Module 5

Moses

Thesis Statement:

The Exodus follows both the individual faith story of a prophet's commitment to his vocation to God, as well as the communal faith story of a People of God seeking liberation from injustice. Through the redemptive action of God, these stories form a unique backdrop to our personal search for faith, kenosis and vocation in the world.

Section 1:
Realpolitik
[The Context of Exodus]

Section 1A - The Story of Joseph as Prelude to the Exodus

In the Hebrew Bible, the demand for justice springs forth from the foundational experience of Exodus, the story of an oppressed people's journey from slavery and death to freedom and life.

Prophetic commitment exists because there is a need. A broken world needs mending, and as such prophets rise to the occasion. Here, it will be important to highlight events that set the stage for the Exodus experience. What manner of brokenness led to the rise of the greatest of all prophets?

It might be prudent to begin just before the Exodus account. The life and times of the patriarchs essentially prepared the way for the eventual journey to the Promised Land. However, there is none more important than the story of Joseph, and the eventual settling of the Israelites in Egypt.

Joseph, after many trials and tribulations, and with the help of God, becomes vizier of Egypt. He brings his family to Egypt, and they settle there under the invitation of the current Pharaoh (Gen. 47:1-12).

Joseph was able to influence much of the future of Egypt (and eventually his people Israel), through his actions in the present. First, it was Joseph that suggested the creation of storage of grain during years of abundant harvest (Genesis 41:33-36). Thus, granaries and storage cities were built under the influence of Joseph's advice. Secondly, Joseph had a direct role as vizier in resolving problems within the Egyptian state. For instance, during a time of great famine, Joseph was tasked to provide food for the people. Joseph machinated a solution to the problem of hunger across the land. Joseph began a program to buy corn and food from other lands, but in order to do this, he took the people's money (Gen 47: 14-15), then the people's cattle (Gen 47: 16-17). The final recourse was to take the people's land (Gen 47:20), and the people were even made to be slaves in their own land (Gen 47:21ff).

> All this prepares the way for the day when "there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (Ex. 1:8), and Israel's ancestors, the descendants of Joseph and his family, also becomes slaves. God and God's promises have grown dim in the story and are now eclipsed. Israel has been in Egypt for four centuries, with no stories of God or the children of Israel. It is a time of bondage and suffering, ironically made possible by centralized royal power put in place by Joseph. It is a terrible reminder of the dangers of "settlement" and "power" when God's promise grows dim. Human action is not tempered by a sense of God's constant gift, and with the best intentions the tools of tyranny are put in place.[1]

As one famous aphorism goes, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." Joseph, although his heart in the right place, actually paved the way for the centralization of the Pharoah's powers in Egypt. It is only in the beginnings of Exodus that we see the far-reaching effects of Joseph's actions. It was Joseph who was the unknowing architect of the social structures of Egypt – the very structures the new dynasty of Egypt uses to grind the people down with heavy burden. The construction of the storage cities Pithom and Rameses (Ex. 1:11) was used by the Pharaoh to control the Israelites under bitter servitude. These were massive construction projects. To carry out their plans, the Egyptians conscripted the Israelites into labor battalions. This was the *maṣ* or *corvée*, which was very common in the ancient world. This forced labor was in conjunction with heavy tithing and taxation. In exchange for foodstuffs during drought, the people handed over to Pharaoh their right to their herds, their lands and fields, and their very bodies. And these bodies were put to work "with hard labor, work with clay and with brick, all kinds of work in the field; they forced on them every kind of labor," (Ex 1:14).

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[1] Bruce Birch, "From Promise to Deliverance," in *What Does the Lord Require?* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1985), 36-37.

Section 1B - A Dog Eat Dog World

The opening verses of Exodus serve as a transition from the narratives of Genesis. They bring to a close the story of Joseph and his generation and point to the seeming fulfillment of the promises made to the patriarchs:

"... the descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong; so that the land was filled with them." (Exodus 1:7).

The phenomenal growth of the children of Israel and their beginnings as a nation, however, is immediately followed by the people's enslavement: "... they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens... So they made the people of Israel serve with rigor, and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigor" (Exodus 1:11,13-15)

- 'anah ("to oppress") and 'abad ("servitude"/"slavery") used 7 times in vv. 11-14.

The centralization of power under the pharaohs of Egypt led the way to creating a new Egyptian society, one that is run solely on the commodification of power. The Israelites, whose sole access to power in the form of vizier Joseph has been forgotten, are now at the bottom tier of this power-based hierarchy. Their context is servitude and slavery under this new power structure.

The new Egypt can be described with one term: *Realpolitik*. The term Realpolitik refers to a kind of politics that assumes survival of the fittest, and all policies are entirely pragmatic; a "dog eat dog" world. It has been described by theologian John Dunne as the "reliance on armed strength for gaining one's ends."[2]

The term Realpolitik was coined by German political figure August Ludwig von Rochau in the 19th century. Rochau distinguished sharply between philosophical speculation and practical politics, which he calls *Realpolitik*. While the former had to do with what principles ought to rule, the latter recognized that power alone rules. The strong cannot let themselves be ruled by the weak. The greatest advocate of such a maxim was Otto von Bismarck, who united the German states under Prussian leadership, through Realpolitik machinations. His diplomacy of Realpolitik gained him the nickname "The Iron Chancellor," the man of "blood and iron."[3]

How does a Realpolitik community emerge? Oswald Spengler', in his 1918 research work "The Decline of the West,"[4] showcases the dynamics of history that can eventually lead to Realpolitik systems: When a community of belief loses the "light," the mythic vision, it declines into a community of reason. A community not motivated by faith to uphold universal rational principles is a community held stable only by mutual fear (thus an eventual decline to being a community of fear).

John Dunne uses Oswald Spengler's theoretical foundations to push for how communities of fear tend to develop into Realpolitik communities: the successive disruptions of the community of belief of the West (Christendom), through the Protestant revolution of the sixteenth century, of the movement to its community of reason, (the Concert of Europe, as it was afterwards named), through the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, and of the community of fear (*Realpolitik*), through the totalitarian revolutions of the twentieth century.[5]

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[2] John S. Dunne, "*Realpolitik* in the Decline of the West," *The Review of Politics* 21 (1959), 145.

[3] For more information on Bismarck's Realpolitik, see Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany: The Period of Unification, 1815-1871, Volume 1* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971).

[4] See Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Charles F. Atkinson, trans. (New York: Oxofrd UP, 1991).

[5] See John S. Dunne, "*Realpolitik* in the Decline of the West," *The Review of Politics* 21 (1959), 131-150.

Section 1C - Women as Life-Givers

In the face of Israel's oppression and Pharaoh's murderous madness, it is courage, defiance and compassion of women which serve as the starting point for the liberation from Egypt.

1. The Hebrew Midwives

The Pharaoh, in order to suppress the continuous growth of the Hebrew population, sent out a decree of mass infanticide of baby boys. The agents of this decree would be two Hebrew midwives, Shiprah and Puah (Exodus 2:15-16). However, the midwives would not follow these commands. Instead, they saved the children and kept them alive. (Exodus 2:17-18). When asked by the Pharaoh why they have done this, they craftily come up with an excuse: the Hebrew women were incredibly strong and lively, such that by the time the midwives arrived, the children have already been hidden away (Exodus 2:19). "The excuse of the midwives is a clever use of fact to avoid the real issue at stake... The king is made to look like a fathead; he is taken in by the excuse."[6]

This narrative, albeit short and brief, is an important pivot point for the greater picture of the Exodus account. This is the first instance of defiance against the mad commands of Realpolitik Egypt and the Pharaoh. This story portrays how it is possible for people to go against the grain and the norm of the times, in order to serve God and the prophetic commitment.

