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# **Conversion as Transformative Experience**

A Sociological Study of Identity Formation  
and Transformation Processes.

**Thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**by**

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Finally, I must acknowledge the love and support of my wife Bernie, my children, and my greater family and friends.

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this work to the youngest members of my family

Mollie and Emily

*Maxima debetur puero reverentia*

Juvenal

## **Abstract**

This thesis contributes to the understanding of the processes involved in the formation and transformation of identities. It achieves this goal by establishing the critical importance of ‘background’ and ‘liminality’ in the shaping of identity. Drawing mainly from the work of cultural anthropology and philosophical hermeneutics a theoretical framework is constructed from which transformative experiences can be analysed. The particular experience at the heart of this study is the phenomenon of conversion and the dynamics involved in the construction of that process. Establishing the axial age as the horizon from which the process of conversion emerged will be the main theme of the first part of the study. Identifying the ‘birth’ of conversion allows a deeper understanding of the historical dynamics that make up the process. From these fundamental dynamics a theoretical framework is constructed in order to analyse the conversion process. Applying this theoretical framework to a number of case-studies will be the central focus of this study.

The transformative experiences of Saint Augustine, the fourteenth century nun Margaret Ebner, the communist revolutionary Karl Marx, and the literary figure of Arthur Koestler will provide the material onto which the theoretical framework can be applied. A synthesis of the Judaic religious and the Greek philosophical traditions will be the main findings for the shaping of Augustine’s conversion experience. The dissolution of political order coupled with the institutionalisation of the conversion process will illuminate the mystical experiences of Margaret Ebner at a time when empathetic conversion reached its fullest expression. The final case-studies examine two modern ‘conversions’ that seem to have an ideological rather than a religious basis to them. On closer examination it will be found that the German tradition of Biblical Criticism played a most influential role in the ‘conversion’ of Marx and mythology the best medium to understand the experiences of Koestler. The main ideas emerging from this study highlight the fluidity of identity and the important role of ‘background’ in its transformation. The theoretical framework, as constructed for this study, is found to be a useful methodological tool that can offer insights into experiences, such as conversion, that otherwise would remain hidden from our enquiries.

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## Introduction

The general aim of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of the processes involved in the formation and transformation of identities, at both the individual and the collective level. The more specific aim is to establish the critical importance of background and liminality in the shaping of identity. By background is meant the external world, the interpersonal relations, and the ‘background practices’,<sup>1</sup> which can influence and shape the identity of the individual. Liminality, on the other hand, analyses the temporary suspension of this background in order that transformative experiences can occur. The particular transformative experience that this thesis is concerned with is conversion and the dynamics involved in the construction of that process.

Thus, taking the conversion process as a means to lay bare the background influences involved in the formation of identity, this thesis begins by attempting to address the diametrically opposed views from the various disciplines concerning the dynamics involved in the conversion process. For psychologists the inner working of the psyche is the greatest influence in this process. Anthropologists, on the other hand, see cultural forces as the only plausible explanation of conversion, while sociologists are reluctant to look beyond social factors when explaining conversion.<sup>2</sup> Of the fifteen conversion theories outlined by Rambo’s (1999) *Theories of Conversion*, one-third approach the process from a psychological perspective, one-third from a sociological perspective and the remaining one-third from the perspective favouring a cultural or anthropological explanation. Sidestepping these attempts to pigeon-hole the study of conversion in the ‘correct’ theory, this thesis will instead approach the task from a multi-disciplinary framework. Drawing mainly from the work of cultural anthropology (liminality) and philosophical hermeneutics (background) the thesis will attempt

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<sup>1</sup> Gadamer, H. (1975 [1959]) *Truth and Method*, London: Sheed and Ward; Szakolczai, A. (1998) ‘Identity Formation Mechanisms: A Conceptual and Genealogical Analysis’. *EUI Working Papers SPS No. 98/2*, Badia Fiesolana: San Domenico (FL).

<sup>2</sup> Rambo, L. R. (1999) ‘Theories of Conversion: Understanding and Interpreting Religious Change’. *Social Compass* 46(3), p.261.



to construct a theoretical framework from which the phenomenon of conversion can be analysed.

According to Aristotle if one wishes to understand things then one must watch them develop and catch them at the moment of their birth.<sup>3</sup> Motivated by a similar objective this thesis will attempt to temporally locate the birth of the experiential phenomenon of conversion. With this idea in mind, the investigation will begin by providing a detailed study of the historical emergence of the conversion process. The origin of the conversion process has its roots in two distinct threads, the Judaic religious and the Greek philosophical traditions; for this reason it is in the Old Testament and the work of ancient philosophers that this study will commence its search. The Hebrew word - שׁוּבָה (*šûbh*), originally meaning a physical or material shift but over time came to mean a change of heart or a spiritual turn, will be the focus for analysis in Chapter One.

Following the analysis of the semantic changes in the Hebrew root שׁוּבָה (*šûbh*) in the Old Testament this thesis will then turn to compounds of two distinct Greek terms; - *στρεφω* (*strepho*) such as *epistrepho* and *epistrophe*; and *περιαγω* (*periago*) such as *periagogé*. The subsequent analysis will indicate that these terms also evolved over time to indicate a shift in meaning from a physical to a spiritual turn. Identifying the temporal location of this shift in meaning will be the primary aim of this chapter in order to place it within a wider contextual framework. The evidence garnered from the first chapter would seem to suggest that sometime between the sixth and fifth centuries before the Common Era (BCE), in both the Judaic religious and the Greek philosophical traditions, semantic changes occurred in certain terms that, prior to this shift, indicated a physical turn but, following this shift, now indicated a spiritual turn or what we now understand as a conversion type experience.

Locating the origin of the conceptualisation of these terms within a wider framework will be the main focus of the second chapter; here the thesis will

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<sup>3</sup> Cited in Hadot, P. (2002) *What is Ancient Philosophy*, tr. M. Chase, Harvard: Harvard University Press, p.2

develop a theoretical framework based on the historical-conceptual background study of the first chapter. Drawing on the work of Jaspers,<sup>4</sup> Mumford,<sup>5</sup> Eisenstadt,<sup>6</sup> and Szakolczai<sup>7</sup> this thesis will place the semantic changes, outlined above, within the broader theoretical framework of the axial-age. This is a term coined by Karl Jaspers (1953) that refers to a relatively short time-period whose median would be sometime around the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE when, in response to widespread political, social, and spiritual unrest, major political and spiritual developments occurred simultaneously in various parts of the known world.

These developments resulted in the emergence of new religions that broke with tradition by emphasising a dividing-line between the individual and society that allowed those individuals to practice, what Max Weber described as, both an ‘inner-worldly’ and a ‘world-rejecting’ asceticism.<sup>8</sup> In this cultural and spiritual milieu the ‘background’ becomes internalised and a certain type of personality, now predisposed to experiences such as ‘conversion’, begins to emerge. Because nothing prepared the ancients for these tumultuous changes taking place, understanding was sought within rites of passage, as they were practiced in the pre-axial civilizations, mainly through the rituals of immersion and circumcision.

Further strengthening of the theoretical framework is provided by the work of anthropologists Arnold van Gennep<sup>9</sup> and Victor Turner<sup>10</sup> whose conceptual tool of liminality provide an understanding for changes that take place in social settings; Max Weber<sup>11</sup> whose ‘charismatic figure’ will act as the ‘master of

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<sup>4</sup> See Jaspers, K. (1953 [1949]) *The Origin and Goal of History*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Mumford, L. (1978 [1956]) *The Transformations of Man*, Gloucester: Peter Smith.

<sup>6</sup> Eisenstadt, S.N. (1986) *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, New York: The SUNY Press.

<sup>7</sup> See Szakolczai, A. (2003) *The Genesis of Modernity*, London: Routledge also Szakolczai, A. (1998) ‘Identity Formation Mechanisms: A Conceptual and Genealogical Analysis’. *EUI Working Papers SPS No. 98/2*, Badia Fiesolana: San Domenico (FL).

<sup>8</sup> See Weber, M. (1993 [1922]) *The Sociology of Religion*, Boston: Beacon Press, p. 166

<sup>9</sup> van Gennep, A. (1960 [1909]) *The Rites of Passage*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>10</sup> Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

<sup>11</sup> See Weber, M. (1993 [1922]) *The Sociology of Religion*, Boston: Beacon Press; and also Weber, M. (1967 [1952]) *Ancient Judaism*, New York: The Free Press.

ceremonies' during the conversion process; and finally Eric Voegelin<sup>12</sup> will provide the idea of recognizing 'spirit' as a critical factor in experiences such as conversion. It is from these three factors, liminality, charismatic figure / master of ceremonies, and spirit as background / *zeitgeist* that a conceptual framework is constructed and employed to analyse and understand the process of conversion.

The four studies that follow will attempt to test this theoretical framework to determine its strengths and weaknesses in providing insight and understanding of the conversion process. However, as conversion is an evolving process, the case studies, which cover a time span from the fourth to the twentieth century, will also identify the changes taking place within the conversion process itself. The organisation of the four case studies that follow is straightforward. First a brief overview of the life of the convert is provided. Following this, the theoretical framework, as constructed in chapters one and two, is applied to the biographical details as supplied by the convert. This framework will examine and analyse the liminal conditions of the narrative in order to understand more fully the transformative experiences taking place. Then the biographical details are further examined to identify the background figure or master of ceremonies present to direct the liminal proceedings. Finally the background or *zeitgeist* is studied to reveal the dynamics or spirit of the times that will help shape the new identity of the convert. It will be the main argument of this thesis that the above analysis can offer insights into experiences, such as conversion, that otherwise would remain hidden from our enquiries.

The first case-study examines the conversion of Saint Augustine as told through his *Confessions* written towards the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century of the Common Era (CE). After establishing in chapters one and two that the conceptualisation of conversion had its roots in two distinct threads, the Judaic religious and the Greek philosophical traditions, we now arrive at a period of time when these distinct threads began to merge and centralize. Augustine, one of the key figures through whom this synthesis can be rooted, best articulates the

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<sup>12</sup> See Voegelin, E. (1990) *Published Essays 1966-1985*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

momentous changes taking place not only in him but also in the Christian religion. Thus the conversion of Augustine, as detailed in the *Confessions*, will provide an exemplary case-study for testing the theoretical framework.

The next account looks at the case of Margaret Ebner (ca. 1291-1351), the Dominican nun and mystic who in her autobiographical *Revelations* details her conversion to Christianity by means of purgation, illumination and union. However this thesis highlights the monastic setting as having, at least, equality of importance in this conversion process. Here every possible aspect of life is rationalised to provide the external means for an inner transformation. The opposition between orthodox and heretical mysticism will provide the background from which Margaret's experiences can best be understood. Again the application of the theoretical framework provides an alternative, and unique, insight into the dynamics at play in the conversion process.

The third case-study deals with Karl Marx's conversion to Hegelianism. While most accounts<sup>13</sup> of this event draw on the one autobiographical statement of Marx's pre-revolutionary years, the letter to his father in 1837, very few deal with the notion that Berlin University was in a state of flux since the death of Hegel in 1835, a watershed year for German biblical criticism, and fewer still examine the liminal phase the eighteen-year-old Marx was passing through at that time. Because of this lacuna in the published material, concerning Marx's conversion to Hegelianism, the remainder of this chapter will focus on these unacknowledged background influences. In particular attention will be focused both on the *zeitgeist* abroad in Berlin University at that time and on the influence the charismatic figure Eduard Gans had on the young Marx.

Arthur Koestler and his transformation from a zealous Communist to a committed ant-Communist will be the focus of the final case-study. Only by analysing and interpreting Communism as mythology can the strange and

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<sup>13</sup>See McLellan, D. (1973) *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought*, London; Mehring, F. (1936) *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life*, London: Butler and Tanner; Wheen, F. (1999) *Karl Marx: A Life*, London: W.W. Norton & Co.

binding force that held Koestler, and other, seemingly willing, captives of that era, be understood. It will be shown that the only delivery from the captivity that was Communism was a conversion type experience. Applying the theoretical framework to the conversion of Arthur Koestler will identify Willi Münzenberg as the charismatic figure that acted as a guide to lead the floundering Koestler toward a new belief system. The conversion of Arthur Koestler to anti-Communism instigated by the charismatic Münzenberg would eventually have its conclusion in the summer of 1950 at the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

The concluding section of this thesis will attempt to draw together the various strands, outlined above, that are involved in the conversion process. Establishing the axial-age as the birth of conversion allows background rather than a particular perspective to be the focus of this work. The monastery became the nursery for conversion where the process was rationalised and streamlined. Breaching the walls of the monastery the conversion process seeped into all spheres of society, where up to the present the monastic influence can still be found in contemporary conversions. Finally ideological conversion becomes possible with the onset of industrialization and the emergence of revolutionary politics, but in time this possibility evaporates with the failure of the revolutionary god. Analysis of these findings will allow a certain understanding of the modern condition – this stems from the genealogical line of reasoning that connects the ancient with the modern world. Thus, understanding historically how change occurs in social settings provides us with the methodological implements to probe such processes as conversion and produce greater insight into the formation of both individual and collective identities.

Prior to proceeding to the main body of this thesis an important methodological point as to definition needs to be established. While most researchers within the social sciences agree that the term ‘conversion’ implies some form of personal transformation there is still widespread debate as to the degree of personal transformation necessary for an experience to be deemed a

‘conversion’.<sup>14</sup> Early studies of the ‘conversion’ process focused much of their attention on the positive aspects of the experience and identifying the psychological factors predisposing individuals to such experiences. In *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, written in 1902, the psychologist William James devoted a substantial section to the study of conversion which he defined as a process ‘gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities’.<sup>15</sup> This deterministic model firmly identified the conversion process with an inner transformation whereby a severe crisis resulting from a divided self is resolved by the individual’s unification.

Further definitions have been wide ranging, identifying it with a complete ‘reorientation of the soul’<sup>16</sup> to a simple ‘thought reform’ resulting in a rapid personality change.<sup>17</sup> More recent research has still not reached a consensus in defining the experience of ‘conversion’ and various theories have been put forward in order to encompass the broad range of definitions. Some have proposed a single theory model to include all types of conversion,<sup>18</sup> while others have proposed a dual model to differentiate between ‘classical’ and ‘contemporary’ definitions<sup>19</sup> and between ‘formal’ and ‘emphatic’ conversion.<sup>20</sup> Still more believe that a broader theoretical framework is needed and should include such phenomena as ‘multiculturalism, individualism, and

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<sup>14</sup> See Snow, D. and Machalek, R. (1983) ‘The Sociology of Conversion’. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 10: pp. 167-90.

<sup>15</sup> See James, W. (1902) *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, London: Longmans, Green & Co. p. 189

<sup>16</sup> Nock, A. D. (1933) *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 6

<sup>17</sup> Wallace (1956) cited in Zinnbauer, B., Pergament, K. (1998) ‘Spiritual Conversion: A Study of Religious Change Among College Students’. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37: p.161.

<sup>18</sup> See Lofland, J. and Stark, R. (1965) ‘Becoming a World Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective’. *American Sociological Review* 30: pp. 862-75; Lofland, J. (1977) *Doomsday Cult*, New York: Irvington; Segger, J. and Kunz, P. (1972) ‘Conversion: Evaluation of a Step-Like Process for Problem-Solving’. *Review of Religious Research* 13: p. 178-184.

<sup>19</sup> See Hood, R., Spilka, B., Hunsberger, B., and Gorsuch, R. (1996) *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*, New York: Guilford Press.

<sup>20</sup> For more on this dualistic approach to conversion see Morrison, K. (1992) *Understanding Conversion*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

secularism’,<sup>21</sup> while another model<sup>22</sup> has identified six different conversion ‘motifs’ – intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist, and coercive – under which the process can best be understood.

At the same time as there has been an overabundance of research on defining and classifying conversion there has been a scarcity of research on distinguishing between religious and ideological conversion and on non-conversion religious change. Because of this divisive debate in the discourse of ‘conversion’ it is proposed at the beginning of this thesis to arrive at a definition of ‘conversion’ that will sidestep the minefield that surrounds the concept. Consequently, the four case-studies that make up the research material for this thesis will be selected and included only on the basis of the authors’ own interpretation of the changes they had experienced and which they described in terms that indicated a spiritual transformation.

Thus when Arthur Koestler describes his journey from Communism to anti-Communism as a ‘spiritual conversion’,<sup>23</sup> it provides the basis for the inclusion of that experience as a case-study in this thesis without further complication. The same conclusion can be reached concerning Karl Marx when he describes how he abandons his old belief system and engages with the new - ‘A curtain had fallen, my holy of holies was rent asunder and new gods had to be installed’.<sup>24</sup> Margaret Ebner describes her life prior to her ‘conversion’ as a life not so well disposed to God’ and ‘I did not live truly according to his will’ whereas after her mystical experiences she describes her new life as being ‘released from all the bonds from which I had been bound’ and which culminates in, what she describes as a, ‘mystical union’ with Christ.<sup>25</sup> Augustine likewise describes a similar illumination and the subsequent abandonment of his old life when he

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<sup>21</sup> See Gorman, U. (1999) *Towards a New Understanding of Conversion*, Lund: Toologiska

<sup>22</sup> See Lofland, J. and Skonovd, L. (1981) ‘Conversion Motifs’. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30 (4): pp 373-385.

<sup>23</sup> Koestler, A. *et al* (1950) *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism*, London: Hamish Hamilton, p. 76.

<sup>24</sup> See the letter from Marx to his father cited in Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1975) *Collected Works vol. I* Lawrence and Wishart: London, pp.17-18.

<sup>25</sup> See Ebner, M. (1993) *Major Works*, tr. and ed. by Leonard P Hindsley, New York: Paulist Press, pp. 58, 87, 172.

claims that ‘there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away’.<sup>26</sup> With the ‘credentials’ of the case-studies established as true ‘conversion’ narratives we can now begin the historical search for the origins of the conceptualisation of the conversion process.

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<sup>26</sup> See Outler, A. C. (ed) (1955) *Augustine: Confessions*, Westminster Press: Philadelphia, VIII: xxviii.



## **Part I**

### **Conceptual origins and theoretical framework**

## Chapter 1

### Conversion in the First Millennium BCE

This chapter attempts to trace the origins and historical development of the concept of conversion. Because the meaning of a concept can, and usually does, change over time this chapter will focus on the diachronic (evolutionary) semantic changes that occurred within the concept we now call conversion. The origin of the concept has its roots in the Old Testament and it is here that this study will commence its search. Unfortunately, the ancients, despite their penchant for description and narration, failed to define systematically just what they meant by conversion.<sup>1</sup> However, progress can still be made, for in antiquity a series of Hebrew and Greek terms, generally meaning ‘turning’ or ‘return’, are found in ancient texts that indicate conversion. The Hebrew word - שׁוּב (šûbh) and compounds of two distinct Greek terms; - στρεφω (*strephe*) such as *epistrephe* and *epistrophe*; and περιαγω<sup>2</sup> (*periago*) such as *periagogé* all of which specifically indicate a physical or material positional shift while more generally they point to a change of heart or a spiritual turn.

#### The Hebrew root šûbh

According to Strong’s Hebrew Concordance of the Bible (H.7725)<sup>3</sup> the Hebrew word šûbh is the twelfth most frequently used verb, occurring almost 1100 times, in the Old Testament. Early usage of the verb refers to a spatial motion as in ‘return’, ‘turn back’, ‘go back’ usually to a person or place and this definition

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<sup>1</sup> See Finn, T. M. (1997) *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity*, New Jersey: Paulist Press, p.19

<sup>2</sup> For purposes of clarity only the Latin transliteration of שׁוּב, στρεφω and περιαγω – šûbh, *strephe*, and *periago* respectively, will be used from this point forward.

<sup>3</sup> In 1890 James Strong assigned numbers to each unique word in the Old and New Testaments and produced both a (G) Greek and (H) Hebrew dictionary listing each word with its number, see Strong, J. (1996 [1890]) *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Nashville: Abingdon.

accounts for over one-third of all occurrences.<sup>4</sup> Examples of the verb šûbh used in the above context include (Gn. xxi: 32) ‘his forces returned to the land of the Philistines’; (Nu. xiii: 25) ‘At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land’; and (Dt. xvii: 16) ‘make the people return to Egypt’. These examples, from some of the earliest of the Old Testament texts, generally refer to physical motion rather than any religious relationship, however as the circumstances of Israel<sup>5</sup> began to change the term šûbh took on a less temporal meaning. Before beginning our investigation of the Hebrew root šûbh it will be necessary to give a brief historical overview of the Old Testament and the events it purports to explain.

Any attempt at undertaking a study of the historical development of a concept in the Old Testament has to take certain matters into account. Because there are many uncertainties about the dates of many Old Testament books, only those that can be placed in some general chronological order will be used. While the material of the Old Testament has passed through numerous generations over many centuries it has come to possess in the process, what Ackroyd has called, ‘canonical authority’.<sup>6</sup> This means that because the text of the Old Testament enjoyed an exalted status among its supporters it has been preserved, more or less, in its original form. An example of this ‘canonical authority’ underpins this point; ‘during the early centuries of the Christian era, the standard text (called the *Masora*, or “tradition”) was meticulously preserved by Jewish scholars known as Masoretes, who counted all the words in order to be sure that no one would ever add or take away a single one’.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Holladay, W. L. (1958) *The Root Šûbh in the Old Testament: With Particular Reference to its Usages in Covenantal Contexts*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, p.2.

<sup>5</sup> Israel here refers to a people rather than a place.

<sup>6</sup> See Ackroyd, P.R. (1980 [1970]) ‘The Old Testament in the Making’. In P. R. Ackroyd (ed) *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.75.

<sup>7</sup> See Anderson, W. A. (1996 [1958]) *The Living World of the Old Testament*, Harlow: Longmans, p.510.

## **History of Israel.**

The Old Testament presents the history of a disparate group of tribes who, as God's chosen people, were united as one people. The whole embryonic nation, under the leadership of the patriarch Jacob, went down to Egypt and some centuries later, under the leadership of Moses, settled in Canaan and established a tribal league. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE the first of a series of collected materials, from both oral and written sources, was composed as a narrative of the history of the Hebrews now united under David (1000-961 BCE) and Solomon (961-922 BCE).

Following the death of Solomon an inter-tribal war erupted which resulted in the division of the kingdom. Arising from the different traditions originating in what was later the northern kingdom of Israel and those in the southern kingdom of Judah, two dominant compilations are evident in the composition of the Old Testament. These compilations that emerged from the divided kingdoms are known as the E (preferring the epithet 'Elohim' for God) and the J (preferring the epithet 'Yahweh') respectively. These compilations were combined by a Judaeansome time after the fall of the northern kingdom (721 BCE) and are to be found inextricably threaded throughout Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel, and First and Second Kings. The combined JE narrative is, according to scholars, the bulk of the Old Testament.<sup>8</sup>

In the days of the divided kingdom, prophets began to confront Israel for failing to heed God's moral obligations and their warning of doom came to pass as Israel fell before the empire building Assyrian might. By 724 BCE most of the northern kingdom of Israel had been captured by Assyria only Samaria remained. It was besieged for three years, and was finally taken in 721 when the whole of the northern kingdom was transformed into a province of the Assyrian Empire.

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<sup>8</sup> See Columbia Encyclopedia (2001) @ <http://www.bartleby.com>. p.3, accessed on 10/01/04.

The southern kingdom of Judah somehow managed to survive and witness the end of the mighty Assyrian empire in 606 BCE. However, pressure by the expanding Chaldean army from Babylon saw Jerusalem besieged three times in ten years and finally in 587 BCE Nebuchadnezzar burned the city along with the temple. Most of the population of Judah was exiled to Babylon and the Hebrew faith was shook to its roots. The suffering of those left in Judaea and those wandering in Babylon are recounted in Lamentations, Job and various Psalms.

During the years of exile the Hebrew religion changed profoundly. Some believed that the calamities suffered by Israel were due to the corruption of their morals and religion. A return to the fundamentals of the Jewish religion was advocated in order that Yahweh might lead them home to Jerusalem. This religious reformation was to re-orient the Hebrew religion around the Mosaic books known as the Torah, which would represent all the laws that Jews should follow. This attempt to return religious practice to its original status was further accelerated by the return to Judah itself. When Babylon fell to Cyrus the Persian in 539 BCE he set about re-establishing religions in their native lands. This included the Hebrew religion and the Judaeans were ordered to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. The Persian period ushered in a time of reform and rebuilding in Hebrew society and this period of relative calm was to last until Alexander the Great captured Jerusalem in 332 BCE.

## **The Old Testament**

The Old Testament, chronicling the above events of the Hebrew religion, is generally considered to consist of three parts. They are in Hebrew the Torah, the Nebim, and the Kethubim or, in English, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.<sup>9</sup> The following books make up the various parts:

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<sup>9</sup> See Anderson, G. W. (1980 [1970]) 'Canonical and Non-Canonical'. In P. R. Ackroyd (ed) *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.135-42.

## **The Law**

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (5)

## **The Prophets**

Two groups of four.

Former Prophets; Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings (4)

Latter Prophets; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve. (4)

(The Twelve or Minor Prophets consist of; Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi)

## **The Writings**

Poetical books:

Psalms, Proverbs, and Job (3)

The Five Scrolls:

The Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther (5)

Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah (one book), and Chronicles (3)

Biblical scholars generally divide the Old Testament books into different phases. The number of phases can vary but they generally follow the order of pre and post-exilic phases with the books of the Torah possessing a distinct phase on its own.<sup>10</sup> Because of the difficulty of dating the passages with any accuracy, and the possible high incidence of secondary material, it is necessary to select only passages where some degree of dependability is assured; consequently, this study will vary, in some way, from the norm.

The three phases to be examined in the course of this study will be divided in the following manner; the first phase will explore the Mosaic texts known as the Torah in Hebrew or the Pentateuch in Greek compiled sometime around the 10<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Talmon, S. (1980 [1970]) 'The Old Testament Text'. In P. R. Ackroyd (ed) *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.164-66; Anderson, G. W. (1980 [1970]) 'Canonical and Non-Canonical'. In P. R. Ackroyd (ed) *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 135-37.

century BCE. The next phase examines the work of the former prophets Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings most of it composed before the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The final phase examines the latter prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel together with Amos and Hosea from the Twelve whose works were composed from the 8<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the Common Era. By re-interpreting the data compiled by Holladay,<sup>11</sup> in his seminal work on the root *šûbh* in the Old Testament, an attempt will be made not only to determine the earliest meaning of the root *šûbh* but also to determine when, and for what reason, the later changes occurred.

### **Two distinct meanings of *šûbh***

The following study makes a clear distinction between a physical and a spiritual ‘turn’. This is the same distinction that Holladay makes when he distinguishes between the covenantal usage of *šûbh* in the Old Testament and the non-covenantal meaning. The physical or non-covenantal category, applies to a physical motion without any further implication while the covenantal usage expresses ‘a change of loyalty on the part of Israel or God, each for the other’.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the covenantal or spiritual usage of the root *šûbh* offers a clue as to the understanding of the Old Testament’s conception of conversion. Moreover, if it can be temporally determined when the concept changed from a spatial to a spiritual movement, then the origins of the concept we now know as conversion may be determined. Attempting to place the books of the Old Testament in some sort of chronological order is a difficult task because of the high incidence of secondary material. Nevertheless the passages from the Latter Prophets of the Old Testament that contain the root *šûbh* have been separated, by Holladay, into ‘original’ and ‘secondary’ and in the Pentateuch and Former Prophets into ‘Deuteronomic’ and ‘Non-Deuteronomic’ passages. This course of action,

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<sup>11</sup> Holladay, W. L. (1958) *The Root Šûbh in the Old Testament: With Particular Reference to its Usages in Covenantal Contexts*, Leiden: E. J. Brill.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.116.

Holladay assures us, provides the resulting analysis to have a chronological order with a ‘high degree of dependability’.<sup>13</sup>

The statistical data employed in this chapter is derived from two sections of Holladay’s work on the root *šûbh* in the Old Testament. In chapter three, *A Lexical Study of Šûbh*, he identifies and classifies 252 instances of non-covenantal usages of the root *šûbh* where human beings were the subject of the physical motion, while in chapter four, *The Covenantal Usage of Šûbh*, he identifies 164 instances where the verb was used in a covenantal manner. By combining both of these sections in an original way this thesis will demonstrate, by means of a detailed analysis that a pattern begins to emerge. This pattern will help to establish and identify the time period when a semantic shift, towards a concept resembling conversion, occurred. The temporal locating of this semantic shift will allow a wider framework to be employed in order to better understand the genesis and conceptualisation of conversion. First an examination of the meaning of the root *šûbh* in the three phases (Torah, Former Prophets, and Latter Prophets) of the Old Testament is required.

### **The meaning of *šûbh* in the Torah of the Old Testament**

Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the sources of the Torah or Pentateuch have been the subject of careful scholarly research. The findings of that research show that these five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) used materials from many different periods and from various sources.<sup>14</sup> To the J and E sources, outlined earlier, scholars have now added the Deuteronomistic (D) and Priestly (P) traditions as being the most important sources in the compilation of the Torah.<sup>15</sup> While no consensus has emerged as to which parts of the contents

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.118

<sup>14</sup> See Gavigan, J. (ed) (1999) *The Navarre Bible: The Pentateuch*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, pp. 19-20.

<sup>15</sup> The earliest source is believed to be the J or Yahwist tradition, which is believed to have been compiled about 950BCE. The later sources E (Elohist), D (Deuteronomistic), and P (Priestly) are generally deemed to be closely based on the Yahwist epic, see Anderson, W. A. (1996 [1958])



of the Torah are linked to which tradition it is generally accepted that the ‘basic elements’ contained within these five books were part of the earliest traditions of the people.<sup>16</sup> Thus, we can be sure that the basic elements contained in these five books reflect in many ways the stories transmitted by the more ancient method of preserving history – the oral recitation – prevalent from about the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>17</sup> For the immediate purpose of this thesis the date for the shaping and compiling of the Torah or Pentateuch will be taken as sometime prior to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE. While the P (Priestly) and the D (Deuteronomy) traditions may have been written sometime after this period there is no question but that these written compilations were closely based on the earlier J or Yahwist tradition.<sup>18</sup> In this way the particular meaning of the root *šûbh*, as it was understood in the time period prior to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE, can be determined.

An analysis of the use of *šûbh* in these books of the Old Testament reveals the following data: the occurrences of *šûbh* are almost entirely of a non-covenantal nature accounting for 62 of the 68 occurrences. Expressed as a percentage of the total the results show that 91% of the occurrences imply a purely physical motion while 9% express some form of spiritual shift. The six instances of *šûbh* expressing a spiritual shift occur in the book of Numbers (2) and the book of Deuteronomy (4).<sup>19</sup> However, an examination of the two instances in Numbers reveal a concept that means to ‘withdraw’ (from following God) and become ‘apostate’, e.g. (Nu. xiv: 43): ‘because you have withdrawn from Yahweh, Yahweh shall not be with you’ and (Nu. xxxii: 15) ‘for if you (Israel) withdraw from him, he will abandon you in the wilderness’

Three of the four instances in the book of Deuteronomy have the verb ‘return’ followed by the prepositional phrase ‘to God’ a typical example is (Dt. iv: 30)

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*The Living World of the Old Testament*, Harlow: Longmans, pp.19-23, 152; Achtemeier, J. (1985) *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, San Francisco: Harpers and Row, p.719.

<sup>16</sup> See Gavigan, J. (ed) (1999) *The Navarre Bible: The Pentateuch*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, pp. 19-20.

<sup>17</sup> See Anderson, W. A. (1996 [1958]) *The Living World of the Old Testament*, Harlow: Longmans, p.22.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 158, 453.

<sup>19</sup> See Holladay, W. L. (1958) *The Root Šûbh in the Old Testament: With Particular Reference to its Usages in Covenantal Contexts*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, pp. 126-8.

‘and you shall return to Yahweh your God and hearken to his voice’. The final Deuteronomistic passage (Dt. xxiii: 14) threatens a spiritual shift on God’s part: ‘therefore your camp must be holy, that he may not see anything indecent among you, and withdraw from you’. From the above it is clear that the basic meaning of *šûbh* in the Torah of the Old Testament is of a physical motion without further implication. In the case of those few instances where *šûbh* has a covenantal or spiritual context the meaning falls far short of the inner transformation associated with the modern concept of conversion.

### **The meaning of *šûbh* in the books of the Former Prophets**

As we have seen attempts to date the books of the Old Testament are full of uncertainties and ambiguity and the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings are no different. These books of the former prophets resume the story of the Israelites after the death of Moses and the succession of Joshua as leader of the Hebrew tribes. While it is now accepted that a Deuteronomic historian reworked the books of the Former Prophets sometime after the fall of the nation in 587 BCE there is ample evidence that the original historical narrative was compiled much closer to the events that they record.<sup>20</sup> For this reason the temporal location of the narrative of the Former Prophets will be given as some time prior to the advent of the 8<sup>th</sup> century Prophets.

An analysis of the use of *šûbh* in the works of the Former Prophets of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings show a somewhat similar pattern as that in the Torah. Of the 118 instances 100 (85%) refer to a purely physical motion, while only 18 (15%) refer to a spiritual or covenantal meaning. While the majority of instances refer to a withdrawal or a return to God as in the Torah, there are four instances that seem to take a new direction.

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<sup>20</sup> See Anderson, W. A. (1996 [1958]) *The Living World of the Old Testament*, Harlow: Longmans, pp. 123, 131-135.

Three of these instances refer to a turning back, not to God, but from evil, (1K. xiii: 33) states that ‘Jeroboam did not turn back from his evil way’. Likewise (1K. viii: 35), ‘and if they turn back from their sin’ and (2K. xvii: 13), ‘Turn from your evil ways’ all combine the concept of sin and evil with the root *šûbh*. The significance of the above passages lie in the seemingly autonomous nature of the subject or subjects as they chose an alternative to God’s way. However because of the dual nature of the passages, referring as they do to good and evil, the conjecture that they emanate from the time of the exile, 587 BCE, rather than prior to the 8<sup>th</sup> century cannot be excluded. This hypothesis coincides with Holladay’s suspicion that an exilic or post-exilic basis lies at the heart of the above passages.<sup>21</sup>

The final example of *šûbh* being used in a new way is from Joshua; ‘if you leave Yahweh and serve foreign gods, then he will turn back and do you harm’ (Jos. xxiv 20), nevertheless, this example is not as significant as it may at first appear. The subject of the verb *šûbh* in the above example is God and not those who serve foreign gods and thus it is God who is undergoing a transformation with his relationship with Israel and not the other way round. Because the passage refers to a change of allegiance from Yahweh to foreign gods this might be interpreted as a conversional type experience but as the root *šûbh* was not used to explain the movement, the concept of ‘*adhesion*’ rather than conversion may be a more suitable explanation. Nock explains adhesion as a process that leads ‘not to any definite crossing of religious frontiers... [but] to an acceptance of new worships as useful supplements and not as substitutes, and they did not involve the taking of a new way of life in place of the old’.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, because the passage from Joshua (xxiv 20) places God as the subject of the verb *šûbh* no inference, as to the evolution of the concept of conversion, can be drawn.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Nock, A. D. (1933) *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp.6-8.

## The meaning of *šûbh* in the books of the Latter Prophets

The books of interest to this section are determined by the high instances of the appearance of the root *šûbh* and where a high degree of dependability, as to dating, is assured. Included are the books of the latter prophets Isaiah (including Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah), Jeremiah, Ezekiel together with Amos and Hosea from the Twelve. An analysis of the use of *šûbh* in these books reveal the following data the occurrences of *šûbh* are almost three times of a covenantal nature compared to a physical or non-covenantal usage accounting for 88 of the 120 occurrences.

Expressed as a percentage of the total the results show that 73% of the occurrences imply some form of spiritual shift while 27% express a physical turn without further implication. Because these books supply such a rich source of material a deeper analysis is indicated. The covenantal use of the verb *šûbh* by the eight-century prophets Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah, all refer to a turning back to God from apostasy.<sup>23</sup> In Amos (iv: 6, 8, 9, 10, 11) following Yahweh's warnings, the refrain 'but you have not returned to me' is repeated five times. Likewise, the instances of *šûbh* in Hosea and Isaiah are all of the type that refer to a return to God, typical examples are, (Ho vi: 1) 'come, let us return to Yahweh', and (Is x: 21) 'a remnant shall return, a remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God'. The important point to note here is the collective action required of the chosen people and because of this the idea of individual responsibility remains undeveloped.

The most important work of the latter prophets, for the purpose of this chapter, is the book of the pre-exilic prophet Jeremiah. The ministry of Jeremiah spanned a period of forty or more years (c.627-587BCE) and his prophetic writings are encompassed in the fifty-two chapters of his book. Almost 30% of all instances of the covenantal or spiritual meaning of the root *šûbh* in the Old

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<sup>23</sup> Holladay, W. L. (1958) *The Root Šûbh in the Old Testament: With Particular Reference to its Usages in Covenantal Contexts*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, pp.120-6; Bertram, G.. (1968) "σπερρω," in G Friedrich (ed) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol.7, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p.716.

Testament are found in the Book of Jeremiah. It has the distinction of being the first book of the Old Testament where the covenantal use of *šûbh* out-number the non-covenantal or physical use, 48 instances of spiritual meanings compared to 22 instances of physical meanings.<sup>24</sup> Many of the instances of covenantal or spiritual *šûbh* occur along the lines of previous texts urging a return to God. The passage (Je. viii: 4), ‘do they fall and not rise again? Does one turn (away) and not turn (back to God)?’, emphasises the dual nature of the verb *šûbh*, it can be used for turning away (apostasy) or turning back (repentance). What must be noted here is that the turning, either away or back, was within God’s people (Israel) and not applicable to outsiders.

The passage (Je. iii: 7) ‘her false sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart’, compares the divided kingdoms and admonishes Judah for an insincere return, note here the rider ‘with her whole heart’. This passage clearly calls for some sort of spiritual or inner transformation and thus brings the meaning a little bit closer to the concept of conversion. Perhaps the most illuminating passage concerning the concept of conversion is (Je. iv: 1), “‘if you turn, O Israel”, says Yahweh, “you should return to me””. The ‘turn’ at the beginning of this passage refers to a changing of ones loyalty and not apostasy and therefore is considered a breakthrough in the development of the meaning of *šûbh*.<sup>25</sup> Up to now the covenantal meaning of the root *šûbh* referred to the loyalty of Israel to Yahweh and vice versa now, however, Jeremiah introduces a new meaning to the concept. From now on *šûbh* can mean not only apostasy and repentance but also the abstraction to ‘change one’s covenantal loyalty’ and this usage would influence the later understanding of the concept.<sup>26</sup>

The later writing in the Book of Jeremiah also began to advocate an individual rather than a corporate approach to salvation. Thus (Je. xxxi: 29) ‘people will no longer say, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set

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<sup>24</sup> See Holladay, W. L. (1958) *The Root Šûbh in the Old Testament: With Particular Reference to its Usages in Covenantal Contexts*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, pp. 60, 128-30.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid; Bertram, G. (1968) “στρεφω,” in G Friedrich (ed) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol.7, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p.716

on edge” insists that later generations should not have to pay for ancestral sins. The concept of personal responsibility is thus introduced and the concept of individual repentance and conversion begins to take shape.<sup>27</sup> This inward turn is identified by Voegelin as a factor in the break between collective and personal existence.<sup>28</sup> It is not a clean break and Jeremiah begins the transformation of the horizon in order to facilitate the change. Thus, when the chosen people are addressed as a body, the personal state of order is emphasised at a metaphorical level, as in Jeremiah (xvii:1) ‘The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their hearts’. For Voegelin<sup>29</sup> the tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written are transformed into the hearts of the people and the subsequent need for a new Covenant with God becomes the aspiration of Jeremiah’s later prophecy:

Behold, the days are coming, says Yahweh, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day that I took them by their hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their master, says Yahweh. But this is the covenant, which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put my law within them, and will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Je. xxxi, 31-33)

Jeremiah thus seems to be anticipating the new order to be located within the individual as he moves away from the collective toward the inner soul and conduct of life.<sup>30</sup> He offers a fundamental insight into this individualistic route to salvation by means of an inner transformation and thus it is only with

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<sup>27</sup> See Ceresko, A.R. (1992) *Introduction to the Old Testament*, New York: Orbis Books, p.230; Sanders, J.A. (1997) ‘The Exile and Canon Formation’. In J. A. Scott (ed) *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, p. 83.

<sup>28</sup> See Voegelin, E. (1969[1956]) *Israel and Revelation*, (Vol.1 of *Order and history*), Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, p.457.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> This conception of inwardness and its influence on the conduct of life will be developed further in chapter 2

Jeremiah that the usage of the root *šûbh* takes on a recurrent meaning of turning or returning to God as prior to Jeremiah's ministry this *leitmotif* was unknown.<sup>31</sup> The development of the verb *šûbh* to indicate an inward turn, as begun by Jeremiah, continued apace during the exilic and post-exilic period.

The Book of Ezekiel (c.593-573) contains twenty instances of covenantal *šûbh* but all refer to a turn back from either evil or righteousness. Because these usages of covenantal *šûbh* are 'monotonous, stereotyped and easily summarized',<sup>32</sup> they fail to deepen our understanding of the concept of conversion. However, progress can still be made, as the Book of Ezekiel does help to develop the concept of conversion in an alternate manner. Building on the concept of personal responsibility Ezekiel echoes Jeremiah's generational proverb (Ez. xviii: 1-3) and attempts to lay the foundations of a new community based within the individual. Thus (Ez. xviii 30) – "I will judge you, each one according to his ways," declares Yahweh,' – stresses the principle of individual retribution over collective; each person is responsible for his own deeds, both good and evil, and will be rewarded by God accordingly. For some commentators much of this new thinking came about because of the Greek and Persian influence in the sixth to fourth century BCE.<sup>33</sup> Because nothing had prepared the Israelites for the calamity of the Exile (587-539BCE), outside help was needed if a motive was to be found to explain why Yahweh had allowed his chosen people be defeated and the temple destroyed.

The exilic period was characterised by the central place of the fundamentalists in Jewish life and thought. However, beneath the surface, many Jews sought explanations for the Exile in foreign religions such as Persia's Zoroastrianism. Founded in the seventh century BCE by a prophet named Zarathustra, this religion offered a world view that explained and mollified tragedies such as the

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<sup>31</sup> See Holladay, W. L. (1958) *The Root Šûbh in the Old Testament: With Particular Reference to its Usages in Covenantal Contexts*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, pp.151-2.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.139.

<sup>33</sup> See Cohn, N. (1993) *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith*, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 129-40; Sanders, J.A. (1997) 'The Exile and Canon Formation'. In J. A. Scott (ed) *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, pp.54-7; Hooker, R. (1996) *The Hebrews*, @ [http://www.edu/~dee/Hebrews/POST\\_EXRE.HTM](http://www.edu/~dee/Hebrews/POST_EXRE.HTM), accessed on 20/01/04, pp.1-2.

Exile. This worldview was characterised by a dualistic, eschatological, and apocalyptic approach. The universe, according to Zarathustra, is divided into two distinct spheres, the god of light and good rules one, while the other is ruled by the god of dark and evil. Human and cosmic history is represented as an epic struggle between these two deities and the end of time would be marked by a final apocalyptic battle where all those on the side of good would prevail and enjoy eternal bliss. This world-view of the Zoroastrians would have an immense influence amongst Jews of the exilic period.<sup>34</sup>

Prior to the Exile the Hebrew religion contained none of these elements. Yahweh is the sole ruler of the world and evil exclusively results from human action. The afterlife is a 'House of Dust' called Sheol where the spirit or soul survives only for a brief time. There is no conception of an end of time or of an afterlife in another world as Sheol was considered 'the land of oblivion'.<sup>35</sup> However after the Exile the Hebrew religion adopted several innovations along the following lines. A dualistic worldview in which all good comes from Yahweh and all evil emanates from the forces of evil. The eschatological approach allows for an elaborate theology of the end of time when Yahweh would finally defeat the forces of evil and darkness. Popular Jewish religion also adopts an otherworldly approach to justice. Since this world seems to be typically exemplified by injustice and tragedy the concept of another world is required where justice prevails. Thus the afterlife becomes the place where good is eternally rewarded and evil eternally punished.

At this stage a brief summery of the development of the verb *šûbh* from the beginning of the Hebrew religion to the Exile will help to set the stage for what, this thesis claims, was one of the most influential events in the development of the concept of conversion. First an overview of the usage of *šûbh* in the Old Testament will show how the usage changed from a non-covenantal to a covenantal manner sometime in the period 800 to 400 BCE.

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<sup>34</sup> See Cohn, N. (1993) *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 79.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.140.



<b>Books</b>	Non-Covenantal	Covenantal
	(Physical)	(Spiritual)
Torah<900BCE	91%	9%
Former Prophets<800BCE	85%	15%
Latter Prophets 800-400BCE	27%	73%

Early usage of the root *šûbh* in the Old Testament was spatial referring on the whole to a person or place. Later usage, in the work of the Latter Prophets, was figurative, return to God or in the case of apostasy turn from God. Jeremiah, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, used it to mean ‘change one’s loyalty’ and Ezekiel began to standardise this covenantal usage towards the concept of an inner conversion. However what must be remembered is that, in pre-exilic Israel, nationality was the sole method of becoming an Israelite and therefore any reference to return, repent, or conversion was with regard to the ‘elect’ or ‘chosen people’ and not aimed at any outsiders.

In 539 BCE the Babylonian kingdom fell to the Persians led by Cyrus. A royal decree allowed the reestablishment of the Jewish community in Judah and Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple to Yahweh. The reestablishment was a slow process that occurred in stages and not without difficulties. Initially the Israelites were only given control of Jerusalem itself and a small area surrounding the ruined city.<sup>36</sup> From the start the work of restoration was hampered by controversies and conflicts within the Jewish community at Jerusalem, mainly between the ‘people of the land’, that is those left behind during the Babylonian Exile, and the returnees. The main areas of conflict between both groups focused on (i) land and property rights, (ii) who had the authority to rebuild the Temple, and (iii) the different religio-cultural values between the two groups.<sup>37</sup> It is the latter area of conflict that is of particular

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<sup>36</sup> Ceresko, A.R. (1992) *Introduction to the Old Testament*, New York: Orbis Books, p.246.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., see also Anderson, W. A. (1996 [1958]) *The Living World of the Old Testament*, Harlow: Longmans, p.516; Smith-Christopher, D. (1994) ‘The Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13: A Study of the Sociology of the Post-Exilic Judean Community’. In T. Eskenazi

interest to this work, especially the religio-cultural value that touched off the Ezra-Nehemiah polemic against ‘foreign wives’ in the early post-exilic era.

As mentioned previously the return was a slow process and took place in stages. Sometime in the middle of the Fifth century Ezra led a group of about five thousand Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem, only to discover that many of those left behind during the Exile and those who preceded Ezra had married their non-Jewish neighbours and thus jeopardized the ‘holy race’ (Ezr. viii 2). A dilemma arose immediately; how could those who had married foreign women remain within the covenant? The answer from Ezra (Ezr. x: 44) and Nehemiah (Neh. xiii: 23-30) was that all who married foreign women must send them away with their children. While many ‘sinners’ complied with the orders of the prophets there were also those who opposed the solution (Ezr. x: 15) and this resulted in what has been termed the ‘mixed marriage crisis’.<sup>38</sup> Except for the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah the activities of the now restored Israelite community in Jerusalem and Judah during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries remain sketchy. It is not until the conquests of Alexander the Great (336-323 BCE) that written records once again become available and the concept of conversion is developed further.

The Hellenisation of the Jewish culture was to last until the fall of the Second Temple following the Roman takeover of 63BCE. Sometime within this period the conception of Israel as a nation began to change. Religious identity, during this time changed from one based on ancient tribal classification to one classified by ritual status. Thus a person previously identified as a ‘Benjaminite’ could now be identified as either a priest, a scribe, or a Levite.<sup>39</sup> One consequence of the above reclassification was the possibility of non-Jews or Gentiles becoming members of the community of Israel. It is particularly difficult to determine the

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and K. Richards (eds) *Second Temple Studies 2: Temple and Community in the Persian Period* (JSOT Supplement Series 175), Sheffield: JSOT Press, p. 20.

