou*

Power, Humanity, Holiness, the Other, Ultimate Reality

Dante's *Divine Comedy*

Conversion, Faith, Hope, Love, Eternity, Punishment, Penance, Blessing

Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*

Faith, Sacrifice, Silence, Ethics, Family

Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*

Guilt, Shame, Mission, Calling, Memory

Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*

Sacrifice, Obedience, Nation, Suffering, Leadership

Accordingly, I look forward to joining the pilgrimage to Rome in order to more deeply understand the contributions of both Christianity and Judaism to these works as they engage with the Great Ideas found throughout the Great Books. As the director of the Great Books program, I will also

find the trip beneficial as I continue to work with other Great Books faculty colleagues in helping strengthen the program for our students. They too will benefit from my pilgrimage which is led by a valued Great Books colleague, Paul Contino.

To be clear, In dealing with the ideas and works enumerated above, I lack a sufficiently rich perspective of Judaism. I have much to learn that can help me from this trip that will enrich my and my students' study of the ways Judaism serves as a baseline for many of our readings. For example, I hope to more fully grasp the meaning of the destruction of the Temple by the Romans. I look forward to understanding what it was like to be a believer living in the midst of persecution. Literature, Theology, and Art can help communicate these ideas, but actually traveling to Rome is the key. An international experience must happen. It is more than study and reflection; it requires that we go, walk, and enter another world.

Moreover, I have much to learn about the role of Roman art and architecture in forming and laying foundational stones to help me understand the works we read. Therefore, I wish to see how Rome forged a breakthrough of faith for both Jews and Christians. I am especially pleased at the opportunity to join the pilgrimage to learn more of the historical significance and power of the visual arts through the eyes of Dr. Colburn. I reference many works of art in my Great Books teaching: including, for example, the Pantheon, Rembrandt's Sacrifice of Isaac, Raphael's School of Athens, Laocoon, the Sistine Chapel, and Michelangelo's Moses. I have served in the university's Florence program, so I have been to Rome a number of times. But, there is always more to learn. I am confident that this pilgrimage will deepen my understanding of Rome's impact on western art, architecture, and thought.

Finally, I would especially like the opportunity to visit Ravenna, a city I was able to go to in the summer of 2016. I would welcome the opportunity to enrich my limited understanding of its expansive mosaic works from the Byzantine Era. I hope we can include this marvelous city in our pilgrimage.

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