2. The Three Unnamed Women

The story of Moses' birth comes just after the new decree of mass infanticide has been released by the Pharaoh. It is a kill-on-sight program that requires all Egyptians to participate in the bloodshed. (Ex. 1:22) This time of great danger will be the context surrounding Moses' birth.

To continue with the narrative, it rather imperative to introduce three female protagonists that led the way to the boy Moses's escape. These are the three unnamed women who sought for a way to save the child from imminent death at the hands of the Egyptians.

(a) First, a married woman identified only as a daughter of Levi, "conceived and bore a son... saw that he was a goodly child... hid him... tok for him a basket... put the child in it and placed it among the reeds at the river's brink" (Exodus 2:2-3). This woman is Moses' mother. We are introduced to a strong woman, a woman willing to pay any price to save her son. We can assume her to be intuitive, crafty and cunning. To have been able to hide the child for three months would have been a struggle in itself under the watchful eyes of Egyptian soldiers (and even the Egyptian citizens) who must have been on alert because of the Pharaoh's decree. This is a woman of life, battling the overwhelming and terrifying forces of death. We must not interpret the mother's offering up the child to river as a sign of resignation or giving up. Rather, it must be seen as a woman's last ditch effort of saving the child. This is a mother committing her child to the river of God's hand. This is a powerful image, in and of itself, of prophetic commitment.

(b) Opposing the daughter of Levi is the second woman, the daughter of Pharaoh who "came down to bathe at the river... saw the basket... sent her maid to fetch it... opened it... saw the child... took pity on him and said 'This is one of the Hebrews' children'" (Exodus 2: 5-6). This woman knew of the identity of the child, yet in direct opposition to the wishes of her own father, took the child in. "Pharoah's concerted attempts to predict and control the time stream as he possibly can," is ironically amended by his own daughter, who, "acting on moral impulse, unexpectedly makes what is for her a relatively innocuous choice that alters the course of history."[7] In the case of the Pharoah's daughter, an impulsive, almost accidental, act forces a change in the direction of the story. In the same manner, many people do not necessarily realize that small measures, initial conversion experiences, are in themselves already initial actions towards prophetic commitment. What for some might be trivial realizations

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[6] Nolan B. Harmon, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible Vol. 1: General and Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), 857.

[7] Raffy Dy-Liacco, "Nation Building: The Kenosis of Moses" (paper written through a Scholarly Work Faculty Grant, awarded to the author by the Ateneo de Manila University, 2009.), 5.

might already mark the start of a greater journey. It does not take a great faith to begin the pilgrimage of commitment. For Pharoah's daughter, all it took was *wattamḥōl*, halfway between pity and compassion. But, in reality, it was a willingness to establish intimate relationship, a familial tie, a relation between a parent and a child.[8] And that is, just as with the committing mother, a powerful image of prophetic commitment.

(c) A third woman serves to bring the two together. Between the placing of the basket among the reeds and the finding of the child, "his sister stood at a distance, to know what would be done to him" (Exodus 2:4). It is she who will take initiative to shape the destiny of the child: "'Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?' ... So the girl went and called the child's mother... So the woman took the child and nursed him. And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son; and she named him Moses..." (Exodus 2:7-10).

The Hebrew midwives are the catalysts for the whole process of changing the broken world. They will defy the standards of Realpolitik. They will not contribute to the growing brokenness of their society. Instead, they will fight, on their own terms, by their own capacities. Eventually, this led to others to defy Pharaoh as well, including three important female figures: Moses's mother, Moses's sister and the Pharaoh's own daughter. These actions which will pave the way for the safe escape of the child Moses in the river. "What are we to make of this conspiracy? Is this women's solidarity? The midwives seem to lead the way and the other women follow. They will not succumb to Pharaoh's mad demands. The women will be life givers, not life takers."[9]

Change begins when one realize change is needed. The Israelite liberation did not begin the moment they left the confines of Egypt. The true liberation began when the people began to cry out and groan under the weight of oppression.

> "And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition." (Exodus 2:23-25)

"Before this, they were so deep in exile that they did not feel they were in exile. Now that they understood exile and groaned, a little redemption began..."[10] The basic requirement of freedom is the awareness of "exile," the groan of conscious alienation. The people's groaning is a symbol of a protest. It is finally the realization and acknowledgement that things are not right. And this is where change shall begin.

The boy is saved by the actions of the women. He has been named Moses (מֹשֶׁה, Mosheh) from the Hebrew *mashah* (משה, "draw out"), because he is the boy drawn out from the river amongst the reeds.

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[8] The Hebrew verb *wattamḥōl* is translated in most versions of the text as "to take pity" (Ex 2:6, She took pity on him). In other cases, it can also mean compassion. In the case of the narrative, it could have simply meant 'to spare from death.' Some commentators, however, argue the case of *wattamḥōl* being more than regular pity or compassion. Rather, it connotes the intimate relationship between a parent and a child. "I will take pity (*wattamḥōl*) on them as a man takes pity (*wattamḥōl*) on his son who serves him' (Mal. 3:17). See George W. Coats, *Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 44. See also William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988), 85.

[9] Burton Visotzky, *The Road to Redemption: Lessons from Exodus on Leadership and Community* (NY: Crown, 1998), 49.

[10] Cf. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture: Reflections on Exodus* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 33

Section 2:
Moses
[The Prophet's Commitment]

Section 2A - The Boy Moses

Not much is known about the early life of Moses. Some of Moses' early life has been tackled in apocryphal and pseudepigraphal text, as well as in Rabbinic literature.[11] What can be assumed is that he must have had a lifestyle similar to those who also lived in Pharaoh's household. He must have received benefits to being part of this household, including food, shelter and security, but probably the most important would have been education. Moses' could have been educated in the schools of Egypt and learned in all their wisdom.[12] This education would have been different from the education received by the ordinary citizen.

Education in ancient Egyptian society was class-based. Your caste and your eventual profession would dictate which education you would receive.[13] A special school was placed for members of ancient Egyptian royalty, called the Prince's School. This particular school educated members of the Pharaoh's household. The only time non-royalty would be allowed to enter the Prince's school is if they showed great promise and intellect, and would then be recommended to be part of the school. Part of this education must have been an education on leadership and politics, which can be assumed to have been lessons on the current political structure of the time, *Realpolitik*.

The education received by Moses is very much similar to the education Ateneo de Manila University students receive. It is a special education that forms the future leaders of this society, and this is an education accessible only to those who can afford such, or are gifted such that they might be recommended to study in the institution. This is a kind of education that not everyone has access to. Just as the river of reeds brought Moses to the Pharoah's household and to the Prince's school, so too are these students brought to the Ateneo by the river of God's hand.[14]

In the Ateneo, students will undergo an immersion experience where they spend a few days amongst people of marginalized sectors of society. They reach out and try to understand the daily plight and struggles of these people, and sometimes, these experiences reveal more about themselves and their people more than they realized.

In the case of Moses, he himself also had an "immersion" experience, where he went out into the real world, and saw the plight of his fellow Hebrew people (Exodus 2:11). He sees a taskmaster beating up a Hebrew slave. His heart is moved by the experience. However, being raised in a world of *Realpolitik*, it is his impulse automatically to fight power with power. He kills the Egyptian and buries him in the sand. The important point here is that Moses has his heart in the right place, but is only able to act within the bounds of the world and the system he knows (*Realpolitik*).