<sup>38</sup> For more on this see Smith-Christopher, D. (1994) ‘The Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13: A Study of the Sociology of the Post-Exilic Judaean Community’. In T. Eskenazi and K. Richards (eds) *Second Temple Studies 2: Temple and Community in the Persian Period* (JSOT Supplement Series 175), Sheffield: JSOT Press.

<sup>39</sup> See Finn, T. M. (1997) *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity*, New Jersey: Paulist Press, p.92

exact period when this first occurred but the practice was well established by the second century BCE.

The Book of Judith<sup>40</sup> is an apocryphal text written in the late second century BCE that outlines the legendary tale of how Judith with the help of Achior, a general of the Ammonite army, saved the unknown Jewish city of Bethulia by assassinating the Assyrians' general Holofernes. For his help in saving Bethulia Achior is honoured and converts to the Jewish faith; 'He believed in God completely...was circumcised and was admitted to the community of Israel, as are his descendants to the present day' (Jdt. 14:10). It is clear from Judith's commentary that conversion to the Jewish faith was a well-established practice by the second century BCE and that certain conditions and rituals were necessary for it to occur.

Finn<sup>41</sup> outlines these elements of the conversion process as (i) belief (ii) practice and (iii) circumcision. Potential converts had to adopt a radical form of monotheism rejecting the very idea of other gods and accepting Yahweh as the one true God. In pre-exilic Judaism this belief did not apply as Israelites generally believed that Yahweh was mightier than gods of other nations - henotheism. The Latter Prophets were instrumental in establishing monotheism and by the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE the prophetic position had won out.<sup>42</sup>

The 'practical' element required from Jews and converts alike referred to the conduct of believers with special emphasis on observing the 613 precepts of the Torah. Observance of these precepts dominated the conduct of Israelites, as their remit extended into all aspects of Jewish life, ranging from ritual conduct (sacrifice, prayer, the Sabbath etc.) to ethical conduct (virtues, morals and the likes). Circumcision the mark of the covenant with God 'in the flesh' together with the various dietary laws, regulations and strict observance of the Sabbath all

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<sup>40</sup> See Moore, C. A. (1985) *Judith: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Doubleday: New York

<sup>41</sup> See Finn, T. M. (1997) *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity*, New Jersey: Paulist Press, p.93.

<sup>42</sup> See Cohn, N. (1993) *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 143.

took on a new significance after the disaster of 587BCE. If the Exiles were to survive the demise of Judah than a new focus, a new identity was needed and circumcision, in this period, achieved prominence as the ‘distinctive mark of Jewishness’.<sup>43</sup>

### **The use of *strepho* and *periagogé* to indicate conversion**

After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE the Hellenisation of Palestine and the Fertile Crescent continued unabated. Within a hundred years most Egyptian Jews had abandoned Aramaic in favour of *koine* Greek.<sup>44</sup> Greek speaking scholars, under the aegis of Ptolemy II (285-246 BCE), translated the Jewish scripture into Greek and the Septuagint, sometimes referred to as the LXX, was completed sometime in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. It derives its name from the popular notion that seventy-two scholars completed it in seventy-two days. Since language can reflect one’s outlook on the world, the rendering in the Septuagint of the Hebrew *šûbh* can shed some light on the ancient Greeks concept of conversion.

About 70% of the renderings in the Septuagint are derived from compounds of *strepho*<sup>45</sup> and these compounds will be the main focus of this section. Compounds derived from *strepho* (verb form; *epistrepho*; noun form; *Epistrophe*) are found from the earliest period in Greek texts and in these contexts it meant physically ‘to twist’ or ‘to turn’. The hypothesis that this thesis seeks to establish is that many senses developed from this definition and between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, the significance of the term, in a philosophical context, took on a transformative meaning especially in relation to a moral or inner turning. The Greek philosophical movement of that period resembled

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<sup>43</sup> Collins, J.J., (1985) “Circumcision and Salvation in the First Century”. In J. Neusner and E. Fredrichs (eds) *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews and Others in Late Antiquity*, Chico California: Scholars Press, p.166

<sup>44</sup> See Anderson, W. A. (1996 [1958]) *The Living World of the Old Testament*, Harlow: Longmans, p.613

<sup>45</sup> See Holladay, W. L. (1958) *The Root Šûbh in the Old Testament: With Particular Reference to its Usages in Covenantal Contexts*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, p.20.

closely the established religions; demanding a break with the mundane while offering an alternative route to enlightenment.<sup>46</sup> Nock's description of the 6<sup>th</sup> century philosophical movement subscribed to by the followers of Pythagoras elucidates these similarities:

The followers of Pythagoras formed societies entered after preliminary discipline, with ascetic doctrine and practices, an intense group-consciousness, and a Pythagorean life prized by its followers and ridiculed by others.<sup>47</sup>

This turning from a life of luxury, self-indulgence and superstition (all objects of philosophical criticism) to a life of discipline, self-denial and contemplation is explained using the Greek noun 'epistrophe'.<sup>48</sup> In Greek poetry the same philosophical turn is observed and is alluded to in the poem *Trachinae* by the Athenian Sophocles (496-406BCE) when he refers to the moral walk that results in an inner turning.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Allegory of the Cave**

This process of turning away from a shallow and shady existence to a contemplative and enlightening mode of living is captured effectively in the allegory of the cave contained in Plato's *Republic*. The philosopher envisions a group of human beings who have lived their entire lives trapped in a subterranean cave illuminated only by a fire set behind them. These cave-dwelling prisoners are chained in place and can see nothing but shadows and reflections projected on to a flat wall in front of them. Between the fire and the wall figures are moving, some silent some talking; the fire casts their silhouettes on the wall, and shadows are all the prisoners see.

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<sup>46</sup> Mumford, L. (1978 [1956]) *The Transformations of Man*, Gloucester: Peter Smith, p.71

<sup>47</sup> See Nock, A. D. (1933) *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.165

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.179

<sup>49</sup> Bertram, G.. (1968) "στρεφω," in G Friedrich (ed) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol.7, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p.714

While all will be able to comprehend the interplay of light and shadow, the more astute among them will become highly skilled observers adept at predicting future patterns. One prisoner is permitted to escape from his shackles and compelled to leave the cave and enter the world of sunlight. Plato concludes the allegory:

When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities...He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day...Last of all he will be able to see the sun and not mere reflections...And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?<sup>50</sup>

One of the terms Plato uses throughout this fable is the compound verb *epistrepho*, -strepho meaning ‘to turn’ and the prefix epi- adds the thought of ‘towards’, causing the compound word to mean ‘turn towards’. This compound, for many scholars, is the precursor or prototype of the Christian religious phenomenon of conversion:

Plato spoke of the object of education as a ‘turning around of the soul’ the word *epistrophe*, later used by

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<sup>50</sup> Plato. (1986) *Republic* tr. by Benjamin Jowett, Prometheus: New York, 7:515a / 516c. It is customary for scholars to refer to Plato’s works using references from the 1578 edition by Stephanus where each page is subdivided into approximately equal segments, designated a-e.

Christians of conversion, is applied to the effects of philosophy.<sup>51</sup>

Another scholar of Greek Platonism concurs with Nock's opinion:

If we approach the problem...of the origin of the Christian conception of conversion, we must acknowledge that Plato was its originator. The word (epistrophe) was transferred to Christian experience in the circles of early Christian Platonism.<sup>52</sup>

### ***Periagogé, Paideia, Agathon***

Another term, used by Plato in the 'cave' fable, to indicate a turning around of the soul, is *periagogé*<sup>53</sup> a compound of the roots *peri* meaning around and *ago* meaning to lead, which in the Platonic sense called for a leading around of the soul towards the light. Because the verb *ago* implies the presence of a benefactor or sponsor the use of the term *periagogé* must be understood in conjunction with two other terms - *Paideia* (traditional education) and the *Agathon* (brightest region of being). Voegelin<sup>54</sup> identifies the clarification of education as the main purpose for which Plato introduced the allegory of the cave at this particular point in the dialogue. Without a turning around of the soul (*periagogé*), a man's full education, and thus the acquisition of true knowledge (*episteme*), remains incomplete. However, this *periagogé* is unlike other virtues of the mind in that it cannot be attained by training and practice and the most an educator can hope for

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<sup>51</sup> Nock, A. D. (1933) *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.179

<sup>52</sup> Jaeger, W. (1944) *Paedeia: the Ideals of Greek Culture. Vol. II In Search of the Divine Centre*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers, p.417.

<sup>53</sup> Plato. *Republic*, tr. Benjamin Jowett (1986) New York: Prometheus, 518 d. The etymology of *periagogé* is derived from the Indo-European root 'per' (through) and will be linked to the concept of 'liminality' in the next chapter.

<sup>54</sup> Voegelin, E. (1969[1956]) *Israel and Revelation*, (Vol.1 of *Order and history*), Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, p.115.

is to turn this ‘organ of vision’ towards the brightest of all realities, the good.<sup>55</sup> Thus the allegory of the cave, written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, can best be understood as referring to the object of education (*Paideia*) as a turning of the soul (*periagogé*) from the realm of becoming towards the brightest being, the good (*Agathon*).

## Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to trace the emergence and historical development of the process of conversion and to attempt to temporally locate the conceptualisation of the process. From the analysis of the Hebrew word ‘*šûbh*’ it became clear that up to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE the meaning and application of the root *šûbh* alluded to a spatial movement only and referred almost wholly to a person or place. Later usage, up to the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, was figurative meaning to turn to or from God. Then during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries a semantical shift occurred and the term began to refer to some form of inner transformation, later writers standardised and conceptualised the term until it approximated the spiritual experience that the process has come to indicate.

Compounds derived from the Greek word *strepho* were known in the Archaic and Classical Greek of Athens prior to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. However, it was not until the Greek philosophical movements (6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE) developed the term that it began to refer to an inner transformation. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Plato further developed the idea that compounds of the Greek words *strepho* and *periago* could be used to refer to a turning from an old way of life to a new one by means of a personal transformation. When, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, the Old Testament texts were translated into Greek, compounds of the Greek term *strepho* became the most popular (70%) rendering for the Hebrew verb *šûbh*.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.



The main findings that emerge from the above analysis suggest that sometime between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries the emergence of the concept of conversion occurred. Was this phenomenon a fundamentally Hebrew/Greek experience or can it be fitted into a wider theoretical framework? To answer this question a study of, what Karl Jaspers<sup>56</sup> coined, ‘the axial age’ is required.

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<sup>56</sup> Jaspers, K. (1953 [1949]) *The Origin and Goal of History*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

## Chapter 2

### Liminality and the Axial Age

The research conducted in the first chapter established that sometime between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE a semantic change occurred in the Hebrew root *šûbh* and compounds of the Greek words *strepho* and *periago*, and this change resulted in the meaning of the term shifting from a physical or material turn to a spiritual or inner transformation. At this stage a broader framework can be employed in order to understand the transformation that allowed the concept of conversion to emerge, this theoretical framework concerns a time-period that is known as ‘the axial- age’.

Coined by Karl Jaspers<sup>1</sup> and expanded on by Eisenstadt<sup>2</sup> the axial-age, generally, refers to a relatively short time-period between 800 and 200 BCE, and more specifically concentrating around the 6<sup>th</sup> century, when major upheavals occurred in response to widespread political, social, and spiritual unrest. The focus of Jaspers’ study was the series of simultaneous spiritual outbursts that occurred in diverse parts of the world that would have universal significance for the course of world history. He declares that ‘the most extraordinary events are concentrated in this period’ citing Lao-tse in China, the Buddha and Jainism in India, the proclamations of prophets (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) in Israel, and the emergence of philosophy in Greece. A particularly illuminating example is provided with the observation that Heraclitus (c.550-480), Confucius (551-479), and the Buddha (c.560-483) were all born, and died, within a few years of one another.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Jaspers, K. (1953 [1949]) *The Origin and Goal of History*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>2</sup> See Eisenstadt, S.N. (1986) *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, New York: The SUNY Press

<sup>3</sup> See Voegelin, E. (1974) *The Ecumenic Age*, (Vol. 4 of *Order and History*), Baton Rouge: Louisiana, p.382; Szokolczai, A. (2003) *The Genesis of Modernity*, London: Routledge, p.80.

In *The Origin and Goal of History*, Jaspers challenges the contemporaneous idea that the birth of Jesus was the turning point in world history and instead sought a more fitting 'axis point' to accommodate civilizations other than those that subscribe to the Christian perspective. The axial-age provided just such a turning point with the most extraordinary spiritual developments occurring simultaneously in China, India, and the West. The effect of these spiritual outbursts on everyday life is profound:

[M]an becomes conscious of Being as a whole, of himself and his limitations. He experiences the terror of the world and his own powerlessness. He asks radical questions. Face to face with the void he strives for liberation and redemption. By consciously recognising his limits he sets himself the highest goals. He experiences absoluteness in the depths of selfhood and in the lucidity of transcendence.<sup>4</sup>

As a consequence of this analysis Jaspers makes the connection between ascetics in India, nomadic thinkers and hermits in China, philosophers in Greece, and prophets in Israel; all linked by, what Schwartz called, '...the strain towards transcendence'.<sup>5</sup> Although these religious teachers and philosophers initiated the changes in spiritual reflexivity, eventually all aspects of culture were transformed. One result of this cultural transformation and spiritual reflexivity is the emergence of the self or personality as we understand it today; this is what Jaspers termed 'spiritualisation', where '[h]uman beings dared to rely on themselves as individuals'.<sup>6</sup>

The evidence for this self-reliance is seen in the Delphic maxim 'know thyself'; in the identification of the atman, by the Upanishads, as the transcendent

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<sup>4</sup> Jaspers, K. (1953 [1949]) *The Origin and Goal of History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p.2.

<sup>5</sup> Schwartz cited in Eisenstadt, S.N. (1986) *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, New York: The SUNY Press, p.2.

<sup>6</sup> See Jaspers, K. (1953 [1949]) *The Origin and Goal of History*, New Haven: Yale University Press. p: 3.

centre of the self; in the Buddha's way of individual enlightenment; and in the ethical Jewish prophets' call for individual moral responsibility.<sup>7</sup> However, this reflexive self-reliance comes at a price and this is manifest in attempts to resolve the growing disjunction between the transcendental and mundane orders. This growing disjunction, evident in the post-axial period, contrasts significantly with the mundane and transcendental orders, as they were understood, in societies prior to the axial breakthrough.

### **Pre-Axial-Age Civilisations**

Civilisations that existed prior to the axial-age (such as Babylonian, Egyptian, aboriginal cultures of China etc.) all perceived a difference between the transcendental and mundane orders, usually assigning a stronger and elevated position to the former. However, the transcendental or higher world in these 'pagan' civilizations was symbolically envisioned along the lines of the mundane world and the search for some type of immortality, which is a universal feature of all societies, is represented by various forms of physical continuity. Thus the transcendental world was usually equated with a physical space, 'the other world,' the land of the dead, and much like the mundane world in many details.<sup>8</sup>

This attempt at maintaining a physical bridge between the transcendental and mundane worlds may, according to Voegelin,<sup>9</sup> have precipitated the decline of the pre-axial religions. Concerning Egypt he identifies the erosion of the pyramids and plundering of the minor tombs as evidence for the ancients that attempts to build eternity materially into this world was a futile exercise, thus providing an experiential break with the cosmological order. He further identifies similar experiential breaks - in Chinese civilization with the emergence

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<sup>7</sup> Cousins, E. (1999) 'Religions of the World: Facing Modernity Together'. *Global Virtue Ethics Review* 1: 12.

<sup>8</sup> See Eisenstadt, S.N. (1986) *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, New York: The SUNY Press, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> See Voegelin, E. (1969[1956]) *Israel and Revelation*, (Vol.1 of *Order and history*), Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, p.59-61.

of Confucianism and in ancient Greece with the development of philosophy.<sup>10</sup> However, prior to these breaks, these pre-axial civilizations were most durable and, provided the experiences of order remained static, could endure the most profound institutional upheavals.

As stated previously these experiences of order, in many cases, envision the transcendental world as a physical extension of the mundane world, and the gods inhabiting these worlds fight in battles, get fits of jealousy, experience hunger just as humans do on earth. The powers of the gods, in such a world, were limited<sup>11</sup> and, therefore, an ‘other-worldly’ conception of a distinct moral order, which is fundamentally different from this world, remains underdeveloped.

This cultural and spiritual under-development hinders the emergence of the type of personality that was necessary for ‘conversion’ to occur. Jasper notes that in these types of societies ‘a strange veil’ seems to lie over the cultures as though ‘man had not yet really come to himself’.<sup>12</sup> Likewise Nock distinguishes between adhesion and conversion, the former, occurring in the pre-axial world, refers to the worship of new gods but only as a means to supplement the old gods, consequently the old way of life remained in place.<sup>13</sup>

Prior to the rise of axial religions the ancients had no difficult decisions to make concerning belief or dogma; one inherited religion as one inherited other aspects of one’s culture. In the event of invasion and conquest it was likely that the victors would incorporate the rituals and gods of the conquered into their own religious system. It was as if the gods were ‘permanent residents’ and as such had a right to the worship of all humans within their territory.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> See Berman, M. (2000) *Wandering God: A Study in Nomadic Spirituality*, Albany: State University of New York Press, p.140.

<sup>12</sup> Jaspers, K. (1953 [1949]) *The Origin and Goal of History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p.7.

<sup>13</sup> Nock, A. D. (1933) *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.7.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.,p.6

There was therefore in these pre-axial religions nothing approaching conversion, as we understand it today, but there was a sense of belonging to the religion one was born into and sometimes one could adopt an alternative form as a result of deliberate choice. These various pre-axial religious forms were portrayed as ‘cults’ by Nock and, as such, its adherents lacked the deeper needs the axial religions claimed to fulfil.<sup>15</sup> Jaspers agrees with this definition of the pre-axial religions when he identifies their common element as being ‘magical’ but ‘...destitute of philosophical enlightenment, [and] devoid of any quest for salvation’.<sup>16</sup>

Changes of status did occur in these pre-axial cultures usually by means of rituals associated with rites of passage but, it should be noted, these were inter-cultural, rather than intra-cultural, ones. Because a rite of passage framework is of the utmost importance to this thesis a further elaboration is necessary.

## **Rites of Passage**

Rituals celebrating an individual or groups change of status are found in all societies and this was the focus of Arnold van Gennep’s pioneering study in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> He noted that whether they were celebrating adulthood, marriage, death or any life crisis, rituals concerning periods of transition seemed to have a similar structure throughout the world. Van Gennep identified these rituals as ‘rites of passage’ and the universal characteristics he identified as ‘rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation’.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.16

<sup>16</sup> See Jaspers, K. (1953 [1949]) *The Origin and Goal of History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p.12.

<sup>17</sup> See van Gennep, A. (1960 [1908]) *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 10-11.

The first phase consisted of the rituals surrounding the separation from the routines and structures of everyday life; the in-between state represented the second phase when the transition rites were performed; the final rites were conducted during the return to the normal daily routine. In a further classification of these rites van Gennep introduces the term liminal to explain the transitory phase following the rite of separation. The term is derived from the Latin word *limen*, meaning threshold, which is used by van Gennep as a metaphor for the social boundaries crossed during *rites of passage*.

Elaborating on the liminal aspects of rites of passage the work of Victor Turner provides a conceptual tool for understanding the changes that occur in social settings. In *The Ritual Process*,<sup>19</sup> Turner identifies the most important phase in van Gennep's processual view on ritual as the liminal or intermediate state. During this phase the structural background is suspended and the liminal subjects are 'neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial'.<sup>20</sup> An interesting etymological point here is that Turner attempted to identify and connect his concept of liminality with the perennial attempts at the conceptualisation of experience. Szakolczai has outlined Turner's etymological journey:

...the Indo-European root 'per'...with the meaning of 'going through' or 'passage', is at the origin of a number of terms expressing danger (like peril, fear, perish, German *Gefahr* (danger)), passage (port, French *porte* (door), German *fahren* (travel) – from which comes *Erfahren* (experience)), or testing, proving (experience and experiment).<sup>21</sup>

Thus, for Turner, the connection between the concept of liminality and attempts at conceptualising 'experience' has been established. What is interesting from the perspective of this thesis is that the ancient Greek concept of

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<sup>19</sup> Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>21</sup> See Szakolczai, A. (2003) *The Genesis of Modernity*, London: Routledge, p.67.

*periagogé*, analysed in chapter one, is derived from the root *περί*, which in turn is derived from the Indo-European root ‘per’.<sup>22</sup> This provides another connection between the reflexivity of the axial-age subject on experience and Turner’s concept of liminality.

This liminal condition allows changes to occur unhindered by the constraints of structure, it can also create feelings of deep comradeship that Turner called ‘*communitas*’ which he describes as a ‘liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses’.<sup>23</sup> This liberation can result in a ‘relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion’ between liminal participants.<sup>24</sup>

However, these unstructured situations can also produce negative responses and are fraught with danger as uncontrollable unconscious energies are released. For this reason the liminal entities involved in rites of passage are provided with ritual instructors that act as ‘guardians’ or ‘masters of ceremonies’ that guide the initiates towards the new structures of identity. It is from such a conceptual framework that the notion of conversion, which emerged in the axial age, can best be understood.

## **Rituals Transformed**

The emergence of a reflexive self during the axial age necessitated the reconceptualisation of the means by which religion is understood and acquired. The pre-axial civilizations, as previously stated, inherited religion along the same lines as other elements of one’s culture, now however another means had to be found to accommodate the reflexivity and autonomy of the subject, particularly

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<sup>22</sup> Riesenfeld, E. H. (1968) “*περί*”. In Gerhard Friedrich (ed) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* v.3, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, p.53.

<sup>23</sup> Turner, V. (1982) *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: PAJ Publications, p.44.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*



with regards to conversion. The most appropriate means, of understanding the conversion process, would be through some of the rituals and customs associated with the universal rites of passage as described above. This is in keeping with Jaspers' ideas concerning the survival of certain practices and rituals from the pre-axial religions:

As a result of this process, (the beginnings of world religions) hitherto unconsciously accepted ideas, customs and conditions were subjected to examination, questioned and liquidated. Everything was swept into the vortex. In so far as the traditional substance still possessed vitality and reality, its manifestations were clarified and thereby transmuted.<sup>25</sup>

Eisenstadt also explains how certain behaviours were taken out of their 'primordial framework' and re-combined with the 'attributes of resolution of the tension between the transcendental and the mundane orders' thereby generating 'new tensions in the formation of personality'.<sup>26</sup> If, as this thesis argues, the process of conversion had its origins in the axial age then its understanding by the ancients would be through the customs and rituals contemporaneous of that period.

The problem posed now is to try and determine which customs or rituals, with regards to conversion, survived the axial transition; the intention being to fit these practices to a 'rites of passage' framework and particularly the liminal stage of this ritual. The main ones identified by this thesis are circumcision and immersion. Because, as the first chapter indicated, the concept of conversion has its roots in the Old Testament and ancient Greece, the focus of this chapter, for the purpose of continuity, will also pay particular emphasis on these same areas.

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<sup>25</sup> Jaspers, K. (1953 [1949]) *The Origin and Goal of History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p.2.

<sup>26</sup> See Eisenstadt, S.N. (1986) *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, New York: The SUNY Press, p.5.

## Circumcision

The initiation ritual of circumcision is one of three practices that historically served to differentiate and separate Jews from non-Jews the other two being the Sabbath and diet.<sup>27</sup> The Book of Genesis is unambiguous in its statement that circumcision was given to Abraham as a 'sign of the covenant' between him and God. Nevertheless, early historians tell us that circumcision was a practice that was learned from the Egyptians. Josephus, a first century Jewish historian of the biblical period, in his work *Against Apion* (1.168-71) cites the 'first' historian Herodotus (5<sup>th</sup> century BCE) as claiming that the Phoenicians and the Syrians of Palestine (Jews) acquired the custom from the Egyptians. Diodorus (1.28.3, 1.55.5) and Strabo (16.4.9.771) both Greek historians of the first century BCE also claim the practice of circumcision was inherited from the Egyptians. A brief survey of Egyptian history reveals that the ritualistic act of circumcision was practiced for thousands of years.

The oldest known Egyptian mummies (1300 BCE) were circumcised and Egyptian wall paintings show that it was practiced thousands of years prior to this time.<sup>28</sup> The earliest recorded evidence of a type of circumcision was a puberty ritual performed during the early Dynastic period of about 2400 BCE<sup>29</sup> The practice, however, was not confined to the Middle East as it was also known in other ancient cultures for example tribal Africa, Australian Aborigines and many of the Native American tribes.<sup>30</sup> The timing of the ritual also varied across cultures, in some African tribes the ritual of circumcision is performed at birth, in

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<sup>27</sup> Feldman, L. H. (1993) *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.153.

<sup>28</sup> See Lewinsohn, R. (1958) *Belief in Beauty: A History of Sexual Customs*, London: Longmans, pp.31-2.

<sup>29</sup> See Gollahar, D. (1994) 'From Ritual to Science'. *Journal of Social History*, 28, p.5 n.1; Badawy, A. (1978) *The Tomb of Nyhetep-Ptah at Giza and the Tomb of 'Ankhn' ahor at Saqqara*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p.19.

<sup>30</sup> See Dunsmuir W.D. and Gordon E.M. (1999) 'The History of Circumcision'. *BJU International*. 83 Supp.1, p.1-2.

Judaism it is performed on the eighth day after birth, while in many tribal communities it is performed as a 'rite of passage' from puberty to adulthood.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, in the prophesy of Jeremiah the ritual of circumcision begins to acquire a significance beyond the mere outward sign of Israel's allegiance to Yahweh and refers instead to the inner turn that is associated with the process of conversion. A direct link has been attempted between the understanding of circumcision in this period and the Christian understanding of conversion:

In the prophesy of Jeremiah...there is raised for the first time, so far as the sources tell us, the theological problem of a rite which ultimately belongs to the sphere of sacramental magic, and which can thus acquire a certain justification in Yahweh belief only if it is divested of its cruder side and referred to the inward man and his relationship with God. Along these lines Jeremiah initiates a theological understanding which gains in prominence during the succeeding centuries and which finally reached its climax in Paul's assessment of conversion.<sup>32</sup>

Moving on, we find that during the Hellenistic period the practice of circumcision is expanded to accommodate proselytism<sup>33</sup> thus broadening the meaning of the ritual to include the initiation of non-Jews into the community of Israel.

An early recording of circumcision accompanying the conversion process comes from the Book of Judith from the second century BCE. As was already noted in Chapter One this book relates how Judith saves Israel from invasion by

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See Meyer, R. (1968) "περίτέμνω," in Gerhard Friedrich (ed) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* v.6, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, p.77.

<sup>33</sup> Feldman, L. H. (1993) *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.155.

the Assyrian general Holofernes by duping and killing the invader. Her daring plan is helped by the assistance of Achior, commander of Holofernes' Ammonite army, who subsequently converts to Judaism:

When Achior saw all that the God of Israel had done, he believed in God completely. So he was circumcised and was admitted to the community of Israel, as are his descendants to the present day.<sup>34</sup>

The contextual evidence from the piece would seem to suggest that the conversion process involving a circumcision ritual was a well-established practice of the time and thus the following rite-of-passage framework can be constructed. The uncircumcised initiand, choosing to convert to the Jewish faith, is separated from his community and is presented for the ritual proper; after the circumcision is completed the initiand is incorporated, as a full member of the Jewish religion, into the community of Israel. The new convert now carries the 'mark' of initiation on his body for life. Thus a custom practiced by the pre-axial religions of Egypt and elsewhere is swept into the vortex, to use Jaspers terminology, and emerges as a classical 'rite of passage' for conversion to one of the main axial religions. In the above ritual the actual 'operation' performed by the Mohel corresponds to the liminal phase of Van Gennep and Turner's 'rite of passage'. In this way the structure or background from whence the initiand emerged is suspended in order that the convert can assimilate the new order of structure.

## **Immersion**

The symbolic use of water in purifying rituals has been used by almost all known cults and religions since the rise of civilization.<sup>35</sup> The belief being that water not

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<sup>34</sup> Judith 14: 10 in Moore, C. A. (1985) *Judith: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Doubleday: New York, p24.

<sup>35</sup> See Meslin, M (1987) 'Baptism'. In M. Eliade, (ed) *The Encyclopedia of Religion* vol.2, New York: Macmillan, p.59.

only cleanses the body but also purifies the spirit or soul of the believer especially if the water is flowing as in a river. Thus the Ganges, the Nile, the Jordan and the Euphrates were all regarded as sacred rivers and treated with reverence. For instance, Herodotus tells us that a person drowned in the Nile was considered ‘holy’<sup>36</sup> and the corpse was treated accordingly, such a person was called – ‘one who had been immersed’.<sup>37</sup> In ancient Babylonia, the *Tablets of Maklu* describes how water was an important element in the cult of Enki, lord of Eridu.

Likewise in Egypt, the *Book of Going Forth by Day* a treatise is outlined on the baptism of newborn children in order to purify them of blemishes acquired in the womb.<sup>38</sup> The Hellenistic Mysteries of Isis and Mithras had initiation ceremonies that involved water purification as did the Appollinarian games and the festival of Pelusium.<sup>39</sup> However, what is important to this thesis is how the purification rituals, described above, changed into a ritual that brought about the enhancement of life; even immortality by means of the conversion process. This kind of ritual can be found in the Jewish *tebilah* (ritual bath of purification) or the rite of baptism as begun by John the Baptist that would later become the core aspect of Christian conversion. Even more important, for this work, is the temporal location for such a change and how it can best be understood within the axial-age transition.

The use of water was common in the Jewish world from the Mosaic books to the works of the latter Prophets. Ablutions were required on the part of priests following sacrifices and on individuals who were unclean because of an infectious disease or contact with a corpse; this is evident in the early books of the Old Testament such as Numbers and Leviticus.<sup>40</sup> In the later Jewish period

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<sup>36</sup> Herodotus II, 90 cited in Oepke, A. (1964) ‘βάπτω, βάπτίζω’. In G. Kittel (ed) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament v.1*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p.533.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Meslin, M (1987) ‘Baptism’. In M. Eliade, (ed) *The Encyclopedia of Religion* vol.2, New York: Macmillan, p.59.

<sup>39</sup> See Oepke, A. (1964) ‘βάπτω, βάπτίζω’. In G. Kittel (ed) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament v.1*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p.531.

<sup>40</sup> See the Old Testament books Num.19: 1-22; Lev. 14, 15, 16:24-30

(6<sup>th</sup> century BCE) the meaning of the ablutions begin to change to imply a symbolic cleansing as is seen in the book of Ezekiel when God says:

Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall  
be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols.  
A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I  
put within you. (Ez.xxxvi: 25-26)

This passage clearly describes a ‘conversion’ experience and as such the baptism equates with the liminal stage in a classical ‘*right of passage*’ framework.

The apocryphal Book of Judith written in the late second century BCE performs a ritual washing that includes Judith immersing herself in the water rather than just sponging or dipping, this can be regarded as one of the few instances where *baptizein* refers to a purification bath or what became known as the Jewish *tebilah* used in proselyte baptism.<sup>41</sup> The community of Qumran provide the next documented evidence for a baptismal ritual that preceded the Christian one. The sects at Qumran (many scholars<sup>42</sup> believe them to be the Essenes as described by Pliny, Philo, and Josephus) were part of the spiritual outbursts that took place during the Second-Temple period in Judaic history (539-70 BCE). In 1947 some of their manuscripts were found in caves in the region of Khirbet Qumran that became known as the celebrated Dead Sea Scrolls, one of these scrolls referred to an initiation ceremony that included a ritual bath of purification. The Rule of the Community also known as the Manual of Discipline, and abbreviated as 1QS, sets down the purification rituals for the initiates at Qumran:

He shall be cleansed from all his sins by the spirit of  
holiness uniting him to His truth, and his iniquity shall be  
expiated by the spirit of uprightness and humility. And

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<sup>41</sup> See Judith 12: 7 in Moore, C. A. (1985) *Judith: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Doubleday: New York, p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> For a listing see J. H. Charlesworth (ed) *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, New York: Doubleday.

when his flesh is sprinkled with purifying waters and sanctified by cleansing water, it shall be made clean by the humble submission of his soul to all the precepts of God.<sup>43</sup>

While the actual date of the origin of the Jewish *tebilah* is not known it is widely accepted that it originated before Christian baptism.<sup>44</sup>

One reason put forward for the practice of immersion and the emergence of the Jewish *tebilah* was as an initiation ceremony for women. While men were accepted into the Jewish religion through the ritualised act of circumcision a similar ritual act had to be incorporated for the growing numbers of women attracted to Judaism. Women in the Jewish community held a relatively more ‘elevated and respected position’<sup>45</sup> and this coupled with the fact that they did not have to undergo excision meant that Judaism held an attraction for women in particular. And thus the practice of immersion or the ritual bath known as the *tebilah* was developed in order to accommodate female proselytes. For one commentator immersion is an initiation ceremony ‘equal with the circumcision of the male proselyte, and for the female proselyte the only initiation ceremony after the destruction of the Temple’.<sup>46</sup> This claim is supported elsewhere when it is maintained that ‘for women, from the Yavnean period on, the only requirement beside acceptance of the Torah was immersion’.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See IQS 3: 8-9, in Vermes, G. (1997[1962]) *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, London: Allen Lane.

<sup>44</sup> See for instance Oepke, A. (1964) ‘βάπτω, βάπτίζω’. In G. Kittel (ed) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* v.1, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p.535; Schiffman, L H (1985) *Who was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism*. Hoboken: Ktav, p.26; Porton, G (1994) *The Stranger Within Your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, p.329 n80.

<sup>45</sup> See Feldman, L. H. (1993) *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.128.

<sup>46</sup> Marsh, H. G. (1941) *The Origins and Significance of the New Testament Baptism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.12; Rowley, H.H. (1940) “Jewish Proselyte Baptism.” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 15, p.327.

<sup>47</sup> Schiffman, L H (1985) *Who was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism*, Hoboken: Ktav, p.26. See also Weber, M. (1967[1952]) *Ancient Judaism*. New York: The Free Press, p.418-21.

Again using the Jaspersian terminology the custom of using water as a purifying ritual as practiced by the pre-axial religions of Egypt and elsewhere is ‘swept into the vortex’ only to re-emerge as ‘immersion’ – a conversion ritual or, to use van Gennep’s and Turner’s terminology, as a classical ‘rite of passage’ where the act of immersion corresponds to the liminal stage of the rite proper. The transformation of the practice of washing in order to abide by the laws of uncleanness to the purification ritual recognised as baptism took place over many centuries and was not perceived as a significant innovation to be mentioned specifically. Instead the application of these purification acts to Gentiles was accepted as the natural preliminary rituals conducted prior to the sacrifice in the Temple.<sup>48</sup> Following the destruction of the Temple these preliminary ablutions took on greater significance and the *tebilah* becomes one of the three most important rituals marking the passage of the convert from heathenism to Judaism, the other two being sacrifice and circumcision.<sup>49</sup>

Indications that seem to support the emergence of conversion during the axial-age transformation is found in the sharp increase of membership in the axial age religions in the period immediately after the sixth century BCE. The main evidence available to support such a sharp increase is the seemingly remarkable explosion in Jewish population at that time. Whilst keeping in mind the advice of some scholars<sup>50</sup> to be cautious of using demographic research for historical analysis there still seems to be ample evidence to support such a claim.

According to Baron,<sup>51</sup> who based his calculations on biblical and archaeological information, the population of Judea in 586 BCE (the time of the destruction of the First Temple) was not more than 150,000 Jews. This figure, Baron estimates, had increased to eight million by the middle of the first century

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<sup>48</sup> Marsh, H. G. (1941) *The Origins and Significance of the New Testament Baptism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 11-12.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-14.

<sup>50</sup> Hollingsworth, T.H. (1969) *Historical Demography*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p.295-8; McKnight, S. (1997) ‘Jewish Missionary Activity: The Evidence of Demographics and Synagogues’. In A. J. Levine and R. I. Pervo (eds) *Jewish Proselytism*, Maryland: University Press of America, p.26.

<sup>51</sup> See Baron, S.W. (1971) ‘Population’. *EJ* 13, p. 869.



of the Common Era.<sup>52</sup> While others would not place this figure so high, McKnight<sup>53</sup> estimates six million and Harnack<sup>54</sup> settles on four million, even the most conservative would have to admit that the only possible explanation for the sudden increase in population is conversion on a large scale.<sup>55</sup>

Having outlined the evidence for the emergence of conversion during the axial-age it is now necessary to examine the changes within the individual that allowed such a process to develop. The axial age changed the order of things and because of this a new transformed self emerged, this was a spiritual self engaged in philosophical endeavours, equipped with a quest for salvation, and with a 'quality of reflection' that would help to reform mankind.<sup>56</sup> These are the attributes needed for a 'conversion' type experience and so it is necessary to analyse their origins a bit further.

### **Asceticism and the Quest for Salvation**

Because these religions, emanating from the new axial age civilizations, emphasised the 'sharp disjunction' between the mundane and transmundane worlds, the problem to be overcome was how this chasm could be bridged.<sup>57</sup> The quest for salvation was begun and we now turn to Weber for an understanding of this concept. According to Weber<sup>58</sup> the quest for salvation was to have sociological implications for 'practical behaviour' in this life and religions that subscribe to certain 'integral values' have a stronger chance of

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 871.

<sup>53</sup> McKnight, S. (1997) 'Jewish Missionary Activity: The Evidence of Demographics and Synagogues'. In A. J. Levine and R. I. Pervo (eds) *Jewish Proselytism*, Maryland: University Press of America, p.11.

<sup>54</sup> Harnack, A. (1905) *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, London: Williams & Norgate, p.5.

<sup>55</sup> Feldman, L. H. (1993) *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.293.

<sup>56</sup> See Jaspers, K. (1953 [1949]) *The Origin and Goal of History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p.52.

<sup>57</sup> See Eisenstadt, S.N. (1986) *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, New York: The SUNY Press, p.3.

<sup>58</sup> Weber, M. (1993[1922]) *The Sociology of Religion*, Boston: Beacon Press, p.149-50.

exerting influence over the mundane things in life. Thus the Weberian concept of salvation, and its influence on the conduct of life [*Lebensführung*], bridges the gulf between the mundane and the transmundane worlds by means of the transformation of human conduct based on the standards of the transcendental orders.

In this way the road to salvation is approached through the utilisation of the conduct of life as a means of gaining sanctification that is a pre-requisite for entry into the next life. One means in this quest of salvation may entail:

a formal withdrawal from the *world*: from social and psychological ties with the family, from the possession of worldly goods, and from the political, economic, artistic, and erotic activities – in short, from all creaturely interests...This is *world-rejecting asceticism* (*weltablehnende Askese*).<sup>59</sup>

Another method, noted by Weber, concerns the rational emphasis the individual placed on the ‘conduct of life’ that led to salvation and how this direction may require both the participation within and the opposition to the institutions of the world; Weber called this behaviour ‘inner-worldly asceticism (*inner-weltliche Askese*)’.<sup>60</sup>

These are novel developments for the salvation religions of the axial-age, prior to this breakthrough the individual acquired his religion from the background that was unusually stable and prone to reconstitution after the most catastrophic events. In such a world the spatial distinction between the individual and society is blurred; however, by means of the ascetic practices described above the dividing-line separating the individual from society is emphasised and pronounced. A sense of inwardness is developed in the new self what Taylor calls ‘this partitioning between the outer and inner world’ and which

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

he explains ‘had a beginning in time and space and may have an end’.<sup>61</sup> With such a dividing-line in place the background now needs to be internalised within the new self and in this way the potential for conversion is activated.

Lewis Mumford identified how these ‘axial religions’ offered new challenges to the individual. Prior to the axial breakthrough the individual inherited religion along the same lines as one inherited other elements of ones culture, now, however, the axial religions were embraced by an expression of faith accompanied by efforts that led to an inner transformation, ‘the new self was to be achieved, not primarily by indoctrination and habituation...but by conversion’.<sup>62</sup> The one obstacle that remains concerns the direction the new self will take, how will the values that have now become de-institutionalised be replaced within the individual? A template must be supplied to provide a discernible model for others to follow; the axial prophets provide just such a template.

### **The Emergence of the Prophet in the Old Testament**

Because the axis-time as outlined above, with its suspension or collapse of order, is comparable to the liminality experienced in small scale ritual settings a ‘master of ceremonies’ is needed in order to guide the followers towards the new order. For Weber this figure is exemplified in the charismatic figure of the prophet and the means by which this figure accentuated the tension or chasm between the mundane and transmundane worlds. According to Weber the greatest achievement of the prophet was to emphasize the ‘strongest tension’ between life as it was and how scripture said it should be and how this tension could only be addressed by orienting the conduct of one’s life to bring about salvation.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Taylor, C. (1989) *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.111.

<sup>62</sup> Mumford, L. (1978 [1956]) *The Transformations of Man*, Gloucester: Peter Smith, p.63.

<sup>63</sup> Weber, M. (1993[1922]) *The Sociology of Religion*, Boston: Beacon Press, p.58.

This turn towards the soul of the individual and the conduct of life is best represented by the two main prophets of the axial age, Jeremiah and Deutero Isaiah. Jeremiah, while prophesising destruction, also looks forward to a time when the restoration of the Temple will bring about a transformed individual. As we have seen in chapter one this will be a time when personal responsibility will be at the heart of salvation and men will no longer say: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But everyone shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge' (Je. xxxi: 29-33). Also on their return from captivity Yahweh will make a new covenant with the house of Israel not like the old covenant when they were led externally by the hand but a new internal covenant that would be placed in 'their inward parts, and in their heart' (Ibid.). Thus, in Jeremiah, a 'new form of prophetic expression'<sup>64</sup> is articulated whereby the human personality is liberated from the collective conscience and finds within itself the means for personal salvation.

These means were further elaborated on by the exilic prophecy of Deutero Isaiah, which, according to Weber, represents an 'apotheosis of sufferance, misery, poverty, humiliation, and ugliness.'<sup>65</sup> But, as well as this positive view of suffering, Deutero Isaiah also highlights the chasm between the mundane and the transcendental orders and at the same time offers a resolution to the disjunction:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.<sup>66</sup>

The solution to this seemingly unbridgeable situation was the demand for faith. Thus the way to salvation changes from the external divine delivery of the

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<sup>64</sup> See Voegelin, E. (1969[1956]) *Israel and Revelation*, (Vol.1 of *Order and history*), Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, p.485.

<sup>65</sup> See Weber, M. (1967[1952]) *Ancient Judaism*, New York: The Free Press, p.369.

<sup>66</sup> See Isaiah 55: 8-9.

chosen people by Yahweh to an internal redemption through individual suffering and the acceptance of that suffering by means of an act of faith.

### **The Emergence of the Individual in Greek Philosophy**

If the axial-age increased the tension between the mundane and transmundane orders and this resulted in a new reflexive subject shaped by the Prophets of the Old Testament than similar developments should be evident in the texts of ancient Greek philosophy. One work that provides evidence for the emergence of a new reflexive subject is Plato's *Symposium*, written sometime between 384 and 369 BCE. This work concerns a series of discourses in praise of love spoken by Socrates, Alcibiades and others at a banquet hosted by Agathon. When it comes the turn of Socrates to speak he delivers his speech by way of a dialogue between himself and Diotima, the priestess of Mantinea, a mountainous region in south-east Arcadia. In this dialogue the disjunction between the mundane and transmundane worlds is encapsulated in the saying: 'For God mingles not with man'<sup>67</sup> and the means by which this chasm can be bridged is by means of the power of love:

This is the power which interprets and conveys to the gods the prayers and sacrifices of men, and to men the commands and rewards of the gods; and this power spans the chasm which divides them, and in this all is bound together, and through this the arts of the prophet and the priest, their sacrifices and mysteries and charms, and all the prophecy and incantation, find their way.<sup>68</sup>

This power of love comes from the mythical figure of Eros, which is neither mortal (human), nor immortal (a god), but an in-between figure, a *daimōn*, and as

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<sup>67</sup> See Plato. (1994) *Symposium*, tr. R. Waterfield, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 203 a

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 202e-203a.

such helps to bridge the gulf between the divine and the mortal. Following the speech of Socrates, a drunken Alcibiades enters the banquet is informed of the nature of the discourses and agrees to partake only if he can speak of love through praising the figure of Socrates. The character sketch of Socrates that follows provides a representation of a unique and unclassifiable personality. Alcibiades notes that, ordinarily, individuals can be classified within different types of personality. Homer's Achilles, for instance, could be classified as 'great general, noble and courageous' as could the Spartan leader Brasidas<sup>69</sup>. Under the classification of 'clever and eloquent statesman' Alcibiades nominates Nestor and Antenor in Homeric times; and among contemporaries, Pericles. However, when it comes to Socrates, Alcibiades finds it impossible to classify or compare such a unique personality either to any contemporary human being or any who have ever lived. It has been stressed that this representation of the 'Individual' is a unique depiction and it appears 'perhaps for the first time in history' in the speech of Alcibiades.<sup>70</sup> This 'Individual', embodied in the figure of the philosopher, is *atopos* (strange and unclassifiable) and creates *aporia* (perplexity) wherever he appears.

However, Hadot goes further and interprets the mythical description of Diotima's as 'applying simultaneously to Eros, Socrates, and the philosopher', especially as all three are intermediate or in between figures.<sup>71</sup> And, just as Weber identified the greatest achievement of the prophet as mediating between life as it was and how scripture said it should be,<sup>72</sup> likewise Hadot perceives the crowning achievement of Plato's portrait of Socrates as a sage who mediates between the 'transcendent ideal of wisdom and concrete human reality'.<sup>73</sup>

The liminal conditions of the above cannot be denied and, as in the Old Testament when the figures of the prophet emerged to act as 'guides' towards the

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<sup>69</sup> A Spartan general, noted for his bravery, who fought against Athens in the Peloponnesian War.

<sup>70</sup> See Hadot, P. (2004 [1995]) *What is Ancient Philosophy*, tr. M. Chase, Harvard: Harvard University Press, p. 30.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43

<sup>72</sup> Weber, M. (1993[1922]) *The Sociology of Religion*, Boston: Beacon Press, p. 58.

<sup>73</sup> See Hadot, P. (1995) *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p. 147.

new order, in ancient Greece charismatic figures, in the form of philosophers, appear facilitating and helping to create the inner transformations that were taking place. Dialogue, such as that used in the *Symposium*, was the method used by Plato to aid this transformation and it has been proposed that the purpose of the dialogues was not to ‘inform’ people but to ‘form’ them.<sup>74</sup> This again highlights the liminal conditions of the time and the actions of the philosopher lie exactly parallel to those of the prophets of the Old Testament to act as guides or ‘master of ceremonies’.

## Conclusion

In order to understand the various strands that have arisen from the study of the axial age it is necessary to give a more precise outline concerning the origins of the process of conversion as outlined in this chapter. The first problem to note is the widening chasm between the mundane and transmundane orders in the religions that emerged during the axial age. As a result of this chasm the quest for salvation was initiated requiring a reflexive subject in order to bridge the gap. Ascetic techniques are one means by which the chasm between the mundane and transmundane orders can be bridged. Both world-rejecting and inner-worldly asceticism are developments offered by Weber that transform human conduct in order to transcend the mundane. In this way the search for transcendence is focused within the reflexive subject and is encapsulated in the Delphic-Socratic adage ‘know thyself’. Consequently, the background, from whence the ancients in the pre-axial religions obtained their religion, became posited within the individual and the potential for conversion, as we understand it today, is made possible.

The second problem concerns the means by which this process is to be understood? Drawing on the rituals and customs associated with an individual’s or group’s change of status – such as birth, adulthood, marriage, or death – the

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<sup>74</sup> Victor Goldschmidt cited in Hadot, P. (2004 [1995]) *What is Ancient Philosophy*, tr. M. Chase, Harvard: Harvard University Press, p.73.

‘rites of passage’ provide the framework for the ancients understanding of the process of conversion. Some of these rituals and customs that survived the axial age transformation and became associated with the conversion process were immersion (baptism) and circumcision. These rituals are particularly associated with the liminal phase of the ‘rite of passage’ framework as they allow the internal and external structures to be suspended in order to facilitate change.

