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THE GREAT AMNESTY

A 'REDEPTIVE ANALOGY' FOR PRESENTING THE GOSPEL

by I. L. (North Africa)

[The author would like feedback from any who use this
analogy or suggestions about similar analogies you have
used with some success. The editor will forward to him your
letters.]

The idea of an amnesty is very prevalent in today's world, especially
in the Arab world. It is in fact a modern equivalent to the ransom
imagery of the Scriptures. There follows a simple framework of ideas
based on this image which can be used in witnessing. Though
developed while working over a few years with Muslims in England,

enough colleagues have benefited from it to warrant wider communication. I present it as one of many pictures we can use, and to encourage people to develop their repertoire of salvation picture frameworks.

We need to exploit the rich imagery of Scripture concerning conversion. An initial search of Scripture reveals at least twenty Biblical images of conversion, though I am not aware of anyone who has listed and studied them all exhaustively, such as Minear has done with the images of the Church. The following combines several images.

1. God created this Universe. He is both separate from creation and involved in it. God made men to serve Him and obey Him completely. Genesis 1:1, Acts 17:24-25, Isaiah 45:18, Deuteronomy 10:12.
2. Man rebelled against God.
 - a. Men are not servants of God but are slaves to sin. Sin is rebellion against God. Sin is not only wrong actions, but wrong attitudes, motives and desires. Sin is a total failure to submit all the time to the authority of God. 2 Peter 2:19, Romans 6:23, Hebrews 9:27, Romans 7:14, 18.

Muslims regard men as "slaves of God"; this concept is central to their thinking and to their identity as "surrendered ones". Therefore, it comes as a considerable shock when they find that God views them as slaves to sin! Some visibly will wince when they read this. Unfortunately the New Testament uses this image infrequently, so I have listed all the main references.

- b. God as Supreme King of men cannot tolerate rebellion for ever. The punishment for rebellion is death. All men die. Romans 6:23, Hebrews 9:27.

What we are trying to do is to help people to view themselves as God sees them. How many times have you had to argue that good works do not save a man? How often have you heard a serious Muslim argue: since he is not Adam, and Adam brought sin into the world, and we are all sinners as a result, then it is not our fault, and God cannot be unjust enough to condemn us for the sin of Adam! Certainly, we need to give due weight to their arguments.

On the other hand, the amnesty picture helps to answer their objections. Fact: all men are born into a race of rebels; a rebel is still a rebel no matter what he does, for, traditionally, there is no mercy for rebels. In the United Kingdom and with children, I use the story of Robin Hood, an outlaw who received no mercy from the Sheriff of Nottingham, even though Robin Hood was a "goody". There may be similar local traditions in your area you could use to illustrate this idea.

c. Man is powerless to change his situation. His rebellion has dug a chasm between himself and God. On his own, he cannot cross that chasm and be put right with God. Romans 3:9, 20, Isaiah 59:1-2, 64:6.

Time and again in using the picture I have brought people back to the fact that, from the point of view of God (and His viewpoint in the last analysis alone is what counts) all men are rebels deserving death; they are not slaves of God but slaves of sin. The problem is one of STATUS not merit. Conversely, a bad son is still a son; works do not affect his status as son once the amnesty has been accepted. We have then the traditional chasm between God and men. God is the King of the Universe, and all men belong to a race of people in rebellion against God.

3. God provided a mediator who now offers an amnesty.

a. Only Christ could cross that chasm. Christ arranged an amnesty for rebels. Under the terms of the amnesty God can offer a Royal Free Pardon, to all who meet the conditions. (see point 4). Romans 3:21, I Timothy 2:5.

b. Jesus Christ was uniquely qualified to be mediator because:

(1. He alone of all men was perfect and sinless. I Peter 2:22, John 8:46.

(2. He alone was fully God and fully man, therefore He is a true mediator because he fully represents BOTH sides. John 1:1, 14, 18.

(3. Christ lives now in heaven, therefore He can continue to be the mediator between God and men, on behalf of men. Hebrews 7:24-25, Revelation 1:18, Luke 24:50-53.

(4. Christ has Supreme authority over all, including the evil powers of the occult world. Luke 11:20, Matthew 28:18, Ephesians 1:21.

The picture now changes. There is a necessity for a mediator. The person of a mediator, his role, and qualifications for the role, are well known in Arab thought at all levels of society. It is reinforced almost daily by political action in the Lebanon and other trouble spots.