The story continues with Moses, upon seeing Israelites quarreling amongst themselves, taking initiative to settle the quarrel. He has inborn leadership qualities. The prophetic potential is evident in Moses. However, initiative is met with harsh resistance from the Israelites. "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" (Exodus 2:14). News has travelled fast of his actions. Moses buried the body amongst the sands, and it was only a matter of time that the winds would have unearthed the body of the dead Egyptian. Now everyone knows of his action. He thought what he did was an act of liberation that would merit lauds and praise from his fellow Israelites. Instead, he is shunned by the Hebrew people, as if saying "Who are you to tell us how to live? You yourself are an oppressor and a murderer!"

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[11] For instance, see *The Book of Jubilees* 47 in R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913).

[12] Cf. Acts 7:22

[13] For more information on ancient Egyptian education, see S.S. Laurie, "The History of Early Education. II. The Ancient Egyptians." *The School Review* 1: 1893, 353-364.

[14] Cf. Proverbs 21:1.

Eventually, the Egyptian leadership catches wind of the events that have transpired, they sought to have Moses brought to justice and killed (Exodus 2:15). Moses had no choice. According to *Realpolitik* philosophy, if you lack the power, then you must capitulate and flee. Moses escapes to Midian.

Section 2B - Lessons in Midian

A humbling fall (Exodus 2:15-21) - From prince of Egypt to fugitive of justice, from palace to nomad's tent.

Midian is not just a geographical location within the context of the narrative, but rather it is an important contrasting symbol to Egypt. Whereas Moses was a child in Egypt, Moses will grow in Midian to be the man that is asked of him to become. It is also important that this contrast already begins the delineation between Egypt and the wilderness (which technically Midian is a part of).

> Moses' flight "for the land of Midian" establishes a "geographical alternative" to the land of Egypt. The whole account of the exodus will move back and forth between Egypt and the wilderness. According to the geography of the account, the "land of Midian" is part of the wilderness, that space is found for freedom and life – a curious thing, really, inasmuch as, in general consciousness of ancient peoples, the wilderness, the desert, is precisely the place where one cannot live (see Deut. 8:15-16). Egypt – great, fertile land of the river Nile – has been converted, in this account, in virtue of its oppressive national state, into a place where one cannot live.[15]

Back to the narrative, Moses, once a prince of Egypt, is now sitting next to a well in the land of Midian. He is now a fugitive in a foreign land. He witnesses a scene by this well. Seven women came to the well to draw water for their father's flock. However, a group of shepherds came and drove them away. Upon seeing this conflict, Moses attempts to help the women. Remember, Moses is a natural-born leader, wanting to settle quarrels. His heart, as always, is in the right place. Moses helped the women get their water, and even watered their flock.

Upon returning home, the women were asked by their father, Jethro,[16] about the happenings of the day. The women responded that they had troubles at the well, but that "an Egyptian rescued [them]" (Exodus 2:19). This is a particularly important point in this narrative.

Moses himself does not know who he is. He is at the crossroads of accepting whether he is Egyptian or Hebrew. In the eyes of the Hebrew people, he is Egyptian, because his actions reflect the oppression that is linked with Realpolitik Egypt. In the eyes of the Egyptians, he is a fugitive and a traitor. He is seen as a threat to power, and any threat in Realpolitik Egypt must be dealt with and eliminated swiftly and thoroughly. Considering this, Moses still does not know who he is. He is on the fence in matters of identity. If he could not commit to something so fundamental, how then can he act on bigger commitments, like the commitment to becoming a prophet? This identity crisis must be settled before committing to his prophetic task. It will be the maturation that he experiences in Midian that will resolve this predicament.

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[15] George V. Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective* (Markynoll: Orbis Books, 1987), 9.

[16] The priest of Midian is named differently depending on the version of the Bible used, and which narrative one is referring to within the Pentateuch. In any case, these two names come from two different traditions of the Wellhausen hypothesis. The first name, Reuel, comes from the Yahwist Tradition, most probably transmitted in Jerusalem. The second name, Jethro, came from groups north of Jerusalem, and is linked with the Elohist Tradition. A third name, Hobab, which is not as commonly used, was prescribed in Judg. 4:11, but is not as prevalent as the other two, and may have come from a different tradition besides the four found in the Wellhausen hypothesis. For all intents and purposes in this study, and for the sake of consistency, Jethro shall be the name used for the Midianite priest. For a more detailed explanation of this, see George V. Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective* (Markynoll: Orbis Books, 1987), 12.

What commitment really means (Exodus 2:21-3:1)

Moses is invited to be part of the shepherd household of Jethro. It is here in Midian, as part of this new community, that he matures as a person. He marries and raises a family (2:21-22) and gets a real job (3:1). The boy Moses becomes a man. We will all go through this in some point in our lives. It is when we start living for someone else, for something greater than ourselves that we start knowing what commitment really means (eg. it is when you enter into a committed relationship, it is when you raise a family, it is when you decide to live your life for the Lord, it is when you commit your job to a certain advocacy, etc.). Commitment: this is the requirement before meeting God.

To be able to prophetically commit, one must have an understanding of themselves first. A knowledge of one's self, and a security of one's identity, becomes the prerequisite for prophetic commitment. When one begins to understand oneself, then one will realize that "God dwells in thee."[17]

Section 2C - The Symbology of the Burning Bush

In Hebrew, the word for fire is *Aish* (אש). *Aish* relates to the concept of passion.[18] If one would characterize fire as passions, hopes and dreams, then one could argue that the humbling fall of Moses from noble to nomad was similar to a fire inside him dying out. Remember, Moses is a natural born leader and a man of action. However, his first attempts in Egypt were met with failure. Despite his heart being in the right place, Moses was still under the Realpolitik mindset, which led to his downfall. Moses has become disillusioned, and ran away to Midian.

Considering this tumultuous past, Moses is simultaneously awed and confused by the image of the Burning Bush, the strangest of fires he has ever seen. The Burning Bush is a fire that never goes out and is never consumed.

What is Moses to make of this image? The Burning Bush is to be understood in this context as a symbol of what God demands from Moses, and effectively from all that will attempt prophetic commitment. It is a challenge to acquire the fire of the Burning Bush, to acquire a passion inside that must never be allowed to die.

The symbology of the burning bush is closely related to the Jewish *menorah*, the seven-branched gold candelabrum of the portable sanctuary known as the tabernacle, where Moses and the rest of the Israelites worshipped God during their journey in the wilderness (Exodus 25:31-40). "The form of the menorah is derived from the shape of a burning or lighted tree. This is related to an ancient image of God as cosmic tree or Torah as a tree of life. The divine tree bears light into the world."[19]

The menorah image can also be paired with the image of the *ner tamid*, or eternal lamp, used in Temple worship by the Israelites (Exodus 27:20). "The lamp is regarded as the symbol of God's presence among his people... and most synagogues have a *ner tamid* for that symbolic reason."[20] The eternal lamp and the menorah are similar in two certain aspects. Firstly, the *ner tamid* is fueled by only the pure olive oil, in the same manner as the menorah in the tabernacle. Secondly, the *ner tamid* burns continuously in the Temple, similar to the permanently lit *menorah*.