This brings us to the third and final problem associated with the origins of the process of conversion and that is the danger associated with liminal situations and the methods used to control them. In the original axial age setting the ‘charismatic’ figures of the prophet and the philosopher emerged to act as ‘masters of ceremonies’ for the liminal conditions occurring as a result of the collapse of order and the ensuing spiritual chaos. Thus a perusal of the proclamations of the prophets, Jeremiah and Deutero Isaiah, show how these axial figures acted as guardians during the dissolution of order and how Israel (the people) were guided to new forms of living. Likewise in a study of ancient Greek philosophy, especially in the writings of Plato, the emergence of the philosopher also acted in the same facilitative and creative manner.

From the above analysis it now becomes clear that any attempt to understand the process of conversion will have to take into account the historical dynamics that make up the process. This thesis suggests that any framework employed to interpret the conversion process should have the following elements: investigation of the liminal conditions; presence of a charismatic figure / master of ceremonies, and an analysis of the background / zeitgeist.

## **Liminal Conditions**

Spiritual outbursts during the axial-age had a profound effect on the everyday life of the individual. Prior to these outbursts the individual inherited religion as one inherited other aspects of ones culture, unreflexively. The new axial religions produced reflexive spiritual individuals whose expression of faith was



accompanied by an inner transformation. Consequently, this inner transformation or conversion was the process by which the axial religions were to be installed within the individual, and the means by which this process was to be understood would be through some of the rituals and customs associated with rites of passage, especially the liminal phase of these rites. Consequently any further change of religion would inevitably be accompanied by the transformation associated with the process of 'conversion' and would necessarily contain the liminal conditions needed for such structural change to occur. It becomes clear then that any investigation into the conversion process or any particular individual conversion would have to take into account the liminal conditions surrounding such accounts.

### **Master of Ceremonies / Charismatic figure**

Because liminal conditions are fraught with danger as a result of unstructured situations and the presence of uncontrollable unconscious energy some form of guidance is necessary in order to maintain and direct the process towards the new structure of identity awaiting the initiand. In a small scale traditional setting this guide or master of ceremonies was usually selected from the 'ritual elders' to act as an instructor during the liminal period of the rite of passage.<sup>75</sup> In larger scale liminal settings where order has collapsed or been suspended, such as the axial-age outlined above, charismatic figures appear to guide the followers towards the new order. Thus in liminal conditions, whether large or small, significant figures are necessary in order to direct the potentially hazardous circumstances and consequently any discourse concerning the liminal process of conversion will have to investigate the background for the presence of a charismatic figure.

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<sup>75</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp.95-6.

## Background / Zeitgeist

During the axial-age a new subject emerged with a sense of inwardness that marked a clear distinction between society and the individual. Prior to this the individual acquired religion from the background; now with such a dividing-line in place the background needs to be internalised within the new subject and the potential for conversion is activated. However, during periods of liminality, when this inner order is challenged or suspended then a new order (or new gods) need to be installed and the background again provides the basis for this. Therefore, in discourse concerning the process of conversion, the background, *zeitgeist*, or spirit of the times is studied for the networks of interpersonal relations from whence the new 'belief-system' can be installed. Omitting this essential feature in the study of any historical process results in mediocre scholarship:

...for to the reality of history there belongs also the spirit, and when the spirit as a critical factor is excluded from the perception of events, then the objectivity of description becomes blameworthy sympathizing with the conditions of spiritual desolation and a complicity in its results.<sup>76</sup>

Consequently the background or *zeitgeist* becomes a critical factor in any attempt to provide a framework to understand the process of conversion.

It is from the above three elements, the liminal conditions, the master of ceremonies, and the background, that a conceptual framework can be employed to analyse and understand conversion and the transformations that accompany it. The empirical analysis that follows will attempt to test this framework for a more detailed understanding of the conversion process.

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<sup>76</sup> Voegelin, E. (1990) *Autobiographical Reflections*, E. Sandoz (ed) Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, p.5.

## **Part II**

### **Two Historical Case-Studies**

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Conversion of Saint Augustine**

From the previous two chapters it is now clear that the origin of the concept of conversion emerged from two distinct threads, the Judaic religious tradition and the Greek philosophical tradition. A decisive moment in the development of this process was the eventual merging of these two distinct traditions and Saint Augustine is one of the key figures through whom this merging can be rooted. This decisive moment was crystallized in the conversion of Augustine, which, he relates, occurred in the garden of his Milanese abode in the year 386.

The conversion of Saint Augustine will accordingly provide the first autobiographical conversion account on which the framework, as outlined in chapter one and two, can be tested. Before proceeding to test the framework it is first necessary to give a brief outline of the life of Augustine of Hippo.

### **Biography of Augustine of Hippo**

Augustine spent only four of his seventy-five years in Rome and Milan, the rest he lived out in the military backwater that was Northern Africa. Despite the short time he spent at the heart of the Roman Empire he exerted immense authority on the shaping of its institutional religion. Trained as a classical rhetorician he used his skills to eloquently proclaim the primacy of Catholic culture over Greco-Roman culture, while at the same time borrowing heavily from the latter in order to transform and interpret the former.<sup>1</sup> The brief biography that follows will attempt to identify the most important experiences in Augustine's life in connection with that transformation and interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup> See Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy @ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/augustine/> accessed on 10/09/2003.

## Early Years

Born on the periphery of the Roman Empire in Thagaste (modern day Souk Ahras in Algeria) in 354 CE, to African parents, Aurelius Augustinus (more commonly known as 'St Augustine of Hippo' or simply 'Augustine') was educated in Thagaste, Madaura and Carthage. In 370 he took a concubine and began a sixteen-year relationship that would produce a son, Adeodatus, born in 372. At the age of eighteen in the course of his studies he came into contact with some philosophical works and was especially taken with a book by Cicero called *The Hortensius*. This turn to 'Wisdom' consequently led Augustine to become a 'Hearer' among a small religious sect in Carthage known as the Manichees.

This sect took its name from the self-proclaimed Paraclete, Mani (216-277) who came from a disenfranchised Babylonian aristocratic family. Because of his family's misfortunes and also, perhaps, as a result of his physical disability (he was lame), Mani had spent his early years in some Gnostic sect that instilled in him an abhorrence towards the human body and an attraction towards an extreme form of asceticism. Thus the religion that he founded subscribed to a dualistic, Gnostic doctrine that proposed a resolution to the problem of evil in which the forces of light had become trapped within the darkness of the physical world. This cosmic opposition, between the forces of light and darkness, is encapsulated in the belief that embodied human beings are particles of light (souls) entrapped in matter (bodies) in the realm of darkness. And thus, from the Manichaean perspective, the physical body and all bodily desires are, by their very nature, evil.

The evil associated with bodily desires is particularly evident in the pursuit of pleasure that may result in the reproduction of the human species. For the Manichees the soul (Light) must be liberated from the body (Darkness) and to produce offspring perpetuates this evil and thus, is an even greater transgression than the mere pursuit of pleasure. Consequently, the Manichee should avoid parenthood and marriage but the taking of a concubine, which was a common

practice at the time, was a lesser evil than the taking of a wife.<sup>2</sup> However, for those already embodied in human form, hope was at hand, as the insights gained from their own authoritative books, and the practice of an austere ascetic lifestyle, allowed the followers of Mani to eventually overcome the forces of Darkness and liberate the Light within and rejoin the greater Light of which the soul was but a tiny part.

Augustine taught rhetoric in Thagaste and Carthage and in 383 in search of 'richer fees', 'higher dignity' and above all else a better-disciplined pupil,<sup>3</sup> he set sail for Rome. However, while the pupils were of a more diligent nature they quite often cheated Augustine out of his fees by abandoning their studies when the time came for him to be paid. Nevertheless, the trip to Rome provided Augustine with the opportunity, through his links with Manichaeism, to become acquainted with many of Rome's aristocracy and especially with the Prefect of the City, Symmachus. From this patronage Augustine was appointed professor of rhetoric for the city of Milan, and as the Imperial court resided in Milan it was considered an important appointment.

By the time Augustine took up his position in Milan in the autumn of 384 he had become disillusioned with what he described as the 'false doctrine' of Manichaeism and turned again to Cicero who had translated into Latin the sceptical views of the 'New Academy'.<sup>4</sup> Following Cicero's instruction that the greatest virtue of the wise man was his ability to thread warily and suspend judgement rather than pledge unheeding devotion to any singular cause, Augustine began to disengage from the Manichaean sect. While the scepticism of the academics liberated Augustine from the dogmatism of the Manichaeans it, in turn, confined him to an angst filled world where all knowledge was suspect.

With his confidence shaken he returned to the religion of his childhood and enrolled as a catechumen in the Church of Milan in the late spring of 385. It was

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<sup>2</sup> See O' Meara, J.J. (2001) *The Young Augustine*, New York: Alba House, p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> Augustine (1955) *Confessions*, edited by A.C. Outler, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, V, viii, 14, hereafter cited as *Confessions*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., V, x, 19.

here that Augustine came under the influence of Bishop Ambrose whose powerful sermons while having a deep affect, nevertheless failed to overcome his recently acquired sceptical outlook. In such a doubtful mood he devoted his time to achieving the trappings of a successful career and particularly in the pursuit of ‘honors, money and matrimony’.<sup>5</sup> With this objective in mind his concubine, the mother of his child, was sent back to Africa to make way for his marriage to a suitable partner selected by his mother. The ending of the sixteen year relationship with his mistress affected Augustine at a deep level and the sorrow he felt at the obligatory separation was a ‘blow which crushed my heart to bleeding. I loved her dearly’.<sup>6</sup>

Tortured by the ‘lie’ of academia and the ‘bitter hardships’ encountered in pursuit of the ambitious life Augustine longed for a more reflective and simpler life. With his mind unsettled he encountered some Neo-Platonist books that had a profound effect and led him to a life in philosophy turned inwards towards the soul.<sup>7</sup> This turn to the philosophy of the Neo-Platonists allowed Augustine to temporarily resist the Christian influence of Ambrose’s sermons and to seek the ascent of the soul through the contemplative life. However, within a few months, Augustine began to question the idea that wisdom could be obtained by the study of the Platonist books alone and began to read the writings of St Paul.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Conversion of Augustine**

Because the conversion of Augustine will be the focus of a detailed analysis later in this chapter it is, at this point, only necessary to give the barest of information concerning that experience. From the readings of the Platonists and of St Paul, Augustine began to become more disposed to the life of a Christian but hesitated on taking the final step – baptism. Upon hearing of a small group of young men

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., VI, vi, 9

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., VI, xv, 25

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., VI, vi, 9 and VII, x, 16

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., VII, xx, 26 and VII, xxi, 27.

who had been so moved by the life of Anthony that they had decided to become monks, Augustine was fired by the story and began to see his own hesitation in becoming a Christian as a weakness unworthy of him. Overcome by his conflicting emotions he describes how he threw himself down under a fig-tree in the garden and wept bitterly at his state of indecision, he then describes being directed to read Paul's Epistle to the Romans and experiences a profound inner transformation. Intent now on breaking with his old life, Augustine decided to give up his academic position and retire to a nearby country-villa, put at his disposal by his friend Verecundus, at Cassiciacum. The small group that accompanied him to Cassiciacum included some of his family, friends and pupils and the days were spent in writing and debating philosophical issues.

In the spring of 387, Augustine returned to Milan where Bishop Ambrose baptized him, along with Adeodatus and Alypius. Sometime later, in the autumn of 387, Augustine and his friends made plans to return to Thagaste and live in Christian retirement praying and studying scripture; however because of political and military disorder he was stranded in Rome for almost a year. By the late summer of the following year (388) the group had returned to Thagaste and set up a life in common pursuing their favourite studies. For three years this small group of individuals began to more and more resemble a 'monastery', with Augustine in the role of 'spiritual father'.<sup>9</sup> In the year 391, while on a visit to nearby Hippo Regius, Augustine, somewhat reluctantly, was ordained a priest by Bishop Valerius. In order that his life as a monk could continue he was granted some church property at Hippo where he immediately established a second monastery.

## **Bishop of Hippo**

Because the primary interest of this thesis is the conversion of Augustine it is necessary, because of space, to quickly conclude the biography of Augustine's

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<sup>9</sup> See Brown, P. (2000 [1967]) *Augustine of Hippo*, London: Faber & Faber, p.129.



life after the conversion. For fear of losing his protégé to some neighbouring see in search of a bishop, Valerius had Augustine consecrated as his co-adjutor in 395 and in the following year Augustine succeeded him as Bishop of Hippo-Regis, a position he would hold until his death in 430. In conjunction with his episcopal duties, Augustine also devoted himself to writing and produced a vast body of work comprising of books, letters, and sermons.

His surviving works manage to fill sixteen volumes as they are reprinted in Migne's, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, Series Latina.<sup>10</sup> The influence that this voluminous body of work has had on the discipline of philosophy and other disciplines, from the medieval to the modern period, extend beyond the parameters of this thesis, but in the early medieval period it can be found in the works of Boethius<sup>11</sup>, Eriugena<sup>12</sup>, and in Anselm of Canterbury.<sup>13</sup> The later medieval period, despite its Aristotelian spirit, still reflected the influence of Augustine in the works of Bonaventure<sup>14</sup> and even Aquinas.<sup>15</sup> Both sides in the Reformation split would turn to Augustine as an authority on Christian doctrine,<sup>16</sup> while in the modern period his influence is found in the works of Descartes,<sup>17</sup> Malebranche<sup>18</sup> and Wittgenstein<sup>19</sup>. More recently Foucault<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See 'Sancti Aurelii Augustini opera omnia', vol. 32-47 (1877-1890). In J. P. Migne (ed) *Patrologia Latina*, Paris: Garnier Bros.

<sup>11</sup> See Bowery, A. M. (1999) 'Boethius'. In A. Fitzgerald (ed) *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 108.

<sup>12</sup> See MacEvoy, J. (1999) 'Eriugena, John Scottus'. In A. Fitzgerald (ed) *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 315-16.

<sup>13</sup> See Adams, M. (1999) 'Romancing the Good: God and the Self according to St. Anselm of Canterbury'. In G. Matthews (ed) *The Augustine Tradition*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 91-109, and Evans, G. R. (1999) 'Anselm of Canterbury'. In A. Fitzgerald (ed) *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 23-4.

<sup>14</sup> Bonaventure claimed that 'Augustine was the greatest of all the Latin teachers' see Zinn, G. (1999) 'Bonaventure'. In A. Fitzgerald (ed) *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 108-10.

<sup>15</sup> While the degree of dependence and agreement in Aquinas's use of Augustine is a contested arena, for one scholar 'Augustine ranks among the most quoted and appreciated of all of Thomas's authorities' see Wawrykow, J. (1999) 'Thomas Aquinas'. In A. Fitzgerald (ed) *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 829-32.

<sup>16</sup> See Muller, R. A. (1999) 'Augustinianism in the Reformation'. In A. Fitzgerald (ed) *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 705-07.

<sup>17</sup> See Matthews, G. (1999) 'Augustine and Descartes on Minds and Bodies'. In G. Matthews (ed) *The Augustine Tradition*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 222-32.

<sup>18</sup> Malebranche (1980) *The Search after Truth*, tr. Thomas M Lennon and Paul J Olscamp, Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

<sup>19</sup> Burnyeat, M. (1999) 'Wittgenstein and Augustine De Magistro'. In G. Matthews (ed) *The Augustine Tradition*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 286-303.

identifies the work of Augustine as a breakpoint in the philosophical movement from memory to meditation.

From the above it is clear that Augustine's body of work had, and still has, an enormous influence on the discipline of western philosophy in all its diverse forms. And the most studied of all Augustine's works will be the reservoir from which this thesis will draw its material for analysis – this is, of course, the '*Confessions*'.

## **Confessions**

Of the monumental surviving works of Augustine the *Confessions* is considered to be one of his three major masterpieces, the other two being *De civitate Dei* (*The City of God*), and *De Trinitate* (*On the Trinity*). Augustine's *Confessions* was written shortly after he became Bishop of Hippo (395), probably at the request of Paulinus of Nola who had an interest in the dedicated Christian life.<sup>21</sup> The book itself is divided into thirteen books (or chapters) and is clearly separated into three parts: part one (books 1-9) deal with the past life of Augustine, part two (book 10) deals with Augustine's present life and books 11-13 provide a commentary on the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis.

The central focus of the *Confessions* crystallise around Augustine's conversion and is presented in two distinct points in time: the first was the conversion of the intelligence achieved through intellectual inquiry (presumption) and the second through submission of the will (confession). Augustine highlights the difference between both of these routes to conversion:

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<sup>20</sup> M. Foucault (2005[2001]) *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College De France 1981-82*. tr. Graham Burchell, Palgrave: New York. pp. 460-61.

<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed study of the rationale behind the writing of the *Confessions* see O' Meara, J.J. (2001) *The Young Augustine*, New York: Alba House; O'Donnell, J. J. (1992) '*Augustine's Confessions: Introduction, Text, and Commentary*'. Oxford University Press: Oxford; and van Fleteren, F. (1999) '*Confessiones*'. In Fitzgerald, A. (ed) *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 227-32.

I might discern and distinguish what a difference there is between presumption and confession-between those who saw where they were to go (Neo-Platonists) even if they did not see the way, and the Way (Christ) which leads, not only to the observing, but also the inhabiting of the blessed country.<sup>22</sup>

It must be remembered that many events that Augustine wrote about in the *Confessions* are presented, not as they seemed to him as they occurred, but rather as they were seen and reflected upon when he was the Bishop of Hippo, a man in his mid forties. However, where a control is available to assess certain sections of the confessions then the facts are verified. From these verifications many scholars have concluded that the *Confessions* are a true account of Augustine's life up to the time of his conversion.<sup>23</sup>

## **Liminal Conditions**

From even a cursory examination of the writings of Augustine it is clear that the act of reading played a vital part in the course Augustine's life was to take. This thesis identifies three reading experiences fitting the liminal conditions necessary for transformative experiences to take place: first the reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* in 373, next the reading of the Neo-Platonic books by Augustine during the summer of 386, and finally the reading of St. Paul's epistle at the end of August 386. That these three reading experiences involved the incorporation of Greek philosophical thinking into the mindset of Augustine will also be detailed.

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<sup>22</sup> *Confessions*: VII, xx, 26.

<sup>23</sup> See van Fleteren, F. (1999) 'Confessiones'. In Fitzgerald, A. (ed) *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp 228/9); and O' Meara, J.J. (2001) *The Young Augustine*, New York: Alba House, p. xxxiv.

## Reading Cicero's *Hortensius*

While studying at Carthage in 373 Augustine came upon a book by Cicero called the *Hortensius*, now lost except for a few fragments garnered mainly from Augustine's own work.<sup>24</sup> From Augustine's own account it is clear that this minor essay had a profound impact on his thought

Now it was this book which quite definitely changed my whole attitude and turned my prayers toward thee, O Lord, and gave me new hope and new desires. Suddenly every vain hope became worthless to me, and with an incredible warmth of heart I yearned for an immortality of wisdom and began now to arise that I might return to thee.<sup>25</sup>

It must be remembered that philosophy at that time had surrounded itself with a 'religious aura'<sup>26</sup> and the love of 'Wisdom' it promoted was able both to turn men from evil and to present a life worth living.<sup>27</sup> However, because Cicero's *Hortensius* contained no reference to the Christian God of Augustine's childhood he decided to direct himself to the Holy Scriptures in order to underpin his philosophical reading. This proved a great disappointment to him as he found the style and meaning of these Scriptures, which contained the Old and New Testaments, as unworthy to be compared with the dignity of Cicero. Rejecting the Bible of the African Christian church as being more suitable for the growth of little ones, he turned instead to a group of radical Christians who professed dissatisfaction with the Scriptures and at the same time embraced Christ as the 'principle of Wisdom par excellence'.<sup>28</sup> Attaching himself to the Manichaeans, attracted by their rational solution to the problem of evil, it would take another

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<sup>24</sup> See especially *Contra Academicos*, III, 14; *De Beata Vita*, X: *Soliloquia*, I, 17; *De civitate Dei*, III, 15; *Contra Julianum*, IV, 15; *De Trinitate* XIII, 4,5; XIV, 9,19.

<sup>25</sup> *Confessions*: III, iv, 7

<sup>26</sup> See Brown, P. (2000 [1967]) *Augustine of Hippo*, London: Faber & Faber, p. 29

<sup>27</sup> See Nock, A. D. (1933) *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 185.

<sup>28</sup> C. Faust. XX, 1-2 cited in Brown, P. (2000 [1967]) *Augustine of Hippo*, London: Faber & Faber, p. 33.

ten years before Augustine would reject this ‘profound darkness’<sup>29</sup> and seek illumination elsewhere.

Prior to Augustine’s reading of Cicero’s *Hortensius*, his life seemed to be in turmoil, his father Patricius had died, the knowledge of the financial strain imposed on his widowed mother to complete her sons education, the taking of a mistress and the birth of a son ‘against the parents’ will’<sup>30</sup> all combined to create the conditions for a sea change to occur in Augustine. Amidst this turmoil it is not hard to find the liminal conditions required for such a change. First there is the geographical location of Carthage on the margin of the Roman Empire and as such a hotbed of interaction and ‘creative tension’.<sup>31</sup> Augustine, himself, identifies the effervescence of this marginal region when he describes Carthage as a ‘seething and bubbling’ cauldron’.<sup>32</sup> Then there is the crisis of adolescence experienced by the eighteen year old Augustine, for two years he attempted to come to terms with his feelings:

I was not in love, but I was in love with love, and from the depths of my need, I hated myself for not more keenly feeling the need...I rushed headlong into love, eager to be caught...and, sure enough, I would be lashed with the red-hot iron rods of jealousy, by suspicion and fear, by bursts of anger and quarrels.<sup>33</sup>

Attempting to escape from those intense feelings, Augustine became captivated by the theatre that was ‘full of the images of my own miseries’<sup>34</sup> in this way he stood on the margin of a world of make believe and the reality of Carthage. Finally there is the ‘coming of age’ of Augustine, having spent two years in Carthage he now finds himself on the threshold of adulthood, however he feels trapped in an unstructured world and bemoans his parents for not

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<sup>29</sup> *Confessions*: III, xi, 19

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*; IV, ii, 2

<sup>31</sup> Szakolczai, A. (2000) *Reflexive Historical Sociology*. London: Rutledge, p. 38.

<sup>32</sup> *Confessions*; III, i, 1

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

arranging the structure of a marriage to save him from ruin,<sup>35</sup> yet when he does take a mistress, who produces a son, he is still aware that ‘I was not joined in lawful marriage’.<sup>36</sup>

With tension and anxiety rising in Augustine from this ‘...unstable period of my life’, he discovers Cicero’s *Hortensius* and begins to see a way out of this ‘wretchedness’, a break with his life and a return to the God of his childhood.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the reading of Cicero can be compared to the separation phase of a ‘rite of passage’ framework; the effect of the reading to the liminal stage and all that remained was the re-aggregation phase. Augustine was under no illusion where this new structure could be found – and he turned quite naturally to the Bible, however, for reasons already mentioned, he found this a great disappointment and by pure chance (*incidi*) he attached himself, somewhat reluctantly, to the Manichees. What is evident from this experience as described by Augustine is that having divested himself of the structure of a carefree student he prepares to embrace the religion of his childhood, however from a superficial reading of the Bible he rejects this life and, as this unstructured situation is a frightening event, he enrolls in the first group that, he feels, offers a solution to his dilemma.

That Augustine was a reluctant Manichee is evident from his writing<sup>38</sup> and also from his lack of ambition within the group, becoming a ‘*hearer*’ on joining and never proceeding beyond this initial stage. At this point Augustine began to distance himself from his Catholic beliefs and, while Manichaeism provided a rational basis for his search for Wisdom he, at the same time, flung himself wholeheartedly into building a successful teaching practice taking him from Thagaste to Carthage to Rome and finally Milan.

In Milan, despite success in his academic career, Augustine once again faced turmoil and disillusion. His disillusion stemmed from his disenchantment of Manichaeism, especially after his disappointing encounter, in 383, with one of its

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., II, ii, 4

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., IV, ii, 2

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., III, iv, 7

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., III, vi, 10

most spectacular leaders, Faustus of Milevis.<sup>39</sup> The turmoil was created by his dissatisfaction with material success and his seemingly futile search for truth that sent him eventually in the direction of the scepticism of the 'New Academy'. However he was reluctant to sever outright his Manichaean ties, perhaps remembering the dangerous instability of the liminal situation he had experienced ten years previously.

### The Neo-Platonic Background to Augustine's Conversion

Having been introduced to some Neo-Platonic ideas through the sermons of Ambrose, Augustine then became acquainted with some of the works of these Neo-Platonists. Many suggestions have been put forward as to the person who Augustine thought was 'inflated with the most monstrous pride' and who procured for him 'certain books of the Platonists'.<sup>40</sup> These suggestions have ranged from Manlius Theodorus<sup>41</sup> to Celsinus,<sup>42</sup> or some other *Platonici* of the Milanese circle,<sup>43</sup> and a strong case has been put forward for Porphyry the then deceased third century philosopher.<sup>44</sup> However, what is more important to this thesis are the specific texts consulted and their effect on Augustine rather than unmasking the mysterious 'mediator'. After a long intensive academic debate concerning the Neo-Platonic works consulted by Augustine it is now widely accepted that Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* was the main Neo-Platonist work consulted and that certain sections of Plotinus's *Enneads*, especially the ones *On Beauty* and *On the Origin of Evils*, were also consulted.<sup>45</sup> While there is strong evidence that Porphyry's work was translated into Latin by Marius

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<sup>39</sup> For more on Augustine's meeting with Faustus of Milevis see O'Meara, J. J. (2001) *The Young Augustine*, New York: Alba House pp. 91-4

<sup>40</sup> *Confessions*: VII, ix, 13

<sup>41</sup> See Courcelle, P. (1950) *Reserches sur les 'Confessions' de saint Augustine*. Paris: E. de Boccard, p. 153.

<sup>42</sup> A. Solignac (1962) Introduction and notes to *Les Confessions*, tr. E. Trehorel and G. Bouissou. Bruges: Desclee de Brouwer pp. 101-103.

<sup>43</sup> P. Alfarié (1918) *L'Evolution intellectuelle de saint Augustin*. Paris: Nourry. p.374

<sup>44</sup> See O' Meara, J.J. (2001) *The Young Augustine*, New York: Alba House, p. 150; Beatrice 1989: 257

<sup>45</sup> For more on this debate see O' Meara, J.J. (2001) *The Young Augustine*, New York: Alba House, p. 131; Beatrice, P. F. (1989) 'Quosdam Platoniorum Libros', *Vigiliae Christianae* 43: 250-254; O'Meara, J. J. (1958) 'Augustine and Neo-platonism', *Recherches augustiniennes*, 1: 96-8; Brown, P. (2000 [1967]) *Augustine of Hippo*, London: Faber & Faber, p.86.

Victorinus there is no evidence that he did the same with Plotinus's *Enneads* and this leads to the conjecture that the Plotinian citations were conveyed through secondary rather than primary readings of Plotinus.<sup>46</sup>

Plotinus' exposition on beauty challenged the particular stance that Augustine had taken seven years previously on the same topic. For Augustine the symmetry or 'corporeal forms' as recognized by the human eye constituted 'beauty',<sup>47</sup> this definition was rejected by Plotinus on the grounds that unsymmetrical phenomena such as the 'sun', 'lightening by night', or 'gold' would have to be thought of as 'not beautiful'.<sup>48</sup> If for Plotinus 'beauty' can be found in and outside symmetry then 'can we doubt that beauty is something more than symmetry, that symmetry itself owes its beauty to a remoter principle?'<sup>49</sup>

This remoter principle resides in another world – a changeless world in contrast to the world known to the senses and is part of the Platonic eternal principles. The world of the senses, therefore, can superimpose the qualities of this other world, such as goodness and beauty, on ephemeral objects, whose 'goodness' or 'beauty' can change or fade. The soul, for Plotinus, can also mirror this projection of an eternal quality, such as beauty, on the material outside world and thus be oblivious to its own inner beauty. While the 'ugliness' of the soul comes about as a result of its infatuation with finding beauty in the material<sup>50</sup> the opposite also holds true that soul is made beautiful by a rejection of the material and a return, through virtue, to its own transcendental self:

The soul thus cleansed is all Idea and Reason, wholly free of body, intellective, entirely of that divine order from which the wellspring of Beauty rises and all the race of Beauty. Hence the Soul heightened to the Intellectual-Principle is beautiful to all its power. For Intellection and

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<sup>46</sup> See Beatrice, P. F. (1989) 'Quosdam Platonicorum Libros', *Vigiliae Christianae* 43, p.252

<sup>47</sup> *Confessions*: IV, xv, 24

<sup>48</sup> See Plotinus, (1956) *Enneads*, tr. S. MacKenna, London: Faber and Faber, I.6.1, pp. 56-7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, I.6.5, pp. 60-1.



all that proceeds from Intellection are the Soul's beauty, a graciousness native to it and not foreign, for only with these is it truly Soul. And it is just to say that in the Soul's becoming a good and beautiful thing is its becoming like to God, for from the Divine comes all the Beauty and all the Good in beings.<sup>51</sup>

In this way the void left by the rejection of Manichaeism began to be filled initially by the sermons of Ambrose on the allegorical method and then by a reading of Plotinus on beauty and the contemplation of the soul. Just as the reading of the *Hortensius* provided Augustine with an escape from the unstructured world that was Carthage, likewise the reading of the Neo-Platonic texts allowed him escape and transform his unfulfilled life in Milan. These reading experiences can be likened to the divulgence of wisdom during sacred liminality when the very being of the neophyte is fashioned anew.<sup>52</sup>

The ontological value gained from these readings prepared Augustine for the transformation to come. However, another problem remained for Augustine, before a conversion to Christianity could be contemplated, this was the problem of evil. For the Manichee the solution to the problem of evil lay in the belief that God and the principle of evil, although separate entities, were composed of some form of material substances constantly at war with each other. Augustine was well aware that this fundamental belief had implications for his entire worldview:

I formed the idea of two masses, one opposed to the other, both infinite but with the evil more contracted and the good more expansive. And from this diseased beginning, the other sacrileges followed after. For when my mind tried to turn back to the Catholic faith, I was

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. I.6.6.

<sup>52</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p.103.

cast down, since the Catholic faith was not what I judged it to be.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, Plotinus again offers a solution that allows Augustine to understand the problem of evil and at the same time offers a route back to the Catholic faith. Evil, for Plotinus, is not a separate entity from the good but rather exists as a result of it. Thus the further things are from the good the more diminished they are by this privation and evil can therefore be described as a negation of good:

If such be the Nature of Beings and of That which transcends all the realm of Being, Evil cannot have place among Beings or in the Beyond-Being; these are good. There remains, only, if Evil exists at all, that it be situate in the realm of Non-Being, that it be some mode, as it were, of the Non-Being, that it have its seat in something in touch with Non-Being, or to a certain degree communicate in Non-Being.<sup>54</sup>

This alternative to Manichaean dualism, that perceives evil as a privation of good rather than existing as authentic being, became the cornerstone of Augustine's deliberations on the problem of evil. In the 'Confessions' he stresses how the material concept of evil blinded him to its true nature:

...because I did not yet know that evil was nothing but a privation of good, that, indeed, it has no being; and how should I have seen this when the sight of my eyes went no farther than physical objects, and the sight of my mind reached no farther than to fantasms? And I did not know that God is a spirit who has no parts extended in length and breadth, whose being has no mass – for every mass is

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<sup>53</sup> *Confessions*: V, x, 20

<sup>54</sup> See Plotinus, (1956) *Enneads*, tr. S. MacKenna, London: Faber and Faber, I.8.3, p. 67.

less in a part than in a whole – and if it be an infinite mass it must be less in such parts as are limited by a certain space than in its infinity.<sup>55</sup>

Augustine finally rejects the materialism of Manichaeism and prepares to fully accept the spirituality of Christianity. Neo-Platonism above all else offered a way for the soul to transcend matter and return to the One and this transcendence is reached by the use of reason and through the ascetic purgation of the soul.

Therefore we must ascend again towards the Good, the desired of every Soul...Even the desire of it is to be desired as a Good. To attain it is for those that will take the upward path, who will set all their forces towards it, who will divest themselves of all we have put on in our descent...But what must we do? How lies the path?...He that has the strength, let him arise and withdraw into himself, foregoing all that is known by the eyes, turning away for ever from the material beauty that once made his joy...This is not a journey for the feet...you must close the eyes and call instead upon another vision which is to be waked within you, a vision the birth-right of all, which few turn to use. And this inner vision, what is its operation? Newly awakened it is all too feeble to bear the ultimate splendour. Therefore the Soul must be trained.<sup>56</sup>

This turning inward to train the soul is one of the most important exercises employed by Christianity in the development of the conversion process.

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<sup>55</sup> *Confessions*: III, vii, 12

<sup>56</sup> See Plotinus, (1956) *Enneads*, tr. S. MacKenna, London: Faber and Faber, I.6.7-9, pp. 61- 63.

## Care of the Soul

The origins of this inward turning to care for the soul lie in the beginning of the philosophical moment when a distinction between the objective and the subjective was made. Here the 'rootedness' provided by myth is displaced and this foreign or alien feeling (*unheimlich*) induces a state of 'blind wandering' that needs to be overcome.<sup>57</sup> The overcoming of this feeling of 'being a stranger' in the world, for the ancient Greeks, was to 'take care of the soul'. For Patocka the idea of taking care of the soul began with the pre-Socratic philosopher Democritus, who advocated vigilance of the soul in order to re-establish the 'rootedness' lost in the transition from myth to logos. In the mythical world the human mind was half-asleep:

But now man has to remain awake [bdi]. This is about such a completely *vigilant, wakeful* [bdi] *soul* and its power. So that we might be able to carry out the completely new, and in a certain sense, merciless task, discipline of the soul is needed, care of the soul is needed, so that it may be capable of something like that.<sup>58</sup>

While the idea of taking care of the soul appears in the work of Democritus the specific words τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπιμελείσθαι (to take care of the soul) were first used in the works of Plato. However, Plato uses the term in quite a different way than Democritus who perceived the care of the soul as a means by which the soul might journey through the universe to the task of understanding. Plato, on the other hand, understood care of the soul as an exercise so the soul can be what it is supposed to be.<sup>59</sup> The care of the soul in the Platonic sense called for the practice of philosophical exercises (*askesis*) which consisted in renouncing the pleasures of the flesh and adhering to a strict physical and dietary regime in order

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<sup>57</sup> See Patocka, J. (2002) *Plato and Europe*, tr. P. Lom, California: Stanford University Press, p. 54.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 77

<sup>59</sup> For a more detailed account of the care of the soul see Szakolczai, A. (2003) *The Genesis of Modernity*, London: Routledge, pp. 170-209; Foucault, M. (1984) *Care of the Self*, London: Harmondsworth; and Patocka, J. (2002) *Plato and Europe*, tr. P. Lom, California: Stanford University Press.

to weaken and subdue the body to make a spiritual life possible.<sup>60</sup> These ascetic practices closely correspond to the various forms of deprivation that are central prior to the moment of testing that is the liminal phase in rites of passage. The initiates may be deprived of either food, shelter, clothes or sex in preparation for the performance that will mark the ‘return to order’.<sup>61</sup>

These philosophical exercises, what Foucault calls ‘practices of the self’, have a common goal – to bring about a transformation in the individual, a ‘conversion to self’.<sup>62</sup> This conversion to self was what the neo-Platonic doctrine preached, the inward turn, the exercise of the highest powers of reason and the purgation of the soul all led to union with the One or God. However, this route to the ascent of the soul, according to Porphyry, was only available to the few capable of this ‘lofty contemplation’; the rest of humankind had to be led to God by way of an authoritative mediator.<sup>63</sup> Augustine, on reading the works of Plotinus and Porphyry and believing himself to be one of the few capable of this ascent of the soul, aspired to reach this plateau: ‘And being admonished by these books to return into myself, I entered into my inward soul’.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the experience was short lived as he describes:

And thus by degrees I was led upward from bodies to the soul which perceives them by means of the bodily senses, and from there on to the soul’s inward faculty...And thus with the flash of a trembling glance, it arrived at that which is. And I saw thy invisibility [invisibilia tua] understood by means of the things that are made. But I was not able to sustain my gaze. My weakness was dashed back, and I lapsed again into my accustomed ways, carrying along with me nothing but a loving

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<sup>60</sup> See Hadot, P. (2004) *What is Ancient Philosophy?* tr. M. Chase, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 189-190.

<sup>61</sup> See Szakolczai, A. (2003) *The Genesis of Modernity*, London: Routledge, p.16

<sup>62</sup> See Foucault, M. (1984) *Care of the Self*, London: Harmondsworth, p. 64.

<sup>63</sup> See O’ Meara, J.J. (2001) *The Young Augustine*, New York: Alba House: p.138

<sup>64</sup> *Confessions*. VII, x, 16.

memory of my vision, and an appetite for what I had, as it were, smelled the odor of, but was not yet able to eat.<sup>65</sup>

The failure to reach internal fulfilment and the ascent of the soul independent of a mediator or external authority, what Augustine called presumption, meant a new interlocutor was called for. Again Ambrose offered a solution through his sermons on St Paul, which fired Augustine into reading the work of that apostle.<sup>66</sup>

### **Reading St. Paul's Epistle**

When Augustine became aware that the Platonist books alone would be insufficient for the ascent of the soul he turned to the writings of the Apostle Paul to supply the moral discipline needed for the soul's journey. As a Manichee Augustine would have been familiar with some of the writings of Paul and the apparent contradictions that seemed to re-enforce the holy books of Mani. Now he read Paul with new eyes:

With great eagerness, then, I fastened upon the venerable writings of thy Spirit and principally upon the apostle Paul. I had thought that he sometimes contradicted himself and that the text of his teaching did not agree with the testimonies of the Law and the Prophets; but now all these doubts vanished away. And I saw that those pure words had but one face, and I learned to rejoice with trembling.<sup>67</sup>

The shortcomings of the neo-Platonists, the lack of a '*universal way*', seemed to be overcome as Augustine edged towards accepting the Christian way of life.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., VII, xvii, 23.

<sup>66</sup> See Brown, P. (2000 [1967]) Augustine of Hippo, London: Faber & Faber, 97, n3.

<sup>67</sup> *Confessions*: VII, xxi, 27.

It was as if the Christian religion had accomplished the kind of results that philosophy had failed to do, namely to convince a sizeable proportion of the population to turn from the material world toward a spiritual life. This was the main difference that Augustine found between the ‘presumption’ (salvation for the few) of pagan philosophy and the ‘confession’ (salvation for the many) of Christianity.<sup>68</sup> According to Augustine if Plato, or other members of the *Platonici*, were to return to earth they would find the Christian churches full and the pagan temples empty, they would see the human race embrace spiritual matters and shun the desire for ‘temporal and transient goods’ they would say ‘That is what we did not dare preach to the people. We preferred to yield to popular custom rather than to bring the people over to our way of thinking and living’.<sup>69</sup> This makes it clear that the deficiency of a universal way in Plato could be addressed by Christianity and finally overcome by an authoritative Catholic Church. Nietzsche best captured the universality of the Christian doctrine in his famous formula - ‘Christianity is Platonism for the people.’<sup>70</sup>

It would seem that no obstacles now stood in the way of Augustine’s conversion but he still hesitated on taking that final step. Intellectually he was convinced that Christianity was the only way but the weakness of the flesh still held him in chains and his will needed to be ‘ground down’ some more in order ‘to be fashioned anew’.<sup>71</sup> The indecision was creating a crisis for Augustine – ‘everything was uncertain’ and ‘my whole life was one of inner turbulence and listless indecision’<sup>72</sup> were common utterances. Augustine decided to approach Simplicianus, an old and experienced Milanese priest who was familiar with Neo-Platonism, to seek guidance. Simplicianus relates the moving story of Victorinus, a rhetor like Augustine, a committed Neo-Platonist, who had translated the Neo-Platonic texts consulted by Augustine, but more importantly a convert to Christianity. Because of a law passed by the Emperor Julian that forbade Christians from teaching literature or Rhetoric Victorinus choose to

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. VII, xx, 26.

<sup>69</sup> “De Vera Religione” IV, 6, in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, selected and tr. by J.H. Burleigh, (1958) Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

<sup>70</sup> Nietzsche, F. (1966) *Beyond Good and Evil* vintage New York, (Preface).

<sup>71</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p. 95.

<sup>72</sup> *Confessions*: VIII, I, 1 and 2.

abandon his profession in favour of his religion. Although ‘fired’ by this tale of Victorinus, Augustine still hesitated to submit his will to the authority of the Catholic Church.

The tension continues to build and some days later Augustine receives a visit from a fellow African Ponticianus, a Christian who held high office in the Emperor’s court. Noticing a book on a table Ponticianus expresses his joy and wonder that Augustine should be reading the Epistles of St. Paul. Ponticianus proceeds to inform Augustine about the Christian Egyptian monk Anthony and the increasing influence of the call of the monastic life, there was even a monastery outside Milan’s city walls under the guidance and care of Ambrose of which Augustine was unaware.<sup>73</sup> Augustine’s lack of knowledge of Christian life in Milan indicates, perhaps, a withdrawal from the social structures akin to the liminal stage of the neophyte.

The final story that Ponticianus related to Augustine again carried the motif of converts to Christianity who had forsaken or abandoned their old life in favour of a Christian one. This story recounted an event that Ponticianus himself had experienced personally. He narrates to Augustine that while in Trier he and three friends had went for a walk in some gardens close to the city walls. During the course of the walk two members of the group happened upon a house in which lived some Christian ascetics, here they found a book on the life of Anthony that one of them began to read. As a result of reading this text this man becomes so moved that he decides to take up the life of a Christian ascetic and his companion is moved to follow him. Furthermore, when they informed their ‘affianced brides’ of their decision they, in turn, also decided to live a celibate life in the service of the church.

The appeal of these conversion stories to Augustine was the ability of these ordinary men to abandon their careers and submit their wills to god while he still procrastinated. The crisis, now reaching breaking point, which Augustine was experiencing, is best told in his own words:

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<sup>73</sup> *Confessions*: VIII, vi, 16.



Then, as this vehement quarrel, which I waged with my soul in the chamber of my heart, was raging inside my inner dwelling, agitated both in mind and countenance, I seized upon Alypius and exclaimed: “What is the matter with us? What is this? What did you hear? The uninstructed start up and take heaven, and we – with all our learning but so little heart – see where we wallow in flesh and blood! Because others have gone before us, are we ashamed to follow, and not rather ashamed at our not following?” I scarcely knew what I said, and in my excitement I flung away from him, while he gazed at me in silent astonishment. For I did not sound like myself: my face, eyes, color, tone expressed my meaning more clearly than my words...I fled into the garden, with Alypius following step by step; for I had no secret in which he did not share, and how could he leave me in such distress? We sat down, as far from the house as possible. I was greatly disturbed in spirit, angry at myself with a turbulent indignation because I had not entered thy will and covenant, O my God, while all my bones cried out to me to enter, extolling it to the skies. The way therein is not by ships or chariots or feet-indeed it was not as far as I had come from the house to the place where we were seated. For to go along that road and indeed to reach the goal is nothing else but the will to go. But it must be a strong and single will, not staggering and swaying about this way and that – a changeable, twisting, fluctuating will, wrestling with itself while one part falls as another rises.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid: VIII, viii, 19.

The story of Victorinus' conversion and that of Ponticianus' friends had increased the crisis in Augustine so much that his pride and will began to crumble. He is faced with a stark choice. To continue along the Neo-Platonic path of presumption and the power of reason and self-autonomy or, taking a leap of faith, relinquish his independence and submit to the authority of the religion of his childhood. He withdraws even further into a more secluded part of the garden: 'I stole away from Alypius, for it seemed to me that solitude was more appropriate for the business of weeping. I went far enough away that I could feel that even his presence was no restraint upon me'.<sup>75</sup> The liminal conditions are clearly evident in Augustine's account, submissiveness and silence are characteristics of the neophyte<sup>76</sup> and this is the state of mind that Augustine was seeking. In addition, the neophyte must become a blank slate on which the knowledge and wisdom of the group is inscribed, here a variety of symbols are used to describe this transition and 'liminality is frequently likened to death'.<sup>77</sup> Augustine is aware what he faces but still vacillates:

because I hesitated to die to death and to live to life... but thou, O Lord, art good and merciful, and thy right hand didst reach into the depth of my death and didst empty out the abyss of corruption from the bottom of my heart.<sup>78</sup>

The symbolism equating the old beliefs with corruption and death and the new belief system with life is clearly evident in this passage and as such highlights the ambiguous nature of the 'liminal persona'.

One final act is needed before Augustine is ready to become celibate and submit his will to the authority of the Catholic Church and this is the final scene in the garden in Milan. Reaching the lowest point in the crisis he throws himself under a fig tree and weeps uncontrollably, suddenly:

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., VIII, xii, 28.

<sup>76</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p. 103.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid: 95

<sup>78</sup> *Confessions*: VIII, xi, 25 and IX, I, 1.

I heard the voice of a boy or a girl [*quasi pueri an puellae*] I know not which – coming from the neighboring house, chanting over and over again, “Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it.” [*Tolle, lege; tolle, lege.*] Immediately I ceased weeping... for I could not but think that this was a divine command to open the Bible and read the first passage I should light upon... So I quickly returned to the bench where Alypius was sitting, for there I had put down the apostle’s [Paul’s] book when I had left there. I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes first fell: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.”<sup>79</sup> I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.<sup>80</sup>

In this moment the conversion of Augustine is accomplished.

### **Ambrose as Master of Ceremonies**

When Augustine first came to Milan, in the autumn of 384, Ambrose was already an imposing and formidable figure in Milanese society.<sup>81</sup> He was the son of a Roman administrator, enjoyed a liberal education before being appointed provincial governor of Aemilia-Liguria, and took up residence in Milan. While

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<sup>79</sup> Rom. 13:13.

<sup>80</sup> *Confessions*: VII, xii, 29

<sup>81</sup> For a comprehensive study of Ambrose see F. Homes-Dudden (1935) *The Life and Times of St. Ambrose*, 2 vols., Oxford.

acting as governor he intervened in a controversial episcopal election in Milan and was himself, suddenly and unexpectedly, appointed bishop of the city. Facing some local opposition to a Nicene replacing an Arian bishop he eventually, through political dexterity, won over his detractors resulting in triumph at the Council of Aquileia in 381. One positive result of this victory was that he ‘earned the favor of the emperor Gratian’,<sup>82</sup> helping to raise his stature especially when, in 382, the imperial court was transferred to northern Italy. Nevertheless, by the time of Augustine’s arrival, in the autumn of 384, Ambrose was frequently in conflict with imperial authority.<sup>83</sup>

## Milan

It will be remembered that after Augustine’s disappointing meeting with the Manichaean leader Faustus of Milevis, in the year 383, he became disillusioned with the Manichees. Losing confidence in his religion coupled with a disappointing year spent in Rome must have made Augustine feel very insecure and unhappy. The need for a spiritual guide or ‘master of ceremonies’ was uppermost in his mind – ‘I desired to confer on various matters with someone well learned’.<sup>84</sup> He also recalled his feelings on being appointed professor of rhetoric in Milan ‘at that time, there was no one more open to being taught than I was’.<sup>85</sup> This was also evident to the Augustinian scholar O’Meara when he observed that ‘...at this stage he [Augustine] felt the need of expert guidance’.<sup>86</sup> This guidance was to present itself in the personage of Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan.

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<sup>82</sup> See McLynn, N.B. (1994) *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 17.

<sup>83</sup> Brown, P. (2000 [1967]) *Augustine of Hippo*, London: Faber & Faber, pp.71-2

<sup>84</sup> *Confessions*: V, xi, 21

<sup>85</sup> “De utiitate credendi”, Viii, 20 cited in Brown, P. (2000 [1967]) *Augustine of Hippo*, London: Faber & Faber, p. 71.

<sup>86</sup> See O’ Meara, J.J. (2001) *The Young Augustine*, New York: Alba House, p. 101.

