

Jesus Christ recycles people.

For further information read John 3:18 or visit your local church.

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1 This Thinksheet's title is a **metaphor** original (I think) with John Lefton, who is Madison Avenue (in both senses, geographical & occupational). A former student of mine, he handed me a large copy of it recently in NY. He'd designed it as a bus-&-subway insert ad (you know, up over your head as you sit or stand) & tried (unsuccessfully) to give it to Riverside Church on condition that they fund it.

2 My today's CCT letter has a similar, less direct evangelistic message. A "conceit" (literary sense) is a developed metaphor, the development in the case of the Exodus being **narrative**.

BACKGROUND: Woods Hole's Robt. Ballard & co. have been highly successful in underwater discoveries (Titanic et al), so some have a natural confidence the team can uncover Pharoah's chariot as it were. I have seized the occasion to expound on nature/miracle & on archaeology as +/- for faith, but mainly to preach "the story's point."

3 Irritated & even alarmed by the rising **naturism** (the absorption of both God & humanity into nature or Nature or Mother Nature), I need to remark the **unnaturalness** of our biblical faith:

4 Recycling aluminum is natural, but doing it to human beings is unnatural. Within the order of nature we are sinners, violating God, nature, ourselves, our neighbors, our pro-human institutions, history itself. The order of grace is the recycling plant: "Jesus saves." Theologians nuance nature/grace, but the basic existential antipathy remains till nature's own redemption (Ro.8.21). "JESUS CHRIST RECYCLES PEOPLE."

5 It was unnatural for the Israelites to leave Egypt's leeks & garlic & go traipsing off out into the wilderness behind Moses, unnatural to believe that Moses' God could deliver them from the vissitudes of nature & the vengeance of Pharoah. Such faith is anti-instinctual, confounding Feuerbach-Freud-Marx's mechanistic-materialistic-positivistic dictum that reality breaks through only when the instinctual is seen underneath the noninstinctual.

6 And the parting of the waters was (as I say in my letter's penultimate paragraph) doubly unnatural, a miraculous direct divine action. Sophisticated definitions of "miracle" cannot entirely deliver the concept of its anti-natural, transcendent feeling.

Archaeology won't quiet biblical skeptics

Responding to your editorial "The Parting of the Waters," a letter from Woods Hole suggests an underwater search, Woods-Hole style, "for artifacts of the Egyptian soldiers," as a way to "tie the Bible to the modern world and quiet the skeptics."

As a biblical theologian I'm all for quieting the skeptics, but archaeology wouldn't do it anymore than space did it for the cosmonauts (U.S.S.R.), who didn't find God out there. The fact that the astronauts (U.S.A.) did find God out there is a comfort to me.

Like all God's children, I'm always hungry for confirmation and distressed by contradiction, by bumping into facts unsettling to my settled convictions.

Suppose Pharaonic artifacts were unearthed, would they close the gap between skepticism and faith? Only if the skeptics could manage no other explanation than that the drowning of some people was God's way of saving some other people, the explanation I'm comfortable with.

But suppose a thorough search turned up nothing. Would that daunt us Jewish and Christian believers? No way! We'd easily manage alternative explanations rather than lose our religion.

As for the current "natural" explanation - that a certain

wind could open up a temporary walkway through the water, and the water soon swiftly rush back - does that strengthen or weaken faith in the biblical God? Again, it depends on the set of your soul's sail.

It weakens faith if with 19th-century rationalists you consider "miracle" no more than superstitious territory not yet invaded by "science." This now-discredited scientism confined God's residence to miracle and naively anticipated forcing him into homelessness.

It strengthens faith to the extent that place and time, geography and history, make faith's history more plausible and thus discredit the know-nothing, lazy assertion that "it's all myth."

Complicating the picture are two biblical details that misfit the current "natural" theory: The biblical wind came in 90 degrees from the theory's required direction; and twice the biblical account speaks of "walls of water" which makes nonsense of the theory.

In all this speculation, the danger is that we may forget the story's point, which is that God abides with his people to save and help us. A good word for a time that has made nervous nellys of almost all of us.

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