The first similarity speaks of the type of fuel that must be used to light the flame. Only the purest of olive oils must be used in the fire that is involved in Temple worship. This is a reminder to any who seek prophetic commitment, that only the best and purest fuel can create such magnificent brilliance. This fuel refers to a person's unique set of gifts and talents, the best fruits, which one offers up to God in commitment. A pure flame will be birthed from the purest of fuels.

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[17] Cf. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *"Γνώθι Σεαυτόν", or Gnothi Seauton*

[18] Cf. Geoffrey W. Dennis, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic and Mysticism* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2007) 94.

[19] Arthur Green, *These Are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999) 200.

[20] R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion* (New York: Adama Books, 1986), 146.

The second similarity speaks of the continuous burning of the lamps. "A burning light is the finest symbol of a continuing spiritual presence. The Hebrews light, the first begotten of God, was the finest, most immaterial substance known, for which no idolatrous corporeal form could be made."[21] Where there is light, there is God.

Therefore, God is within the prophet, constantly and continuously. Even and especially in the darkest of times, God is there. When the prophet is about to lose hope, it is the constancy of God that provides the flame to keep going.

SUMMARY: We start with the concept of fire. If fire denotes passions, hopes and dreams, then we can say that the fall of Moses (and his eventual escape from Egypt) was similar to a fire inside him dying out. However, he is met with the image of the Burning Bush, the strangest of fires he has ever seen. The Burning Bush is a fire that never goes out and is never consumed. This is a symbol of what God demands from Moses, and effectively from us all, a fire, a passion inside of us that we must never allow to die.

Distinguish:
Moses - "Those are *my* people, these people I would save." - self-centered logic
God - "Those are GOD's people. You belong to them. You are part of a bigger story." - other-centered logic

At these words, Moses is a lowly man who trembles at God's word (3:6), a much humbled man meeting God.

"I have come down to deliver them from Egypt." The young Moses operated under many reasons, but most of these reasons were wrong. And most of the time, he operated under the limits of how he was raised, and the world he lived in (elite *Realpolitik* under the Egyptian context). However, this time, Moses is invited to have a vision, a vision of God.

Section 2D - The Five Refusals of Moses

God calls Moses to his vocation, but Moses refuses... 5 TIMES!

a) God's Glory, not Moses' (3:11-12) - who am I that i should do this great task?

The first refusal of Moses is a question of capacity. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11). Moses thinks he is not from any special lineage or background that qualifies him to be the leader that God wants him to be. It is a case of insecure modesty. However, this insecure modesty partakes of faithlessness and frustration. It is a sign of how Moses has much to learn about God and faith in what God is capable of. God must transform this insecurity into the humility of faith.[22]

In the face of Moses' feeling of personal inadequacy, he is reminded that the power and the strength behind him is not his own, but that of the one who calls him.

b) God's Transcendence, not Moses' (3:13-14) - I was never really a Hebrew nor Egyptian. They will not believe me! They will say I do not "know" God!

The second refusal of Moses is a lack of knowledge about God. "They will ask me, 'What is [God's] name?' Then what shall I tell them?" (Exodus 3:13) Moses, having grown up in the house of Pharaoh's household, must have been knowledgeable about Egyptian culture, religion and practices. The gods he must have known were the gods of Egypt. It must have only been in recent years, through his exposure to the Midianites, that he began to learn more about the Hebrew people, their faith and their God. Thus, the next area of hesitation is a lack of knowledge about God.

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[21] Nolan B. Harmon, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible Vol. 1: General and Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), 1037.

[22] Nolan B. Harmon, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible Vol. 1: General and Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), 874.

The experience of the call contains within it urgency, the need, to know the caller better. To serve others and to help liberate others, one must be able to communicate to them a living sense of who it is that sent us. Every call is simultaneously a call to grow in service and a call to grow in prayerful knowledge of the one who is calling us.

c) God's Authority, not Moses' (4:1-9) - I have no authority! They remember me only as the murderer!

The third refusal of Moses refers to his supposed lack authority as the prophet of God. "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you?'" (Ex. 4:1). Moses is fearful of the reaction of the Israelites to his presentation as the prophet of God. It can be assumed that the last image of the Israelites of Moses is that of a murderer. Can the Israelites trust a fugitive? Can they trust a person who once identified as an Egyptian? At the same time, the Israelites might also question if the authority that Moses' possesses comes from the Hebrew God, and not from any other source.

God gives him special powers, signs which demonstrate that his mission is from God (remember the signs of the credibility of revelation).The power of God thus becomes the power of Moses. God invests Moses with his power. Since the mission is the mission of God, it will be carried out through God's power.

d) God's Truth, not Moses' (4:10-12) - I don't have the skills!

The fourth refusal of Moses points to his difficulty in speech. "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." (Exodus 4:10) This next objection is similar to the first regarding insecurity. In particular, Moses is insecure about his capacity to speak. His self-abasement is due in part to his manner of speaking. Some commentators point to a physical impairment on the part of Moses that limits his capacity to speak. Other commentators point to a variety of speech impediments, like stuttering or stammering. Still others highlight how Moses was just not very good at expressing himself and his ideas.[23]

Remember that Moses is a student of Realpolitik, where they put emphasis on skill, power, talent and capacity. Here, one must be reminded of the task of the prophet. A prophet is "one who speaks for another," and in the Old Testament tradition, a prophet is acknowledged as the spokesperson or mouthpiece of God.[24] Therefore, the word that the prophet utters is not his own. The word comes from God. The imagery one can refer to here would be the image of the call of Isaiah. God takes possession of the prophet, and burns the words unto his mouth (Is. 6:5-6).

e) God's Will, not Moses' (4:13-17) - I just don't want to! This is a little too much you're asking of me!

Finally, in the last refusal of Moses, Moses points out that there must be some other person more capable than he is, and that God should rather just look for that other person that possesses characteristics better suited to becoming a prophet. "Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else" (Exodus 4:13). This is a desperate plea to decline the commitment being asked by God.

In the end, Moses just doesn't want to (lumabas na ang tunay na kulay!), which angers God! The final refusal is a desperate plea to find someone else. This is the true natural of all the refusals. However, what is surprising is what happens next, the sudden acceptance of the vocation.

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[23] Jonathan L. Friedmann, *Music in the Hebrew Bible: Understanding References in the Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014), 93.

[24] Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000) 403.

Section 2E - Moses Accepts His Vocation

The reader of Exodus will eventually find out that Moses suddenly accepted his vocation. This is a mystery that will be decided within the reader himself. There is no logical explanation to the sudden acceptance of Moses.

Some can argue that God might have coerced Moses to become the prophet. It is within the realm of the capacities of God. However, this idea disputes the God of freedom and liberation that we encounter all throughout the narrative. Therefore, that line of thinking should be discarded.

The best way to understand this reality would have to be drawn from real life experience. Sometimes, people can encounter an experience of wanting to do something for its own sake. It is not to say that these decisions and actions are illogical. There is reason, but at the same time, these reasons cannot be articulated fully by the human person.

An important point can be taken from the Treatise on John by Saint Augustine: *Da mihi amantem, et sentit quod dico*. "Show me one who loves, and he or she feels what I am saying. Show me one who desires or is hungry, or one who is thirsting in the desert, sighing for the fountain of the eternal homeland; show me one such, and that one will understand what I am trying to say."[25]

Those who have loved understand this situation. Sometimes, the lover is moved to action, something is propelling them to do it, despite initial fears and lack of reasons. One possible formulation would be through Blaise Pascal's maxim. "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know of."[26]

One could also borrow from the French a good way of articulating this situation: *Tout simplement*, "just because."