On coming to Milan the disillusioned Augustine paid a courtesy call to Ambrose who made an immediate personal impression upon him - 'That man of god received me as a father would'.<sup>87</sup> It is interesting to note the paternal element that Augustine takes from this encounter as it corresponds closely to the relations in 'rites of passage' where, according to Turner, the master of ceremonies or senior instructor 'becomes a father for the whole group'.<sup>88</sup> It must have been a surprise to Augustine that Ambrose received him so warmly. He had come to Milan, it would seem, on the recommendation of the enemies of Ambrose and his stay would be at the behest of those same enemies.<sup>89</sup> Regardless of the warm welcome, Augustine proceeded slowly and at this stage was content to become a catechumen of the Church of Milan and attend the weekly public sermons of Ambrose. Becoming a catechumen, at that time, was more a political gesture than a deep commitment to Catholicism; it would help his career, cheer his mother Monica and it allowed him to postpone indefinitely the more significant step of being baptized.<sup>90</sup>

The catechumenate, therefore, was understood by Augustine as an in-between phase in his spiritual development and was undertaken 'until something certain shone forth by which I might guide my course'.<sup>91</sup> That 'something certain' began to emerge from the sermons of Ambrose, which Augustine attended initially for their rhetorical style but later began to absorb their message:

And I studiously listened to him [Ambrose]-though not with the right motive – as he preached to the people. I was trying to discover whether his eloquence came up to his reputation, and whether it flowed fuller or thinner than others said it did. And thus I hung on his words intently, but, as to his subject matter, I was only a careless and contemptuous listener. I was delighted with

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<sup>87</sup> *Confessions*: V, xiii, 23

<sup>88</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul p.108.

<sup>89</sup> See O'Meara, J. J. (2001) *The Young Augustine*, New York: Alba House, p.110

<sup>90</sup> See Brown, P. (2000 [1967]) *Augustine of Hippo*, London: Faber & Faber, p.71.

<sup>91</sup> *Confessions*: V, xiv, 25

the charm of his speech, which was more erudite, though less cheerful and soothing, than Faustus' style. As for subject matter, however, there could be no comparison, for the latter was wandering around in Manichean deceptions, while the former was teaching salvation most soundly. But salvation is far from the wicked, such as I was then when I stood before him. Yet I was drawing nearer, gradually and unconsciously.<sup>92</sup>

From the above it is clear that Augustine was finally rejecting Manichaeism and beginning to return to the religion of his boyhood. But obstacles still remained impeding his return to Catholicism, on the one hand his view of the Old Testament remained as a book of 'crude stories' beyond belief and on the other hand, because of his material and rationalistic grounding in Manichaeism, he was unable to conceive of anything spiritual. If these obstacles could be removed then a reconciliation or 'conversion' to Catholicism was possible. Ambrose was to play a pivotal role in the removal of these obstacles and thus, it will be shown, a central figure, spiritual guide or charismatic 'master of ceremonies' guiding Augustine towards the new structure – Catholicism. It must also be remembered that, during this time, the relationship between Ambrose and Augustine was not a very close one and that apart from irregular meetings their only contact was by means of the public sermons. Nevertheless the sermons had a very definite effect on the obstacles mentioned above.

### **Ambrose and Allegory**

Concerning his disbelief in the stories of the Old Testament Ambrose provided a method of interpretation that opened up new horizons for Augustine; this was the allegorical rather than the literal method:

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. V, xiii, 23

And I listened with delight to Ambrose, in his sermons to the people, often recommending this text most diligently as a rule: “The letter kills, but the spirit gives life,”<sup>93</sup> while at the same time he drew aside the mystic veil and opened to view the spiritual meaning of what seemed to teach perverse doctrine if it were taken according to the letter.<sup>94</sup>

Here, Augustine seems to employ the language of initiation ceremonies (‘mystic veil’, ‘opened to view’ etc.) in which the values, norms, and wisdom of a culture are revealed and imparted during the liminal phase of the ritual and this results in the transformation of ‘the very being of the neophyte’.<sup>95</sup> By using the allegorical method, Augustine was able to overcome the antipathy he felt towards the stories of the Old Testament:

This was especially clear after I had heard one or two parts of the Old Testament explained allegorically- whereas before this, when I had interpreted them literally, they had “killed” me spiritually.<sup>96</sup>

With his hostility towards the stories of the Old Testament resolved Augustine now turned his attention to the materialistic philosophy of the Manichees that stood in the way of his conversion to the spirituality of the Christian way of life. Again, Ambrose’s allegorical method provided the means by which this obstacle would be challenged and eventually, by means of the turn to the Neo-Platonists, eliminated. Beginning with the belief that God was corporeal which the Manichees had deduced from the Book of Genesis (1: 26): ‘And he said: let us make man to our image and likeness’, Ambrose applies his allegorical method to

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<sup>93</sup> 2 Cor. 3:6.

<sup>94</sup> *Confessions*: VI, iv, 6

<sup>95</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p.103.

<sup>96</sup> *Confessions*: V, xiv, 24; the discovery of the allegorical method of interpretation opened new horizons for Augustine in the field of Biblical interpretation and he adopted it as a settled principle in his sermons and commentaries. The use of the allegorical method for Christians had begun in Alexandria some two centuries earlier and will be the subject of the *Zeitgeist* section later in this chapter.

this text and convinces Augustine of the spiritual or ‘other-worldly’ aspect of the divine:

I noticed, repeatedly, in the sermons of our bishop...that  
when God is thought of, our thoughts should dwell on no  
material reality whatsoever, nor in the case of the soul,  
which is the one thing in the universe nearest to God.<sup>97</sup>

The allegorical method allowed Augustine to abandon the Manichaeism’s rational and material ideas and begin the spiritual journey towards conversion. This clear-out of old ideas is comparable to the liminal phase of rites of passage in which the neophyte, according to Turner, is ‘being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew’.<sup>98</sup> Augustine is aware of the process he is undergoing and becomes ‘convinced that all those knots of crafty calumnies which those deceivers of ours had knit together against the divine books could be unravelled’.<sup>99</sup> For Turner ‘the neophyte in liminality must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank state’<sup>100</sup> and this, according to one scholar, is exactly what Augustine was becoming – ‘as he was at least indebted to these elucidations [the allegorical interpretation of passages from the Old Testament] for having definitively created in his mind a *tabula rasa* of Manichaean ideas’.<sup>101</sup>

When Augustine turned away from Manichaeism and the scepticism of the Academics new gods needed to be installed and again Ambrose supplied the solution. In May and June of 386 Ambrose began preaching a series of sermons whose themes seemed to parallel the *Enneads* of Plotinus and thus became the first person to introduce Augustine to the ideas of the Neo-Platonists.<sup>102</sup> And, as

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<sup>97</sup> *de Beata Vita*, i, 4, cited in Brown, P. (2000 [1967]) *Augustine of Hippo*, London: Faber & Faber, p. 75.

<sup>98</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p. 95.

<sup>99</sup> *Confessions*: VI, iii, 4

<sup>100</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p. 103.

<sup>101</sup> Lancel, S. (2002) *St Augustine* London: SCM Press. p. 70

<sup>102</sup> That Ambrose was the first link between Augustine and Neo-Platonism is a belief held by many Augustinian scholars including Courcelle, P. (1950) *Reserches sur les ‘Confessions’ de saint Augustine*. Paris : E. de Boccard. pp. 93-138; Hadot, P. (1956) ‘Platon et Plotin dans trios sermons de saint Ambrose’, *Revue des etudes latines* 34, 1956, pp 202,20. all cited in Lancel 2002: 82 n. 11 and 12; also J.J. O’Meara (1958) ‘Augustine and Neo-platonism’, *Recherches augustiniennes* 1: 91-111; and Brown, P. (2000 [1967]) *Augustine of Hippo*, London: Faber & Faber, p. 85.



was seen from the previous section, the reading of these Neo-Platonic texts had a profound effect on the course Augustine's life would take. Because the ideas of the Neo-Platonists reached Augustine via Ambrose's lens of Christianity it should be noted that his subsequent reading of these texts was achieved through a similar Christian inclination. Thus one of the most influential background figures who became central to Augustine's conversion was the charismatic St. Ambrose of Milan.

### **Background / Zeitgeist**

The two main areas animating the zeitgeist of the Christian world, at the time of Augustine's conversion, were the conceptualisation of Christianity as a philosophy and the emergence of a western form of monasticism. These developments were by no means independent as some of the early interpreters of Christianity as a philosophy were themselves practitioners of monasticism.<sup>103</sup>

While the latter will be analysed in some detail in the next chapter, dealing with Margaret Ebner, the former will now be analysed to identify the dynamic spirit from whence the new belief system would emerge. The conceptualisation of Christianity as a philosophy had its origins in the writings of the early Apologists. For this reason the development of a positive encounter between Christian theology and Greek philosophy will be examined from the perspective of these Apologists, especially Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and the founder of Biblical study as a discipline – Origen. The next section will deal with the attempt by the Neo-Platonists to regain the ground lost to Christianity, in particular the work of Plotinus and Porphyry. The final section will deal with the synthesis of these Neo-Platonic ideas and Christian theology; this was achieved by one of Rome's most distinguished rhetors – Marius Victorinus.

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<sup>103</sup> See Hadot, P. (2004) *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 241-3

## Justin, Clement and Origen

Justin Martyr (c.100 – c.165) the most influential of the apologists and a ‘major figure’ in the interpretation of Christianity as the ‘True Discourse’ had begun this transformation of Christianity into philosophy.<sup>104</sup> Born to Gentile parents, at Flavia Neapolis in Samaria, Justin ‘the Martyr’ had travelled widely in search of philosophical wisdom. This journey had exposed him to the various philosophical schools – Stoic, Peripatetic, Pythagorean – but it was the Platonists who he claimed had the most to offer in this quest.<sup>105</sup> Justin was persuaded to ‘correct’ his Platonism by an old man he encountered as he meditated by the sea, who told him about the Hebrew prophets, ‘...who alone saw and declared the truth to mankind’.<sup>106</sup> Justin was converted to Christianity but remained positive towards Platonism, which he believed was ‘not radically different from Christianity but not quite the same’.<sup>107</sup> Thus it was by progression rather than conversion that a Platonist accepted Christianity as it required no radical rejection of a former world-view. He travelled to Rome, sometime in the middle of the second century, and established a philosophical school that claimed the superiority of Christianity by its possession of the divine *Logos*.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, Justin still acknowledges the debt he owed to Platonism and he still ‘rejoiced in the teachings of Plato’.<sup>109</sup> Sometime during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (160-180), probably between 162 and 168, Justin was executed along with some of his students.<sup>110</sup>

This idea of interpreting Christianity as the true philosophy, begun by Justin, was further developed by Clement of Alexandria in the early part of the third

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<sup>104</sup> See Szakolczai, A. (2003) *The Genesis of Modernity*, London: Routledge, p.162 and Hadot, P. (2004) *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 239

<sup>105</sup> Justin, Dialogue 2.6, cited in Droge, A. (1987) ‘Justin Martyr and the Restoration of Philosophy’, *Church History*.56, 3 p.303.

<sup>106</sup> Justin: Dial. 7.1-2, Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Justin *Apol. II* 13 cited in Chadwick, H. (2001) *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 93

<sup>108</sup> Justin, *Apol. I* 46, 3-4 cited in Hadot, P. (2004) *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 239

<sup>109</sup> Justin *Apol. II* 12. 1, cited in Droge, A. (1987) ‘Justin Martyr and the Restoration of Philosophy’, *Church History* 56: 305.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

century. Titus Flavius Clemens (c.150 – c.215) was born in Athens and towards the end of the second century settled in Alexandria, the great city that had become a centre for the teaching of Christian ‘philosophy’. His treatises (*The Protreptic*, *The Instructor*, and *The Stromata*) attempted to outline the spiritual direction of the Christian life. His *Exhortation to the Greeks* fiercely attacks the popular religions and mystery cults of the Greek speaking people in his attempt to consolidate Christianity.

It must be remembered that at this time Christianity was struggling for survival and these popular Greek religions were its deadliest enemy.<sup>111</sup> However, Clement clearly makes a distinction between these ‘absurd’ religions and the lofty ideals of Plato who recognises that ‘God [is] the measure of the truth of all existence’.<sup>112</sup> He likewise extols the writings of the prophets of the Old Testament who provide ‘models of virtuous living’ that lead to the ‘short roads to salvation’.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, according to Clement, to become a Christian did not require the abandonment of these ancient routes to salvation such as keeping the commandments of the *Torah* or the quest for the good life. Instead the importance placed in the Old Testament by the Hebrews and in philosophy by the Greeks was now providentially transmitted through the Christian gospel by means of the confluence of both streams.<sup>114</sup> Both of these traditions (Old Testament and philosophy) are explicitly revealed in Clements claim of Christianity as the true philosophy that ‘teaches us to conduct ourselves so as to resemble God, and accept the divine plan as the guiding principle of all our education’.<sup>115</sup> This common way of life fosters the growth of ‘brotherly love’ and thus contributes to the effective emancipation from a persecuting political

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<sup>111</sup> For more on this see ‘Introduction’ by G.W. Butterworth p. xvii, in Clement of Alexandria (1960[1919]) *The Exhortations to the Greeks; The Rich Man’s Salvation; To the Newly Baptised*, tr. G. W. Butterworth, London: Heinemann.

<sup>112</sup> *Ex. to the Greeks*, Ch. vi, in Clement of Alexandria (1960[1919]) *The Exhortations to the Greeks; The Rich Man’s Salvation; To the Newly Baptised*, tr. G. W. Butterworth, London: Heinemann, pp.151-7

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid* p.173

<sup>114</sup> See in Chadwick, H, (2001) *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 127

<sup>115</sup> Clement’s ‘*Stromata*’ cited in Hadot, P. (2004) *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 239

order.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, emancipation does not assure safety and when persecutions increased under Septimius Severus in 202 Clement was forced to leave Alexandria never to return. It is estimated that he died in the year 215.<sup>117</sup>

The next Christian philosopher of interest to this thesis is Origen whose work we know from the writing of Eusebius. A prolific writer Origen was regarded by Jerome as ‘the greatest teacher of the Church since the apostles’.<sup>118</sup> The transformation of Christianity into philosophy continued and was further developed by Origen, especially in his ambitious work *On First Principles*, also referred to by its Greek title, *Peri Archon*, in which he attempts to produce a synthesis between Christianity and Platonism by means of scriptural exegesis. Central to Origen’s methodology was his use of allegory. In the rare event when the literal interpretation of the Bible created difficulties, Origen offered the allegorical method as a solution. Thus, the size of Noah’s ark necessitates some mathematical manipulation in order to be defended literally but for Origen the inner meaning is what really matters: ‘Outside the Church there is no salvation’.<sup>119</sup>

The allegorical method had long been practiced at Alexandria, initially by the Hebrews who applied it to the Old Testament and the Gnostics who applied it to the New, now it was commandeered by the Christian philosophers stationed there, first by Clement and then by Origen. Later this method would be taken up and used by Ambrose and, as was investigated earlier, would have a profound effect on Augustine.

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<sup>116</sup> For more on congregational religions and ‘brotherly love’ see Weber, M. ([1921-2] 1978) *Economy and Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 579-81. The loss of these fraternal ties, on the Christianising of the Roman Empire, lie at the heart of the rise of monasticism, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

<sup>117</sup> See the ‘Introduction’ by G.W. Butterworth p. xii, in Clement of Alexandria (1960[1919]) *The Exhortations to the Greeks; The Rich Man’s Salvation; To the Newly Baptised*, tr. G. W. Butterworth, London: Heinemann.

<sup>118</sup> Jerome cited in Chadwick, H, (2001) *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 135

<sup>119</sup> See Origen’s *Hom. On Josh. 3.5* cited in Chadwick, H, (2001) *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 135

The persecutions that had pervaded the early years of the apologists had abated by the time of Origen and the Church had grown steadily in numbers during this perplexing period of religious tolerance coupled within an overall age of anxiety.<sup>120</sup> The intellectual capacity of the Christian philosophers at the time of Origen is undeniable. His students were instructed not only in philosophy but also in mathematics and natural science; just as the Platonists proposed a reading order for the dialogues of Plato, which corresponded to the phases of spiritual progress, so Origen had his students consult the Bible in a reading order that promoted ethical progress; and finally he thought theology as a means to union with God.<sup>121</sup> In the development of Christian philosophy it would appear that the exponents of this tradition, such as Justin, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, were the intellectual match for their Pagan counterparts, such as Lucian, Galen and Celsus. Thus, by the middle of the second century, the Christians had not only grown in numbers but also in confidence as is evident when Origen chides the pagan philosophers for the weakness of their argument.<sup>122</sup> But the war was far from won and when Decius succeeded Philip the Arab as emperor in 249 the most vicious wave of persecution took place in which Origen was detained and brutally tortured. He never fully recovered and died at Tyre about 254.

## Plotinus and Porphyry

Because the persecutions failed to stem the growing popularity of Christianity a new philosophy claiming the authority of Plato and the rehabilitation of polytheism was seen as the way forward. While Justin, Clement and Origen attempted to supplement authority with reason, conversely, pagan philosophy tended increasingly to augment reason with the authority of Plato. The philosophers who drew their inspiration from Plato were known as ‘Platonici’ or

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<sup>120</sup> For more on the political and religious climate of that period see Dodds, E. (1965[1993]) *Pagan and Christian in an age of Anxiety*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.102 -38

<sup>121</sup> See Hadot, P. (2004) *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 240. For more on the claim that Origen should be considered the first Christian mystic rather than Gregory of Nyssa see Dodds, E. (1965[1993]) *Pagan and Christian in an age of Anxiety*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.98

<sup>122</sup> ‘Origen feels he could have made a far more effective case against Christianity than Celsus did’ (Miura – Strange cited in Dodds, E. (1965[1993]) *Pagan and Christian in an age of Anxiety*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 106 n.4

Platonists the most influential being Plotinus and Porphyry. The modern term to describe this branch of philosophy, begun by Plotinus, in the third century CE, is Neo-Platonism. Plotinus, an Egyptian Greek, was the first systematic philosopher of the Platonist movement. He travelled to Rome in 244 and taught philosophy for ten years, where, included among his admirers were the Emperor Gallienus and his wife Solonia.

After his death the main body of his work, fifty-four treatises, were edited by his disciple Porphyry into six groups of nine and hence became known as the *Enneads*. At the heart of Plotinus's philosophy is the idea that God is light and matter is the source of all evil. Human beings are comprised of both a body and a soul; matter and light, and in order for the human soul to return to God it must free itself from the shackles of matter and ascend towards the good. By progressively reaching levels of attainment through the practice of philosophy the individual (soul) can eventually experience the ecstasy (*ekstasis*) of union with God. While Plotinus fails to mention the Christians by name it is clear that his work in some ways challenge the Christian philosophers' interpretation and adaptation of ancient philosophy.

A quick investigation of the principles of Christianity and Neo-Platonism would seem to indicate close affinities between both doctrines. Both subscribe to the superiority of the spiritual over the material – soul over body; they also admit that all things in the universe, including man, have their origin from a supreme Being; both recognize in this supreme Being a trinity, for the Christian it comprises the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit while the Neo-Platonic trinity is made up of the One, the Intellect and the Soul. The Christian and the Neo-Platonist both view life in this world as a battle between good and evil and victory in that battle will result in union with God in the life to come.<sup>123</sup>

However, a deeper investigation of the basic tenets underlying both doctrines will reveal more subtle differences that are difficult to correlate. The supreme

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<sup>123</sup> See Garvey, M. (1939) *Saint Augustine: Christian or Neo-Platonist?* Milwaukee: Marquette University Press p.52

being or God for the Christian is a personal god who created the universe from an autonomous and decisive action. Conversely the Neo-Platonic supreme being or One is an ‘all transcending’ and ‘self-sufficing’ god from whom all things proceed, not as a result of free choice but out of necessity.<sup>124</sup> Thus the primacy of the Christian god is ‘being’ while the primacy of the Neo-Platonic god comes from the ‘good’. Again when we delve a little deeper into the ‘trinity’ of both doctrines a vital disjunction is revealed; for the Christian the relationship between the three persons of the trinity is understood as emanating from the one substance – the Word – and therefore equal, whilst for the Neo-Platonists there can be no consubstantiality between anything that emanates from the One.<sup>125</sup>

According to the Plotinian doctrine of emanation, from the supreme being the One emanates the Intellect which is the image of the One but capable of multiplicity. From this Intellect emanates the Soul which in turn is the image of the Intellect and so capable of even more multiplicity and responsible for the individual souls and the material world.<sup>126</sup> Because the Intellect proceeds from the One, by the doctrine of ‘emanation’ it implies multiplicity and therefore must be inferior to the One. Thus, it is clear that while Plotinus did not explicitly confront the Christians through a philosophical dialogue, implicitly he challenged their credibility by attempting to undermine their central beliefs.

When we come to read the summary and somewhat vague description of the Platonic books (*Platonicorum libros*) that Augustine claimed to have read it is clear that he picked up none of the subtle differences described above. In fact Augustine sounds astounded at the similarity of the Plotinian doctrine of the

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., see also Plotinus, (1956) *Enneads*, tr. S. MacKenna, London: Faber and Faber, VI.9.6, pp. 619-20.

<sup>125</sup> Arius (c.250-336), a priest in Alexandria attempted to accommodate the Neo-Platonist doctrine of emanation by claiming that the Son of God was a creature and therefore not consubstantial with the Father. This doctrine was condemned, first at Alexandria then at Nicaea, as heresy and Arius was excommunicated and banished. Revived, with imperial approval from Constantine, Arianism would continue to divide the Church for many centuries. For more on Arianism see Williams, R. (1987) *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, London: Dartman, Longman & Todd.

<sup>126</sup> See Plotinus, (1956) *Enneads*, tr. S. MacKenna, London: Faber and Faber, V.4, V.1; see also Garvey, M. (1939) *Saint Augustine: Christian or Neo-Platonist?* Milwaukee: Marquette University Press pp.48-55, 75-77.

three hypostases and the Christian Trinity.<sup>127</sup> He specifically compares the prologue of the Gospel of John – ‘In the beginning was the Word...’ – and the three basic hypostasis as given by Plotinus in Ennead V whereby the soul while bearing witness to the light should not be identified with the light by which it was created. This harmonic reading of Plotinian and Christian thinking leads one to suspect that Augustine interpreted Plotinus through secondary rather than primary sources. Beatrice<sup>128</sup> agrees with this analysis when he claims that certain ideas attributed by Augustine to Plotinus are not in fact found in the Enneads. Therefore a different source must be found for Augustine’s interpretation of Plotinus and the resolution of this dilemma leads only in one direction.

Porphyry, a disciple of Plotinus, was a prolific writer and wrote biographies of both Pythagoras and Plotinus. Born in Tyre about CE 232, he studied under Longinus in Athens, and became a faithful disciple of Plotinus whom he met on a visit to Rome. Like Plotinus, he believed that the practices of asceticism are the beginning of the process of perfection. Self-contemplation was the next stage of advancement in this process and once this stage was attained, further progress could be made by the consultation of oracles. Among the oracles that were valued by Porphyry were the ‘Chaldaean Oracles’ produced, as a collection of pagan oracles, sometime in the late second century. From this collection Porphyry was particularly interested in the oracles of Apollo and Hecate and they became the focus of his early work *On the Philosophy of Oracles*. What Porphyry attempted to achieve with this work was to offer a religious version of Platonism to conservative pagans who were alarmed at the revolutionary zeal of the Christians and their abandonment of ancestral customs.<sup>129</sup>

In his *Against the Christians*, written about 270, Porphyry again expresses alarm at the advance of Christianity and sees the increasing size of the churches as evidence of the confidence and wealth of the followers of Christ. He notes

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<sup>127</sup> See *Confessions*: VII, ix, 13-14; For an analysis of Augustine’s Platonic readings see Beatrice, P. F. (1989) ‘Quosdam Platoniorum Libros’, *Vigiliae Christianae*, 43: 248-281.

<sup>128</sup> See Beatrice, P. F. (1989) ‘Quosdam Platoniorum Libros’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 43: 251-2.

<sup>129</sup> See Chadwick, H, (2001) *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 174.



how in Rome the cult of Asclepius is being replaced by the cult of Jesus; but he rejects calls for persecutions expressing pity for those Christians ‘inhumanely punished’.<sup>130</sup> While he rejected the claims of Christianity to provide an exclusive path to salvation his search for a universal way failed to reach fruition.<sup>131</sup> This failure, to find a universal way, made the task of defending the Christian path less difficult and in a way ensured its survival at the cost of paganism. Also, in order to challenge Christianity on equal terms, Porphyry had advanced Neo-Platonism more as a religion than a philosophy and the path to salvation, he maintained, required a certain amount of faith. Without this faith the multitude could never attain ‘truth, love or hope’.<sup>132</sup>

In the *Philosophy from Oracles* Porphyry depicts Jesus as a wise and pious man but at the same time criticising Christians for misunderstanding his teachings.<sup>133</sup> The significance of this move toward Christianity, by a pagan Greek philosopher, cannot be underestimated.<sup>134</sup> By sailing this close to the wind of Christianity Porphyry had strengthened rather than weakened the appeal of the Christian Church and, despite the imperial persecutions, Christianity continued to flourish in the years to come. Future generations of Neo-Platonists, such as Iamblichus and Proclus of Athens, viewed Porphyry’s dialogue with Christianity as having surrendered too much to Christian critics<sup>135</sup> and their efforts to regain the ground lost to Christianity proved futile. Thus Neo-Platonism, as developed by Porphyry, became a tool for the Church Fathers to use and, according to Hadot, from Christian antiquity onwards philosophy

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<sup>130</sup> Porphyry, *Adv. Christ.*, fragments 13; 80; 76; 36.9 cited in Dodds, E. (1965[1993]) *Pagan and Christian in an age of Anxiety*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.108-10. It should be noted that some scholars (Beatrice, Harnack etc.) question the existence of *Against the Christians* and believe it to be in fact Porphyry’s *Philosophy from Oracles* for more on this see O’ Meara, J.J. (2001) *The Young Augustine*, New York: Alba House, p. vii.

<sup>131</sup> See Chadwick, H, (2001) *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 178

<sup>132</sup> Porphyry, *Ad Marc.*, 24 cited in Dodds, E. (1965[1993]) *Pagan and Christian in an age of Anxiety*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 123.

<sup>133</sup> Cited in Augustine (1998) *The City of God against the Pagans*, edited and tr. by R .W. Dyson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Book 19 Chapter 23, pp. 953-60.

<sup>134</sup> See Digeser, E. (2000) *The Making of a Christian Empire: Lactantius & Rome*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 93-107.

<sup>135</sup> See Chadwick, H, (2001) *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 175

became the ‘servant of theology’.<sup>136</sup> This employment of Neo-Platonic philosophical ideas by Christian theologians to defend orthodox doctrine (in particular the Nicene orthodoxy) would reach its highest form in the latter half of the fourth century. One of the most noted Latin philosophers, during this second phase of the Arian controversy, was Marius Victorinus who wrote several theological essays in the five years prior to his death in 363 CE.

### **Marius Victorinus**

Born in Africa, around the year 280, Marius Victorinus was a rhetorician, philosopher, grammarian and theologian. He migrated to Rome in order to advance his career as a teacher of rhetoric. So noted was he as a tutor to the aristocracy that in 353 a statue in his honour was erected in the Forum of Trajan, an almost unheard of tribute to one still living. Almost all we know regarding the life of Victorinus comes from Jerome or Augustine, the latter based on information Augustine received from the old priest Simplicianus.<sup>137</sup> Following his long and distinguished professional career Victorinus publicly converted to Christianity, in or around the year 355, at the time when the anti-Nicaean emperor Constantius was demanding that the Homoian formula become the agreed creed of Christianity. Between his conversion in 355 and his death (c.363) Victorinus wrote several theological essays in refutation of Arianism.<sup>138</sup>

He opposed successfully the Anomoean (dissimilar) doctrine that emerged from the synod of Sirmium in 357; the Homoiousian (like in substance) doctrine as expressed by Basil of Ancyra in 358; and finally the Homoean (similar)

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<sup>136</sup> See Hadot, P. (2004) *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 256

<sup>137</sup> See Chapter 10 of Jerome’s *De Viris Illustribus*, and Augustine’s *Confessions*, VII, ii, 3 – v, 10.

<sup>138</sup> The Arian controversy persisted following the definitive Creed issued, in 325, by the Council of Nicaea due to the terminology used by the Council. In particular the use of the word homoousios ( of one substance) was successfully challenged as a Sabellian heresy. Between 341 and 360 up to fourteen Councils were held in an attempt to bring the various groups together and by imperial order in 359 the Homoean (similar) formula was confirmed and adopted. However, with the death of Constantius in 361 this unpopular formula collapsed and the term homoousios was again favoured and in 362, at the Synod of Alexandria, the Nicene Creed was re-affirmed. Arianism continued in the East for another twenty years but in 381 the Council of Constantinople in the East and the Council of Aquileia in the West finally adopted the faith of Nicaea resulting in the unity of the entire Church.

adopted by the councils of Sirmium and Rimini in 359.<sup>139</sup> Victorinus also translated into Latin selected pieces by Porphyry and maybe Plotinus. He was also the first to write Latin commentaries on the Pauline epistles to the Galatians, Philippians and Ephesians and his doctrine on predestination led Harnack to refer to him as ‘an Augustine before Augustine’.<sup>140</sup> It is estimated that Marius Victorinus died in 363 shortly after closing his school following Julian’s imperial edict forbidding Christians to teach literature and oratory.<sup>141</sup>

To understand the enormous influence that Marius Victorinus had on Augustine we must be aware of the ambitious and difficult nature of his enterprise. He attempted to refute Arianism by means of a defence of the use of *homoousios* within a philosophical framework taken from Porphyry. Employing Neo-Platonic ideas to give a systematic account of the Trinity was a novel departure for Christian philosophers.

For Victorinus the Christian Father is identified with the first Neo-Platonic hypostasis wherein the One or Being is the first term of the triad One-Intellect-Soul. The Son and the Holy Spirit are identified with the second and third hypostases recognised by Porphyry in the dyad Intellect / Soul, Intellect being identified with Christ and Soul with the Holy Spirit. Thus, for Victorinus, Christ leads the many through the process of conversion through the Holy Spirit toward the Father (One) and this movement is explained using the Porphyrian terms ‘emanation’ and ‘procession’.<sup>142</sup>

Finally the contention that the term *homoousios* was to be rejected because it was not found in scripture was challenged by Victorinus on the grounds that the term ‘God of God, light of light’ equally was not found in scripture. Moreover

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<sup>139</sup> See Hadot, P. (2003) ‘Marius Victorinus’. In *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 9, Washington: The Catholic University of America, pp. 181-2.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> An excellent and compelling temporal estimation of the birth (280) and death (363) of Marius Victorinus is offered by Travis, A. (1943) ‘Marius Victorinus: A Biographical Note’, *The Harvard Theological Review* 36: 83-90.

<sup>142</sup> See Hadot, P. (2003) ‘Marius Victorinus’. In *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 9, Washington: The Catholic University of America, p. 182. While Hadot refers to the Porphyrian triad as Being-Life-Thought, for purposes of continuation this thesis will persist with the One-Intellect-Soul triad.

many compounds of words ending in *ousia* were found in the Bible and liturgy such as in the Lord's Prayer when *epiousios* (daily) bread is prayed for and in the prayer of oblation in the Eucharist when God is asked to 'Save the *presiousios* [special] people, zealous of good works'.<sup>143</sup>

On Victorinus' conversion it is interesting to note that his turn to Christianity had its origins in the intellectual content rather than the blind faith of the Christian religion. Here lay the path to the 'knowledge and the vision of God', by means of Christian practice the Neo-Platonic ideal of liberating the soul from imprisonment could be realized.<sup>144</sup> Is it possible that while translating some of the Neo-Platonic texts that Victorinus was impressed by Porphyry's depiction of Jesus as a pious and wise man? While there is no doubt that at the time of Victorinus' public declaration to Christianity he was an old man (*extrema senectude* according to Jerome), nevertheless, according to Simplicianus as related to Augustine, for a long time before his public declaration Victorinus 'had read the Holy Scriptures...and thought out and studied all the Christian writings studiously.' Fearful of offending his pagan friends Victorinus remained a secret Christian and it was only in his old age when he began to doubt his false life – 'lest he should be denied by Christ before the holy angels if he now was afraid to confess him before men' – that he abandoned his secret life and openly declared himself a Christian.<sup>145</sup>

If, as this analysis seems to suggest, Victorinus was disposed to the Christian way of life since his translations of the Porphyrian texts then it may have been a Christianised version of those texts that Augustine came to read. This seems to be borne out by Simplicianus' commendation to Augustine on hearing that Augustine had been reading 'certain books' by the Platonists, which Victorinus had translated into Latin. Other philosophical books, according to Simplicianus, were full of fallacies and deceit but in these Platonic translations 'at every turn,

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<sup>143</sup> Victorinus, *contra Arium* 2, 8, 34 cited in Chadwick, H, (2001) *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 281

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Confessions, VIII, ii, 3-4

the pathway led to belief in God and his Word.<sup>146</sup> These then were the *libri Platoniorum* read by Augustine prior to his conversion and there seems to be general agreement amongst Augustinian scholars that Porphyry was one of the main sources of these books.<sup>147</sup>

## Conclusion

From the above it is now clear that Augustine's conversion drew heavily from the Greek philosophical tradition and its emphasis on the inner journey as a means to access the Good. This philosophical quest was initiated when the eighteen year old Augustine encountered Cicero's *Hortensius*. From this early reading experience Augustine begins his search for wisdom; he yearned to 'fly from earthly things' to the God of his childhood. Freed from the restraints of the physical world he consults the Scriptures of his childhood religion but his philosophical pride made the Holy Scriptures unworthy to be compared with the 'dignity' of Cicero. Having begun his search for wisdom and rejecting the 'simplicity' of Christianity Augustine then fell in with the Manichees.

The rationalism and materialism of the Manichees failed to quell the turmoil and disillusion of Augustine and he set about building a successful teaching career moving from Carthage to Rome and finally Milan. However, he finds himself disenchanted with Manichaeism and again turns to Greek philosophy with the guidance of Ambrose Bishop of Milan who had begun using some themes from the *Enneads* of Plotinus in his sermons. Fired by the texts of the Neo-Platonists, Augustine rejects Manichaeism and opts for a spiritual quest to attain salvation. This inner spiritual quest is one of the most important features of ancient philosophy designed to 'take care of the soul' and it appealed to Augustine who at this time had rejected the materialism of Manichaeism.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> See Beatrice, P. F. (1989) 'Quosdam Platoniorum Libros', *Vigiliae Christianae* 43: 248-281; O' Meara, J.J. (2001) *The Young Augustine*, New York: Alba House, pp. 128-38

The 'care of the soul' was to be achieved through spiritual exercises that had been imported from ancient Greek philosophy by those practicing the monastic life, which had so impressed Augustine. While the Neo-Platonists, Plotinus and Porphyry, had examined and rejected the claims of Christ as mediator between the Father and mankind Augustine made that connection through a reading of St Paul. The scene was now set for the moment of 'conversion' when both the Christian religious tradition and the Greek philosophical tradition could be united. This occurred in the 'tolle lege' scene in the garden of Milan. The next great development in the conversion process occurs as a result of the monastic institutionalisation of the process and the conversion of Margaret Ebnor, the focus of the next study, will highlight this development.

## Chapter 4

### The Conversion of Margaret Ebner

If the meaning of the concept of conversion had its most profound change sometime around the sixth and fifth centuries BCE then the monastic setting of the Middle Ages provided the ideal location where these changes could be streamlined and rationalised. It is for this reason that the medieval mystic Margaret Ebner is selected as a study of monastic conversion in the Middle Ages. As with the other case-studies, the structure of this chapter is divided into five parts; part one introduces the life of Margaret Ebner – a fourteenth century Dominican nun. Because the monastic setting is of vital importance to conversion in the Middle Ages the following section will give a brief historical overview of Christian Monasticism.

The application of the theoretical framework, as constructed by this thesis, will account for the final three sections in this chapter. The liminal conditions identified will include the ritualised suffering endured by Margaret and the transformation of this suffering in the joyful *imitatio Christi*. Another condition of liminality will be the monastic setting itself, which was designed with the express purpose of bringing about conversion. It will be shown that in this setting the lines between the individual and the community are blurred. In other words, the external background and the subjective will of the individual fuse in order that liminal and transformative experiences can occur. The charismatic figure instrumental in the shaping of Margaret's experiences will be identified as Henry of Nördlingen. The final section examines the *zeitgeist* to identify the background from which her new persona would be moulded. The dynamics in this social and political background stem from the conflict between the Catholic Church and heretical mystics of the fourteenth century. The role of the group known as the 'Friends of God' will also be investigated for the part they played in the conversion of Margaret Ebner. Before proceeding it is important to understand the way conversion was understood in medieval times especially monastic conversion.

The ideal of conversion in the Middle Ages evolved around the establishment of an environment that prepared the Christian for a ‘deeper life in Christ’.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Margaret Ebner was not replacing one belief system with another, as in the other four case-studies examined in this thesis, but rather developing and deepening the belief system already in place. This was to be achieved through the process of a gradual conversion brought about through institutional order and continuity. This institutionalisation of the conversion process would have its finest hour in the monasteries of the Middle Ages.

### **Biography of Margaret Ebner**

The few extant works that deal with the life of Margaret Ebner (c.1291-1351) originate from two sources; the text of her *Revelation*<sup>2</sup> and the surviving collection of letters between herself and her spiritual director Henry of Nördlingen. While Margaret’s *Revelations* were written, at the request of Henry, between 1344 and 1348, the content of the text cover almost her entire life. The substance of the work includes the events of her life, her mystical experiences, and her relationships with the sisters in the monastery, with Henry, and with Jesus.

Margaret Ebner was born into a wealthy merchant family in the city of Donauwörth around 1291. When she was about fifteen years of age she entered the monastery of Dominican nuns at Maria Medingen near Dillengen. This monastery was founded by Hartmann IV, Count of Dillengen, in 1246, and was entrusted to the spiritual care of the Order of Preachers. It was one of sixty-five

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<sup>1</sup> See Hindsley, L. (1997) ‘Monastic Conversion: the case of Margaret Ebner’. In J. Muldoon (ed) *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida. p. 31

<sup>2</sup> The oldest extant manuscript of the text is the one that dates from 1353 and is held in the archives of Kloster Maria Medingen in Modingen, Germany. It is from this manuscript that Leonard P Hindsley, in 1993, translated and edited his *Margaret Ebner: Major Works* (MEMW) and this is the edition used throughout this work.



monasteries of nuns under the protection of the Dominicans in Upper Germany in the fourteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

By her own admission Margaret's early years in the monastery and her life prior to admission was non-reflective with regard to her spiritual life. Her reasons for entering the monastery may have been traditional (one aunt was in residence and other close relatives seemed to follow her there) rather than vocational. In the fourteenth century most of the nuns in the Dominican cloisters in Germany were drawn from the bourgeois upper levels of society.<sup>4</sup> The transformation from a non-reflective and spiritually unaware state to one of introspection and deep union with her beloved Christ was understood by Margaret not as a swift and dramatic event in her life but rather as a gradual and life-long process. This kind of conversion – what Morrison terms 'empathetic conversion' – is typical of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when the concept of conversion reached its fullest and richest expression.<sup>5</sup>

The onset of her transformation began a year after Margaret was overcome by 'a grave and mysterious illness'.<sup>6</sup> Failing to treat the illness by human means she gave herself over to the will of God and 'desired that He not let me recover my health, but then He restored me to health both in body and soul'.<sup>7</sup> This recovery was to be of a temporary nature and shortly after she was again afflicted with the illness that was to remain with her, intermittently, up to the time of her death. She saw withdrawal from the world as a means to improve her relationship with God:

I was greatly concerned that I myself was not so well  
disposed to God with interior desire as I should have  
been, and also did not yet live according to His will. This

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<sup>3</sup> MEMW p.13

<sup>4</sup> See Gieraths, G.M. (1986) 'Life in Abundance: Meister Eckhart & the German Mystics of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century'. *Spirituality Today* 38: 13-20.

<sup>5</sup> See Morrison, Karl F. (1992) *Understanding Conversion* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia pp. xii, 24, 67, 123.

<sup>6</sup> MEMW p.85-7

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

bothered me especially because I did not have the necessary love and desire for the Eucharist and because I was not adequately prepared whenever I should receive Him in communion. I blamed myself and thought this was so because I had not withdrawn myself definitively from all earthly things.<sup>8</sup>

Margaret now steadfastly set about this withdrawal in order to facilitate her conversion. She refrained from talking and visiting others and was reserved towards all. 'As much as I was able, I withdrew from all thoughts that disturbed me or hindered my prayer and devotions'.<sup>9</sup> This emotional withdrawal was coupled with a physical withdrawal for in the following thirteen years she was often confined to her bed with a sickness so severe that she had to be nursed by a faithful companion. However, after many years of tending to Margaret's needs, this sister herself got ill and died a tragedy that had a deep effect on Margaret:

For a long time no day went by without my intense weeping. I could not pay attention to anyone else, and those who were previously dear to me I did not want to see. There were times when I thought I could not be without my sister and could not live without her.<sup>10</sup>

The coping mechanism she employed to deal with this grief was to withdraw further from the world around her. This reaction was so alarming to her superior that a well-known spiritual director, Henry of Nördlingen, was summoned to help Margaret overcome her melancholy. Their first meeting was arranged for St Narcissus Day,<sup>11</sup> 1332, and Margaret went 'unwillingly'. However, the meeting proved fruitful, as she was unburdened of her great grief and thus helped to progress in her conversion. From this brief meeting there began a life-long spiritual friendship that calmed Margaret's emotional turmoil. Margaret was

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.92

<sup>11</sup> October 29<sup>th</sup>.

forty-one years of age when she first met Henry whom she considered her spiritual guide ‘from whose words and life I always received powerful consideration’.<sup>12</sup>

The friendship begun at this meeting now continued by means of an exchange of letters of which fifty-six of Henry’s but only one of Margaret’s is extant. From the letters, which span a period of almost twenty years, from 1332 to 1350, Henry’s life and character is revealed somewhat sketchily.<sup>13</sup> Henry was a secular itinerant priest from Nördlingen who acted as spiritual advisor to a group of nuns and lay women in the surrounding monasteries. He was known as a ‘Friend of God’ a name designated to the German Mystics of the fourteenth century, for her part Margaret characterised Henry as ‘God’s true friend’.<sup>14</sup> Because of a dispute between Pope John XXII and Louis the Bavarian, Henry, who had sided with the Pope, was forced to leave the country. Margaret, on the other hand, sided with Emperor Louis in the dispute but their political differences did not affect their close spiritual friendship. Henry finally settled in Basel where John Tauler, the renowned mystic, befriended him. For ten years he was a popular and well-known preacher in Basel and he also assembled and directed a circle of the ‘Friends of God’, a group who practiced a deeper and mystical religious life. He made several short trips to Germany, the last one in 1350 but left shortly after the death of Margaret Ebner in 1351. The place and time of his death, as of his birth, are not known.

It was at Henry’s insistence that Margaret began recording her Revelations and through this written testimony Henry endeavoured to promote mysticism in the groups he directed:

Thus it happened that this simple, unworldly nun became  
a pillar of strength and tranquillity for a large circle of  
men and women in difficult and tempestuous times, a

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<sup>12</sup> MEMW pp.27-8

<sup>13</sup> See Stoudt, D.L. (1986) ‘The Vernacular Letters of Heinrich von Nördlingen’, *Mystics Quarterly* 12: 19-25.

<sup>14</sup> The ‘Friends of God’ will be investigated more closely in the final section of this study.

guide amid the dangers and trials of life. Throughout Germany, from the Netherlands to Switzerland, Margaret Ebner gave consolation and hope to all the Friends of God through her prayers and revelations.<sup>15</sup>

In the letters Henry charted Margaret's transformation concerning her mystical union with Christ; he claimed she was 'elevated, united, and hidden in the hiddenness of his face' this phrase reveals Margaret's journey from human darkness to be shaped by Christ into 'his most perfect likeness'.<sup>16</sup> He also calls Margaret the 'pearl of God' and likens her deeper conversion to the formation of a valuable and precious jewel, whose origin and formation remain a mystery.<sup>17</sup> Margaret Ebner died at Medingen on July 20<sup>th</sup> 1351. She was beatified by Pope John Paul II on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1979 and at the time of writing her canonization is pending.

## **Brief History of Christian Monasticism**

It will be determined, by the analysis that follows, that Margaret Ebner's life and spiritual experiences, including her deeper conversion to Christ, was shaped by the institutionalised life in the monastic setting. To understand how 'conversion' became institutionalised in the new orders of the eleventh and twelfth centuries it is necessary to examine the history of Christian monasticism.

## **The Nazirites**

Perhaps one of the earliest mentions of what could be termed monasticism occurs in the Old Testament in both the Pentateuch and the Book of Numbers

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<sup>15</sup> Wilms (1928) cited in Gieraths, G.M. (1986) 'Life in Abundance: Meister Eckhart & the German Mystics of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century'. *Spirituality Today* 38, p20

<sup>16</sup> Letter X, cited in MEMW: p.41

<sup>17</sup> Letter XIII, Ibid.

concerning the Jewish community of Nazirites. The Book of Numbers details the rules on becoming a Nazirite:

Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to the LORD as a Nazirite, he must abstain from wine and other fermented drink...During the entire period of his vow of separation no razor may be used on his head. He must be holy until the period of his separation to the LORD is over; he must let the hair of his head grow long. Throughout the period of his separation to the LORD he must not go near a dead body...Throughout the period of separation he is consecrated to the LORD (Numbers 6, 1-8).

However, while the vow of separation resembles a monk-like withdrawal from society no direct link between the community of Nazirites and western monasticism can be found.

## **The Essenes**

Among the many scrolls found in caves above the Dead Sea in the region of Khirbet Qumran were two documents that appear to be the rules of a Second Temple Jewish ‘monastic order’. The documents in question are the *Rule of the Community* (also known as the *Manual of Discipline*) and the *Damascus Document*,<sup>18</sup> which contains provisions for the admission, governance and discipline of the community. Some scholars have speculated on the positive connection between the Essenes and the Christian monastic communities that

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<sup>18</sup> See Charlesworth. J. (ed) (1996) *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English translations, Vol. 1: Rule of the Community and Related Documents*, Westminster: John Knox.

emerged more than two centuries later.<sup>19</sup> However, the lack of any concrete historical evidence for making such a connection has resulted in other works that challenge those assumptions. Timothy Fry has questioned the idea that the Essenes were permanent residents at the site of Qumran and argued instead that the site was used as a 'seasonal gathering place for the Essene sect'.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Cross regards the Essenes as traditionally Jewish in their beliefs and thus unlikely to practice permanent celibacy, a hallmark of Christian monasticism.<sup>21</sup> For these and other reasons<sup>22</sup> it must be assumed that there is no historical evidence to directly link the Essenes and the early Christian monks.

### **Role Models in the New Testament**

Perhaps a more obvious route to trace the origins of Christian monasticism lie in the textual analysis of the New Testament that was carried out studiously by the early monks in order to acquire a role-model for the Christian way of life.<sup>23</sup> The following reference from the Gospel of Matthew highlights the monk-like existence of John the Baptist:

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the desert of Judea...John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:1-6).

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<sup>19</sup> For more on this connection see Sutcliffe, E. F. (1960) *The Monks of Qumran*, Westminster: Newman Press

<sup>20</sup> See Fry, T. (ed) (1981) *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, pp.5/6

<sup>21</sup> See Cross, F. (1995) [1958] *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, pp. 127-60

<sup>22</sup> See also Hubner, H. (1971) 'Zolibat in Qumran?' *New Testament Studies* 17: 153-167.

<sup>23</sup> See Peifer, C. (1966) 'The Biblical Foundations of Monasticism', *Cistercian Studies* 1: 7-31.

Ascetic practices, later to be found in western monasticism, can also be identified in the teaching of the New Testament; the sharing of possessions, a life of poverty, daily prayer, and communal meals were all part of early Christian practices prior to the advent of monasticism as these passages from Acts will testify:

All the believers were together, and they shared everything with one another. They made it their practice to sell their possessions and goods and to distribute the proceeds to anyone who was in need. They had a single purpose and went to the Temple everyday. They ate at each other's homes and shared their food with glad and humble hearts (Acts 2: 44-46)

Celibacy was another attribute that was admired in the early church as this biblical reference testifies: 'Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am' (1 Cor. 7:8).