In his book, The Arab Mind, Raphael Patai has a helpful section on the role of the mediator (the Wasit) in the Arab World. In North Africa, the "Marabouts" often perform mediatorial functions, both between people and, in some places, between people and God. It was his list of the qualifications of the mediator that first set me thinking about this analogy. We need to note that a mediator first of all needs to be impartial, to fully represent both sides, and to be held in high respect by both sides. In the process of

negotiating, a mediator often gets "shot at" from both sides, and once the treaty is arranged, the mediator is responsible for enforcing it (Patai 1976:228-233).

The picture forcefully illustrates why Christ had to be both God and man. Christ as man of course was not a rebel, but a "loyalist". I have yet to find that point disputed once I get going with the imagery. The place where the amnesty was negotiated was the cross (Morris 1976, cf Richardson 1974). Here again I like to develop the imagery by reminding people that in ancient times, armies would arrange to settle a dispute by a champion from each side agreeing to fight it out, winner take all; Christ was God's champion who agreed to the trial of strength; the enemy was able to fling anything at Him in an attempt to get him to sin and rebel against God. Strictly speaking this changes the imagery; sometimes it proves helpful. Perhaps it is worth developing as a separate framework picture.

What does need stressing, delicately, is that on the cross Jesus got shot at from BOTH sides. I often find people stressing one or other side; BOTH need stressing. Jesus on the cross took the worst that Satan and men could fling against him, at all levels of suffering; the betrayal and rejection of his friends and the shame were as hard as the actual physical torture.

Then, worse, Jesus, who until then had from eternity known unbroken and untarnished fellowship with the Father, was actually forsaken by the Father. Not only did Jesus experience the wrath of God against the sins of the world as he bore them in His body, but Jesus was rejected by God. It is worth explaining these details! And if people ask how all the sins could be laid on one man, the simple reply is "quality" not quantity. Jesus as the infinite one was able to bear it all.

Jesus' death then was the victory! Jesus did not rebel, and was able to "take it" from both sides. There is no more of God's wrath and Satan's fury left for those who accept the amnesty. (I use the two words like this deliberately, wrath for God, and fury for Satan.) Even at the point of death Jesus was loyal; the challenge of Satan concerning Job, "will man serve God for naught?" has its true reply.

4. The terms of the amnesty are "unconditional surrender".

- a. The chasm between God and men has been bridged. The way is open for men to be put right with God. God offers all men a free pardon.

Jesus then by His death negotiated an amnesty between God and man, an amnesty for rebels, a Royal Pardon, such as King Richard is said to have given Robin Hood. As mediator, He is responsible for implementing the treaty.

b. The only condition is that you as a rebel, surrender! You must surrender your life unconditionally to the control of Christ. Matthew 16:24-26, John 6:40.

At this point I usually ask people what terms the Allied forces imposed on Germany at the end of World War II. Clearly, it was "unconditional surrender", and that is what men must do. The question of good works is by now long gone. We need to explain that the result of this amnesty, or "Royal Free Pardon" is a new status as sons: to avoid contempt for the grace of God ("you mean when I am forgiven I can go on sinning as much as I like...") we need to turn to passages such as Hebrews 12:1-13 which talk about the training programme for sons who now become servants of God.

5. When you do this God will forgive you of all your rebellion and sin. God will look upon you, not as a rebel, but as a son. You will never face judgement for your rebellion, but will be given a new life, vastly superior to the old in quality. This new life begins now, and continues into the next life. God will give you His Spirit, called the "Holy Spirit," to live in you and teach you. Acts 10:43, Romans 3:25-26, Isaiah 53:11, John 10:10, 11:25, 17:2-3, Acts 2:38, Ephesians 1:13, Romans 8:15, etc.

This framework of ideas has the merit of helping to explain the "Why" of salvation history. e.g. why Christ came to die and why things are as they are, i.e. a planet in rebellion. Try it out, develop it, and add it to your tool-kit. The core concept words should not be difficult to translate, i.e. King, rebel, son, mediator, amnesty/Pardon and Unconditional surrender. The Scriptural roots of the amnesty concept are in the idea of "ransom". The trouble with the ransom idea is that it raises the question as to whom the ransom is paid, and gives rise to the devil-ransom theory (clearly NOT the Biblical position). The concept of an Amnesty or Royal Pardon then is the closest modern equivalent to the ransom idea of the Bible.

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