Section 3:
Crossing the Sea of Reeds[27]
[From Slavery to Freedom]

First Section (Exodus 14:1-14)

1. Egypt and Israel long for each other

Egypt changes its mind quickly regarding Israel: "What is it that we have done, that we have let Israel go from *serving* us?" Israel too quickly changes its mind: "Is not this what we have said to you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us *serve* the Egyptians?' For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."

2. Why the longing for each other?

A reason for this nostalgia on the part of egypt is to secure the satisfaction of their needs. Egypt is a limited world, focused on the level of needs. Thus, there is no space for freedom born beyond the mere level of needs. On the other hand, Israel longs for Egypt because of FEAR, the fear of Egypt and its impressive military might *and* the fear of the desert.

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[25] Augustine. *Treatise on John, Tractate 26, 4*.

[26] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (England: Penguin Books Limited, 1995), 446.

[27] Much of this section is patterned after the main text, Jean Louis Ska, "The Crossing of the Sea" *Landas* 17:1 (2003) 36-50

3. The choice of Israel

Israel has to choose their path: between going back to Egypt or pressing forth to the wilderness.

Egypt	Desert
a known world	an unknown world
security	risk
slavery	freedom
serve Pharaoh	serve God

Israel still has the heart of a slave. They prefer to go back to Egypt rather than cross the sea to the desert because crossing the sea also means death.

4. Moses' response

"Fear not, stand firm, and *see* the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you *see* today, you will never *see* again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still."

"see" in response to "When Pharaoh drew near, the people lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them; and they were in great fear."

Second Section (Exodus 14:15-25)

1. Maneuver of the Cloud

"Then the angel of God who went before the host of Israel moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel." The cloud prevents the master and the slave to discover one another again. It is God who does the separating.
Structure:

Egyptians // Column of Cloud // Israelites // The Sea of Reeds

Israel now has to make a personal decision. Would it be willing to enter the sea, to take a risk? Before, God was in first position. Now Israel must choose.

2. Dry land/Sea (vv. 16, 21, 22, 29) and Wind: Similar to Genesis 1, 9-10. Passage through the sea is seen as New Creation. As in the flood story, the God who saves Israel is the Creator God.

3. "Two Walls"

"And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left." : "right" (Hebrew *yamin*, which also means south) and "left" (Hebrew *semol*, which also means north). If the Israelites had the south to their right and the north to their left, they were traversing from west to east.

In the Ancient Near East, "east" was the gate of life, the place where light (the sun) defeats darkness and death. "West" was the entrance to the underworld, the world of darkness, death and evil. Therefore, if the Israelites were traveling from West to East, they were traversing and fighting the forces of death, the forces of darkness and evil, the forces of their desires, to be born unto a new life at dawn.

Third Section (Exodus 14:26-31)

1. Last appearance of the Egyptian army (cf. vv. 6, 7, 9, 17, 18, 23) like an antiphon which reminds the reader of the power of the Pharaoh's army. And yet, this army, the most sophisticated in its time, could do nothing against God.

2. Israel is on the other side of the shore beyond the reach of the Egypt. They passed from one shore to the other, from Egypt to the desert, from fear of Egypt to fear of God, from servitude to faith in God. God not only saved Israel, but also converted Israel. For no longer does Israel have a heart of a slave because now she believes and worships God... "And Israel saw the great work which the Lord did against the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord; and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses."

Section 4:
Israel
[The People of God]

Section 4A - The Ten "Commandments"

Compare the tense and form between the translation of the Ten Commandments with the original Hebrew.

TRANSLATION	ORIGINAL HEBREW
You shall not have other gods	To have other gods will not be for you
imperative form	future infinitive form

The Original Hebrew speaks in a state of being for the future. It talks of "commandments" for the future, which entails that there has been a relationship that is established that extends not just to the present or the short-term future, but for the long-term future, with God and his people together.

This form is similar to when one makes a commitment, example is when you enter marriage. The marriage vows are similar to the future infinitive form, and in meaning, is very similar with what the Ten Commandments want to say. *In essence, the Ten Commandments serve as the marriage contract between God and his people.*

Section 4B - Comparisons: Exodus 20, Leviticus 19 and Deuteronomy 5-6

Structure	Exodus 20	Leviticus 19	Deuteronomy 5 & 6
Vision	Moses has a vision of God	Each Israelite hears and follows God's call to him/her	Each Israelite makes the vision of God his/her own
Norms	Write God's law on stone	Write God's law on every fiber of your being and in every aspect of your life	Write God's law on your heart
Acts	A holy nation obeys the law	A holy people constitute a holy nation	A holy people practice the law as virtue

Deuteronomy 5-6 is one of three versions of the Ten Commandments found within the Torah, the other two being Exodus 20 and Leviticus 19. Whereas Exodus 20 is more a narrative of the reception of the law, and Leviticus 19 is a code of holiness, Deuteronomy's version is an exposition on the nature of the following of the law. The other two versions answer how the law was received, and what its contents are. But Deuteronomy tells us in greater detail why an Israelite must follow the law.

The title Deuteronomy itself is already indicative of this difference in presentation of the law. "The word *deuteronomy* means second giving of the law. The Ten Commandments were given in Mount Sinai forty years earlier. Now in Deuteronomy Moses repeats the Ten Commandments, reminds the nation of Israel about the circumstances under which they were given and explains again what they mean."[28]

For many people, the Ten Commandments come as a set of rules that must be followed, otherwise, an angry God will punish them for their iniquity. It has been traditionally though through memorization, especially in primary and secondary schooling in Catholic schools. This kind of reception of the Ten Commandments paints a picture of a Realpolitik God, vindictive, despotic and overly legalistic. This God is imaged as using harsh punishment on his subjects if it they went against His will.

This misunderstanding is common, and young people sometimes fear God, not because of reverence or awe, but because they are literally afraid of the consequences of their actions, or lack thereof. "How many times can I lie to my parents before it counts as mortal sin?" "If I stop going to Mass, can I still be considered Catholic?" "Will I go to hell if I am a homosexual? But, I didn't choose to be gay." Many questions like these sprout because of an overtly legalistic understanding of the Ten Commandments and the purpose these "commandments" play in salvation history.

However, these ten "commandments" aren't necessarily commandments. To speak of "commandments" without context sometimes brings connotations of rulers and subjects. It is hierarchical language. However, such is not the case for the Israelites and their God. "The Ten Commandments are literally the 'Ten Words' (*ăśeret haddĕbārîm*) in Hebrew. The use of the term *dābār*, 'word,' in this phrase distinguishes these laws from the rest of the commandments (*miṣwâ*), statutes (*hōq*), and regulations (*miśpāṭ*) in the Old Testament."[29]

> The Ten Commandments are not burdensome decrees but an invitation to relationship characterized by mutual freedom. The god of Israel is free from coercion by magic; the Israelites are free of the burdens of polytheism. The prologue offers an ageless reason for fidelity to these commandments, namely the Lord freed the people from slavery in Egypt.[30]

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5) The Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy highlight the directive for moral obligation, not out of the coercion of God, but out of the self-giving of the intimate relationship between God and his people. The reason for the obedience is love. The fruits of the obedience is love as well.

What makes a nation or person holy?

> What is it in your life that sets you apart from everyone else? It is your hopes, your dreams, everything you desire to be, to become. All these hopes and dreams and desires are what will drive you to do good in the world. It then becomes a vocation, your unique path to holiness. Just as God uses everything for our sake, God calls us to find our own holiness.