Apart from the role model that scripture provided, another root of early monasticism is found in the changing relationship between the Church and society that developed in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. With the Christianisation of the Roman Empire and the end of persecutions a hero was needed to replace the martyr of the past three centuries. The rise of the monk has been cited as the replacement of the martyr by the hero for the triumphant Church of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> For some the triumph of the church meant the demons were banished from the cities, but the new heroes of the faith followed them to the desert to do battle with them there.

Malone<sup>25</sup> has traced this complex development from martyrs to monks in the various stages of the Patristic works. In the transition from a minority religion to an imperial one the Church itself underwent radical change. When Constantine

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<sup>24</sup> See Fry, T. (ed) (1981) *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, p.14

<sup>25</sup> See Malone, E. *The Monk and the Martyr* (1950) Washington: C. U. P.

embraced Christianity the Roman Empire was changed profoundly, at the same time the invasion of the Church by the 'world' or secular society was just as profound for many Christians.<sup>26</sup> The vocation of the bishops had changed from being underground leaders of a persecuted religious movement to the more secular and mundane tasks of town administration and imperial politics. For some of the most faithful their only recourse was to escape from this secularised Christian life, move to the desert, and embrace a more Christ-like existence.<sup>27</sup> The emergence of the monk thus resulted, on the one hand, as a response to the demise of the martyr, and on the other hand because of the cosmopolitan and politicised nature of the Church. We now turn to the various types of monasticism that emerged in the early part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Anchorite and the Eremite**

For the early Christian desert monks the life of Jesus offered plenty examples of withdrawal from the world to strengthen the spirit. In Matt 14:13 it is said that Jesus 'withdrew...into a desert place by himself', the words used being 'anachorein' and 'eremos topos' which in turn gave rise to the monastic terms of 'anchorite' and 'hermit'.<sup>28</sup> Again Matt 4: 2-10 describes how Jesus spent forty days and forty nights in the desert engaged in fasting, praying and battling with demons. This was the primary example to be followed by the desert monks. The most noted of these desert monks is St. Anthony (251-356), renowned by virtue of his biography, the *Life of Antony* written by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> See Fry, T. (ed) (1981) *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, pp. 16-7

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., and also Borkenau, F. (1981) *End and Beginning: On the Generations of Cultures and the Origins of the West*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 330

<sup>28</sup> See Fry, T. (ed) (1981) *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, pp. 16-7

<sup>29</sup> See Athanasius, Saint, d. 373, (1980 [1891]) 'Life of Anthony'. In P. Schaff and H. Wace (eds) *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, Vol. IV of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans



Egyptian by birth, Antony was born into a wealthy family about 251 CE. After the early death of his parents, Antony renounced his wealth, put his sister in the care of a community of pious women, and retired to tombs outside his village imitating the ascetic lifestyle of an old man of his village.<sup>30</sup> Later he moved much further to a remote mountain area where he battled constantly with demons. He then moved to the desert where he lived in an abandoned fort for twenty years. During this time his fame spread and many people visited Antony and were drawn to the monastic life:

He persuaded many to embrace the solitary life. And thus it happened in the end that cells arose even in the mountains, and the desert was colonised by monks, who came forth from their own people, and enrolled themselves for the citizenship in the heavens.<sup>31</sup>

However, these cells lacked any form of organisation, formal novitiate or profession of vows. Instead the newcomer would seek out an older monk whom he might serve as a kind of apprentice and emulate his ascetic way of life. Pachomius has been credited with being the first monk to organise a distinct monastic community very different from that of the anchorite monk.<sup>32</sup>

### **Pachomius, Basil and the rise of Cenobitic Monasticism**

While Pachomius started the early part of his monastic life as a wandering anchorite he eventually settled in the abandoned village of Tabennesi following an angelic visitation. He soon attracted a number of followers and the monastery he built consisted of several houses surrounded by a wall. As Pachomius was a retired army sergeant he quickly adopted the rules of barrack life to the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., § 3, p.96.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., § 14, p.200.

<sup>32</sup> See Borkenau, F. (1981) *End and Beginning: On the Generations of Cultures and the Origins of the West*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 331-40; Dunn, M. (2000) *The Emergence of Monasticism*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 25-33

regulations governing his monasteries in Egypt. The layout of the monastery also included a gatehouse, a kitchen, an infirmary, a refectory and a common prayer hall. The monks cultivated their own crops and they produced handicrafts to supplement their income. They cared for the sick and fed the hungry of the surrounding area. The ascetic house rules regulating the day-to-day life of the monks were strictly enforced, such as chastity, silence at certain hours, the wearing of rough garments, sleeping sitting up, and eating only one meal a day.<sup>33</sup> The cenobitic or communal life proved so popular that the monks grew too large for the monastery at Tabennisi and a second one was opened at Pbow. More quickly followed and by the time Pachomius died in 346 he was ruling over nine monasteries for men and two for women.

Most of these monasteries were in the more desolate regions of upper Egypt in an area known as the 'Thebaid' and were in complete contrast to those semi-eremitical colonies that had mushroomed in lower Egypt, particularly around the area of Alexandria. Perhaps the greatest distinction between the semi-eremitical and Pachomian form of monasticism was their approach to ascetic exercises. While the semi-eremitical monks of lower Egypt had an almost Gnostic attitude in their quest for the most extreme types of asceticism the Pachomian form of Monasticism, practiced in upper Egypt, allowed a more 'lax' approach with regards to ascetic practices.<sup>34</sup>

After experiencing first hand the various monastic movements in Egypt, Palastine, Syria and Mesopotamia, St. Basil of Caesarea (c.330–c.379) also strongly favoured the cenobitic over the eremitic way of life.<sup>35</sup> He criticises the eremitical life for lacking the opportunity to practice charity and also impeding humility; community life he declares, on the other hand, 'offers more blessings than can be fully and easily enumerated', he goes on to say that 'it is an arena for combat, a good path of progress, continual discipline, and a practice of the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.333

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Dunn, M. (2000) *The Emergence of Monasticism*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p. 35.

Lord's commandments, when brethren dwell together in community'.<sup>36</sup> St. Basil wrote extensively on his form of monasticism, his most important work being the *Asceticon* that includes rules for his followers. These include: the age and qualifications of new members, dealing with those wishing to leave the brotherhood, dealing with disobedience, and rules on silence and laughter. Many of these rules still survive in the various monastic rules of today.

For Borkenau these rules and ascetic practices were mild when compared to the ones adopted by the earlier hermits and semi-hermits in the East who described themselves as 'God's athletes'.<sup>37</sup> Because of this less radical approach the Pachomian rule helped to heal the rift between the monks and the local clergy and thus, had a decisive influence on Western monasticism. When Athanasius, the biographer of St. Anthony, introduced this Pachomian form of Egyptian monasticism into Italy, in the middle of the fourth century, there remained a crucial difference between the Eastern and Western model. On the one hand Eastern monasticism had a long tradition of maintaining its autonomy and independence from the ordinary ecclesiastical hierarchy and regarded the local clergy and even other monks with the greatest of suspicion. In the West, from the beginning, no such division of spheres existed.<sup>38</sup>

## **The Rule of St. Augustine**

The oldest monastic rules with western origins remain the *Rule* of St Augustine.<sup>39</sup> Far from being an obsolete document from late antiquity it still 'provides daily inspiration for more than one hundred and fifty contemporary

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<sup>36</sup> Basil. *Reg. fus.*: 7, cited in Fry, T. (ed) (1981) *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> See Borkenau, F. (1981) *End and Beginning: On the Generations of Cultures and the Origins of the West*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp.335-8.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> For the rule of St Augustine in Latin and English see Lawless, G. ([1987] 1991) *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Christian communities'.<sup>40</sup> Augustine, as was described earlier (p.82), first heard of the Monastic life from Pontician whom he met in Milan in the summer of 386. Prior to this he had pursued a philosophical career at Carthage, dabbled in the Persian cult of Manicheism, and gained a professorship of rhetoric at the imperial court at Milan. Having been deeply impressed by the narrative of Pontician he decided to give up his academic position to serve the Lord<sup>41</sup>, and retired for the winter to the nearby country villa of Cassiciacum. His family and friends accompanied him to Cassiciacum, together with a couple of paying students and the days were spent in philosophical and literary debate and study.<sup>42</sup>

In the spring of 387, Augustine returned to Milan where he was baptized by bishop Ambrose. Sometime later, in the Autumn of 387, Augustine and his friends decided to return to Thagaste and live in Christian retirement praying and studying scripture; however because of political and military disorder he was stranded in Rome for almost a year. While awaiting transport Augustine took a great interest in the Roman monasteries<sup>43</sup> and this is reflected in the anti-Manichaeian treatise he composed there.

In *The Ways of the Catholic Church and the Manichaeans*, Augustine indicates the most salient features of a monastery that would, some ten years later, be moulded into the *Rule*, which he would compose at Hippo. Some of the insights he makes in *The Ways*...are the perception of eastern monks as 'completely happy in their contemplation of (God's) beauty'; he omits the use of the word 'monk' in favour of 'holy men', 'brothers' and 'people who serve God'.<sup>44</sup> The regimen of the monastery is referred to as 'ordo, institutum, mores'.<sup>45</sup> Many of the elements that Augustine would adopt in his *Rule* are here aired for the first time; shared possessions, chastity, fasting, diet, clothing, prayer

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. xii

<sup>41</sup> See Augustine (1955) *Confessions*, edited by A.C. Outler, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, IX, v, 13.

<sup>42</sup> See Lawless, G. ([1987] 1991) *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, Oxford: Clarendon Press pp. 29-37.

<sup>43</sup> See Brown, P. (1967) *Augustine of Hippo* London: Faber and Faber, p.136

<sup>44</sup> *De moribus ecclesiae Catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* 1.31.66 cited in Lawless, G. ([1987] 1991) *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, Oxford: Clarendon Press p.40.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1.31.68.

and reading of scripture are all mentioned in the treatise.<sup>46</sup> By the late summer of the following year (388) the group had set sail for Thagaste where Augustine would put his theories on monastic life into practice. Although there is some scholarly debate on whether the retreat at Thagaste was in fact a monastery the body of evidence weighted in its favour, seems impressive.<sup>47</sup>

Borrowing from his first hand observations of monastic life at Rome and Milan, Augustine adapts these observations to fit his own personal circumstance and those of the lay community at Thagaste. Here communal life was characterised by enforced poverty, fasting, fraternity, prayer, dialogue, the reading of Scriptures (*lectio diuina*), and work of an intellectual nature.<sup>48</sup> Some three years later, on a visit to nearby Hippo, Augustine, somewhat reluctantly, was ordained a priest by Bishop Valerius. In order that his life as a monk could continue he was granted some church property at Hippo where he quickly established a second monastery. It was for the monastery at Hippo that Augustine composed his *Rule* or *Regula ad servos Dei*. The essence of Augustine's ideal are captured in the initial precepts of the *Rule*:

Here are the rules we lay down for your observance, once you have been admitted to the monastery.

The chief motivation for your sharing life together is to live harmoniously in the house and to have one heart and one soul seeking God.

Do not call anything your own; possess everything in common. Your superior ought to provide each of you with food and clothing, not on an equal basis to all, because all do not enjoy the same health, but to each one in proportion to his need. For you read in the Acts of the Apostles: 'They possessed everything in common', and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 1.31.67; 1.33. 71-3.

<sup>47</sup> See Brown, P. (1967) *Augustine of Hippo* London: Faber pp. 135-6, Lawless, G. ([1987]1991) *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, Oxford: Clarendon Press pp. 46-8; van der Meer, F. (1961) *Augustine the Bishop* New York: Harper & Row, p. 208

<sup>48</sup> Lawless, G. ([1987]1991) *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 48

‘Distribution was made to each in proportion to each one’s need.’<sup>49</sup>

The remainder of the Rule is but the practical application of this ideal of ‘apostolic life’.<sup>50</sup> What is also evident is that Augustine’s source for this apostolic ideal comes from his oft quoted section of the verse from Acts 4: 32: ‘one mind and one heart’. For Augustine this brotherly single-mindedness allows the brothers at Hippo to be considered ‘monks’ in the true sense:

Since the Psalm says, “behold how good and how pleasant it is that brothers should dwell together in unity,” why then should we not call monks by this name? For monos is ‘one.’ Not one in just any way, for an individual in a crowd is ‘one,’ but, though he can be called one when he is with others, he cannot be monos, that is ‘alone,’ for monos means ‘one alone.’ Hence those who live together so as to form one person, so that they really possess, as the Scripture says, “one mind and one heart,” who have many bodies but not many minds, many bodies but not many hearts, can properly be called monos, that is, ‘one alone’<sup>51</sup>

Because of the significance of Augustine’s Rule to the conversion of Margaret Ebner it was important to dwell on its construction and background at some length, however, the subsequent monastic history will now be condensed for brevity.

The reputation of Augustine’s *Rules* spread and monastic life flourished in the years up to and after his death. This influence was so tangible in both Gaul and

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 81

<sup>50</sup> Fry, T. (ed) (1981) *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, p. 62.

<sup>51</sup> Aug. *Commentary on Psalm 132, 6* cited in Fry, T. (ed) (1981) *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, p. 62; Lawless, G. ([1987]1991) *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 158.

Italy that it was spoken of as an ‘Augustinian invasion’,<sup>52</sup> but, perhaps, its greatest influence was on the Rule of St. Benedict that in turn would have immense effect on western monasticism.

### **The Rule of St Benedict**

After acquainting himself with the lives of the desert monks and with the writings of Pachomius, St Basil and St Augustine, Benedict of Nursia wrote his famous Rule for monastic life. The Rule of St Benedict was written for his monastery at Montecassino, Italy about ten or fifteen years before the saint’s death in 543.<sup>53</sup> The little we know about the early diffusion of the Rule comes from St Gregory the Great’s *Life of St Benedict* written around 593/4. St Gregory praises the Rule in the *Dialogues* and probably introduced it into the monastery of St Andrew on the Coelian hill in Rome and also the monasteries he founded in Sicily.<sup>54</sup> In the seventh and eight centuries the spread of Benedict’s Rule continued steadily throughout Italy into Gaul and across to England. These Anglo-Saxon monks continued the missionary tradition and spread the Rule of St Benedict throughout the monasteries of the Low Countries, of particular importance was the reform of the Frankish Church in Germany under the guidance of St Boniface. Armed with the blessing of the Holy See and the Carolingian monarchy, Boniface and his disciples set about converting the remaining heathen tribes and replacing the Columban form of monasticism with the more Roman friendly *Rule of St Benedict*.<sup>55</sup>

Successors of Boniface continued with the rapid spread of Benedictinism carrying it as far as Scandinavia and Hungary, it seems one of the few countries where its influence was slight was Ireland where the Rule of Columban prevailed. By the beginning of the ninth century the Benedictine form of

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<sup>52</sup> Fry, T. (ed) (1981) *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, p. 64

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114

<sup>54</sup> Herbermann *et al* (1907-12) *Catholic Encyclopedia* vol. X London: Caxton, p.474.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid* also see Fry, T. (ed) (1981) *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, pp. 118-20.

monasticism had become the norm throughout the West as the result of policies pursued by Charlemagne (768-814). Using the monasteries as models to Christianise and unite the Roman and German people Charlemagne recognized the importance of the *Roman rule* of St Benedict and set about securing an absolute uniformity of all the monasteries in the empire. However, he died before completing this scheme and it was left to his son Louis the Pious, with the help of St Benedict of Aniane (750-821), to take the decisive step.

Louis built a Royal monastery near his imperial palace at Aachen, and there Benedict ruled over a community of some thirty monks. This monastery was to be a model for all the religious houses of the empire and with this in mind, Benedict drew up series of resolutions that were passed at a synod of abbots held in Aachen in 817. These resolutions, or what would nowadays be called ‘constitutions’, were meant to supplement the Rule of St Benedict in order to regulate and standardise the lesser details of everyday monastic life. However after the death of Benedict of Aniane the great project, to reform the Benedictine monasteries, never reached fruition and the period known as the ‘Benedictine centuries’ went through various periods of decline until the rise of Cluny in the tenth century.

## **The Rise of Cluny**

Centralization and uniformity were the essential characteristics of the Cluniac system. Prior to this each monastery was autonomous under the stewardship of its own leader. The ideal of Cluny, however, was to set up a monastic empire with one great central monastery and a vast amount of dependant houses spread over many lands ruled by the Abbot of Cluny. For almost two centuries the Cluniacs grew into a powerful force within the Church and dominated the reforms taking place there.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless by the eleventh and twelfth centuries a reaction to Cluny and the system of centralization was developing.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.126.



The Cluniacs who tended to recruit from the nobility became very prosperous in time but had not changed with the profound societal changes going on around them. Because of this there developed a widespread and fervent desire for a more simple and solitary life, less political and economical – in short a type of monastic fundamentalism. The movement that emerged spontaneously around Europe, as a reaction against Cluny, produced a wave of new ‘orders’ and observances alongside the established monasteries.<sup>57</sup> The most important being the Carthusians and the Cistercians; the Carthusians were founded by St Bruno in 1084, at the Grand Chartreuse near Grenoble and their observations stressed poverty, penance, silence, and manual work. The Cistercians, perhaps the greatest of the monastic reform movements of the Middle Ages, derived their name from Citeaux near Dijon where Robert of Molesmes founded the Order in 1098. The Cistercians were known as the ‘White Monks’ and their most famous and charismatic leader St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) launched a surge of vocations in the twelfth century that ‘filled all Europe with Cistercian abbeys, from Scandinavia to the Balkans and from Ireland to the Holy Land’<sup>58</sup>

### **The Rise of The Canons and The Friars**

While the impetus of the Carthusians and the Cistercians helped to rejuvenate the stagnated Benedictine monasteries of Europe a new variation of the monastic ideal was created by the Augustinian and Premonstatensian canons of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Both groups of canons followed the Rule of St Augustine rather than the Benedictine Rule and both orders lived in communities rather than in isolation. The final great monastic movement of the Middle Ages was that of the mendicant friars the two most notable being the Franciscans and the Dominicans.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 127-8.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

The Franciscans were founded by St Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), the son of a wealthy merchant, who renounced his wealth to embrace a life of poverty. The second main group of mendicant friars that arose during the thirteenth century was the Dominicans founded by St Dominic (c1170-1221), who began monastic life as an Augustinian and devoted most of his life preaching against, and trying to convert, heretics. However, this was not the only focus of the Dominicans as the need for teaching and educating the believers was also a major objective. While both the Franciscans and the Dominicans attempted to imitate the life of the apostles the former did it primarily through the imitation of poverty while the latter did it mainly through the imitation of preaching. In 1216 the Dominicans, or the Order of Preachers as they were then known, were given Papal confirmation and quickly spread throughout the urban areas of Europe. However, what is of importance to this thesis is the legislative texts connected to the Order and especially to the Second Order otherwise known as the Dominican Sisters.

In 1205, Dominic founded the Monastery of Prouille, in the Diocese of Toulouse, to accommodate the women he had converted from heresy. He adopted the Rule of St Augustine to regulate the life of the Sisters and when subsequent monasteries were founded by Dominic it was Augustine's Rule that prevailed. Thus in 1216, when Innocent III authorized Dominic to choose a rule, with a view to Papal approbation, he adopted the Rule of St Augustine together with the 'Consuetudines' to regulate the ascetical and canonical life of the brethren.<sup>59</sup> At Bologna, in May 1220, the first general chapter of the Order assembled and drew up a new set of Constitutions to supplement the *Rule*, the main change was the relinquishing of all possessions and revenues by adopting the practice of strict poverty. It was also established that the assembly of the annual general chapter was to be the regulative power of the order, and the source of legal authority.

By this time (1220) there were three monasteries of Sisters under the jurisdiction of the Order: Prouille, Madrid, and St Sixtus of Rome, these orders

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<sup>59</sup> Herbermann *et al* (1907-12) *Catholic Encyclopedia* vol. II London: Caxton pp. 354 -355

‘borrowed’ from the new Constitutions whatever might be adapted to a monastery of Sisters. However, when the great canonist Raymond of Pennaforte became master general of the Order in 1239 he set about reorganising the Constitution of the Preachers. The general chapters from 1239 to 1241 accepted and legalised the new constitution and this has remained, with some modification, the official text up to the present time.<sup>60</sup>

This in turn called for a corresponding reorganisation of the Rule of the Dominican Sisters and, in 1257, Pope Alexander IV nominated Humbert of the Romans, the fifth master general, to restructure and rewrite the Constitutions of the Sisters. Humbert remodelled the Sisters Constitutions on the lines of the Constitutions of the Brothers. The general chapter of Valenciennes, in 1259, accepted the new text and gave it the force of law. It was into just such a Dominican order that Margaret Ebner was accepted around the year 1305. What must be remembered is that access to theological study was denied to women in cloisters and therefore their spiritual needs had to be met by a different path than the scholarly one available to their male counterparts. In the monasteries of medieval Europe the means to spiritual growth, especially for women, was to direct them toward the ‘inner journey of the self’.<sup>61</sup>

## **Liminal Conditions**

This thesis identifies and investigates two highly liminal conditions inherent in the dynamics surrounding the conversion of Margaret Ebner. The first is the almost perpetual illness endured by Margaret throughout her life. Illness was one of the few routes for females to experience the suffering and pain that was a hallmark of the medieval mystics and their recognition and desire of such suffering through the ritualised patterning of *imitatio Christi*. While their male counterparts could experience and endure this suffering through external attacks

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> For more on this see Kaelber, L. (1998) *Schools of Asceticism: Ideology and Organization in Medieval Religious Communities*, Pennsylvania: State University Press, pp. 89-93.

– ‘demons, slander of their reputation, temptations by women and the devil’ – women were restricted to endure suffering mainly through illness.<sup>62</sup> The second liminal condition identified by this thesis is the monastic setting where the paradox of institutionalised conversion is embodied. In this setting all external actions are conducted with the express purpose of bringing about interior conversion. These actions can range from the mundane – the cutting of hair, dietary requirements etc. – to the more spiritual – such as singing, reading and the observance of silence. The monastery was the ideal setting where a continuous process of transition and transformation could take place and is best described as a condition of ‘permanent liminality’.<sup>63</sup>

### *Imitatio Christi*

To imitate a religious exemplar is not a practice confined to the Christian religion as it is found in all major world religions.<sup>64</sup> Within the history of Christianity the lives of many holy figures have been imitated in order to achieve salvation, an example of this mimetic behaviour has already been highlighted in the analysis of the desert monks, such as Anthony, who attracted enough followers that they colonised the desert. By the time of the medieval period the imitation of the most exemplary Christian figures, such as *imitatio Mariae* and *imitatio Christi*, had become widespread and almost contagious.<sup>65</sup> One of the most widely sold and distributed books (excluding the Bible) in the history of Western Christianity is the fifteenth century treatise by Thomas à Kempis *Imitatio Christi* or *The Imitation of Christ*.<sup>66</sup> The central theme of this treatise is the search for inner

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<sup>62</sup> For more on the relationship between the female mystic and illness see Garber, L R (2003) *Feminine Figurae*, London: Routledge, pp.93-96.

<sup>63</sup> For the ‘institutionalisation of liminality’ see Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp.106-8; for an analysis of ‘permanent liminality’ see Szakolczai, A. (2000) *Reflexive Historical Sociology*. London: Rutledge, pp. 215-26.

<sup>64</sup> See Hale, R. D. (1999) ‘Rocking the Cradle: Margaret Ebner (Be)Holds the Divine’. In M. Suydam and J. Zeigler (eds) *Performance and Transformation: New Approaches to Late Medieval Spiritually*, New York: St. Martins Press, p.216

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. For a detailed analysis of the contagion inherent in mimetic behaviour see Girard, R. (1979) ‘Mimesis and Violence: Perspectives in Cultural Criticism’. *Berkshire Review* 14: 9–19.

<sup>66</sup> See van Engen, J. (1988) *Devotia Moderna: Basic Writings*, New York: Paulist Press, p.8.

peace brought about by the denial of one's own self and the willing acceptance of suffering as a means to salvation. 'If you carry your cross willingly', the treatise claims, 'it will carry you and bring you to the goal for which you long. There, as you know, suffering will come to an end'.<sup>67</sup>

For Margaret, as for other pious women of the Middle Ages, conversion was seen as a gradual process whereby the final state of grace would be characterised by this full imitation of Christ and the means to achieve this spiritual union lay through suffering in imitation of Christ's Passion. Any other form of spirituality was incomprehensible; in January 1346 she wrote 'When I heard about someone who led a great and perfect life, but did not follow the way of sufferings of our Lord, I could not understand it'.<sup>68</sup>

Suffering, as a means to redemption was a common belief among the mystics of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Meister Eckhart stresses its nobility; 'If there were anything nobler than suffering, then God would have redeemed man by means of that'.<sup>69</sup> Likewise Henry Suso in his 'Little Book of Eternal Wisdom', of which Margaret would have been familiar, saw suffering in Christ's afflictions as the true path to eternal happiness:

No one can arrive at divine heights or taste mystical sweetness without passing through my human bitterness. The higher anyone climbs without passing through my humanity, the deeper will be his fall. Anyone who wishes to attain what you are seeking must tread the road of my humanity and pass through the gate of my suffering.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> See Thomas à Kempis (1960) *Imitation of Christ*, tr. R. Knox and M Oakley, London: Burns and Oates, II, 12, 5. p.91.

<sup>68</sup> MEMW p. 107.

<sup>69</sup> Cited in Gieraths, G. M. (1986) 'Life in Abundance: Meister Eckhart & the German Mystics of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century'. *Spirituality Today* 38: 20.

<sup>70</sup> Suso cited in Gieraths, G. M. (1986) 'Life in Abundance: Meister Eckhart & the German Mystics of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century'. *Spirituality Today*, 38: 13.

Another noted contemporary German mystic and ‘Friend of God’ was John Tauler who preached of the benefit of suffering:

God’s true friends take refuge in Him and accept all sorrow freely for His sake, thus suffering with Him and in Him. Or they lose themselves in Him in such a loving union that suffering ceases to be felt as such and turns into joy.<sup>71</sup>

The illnesses and suffering that Margaret underwent are comparable to the ‘ordeals and humiliations’ experienced by neophytes during the liminal stage of rites of passage. Pain and suffering are recognised in many initiation rites as a ‘pedagogical means’ to undermine the foundations of personality in preparation for the new identity.<sup>72</sup> For Turner these ordeals of suffering represent on the one hand the destruction of the neophytes previous social status and on the other hand a tempering of their spirit to prepare them for their new responsibilities.<sup>73</sup> Thus, through suffering, Margaret was drawing a line between her former unreflective life and preparing for her future mystical life and its culmination in mystical union with Christ and the Godhead. The symptoms of Margaret’s suffering can also be compared to the ritualised ordeals experienced by the neophytes.

Throughout the Revelations the suffering that Margaret underwent is described in great detail and the imitation of Christ in his passion was central to her devotional life. She described various mystical experiences in response to Christ’s passion, among them were ‘binding silence’ (*gebundene swingen*), ‘uncontrollable speaking’ (*redden*), ‘loud outcries’ (*lute rufen*), and heartfelt pain as if from a ‘sharp arrow’ (*sagitta acuta*).<sup>74</sup> As her mystical experience progressed these symptoms seemed to grow more intense. The ‘binding silence’,

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<sup>71</sup> Tauler cited in MEMW p. 59.

<sup>72</sup> Walter Burkert cited in Morrison, Karl F. (1992) *Understanding Conversion* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia p. 67.

<sup>73</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 102-4

<sup>74</sup> MEMW pp. 60, 123, 150-2.

interpreted by Henry of Nördlingen as a grace bestowed by God, deepened over the years into more profound and longer periods and is comparable to the silence that is characteristic of the submissiveness of the neophyte.<sup>75</sup> Likewise the ‘uncontrollable speaking’, usually entailing the constant repetition of the name Jesus Christus, and the ‘loud outcries’ are comparable to the incantations uttered during ritualised procedures.

Margaret’s journey towards mystical union with Christ, by means of spiritual suffering, began with a desire to live like Christ and progressed to what she described as the exchange of hearts in February 1335. In this exchange her heart was taken with the ‘grasp of love’ (*minnegriff*) that symbolized the commencement of her mystical life.<sup>76</sup> Her mystical growth was marked by an increase and intensification of the manifestations mentioned above; the binding silence intensified, the uncontrollable speaking extended and the loud outcries increased until she became hoarse and unable to continue. While suffering and sickness played a major role in Margaret’s conversion she, nevertheless, frequently described great joy and happiness as a result of that suffering. In 1338 she describes contemplating on the sight of a crucifix and the pain she experienced from the image; yet through prayer this sorrow was turned ‘...to great joy in sweet grace...And so sorrow for my dear Lord Jesus Christ came to an end in joy which He brought about in me, His unworthy handmaiden’.<sup>77</sup>

In the following years, as described by Margaret, the severest suffering and pain occurred during the Lenten period and these periods were usually followed by periods of good health and joy. This cyclical pattern that imitated and conformed to the temporal suffering of Christ, seemed to offer to Margaret and her contemporaries a divine source for her illness. By 1344, in her desire for a deeper conversion through suffering and imitation, Margaret prayed that she might receive the stigmata like St Francis. ‘Then it was revealed to me with

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<sup>75</sup> For Henry’s interpretation of the ‘binding silence’ see MEMW p. 34 and for the liminal characteristic of silence see Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p.103.

<sup>76</sup> MEMW, p. 100

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 111

powerful loving delight that I was to share in every sort of suffering that God had endured because I had given my life over to Him at that time’<sup>78</sup> She received this news with ‘great joy’ perceiving it as another step in her conversion toward the goal of union with Christ.

The suffering that Margaret was undergoing reached a climax on Laetare Sunday in 1347 which she described as exceptional in relation to her previous suffering; ‘I was then given the greatest anguish I had ever suffered in all my life and I was drawn by strong love into the Holy Passion of my Lord Jesus Christ’.<sup>79</sup> In the ensuing weeks Margaret was again afflicted with the usual mystical phenomena but this time with an intensity that was unequalled. For five months the binding silence, the loud outcries, the uncontrolled speaking and the *sagitta acuta* increased in intensity before culminating, on the 27 July 1347, in the highest level of union with Christ – bridal mysticism.

Then the greatest grace overcame me and I knew not how it would end...also, in true love it was granted me to yearn for many great, mysterious desires. Then I was answered, ‘I have given myself to you and will never withdraw myself from you. It is I alone, the true God who should possess your heart. All your delight is in me and all my delight is in your soul and in your heart. You are my love as I am your love. You do not understand that it is my pure love from which all this comes to you. Suffer me for the sake of my love, because I cannot do without your acceptance of it. It is I alone, the pure Truth, who lives in you and works through you, and I have surrounded you with my mercy. Rejoice that the true God lives in you and that my goodness will never forsake you in time or in eternity. I am your sweet delight on earth and you are my joy in heaven.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 63

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 150



Compelled by my very great love I have chosen you for myself in order to accomplish in you yet more for my eternal honour here and hereafter. It is I alone, your Lord and your God and your only Love, who accomplish great things in you.’ These words and still others that are similar to them were given to me with sweet power, and a sweet fragrance arose from within me, and from this I received wondrous joy.<sup>80</sup>

The following year, 1348, the same cycle again occurred with the mystical phenomena appearing during the Lenten period followed by a period of pure joy. This is the final year of the Revelations. Even though Margaret lived on until the 20 June 1351, no information survives concerning the intervening years, but it is speculated that Margaret having transcended the suffering and pain of this world was merely awaiting the arrival of her Beloved.<sup>81</sup>

### **The Monastic Setting as a Site of Permanent Liminality**

The monastery of Maria Medingen was founded in 1246 and by a papal bull of the same year was placed under the care of the provincial of the German province of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans). By coming under the care of the Dominicans the monastery thus adopted the rule of St Augustine to regulate the lives of the sisters and in 1259 Humbert of the Romans, Master of the Order of Friars Preachers, imposed a modified ‘Constitutions of the Sisters of the Order of Friars Preachers’ to supplement the ‘Rule of the Dominican Sisters’. From the beginning, Humbert was explicit in his objective of linking the monastic setting with an inner conversion, he thus explains in the first paragraph that:

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.161

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 64

Since by the precept of the Rule the Sisters are commanded to have one heart and one mind in the Lord, it is fitting that since they live under the same Rule and under the vow of one profession, they should be uniform in the observance of the same Constitutions: for uniformity observed outwardly in our manners fosters and brings to mind that unity which ought to be preserved inwardly in our hearts.<sup>82</sup>

The monastic life as regulated by the Constitutions should thus bring about a transformation in the individual nun along the lines of a conversion type experience. Victor Turner<sup>83</sup> compares the self discipline and ascetic lifestyle of the monk (or nun) with that of the neophyte undergoing the liminal stage of a rite of passage. The parallels between the neophyte and Margaret Ebner's novitiate are also striking. During the boys' circumcision rites, or Mukanda, the boys are 'stripped' of their mundane clothing and pass beneath a symbolic gateway; they discard their former names and are assigned a common designation and treated alike. A senior instructor is assigned to the boys and becomes a father figure to the group as a whole, his title is 'Mfumwa tubwiku', which literally means, 'husband of the novices', emphasising the submissive role of the neophytes. They become 'liminal entities' and as such they behave in a passive and humble manner:

...they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The 'Constitutions' are found in the 'Early Documents of the Dominican Sisters, Vol. 2 (1969) Summit: New Jersey. The 'Constitutions' range from Chapter I to Chapter XXXI and will henceforth be cited as Const.I, or Const. XXXI etc.

<sup>83</sup> Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 107-8

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

Admission to the sisterhood, likewise, is rich in liminal symbols, the novice must:

...prostate herself in the midst of the community...Then, taking off her secular dress, she is clothed with the religious habit, and she is received into the community of the Sisters in Chapter.<sup>85</sup>

The senior instructor is represented by the Novice Mistress appointed by the Prioress who will be:

...diligent in the instruction of the novices. She will teach them about everything concerning the Order, and she will be careful to correct them by word or sign in the church and everywhere else whenever they are negligent.<sup>86</sup>

Just as in the Ndembu rites of passage obedience plays a significant part in the lives of the novice nuns who will be required '...to renounce their own will for the will of the superior, and in all things to render a willing obedience'.<sup>87</sup> The acceptance of arbitrary punishments is again a common feature of the liminal phase of rites of passage<sup>88</sup> and Chapters XVII, XVIII, XIX, and XX of the Constitutions is taken up with the various punishments meted out for transgressions ranging from light to most grave faults. Thus the idea of conversion as a permanent condition of transition is institutionalised in the monastic orders of the medieval period.

The institutionalisation of liminality occurs when the transitory or liminal phase of a rite of passage becomes a permanent condition. Nowhere has this

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<sup>85</sup> Const. XVI

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., XV

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 95

state been more clearly defined, for Turner, than in the ‘monastic and mendicant states in the great world religions’.<sup>89</sup> Thus the way Ebner understood her conversion, not as an immediate ‘Damascus Road’ type of experience, but rather as a lifelong process, which ‘although initiated by some deep insight, nevertheless called for acquiescence of the will at every turn in the spiritual life’,<sup>90</sup> fits well with the permanency that Turner describes.

However, it was not only the initiation rites that were designed to foster an inner transformation, but also every aspect of monastic life, including its architecture, helped to provide the ideal setting conducive for interior conversion. Thus, what and when to eat, how to dress, the cutting and washing of hair, and the practice of bloodletting are all regulated and designed to eliminate the structures between self and community, between consciousness and culture in order to promote conversion. The use of identical dress, a habit, wimple, headdress and veil, helps to conceal the very characteristics that help to identify the individual.<sup>91</sup> A whole chapter of the Constitutions<sup>92</sup> is devoted to the design and architecture of the nuns monastery; high walls, locked doors, segregated seating in the church, choir screens, and the use of secure windows (grilles) to communicate with outsiders ensured the nuns were kept in isolation from outside influences and thus more likely to achieve Augustine’s ideal of ‘one mind and one heart’.

Again this fits with Turners concept of ‘liminality’ and ‘communitas’, the former indicates that for a change to occur the neophyte or novice must be separated from the original ‘social structure, from a set of cultural conditions or from both’, while the latter identifies the ‘generic human bond’ that results from such liminal conditions.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> See Hindsley, L. (1997) ‘Monastic Conversion: the case of Margaret Ebner’. In J. Muldoon (ed) *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, p 35.

<sup>91</sup> Garber, L R (2003) *Feminine Figurae*, London: Routledge, p.1

<sup>92</sup> Const.: XXVIII.

<sup>93</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp 94 -7.

Having established that Margaret Ebner's conversion experience was aided by the liminal conditions provided by the Monastery of Maria Medingen, through its adoption of the rule of St Augustine and the Constitutions, as imposed by Humbert of the Romans, it is now necessary to study the horizon for the background figure that guides the process. While the monastic setting, as outlined above, was a crucial element in Ebner's conversion to a deeper union with Christ it must be remembered that not all monastics achieve this Christian perfection. One of the influential factors generating the conversion experience, according to this theoretical framework, is Weber's 'charismatic figure'<sup>94</sup> who acts as the master of ceremonies for transformative experiences. The one figure in the background of Margaret Ebner that fulfils this role is Henry of Nördlingen.

### **Henry of Nördlingen as Master of Ceremonies**

The influence of the secular priest, Henry of Nördlingen on the development of Margaret's mysticism cannot be overstated. By the time Henry met Margaret for the first time on 29<sup>th</sup> October 1332, he was well established as spiritual adviser to several women's monasteries in the area including Maria Medingen where he was a 'frequent guest'.<sup>95</sup> Prior to their meeting, Margaret would complain in her writings that due to her long-suffering illness her fellow sisters had abandoned her to her fate, thus implying that because the source of her illness was indeterminate the possibility of diabolical roots could not be ruled out. The procedure of seeking an outside expert (usually a male cleric) to determine the possible extranatural causes of disease and illness (usually in females) was a well established monastic practice in medieval times.<sup>96</sup> The first meeting between Margaret and Henry occurred when Henry was summoned to Medingen and Margaret was asked to go and see him, she went 'reluctantly'. Nevertheless, as a

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<sup>94</sup> See *From Max Weber*, (1948) edited by H. Gerth and C.W. Mills, London: Routledge p.271; Szakolczai, A. (2003) *The Genesis of Modernity*, London: Routledge pp.15-16.

<sup>95</sup> Strauch cited in Garber, L R (2003) *Feminine Figurae*, London: Routledge. Also MEMW p. 27

<sup>96</sup> See Garber, L R (2003) *Feminine Figurae*, London: Routledge, pp. 114, 214-5 n. 5; Bynum, C. (1987) *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Berkeley: University of California Press p. 125, 195-6, 205.

result of this meeting her illness, her mysticism and her relationship with the other nuns all change markedly.

Following Henry's visit a notable change occurs in Margaret's illness, for the first time Ebner incorporates her suffering into the passion of Christ – imitatio Christi. Prior to this Margaret describes her illness as a gift bestowed by God which she suffered gladly for him; 'to suffer great illness for God', 'I was able to suffer all pain for God', 'I considered it [suffering] to be a true gift from God',<sup>97</sup> only now, after her meeting with Henry, does Margaret embrace her illness as a means of suffering 'with', as opposed to 'for', Christ.

Her identification with Christ's suffering is immediately highlighted directly after the fateful meeting with Henry; 'Especially at night I had no one. I did not like to disturb the other sisters, so I placed myself with my Lord Jesus Christ in the room to which He had first been led captive'.<sup>98</sup> This initial textual insertion of her illness into the model of imitatio Christi was a new departure for Margaret and would continue for the remainder of the Revelations. The importance of the meeting with Henry can further be gauged by the scant attention Margaret gives to her life in the monastery prior to Henry's visit.<sup>99</sup>

If her illness took on a new meaning for Margaret then the mystic path she traversed also changed after Henry's visit. The visions she experienced prior to her meeting with Henry generally involved the 'Poor Souls' or deceased nuns from her monastery,<sup>100</sup> now, however, her dreams took on a more intensive and complex metaphorical structure.<sup>101</sup> Scholars have consistently recognised the similarities between Margaret's mysticism and that of Mechthild of Magdeburg

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<sup>97</sup> MEMW pp. 85, 86, 92.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 95 (*italics added*).

<sup>99</sup> Margaret spent a total of 46 years in Medingen, 27 years prior to Henry's visit and 19 years after. However, less than ten per cent of her *Revelations* is devoted to the time prior to Henry's visit.

<sup>100</sup> See MEMW pp. 87-88.

<sup>101</sup> For an interpretation of these dreams see Garber, L R (2003) *Feminine Figurae*, London: Routledge, p 114-5.

(1210 –1297),<sup>102</sup> but what was not stressed is the relationship of Henry of Nördlingen to both of these female mystics. Although it is unlikely that Henry ever met Mechthild of Magdeburg what is certain is that he was a noted scholar on her works especially her masterpiece *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*.

An unusual feature of this work was its composition in Mechthilde's native tongue, Low German, rather than the more usual Latin and the translation into High German was undertaken by Henry of Nördlingen in 1344. He then sent the book to Margaret and 'especially recommended' it for her reading and this text provided the motif and linguistic influence for Margaret's 'Revelation' which she began to compose that very same year.<sup>103</sup> From the beginning the influence of *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* is evident in the 'Revelations', the phrase 'Friend of God' used exclusively by Margaret to describe Henry was a familiar term throughout Mechthild's text. The devotion that Margaret had to the wounds of Christ bears a strong similarity to Mechthild's interpretation and contemplation of wound imagery.<sup>104</sup>

Mechthild also identified four ways that the soul might be wounded so that it empathises with the wounded love of Christ and these were all prominent in the 'Revelations' of Margaret Ebner. Reception of the Eucharist, the kiss of the mouth, signifying the union of human and divine, *sagitta acuta*, and being pierced with the sword of Longinus are Mechthilde's experienced responses to the four wounds of Christ all of which are present in Margaret's 'Revelations'.<sup>105</sup>

It thus becomes clear that by guiding and influencing Margaret's experiences the charismatic Henry of Nördlingen acted as a true master of ceremonies in her conversion. Consequently, not only did the course of her illness and her mystical experiences change but the relationship between herself and the other nuns in the

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<sup>102</sup> See Sinka, M. (1985) 'Christological Mysticism in Mechthild von Magdeburg's "Das Fliessende Licht der Gottheit": A Journey of Wounds'. *The Germanic Review* 60: 124-5; MEMW pp. 28, 33, 46-7, 55, 61-2.

<sup>103</sup> MEMW p. 47

<sup>104</sup> See Sinka, M. (1985) 'Christological Mysticism in Mechthild von Magdeburg's "Das Fliessende Licht der Gottheit": A Journey of Wounds'. *The Germanic Review* 60: 124.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid also MEMW p. 62

convent also underwent a transformation as a result of Henry's intervention. Once Henry of Nördlingen had assured Ebner's fellow nuns, that Margaret's symptoms were the result of divine inspiration then a reciprocal positive response is initiated. Thus, when Henry associates Margaret's life with that of the contemporary female mystic, her monastic community, who she felt had initially abandoned her, now responded positively and this helped to reintegrate her back into the relationship of *communitas* as experienced by the novitiates.<sup>106</sup>

## **Background / Zeitgeist**

The main background areas identified by this thesis as being important in the conversion of Margaret Ebner is the emergence of an heretical mysticism in the fourteenth century and the development of an orthodox mysticism to counter this radicalism within the church. The main heresies of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries concerned such groups as the Cathars, the Waldensians and the Humiliati who tended to be located on the margins of the Catholic Church. However, by the time of the fourteenth century the groups being investigated included more mainstream Catholic groupings such as the Spiritual Franciscans, and the Béguine and Beghard movement. Of particular importance to this thesis are the Béguines, a loosely defined feminist religious movement that was liminally positioned between the monastic orders and the lay community. It was this unstructured, and therefore threatening, position that led the Béguine movement to be suspected of heretical inclinations.

## **Mystical Heresy in the Fourteenth Century**

The noted Swiss historian Charles de Sismondi described the fourteenth century as 'a bad time for humanity'.<sup>107</sup> It was a time of major upheaval in society,

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<sup>106</sup> For more on the positive response to Margaret following Henry's intervention see Garber, L. R. (2003) *Feminine Figurae*, London: Routledge, pp.109-17

<sup>107</sup> Cited in Tuchman, B. W. (1978) *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14<sup>th</sup> Century* London: MacMillan, p. xiv



mainly due to the Black Plague but also due to political instability, insurrection, schism in the Church, and natural disasters such as severe floods and famines as a result of the onset of what became known as the Little Ice Age. The political struggle between Pope John XXII and Louis the Bavarian, which was instrumental in the letter exchange between the exiled Henry and Margaret, had its roots in the German King's claim to the imperial crown. The papacy, for its part, understood the role of the emperor as defender of the church and the granting of the title was understood as a free act of the pope.<sup>108</sup>

Since the end of the Hohenstaufen dynasty in the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century and the disintegration of regional unity in Germany the German Kings had been locked in a constant struggle with the papacy. Thus when Louis the Bavarian, in 1324, exercised his right to rule without papal approval, John XXII declared the king removed from office and excommunicated him. Louis response was to accuse the pope of heresy with regard to his position on evangelical poverty.<sup>109</sup> Both sides remained deadlocked until 1327 when John XXII declared that Louis had forfeited all imperial fiefs including the duchy of Bavaria. In retaliation, Louis declared John XXII removed from office and had Nicholas V elected as anti-pope, which in turn was declared as invalid by the pope who simultaneously imposed an interdict on Germany. The result of this political struggle was to create a groundswell of nationalistic sentiment among the German populace and even in Margaret's convent the imposition of the interdict was left to the individual conscience.<sup>110</sup>

The pope's struggle with Louis was just one of many disputes that John XXII was involved in at that time. The political conditions in Italy were so unstable that John's predecessor Pope Clement V had refused to go to Rome and had instead chosen Avignon, south of Lyon, as the papal residence. Here Clement V meekly granted the King of France, Philip IV, the authority to eliminate the Knights Templars after confessions of heresy were extracted from them under

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<sup>108</sup> See MEMW : p.20

<sup>109</sup> In 1323 John XXII had taken decisive action against the Franciscans Spirituals and condemned as heresy the teaching that Jesus or the apostles either advocated or practiced poverty.

<sup>110</sup> See MEMW : pp.22-3

torture. Over seven years the Templars' Order in France, and all of its branches, were abolished, its property confiscated and many of the Knights were burned alive as heretics.<sup>111</sup>

Pope John XXII was a trenchant successor to the servile Clement and on issues of heresy his 'instinct' was to 'define and condemn' and to provide plenty of work for the inquisitors.<sup>112</sup> Thereafter charges of witchcraft, sorcery, and magic became a favoured method to eliminate an enemy and torture became the popular means of the Inquisition to identify heretics. Some of the movements that John XXII accused of heresy were the Apostolics, Dolcino's rebels, the fraticelli of Italy, the adherents of the Free Spirit in Germany, Silesia and Bohemia, and the Spiritual Franciscans of northern Italy.<sup>113</sup> It was the latter group that revealed how a popular heresy could emerge at the very heart of the Catholic Church and thus the Spiritual Franciscans were perceived as the 'enemy within'.<sup>114</sup>

The rift in the Franciscan movement had its roots in the twin objectives of the order; a severely harsh ascetic lifestyle combined with a significant degree of pastoral activity in the world. The pull to pastoral activity in the world, and the accruing privileged position within the Catholic Church, tended to mitigate and supplant the life of simplicity and poverty. From his deathbed Frances dictated a last Testament condemning the transformations taking place within the order that swapped poverty and simplicity for privilege.<sup>115</sup> The memory of the Testament was kept alive by a small group of fundamentalist Franciscans who became known as the 'Spirituals'.

After the election of Pope John XXII, in 1316, these 'Spiritual Franciscans', who had gained in number and popularity, now posed a threat to the materialist

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<sup>111</sup> See Russell, J. (1971) *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca: New York, pp. 194-200

<sup>112</sup> See Lambert, M. (2002) *Medieval Heresy*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p. 191

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p.232

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., pp.207-35

pontiff known as the ‘pope with the touch of Midas’.<sup>116</sup> A bull, *Quorumdam exigit*, was issued in an attempt to subject the ‘spirituals’ to the authoritarian definitions of poverty. Disobedience was considered synonymous with heresy as evinced by the obduracy of four friars burnt as heretics in Marseilles in May 1318.<sup>117</sup> With this sanctioning and regulation of the Franciscans by the Papal authority the Order began to lose much of its appeal as a primitive and extremely ascetic movement and its prestige declined accordingly. It was because of this curtailment that the heresy of the Free Spirit, held in check for the previous fifty years, again began to spread rapidly.<sup>118</sup> Consequently the Church again found itself confronted with autonomous ascetic groups formed from the ‘voluntary poor’.<sup>119</sup>

### **The Béguine Movement of Northern Europe**

One such group that emerged to challenge the materialistic pre-occupied Church was the Béguine mystical movement that appeared between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. This movement was a lay order for women who wished to dedicate their lives to God without entering a nunnery. The simplicity and lack of formal organisation met the needs of many medieval women who for socio-economic or moral reasons did not have access to the established orders. During the thirteenth century Béguines became very numerous in the Rhine valley and in Bavaria and were treated with suspicion by the established orders and the clergy alike.<sup>120</sup>

A further consequence of the emergence of lay orders was what Lambert calls the ‘democratization of the mystical way’<sup>121</sup> whereby access to direct communion with God, once the preserve of the monk or nun in an enclosed order, was now available to the pious layperson. This, in turn, was satisfying a growing trend for the reading of mystical experiences, made possible by the

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<sup>116</sup> See Tuchman, B. W. (1978) *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14<sup>th</sup> Century*, London: MacMillan, p.28

<sup>117</sup> See Lambert, M. (2002) *Medieval Heresy*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p.229

<sup>118</sup> Cohn, N. (1957) *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, London: Secker & Warburg, 164-7.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Lambert, M. (2002) *Medieval Heresy*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp.200-2.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

higher educational standards, the increased leisure time, and the growing affluence of the aristocratic and bourgeois classes. The Church was becoming concerned with the lack of control of this lay movement and, in 1307, the Béguines now deeply involved in the mystical movement were accused of harbouring a sect of heretical mystics, known as adherents of the *Free Spirit*.

One such mystic Marguerite Porete, who wrote *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, was arrested and charged with heretical mysticism, sent to Paris, interrogated and burnt as a heretic in 1310.<sup>122</sup> The mystical movement in general, and the Béguines in particular, continued to be treated with suspicion but were never fully suppressed. In fact, in 1318, John XXII came to the defence of the ‘good’ mystic who led a stable life and refrained from challenging high theological matters.<sup>123</sup>

It is clear from the above that spiritual or mystical experiences, whether within or outside of the established orders, were to be treated with suspicion until clarification as to their true nature could be determined. Conversely, within the orders, a certain stature surrounded the presence of a ‘good’ mystic among its inhabitants as this tended to attract patrons, novices and thus economic gains.<sup>124</sup> Consequently when Margaret Ebner’s illness began to take on a mystical manifestation a crisis, concerning its nature and direction, emerged. This crisis needed to be resolved satisfactorily to exclude the possibility of a malevolent or heretical source to her mystical experiences.

Having worked for a considerable time as spiritual advisor to many of the monasteries close to Medingen, Henry of Nördlingen was considered to be an ‘honestus vir’ of ‘magnae discretionis’<sup>125</sup> and thus professionally qualified to resolve the crisis. More importantly Henry was a member of the Friends of God

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<sup>122</sup> See Tuchman, B. W. (1978) *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14<sup>th</sup> Century*, London: MacMillan, p.317

<sup>123</sup> For more on this papal bull, *Racio recta*, see Lerner, R. (1972) *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, Notre Dam Ind.: University of Notre Dam, pp.48-9; Lambert, M. (2002) *Medieval Heresy*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 206-7.

<sup>124</sup> See Garber, L R (2003) *Feminine Figurae*, London: Routledge, p.28

<sup>125</sup> Strauch cited in MEMW p. 27

(*Gottesfreunde*) one of the few groups, outside of the established orders, tolerated by the Catholic Church. The reason for this toleration needs to be investigated a bit closer in order to understand the positive reception given to Ebner's *Revelations*.

## Friends of God

Originating in Germany and Switzerland in the early part of the fourteenth century the Friends of God took their name from certain passages from both the Old and the New Testament especially the episode from the gospel of John:

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down  
his life for his friends...[H]enceforth I call you not  
servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth:  
but I have called you friends. (Jn. 15: 13-15)<sup>126</sup>

These *Friends of God*, being the generation that followed the most famous German mystic, Meister Eckhart, had to tread warily to avoid heretical suspicion, as no mystic was immune from that charge in the later Middle Ages. While Eckhart himself attacked unauthorised mysticism it was not enough to save him from being indicted of heresy by John XXII. The bull *In agro Dominico*, issued in 1329, posthumously condemned twenty-eight articles from his works.<sup>127</sup>

According to Oehl,<sup>128</sup> this new generation of German mystics defined themselves as the *Friends of God* to show their solidarity and support for the

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<sup>126</sup> In the Old Testament (Psalm 139: 17) the term *Friend of God* is rendered from the Latin *amicus Dei* in all of the ancient texts. However, in modern translations of this verse, *amicus* is rendered as *thoughts* rather than *friends*. According to Hindsley (MEMW p. 74 n.65) this is the only instance in the O. T. where this root is rendered as *thoughts*.

<sup>127</sup> See Lerner, R. (1972) *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, Notre Dam Ind.:University of Notre Dam, pp. 182-6; Lambert, M. (2002) *Medieval Heresy*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p.206.

<sup>128</sup> W. Oehl, (1931) cited in MEMW p. 28.

Catholic Church. One of their leaders, John Tauler, was in no doubt as to where his allegiance lay, in a sermon to commemorate St Matthew he asserts that from the holy Church he has received:

my order, my cowl, this habit and my priesthood that I might become a teacher and might hear confessions. Now if it should come to pass that the Pope and the holy Church, from whom I have received them, should wish to take them away from me...I should let them go and I should not question why they did so...I should not remain any longer in the monastery with the brothers, nor be a priest, nor hear confessions, nor preach. But if anybody else wanted to take these things from me, I would rather die than allow them to be taken from me.<sup>129</sup>

Likewise Henry Suso's support for the Catholic Church is beyond question. A Dominican priest, Suso militantly attacked the heretical philosophy of the Free Spirits who, he claimed, believed that God was an obstacle for those who wished to attain the 'highest good'.<sup>130</sup> That Henry was as loyal to the Church as Tauler and Suso can be gleaned from his action in response to the law issued by Louis the Bavarian, in 1338, ordering the reinstatement of all sacraments in the cities under papal interdict. Rather than disobey the Church's interdict Henry choose to exile himself in Basel for the following ten years.<sup>131</sup>

This movement of orthodox mysticism ran parallel, but in opposition, to the radical form of mysticism associated with the Béguine and Beghard movement mentioned above. Also, at this time in Germany, as it was predominantly women who claimed mystical experiences then some form of theological interpretation was necessary to determine its origins. In the case of the

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<sup>129</sup> Tauler cited in Jones, R. (1939) *The Flowering of Mysticism*, New York: MacMillan

<sup>130</sup> Cited in Lerner, R. (1972) *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, Notre Dam Ind.: University of Notre Dam, p. 187

<sup>131</sup> This conflict between the Pope and Louis also resulted in the self-imposed exile of both Tauler and Suso.

‘unlearned nuns’ of the Dominican convents the Friends of God became the ‘spiritually experienced’ clerics that would provide the information.<sup>132</sup> Thus began a long association between these orthodox scholarly mystics – Eckhart, Suso, Tauler and Henry of Nördlingen among them – and the growing number of German Dominican nuns having mystical experiences, this relationship would help to transform the ‘spiritual and literary landscape of Europe’.<sup>133</sup>

With Henry’s total allegiance to the Church established we can now identify the twin logic behind his summons, in 1332, to Medingen to assess Margaret’s mystical experiences. First, the Church was in need of, what John XXII called, the ‘good’ mystic to counter the heretical mystics found among the Béguines and Beghards of Germany and second, the need of the monastery to establish the source of Margaret’s experiences and if divine then her life, in imitation of Christ, would provide an exemplary form for others to follow. The importance of having an authorised mystic in their midst is made clear when, in December 1345, Henry instructed Margaret to write of her experiences; it was the future prioress of Medingen, Elsbeth Scheppach, who was assigned to aid Margaret in the important task of compiling her *Revelations*.<sup>134</sup>

## Conclusion

For almost three decades (1305-1332) Margaret’s life in the monastery of Maria Medingen was uneventful save for her illness, isolation and despondency at her perceived abandonment by her fellow nuns. However as soon as Henry of Nördlingen announced a divine, rather than a diabolical, reason for her illness her suffering is inscribed into the imitation of Christ’s suffering in line with the

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<sup>132</sup> Ruh cited in Garber, L R (2003) *Feminine Figurae*, London: Routledge, pp.25, 177 n. 61, 62.

<sup>133</sup> See MEMW p. 5; Kaelber, L. (1998) *Schools of Asceticism: Ideology and Organization in Medieval Religious Communities*, Pennsylvania: State University Press, p. 90; for a link between mysticism and the ‘rational vocational asceticism’ that helped to shape Europe see Weber, M. (1958) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, tr. Talcott Parsons New York: Charles Scribner, p.86

<sup>134</sup> A short time later Scheppach was elevated to prioress at Medingen, for more on this see Garber, L R (2003) *Feminine Figurae*, London: Routledge, pp.27, 178 n.71

literary pattern common to female mystics of that era. The permanently liminal conditions present in the monastery ensured that the process of transformation would continue throughout her life. Thus, the conversion experience on entering the monastery becomes a rationalised and streamlined process affecting those who live within.

Nevertheless, monastery walls offers no defence to matters spiritual and the zeitgeist abroad in Germany in the fourteenth century seeped through the monastery walls and helped to influence, shape, and determine the direction of Margaret's conversion. But breaches in monastery walls work in both directions and within a couple of centuries the winds of change were blowing in the other direction. Thus during the Middle Ages the ideal of conversion, and other religious practices, which had hitherto been contained within the monastery, now, by the age of enlightenment, had breeched the monastery walls, '...strode into the market-place of life, slammed the door of the monastery behind it, and undertook to penetrate just that daily routine of life'.<sup>135</sup> The next case-study of the conversion process examines just such a secular transformation, the conversion of Karl Marx to Hegelianism.

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<sup>135</sup> Weber, M. (1958) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, tr. Talcott Parsons New York: Charles Scribner, p.154



## Interlude

The first two case-studies examined in this thesis, Augustine and Ebner, respectively looked at the merging of the Judaic religious and the Greek philosophical traditions and the institutionalisation of the conversion process within the monastic setting. The next two cases will examine non-religious types of conversion. It will be the contention of this thesis that the opportunity for conversion to ideology had a specific time-frame when the conditions for such experiences peaked – beginning sometime in the period from 1830 to 1840 and finishing exactly one century later. This contention is based on a hypothesis put forward by Michel Foucault in his lecture at the College De France on the 10 February 1982. In this lecture Foucault maintained that although ideological conversion was absent at the time of the French Revolution of 1798 it did become possible by locating this event as the ‘founding, historico-mythical’<sup>1</sup> experience in the following century.

However, according to Foucault, this type of conversion was ‘gradually validated, then absorbed, soaked up, and finally nullified by the existence of a revolutionary party’.<sup>2</sup> Thus, exactly one hundred years after ideological conversion, or what Foucault described as ‘conversion to the revolution’, became possible it was nullified by the emergence of the Soviet Communist Party. Subsequently Foucault progresses our understanding of conversion a stage further by claiming that with the end of this conversion to the revolution a new type of conversion appears – conversion to ‘renunciation of revolution’.<sup>3</sup> He believes that the contemporary position, with regards to non-religious conversion type experiences, is that the ‘great converts today are those who no longer believe in the revolution’.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M. Foucault (2005) *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College De France, 1981-82*, tr. G. Burchell, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.208

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.209

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The type of society needed to allow non-religious, or ideological, conversion to take place generally began to take shape during the European Enlightenment project and, more particularly, after the French Revolution at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Here the medieval world was subjected to a resolute critique because of its reliance on tradition and superstition. The main objectives of the enlightenment project were the emancipation of the individual and the rational organisation of society. These objectives were mainly to be achieved by the replacement of a religious perspective of the world with a scientific one. Inspired, in part, by Enlightenment ideas of individual freedom a wave of revolutions swept across Europe and the Americas. Advances in technology and manufacturing meant that simultaneous with these political revolutions an industrial revolution was also sweeping across the western world. Major industrial regions grew up around the coal and iron-fields of Europe and these regions attracted millions of workers from the villages creating a new class of urban labouring poor.

The most distinguishing feature of this new society was its propensity towards egalitarianism as a result of its inherent social mobility. This tendency towards equality, first identified by Tocqueville<sup>5</sup> as the principle of ‘equality of conditions’, whereby economic and social equality is progressive and inevitable has been the defining trend of modern societies. Social mobility thus arises as a consequence of the instability of the occupational structure. Because medieval society depended greatly on a rigid and complex hierarchical status-system, opportunities of social and occupational mobility in such a society will be severely curtailed. However, as society industrialises and modernises these rigid social structures are eroded and become redundant mainly as a result of the innovation required to cope with the ever-changing technological inventions. In such a fluid society ideologies, capable of shaping and controlling the individual, will inevitably appear.

Another characteristic of industrial society is its need for a literate workforce and consequently the idea of universal education is developed. Those ideals

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<sup>5</sup> See Tocqueville, A. de. (1994 [1835-40]) *Democracy in America* London: Fontana Press.

were encapsulated in the motto of the French Revolution – *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* – and they provide the basis for belief systems other than religion to take hold. According to Gellner<sup>6</sup> these characteristics of industrial society allowed ‘nationalism’ to develop, however it’s not only nationalism but also communism, liberalism and other ideologies that can become internal belief systems and as such allow ‘conversion’ type experiences to occur. Foucault concurs with this idea when he notes that from the nineteenth century the idea of conversion was introduced into ‘thought, practice, experience and political life in a spectacular and we can even say dramatic way.’<sup>7</sup>

What the above analysis suggests is that the rigid social structures, evident in medieval society, are eroded as a result of industrialization and the ensuing fluidity allow ideologies to appear that can, through a conversion type experience, replace other inner belief systems. Subsequently, according to Foucault, with the establishment of new structures such as the Communist Party this fluidity would eventually evaporate.

Keeping these ideas in mind a search was begun for two case-studies that would test not only the theoretical framework of this thesis but also supply an understanding of Foucault’s hypothesis. The final two case-studies, selected to fulfil the above requirements and to complete our analysis of conversion, are Karl Marx’s conversion to Hegelianism and Arthur Koestler’s conversion to anti-communism.

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<sup>6</sup> See Gellner, E. (1997) *Nationalism*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson pp. 25-30.

<sup>7</sup> See Foucault, M. (2005) *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College De France, 1981-82*, tr. G. Burchell, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.208.

## **Part III**

### **Two Modern Case-Studies**

## Chapter 5

### Karl Marx's Conversion to Hegelianism

The first two case-studies examined in this thesis, Augustine and Ebner, respectively looked at the merging of the Judaic religious tradition with the Greek philosophical tradition and the institutionalisation of the conversion process within the monastic setting. The particular case-study we now turn our attention to is the conversion of Karl Marx to Hegelianism and when the theoretical framework, as outlined in chapter two, is applied to this case our understanding of the dynamics involved in his conversion is enhanced. The majority of commentators see Marx's embracing of Hegelianism as a 'conversion' type experience and Marx himself, in the letter to his father, is in no doubt that this is what it was.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the conversion of Karl Marx to Hegelianism is justified as a focus of study for this thesis.

As with the other case-studies this section is divided into various sections. After a brief biography of Karl Marx the application of the theoretical framework will begin with a detailed analysis of the liminal conditions surrounding Marx's conversion. The next section will identify Eduard Gans as being the charismatic figure influential in guiding Marx toward a left-wing version of Hegelianism. Finally, the last section will deal with the background or *zeitgeist* abroad in Berlin at the time of Marx's conversion to Hegelianism.

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<sup>1</sup> See McLellan, D. (1973) *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought*, London: Macmillan, p.28 'Now he had to resolve his spiritual crisis by a conversion to Hegelianism – a conversion that was as profound as it was sudden'; Berlin, I. (1949[1939]) *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, London: Oxford University Press, p.67-8 'an exhaustive study of Hegel's work...announced his complete conversion'; and Marx in the letter to his father (see Marx, K. and Engels, F (1975) *Collected Works vol.1* Lawrence and Wishart: London, pp. 17-18) describes how a conversion type experience was needed to overcome his disillusionment with the metaphysics of law; 'A curtain had fallen, my holy of holies was rent asunder and new gods had to be installed'. The 'new gods' would come in the form of Hegelian philosophy.

## Biography of Karl Marx

Karl Marx, the second eldest of eight children, was born into a comfortable home in Trier, in the German Rhineland, in 1818. His father, born Herschel Levi, abandoned his Jewish heritage in favour of the rational enlightenment philosophy permeating Prussian society at that time. He changed his name to Heinrich Marx and in the year prior to Karl's birth adopted the Protestant religion in order to retain his job as a practicing lawyer. The young Marx attended the local High School, received a solid classical education and finished equal eighth in a class of thirty-two pupils.<sup>2</sup> He left the High School in Trier, in 1835, and enrolled as a student of Law in the University of Bonn where he wrote Byronic poetry, fought duels, incurred huge debts and, on at least one occasion, was arrested for 'disturbing the peace of the night with drunken noise'.<sup>3</sup> After one year in Bonn his father decided to transfer Karl to Berlin University where he studied law and philosophy for the next four and a half years. Before leaving Bonn Marx became engaged to Jenny von Westphalen, the daughter of a distinguished government official in Trier. Baron von Westphalen had some years previously befriended the young Marx and instilled in him a love of Romantic literature.

Marx is 'sobered' by the social and economic upheavals he finds in Berlin and the University becomes the focal point for much of the radical opposition towards the bureaucracy of the Prussian state. The romantic period that Marx was experiencing did not last long in the atmosphere of the university and he became a committed Hegelian despite his previous scorn for such a metaphysical system.<sup>4</sup> He became a member of the *Young Hegelians*, a group of radicals committed to attacking the orthodoxies of the day. In 1841 after obtaining his doctorate from the University of Jena, Marx, because of his radical outlook, was denied a university career and instead opted for journalism as a profession. In

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<sup>2</sup> See McLellan, D. (1973) *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought*, London: Macmillan, p. 10

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.17 and Berlin, I. (1949[1939]) *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, London: Oxford University Press, p.33

<sup>4</sup> As this transformation or conversion will be the focus of a detailed analysis later it is only necessary, at this point, to outline the experience in a succinct manner.

October 1842 he became editor of the influential *Rheinische Zeitung*, a radical journal supported by a group of liberal industrialists unhappy with the reactionary policies of the Berlin government. Less than six months after taking control the *Rheinische Zeitung* was shut down when the Prussian government ruled to suppress the liberal press.<sup>5</sup> With little hope of finding work in such a censored political climate Marx, together with his new wife Jenny von Westphalen, decided to emigrate to Paris.

In Paris Marx cemented his relationship with Friedrich Engels, the eldest son of a large family of wealthy industrialists, who would remain a lifelong friend and financial supporter of Marx. While in Paris Marx wrote detailed notes on classical economics, communism, and Hegel, and these notes, published in 1932 as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, were intended as a draft of a major work to follow. He also published articles attacking policies in Prussia and in particular the social reforms being proposed by the King of Prussia. Because of his Communist writings, and attacks on Prussia, Marx was expelled from Paris at the beginning of 1845 and moved to Brussels where he would remain for the next three years.

In the course of a short trip to London Marx became involved with the *Communist League* who commissioned him to write a document outlining their beliefs and aims. This work was published in early 1948 under the title of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* and it appeared at a time when Europe was experiencing increasing social unrest. When a wave of revolutions swept over Europe, in 1848-49, Marx first moved to Paris and then to Cologne to try and establish a base for Communist agitation. In Cologne Marx re-founded the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, a paper that supported a 'united front' of democratic forces against the autocracy of the Prussian state.<sup>6</sup> When the heroic phase of the revolutionary spirit had been subdued the conservative forces began to regain control and ordered the closure of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. Marx was expelled from the Rhineland and after a short sojourn in Paris finally emigrated

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<sup>5</sup> See McLellan, D. (1973) *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought*, London: Macmillan, pp. 44-62.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 199-201.

to London in May 1849 to begin, what would become, a ‘long and sleepless night of exile’.<sup>7</sup>

While in London the Marx family lived in abject poverty, their main source of income coming from Engels and also supplemented by a small stipend obtained from writing weekly articles for the *New York Daily Tribune*. Marx spent much of his time in London writing and studying in the library of the British Museum. In 1867 he published the first volume of *Capital* a monumental work that sought to analyse and expose the capitalist mode of production. He also played a leading role in organising the *International Working Men’s Association* popularly known as the *First International*. He resigned from the *International* in 1872 to concentrate on his writings especially two more volumes of *Capital*, which he worked on until his death; both volumes were published posthumously in 1885 and 1893 respectively. In 1881 Marx’s wife Jenny died after a long illness and in 1883 following a heavy bronchial attack Karl Marx died and was buried in Highgate Cemetery in London.

### **Liminal Conditions**

The liminal conditions experienced by Karl Marx in his conversion to Hegelianism will be the focus of this section. The status of Hegelianism will be examined in the first part. After the vacuum left by the death of Hegel it seems his philosophy was at a crossroads as to the direction it would take. The power struggle ensuing in Berlin University created two factions struggling to gain control over the direction of his ideology. The liberal faction would prove to be the most captivating for the eighteen year old Marx and their meetings outside the University would provide the ‘ideological communitas’ to structure this band into the Young Hegelians.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 226



The second part of this section will examine Marx's own account of his conversion and will analyse the liminal aspects contained in that account. Marx's account of his conversion will then be compared to a 'rite of passage' framework and the close similarities will be revealed. The generational tensions between the eighteen-year-old Marx and his father will be the focus of the final section. This transitional stage between childhood and adulthood is unsettling for the younger Marx, but it will be shown to be characteristic of the wider modernisation process taking place in Germany at that time.

## **Hegelianism**

When Marx arrived in Berlin University in the fall of 1836 the dominant intellectual influence, as indeed in almost all German universities at this time, was Hegelian philosophy. Georg W. F. Hegel, born in Stuttgart in 1770 was a German 'idealist' following in the tradition of Kant, Fichte and Schelling. His philosophy can be interpreted as a refutation of the views of materialists and empiricists, such as the 'common sense' philosophy of Hume and the rigid empiricism of John Locke. The counter-attack against rationalism was begun in Germany in 1781 with Kant's revolutionary work, the '*Critique of Pure Reason*'.<sup>8</sup>

Because we perceive the world through the structures of our minds, Kant maintained that we can never know 'things in themselves' only 'things as they seem'.<sup>9</sup> By this philosophy Kant revealed the role of the mind in the structuring of experience. For this reason Kant insists that philosophers must abandon all pretensions of 'a priori knowledge of things in general' and instead base all ontological claims on 'a mere analytic of pure understanding'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Kant, I. (1978 [1781]). *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. N. Kemp Smith, London: MacMillan Press.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 257-59.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.264

Nevertheless, objective knowledge does become possible by means of ‘transcendental deduction’ whereby the categories of thought provide an insight into the realm of objectivity. It is through this transcendental reasoning that experience becomes possible and nature as we experience it becomes subject to these categories of the mind. This insight frees the individual from the bonds of nature’s laws and allows the human mind the capacity to create and mould the individual’s experience.<sup>11</sup> Hence, one of the great accomplishments of the Kantians was the denial of the rigid empiricism and passionless materialism that dominated the ‘Enlightenment’.

Much of Hegel’s work attempts to move beyond Kant’s critical philosophy. Hegel’s philosophy does allow for the human mind playing a large role in structuring the existence of the individual but only through its opposition to the concrete world. In this way Hegel’s philosophical system of dialectic emerges whereby a category, being ‘the other of itself’, eventually drives through itself ‘into its opposite’. In this way determinations, which were previously perceived as merely opposed to one another, are, for Hegel, inextricably linked. The dialectical method involves the notion that movement, process, or progress, results from thought apprehending the ‘unity of the determinations in their opposition’.<sup>12</sup> This ‘speculative’ interpretation allows an ‘affirmative’ to emerge from the ‘dissolution’ or ‘transition’ of these oppositions, which in turn perpetuates the process.<sup>13</sup> This process has erroneously been conceptualised as the ‘thesis, antithesis, and synthesis’ model. In fact in all of Hegel’s work this ‘triad’ is never used.

Gustav Mueller has traced the origins of ‘thesis, antithesis, and synthesis’ to Heinrich Moritz Chalbäus, professor of philosophy at the University of Kiel who coined the phrase in the course of his lectures which were published, and became

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. pp.170-5

<sup>12</sup> See Hegel, G.W.F. (1998 [1830]) ‘Encyclopaedia Logic: Preliminary Conception’. In Houlgate, S. (ed) *The Hegel Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 168-173.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

quite popular, in 1837.<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that Karl Marx used the ‘triad’ in ‘The Poverty of Philosophy’ published in the mid 1840’s when he asks:

So what is this [Hegel’s] absolute method? The abstraction of movement. What is the abstraction of movement? Movement in abstract condition. What is movement in abstract condition? The purely logical formula of movement or the movement of pure reason. Wherein does the movement of pure reason consist? In posing itself, opposing itself, composing itself; in formulating itself as thesis, antithesis, synthesis: or, yet, in affirming itself, negating itself, and negating its negation.<sup>15</sup>

The use of this ‘triad’ suggests that Marx was familiar with the work of Chalbäus who published his famous book in 1837 the year Marx converted to Hegelianism. Mueller corroborates this suggestion when he informs us that the Young Hegelians discussed the ‘famous book’ at the time when Marx was a member of that club.<sup>16</sup> Because Marx interpreted the dialectical movement as the resolution of a struggle rather than as the ‘unity’ of the oppositions, it raises the possibility that it was a mis-reading, rather than a true reading, of Hegel that provided Marx with the impetus to convert to Hegelianism.

Returning to Hegel’s dialectical approach we find in it the basis for his ‘social idealism’ insofar as he treated all human actions in such a dialectical manner. He then transferred the concept, whereby human action unfolds and reveals the true nature of a person, to the case of entire cultures and nations.<sup>17</sup> Hegel’s

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<sup>14</sup> See Mueller, G. E. (1958) ‘The Hegel Legend of “Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis”’. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 19: 411-4.

<sup>15</sup> See Marx, K. (1900[1847]) *The Poverty of Philosophy*, London: Twentieth Century Press, p. 91.

<sup>16</sup> See Mueller, G. E. (1958) ‘The Hegel Legend of “Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis”’. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 19: 414.

<sup>17</sup> See the Preface to Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’. In S. Houlgate (ed) *The Hegel Reader*, (1998) Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp.325-39; Berlin, I. (1949[1939]) *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, London: Oxford University Press, p.51.

application of the dialectic to the concept of ‘conflict of cultures’ stimulated historical analysis and in the political arena made him a hero for those working for a unified Germany. These new methods of research and interpretation produced a startling and almost ‘intoxicating effect’ on enlightened German society and helped bring to an end a long and sterile period of German history.<sup>18</sup>

Hegelianism became the official dogma of everyone with intellectual pretensions, the new ideas were seized enthusiastically and applied in every facet of life and thought. Academic studies were totally transformed and ‘Hegelian logic, Hegelian jurisprudence, Hegelian ethics and aesthetics, Hegelian theology, Hegelian philology, Hegelian historiography, surrounded the student of humanities wherever he turned’.<sup>19</sup> It would appear that a consensus existed whereby Hegelian philosophy could be employed to explain and interpret almost any phenomena and this consensus would last up to and beyond the death of this great philosopher in 1831.

In the years following Hegel's death his school was united and supreme in the universities of Germany.<sup>20</sup> However, by the mid 1830's it had begun to split into two wings on the subject of religion. Both camps, the old and the new Hegelians, based themselves on their founder's famous dictum according to which ‘the real is the rational and the rational is the real’.<sup>21</sup> The conservative wing of the school held to the first part of the dictum, proclaiming that the real was rational, while the radicals or, as they later came to be called, the Young Hegelians, stressed the converse, protesting that only the rational was real.

Citing Hegel's idea of the dialectic the radicals reminded their rivals that progress resulted from the tension inherent in opposing forces. This tension grew to a crisis that sometimes resolved itself in an open revolution that brought about the next stage of development. The duty of all philosophers was, therefore,

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<sup>18</sup> See Berlin, I. (1949[1939]) *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, London: Oxford University Press, p.56.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> McLellan, D. (1973) *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought*, London: Macmillan, p.31.

<sup>21</sup> Berlin, I. (1949[1939]) *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, London: Oxford University Press, p.62.

to promote such revolution by awakening the masses through ‘intellectual warfare’.<sup>22</sup> The Prussian authorities attempted to censure such subversive activity and even brought the aged Schelling, Hegel’s main opponent, to Berlin in an effort to refute the Young Hegelian doctrine.

The State’s attempt at censorship only served to further marginalize the proponents of the Hegelian left into a small but committed group of radicals. In Berlin, particularly in the University surrounds, this committed group organised themselves into a graduate association known as the ‘Doctor’s Club’ and met frequently for debates and fraternal drinking sessions. It was mainly composed of young radicals ‘betwixt and between’ the student and academic structures and as such an arena where, what Turner calls, ‘ideological communitas’ could take place.<sup>23</sup> The University of Berlin was the prime locale of this liminal group and it was here in the autumn of 1836 that the eighteen-year-old Marx matriculated.

### **Marx’s Own Account of His Conversion**

After spending an unsettled year (1835-1836) studying civil law at the University of Bonn, Karl Marx at the insistence of his father, transferred to the University of Berlin. Here he studied law and ‘above all felt the urge to wrestle with philosophy’.<sup>24</sup> At this point it is necessary to understand that Marx did not distinguish clearly between these two disciplines, as the identification of law with philosophy, in pursuit of the common good, was one of the first lessons learned by first year law students. ‘Jurisprudence is the true philosophy’ is a principle taken from the very first sentence of the Pandects, the rudimentary

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p.64.

<sup>23</sup> For more on ‘ideological communitas’ see Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p. 132-140

<sup>24</sup> Marx to his father cited in Marx, K. and Engels, F (1975) *Collected Works vol.1*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, p. 11, hereafter referred to as CW 1.

collection of classical jurisprudence that Marx had begun to translate into German.<sup>25</sup>

‘The two’ – wrote Marx of law and philosophy – ‘were so closely linked that, on the one hand, I read through Heineccius, Thibaut and the sources quite uncritically, in a mere schoolboy fashion...and, on the other hand, tried to elaborate a philosophy of law covering the whole field of law’. He wrote the thesis up in a three hundred page ‘unhappy opus’, which unfortunately has not survived, but found the whole thing ‘replete with tripartite divisions, it is written with tedious prolixity, and the Roman constitutions are misused in the most barbaric fashion in order to force them into my system’. The difficulty originated in that classical ‘opposition between what is and what ought to be’ wherein he saw ‘the falsity of the whole thing’ and abandoned the project.<sup>26</sup> For Marx the ‘metaphysics of Law’ was characteristic of Kantian ‘idealism’ and if a solution was not forthcoming within the philosophy of Law than pure philosophy might oblige.

Thus, disillusionment with the law sent him back to philosophy and even poetry and there:

...suddenly as if by a magic touch – oh, the touch was at first a shattering blow- I caught sight of the glittering realm of true poetry like a distant fairy palace, and all my creations crumbled into nothing.<sup>27</sup>

The insight that philosophy and poetry offered Marx may have suggested that as Hegel challenged Kant’s idealism so too could Hegel offer a solution to the ‘metaphysics of law’. Having spent many sleepless nights fraught with anguish and excitement Marx succumbed to a severe bout of illness and was advised to recuperate in the country. He travelled to Stralow, a peaceful little fishing

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<sup>25</sup> Kelley, D.R. (1978) ‘The Metaphysics of Law: An Essay on the Very Young Marx’. *American Historical Review* 83: 352-3.

<sup>26</sup> CW 1: p.11-17

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp.17-18

village, just outside Berlin where his inner turmoil reached a climax ‘A curtain had fallen, my holy of holies was rent asunder and new gods had to be installed’.<sup>28</sup> From a previous reading, Marx had rejected Hegel’s conceptual rationalism and remained a follower of Kant and Fichte who considered the ‘highest being to be separate from earthly reality’.<sup>29</sup>

Now, however, he was prepared to approach Hegel once more but this time less defensively:

I had read fragments of Hegel's philosophy, the grotesque craggy melody of which did not appeal to me. Once more I wanted to dive into the sea, but with the definite intention of establishing that the nature of the mind is just as necessary, concrete and firmly based as the nature of the body. My aim was no longer to practise tricks of swordmanship, but to bring genuine pearls into the light of day.<sup>30</sup>

Faced with the spectacle of finding himself in harmony with his adversary Marx attempted to clarify his ideas by writing them down, a formula he had tried before and would try many times later.<sup>31</sup> He produced a twenty-four-page dialogue on religion, nature and history entitled *Cleanthes, or the Starting Point and Necessary Progress of Philosophy* thereby acquainting himself with the work of Schelling. This work culminated in his conversion to Hegelianism, as on completion he found that his ‘...last proposition was the beginning of the Hegelian system...and this work, my dearest child, reared by moonlight, like a false siren delivers me into the arms of my enemy’.<sup>32</sup> Thus, not unlike classical German philosophy, Marx had arrived at Hegel from Kant and Fichte via Schelling.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> McLellan, D. (1980[1970]) *Marx Before Marxism*, London: Macmillan, p.48

<sup>30</sup> CW 1: p.18

<sup>31</sup> McLellan, D. (1980[1970]) *Marx Before Marxism*, London: Macmillan, p.49

<sup>32</sup> CW1: p.18

This painful conversion process in which Marx gave up his romantic idealism had a radical and profound effect:

For some days my vexation made me quite incapable of thinking; I ran about madly in the garden by the dirty water of the Spree, which “washes souls and dilutes the tea”. I even joined my landlord in a hunting excursion, rushed off to Berlin and wanted to embrace every street-corner loafer.<sup>33</sup>

During a second bout of illness, as a result of the ‘annoyance at having to make an idol of a view that I hated’ Marx studied Hegel ‘from beginning to end’.<sup>34</sup>

Through his friends in Stralow Marx was introduced to the ‘Doctors’ Club’, a group of young Hegelians who met regularly at the Hippel café in the Franzosische Strasse for informal, hard drinking evenings, debating awkward and controversial questions on the finer points of Hegelian doctrine. Members of the informal ‘Doktorklub’, mainly young marginal academics, included the brothers Bruno and Edgar Bauer, both free-thinking radicals of the Hegelian left, Adolph Rutenberg, recently dismissed from his post as a geography teacher and now working as a journalist, Max Stirner, who later became the proponent of ultra-individualistic anarchism, Karl Koppen, a history teacher who later became an expert on the origins of Buddhism, and Eduard Gans, Professor in the Juristic Faculty at the University of Berlin.<sup>35</sup>

If Marx’s account of his conversion is measured against a ‘rites of passage’ framework the result is comparable on many points. According to van Gennep and Turner, such ‘rites’ comprise of a three-part sequence. They begin with the first phase the ‘rite of separation’ this comprises of symbolic behaviour that

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> See CW1: p.18; McLellan, D. (1973) *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought*, London: Macmillan, p.32; Wheen, F. (1999) *Karl Marx: A Life*, London: WW Norton and Co, p.11.



signifies the ‘detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions or from both.’<sup>36</sup> Marx retreats from Berlin for the seclusion of Stralow where he prepares to engage with Hegel. He notes that he traverses the ‘whole length of the city to the gate and went to Stralow’,<sup>37</sup> the passage through the ‘gate’ signifies the beginning of the liminal (threshold) phase of the ritual. The second stage ‘is the rite proper, in which certain acts must be performed’.<sup>38</sup> Marx approaches Hegel and studies him from beginning to end. This is also the phase identified by Turner where the initiates experience ‘communitas’ the bonds of the low or marginalized. And it was in Stralow that Marx was introduced to the marginalized academics that made up the ‘doctors club’. The final sequence in the ritual process is the ‘rites of re-aggregation’ where the suspended social order is restored and the individual is returned to the community in his or her new role or status. On his return to Berlin University Marx was a committed Young Hegelian.

## Generational Tensions

It must also be remembered that Karl Marx was aged 18-19, during his first year as a student at Berlin University, when his conversion to Hegelianism took place. Although not an adolescent the correspondence from his parents, at this time, seem to suggest that their view of their son was not as an adult either. His Mother’s main concern was about her son’s housekeeping and personal hygiene while his Father’s main apprehension was his concern for Karl’s moral goodness.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p. 94

<sup>37</sup> CWI: p.18

<sup>38</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p. 94

<sup>39</sup> The concerns of his parents survive in the letters (two from his mother many from his father) they wrote while he was a university student see Marx, K & Engels, F. (1927) *Historisch – kritische Gesamtausgabe* (d. Rjazanov and V. Adoratskij eds.) cited in Seigel, J. E. (1973)

It is interesting to note that Heinrich Marx was a steadfast anti-Hegelian and a follower of Kant; one commentator suggests that Karl's similar approach was merely the son emulating the father.<sup>40</sup> Thus the crisis that Marx experienced in his rejection of Kantian idealism in favour of Hegelian realism is further exacerbated by the estrangement, which will inevitably follow, between his father and himself concerning Hegel. This generational tension is characteristic of the first stages of economic and political modernisation and emerges from, what Eisenstadt calls, the 'non-familial' division of labour.<sup>41</sup> Because many of the functions of the family are being taken over by specialised agencies parental influence diminishes accordingly. In such an environment 'deep doubt' about the father's principles creates a crisis that may find a resolution in the son's 'open rebellion'.<sup>42</sup> This resolution can create a new self-awareness for the younger generation that aids in the transition to adulthood.

The younger Marx is in no doubt that this event, his conversion to Hegelianism, is a defining transitional stage in his life-cycle when he states that: 'There are moments in one's life which are like frontier posts marking the completion of a period but at the same time clearly indicating a new direction.'<sup>43</sup> Finally he finishes the letter by including conciliatory gestures to his father these were by way of attempting to heal the rift he knew his conversion would create. First, he reassures his father that he is now pursuing only 'positive studies', he then goes on to relay his hopes of being published, and finally discusses a strategy for acquiring a career in 'cameralistics'.<sup>44</sup>

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'Marx's Early Development: Vocation, Rebellion, and Realism'. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3: 486.

<sup>40</sup> See Seigel, J. E. (1973) 'Marx's Early Development: Vocation, Rebellion, and Realism'. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3: 499.

<sup>41</sup> For a sociological account of youth rebellion see Eisenstadt, S. N. (1971) *From Generation to Generation*, New York: Free Press; for a psychological analysis see Erikson, E. (1968) *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, New York: W. W. Norton.

<sup>42</sup> See Erikson, E. ([1950] 1963) *Childhood and Society*, London: Hogart Press, p.323.

<sup>43</sup> CW1: p.10.

<sup>44</sup> CW1: p.20-1.

By focusing on the age of Karl Marx at the time of his conversion to Hegelianism the liminal aspects of this age group are highlighted. Marx finds himself ‘betwixt and between’ adolescence and adulthood, college life and a career, family and friends. This transitional phase of Marx’s life is paralleled by the journey Hegelianism was taking in the vacuum created by the death of its founder.

The liminal conditions examined above – the in-between status of Hegelianism, the crisis among his followers in Berlin, eighteen-year-old Marx’s own account of his conversion – all provide convincing evidence that what Marx was undergoing was a genuine ‘rite of passage’ experience. Therefore, having established the liminal aspects of the experience, the analysis must now turn to a charismatic figure who, according to the conceptual framework employed by this thesis, should appear to guide him towards the new structure, in this case, a liberal brand of Hegelianism.

### **Eduard Gans as Master of Ceremonies**

Eduard Gans (1797-1839), philosopher of law, studied under the noted Heidelberg scholar A. J. Thibaut and later from the mid 1820’s became one of Hegel’s ‘most brilliant followers’.<sup>45</sup> While Hegel regarded Gans as one of his favourite disciples, there were certain matters in Hegel’s philosophy with which Gans did not agree. Born a Jew, Gans was a radical humanist as was his close friend Heinrich Heine and they both disagreed with Hegel on the utility of the French Revolution. While Hegel, in accordance with the Prussian official line, adopted a negative view of the revolution in France, Gans, through personal

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<sup>45</sup> Breckman, W. (2001) ‘Eduard Gans and the Crisis of Hegelianism’. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62: 544.

experience, had developed a positive and lifelong commitment to the basic principles of this event.<sup>46</sup>

Gans' perspective was further reinforced while on a visit to Paris during the July revolution of 1830 when he came in contact with the Saint-Simonians, who made a strong impression on him, particularly with their articulation of the social crisis within industrial society.<sup>47</sup> A more personal reason for Gans' admiration for the French revolution stemmed from the knowledge that it was only the parts of Germany conquered by revolutionary France that Jews had experienced any improvements. His own anti-Semitic experiences as a student at the University of Berlin, together with the anti-Jewish riots of 1819, had incited him to actively participate in the founding of two of the most influential Jewish associations there.

These student initiatives anticipate the mature Gans' commitment to 'associational life in civil society' and the importance he placed on politically organising the intellectuals in the pursuit of a political cause.<sup>48</sup> The official anti-Semitism that Gans experienced as a student continued as he attempted to pursue an academic career and was further compounded when, in 1822, Friedrich Wilhelm III issued a special cabinet order, in an attempt to block Jews, such as Gans, from attaining academic positions. The order, known as 'Lex Gans',<sup>49</sup> was put in place to counter the Jewish emancipation edict of 1812 and definitively exclude Jews from holding teaching positions in universities. The order of 1822 was issued after representations were made by Friedrich Karl von Savigny, founder of the Historical School of Jurisprudence at Berlin University, an anti-Hegelian and opponent of Jewish emancipation, who became alarmed at the prospect of having Gans as a colleague. For Prussian Jewish academics the only

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<sup>46</sup> See Berlin, I. (1949[1939]) *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, London: Oxford University Press, p.67; Breckman, W. (2001) 'Eduard Gans and the Crisis of Hegelianism'. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62: 556-7.

<sup>47</sup> Although Gans was attracted to the sociological realism of the Saint-Simonians he rejected their claims that 'New Christianity' would best shape society, see Breckman, W. (1999) *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 168-9

<sup>48</sup> See Breckman, W. (2001) 'Eduard Gans and the Crisis of Hegelianism'. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62: 556.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

route to a career was to change their religion and Gans, while on a visit to Paris, duly converted to Protestantism and, consequently, attained a position in Berlin University in 1825.

A frequent visitor to France and a trip to England in the early 1830's allowed Gans to broaden his perspective of the social transformations taking place as a result of the industrial revolution. The Saint-Simonians, he believed, were fundamental in recognising the endemic social crisis, as a result of the widening gulf between the wealthy bourgeoisie and the poverty stricken workers, that appeared like an 'open sore of the present age'.<sup>50</sup> He advocated a higher level of state intervention to combat poverty and his ideas of 'free corporation' seemed to anticipate trade unionism, collective bargaining and agreement.<sup>51</sup> This was another area in which Gans found himself at odds with his mentor Hegel who seemed to be resigned to the idea that civil society is unable to prevent an 'excess of poverty and the formation of a rabble'. The only concrete solution offered by Hegel to combat poverty was to direct the poor 'to beg from the public' or encourage them to emigrate to overseas colonies.<sup>52</sup>

By interpreting the philosophy of Hegel through a Saint-Simonian perspective Gans was adopting a radicalised understanding of Hegel. And, once he became a professor in the juristic faculty at the University of Berlin, this was the brand of Hegelianism through which a generation of his students, including Marx, were educated. This created an undercurrent of tension within the faculty of Law at Berlin University as Professor von Savigny, of the Historical School, was in total opposition to this radical version of Hegelianism. Although the young Marx attended both Savigny's and Gans' lectures in his first year at Berlin University, most commentators believe that the influence of Gans was more considerable.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Gans cited in Breckman, W. (2001) 'Eduard Gans and the Crisis of Hegelianism'. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62: 550.

<sup>51</sup> See Waszek, N. (1987) 'Eduard Gans on Poverty: Between Hegel and Saint-Simone'. *Owl of Minerva*, 18: pp.172-8.

<sup>52</sup> See Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right: Ethical Life', in S. Houlgate (ed) (1998) *The Hegel Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 375-6

<sup>53</sup> See Breckman, W. (1999) *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 260-1; Berlin, I. (1949[1939]) *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, London: Oxford University Press, p. 67; Kelley, D.R. (1978) 'The

The young professor's lectures were 'models' of erudition and courage, ignoring the ethos of traditionalism pervading the university, he freely criticised current legal institutions and practice from a philosophical or idealist position. This critical stance had a 'profound' effect on the young Marx and inspired in him a 'method of theoretical criticism which he never completely lost'.<sup>54</sup>

Eduard Gans also elaborated on Hegel's views in the fields of jurisprudence and history. In direct opposition to the Prussian official line, he declared that the French Revolution of 1830 had a beneficial effect on all of Europe. He also denounced wage labour and class divisions in his critical approach to industrial society. However it was his attack on the exploitation of workers that had the most detectable influence on Marx. In his work *Retrospects on Persons and Conditions* (1836) Gans had identified with the Saint-Simonian socialists in the belief that slavery still persisted in the form of tyranny of the capitalist worker, 'Visit the factories' he urged his readers 'and you see hundreds of men and women, emaciated and miserable, in the service of a single person, sacrificing their health and their joy of life for a miserable pittance'.<sup>55</sup> The ever-widening gulf between the bourgeoisie and the workers, according to Gans, makes future social conflict inevitable.<sup>56</sup> Resoundings of Gans radical ideas can be detected in the older Marx, especially in the *'Communist Manifesto'*.

Because Marx failed to mention Gans by name in the letter to his father in 1837 it is necessary to read between the lines to determine the deep impact the professor had on his young student. Breckman has outlined the following examples as evidence of Gans influence on the young Marx: The influence can first and foremost be measured by the fact that Marx '... wholly laid claim to his

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Metaphysics of Law: An Essay on the Very Young Marx'. *American Historical Review* 83: 358; Levine, N. (1987) 'The German Historical School of Law and the Origins of Historical Materialism'. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48: 444; Padover, S.K. (1982) *Karl Marx: An Intimate Biography*, London: McGraw Hill, pp.75-6.

<sup>54</sup> See Berlin, I. (1949 [1939]) *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, London: Oxford University Press, p.67.

<sup>55</sup> Gans cited in Padover, Saul, K. (1982) *Karl Marx: An Intimate Biography*, London: McGraw Hill, pp.76-7.

<sup>56</sup> See Breckman, W. (2001) 'Eduard Gans and the Crisis of Hegelianism'. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62: 550.

teacher's objections against both Kantianism and the Historical School'.<sup>57</sup> Precisely in line with Gans, Marx argued for a dialogue between the philosophy of law and the metaphysics of law, i.e. between the 'form' and 'content' of law. When Marx rejected his earlier attempts to treat these two concepts separately '...as if positive law in its conceptual development could ever be something different from the formation of the concept of law',<sup>58</sup> he was fashioning his argument on Gans.

Later in the letter he related that when he read Savigny's '...learned work on ownership' the theory of keeping separate the form and content of law was '...an error I shared with Herr v. Savigny'.<sup>59</sup> Thus, without ever mentioning Eduard Gans, Marx had plainly sided with him in his dispute with von Savigny. Marx continued to favour Gans' philosophical interpretation of Hegel over Savigny's historical method, as he could no longer force the 'Roman concepts' – as Savigny had derived them – into the Kantian system that he (Marx) had tried to construct. Instead Marx opted for Gans' historical dialectic of legal philosophy as the only way out of the impasse represented by the confrontation of legal facts and legal forms. Therefore when Marx was enticed to return to Hegel it was not the conservative Hegel, on whose side Savigny now found himself, but a radicalised version of Hegel shaped by Gans.