Vocation as Holiness

> When your vocation puts your unique combination of hopes, gifts and talents at the service of the greater good, then you have been set apart from others in order to be set apart for God.

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[28] Stephen D. Eyre, *Deuteronomy: Becoming a Holy People*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 5.

[29] Mark F. Rooker, *The Ten Commandments: Ethics for the Twenty-first Century* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 3.

[30] J. Edward Owens, *Deuteronomy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011) 35.

Section 4C - The Holy Mountain (Isaiah 11:6-9)

As a final note to ponder upon,

> *The wolf will live with the lamb,*
> *the leopard will lie down with the goat,*
> *the calf and the lion and the yearling together;*
> *and a little child will lead them.*
> *The cow will feed with the bear,*
> *their young will lie down together,*
> *and the lion will eat straw like the ox.*
> *The infant will play near the cobra's den,*
> *the young child will put its hand*
> *into the viper's nest.*
> *They will neither harm nor destroy*
> *on all my holy mountain,*
> *for the earth will be filled*
> *with the knowledge of the LORD*
> *as the waters cover the sea.*

This is the beginnings of the Kingdom of God, when polar reversals in human relations happen because of the unique holiness of each people. Whenever you do good in the world, you make that spot in the world a holy mountain, upon which you bring forth the Kingdom of God. And when each one of us does our part, "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord," and the world will finally be the Kingdom that we yearn for.

Section 5:
The Death of Moses
[Kenosis, Vocation and the Prophetic Horizon]

Section 5A - Finitude of the Prophet

The book of Deuteronomy ends with the last vision of Moses. We see an image of Moses on top of Mount Nebo, overlooking the land that has been promised to his forefathers. The Promised Land is within reach, and yet so far away at the same time. Moses dies in Moab, so close to the end goal, yet not reaching it still.

For many who have read the life and times of Moses, this is a hard image to swallow. Moses, the greatest prophet of God does not enter the Promised Land. The hero does not get the reward at the very end. If this is the case, then what will make us commit to a life of propheticism if we know the prophets are not rewarded by God at the very end?

The great German thinker Franz Kafka had this to say about Moses inevitable death:

> He is on the track of Canaan all his life; it is incredible that he should see the land only when on the verge of death. This dying vision of it can only be intended to illustrate how incomplete a moment is human life, incomplete because a life like this could last forever and still be nothing but a moment. Moses fails to enter Canaan not because his life was too short but because it is a human life.[31]

[31] Franz Kafka, *Diaries 1914-1923*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Martin Greenberg and Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1965), 195-96.

Moses was a human like all of us. Just like any who work towards their mission and commitment to God, we will always be limitedness by the sheer finitude of human living. We are creatures, who will perish in one way or another. It is entirely possible that for many who commit to the Christian mission, our lifetimes might not reach the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.

> This last chapter of Deuteronomy makes no attempt to explain or to rationalize Moses' death. Moses′ death is not presented as an atoning sacrifice, a precursor of the people′s judgment′ or punishment for Moses′own sin. The reader no longer hears Moses begging God to let enter the promised land (Deut. 3:23-26). The straightforward narration of Moses' death without explanation simply underscores the inevitable reality of human death and limitation. The text allows the mystery of human suffering and death to remain unanswered. After Moses "went up" to Mount Nebo, Yahweh takes over the action of the verbs – showing, speaking, commanding, and burying. The only action that Moses does is "die."[32]

If that is the case, then what is the direction and goal of the prophetic commitment? If Moses simply dies without entering the Promised Land, was all his prophetic commitment in vain? It might be prudent to take a look at one of the definitive events that led to the wandering of the Israelites in the wilderness, and the eventual barring of Moses and the rest of the first generation of his people from entering the Promised Land.

Section 5B - Moses: Bearer of a Covenant

1. "We shall not dream a lesser dream"

The "dream" is closely associated with the Kingdom of God, where there is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty. And polar reversals will happen. There will be justice and joy (cf. The Holy Mountain of Isaiah 11:6-9 and the Joy of the Redeemed of Isaiah 35). We are all dreamers, wishing to enact this Kingdom here on earth, because we are creatures "a little less than angels," (cf. Psalm 8:5) with one foot as creaturely beings, and another foot in the eternal. Therefore, humanity is made for the transcendent, and to reduce the transcendent is to reduce ourselves.
2. Pass it on: Deuteronomy 6:20-25

> *"In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?" tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the LORD sent signs and wonders—great and terrible—on Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land he promised on oath to our ancestors. The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness."* (Exodus 6:20-25)

vv. 20-22 show God's power, v. 23 shows God's story, and vv. 24-25 affirm that we must live the "dream".

For Moses and the Israelites, the dream meant salvation from the Kingdom of Pharaoh and *Realpolitik*, into the Kingdom of God and the Promised Land. It was the Lord and his power that allowed the beginning of their "dream" story, and they must keep alive the "dream."

However, the Israelites were not satisfied with the "dream," and wanted to look for it some place else. THEY GRUMBLED, AND THEY KEPT ON GRUMBLING

[32] Dennis T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses: A Theological Reading* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 167.

The Hebrew word for grumbling (לון or *luwn*) appears numerous times in Exodus 15-17 and Numbers 11-17. In Number 13-14 alone, the word appears 15 times as a verb and 7 times as a noun. There is a noteworthy accumulation of instances of just one word and its cognates amongst these narratives, such that many commentators speak of it collectively as the grumbling or murmuring narratives. In Hebrew literature, the rule of repetitions states that when words are repeated, that particular word is of importance to the narrative. In this case, the narrative is driven by the grumbling of the Israelites.

The grumbling is symbolic of the dissatisfaction and disillusionment the Israelites have encountered in the desert. This dissatisfaction is directed at both the prophet and God. In fact, it is not unlikely for many who undertake prophetic commitment to encounter such grumbling around them.

Classic example is Exodus 32, the worship of the golden calf: "He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "*These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt*." (Exodus 32:4)

We are all like the Israelites. I bet at some point in our lives, we have lost our dreams. (It reminds me of the Spongebob Squarepants episodes "One Krabs Trash," where Squidward was bringing flowers to a grave labeled "Squidward's Hopes and Dreams").

More specifically, I bet a lot of us had a phase in our lives where we lost the "dream," our faith in God. Some of us might still be in that phase. Some people never get out of it. And they lose something valuable if they do not recover it.

Question: When you undergo heartbreak, do you not love again? If you choose to love again, do you not feel liberated. To be stuck in the heartbreak, in the past, in the sadness, is like being in "exile." It holds you down, and keeps you from moving forward. EMO!

Due to the first generation's sin (worshipping the Golden Calf. considered by the Jews to be *the* original sin), they will not be allowed to enter the Promised Land.

Some important questions:

1. Why was the first generation not allowed to enter the Promised Land?
2. Why was the second generation allowed to enter the Promised Land?
3. Which generation is the intended audience of the story of Moses?

Very simply, if one were to ask why the first generation of Israelites were not allowed to enter the Promised Land, the answer is simple. They were born in slavery, the horizon of *Realpolitik*. Therefore, the ethics of these people of is one of power and is determined by relationships of power. They lie solely on the level of needs, and they fear the loss of those needs, and the loss of power and control. This is prevalently seen in both the scout narrative and the grumbling narratives.

If God were to allow this generation to enter the Promised Land, it is entirely possible that they will fashion for themselves a community that is similar to, if not an identical copy of, the *Realpolitik* they experienced in Egypt, a dog-eat-dog world where power is the greatest commodity.