Also, while in Stralow, when 'new gods had to be installed' Marx began attending the 'Doctor's Club' where he became 'ever more firmly bound' to this radicalised version of Hegelianism.<sup>60</sup> Eduard Gans 'contributed significantly' to the radicalisation of Hegelianism and as he was a core member of the 'Doctor's Club' he thus played a 'potentially formative role in shaping the social thinking of the very young Marx'.<sup>61</sup> It is now clear that the crisis the eighteen-year-old Marx experienced on entering Berlin University arose as a result of his failure to

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<sup>57</sup> See Breckman, W. (1999) *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 260-1.

<sup>58</sup> CWI: p.12

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.15

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp.18-9

<sup>61</sup> Breckman, W. (2001) 'Eduard Gans and the Crisis of Hegelianism'. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62: 564

reconcile the ‘metaphysics of law’ within a Kantian framework. Attending Gans lectures, with their Hegelian slant, meant Marx was exposed and open to regard Hegel as a resolution to the crisis. On reading Hegel from beginning to end he still hesitates on taking the final step. Debates in the ‘Doctor’s Club’, with the charismatic Gans and others, finally clears the way for his conversion to Hegelianism. The personal struggle, experienced by Marx, seemed to be a reflection of the institutional conflict taking place in the University of Berlin, which in itself was representative of the societal unrest occurring in the Prussian state. Therefore to understand more fully the conversion of Karl Marx an analysis of the dynamics taking place in the background is essential.

### **Background / Zeitgeist**

As was already stated, following Hegel’s death in 1831 his methods of research and interpretation were beginning to politically mobilise some enlightened Germans into opposition towards the Prussian Government. In order to prevent the cultivation of this rebellious seed the State introduced censorship, which, in turn, forced the opposition into less direct methods of contesting the political sphere. Consequently, the attack against orthodoxy would take place in the field of Christian theology; the opposition being secure in the knowledge that, with the close relationship between church and state in Germany, any attack on the church was also an indirect attack on the state. The main arena where these issues were contested were the universities, and in particular Berlin University, the main base for Hegelian philosophy. While these attacks were directly influenced by the legacy of Hegel their origins can be found in the German tradition of Biblical criticism begun almost a generation earlier.

### **Biblical Criticism in Germany**

To understand the discord that erupted among the Hegelians in 1835 it is necessary to briefly examine the origins from whence it came. Biblical Criticism



in Germany emerged from three distinct sources.<sup>62</sup> The first began as an outgrowth from English Deism of the seventeenth century and French Enlightenment thinking of the eighteenth century. Attempting to discard the supernatural from religion this German rationalist perspective exhibited an anti-religious and particularly an anti-Christian, character.

The founding figure of this tradition in Germany was Herman Reimarus (1694-1768) who not only questions the motives of the writers of the New Testament but also expressed doubts about the honesty of Jesus. The aim of Reimarus was clear, to destroy the authority of the New Testament and replace it with a religion compatible with reason and nature.<sup>63</sup> His methodology consisted of two lines of argument. On the one hand he relied on speculative argument, such as the refutation of miracles from a rationalist perspective. On the other hand he used *ad hominem* arguments, this included such strategies as portraying the disciples as ‘liars and rogues’ who invented stories and misled people simply for selfish gains.<sup>64</sup> The lack of scholarly expertise in such arguments seemed to go unnoticed at the time, perhaps as a result of the divisive nature of the topic.

The second source giving rise to the German tradition of Biblical Criticism emerged as a response to the rationalist arguments of Reimarus. The main representative and founding figure of this tradition, that acknowledges the religious force of sacred writings such as the New Testament, was Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). His first major work *On Religion*, published in 1799, defended religion from the assault of Enlightenment critics, whom he described as ‘cultured despisers’.

The aim of Schleiermacher was to provide a ‘counter-critique’ through a philosophical hermeneutics using the technique of ‘understanding’ (*verstehen*),

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<sup>62</sup> The examination of Biblical Criticism in Germany that follows is mainly informed by the original English draft version of the Italian publication Procacci, G and Szokolczai, A. (2003) *La scoperta della società* (The Discovery of Society), Roma: Carocci and also from discussions with its author Arpad Szokolczai.

<sup>63</sup> See Breckman, W. (1999) *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 24

<sup>64</sup> See Procacci, G and Szokolczai, A. (2003) *La scoperta della società* (The Discovery of Society), Roma: Carocci, (English draft version: p.1).

which would later be taken up by Dilthey, Weber, Heidegger, Gadamer and much of contemporary social theory.<sup>65</sup> While Schleiermacher is the founding figure of nineteenth century Protestant theology in Germany, his school does fit into a wider and deeper German tradition. Reventlow has described this wider tradition as having a certain ‘spiritualist orientation’, influenced by medieval mystics such as Meister Eckhart and Jakob Böhme, and various heretic groups such as the ‘Free Spirits’ movement.<sup>66</sup> This anti-materialist tradition would resurface not only in the ‘idealist’ philosophical works of Schelling, but also in the philosophy of Hegel and, more importantly for this thesis, in the work of Eduard Gans.

The third thread attributed to the rise of Biblical Criticism in Germany emerged from a methodological rather than a substantive basis and is referred to as ‘source criticism’. Again, as with the previous two branches, a central or founding figure is representative of this particular tradition. Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776-1831) pioneered a scientific ‘materialist’ method of historical research, which he employed in his three volumes of ‘Roman History’, published between 1811 and 1832. Niebuhr related individual events to the various institutions present in a particular historical source and thus laid the groundwork for future German historical studies. Mommsen, Leopold Ranke and Karl von Savigny were all either students or colleagues of Niebuhr and through his inspiration developed and refined his techniques.<sup>67</sup> The tensions between Schleiermacher’s almost spiritualist perspective and Niebuhr’s materialistic stance would again re-emerge, in Berlin University in the 1830’s, in the tensions between the ‘realism’ of Karl von Savigny and the ‘idealism’ of Eduard Gans which in turn would prove to be extremely significant in the development of the crisis experienced by the young Marx.

These three main sources of Biblical Criticism in Germany, for a long time, remained unconnected. When these three strands did become fused the resultant

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Reventlow p.18 cited in Procacci, G and Szakolczai, A. (2003) *La scoperta della società* (The Discovery of Society), Roma: Carocci, (English draft version: p.2).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

spark created profound and extensive effects. For Szakolczai this moment was the publication, in 1835, of three ‘epoch-making’ theological texts, Baur’s – *Christian Gnosticism*, Vatke’s – *The Religion of the Old Testament* (intended as part one of a *Biblical Theology*), and in particular David Strauss’ – *Life of Jesus*.<sup>68</sup> The three texts of 1835 were by no means independent. Strauss, during his formative years, was a student of Baur’s at the theological seminary in Blaubeuren and also during his theological studies at Tübingen from 1827 to 1830; while Vatke and Strauss were ‘good friends’.<sup>69</sup> As professor of Theology at Tübingen Baur was instrumental in introducing Strauss to Schleiermacher’s – *Glaubenslehre*, a reading experience that served to convert Strauss from ‘his romantic and mystical affinities to the rigour of Hegelian dialectic’.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Vatke’s text was informed by the ‘philosophy of Hegel with its notion of development and progress’.<sup>71</sup> Thus the spirit of Hegel animated all three works and their influence and effect would dominate German thought for many years to come.

The one ‘major difference’ in the reception of the above works concerned the level of controversy generated by them. Ferdinand Christian Baur (1789-1860) was the most noted of the three authors and his work ambitiously attempted to present an overview of the links between ‘ancient Gnosticism and modern German thought’. However, the work did contain some methodological shortcomings especially its exclusive reliance on German sources and the forcing nature of the Hegelian system on the material, creating a foundational flaw in its methodology.<sup>72</sup> Johann Karl Wilhelm Vatke (1806-1882) was an assistant professor in the University of Berlin at the time of Marx’s matriculation. His work – *The Religion of the Old Testament*, also provided plenty of scope for a

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., and Kim, J. H. (1998) ‘David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874)’, The Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Modern Western Theology @ <http://bceofmwt.htm>, accessed 05/12/2005.

<sup>70</sup> See Hodgson, P. (1972) ‘Editor’s Introduction: Strauss’s Theological Development from 1825 to 1840’. In D. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., tr. George Eliot [1846], Fortress Press: Philadelphia, p.xx

<sup>71</sup> See Martens, E. (1997) ‘The Flowering and Floundering of Old Testament Theology’. *Direction* 26: 64.

<sup>72</sup> See Procacci, G and Szakolczai, A. (2003) *La scoperta della società* (The Discovery of Society), Roma: Carocci, (English draft version: pp.2-3)

detailed critique as this work was the first to apply Niebuhr's principles of source criticism to biblical studies. From this application Vatke made many claims including the hypothesis that the laws found in the Pentateuch came after and not before the prophets.<sup>73</sup> Despite the novel claims made by Vatke and the ambitious claims by Baur the reception of their work was subdued in comparison to the storm that would break over the publication of the third text by Strauss.

### ***The Life of Jesus Critically Examined***

Of the three texts that connected the disparate threads of Biblical Criticism, in Germany in the eighteenth century, the most influential, and by far the most controversial, was the book by David Strauss. The main claim of *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* is that the Gospel narratives should be understood as myth and not as historical reality. However, by describing himself as both critic and believer Strauss attempts to re-establish dogmatically what he has destroyed critically.<sup>74</sup> While 'myth' should be regarded as 'fiction' it tends to reflect 'the spiritual tendency of a particular community' and as such provide a positive criterion for interpretation.<sup>75</sup>

On the basis of speculative philosophy and historical criticism Strauss denies the Gospels claim that the unity of the divine and human was realized only in the historical Jesus. Instead, he claims that this union could be realized in all of humankind: 'In an individual, a God-man, the properties and functions which the church ascribes to Christ contradict themselves; in the idea of the race, they perfectly agree'.<sup>76</sup> The book caused an immediate storm not only in conservative circles but also among Hegelians themselves.

Among the theological opponents of Hegel's philosophy of religion, Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg could barely conceal his delight that Strauss had finally

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<sup>73</sup> Graf, Keunen, and Wellhausen would later take up these ideas.

<sup>74</sup> Strauss, D. (1972 [1835]) *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (P. Hodgeson ed.) 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., tr. G. Eliot [1846], Fortress Press: Philadelphia, p.757.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.89.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.780.

brought into the open the anti-Christian bias of Hegelianism.<sup>77</sup> Within the Hegelian camp the rift, which had begun some years prior to the publication of Strauss's book, now turned into an ever-widening chasm. On the right stood the 'Old' Hegelians, represented by Karl Friedrich Goschel, Georg Andreas Gabler and Leopold von Henning among others. These conservative Hegelians believed Strauss's *Life of Jesus* critically jeopardized their attempts to prove the compatibility of Hegelian philosophy with Christianity. The 'Young' Hegelians, on the other hand, welcomed the radical anti-Christian stance of Strauss's book. Some, like Bruno Bauer, extended Strauss's criticism into a total denial of the historicity of Jesus and explained the Gospels as the works of 'pure imagination'.<sup>78</sup>

Just as important as the theological debate that followed the publication of Strauss's book was the political debate that accompanied it. The July rebellion of 1830 in Paris had sent a wave of revolutionary hope among German liberals and republicans. Reactionary measures by the Prussian State included persecuting academic liberals and banning the writings of left-wing social commentators known as the *Young Germans*.<sup>79</sup> Because of these measures politics became an extremely risky subject for debate and less direct methods of attack were used. Christian theology became the new front line where such methods were employed. However, because of the Establishment of the Church in Germany and the close ties between religion and politics, any criticism of religion could be seen as criticism of the political regime.

Consequently the religious storm that erupted over the publication of *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* was swiftly transformed into a political debate that

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<sup>77</sup> See Breckman, W. (1999) *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 136.

<sup>78</sup> See Berlin, I. (1949[1939]) *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, London: Oxford University Press, p.65.

<sup>79</sup> For more on the *Young Germans* and the plight of the *Gottingen Seven* see Breckman, W. (1999) *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.130-2, 158-64.

led to government censorship.<sup>80</sup> The last remaining arenas where political debate could take place in a relatively free environment were the universities.

## **Berlin University**

When Marx entered the University of Berlin, in October 1836, he entered an academy totally different from the one in Bonn. It was over three times the size of the university in Bonn and the atmosphere encouraged serious political debate and a strong work ethic.<sup>81</sup> Some years earlier the student Ludwig Feuerbach had described this atmosphere in a letter to his father:

There is no question here of drinking, duelling and pleasant communal outings; in no other university can you find such a passion for work, such an interest for things that are not petty student intrigues, such an inclination for the sciences, such calm and such science. Compared to this temple of work, the other universities appear like public houses.<sup>82</sup>

However, by the time of Marx's enrolment this atmosphere of calm had given way to one of unrest and tension. The political and theological discord evident in Prussian society, after the publication of Strauss's book, was replicated in Berlin University. Most of the original giants who had lent prestige to the University had passed away. Schleiermacher and Niebuhr, both already mentioned as significant figures in the development of Biblical Criticism in Germany, had died in 1834 and 1831 respectively. The University's most eminent philosopher, Georg Hegel had also died in 1831. Thus, a definite generational change was

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<sup>80</sup> See McLellan, D. (1973) *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought*, London: Macmillan, p.31; Breckman, W. (1999) *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.135; Berlin, I. (1949[1939]) *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, London: Oxford University Press, pp.65-6

<sup>81</sup> See McLellan, D. (1973) *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought*, London: Macmillan, p.19

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

evident in the personnel of Berlin University, as it was in German intellectual life as a whole.<sup>83</sup>

Within the faculty of law the division between the historical and philosophical camps was causing ferment and open warfare. On one side stood Friedrich von Savigny, the leader of the 'Historical School of Law', a rabid anti-liberal and a rival of Hegel who now found himself on the side of the 'Old' Hegelians in their battle with the radical left.<sup>84</sup> Savigny, a colleague and admirer of Neibuhr, interpreted law historically as a continuous, traditional and orderly development arising from the principles and character of a stable nation. He now turned this historical approach to other institutions in a manner that implied tacit support for the maintenance of the political status quo. This approach was very similar to Hegel's 'absolute idea' – a constant universalism that remained outside of human control.<sup>85</sup>

On the other side stood Eduard Gans a liberal Hegelian who stressed a different element of Hegel's philosophy, that of dialectics. While the 'absolute idea' approach remained constant, static and retrospective the dialectical approach was changeable, evolutionary and forward looking.<sup>86</sup> As was already mentioned the argument between Savigny's 'realism' and Gans' 'idealism' was a resurfacing of the tensions between the various strands of biblical criticism but it was also representative of the wider dispute that was splitting Hegelians into two factions, the 'Old' and the 'Young' Hegelians.

When Marx began his studies at Berlin University the altercation between Gans and von Savigny was in full swing. One commentator described the altercation thus: 'the war is spectacular. In the historical school they are afraid of philosophy... In the philosophical camp they look down with pity on purely

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<sup>83</sup> See Procacci, G and Szokolczai, A. (2003) *La scoperta della società* (The Discovery of Society), Roma: Carocci, (English draft version: p.2).

<sup>84</sup> This union of the Hegelian right with their philosophical rivals had come about as a backlash against Strauss's use of Hegelian principles for radical anti-Christian purposes, for more on this see Breckman, W. (1999) *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.133-9

<sup>85</sup> See Padover, Saul, K. (1982) *Karl Marx: An Intimate Biography*, London: McGraw Hill, p.76

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

historical jurists'.<sup>87</sup> The two professors not only differed in their interpretation of Hegel but also in their personalities and styles. Age wise they were a generation apart. Savigny born in 1779 was nineteen years older than Gans. The latter was a Jew from Berlin, who it was previously noted, had to convert to Christianity in order to qualify for a position at the University. Savigny on the other hand, was descended from an established aristocratic family from Lorraine.

While von Savigny's lectures were dry and sluggish, Gans' were a model of both eloquence and courage and were attended by Berlin's most fashionable and finest citizens.<sup>88</sup> Prior to his conversion to Hegelianism the eighteen-year-old Marx signed up for three courses in his first term - *Roman Law and the Pandects* with Professor von Savigny, *Criminal Law* with Professor Gans and *Anthropology* with Professor Steffens, his student records describe him as an 'exceptionally diligent' student.<sup>89</sup> It would be naïve to assume that the 'crisis' experienced by Marx, and the 'conversion' that resolved it, was in no way influenced by the political and theological ferment taking place in Berlin University at that time.

### **The Significance of the Conversion in the Later Works of Marx**

The final part of this study will briefly examine the significance of these early influences on the later works of Marx. What has become clear from the above study is that, in 1837, Marx interpreted Hegel from the perspective of Gans rather than from supporters of Savigny's Historical School, who had aligned themselves with the Old Hegelians. Nevertheless, this interpretation by no means persisted throughout his later work. In 1842, five years after his 'conversion', Marx again rejected Savigny in an article called 'The Philosophical

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<sup>87</sup> Lerminier, the noted French scholar, cited in Kelley, D.R. (1978) 'The Metaphysics of Law: An Essay on the Very Young Marx'. *American Historical Review*, 83: 352.

<sup>88</sup> See Padover, Saul, K. (1982) *Karl Marx: An Intimate Biography*, London: McGraw Hill, p.75; Berlin, I. (1949[1939]) *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, London: Oxford University Press, pp.66-7.

<sup>89</sup> CW1: p.699



Manifesto of the Historical School of Law'.<sup>90</sup> Also in that year Marx campaigned for the removal of press censorship and the secularisation of marriage and divorce, these were incompatible with the conservative principles championed by Savigny and others whom Marx described as 'puppets of the Brandenburg monarchy'.<sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, by 1846, with the publication of the '*German Ideology*', a sea-change had taken place in the thinking of Marx. Distancing himself from Gans' idealistic interpretation of law, he began to accept a materialistic view of history and became receptive to the insights of the Historical School into the sociological nature of both law and property. Levine constructs a persuasive argument, which traces the roots of Marx's historical materialism to the German Historical School of Law.<sup>92</sup>

'Historical materialism' a general term for Marx's conception of historical, social and economic change was first articulated in the '*German Ideology*' and had at its foundation two basic premises. On the one hand, was the contradiction of the means and mode of production and on the other, was the determining influence on an economic system by the prevailing form of ownership. It is the latter premise that is of importance here. When Marx discussed the three modes of ownership, tribal, classical and German, in the '*German Ideology*', he utilised the works of Niebuhr, Hugo and Pfister all pivotal historians informing Savigny's Historical School of Law.

When in '*The Grundrisse*' (1857-58) he discussed pre-capitalist forms of land ownership he distinguished between property and possession, this is a pure Savignian paradigm.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, in 1867, in volume one of '*Das Kapital*', Marx again used von Savigny's colleague Barthold Georg Niebuhr as an

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp.203-10

<sup>91</sup> Marx cited in Levine, N. (1987) 'The German Historical School of Law and the Origins of Historical Materialism'. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 48: 433

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp.443-50

authority.<sup>94</sup> It is clear from the above that Marx was abandoning Hegel's 'idealism' and opting instead for a material version of Hegel's dialectic. While Marx continued to engage with and modify Hegel's philosophy for the rest of his life, he never entirely disavowed the great thinker's ideology.<sup>95</sup> Thus, by 1867, when it became fashionable to treat Hegel as a 'dead dog', Marx came to the rescue and openly declared himself a 'pupil of that mighty thinker'.<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusion

The conversion of Karl Marx to Hegelianism took place over a relatively short period of time in comparison to the other case studies examined in this thesis. On his arrival at Berlin University, in the fall of 1836, Marx was, according to his own account, dismissive and even hateful of Hegel's philosophy. One year later, in November 1837, Marx had become a committed Hegelian having made an idol of a view he once hated.

The analysis, provided by this thesis, established that the liminal conditions permeating Berlin University, after the death of Hegel, created an environment conducive to the type of experience that Marx underwent in that fateful year. The two major figures in the University, Friedrich von Savigny and Eduard Gans, were in open and hostile disagreement concerning Hegel's legacy. Situate the tempestuous eighteen-year-old Marx in this combat zone of radical philosophy and the ingredients for a crisis emerge. The crisis deepens as Marx becomes ill, detaches himself from the familiar surrounds of Berlin, and moves to Stralow. The crisis is resolved when Marx is steered towards a liberal interpretation of Hegel by the charismatic Gans who holds court at the 'Doktorklub'. On his return to Berlin Marx is transformed into a full-blooded

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<sup>94</sup> See Marx, K. (1976) *Capital Vol. I*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, p.345.

<sup>95</sup> See Breckman, W. (1999) *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.4; Fraser, I. (1998) *Hegel and Marx: The Concept of Need*. Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, p.2.

<sup>96</sup> See Marx, K. (1976) *Capital, Vol. I*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp.102-3.

Young Hegelian and a lifelong, albeit hot and cold, passion with Hegel's philosophy followed.

Some of the wider issues revealed by this thesis include the significance of the different strands of Biblical Criticism in Germany to Karl Marx's conversion. On the one hand, the materialist orientation of Niebuhr's methodology was taken up and continued by von Savigny and his Historical School in Berlin University. Eduard Gans challenged this materialist view of law and adopted an 'idealist', or Schleiermacherian, perspective to reject the empiricism and logic of von Savigny's position. Thus, the dissent that arose between Niebuhr's materialist perspective and Schleiermacher's spiritual perspective resurfaced in Berlin University and was bitterly contested between the 'realism' of Savigny and the 'idealism' of Gans.

The publication, in 1835, of *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* written by David Strauss marked a watershed for Hegelian philosophy. The furore that accompanied the publication of this book brought the underlying tensions, in the faculty of law, at Berlin University to the surface. The resulting split between the Young and Old Hegelians meant that participants were forced to choose sides, as neutrality in such a bitter dispute was not an option. It was into such an environment, of political and intellectual ferment, that the young Marx entered in the fall of 1836. Taking courses from both von Savigny (Roman Law) and Gans (Criminal Law) placed the eighteen-year-old Marx at the centre of the maelstrom. Had Marx stayed in Bonn and not been exposed to the 'slings and arrows' of the fermentation taking place in Berlin University, between Gans and von Savigny, then maybe his identity, his life, and maybe even world history would have been unimaginably altered.

## Chapter 6

### Arthur Koestler's Conversion to Anti-Communism

The final case-study examines the conversion of Arthur Koestler to anti-Communism. Taking its cue from Foucault's assertion that 'the great converts today are those who no longer believe in the revolution',<sup>1</sup> this chapter provides a fitting concluding case-study to this thesis. Because this chapter analyses a conversion from one particular ideology (Communism) to its polar opposite (anti-Communism) it is somewhat different to the particularities of the previous studies. For this reason, specific attention will be paid to analysing the originating structure (Communism) and the seemingly strange hold it had over its disciples. This analysis will demonstrate that the study of Communism is best undertaken through the medium of mythology. Here the integrative and binding forces of Communism can best be understood by their powerful influence on the collective unconscious.

Having established the retentive and tenacious nature of Communism the analysis will then turn to the 'conversion' needed for deliverance from its bonds. This is where the conceptual framework will be employed to analyse and offer a more detailed understanding of the transformation of Arthur Koestler from a devout Communist to a committed anti-Communist. As with the previous case-studies, the rationale for treating the experience as a 'conversion' comes from the subject's own understanding of the experience. From the perception of the subject (Koestler) of this chapter, it is quite clear that the transformation he experienced when he turned from Communism to anti-Communism was a 'spiritual conversion'.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the main analysis of this chapter, a brief outline of the subject of the case-study is necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> See Foucault, M. (2005) *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College De France, 1981-82*, tr. G. Burchell, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.209

<sup>2</sup> Koestler, A. *et al* (1950) *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism* London: Hamish Hamilton, p. 76.

## Biography of Arthur Koestler

Arthur Koestler was born in Budapest, on September 5<sup>th</sup> 1905, into a well to do middle class family. His mother, Adele, came from an eminent Viennese Jewish family and his father, Henrik was born in Hungary from a Russian Jewish background. Henrik Koestler was the Hungarian representative of an old established British and German textile manufacturer. However, with the onset of the First World War, partnerships such as these quickly went out of business and the Koestler's 'middle class idyll collapsed.'<sup>3</sup> Henrik did manage to provide his son with an education and in 1922 at the age of seventeen Arthur Koestler entered the Vienna Technical University to study engineering and physics. He describes the three years he spent at university as the only truly happy and anxiety-free period in his life.<sup>4</sup>

It was during his university years that Koestler experienced the first of his ideological conversions when he turned to Zionism as the result of an encounter with the Zionist firebrand Vladimir Jabotinsky.<sup>5</sup> The revisionist Zionism, which Jabotinsky subscribed to, involved the demand for a Jewish state on both sides of the river Jordan, a stance against the powerful closed-shop policies of the Jewish trade unions and a rejection of the socialist practices employed in the collective farms in Palestine. Koestler was attracted to Jabotinsky's brand of Zionism and accompanied him on a speaking tour of Austria and Czechoslovakia.

In October 1925, Koestler abandoned his studies and shortly after left Europe for Palestine to take up the Jewish cause for a homeland. However, after working for a few months in a *kvutza* – collective settlement – in the Jezreel Valley, Koestler found himself at odds with their left-wing policies and departed

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.27

<sup>4</sup> See Koestler, A. (1952) *Arrow in the Blue*, New York: Macmillan, p.127.

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed account of this maverick Zionist see: Schechtman, J. (1961) *Fighter and Prophet: The Vladimir Jobotinsky Story*. London: Collins.

the rural settlement for the city of Haifa.<sup>6</sup> He began work, based in Palestine, as the Middle Eastern correspondent for the Ullstein press who owned a number of German newspapers. In 1929 he was transferred to Paris and a year later he became science editor for the Ullstein press based in Berlin.

In 1932 Arthur Koestler became a member of the German Communist Party and, shortly after, lost his job with the Ullstein press when his Party affiliations were discovered. He then spent a year in the Soviet Union travelling and writing of his experiences with the Soviet system. While he was in Russia, Hitler came to power in Germany and Koestler, in the autumn of 1933, decided to join his comrades in exile in Paris and continue with the fight against National Socialism. Between 1932 and 1936 Koestler worked at a number of jobs in Paris mainly for left-wing organisations writing propaganda.

Willi Münzenberg was the director of many of the Communist activities in Paris and at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War he suggested that Koestler use his journalistic credentials to gain entry into Franco Spain to gather intelligence.<sup>7</sup> After only two days in Seville he was recognised and denounced as a Communist and was lucky to escape without harm. However, in Malaga, six months later he was arrested by Franco's forces and sentenced to death but due to the intervention of the British Government he was subsequently and unexpectedly set free.

On his release Koestler travelled first to England and then to Paris, he became disillusioned with Communism and finally left the Communist Party in April 1938. When war broke out in France Koestler was arrested and interned in Le Vernet but managed to escape and make his way to England via Portugal. He served in the Pioneer Corp of the British Army between 1941 and 1942 and in December 1948 became a British subject. He finally made his international breakthrough on the literary front in 1940 with the publication of *Darkness at*

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<sup>6</sup> See Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, pp.45-50.

<sup>7</sup> Koestler, A. et al (1950) *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism* London: Hamish Hamilton, p.74-5.

*Noon* a novel about the Communist purges during the Stalin years. Other anti-Communist works followed including *The Yogi and the Commissar* (1945) and *The God That Failed* (1951).

In order to counter the various international propaganda conferences set up by the Soviets Koestler, together with Melvyn Lasky, Ruth Fischer and Franz Borkenau, organised the Congress for Cultural Freedom - an international meeting of writers, scientists and scholars held in West Berlin in 1950. It was later revealed that the Congress was covertly funded by the CIA as a Cold War operation.<sup>8</sup> In the middle of the 1950's Koestler announced his retirement from politics and began to study such diverse topics as mysticism, Jewish history and parapsychology. In 1971 the Prime Minister Edward Heath appointed him a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE). Early in 1976 Arthur Koestler was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and took his own life in a joint suicide, with his third wife Cynthia, in March 1983.

Before proceeding to the application of the theoretical framework to the conversion of Arthur Koestler it is first necessary to examine the seemingly paradoxical persistence and growing popularity of Soviet Communism precisely at the time when the violence of Stalin's purges was entering its most brutal phase. The solution offered to this apparent puzzle requires the interpretation of Communism as myth. This interpretation will help in some way to explain Koestler's commitment to the Party despite his negative experiences in the USSR.

### **Communism as Myth**

While Arthur Koestler experienced a number of conversion type experiences, for example his turn to Zionism, Communism, and anti-Communism, it must be

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<sup>8</sup> For more on the Congress for Cultural Freedom see Colman, P (1989) *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind, of Post War Europe*. London: Collier Macmillan.

remembered that it is his conversion from Communism, or to anti-Communism, that is of interest to this thesis. Although Koestler officially resigned from the Communist Party in 1938 his disillusionment with Communism had begun some five years earlier during his travels in the USSR. The question now to be answered is why Koestler remained in the Communist Party given his experiences in the USSR. For this reason it is necessary to analyse in more detail this five year period of Koestler's disillusionment with Communism.

On his return, in 1933, from his travels in the USSR Koestler seemed to be affected deeply by what he had seen and experienced. Manes Sperber, a fellow Party member and a writer on psychoanalysis, noticed that his once boyish and untroubled features had taken on an anxious and worried demeanour and that Koestler, on his return from the USSR, had become a 'changed man'.<sup>9</sup> Koestler himself admits that his faith in Communism had been badly shaken as a result of his stay in Russia but that a number of 'external events and inner rationalisations' helped him to continue as a Party member until 1938. The most important being the virulent anti-Fascist campaign that emerged from the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1934.<sup>10</sup> However, according to Cesarani,<sup>11</sup> on closer examination this rationalisation becomes untenable and the true reason for Koestler's vacillation lay in his condition of homelessness and the need to belong. In fact, Cesarani thought this condition so much a part of Koestler's make up that he called his biographical study *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*.

An analysis of this pathological condition is of crucial importance for understanding the dynamics at play in the five years prior to Koestler's resignation from the Communist Party. It will also explain why a conversion type experience was needed for Koestler to extricate himself from what he

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<sup>9</sup> Sperber, M. (1994) *Until My Eyes Are Closed With Shards*, tr. H. Zohn, New York: Holmes & Meier, p.48.

<sup>10</sup> Koestler, A. *et al* (1950) *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism*, London: Hamish Hamilton, p. 70.

<sup>11</sup> Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p. 99.



termed the ‘addiction to the Soviet myth’.<sup>12</sup> And it is exactly in mythology that the answer can be found to the dilemma that Arthur Koestler and many others like him found themselves in the mid 1930’s.

To understand the irrational persistence of Communism for Koestler and the difficulties he experienced in extricating himself from its grip it is necessary to analyse the strange hold that Communism had over its disciples and the solution it offered in the form of a Utopian dream. The best method to study this dream-like quality and its inextricable bind is by studying Communism as myth.<sup>13</sup> Its emergence can be traced to the ideology of an ‘obscure underground sect’ that in a short space of time, and seemingly without a homogeneous base, became the single ‘most influential mass ideology’ of the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> Rational and objective political, or sociological, thought seems at a loss to explain how this phenomenon became the defining ideology of the twentieth century and seems to be at an even greater loss in explaining its rapid demise between 1989 and 1991. For this reason it is necessary to return to the pre-axial age and the logic of mythopoeic thought to understand its beginning and the uncritical religious fervour that its disciples assigned to it.<sup>15</sup>

It will be recalled from chapter one that prior to the emergence of a dividing line between the individual and society mythopoeic thought pervaded and explained human experience. Instead of analysis and conclusions the ancients told myths, not in an allegorical way but as an articulation of abstract thought. Thus, myths represent a perception of reality at a primordial or foundational level and as such provide a powerful tool to mobilize devotees to its cause. A further

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<sup>12</sup> Koestler, A. *et al* (1950) *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism*, London: Hamish Hamilton, p. 82.

<sup>13</sup> The analysis that follows is heavily indebted to the work of Agnes Horvath (1997) ‘The Political Psychology of Trickster-Clown: An Analytical Experiment Around Communism as a Myth’. *EUI Working Papers SPS No.97/5*. San Domenico: Badia Fiesolana (FI); (1998) ‘Tricking into the Position of the Outcast’. *Political Psychology* 19: 331-47; and Horvath, A. & Szakolczai, A. (1992) *The Dissolution of Communist Power: The Case of Hungary*, London: Routledge.

<sup>14</sup> See Horvath, A. (1997) ‘The Political Psychology of Trickster-Clown: An Analytical Experiment Around Communism as a Myth’. *EUI Working Papers SPS No.97/5*, San Domenico: Badia Fiesolana (FI), p.7.

<sup>15</sup> For more on mythopoeic thought see H. Frankfort, *et al* (1971[1946]) *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, Baltimore: Penguin.

development in our understanding of Communism as myth is provided by Horvath in the form of Jung's *archetype* as a means to explain the persistence of the 'irrational in contemporary existence'.<sup>16</sup>

Jung claimed that humans have access to a collective unconscious that is a reservoir of latent images, which he labelled primordial images. These images are inherited from man's ancient past, including human as well as pre-human ancestors. These images can enter consciousness in an infinite variety of variations. At the deepest levels of the unconscious were a few basic images which Jung called archetypes, and it was one of these archetypal images that Horvath takes up to explain the lure of Communism.

Using the archetype of the *charismata* and in particular its counterpart the *trickster* Horvath interprets Communism as a myth arranged around the images and visions streaming from the archetype. Under the guise of a promised Utopia the trickster figure (Communist leader), masquerading as charisma, professes to solve the problems besetting the community by bringing, what Weber calls 'well-being' to its faithful followers.<sup>17</sup> Here the Communist leaders, through their actions and speeches awaken the archetypal figure from which the images stream and the public become the transformers of this communist myth into objective reality.<sup>18</sup>

By examining Koestler's persistence with Communism in light of this understanding of Communism as myth a new reading is developed. When Koestler returned from his tour of the USSR in 1933 he seemed to be deeply affected by what he had seen; still he was to remain in the Communist Party for another five years. In Paris he joined Münzenberg in his *brown-book* campaign to counter the Nazis' blaming of the German Communists for the Reichstag fire.

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<sup>16</sup> See Horvath, A. (1997) 'The Political Psychology of Trickster-Clown: An Analytical Experiment Around Communism as a Myth'. *EUI Working Papers SPS No.97/5*, San Domenico: Badia Fiesolana (FI), p.13.

<sup>17</sup> Weber, M. ([1921-2]1978) *Economy and Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press p.1114

<sup>18</sup> See Horvath, A. (1997) 'The Political Psychology of Trickster-Clown: An Analytical Experiment Around Communism as a Myth'. *EUI Working Papers SPS No.97/5*, San Domenico: Badia Fiesolana (FI), p.21.

This was to be the initial international confrontation between the two giant totalitarian ideologies and the Communists, by evoking the mythology of good versus evil, were adopting the high moral ground.

By evoking this myth the Communists, under Stalin, were representing themselves as the only real opposition to the evil empire that was Nazism and thus, by virtue of this opposition, harbingers of the good. Thousands of the most ‘enlightened’ people in the West were won over by this argument, flocking to join the Communists and were to remain committed despite the purges and the reign of terror unleashed from within. The logic being that the ‘wrong’ of Hitler reinforced the ‘right’ of the Communists and ‘any attack on Stalin’ was construed as ‘an endorsement of Hitler’.<sup>19</sup> Emphasising the role of trickster as charismata in this myth is the deception of both Hitler and Stalin, trickster figures extraordinaire, who in public seemed to be the bitterest of enemies but in private were secretly collaborating all along.<sup>20</sup>

Koestler himself later became aware of the mobilising and deceptive force of this archetypal figure when he explains how the ‘magic’ of Communism enchanted people from all walks of life, from Italian illiterates to American Presidents, and provides ‘an indication of the deep, myth-producing forces that were and still are at work.’<sup>21</sup> He also explains how this myth acts on the rational and irrational level of its victims and as such provides a closed system of thought within which its adherents become trapped.<sup>22</sup>

The problem now concerns the method of escape from this alternative reality, steeped as it is at the level of the archetypal myth, and to achieve this escape a second ‘conversion’ is needed – to, what Foucault terms, ‘renunciation of revolution.’<sup>23</sup> Koestler likewise recognised that a spiritual transformation was

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<sup>19</sup> See Koch, S. (1994) *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals*, London: Harper Collins, p.48.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp.45-74.

<sup>21</sup> See Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, p.390.

<sup>22</sup> See Koestler, A. (1952) *Arrow in the Blue*, New York: Macmillan, pp.277-88.

<sup>23</sup> See Foucault, M. (2005) *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College De France, 1981-82*, tr. G. Burchell, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.209.

required to break with Communism and this has to occur at the level where the unconscious axioms of faith are located – the spiritual level. Eventually this transformation will seep into the conscious realm and what he calls an ‘intellectual re-furnishing’ can then take place.<sup>24</sup> We now turn to the application of the conceptual framework to the conversion of Arthur Koestler. An analysis of the liminal conditions, the search for the presence of a charismatic figure or master of ceremonies, and an exploration of the background or zeitgeist renders possible a more detailed understanding of this conversion experience.

### **Liminal Conditions**

This thesis identifies three highly liminal conditions experienced by Arthur Koestler in his conversion to anti-Communism. The first was his imprisonment in a Franco jail, the next was his encounter with Thomas Mann in the manner of a true reading experience, and the third was his experiences during the dissolution of order that was the Second World War. Koestler was arrested in Malaga in February 1937 and was imprisoned pending execution, a penalty he was lucky to avoid as it was estimated that the Franco forces executed over 4,000 people immediately after the fall of Malaga.<sup>25</sup>

Of the three months that Koestler spent in Seville Central Prison, two were spent in solitary confinement his only solace being granted access to the well-stocked prison library for the final month. Comparing Koestler’s prison experience to a rite of passage framework illuminates how his disillusionment with communism began. As in rites of passage the first stage is the ‘rite of separation’ this comprises of symbolic behaviour that signifies the ‘detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions or from both.’<sup>26</sup> Thus Koestler is

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<sup>24</sup> See Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, p. 357.

<sup>25</sup> See Thomas, H. (1977) *The Spanish Civil War*, London: Hamish Hamilton, p.586.

<sup>26</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p. 94.

arrested and detached from the familiar social setting. Being held in solitary confinement and being vigorously interrogated he has no choice but to reflect on the circumstances that precipitated his incarceration, in the initiation ritual the participants are ‘alternately forced and encouraged to think about their society.’<sup>27</sup>

Turner also emphasizes that ‘liminal entities such as neophytes ...have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system – in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes...’.<sup>28</sup> It is clear that, in this instance, the words neophyte and prisoner are interchangeable without any loss of meaning as prisoners too are stripped of their previous social status. Koestler was in no doubt that his time in prison was a turning point not only in his politics but also in his whole philosophy of life – and as such a real rite of passage. The following citations clearly and unambiguously capture the parallels between the liminal stage of a rite of passage and the liminal aspects of Koestler’s conversion:

Turner: ‘It is as though they’ the neophytes ‘are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew.’<sup>29</sup>

Koestler: ‘In the condemned cell of a Franco prison my former life was to be dissolved and recast in a new shape.’<sup>30</sup>

Because the liminal stage of a rite of passage is fraught with danger due to the release of uncontrollable unconscious energies (See Chapt.2) it is important that a senior instructor or master of ceremonies controls such proceedings. However, being in prison Koestler had no access to such a guide so an improvisation of a sort was called for. Being held in solitary confinement and, for the first two months, not having access to writing or reading material meant that Koestler was severely limited to outside influence. However, he overcame these difficulties

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<sup>27</sup> Victor Turner (1967) *The Forest of Symbols*. New York: Cornell University Press, p.103.

<sup>28</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p. 95.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> See Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, p.193.

by practicing memory exercises such as recalling certain passages from books that he had read in the past.<sup>31</sup>

A passage from one of these books had a profound effect on the incarcerated Koestler. This was a passage from Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*<sup>32</sup> and it is the contention of this thesis that a recollection of that reading provided the inspiration for Koestler to move towards the new structure of identity – anti-Communism. The passage in question concerns Mann's character the prematurely aging Consul Thomas Buddenbrook who, nearing death, searches for meaning in his life. The search successfully concludes with a reading of Schopenhauer's essay *On Death, and its Relation to the Indestructibility of our Essential Selves* and in particular the chapter called *On Death, and its Relation to our Personal Immortality*.

In the novel Thomas Buddenbrook on reading this essay has what can only be described as a mystical experience when the concept of eternity is grasped amid an ecstatic revelation.<sup>33</sup> This revelation has a deep impact on Thomas Buddenbrook who feels freed by the 'sudden rapturous illuminations of his inmost being.'<sup>34</sup> The insight revealed to Mann's character concerned the true freedom that was to be obtained in the demise of the individual; on the question of death it was revealed that:

...death was a joy, so great, so deep that it could be dreamed of only in moments of revelation like the present. It was the return from an unspeakably painful wandering, the correction of a grave mistake, the loosening of chains, the opening of doors – it put right again a lamentable mischance.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 452.

<sup>32</sup> See Thomas Mann's (1999[1901]) *Buddenbrooks*, London: Vintage.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp.523-30

<sup>34</sup> Ibid p.527.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid p.526.

While it is clear that Koestler's reading, or recollection of reading, of Mann might provide solace to one condemned to death what is not so clear is how this reading provides the impetus for converting him away from Communism. The answer, as in Augustine's reading of Ambrose, lies in the allegorical rather than the literal method of interpretation. On the one hand, the literal interpretation of Mann's essay helped Koestler to deal with the prospect of his imminent execution, as physical death, according to this interpretation, allowed the will to float free in mystical union with all humanity. On the other hand, his reflection and disenchantment with his life in the Communist Party could be interpreted allegorically as the death-knell for his old life and the laying of the groundwork for a change in his belief-system.

In the manner that Augustine's spiritual interpretation 'drew aside the mystic veil and opened to view the spiritual meaning',<sup>36</sup> likewise Koestler using this method sees that 'for the first time the veil has fallen and one is in touch with "real reality", the hidden order of things, the X-ray texture of the world, normally obscured by layers of irrelevancy'.<sup>37</sup> Here, in the same way as Augustine, Koestler seems to employ the language of initiation ceremonies.

Just as mysticism was crucial for Thomas Buddenbrook to come to an understanding of life's meaning, similarly, Koestler's reflections on recalling that experience, described as the mystical 'hours by the window', gave new meaning to his circumstances and, he claimed, changed his life completely.<sup>38</sup> In these mystical experiences Koestler describes becoming aware of the infinite, the dissolution of the 'I' and communion with the 'universal pool'. Such experiences are highly liminal and Koestler is fully aware of the possibilities afforded by such anti-structural landscapes when he recalls his prison experiences as 'a softening of resistances and rearrangement of structures which laid them open to that new type of experience that I am leading up to'.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Confessions*: VI, iv, 6.

<sup>37</sup> See Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, p. 352.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 345-62.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 350.

This new type of experience was mysticism and the structures it helped to rearrange was Communism. Thus Koestler began his conversion from Communism to anti-Communism, and the work of Thomas Mann provided the impetus for such a change. Nevertheless, 'reading experiences' are intangible events and as such only provide a direction and energy for the forthcoming quest.<sup>40</sup> In the case of Koestler this quest would begin with an attempt to contact a guide or 'master of ceremonies' to help him come to terms with the disillusionment he was now beginning to feel towards the Utopian myth that was Communism.

That Koestler perceived Thomas Mann as a potential guide becomes evident from the fact that, immediately after his release from prison, he contacted and subsequently travelled to Switzerland to 'pay homage to the master'.<sup>41</sup> However, the meeting for Koestler was unhappy and depressing as Mann treated Koestler as just another roving reporter while Koestler behaved like an adolescent hungering for 'paternal approval'.<sup>42</sup> Again, as in Augustine's relationship with Ambrose, the paternal element is evidence of the parallel with a rite of passage proper when the guide or senior instructor becomes a 'father for the whole group'.<sup>43</sup> Having failed to engage Mann as a guide in order to extricate himself from the Communist Party and steer him to some alternative structure, Koestler now begins the search for a new guide and a new belief system. In September 1937 he returned to Paris and renewed his acquaintance with the man who would guide him to the anti-communist stance that would allow him to finally make the break from the Party – this man was Willi Münzenberg.

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<sup>40</sup> For more on reading experiences as liminal events see Szakolczai, A. (1998) *Max Weber and Michel Foucault: Parallel Life-Works*, London: Routledge, pp.20-37.

<sup>41</sup> See Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, p.372.

<sup>42</sup> See Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p. 143.

<sup>43</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p.108.



## Willi Münzenberg as Master of Ceremonies

Born in Erfurt, Germany in 1889, the son of an alcoholic inn-keeper, Willi Münzenberg grew up in poverty. His mother died when he was six and his father ‘accidentally’ killed himself, whilst cleaning his gun, when Willi was thirteen. In his youth Münzenberg became involved in trade unions and joined the Social Democratic Party of Germany in 1906. Sacked because of his radical activities Münzenberg took to the road and eventually, in 1910, made his way to Zurich where he spent the next eight years involved in Swiss left wing politics.

In 1914 he came into contact with Leon Trotsky who introduced him to Vladimir Lenin and Willi became an important member of the original Bolshevik circle. In 1915 Münzenberg became editor of the *Jugend-Internationale* the most influential and widely circulated socialist journal published during the war. His leadership qualities and practical successes won him the respect of the Russian exiled Bolshevik leaders, notably Karl Radek and Lenin. Following the Russian Revolution Münzenberg was arrested and deported from Switzerland for being an undesirable foreigner.

Back in Berlin Münzenberg transformed the Socialist Youth International into the Young Communist International and took to the streets in battles with the new Weimer government. He also successfully organised aid for the victims of the counter-revolutionary terror in Hungary in 1919. Recognising his charismatic and organisational qualities Lenin made Münzenberg a member of the Executive Committee of the Comintern and also asked him to set up a relief campaign for the victims of the famine that had spread throughout large parts of the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup>

In December 1921 the *Internationale Arbeiter Hilfe* (International Workers Relief) known as the IAH was set up by Münzenberg and his charismatic appeal

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<sup>44</sup> For more on Münzenberg’s visit to Moscow to see Lenin in 1921 see Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p. 102; Gruber, H. (1966) ‘Willi Münzenberg’s German Communist Propaganda Empire 1921-1933’. *The Journal of Modern History* 38: 284.

can be gauged by the prominent personalities he managed to attract to the organisation these included Albert Einstein, Anatole France, Henri Barbusse and George Bernard Shaw. The IAH was a huge success and following its relief efforts on behalf of the Russian famine went on to organise aid for the Japanese earthquake of 1923-4; support for strikers in Canton and Shanghai in 1925; aid to striking British miners in 1926; campaign for the liberation of Sacco and Vanzetti; and support of strikers in Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, France, Iceland, Holland, India, South Africa, and the United States.<sup>45</sup>

Münzenberg became leader of the German Communist Party (KPD), which was the largest Communist Party outside of the Soviet Union and served as a deputy in the Reichstag from 1924 to 1933. After the Reichstag fire on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1933 Hermann Goering led the Nazi Party on a violent purge against their left-wing opponents. Willi Münzenberg and many of his Party colleagues were forced to flee across the French border, where they applied for political asylum and regrouped in Paris.

Paris in 1933 was a mecca for political exiles from Nazi Germany and Münzenberg set about organising and recruiting these émigrés.<sup>46</sup> In Paris Münzenberg achieved what was probably his greatest hour the publication of *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror and the Burning of the Reichstag*, which contained a brief account of the Nazis' rise to power, their persecution and murder of writers and artists, and an analysis of the Reichstag fire. It attempted to prove that the Nazis and not the Communists were responsible for the Reichstag fire in order to assume dictatorial power and eliminate all political opposition.

Münzenberg's strategy, to expose the Nazis as the real arsonists, was so effective that even Goering referred to the Brown Book during the trial of Communists for the fire. In the end, all the prominent Communists were acquitted and only Marinus van der Lubbe, who was arrested near the scene of

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>46</sup> See McMeekin, S. (2004) *The Red Millionaire: A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg, Moscow's Secret Propaganda Tsar in the West*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p.254.

the crime, was convicted.<sup>47</sup> Following the success of the Brown Book campaign Münzenberg organised a series of similar campaigns including: *The Reichstag Fire Trial: The Second Brown Book of Hitler Terror*; the Committee for the Relief of Victims of German Fascism and the Committee Against Imperialist War; the Congress for the Defence of Culture; the campaign to free Thaelmann; and the campaign to provide aid for the Spanish Loyalists. However, in the political climate developing in Moscow, no one was safe least of all those who exhibited leadership qualities or creative thinking.