Considering these factors, who were the only people allowed to enter the Promised Land? It is the second generation of Israelites. These people were born outside of Egypt, and have not experienced Realpolitik first hand. The second generation was raised in freedom and to dream God's dream. They live by ethics of trust and mutuality. Eventually, this next generation of Israelites, led by a new leader, Joshua, will enter the Promised Land. Moses charges the next generation to continue not with "the discouraged hearts of the children of Israel," the hearts of slaves, as their fathers did in the first generation (Numbers 32-6-15). Rather, Moses invites them to a new life of prophetic commitment, with hearts of freedom, hearts one with God.

Section 5C - Kenosis: The Cost of Prophetic Commitment

But, what about Moses? Moses, as the leader of the first generation, pays the price of prophetic leadership (Deuteronomy 4:21-22). Due to the first generation's iniquities, Moses suffers the same fate: he will not be able to enter the Promised Land. Remember, the prophet is not only with God, but with God's people as well. As their leader, he must be with them, even in suffering, and even in death.

What are we to make of this image? It is a very difficult situation to accept, especially amongst many of us who consider Moses to be the greatest of all the prophets. If the greatest prophetic commitment does not enter the Promised Land, what motivation do we have in our own attempts at committing?

If we think only of the reward at the very end, that is a very *Realpolitik* mindset. Getting what we want is not the end goal of the commitment. The reward is not the motivation for the prophetic commitment. Otherwise, is it really commitment?

The true cost of prophetic commitment is the possibility of not seeing the fruits of one's labors during one's own lifetime. For some, this is a great price. We live in a world where success is measured by output and production, and one will be judged based on what one creates. But, what if what a person creates is not something attainable within their own span of years?

> This is what we are about.
> We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
> We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
> We lay foundations that will need further development.
> We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.
> We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
> This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
> It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord′s grace to enter and do the rest.
> We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
> We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.
> We are prophets of a future not our own.[33]

A prophet fights for a future not his own. This is the beauty of the prophetic commitment's vision. The true beneficiaries of prophetic action are not necessarily the prophet or his own generation. The prophetic task is to pave the way for rebuilding the world so that the next generation might enter the Promised Land.

In the case of Moses, he was barred from entering the Promised Land midway through the journey from Egypt to Canaan. (Numbers 20:7-13, cf. Deut 4:21-22). Moses could have freely chosen to end the journey there, as he was already denied the reward, which in this case is the chance to enter the Promised Land. Moses could have left the people in the wilderness for dead. Moses could have run away, like he did when he was a child. But, what separates the boy Moses from the man that we see before us on the mountain in Moab? Recall the case of Moses in Midian. It was commitment that was the requirement before meeting God. Commitment was the sign of maturity, and commitment here is seen as a realization that one's own life work is not solely about the self but about something greater than one's self.

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[33] *The Prayer of Archbishop Romero*. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. This prayer was composed by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, drafted for a homily by Card. John Dearden in Nov. 1979 for a celebration of departed priests. The words of the prayer are attributed to Oscar Romero, but they were never spoken by him.

> There is a sense of profound joy and delight in giving oneself to a cause or mission greater than oneself, that aims in small yet real ways to make a difference in how social and ecclesial life is understood and lived. This is joy, not in the sense of an ephemeral happiness or fleeting pleasure, but rather of deep satisfaction that what one is doing is fundamentally worthwhile. Such joy can be pervasive even while feeling tired and spent after a day of intense labor, teaching, lecturing, and writing. Amid the tiredness there is the inner satisfaction of having spent one's energies on a cause that is meaningful, purposeful and attuned with the promptings of the Spirit.[34]

The true prophetic commitment is one that works, not towards the self as the end, but towards the other beyond the self. It is a commitment to other people (the first generation), a commitment to the future (the second generation, and future generations of Israel), and an absolute commitment to the absolute Other (God). The term to describe this characteristic of prophetic commitment is KENOSIS (Gr. Κένωσις, "emptiness"). Kenosis refers to self-emptying. When one speaks of self-emptying here, it is not the drawing out of the self, such that there will be nothing left after commitment. Rather, the self-emptying referred here speaks of putting the other before the self. In doing so, one becomes more open to the divine will, to the love of God, and thus, will allow for even more good to flow out from one's self.

To better grasp this concept, one must use the imagination. One must imagine a vessel. It may be an earthen pot or a glass pitcher. Either way, the purpose of this vessel is to be filled, such that its contents might be poured out in some way for a specific purpose. An earthen pot might be used to water plants. A glass pitcher might be used to provide refreshments to dinner guests.

This vessel represents the prophet that commits to God. He is filled with water. The water represents everything that he is, inclusive of his unique skills and talents, his capacity, his freedom, his faith. The prophet is filled with this water such that they will satisfy a particular purpose or need. The source of the water is God, and God filled the vessel with enough water such that this water might be poured out to others.

However, the misconception is that God only fills the vessel then, and that the vessel only has a limited amount of water in us. When working towards prophetic commitment, it does not mean that the vessel empties itself towards others without care or concern for the self. A pitcher that has gone empty cannot serve refreshments to dinner guests, and thus, has lost its purpose. However, the image that one must set here is that the vessel must constantly be within reach of a source of water. The source of living waters is Christ, and Christ acts as an infinite stream that constantly refills the vessel, for as long as the pitcher is willing to be placed underneath the stream, for as long as the believer is open to Christ. In doing so, the vessel is refilled, and the water is then transferred to others. The pitcher is constantly being emptied, but is never truly empty. This is kenosis. "We possess this treasure in earthen vessel, so that the supremacy of the power is God's and not our own." (2 Cor 4:7)

Moses is an exemplar of kenosis, and truly one of the greatest prophetic commitments encountered in Biblical narrative. He offered his life not just for his own personal satisfaction, but he continued his prophetic commitment despite losing the reward because the reward was never the goal – the vision – of commitment. The vision was in allowing for others to enter the Promised Land for him. If he had stopped, then no one would have entered the Promised Land. But he didn't. And that is why he is the greatest.

A constant image throughout Deuteronomy is the motif of dying to oneself and rising to others in new life. This motif is most exemplified in the final moments of Moses' life. Overlooking the Promised Land on Mount Nebo, Moses is finally able to see the fruits of his labor, but is not allowed to enter it. "The Lord said to him, 'This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give this to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.' Then, Moses the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command" (Deut. 34:4-5). Moses' whole life, and even his death, was under the command of God.

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[34] Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010) as quoted in Michael Leach, Doris Goodnough, eds., *A Maryknoll Book of Inspiration: Readings for Everyday of the Year* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 9.

The death of Moses reminds us of the finitude of any prophet that serves God. If anyone is to commit to God, they must be prepared to be able to see only a glimpse of the fruits of their work. To some, this might appear as distressing, even mortifying. But, at the end of the day, "it is not my will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

The prophetic commitment is one pattern for Christian commitment. The character of kenosis beautifully exemplifies what it means to commit to others and to commit to God. True commitment lies not in what the commitment can provide for a person, but what one person can provide towards his or her own commitment.

This is the vision of prophetic commitment that can be neatly summarized into one statement: "I am called to a dream greater than myself, and I shall not dream anything less."

Section 6: Conclusion

Section 6A - The Corporate Identity of Prophetic Faith

The salvific action of God is done not just in relation to individuals, but it in relation to a People of God. The very mission that Moses is given showcases this corporate identity that is part and parcel of the commitment asked by God. "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10). This mission is clear. Moses is sent for the sake of community, and he himself is part of that community. "Let me return to my own people" (Exodus 4:18). Moses is committed to his people, and through his people, he is committed to God.

One must understand that it is in others that one can encounter the living God, and that God also reaches out to us through the people we relate to. Humans are social beings, and as such, we are always connected to the "others" around us, such that we might connect to the "Other" who is God.

If at all there is a feeling that dominates the minds of young people today, it is that they believe the work that they do is only theirs to bear. Many have gotten used to working alone. In the Ateneo, group work is often times avoided, because it has connotations of unequal distribution of work. Many prefer to just do individual work. Some feel stressed because they are bearing the work that otherwise is meant for more than one person. At the same time, many hear of stories about the life of work outside the Ateneo. Many speak of this work as "every man for himself," and how you cannot depend on anyone but yourself. This is a remnant of the cultural ideal of the postmodern world as "the self-made, self-sufficient, autonomous individual who stands by himself or herself, not needing anyone else . . . and not beholden to anyone or anything."[35]

Young people today are becoming more concerned with being self-made individuals. One can describe this as the emergent culture of individualism. This is due in part to how society markets independence and individuality as goals to strive for, which is resonant with the nature of youth as self-oriented.[36] The once well thought of and contemplated search and discernment for place and purpose in the world has been substituted with a feverish careerism, where wants and needs are pursued at any cost, even at the cost of values, moral norms and the concern for others, society and the transcendent. These individualistic tendencies extend even into the faith life of young people. Some warn of young people acquiring an "appalling loneliness that a privatized spirituality can bring."[37] For instance, a study has been made on the effects of individualism in the United States, and it showed that individualism can give rise to alienation, lovelessness, unhappiness and an inability to maintain relationships.[38]

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[35] Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 15.

[36] Cf. Craig Dykstra, *Vision and Character: A Christian Educator's Alternative to Kohlberg*,(New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 141.

[37] David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004), 145.

[38] Cf. Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 142-63.

Moses himself fears of the great weight of the task that he has been given because he thinks he is to work alone. Such was his fear that he cried out in a desperate plea, "Lord, send someone else" (Exodus 4:13). God quickly rebukes Moses for thinking of this. He reassured him that he would be supported by others along the way. God speaks of his brother, Aaron, who will be more than glad to assist Moses in his journey. (Exodus 4:14-17). God also highlights how he has called others to the task in the past – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – and that Moses is continuing the legacy of the Patriarch who have come before (Exodus 4:5). Of these various reminders, the most powerful is God's own promise: "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12). Moses is not alone.

In fact, if one needs to see an illustration of corporate identity, the very Ateneo community one is part of is indicative of the capacity of collective movement. During basketball games, the Ateneo gallery cheers the players who are on the court, their support propels the players to do well in the game. The players feed off the energy of the Ateneo crowd, and the crowd feeds off the energy of the players.

Aside from this, the collective effort of the Ateneo community has helped touch the lives of thousands of people in the Philippines who were hit by various calamities throughout the years. Back in September of 2009, the super typhoon *Ondoy* battered several areas of the Philippines, especially in the Metro Manila area. Young people, both Ateneans and non-Ateneans, flocked the Ateneo grounds to help in relief efforts to help victims of the super typhoon. The same relief efforts were seen in the Ateneo in August 2012, when torrential rains brought by the southwestern monsoon, or *habagat*, ravaged areas of the National Capital Region and nearby provinces. Together, communal effort resulted in transformative action that provided food, clothing, medicine and monetary aid to many families hit by these calamities.

At the same time, one need not look far to see how student organizations within the Ateneo, through their efforts, have been able to promote great change in various sectors of society, whether public health, education or good governance. Surely, this is work that would not have been possible alone.

And one need only look at the Church, the mystical body of Christ, to see how joined hands and hearts are able to promote change and transformation in a world that desperately needs it. Christian commitment involves being part of the Body of Christ, the Church. Intrinsically, Christian commitment is understood as social, and specifically, ecclesial. It comes from the New Testament "*ekklesia*," which means "an assembly convoked by God."[39] Christians do not commit just as individuals. Inasmuch as commitment is a personal call, this call is not an isolated reality. All Christian commitments are interrelated because they are part of the bigger story of salvation that involves being part of the community of Christ which is called Church. This history of salvation includes the experience of the Israelite nation and extends to the present day in the Church.

> Israel according to the flesh, which wandered as an exile in the desert, was already called the Church of God. So likewise the new Israel which while living in this present age goes in search of a future and abiding city is called the Church of Christ. For He has bought it for Himself with His blood, has filled it with His Spirit and provided it with those means which befit it as a visible and social union. God gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and established them as the Church that for each and all it may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity.[40]

[39] CCC 751.

[40] *LG* 9.

Section 6B - Called to Be Navi

For whom is the story of Moses intended? It is a story for all peoples. It is a general invitation for all humans to find a place set apart where they may find their wholeness. However, more specifically, it is a story for Christians, a pattern for their own understanding of commitment, in light of the work and mission for the Kingdom of God.

The prophetic commitment is a call to a life of *Navi* (נביא), or "prophet." It is a call to speak and speak out in behalf of God. All peoples have prophetic potential in them. God is accessible and present in daily life and may be addressed through prayer. Unlike the old *Navi* of the past, like Moses or Elijah, who heard God's word directly and bore it out into the world, the new *Navi* of today's world bear witness to the silence of God.[41] However, it does not mean that God is silent that one cannot make some noise. It is the task of current prophetic commitment, to continue in joyful clamor the work that has come before. Modern-day *Navi* are invited to be filled by God's message, like an earthen vessel, and to put this message into words and actions using their own powers of articulation. The modern Christian is called to don the prophetic mantle, to become cantors, preachers and poets to an age that is growing dimmer and dimmer due to the shadows of the globalized and cynical world. The *Navi* is, like the *menorah* and the burning bush, the light of the world. To be prophet of today's Church is to become a shining beacon to a dark universe.

We are all called to be prophets in our lifetimes. We are all captains of ships in this vast ocean of a world. But, these ships are not our own. It takes a crew to venture forth. We aim for a bright horizon, over on the cusps of the ocean and the sky. And navigate our ships forward, the spirit of God in our sails. The journey waits for no one. So we must press on.

"For those of us who believe in the crucified and risen One -- the cosmic Christ -- this is a hopeful and a demanding vision. It doesn't appear that injustice will be defeated anytime soon, or that the world of violence is about to end. Perhaps this is precisely the challenge of discipleship in our time -- to trust that our prayer and action on behalf of justice will make a difference despite all indications to the contrary. It is possible that, in the first decades of the twenty-first century, believing has less to do with doctrinal details and more to do with embodying the gospel vision, even when it is not politically correct or religiously approved. Perhaps like the carpenter from Nazareth, we must choose to live and act without the assurance of significant outcomes or measurable results.

Like most of my sisters and brothers in the human community, I do not have a clear view of the future -- no magic lantern, no crystal ball, no personal revelation, no apocalyptic secret. But, whatever the future will be, this is what I trust. The nonviolent coming of God is unfolding surely as scattered seeds will find good soil; as certainly as there is hidden treasure in the field of human history. And as confidently as grains of wheat fall into the ground in search of a harvest that is still to come.

Hope has feet. And we are still walking."[42]

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[41] Cf. Arthur Green, *These Are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999), 165-166.

[42] John Heagle, *Justice Rising: The Emerging Biblical Vision*. (Markynoll: Orbis Books, 2010).