In October 1936 Münzenberg was summoned to Moscow, grilled by the International Control Commission of the Comintern, and severely reprimanded for breaches in security, excessive independence and accusations of promoting 'popular frontism'.<sup>48</sup> Show trials were underway at this time in Moscow and Münzenberg was lucky to escape a similar fate to other old Bolsheviks whose days were numbered by the Stalinist purges. That he escaped such a fate was mainly due to a plea for further aid from Spain that reached Stalin at this time and Münzenberg was undoubtedly the best person for organising such aid. Nevertheless, within a short time Münzenberg was ordered to surrender control of all his enterprises in Paris to his 'co-worker', the Czech Communist Bohumil Smeral.<sup>49</sup>

Münzenberg was ordered back to Moscow but refused to go and was made a virtual outcast in the Paris Communist movement at that time. He continued to work against the fascist danger and published a weekly paper, *Die Zukunft* (The Future), which ran from October 1938 until the French government, in May 1940, interned him. After internment Münzenberg was marched South during the retreat of the French army and was held at a camp at Chambaran near Lyon. When the French Government fell to the Nazis on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1940 the camp was

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<sup>47</sup> For more on Münzenberg's *Brown Book* see Andrews, C. and James, H. (1990) 'Willi Münzenberg, the Reichstag Fire, and the Conversion of Innocents'. In D. Charters and M. Tugwell (eds) *Deception Operations: Studies in the East-West Context*, London: Brassey's, pp.25-52.

<sup>48</sup> See Gruber, H. (1966) 'Willi Münzenberg's German Communist Propaganda Empire 1921-1933'. *The Journal of Modern History* 38: 297.

<sup>49</sup> See Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p. 122

evacuated and Münzenberg fled south towards the Swiss border. Five months later Willi Münzenberg's body was found in a wood near Grenoble by two hunters and their dogs. It was clear from the decomposition of the body that Willi had died shortly after fleeing the internment camp at Chambaran. What is not so clear is the cause of death: while the official coroner's report deemed Münzenberg's death to have been self-inflicted by hanging, most commentators believe that Willi was assassinated.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, ended the life and career of Willi Münzenberg who was invariably described as 'Moscow's secret propaganda Tsar',<sup>51</sup> the organiser of the 'German Communist propaganda empire',<sup>52</sup> the seducer of Western intellectuals,<sup>53</sup> and as 'a prophet in the wilderness'.<sup>54</sup> For Koestler, Münzenberg fulfilled the role of guide during his disengagement or conversion from Communism and for this reason it is necessary to analyse more closely their relationship.

## Paris Exiles

That Münzenberg was a charismatic leader is evident from his amazing success at mobilising the intelligentsia of the West in the cause of some moral agenda with a Soviet slant.<sup>55</sup> Helmut Gruber describes Münzenberg as a man who was 'open, adaptable, tolerant of others, and gifted with people and he managed to

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<sup>50</sup> See Gruber, H. (1966) 'Willi Münzenberg's German Communist Propaganda Empire 1921-1933', *The Journal of Modern History* 38: 297; Koch, S. (1993) 'Lying for the Truth: Münzenberg and the Comintern'. *The New Criterion* 12: 29; Koestler, A. *et al* (1950) *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism* London: Hamish Hamilton, p. 71; Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, p. 205; Trepper, L. (1977) *The Great Game: Memoirs of a Spy Hitler Couldn't Silence*, New York: McGraw Hill.

<sup>51</sup> See McMeekin, S. (2004) *The Red Millionaire: A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg, Moscow's Secret Propaganda Tsar in the West*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>52</sup> See Gruber, H. (1966) 'Willi Münzenberg's German Communist Propaganda Empire 1921-1933'. *The Journal of Modern History* 38, 3: 278-97

<sup>53</sup> See Koch, S. (1994) *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals*. London: Harper Collins.

<sup>54</sup> Reglar, G. (1959) *The Owl of Minerva*, tr. N. Denny, London: Rupert Hart-Davis, p.76.

<sup>55</sup> For an extensive list of these 'notables' see Koch, S. (1994) *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals*. London: Harper Collins, p.14.

dominate all of his enterprises through the dynamism of his personality.’<sup>56</sup> This was especially true when he re-established his propaganda operation in Paris in 1933 surrounded by his closest followers.

Koestler entered this world and met Willi Münzenberg for the first time when he reached Paris in mid-September 1933 following his travels in the USSR. He was immediately enchanted by the charismatic Münzenberg and became ‘deeply attached to him – an attachment which lasted until he was assassinated in 1940.’<sup>57</sup> This type of devotion to Münzenberg was not uncommon among the band of collaborators surrounding him in Paris, nevertheless, for one commentator Koestler was the ‘greatest disciple’ of that ‘magic circle’.<sup>58</sup> But court intrigue and rivalry for Münzenberg’s favour meant that Koestler, the latest addition to the court, was assigned to compiling an Anti-Fascist Archive far from the inner sanctum of the *Münzenberg Trust*. For the next few years Koestler acted as a kind of roving correspondent and writer for Münzenberg’s many publications travelling to report on such events as the campaign over the Saar plebiscite in 1934 and two stints in civil war torn Spain in 1936 and 1937.

By the time of his second assignment in Spain Koestler’s ardour for Communism seemed to be undergoing a revival while Münzenberg’s was weakening.<sup>59</sup> It was on this assignment that Koestler was arrested and related his mystical experiences as the ‘hours by the window’; following his release Koestler eventually made his way back to Paris after the unsuccessful encounter with Thomas Mann. Now he was ready to make a final break with the Communist Party if a mentor or guide could be found and Münzenberg fulfilled that role. By the time Koestler arrived back in Paris in the winter of 1937

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<sup>56</sup> See Gruber, H. (1966) ‘Willi Münzenberg’s German Communist Propaganda Empire 1921-1933’. *The Journal of Modern History* 38: 295-6.

<sup>57</sup> See Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, p. 205.

<sup>58</sup> See Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p. 104.

<sup>59</sup> For more on Koestler’s and Münzenberg’s ardour towards Communism see Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p. 122; Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, p. 314; Gruber, H. (1966) ‘Willi Münzenberg’s German Communist Propaganda Empire 1921-1933’, *The Journal of Modern History* 38: 297.

Münzenberg had already lost his power base in the Comintern and seemed to be cutting his ties with the Communist Party.<sup>60</sup>

While Koestler claimed that Münzenberg 'broke with the Comintern in 1938 six months after myself',<sup>61</sup> it would appear that this assertion is erroneous as Münzenberg had been disobeying calls to present himself in Moscow since January 1937 and in September 1937 his book *Propaganda als Waffe* appeared and was roundly condemned by the Communist Press.<sup>62</sup> The reason for Koestler's blurring of the dates of his' and Willi's departure from the Comintern is, according to Cesarani, suggestive that in retrospect Koestler had 'wished he had left earlier, pre-empting his mentor rather than trailing in his wake'.<sup>63</sup> Koestler himself admits that the date of his final break with the Communist Party is hard to identify, as it is a story of confusion and last minute hesitations.<sup>64</sup> What is clear is that Koestler despite his later writings remained in outward appearance to be still totally committed to the cause at least up to the time when he returned to Paris in December 1937.

The first thing Koestler had done on being freed from Spanish prison in May 1937 was to send a telegram to Münzenberg quoting Goethe with the words 'I embrace thee, ye millions' and adding the words 'am cured of all belly-aches' – belly-aches being the slang expression for doubts about the Party line.<sup>65</sup> It is clear that Koestler was still a committed Communist and needed to reassure Münzenberg of this.

Then he spent three months in England writing a book on his Spanish experiences called *Spanish Testament* completed in mid September 1937;

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<sup>60</sup> See Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p. 149.

<sup>61</sup> See Koestler, A. *et al* (1950) *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism* London: Hamish Hamilton, p. 71.

<sup>62</sup> See Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p. 149.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> See Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, p. 382.

<sup>65</sup> See Koestler, A. *et al* (1950) *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism* London: Hamish Hamilton, p. 76.

included in this work was his earlier *L'Espagne ensanglantée* written after his first journey to Spain. The American literary historian Murray Sperber identifies three distinct shifts in Koestler's self-perception between the autumn of 1936 when he wrote *L'Espagne ensanglantée*, the summer of 1937 when he wrote *Spanish Testament* and the publication of the revised *Dialogue with Death* in 1942 some four years after his resignation from the Communist Party.<sup>66</sup>

For Sperber the writing of *L'Espagne ensanglantée* reflects Koestler's self-perception as an anonymous anti-fascist fighter whose subjective experiences are subordinate to the larger objective goals. The emphasis in this work focuses on the *Nationalist* campaign and Koestler's own adventures are muted. By the time of the writing of *Spanish Testament*, which included a section called *Dialogue with Death*, Sperber identifies a shift in Koestler's self-perception as his subjective experiences become more pronounced. Sperber classifies this period of Koestler's life (summer and autumn 1937) as one of transition and tension and this is reflected in the writing style adopted in *Spanish Testament*.

The first half of the book unsuccessfully attempts to combine what Sperber calls 'the propagandist's contempt for his audience with the liberal journalist's sympathy for a like-minded, individualist reader'.<sup>67</sup> Only in the second half of the book after Koestler adopts a more subjective style does the narrative become more coherent. The tension evident in Koestler's literary style in *Spanish Testament* is, according to Cesarani, a reflection of the tension in the author's own life at the time of writing especially the ideological mire in which Koestler found himself in 1936-7.<sup>68</sup>

Finally in Koestler's writing after he left the Communist Party a new sense of self is evident, this is particularly marked when the 'Forwards' to the 1937 and 1942 editions of *Dialogue with Death* are examined. In the 'Forward' to the

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<sup>66</sup> For a more detailed historical account of this literature see Sperber, M. A. (1977) 'Looking Back on Koestler's Spanish War'. In M.A. Sperber (ed) *Arthur Koestler: A Collection of Critical Essays*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, pp.109-21.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p.113.

<sup>68</sup> See Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p. 137

1937 edition Koestler refers to himself as ‘a journalist’ and ‘a writer’, however, when he wrote the 1942 ‘Forward’ he largely writes in the first person singular and the increasing use of ‘I’ is continued throughout the main text. Thus through a textual analysis of the successive ‘Forwards’ Sperber has identified Koestler’s emerging individualism and this individualism would eventually help him to break with the Communist Party.<sup>69</sup>

### **Harbinger of Disillusionment**

However, returning to the period at the end of 1937 when Koestler’s life was full of tension and he was unaware of the profound and unconscious changes in his outlook and values, something or someone was needed to guide him from the ideological mire in which he was trapped. This guide would appear in the form of Willi Münzenberg in Paris at the end of 1937.

The above analysis demonstrates that after his release from a Spanish jail, and prior to his return to Paris and his re-acquaintance with Willi Münzenberg, Koestler still outwardly considered himself a Communist but inwardly changes were taking place. After spending three months in England and a short time in the Middle East as a reporter for the *News Chronicle* Koestler returned to Paris for a few weeks. It is these few weeks in Paris, in December 1937, that a sea-change occurred in Koestler’s relationship with the Communist Party or as he claims himself that the ‘conflict began’.<sup>70</sup>

Prior to these few weeks in Paris Koestler maintained the persona of a committed Communist, however, after the Paris sojourn he began to talk openly against the Party line on certain matters, a course which could only lead to one outcome – a break with the Communist Party. For this reason it is crucial to investigate the short time that Koestler spent in Paris at the end of 1937 and what

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p.116.

<sup>70</sup> See Koestler, A. *et al* (1950) *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism*, London: Hamish Hamilton, p. 76.



influenced him so much that allowed him to abandon his deeply felt beliefs concerning Communism. However, as either himself or others provided no detailed account of his stay in Paris in December 1937, a certain extrapolation of the circumstances is necessary in order to close the circle.

At the time that Koestler returned from Palestine in December 1937 to spend a few weeks in Paris Willi Münzenberg had been relieved of his Comintern duties and was about to seek political hibernation in a French sanatorium under the guise of suffering from a 'slight cardiac neurosis'.<sup>71</sup> The circumstances that had precipitated this move were a wave of political murders and terror that swept through the European Communist Party directed against those perceived as enemies by Stalin – the Comintern was being liquidated.<sup>72</sup> In such a dangerous political climate Münzenberg was preparing for his final break with Soviet Communism and had instigated that break by refusing to obey orders to return to Moscow. This was the exact time when Koestler, himself in search of guidance, returned to Paris for the fateful meeting with Münzenberg.<sup>73</sup>

The meeting must have been a revelation for Koestler as it was clear that this guardian of the *Holy Grail* was severing his ties to the Communist Party. Münzenberg, stripped of his power base, shunned by his friends and allies, was shifting his allegiance from Communist propaganda to anti-fascist socialism. For Willi the break with the Comintern had been brewing for a long time. Twelve months previously he had been summoned to Moscow with his wife Babette Gross who later recalled that when they arrived in Moscow they were shunned

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<sup>71</sup> For accounts of Münzenberg's supposed 'illness' in Paris at this time see McMeekin, S. (2004) *The Red Millionaire: A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg, Moscow's Secret Propaganda Tsar in the West*, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp.286-7; Koch, S. (1994) *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals*. London: Harper Collins, pp.302-6.

<sup>72</sup> For an insight into the terror and murder that swept through the Comintern see Conquest, R. (1990) *The Great Terror*, London: Queen Anne Press, and for a first hand account see Krivitsky, W. G. (1985 [1939]) *In Stalin's Secret Service*, New York: Enigma Books.

<sup>73</sup> For references to Koestler's short stay in Paris at this time see Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p.146; Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, p.382.

by many of their friends – ‘no one dared visit us after all we might be among the damned.’<sup>74</sup>

Anticipating his destiny Münzenberg now began to distance himself from the Communist Party and had went so far as to create a new party called the *Deutsche Freiheits Partei* (German Freedom Party) with such liberal, bourgeois and conservative figures as the novelist Heinrich Mann, one time editor of the Ullstien press Georg Bernhard, and Catholic Center Party members Dr. Karl Spiecker, Father Muckermann and Monsignor Poels.<sup>75</sup> It was clear that Willi Münzenberg after more than two decades of affiliation to Russian Communism was finally severing his ties to that Party.

Witnessing his ‘political shaman’ shaking off the ‘last ditch illusions’ about Soviet Communism must have had a profound effect on Koestler who, at the time, admitted that he clung to the hope-sustaining illusion of Communism and thus hesitated on making any firm decision.<sup>76</sup> Now the unconscious changes that had taken place in a Spanish jail could at last be acknowledged, brought to the fore and acted upon. And this is what happened – using Münzenberg’s critical stance against Soviet Communism Koestler began to slowly dissolve ‘the ideological and emotional bonds that bound him to Communism.’<sup>77</sup> All Koestler needed in order to articulate this dissent was the guidance and ratification of his ‘mentor’ Willi Münzenberg, and this was provided in the last weeks of December 1937 in Paris.

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<sup>74</sup> Gross cited in McMeekin, S. (2004) *The Red Millionaire: A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg, Moscow’s Secret Propaganda Tsar in the West*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p.286.

<sup>75</sup> For Münzenberg’s anti-Communist stance see McMeekin, S. (2004) *The Red Millionaire: A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg, Moscow’s Secret Propaganda Tsar in the West*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp.287-294; Koch, S. (1994) *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals*. London: Harper Collins, pp.302-9; Gruber, H. (1966) ‘Willi Münzenberg’s German Communist Propaganda Empire 1921-1933’, *The Journal of Modern History* 38: 297; Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, pp.148-9.

<sup>76</sup> See Koestler, A. (1952) *Arrow in the Blue*, New York: Macmillan, pp.79-81; Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, p.384.

<sup>77</sup> See Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p.149.

## Going Public

The first public utterance that Koestler made concerning his drift from the Communist Party happened immediately after his visit to Paris and witnessing the open dissent between Münzenberg and the Comintern. During a lecture tour of England, for the Left Book Club, Koestler was asked to comment on the small Leftist splinter group the *Partido Obrero Unificado Marxista* (POUM) who had split with the Communist Party of Spain on the side of Trotsky instead of Stalin. The Communists considered the POUM at this time as their number one enemy. When asked to comment Koestler replied that in his opinion the POUM ‘acted in good faith and to call them traitors was both stupid and a desecration of their deed’.<sup>78</sup> He was to repeat such criticism of divisive policies in the following lectures but in the conservatism of the English Communist Party this critique only resulted in either heated debates or shunned silences.

That he was not immediately dismissed from the Communist Party is probably due to the fact that the Party did not want a public rupture with such a famous survivor of Franco’s prison. However, on return to Paris in the spring of 1938 he prepared to give a talk to the *German Émigré Writers’ Association*. The talk itself contained no direct criticism of either Stalin or of Soviet Russia but it did finish with three platitudes that left no doubt to insiders that Arthur Koestler was burning his Communist bridges. The conclusions began with a claim that no movement, party, or individual was infallible, next it stated that it is wrong to persecute friends who pursue the same goals through different means, and finally ended with a quote from Thomas Mann that ‘in the long run, a harmful truth is better than a useful lie’. With these words Koestler in effect excommunicated himself from the Communist Party and within a few days had sent a letter of resignation to Party headquarters.

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<sup>78</sup> See Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, pp.383-4.

Having divested himself of Communist beliefs Koestler now needed to install a new belief system and during the critical period after the break with the Communist Party he surrounded himself with like minded individuals. In the autumn of 1938 he immersed himself as editor of a new German weekly paper called *Die Zukunft* (The Future) published by Münzenberg in Paris. Other ex-Communists on the editorial staff included Manes Sperber, Paul Sering, the sociologist Julius Steinberg and the novelist Ludwig Marcuse.

To emphasise the liminality of the situation the feelings of *communitas* experienced by these anti-Communist initiands must be highlighted. For Sperber ‘our friendship was like that of rock-climbers who are exposed to the same enticements and dangers and expect no less from each other than they do from themselves.’<sup>79</sup> While in Koestler’s recollection the ‘comradeship of a like-minded team’ helped him through the critical period when they were ‘like convalescents learning to walk again after an operation.’<sup>80</sup> Turner describes this feeling of comradeship as *communitas* and describes it as ‘a liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc, from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses.’<sup>81</sup>

It is no coincidence that Koestler now enters ‘the most creative and chaotic period of [his] life’.<sup>82</sup> In the following years he wrote and published two novels *The Gladiators* (1939) based on a slave revolt led by Spartacus and *Darkness at Noon* (1940) a novel about the Soviet show trials of the late 1930’s. He also wrote *Scum of the Earth* (1941) an account of the fall of France in 1940 and his own escape from the Nazis.

In the following years Koestler’s stance against the Communists hardened and in 1950 with like-minded anti-Communists he published the classic *The God*

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<sup>79</sup> See Sperber, M. (1994) *Until My Eyes Are Closed With Shards*, tr. H. Zohn, New York: Holmes & Meier, p. 134.

<sup>80</sup> See Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, pp.406-7.

<sup>81</sup> Turner, V. (1982) *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York, PAJ Publications p.44.

<sup>82</sup> See Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p.145.

*That Failed* he had now come full circle; from his conversion to Communism in 1931 he was now, twenty years later, a convert to anti-Communism. Ignazio Silone, a contributor to *The God that Failed* recognised the difficulty to 'free oneself from an experience as intense as that of the underground organisation of the Communist Party.' A conversion is necessary and when this occurs the ex-Communists constitute 'a category apart'. He jokingly concludes that the 'final struggle will be between the Communists and the ex-Communists.'<sup>83</sup>

It should now be clear that Arthur Koestler's departure from the Communist Party required a 'conversion' type experience and Willi Münzenberg provided the role of expert guide during this liminal moment. By identifying the influence of a 'charismatic' figure in guiding Koestler from the grip of Communism a greater insight is provided of the 'liminal' conditions surrounding that transition. Nevertheless it is the interpersonal relations and the societal conditions that will provide the basis from whence a new belief system will be installed.

## **Background / Zeitgeist**

Although Koestler resigned from the Communist Party in 1938 it took 'many years' to alter what he calls the 'intellectual structure' and free him from the myth of Communism.<sup>84</sup> New gods needed to be installed and these deities would come in the shape of a new faith that would again transform Koestler's belief system. Consequently, the spirit of the times or the social background needs to be investigated to determine from whence this new faith would come. Over the next few years the journey towards the new anti-Communist identity would take place and before arrival three key steps along that journey will be identified. First the writing of the classic novel '*Darkness at Noon*' synonymous with a clearing out of the old, next was his immersion in the community of like-minded anti-communists and finally the installation of the new which occurred with his

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<sup>83</sup> See Silone in Koestler, A. *et al* (1950) *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism* London: Hamish Hamilton, p.118.

<sup>84</sup> See Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, p. 357.

organising of, and participation in, the *Congress for Cultural Freedom* held in Berlin.

## **Darkness at Noon**

Taking inspiration and guidance from Münzenberg's break with the Communist Party Koestler set about putting his ideas on his own disillusionment with Communism into literary form. The result was the novel *'Darkness at Noon'*, begun in the summer of 1938 and finally published in the beginning of December 1940. Having begun the novel Koestler notes that he:

Did not have to search for plot and incident; they were waiting among the stored memories of seven years, which, while the lid was down on them, had undergone a kind of fermentation. Now that the pressure was lifted, they came bubbling up, revealing their true essence and colour.<sup>85</sup>

The lid that kept those memories in check was the myth of Communism and the lifting of the lid began when Koestler, taking his cue from Münzenberg, resigned from the Communist Party.

In the novel Koestler attempts to explain the riddle of why veteran Bolsheviks, during the course of the Moscow show-trials, took the stand and reiterated the confessions they had made in captivity incriminating themselves and others in crimes they could not have committed. The solution to this riddle, known as the 'Rubashov theory of the confessions', logically deduces that the mythology and political philosophy the old Bolsheviks have converted to is so compelling that it obliges them to offer one last act of self-sacrifice for the revolution.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 394.

Writing the novel was not only a cathartic exercise for Koestler but it also occurred during the anti-foreigner era ushered in after the German – Soviet pact in 1939 after which Koestler was interned. Released in January 1940, amid the hysteria and anti-foreigner sentiment gripping France, Koestler was continuously harassed by the police as he attempted to finish the novel. Thus, as the social order was breaking down, Koestler accesses from within this dissolution an insight into the mythical lure of Communism and likewise an understanding of a means to escape by forming a new identity in the shape of anti-Communism.<sup>86</sup> The process described by Koestler as ‘a revelation’ is strikingly familiar to the wisdom (*mana*) imparted in rites of passage and described by Turner as having ontological value in that it ‘refashions the very being of the neophyte.’<sup>87</sup>

When the novel *Darkness at Noon* was published it seemed to provide a banner under which disaffected Communists could assemble and begin their refutation and renunciation of the myth that was Soviet revolutionary doctrine.<sup>88</sup> However, as war raged across Europe any hope of developing structures, so that these ideological roots could be cultivated, had to be put on hold.

After the war Koestler began his search for an identity in which he could incorporate his political and ideological beliefs. This ideological and political search for a home parallels his search for a physical home as up to now he lived a kind of nomadic lifestyle that saw him residing in Hungary, Austria, Germany, Palestine, Russia, France and England and would often complain of having

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 393-405.

<sup>87</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p.103.

<sup>88</sup> Michael Foot describes how his reading of the novel led to a ‘true revelation’ and how it cast a ‘terrifying shaft of darkness’ over, not only the past but also the future, see Foot, M. (1986) *Loyalists and Loners*, London: Collins, p.217; Other commentators included Hugh Thomas the biographer of the left wing writer John Strachey who maintained that a reading of Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon* ‘...completed Strachey’s political education’ see Thomas, H. (1973) *John Strachey*, New York: Harper & Row, p.209-10; and David Cesarani who perceived in the novel a ‘powerful appeal’ to the ‘tens of thousands of ex-Communists who wanted their disillusion explained and their transgression forgiven’, see Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p.174.

‘nowhere to go’.<sup>89</sup> In the coming years he would try living in the U.S., North Wales and Italy before finally settling in Britain.

In addition, this feeling of homelessness can be directly linked to the idea of Communism being understood in terms of mythology. Just as prior to the axial-age mythology provided a ‘rootedness’ for half-awakened consciousness the mythology of Communism also provided its adherents with a sense of belonging, the capacity to feel at ‘home’ in a strange world. However, this feeling comes at a cost as it best becomes effective with the submission of will and self-reflexivity for an illusive future and the Party provides this by advocating a pre-occupation with a future Utopia. Thus, members of the Comintern such as Koestler could blind themselves to the terror and dark side of the Party by dreaming of a Utopian future. However on leaving the Communist Party one is again forced to reflect on the present and a state of ‘blind wandering’ returns and needs to be overcome.<sup>90</sup> To overcome this feeling of ‘homelessness’, or what Koestler calls this ‘period of outer loneliness and inner emptiness’,<sup>91</sup> a new home is required and Arthur Koestler began to seek that home amongst the numerous ex-Communists in post war Europe.

## Other Initiates

In *The God That Failed* Koestler indicates that a renunciation or conversion from Communism is needed, as the:

...addiction to the Soviet myth is as tenacious and difficult to cure as any other addiction. After the Lost Week-end in Utopia the temptation is strong to have just

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.417.

<sup>90</sup> This feeling of ‘homelessness’ conceptualised as *unheimlich* has already been analysed in chapter three, ‘The Conversion of St. Augustine’, of this thesis.

<sup>91</sup> See Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, p.393.



one last drop, even if watered down and sold under a different label.<sup>92</sup>

In order to side-step the attraction to some diluted version of Communism, Koestler seeks the 'communitas' of other initiates who found themselves outside the structures of the Communist Party. His first political venture after the war was to join with George Orwell in attempting to revive the *League for the Rights of Man*, a movement dedicated to the promotion and defence of human rights with particular emphasis on freedom of thought. With this idea in mind Koestler and Orwell had written a manifesto calling for psychological disarmament that would see the dismantling of obstacles to the distribution of information.

One idea they had in mind was to freely distribute British newspapers in Russia and Russian newspapers in Britain, similar ideas were envisioned for beaming radio and television signals across frontiers and also the right of citizens of each bloc to travel and holiday in the territory of the other.<sup>93</sup> They set about seeking endorsement for such a proposal from some of the world's best known personalities. However, within a few months the international situation was beset with mistrust and tension, and relations between the East and West was deemed to have deteriorated too far for such a scheme to work.

Instead they attempted to assemble a gathering of left-wingers and socialists to lay the foundations for a:

...new, broader and more modern League for the Rights of Man, with the primary aim of coordinating those at present isolated movements people and groups from America to Hungary, which have a common outlook.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> See Koestler, A. *et al* (1950) *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism* London: Hamish Hamilton, p.82.

<sup>93</sup> See Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, pp.252-3.

<sup>94</sup> Koestler to Manes Sperber cited in Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p.254.

The 'common outlook', alluded to by Koestler, was obviously an anti-Communist one. It is clear that Koestler was attempting to organise a structure that would allow the reaggregation of the ex-Communists and thus consummate the passage from Communism to anti-Communism. Among the people, having a common outlook, that Koestler joined forces with at this particular time were Bertrand Russell, Albert Camus, André Malraux, Franz Borkenau, Manes Sperber, André Gide, Ignazio Silone, Stephen Spender and Richard Crossman, to name just a few.

It was with the Labour M.P. Richard Crossman, in the winter of 1947, that Koestler jointly worked on a plan for a book of essays written by like-minded people about their disillusionment with Communism. *The God That Failed*, published in the beginning of 1950, included essays from Koestler, Gide, Silone, Spender, Richard Wright and Louis Fischer and provided a literary outlet for ex-Communists to vent their disillusionment with the mythology of Marxism. The book appealed to a wide readership and was instrumental in helping many to break with Communism including the young Arnold Wesker and the Hungarian writer George Schopflin.<sup>95</sup>

From his writing of *Darkness at Noon*, and his essay in *The God That Failed*, Koestler seemed to be finding a 'home' for his ideological and political roots in the philosophy of anti-Communism he was developing. This philosophy would be further developed and underpinned with the organisation of the anti-Soviet pro-democratic *Congress for Cultural Freedom* held in Berlin in June 1950.

### **Congress for Cultural Freedom**

The Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) was born from a desire to counter the Soviet propaganda machine aimed at the West. Taking advantage of its wartime popularity and the tradition inherited from Willi Münzenberg of creating

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<sup>95</sup> See Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p.344.

(ostensibly autonomous) popular front organisations, the Soviets in the late 1940's had organised a series of events to highlight how American 'imperialism' threatened to enslave the world. Under a 'peace offensive' banner the Soviets had been instrumental in organising the Conference for Peace in Wroclaw in September 1948, the International Peace Conference in New York in March 1949 and the Peace Congress in Paris in April the same year. Notable cultural icons attending these events included Picasso, Paul Robeson and Charlie Chaplin and their endorsement of Soviet ideology seemed to give the USSR the edge in the propaganda war beginning to emerge in the post-war era.<sup>96</sup>

While there had been some challenges to the Soviet 'peace offensive', as in Sidney Hook's rally under the banner of *Americans for Intellectual Freedom* to coincide with the pro-Soviet peace conference in New York, and David Rousset's *International Day of Resistance to Dictatorship and War* at the time of the Paris peace congress in April 1949, many American foreign policy analysts were calling for a more radical approach to propaganda.<sup>97</sup> With this idea in mind, in the summer of 1949, Melvyn Lasky, an employee of the American Office of Military Government, approached Ruth Fischer and Franz Borkenau about plans to hold a Soviet style congress in support of democracy and cultural freedom, attended by intellectuals and to be defiantly located in West Berlin the following year.

Early in 1950 Koestler was invited to help organise the congress, provide a keynote speech in the opening session, deliver a paper on the second day, and help to draft a manifesto on intellectual freedom to be presented at the closing ceremony. He accepted the invitation and immersed himself whole-heartedly in the organisation of that event.

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<sup>96</sup> For more on the Congress for Cultural Freedom see Coleman, P. (1989) *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind, of Post-War Europe*, London: Collier Macmillan, p. 4; Scott-Smith, G. (2000) '“A Radical Democratic Political Offensive”: Melvyn J. Lasky, *Der Monat*, and the Congress for Cultural Freedom'. *Journal of Contemporary History* 35: 266.

<sup>97</sup> See Scott, L. (1999) 'Beyond Diplomacy: Propaganda and the History of the Cold War'. In G.D. Rawnsley (ed) *Cold-War Propaganda in the 1950s*, London: Basingstoke; and Rawnsley, G.D. (1999) 'The Campaign of Truth: a Populist Propaganda'. In G.D. Rawnsley (ed) *Cold-War Propaganda in the 1950s*, London: Basingstoke, p.32.

The content and tone of Koestler's contribution to the Congress makes it clear that he had finally and completely not only broken with Communism but also had fully converted to the anti-Communist stance he now professed.<sup>98</sup> He ridiculed those intellectuals, in particular people like Thomas Mann and Jean Paul Sartre, who attempted to preserve their neutrality and 'supposed integrity' when debating the choice between Communism and anti-Communism. 'Faced with destiny's challenge, they act like clever imbeciles and preach neutrality towards the bubonic plague. Mostly they are the victims of a professional disease: the intellectual's estrangement from reality.'<sup>99</sup> He concluded this opening speech by appealing to the intellectuals to abandon their neutrality.

The following day Koestler delivered a paper, *The False Dilemma*, in which he tried to portray the anguish experienced by intellectuals concerning their neutralist position as a false dilemma. By analysing the meaning of political terms such as 'Left' and 'Right' Koestler maintained that these terms, and others such as 'socialism' and 'capitalism' had become so far removed from their original meaning that they were no longer helpful as expressions of political reality. To emphasise this point Koestler suggested that the people of socialist Britain and capitalist United States experienced a similar high level of freedom irrespective of their opposing economic systems. On the other hand the curtailment of freedom in the USSR and Fascist Spain seemed to be at a similarly high level.

Challenging Marxist ideology Koestler was suggesting that the freedom of the individual rested more on the political system rather than the economic system: 'The alternative is no longer nationalisation or private economy in the abstract; the real problem is to find the proper balance of state ownership, control, planning and free enterprise.' The solution lies not in capitalism or socialism but in a dialectical mysticism, which Koestler anticipated would result from the pressure of tyranny against freedom. Out of this pressure would emerge a

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<sup>98</sup> For the text of Koestler's contribution to the Congress for Cultural Freedom see Koestler, A. (1955) *The Trail of the Dinosaur and Other Essays*. London: Hutchinson, pp.186-95.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.189-91.

‘biological stimulus as it were, which will release the new mutation of human consciousness; and that its content might be a new spiritual awareness, born of anguish and suffering, of the full meaning of freedom’. In this way the members of the Congress for Cultural Freedom were to be the vanguard in the counter-faith that was anti-Communism.<sup>100</sup>

Arthur Koestler had at last found a home amongst the writers and intellectuals that embodied the now spiritualised anti-Communist faith that emerged in post war Europe. However, while throughout the rest of his life he remained a committed anti-Communist his domicile within the Congress for Cultural Freedom was short lived. Within four months of addressing the inaugural meeting of the CCF Koestler had resigned from the Executive Committee set up to continue the work begun in Berlin.

Publicly Koestler cited ‘grounds of health’ as the reason for his resignation but in private he referred to a number of difficulties to explain his sudden departure. His first threat to resign from the Congress was over a proposed invitation to Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Thomas Mann to attend an event, to be held in Paris and organised by the Congress. His opposition, to these European intellectuals being sponsored by the Congress of Cultural Freedom, lay in his belief that they were at best neutrals in the fight against Communism and at worst potential members of Stalin’s Fifth Column in Europe.<sup>101</sup> Another reason put forward for his sudden departure from the Congress was Koestler’s annoyance over the rejection of some of his favourite schemes to counter the propaganda emanating from the Soviets. Also Koestler’s militancy now appeared out of place in an organisation that seemed to have come under the control of the pacifistic members of the Congress.<sup>102</sup> For whatever reason Koestler resigned from the CCF it is clear that the short period of time (May to August 1950) he spent immersed in the project provided the impetus to

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> See Hamilton, I. (1982) *Koestler: A Biography*, London: Secker. & Warburg, pp.217-8; also Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, pp.290, 367.

<sup>102</sup> See Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, pp.367-8.

alter and shape the intellectual structure that resulted in his anti-Communist persona.

Having undergone this transformation, which began with the three months spent in a Spanish prison in the spring of 1937 and culminated in the three months spent in the CFF in the summer of 1950, Koestler is now totally freed from the myth of Communism and proceeds to his next project. As to the length of time it takes to convert from Communism Koestler is aware of the dynamics involved and conscious that a change of this sort takes place at the 'spiritual core of the subject', and that it will take a long time to 'seep through to the periphery', until finally the entire personality, all 'conscious thoughts and actions', become 'impregnated with it'.<sup>103</sup>

In many ways Koestler's involvement with the CCF signifies the consummation of the passage from communism to anti-communism and as such can be likened to the third phase of the ritual, which Turner called 'reaggregation or reincorporation'.<sup>104</sup> Thus having disengaged himself from Communism through his conversion to anti-Communism, which culminated in his contribution to the Congress in Berlin, Koestler returns to the structures of European society revitalised by his experience of *communitas*. Many commentators, including Koestler himself, were aware of the significance of the Berlin Congress as a turning point in his life. Peter Coleman, Australian lawyer, parliamentarian and chronicler of the Congress movement, has observed: '...if Berlin was a triumph for Arthur Koestler, it was also the climax of his swan song.'<sup>105</sup> The latest biographer of Koestler portrays his participation and resignation from the Congress as a 'catharsis',<sup>106</sup> while Koestler himself describes his 'Berlin triumph and resignation as an emergence from one of the

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<sup>103</sup> See Koestler, A. (1954) *The Invisible Writing* London: Collins, p.357.

<sup>104</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p. 94.

<sup>105</sup> Colman, P (1989) *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Post War Europe*, London: Collier Macmillan, p. 33.

<sup>106</sup> See Cesarani, D. (1998) *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, London: William Heineman, p. 370

major periodic shocks which determine the pattern of my life.’<sup>107</sup> He also notes that by the end of the Congress he is unhappy because ‘real fraternal feeling’ is ‘missing’,<sup>108</sup> the significance of this statement, in the context of a rite of passage, reinforces Koestler’s transition from the second phase of liminality and *communitas* (fraternal feeling) to the third phase of reaggregation (structure).

Writing *Darkness at Noon* was a cathartic moment for Koestler that offered an insight into the mythology of Communism and a means to sever the binding forces that kept him clinging to the last shreds of the ‘torn illusion’.<sup>109</sup> The publication of this novel provided an umbrella under which other disillusioned Communists could gather. The *communitas* experiences by these initiates provided the networks of interpersonal relationships from whence the new ‘belief-system’(anti-Communism) could be installed. The installation of this new belief-system occurred for Koestler in his organisation of, and participation in, the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Now that the background had provided the new belief-system the dialectical circle is closed and Koestler is free to return to his primary interest – matters scientific. He clearly intimates that it is time to return to the structure of his professional career when he declares ‘...that Cassandra has gone hoarse, and is due for a vocational change’.<sup>110</sup>

## Conclusion

The conversion of Arthur Koestler to anti-Communism occurred over a long period of time beginning with his incarceration in a Spanish prison in 1936 and culminating in his presentations at the Congress for Cultural Freedom in the summer of 1950. While the impact of the Second World War (1939-45), on

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<sup>107</sup> From Goodman, C. (ed) (1985) *Living With Koestler: Mamaine Koestler's Letters 1945-51*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, pp.151.

<sup>108</sup> Koestler cited in Hamilton, I. (1982) *Koestler: A Biography*, London: Secker. & Warburg, p.193

<sup>109</sup> See Koestler, A. *et al* (1950) *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism* London: Hamish Hamilton, p.82.

<sup>110</sup> Cited in Hamilton, I. (1982) *Koestler: A Biography*, London: Secker. & Warburg, Preface, p.xv.

Koestler's life, played an important role in the extended duration of his conversion, of equal importance was the irrational and tenacious hold Communist ideology had over its faithful followers. In order to understand this retentive bond an analysis of Communism as Myth was offered whereby its Utopian promise is used as a lure to awaken the collective unconscious and bind followers to its cause. Consequently a conversion is needed to break free from the bond of Communism and this allows the application of the theoretical framework to be applied to Koestler's turn to anti-Communism.

Beginning with his experiences in a Spanish prison it is clear that the liminal conditions forced Koestler to reflect on his circumstances, which, in turn, led to a reassessment of a passage by Thomas Mann concerning a mystical interpretation of death. Analysing this death in an allegorical manner allows us to view Koestler's mysticism as the beginning of his break with Communism. Willi Münzenberg acts as the charismatic figure instrumental in guiding Koestler towards breaking with the Communist Party. Witnessing Münzenberg, whom he describes as his *shaman*, openly disagreeing with Soviet dictats allows Koestler to articulate his own dissention, which had been brewing since his incarceration in a Spanish jail. The final piece of the theoretical framework provides the experiential basis from which the new identity would be constructed. Writing, testing, and finally articulating his conversion to anti-Communism provides Arthur Koestler with the means to irrevocably free himself from the stranglehold that was Communist mythology.

Some of the broader issues that can be elucidated from the conversion of Arthur Koestler reinforce the main aims of this thesis. Without the anthropological, sociological and psychological tools employed by the theoretical framework much would be lost in the analysis of Koestler's conversion. Liminality as experienced by Koestler in a Spanish jail and in the vacuum created by the Second World War led to the suspension of the background and opened the door to enable a crossing of the threshold. The social background that was post-war Europe offered the means by which a new belief-system could be structured. Cold-War politics plays no small part in mobilising the disaffected Communists and provides Koestler a stage on which



to articulate his re-orientation. Finally the feelings of 'homelessness' experienced by Koestler throughout his conversion motivated him in the direction of his new 'home' - anti-Communism.

## **Conclusion**

The starting point of this thesis was to study certain dynamics involved in the conversion process. An historical investigation was conducted in order to identify the origins of these motivating forces. Identifying those forces as liminality, the charismatic figure and background influences allowed a framework to be constructed from which the phenomenon of conversion could be analysed. Applying this theoretical framework to some selected case-studies provided insights into the social, political, cultural and historical aspects of the conversion experience. These insights in turn highlighted the fluidity of identity and the important role of background influences in its transformation. While the four case-studies were spatially and temporally disconnected they can, under the above motivating forces, be investigated in a comparable manner.

## **Liminality**

The importance of a concept such as liminality for an investigation of a topic like conversion cannot be overstated. As was seen in the case-studies by researching the liminal aspects of the conversion experience it allowed a deeper understanding of the experience to emerge. When Augustine encountered Cicero, the Neo-Platonists and finally the work of St Paul it allowed the suspension of the once stable background to take place and the conditions to emerge where transformative experiences can occur. That these reading experiences involved the incorporation of Greek philosophical ideas into Augustine's creed helped to bring about the spiritual rather than the material quest for salvation. A reading experience was also at the heart of Arthur Koestler's transformation that had begun in a prison cell in Seville in the early part of 1937. Forced by circumstances of incarceration to reflect on his situation Koestler recalls a reading from the work of Thomas Mann that would enable his break with Communism to begin. Other instances of liminality that emerged from the study were periods of illness (Ebner and Marx), war and conflict

(Koestler and Marx), transitional life-stages (Marx and Augustine), and confined to a prison or monastic setting (Koestler and Ebner).

What these out of the ordinary conditions illustrate is that the suspension of the normal circumstances of everyday life helps to promote the emergence of a fluid and transitory environment where experiences such as conversion can occur. However these uncontrolled betwixt and between situations are fraught with danger and the need for a guide to provide direction is paramount in these unsettling times.

### **Masters of Ceremonies**

From the analysis produced in the main body of this thesis it is clear that influential or charismatic figures played a most influential role in the transformations or conversions of the subjects of the case-studies. According to Turner the role of the senior instructor or master of ceremonies, in regular ‘rites of passage’, is a paternal or patriarchal one emphasising the submissiveness and passivity of the initiands.<sup>1</sup> When reflecting on the four case-studies of this thesis at least two (Augustine and Koestler) mention explicitly the paternal role of the charismatic figure who was central to their conversion experience. In the case of Margaret Ebner the role of Henry of Nördlingen was typical of the patriarchal relationship between visionary women and their confessors in medieval German Christianity.<sup>2</sup> While for Marx and the other Young Hegelians the middle aged Gans must have been perceived as a father-figure to the group.

The influence of these charismatic figures in the conversions of the four case-studies can be gauged by the resolute direction their lives took following their fateful encounters. Following Ebner’s meeting with Henry a notable change

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<sup>1</sup> See Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, p.108

<sup>2</sup> For more on the relationship between female mystic and male confessor see Garber, L R (2003) *Feminine Figurae*, London: Routledge, pp. 22-30. For an analysis of Patriarchal domination see Weber, M. (1978 [1921-2]) *Economy and Society*, Vol. 2, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.1006-10.

occurred in the way Margaret came to understand her illness as a gift from God, this not only changed Margaret's outlook but also how her community perceived her. For Koestler the stand that Münzenberg was taking against the official Party line permitted him (Koestler) to contemplate and instigate his own break with Communism. Likewise, the allegorical method as practiced by Ambrose allowed Augustine to overcome the material and sceptical position within which he had become enmeshed. And finally the radical interpretation of Hegel that Gans was professing allowed Marx to resolve the adolescent crises he was experiencing at that time.

## **Background**

The importance of the background in the conversion process was the third element analysed by this thesis and it emerged as the most important of the three in all four case-studies researched. The battle for the soul of the Roman Empire was taking place when Augustine converted to Christianity. On one side stood the pagan philosophers attempting to regain the ground lost to Christianity by means of a rehabilitation of polytheism. On the other stood the Christian philosophers who attempted to portray Christianity as a search for truth and as such the ideal, or true philosophy inherited from the ancient Greek tradition. By assimilating many of the positive elements of Greek philosophy Christianity had provided a universal way to salvation that ensured its eventual victory over the popular religions and mystery cults of the pagans. Neo-Platonists such as Plotinus and Porphyry, because their philosophical content could be assimilated to the Christian cause, tended to strengthen rather than weaken the argument against the cults of paganism.

In many ways the demise of these 'absurd' religions can be compared to the end of Communism in the modern era. Both were based on mythology and as such provided a closed system of thought from which it was difficult to escape. However once that system was breached in any significant way then a rapid decline would follow. Nevertheless the difficulty of escaping from a closed

system was analysed in the case of Arthur Koestler and it was seen that a conversion was necessary to extricate himself from the grip of Communism. It was only by immersing himself in a community of like-minded disenchanted Party members that Koestler could begin the process of becoming a committed anti-communist. From these religious and ideological battles would emerge the belief systems that would sustain and give new direction to both Augustine and Koestler in times of deep personal disorder. Likewise for Margaret Ebner and Karl Marx the political situation coupled with the dissolution of order, which was abroad in the Germany of the fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries, helped to influence and shape the direction of their respective conversions.

### **Future directions**

The general aim of this thesis was to contribute to the understanding of the processes involved in the formation and transformation of identities. Was this aim achieved? It is the contention of this thesis that the aim was achieved and the research conducted has helped to move the discussion on identity forward, in some small way. By researching the conversion process from its origins in the axial age this thesis has ascertained the importance of liminality and background in the shaping of identity. From these concluding remarks a certain number of areas suggest themselves as viable locations in which future research might direct its enquiries. If, as this thesis suggests, the axial age, located around the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, resulted in a more reflexive subject thus triggering the potential for conversion then other axial ages would likewise have consequences for the construction of identity at both the individual and the collective level.

Bernhard Giesen<sup>3</sup> has already begun this project by proposing a theory of collective and national identity, which he has based on a common language or culture that emerged during certain ‘axial phases’. These axial phases, ‘axial moments’,<sup>4</sup> or ‘axis time’,<sup>5</sup> are all rich sources for the analysis of identity in

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<sup>3</sup> See Giesen, B. (1998) *Intellectuals and the German Nation: Collective Identity in an Axial Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>4</sup> See Szakolczai, A. (1998) “Identity Formation Mechanisms: A Conceptual and Genealogical Analysis.” *EUI Working Papers SPS No.98/2*, San Domenico (FI): Badia Fiesolana.

different historical periods. Liminality is another concept that is far from exhausted as a tool for studying and understanding experiences such as conversion.

In the realm of experiential sociology the call for a return to reality, rather than a continuation of the scholastic discourse on artificial categories, has been made.<sup>6</sup> In such a field of study the use of a conceptual tool such as liminality cannot be overstated. Again Giesen offers a theoretical sketch that attempts to identify the in-between space where social transformations take place and where collective identities are constructed. His 'mediating realm',<sup>7</sup> as the source and location of identity construction is in many ways similar to the concept of liminality and together could offer new insights into the construction of collective and national identities.

A third area of research highlighted by this thesis is the distinction between the individual and society that became more pronounced following the axial age. This partitioning of the exterior and interior worlds was analysed in chapter two and it was noted that Charles Taylor believed that this partitioning had a beginning in time and may have an end.<sup>8</sup> Some questions that need to be asked in the early days of the twenty first century of the modern era are – has the end of this partitioning already begun? Is the spatial distinction between the individual and society again becoming blurred? One way of attempting to answer these questions would be through an extensive empirical study of contemporary conversions and a comparison made with past studies. But these are areas and questions that lie beyond the parameters of this thesis and as such must wait for another day to be investigated.

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<sup>5</sup> See Voegelin, E. (1974) *The Ecumenic Age*, (Vol. 4 of *Order and History*), Baton Rouge: Louisiana, pp.47-51, 380-5.

<sup>6</sup> See Szakolczai, A. (2004) 'Experiential Sociology'. *Theoria* 51: 59-87.

<sup>7</sup> See Giesen, B. (1998) *Intellectuals and the German Nation: Collective Identity in an Axial Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.13-15.

<sup>8</sup> See Taylor, C. (1989) *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.111.

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