

Fish in the Bible

Psychosocial and Cultural Analysis of Contemporary
Meanings, Values, and Effects of Christian Symbolism

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*This book is dedicated to King Zulu, known as Bhoja,
twin of Adee and Charaka. King Zulu wrote Fish in the
Bible with me in my time of need and greatest despair.
He lives on in spirit – his spirit lives!*

Acknowledgments

Save the White Tiger!!!

White Tiger (Bengal)

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Introduction

Fish in the Bible: Psychosocial Analysis of Contemporary Meanings, Values, and Effects of Christian Symbolism contemplates why and to what extent tales and truths about fish presented in the Bible are relevant in Christian societies. *Fish in the Bible* argues that portraits of fish and fishermen presented in the Bible have been both embraced and rejected by contemporary cultures with primarily Christian constituents (e.g. American culture). This book does not make an ethical or moral argument about whether the meaning of fish in the Bible ought to be relevant; rather, it explores manners in which Christians have selectively rejected or accepted depictions and symbols of fish and fishermen. For example, this book will demonstrate how humane slaughter methods continue to be as relevant today as they were when kosher laws were first established (Cusack, 2011). It explores differences between Christian maxims presented in Bible verses and beliefs and actions of societies operating under Christian moral majorities.

This book is holistic and nuanced. Chapters are standalone works, yet an audience member would benefit by seeing the chapters as a congruent work, not solely piecemeal supplements. By seeing the entire work, the continuity emerges and the theme is clearly established. The topic is unique, but this does not mean that it departs from traditional disciplines or authorities. *Fish in the Bible* draws from varied sources, which are essential for this type of analytical foray. Variety between chapters and diverse reference sources do not disrupt, but positively contribute to and influence, the continuity of the theme overall, which is that Christians view fish through a psychosocial lens that relates to the Christian experience as described by the Bible.

Christians may recognize their differences and experience them as being vast philosophical, social, cultural, or theological distinctions; however Christians' differences may be subtle or imperceptible to people, who differ from Christians, such as Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Jews. Christianity is described as being a "body" (1 Ephesians 3:6, 5:23; Colossians 1:18-24; Corinthians 12:12-27; Romans 12:5). This metaphor is apt because an arm does not appear to be similar to a leg, but each individual is recognized as being one continuous organism. Therefore, the Christian body appears to be one organism to other bodies; and many times Christians experience it to be one body without labeling it as such. Differences between Christians are organized and fleshed-out through sectarianism, knowledge of which requires specific education, information, and experience atypical of practitioners of

other religions and people living in regions that are predominantly influenced by other religions.

Fish in the Bible works on several specialized topics to argue that, overall, depictions of fish and fishermen in the Bible significantly shape Christian culture even when Christians ignore, overlook, or dismiss ways in which fish and fishermen are characterized and treated in the Bible. Fish serve as a metaphor for God's power, human sin, and fertility; they are used to instill boundaries and standards in practitioners with depictions of work and ritual; and sometimes fish are worshiped, demonized, and subjugated. There is no clear or singular message regarding fish or fishermen; and Christian societies are left to abide by a patchwork of representations to formulate their own opinions and judgments.

Fish in the Bible also considers the evolution of symbolism and metaphors in Christian society using parables and tales found in the Bible. Subsections in this book summarize and synopsise implications raised by symbolism and literalism in certain contexts, stories, and verses demonstrating potentially pervasive significances of fish in Christian cultures throughout the world. The foundations of this research are media studies, law, history, cultural studies, religious studies, animal studies, criminal justice, sociology, and environmental studies. In particular, social and behavioral patterns, as well as cultural customs, commerce, and current events demonstrate Christians' understandings of how fish and fishermen and fisherwomen ("fishermen") ought to be treated.

In considering the meaning of fish in Christian societies and culture, this book will propose that some Christians' sociopolitical and psychocultural values vary depending on innumerable factors, such as economy, geographic location, culture, and holidays. Therefore, interpretations will fluctuate based on perceptions of Christian customs, definitions of sin, and relative prices for harming or endangering species. For example, Irish American Margaret Sanger, Planned Parenthood's founder, has been blamed by Christians for corroding society's support for traditional family structures, but she explained that she and her father perceived socialism to be the purest distillation of Christian values (Sanger, 2004). "*Father never talked about religion without bringing in the ballot box* (Sanger, 2004, p. 23). "*He took up Socialism because he believed it Christian philosophy put into practice, and to me its ideals still come nearest to carrying out what Christianity was supposed to do*" (Sanger, 2004, p. 23). Sanger's father was an idealist. "*Unceasingly, he tried to inculcate in us the idea that our duty lay not in considering what might happen to us after death, but in doing something here and now to make the lives of other human beings more decent*" (Sanger, 2004, p. 23). "*[O]ne of his maxims*" was "*You have no right to material comforts without giving back to society the*

benefit of your honest experience" (Sanger, 2004, p. 23). "[H]is parting words to each of his sons and daughters who had grown old enough to fend for themselves were, 'Leave the world better because you, my child, have dwelt in it.' This was something to live up to" (Sanger, 2004, p. 23).

Her father's belief in socialism may have been utopian, but Sanger pragmatically attempted to put these values into practice through advocacy, debate, publication, and legal reform. Sanger believed that anti-birth control dogma could not be defended using "*nature*" because then activities, such as fishing, would also be called into question (Cusack, 2015; Sanger, 2004, p. 412; U.S. v. Stevens, 2010). "*It had become part of my routine to answer every challenge to the cause, just as I tried to answer every question at a meeting. Here again was the hoary 'nature' argument which should have been in its grave long since*" (Sanger, 2004, p. 412). Sanger argued that "[t]he contention that it was sin to interrupt nature in her processes was simple nonsense. The Pope frustrated her by shaving or having his hair cut. Whenever we caught a fish or shot a wolf or slaughtered a lamb, whenever we pulled a weed or pruned a fruit tree, we too frustrated nature" (Sanger, 2004, p. 412). Sanger's argument was extensive. "*Disease germs were perfectly natural little fellows which had to be frustrated before we could get well. As for the alleged 'safe period' which Rhythm now set forth, what could be more unnatural than to restrict intercourse to the very time when nature had least intended it?*" (Sanger, 2004, p. 412). Sanger's analogies and ideology continue to be unpopular among millions of Christians living in capitalist societies even though pharmaceutical companies earn billions of dollars in profit from birth control policies and legal reforms pioneered by Sanger. Some corporations may even claim that their fortunes not only attest to the moral correctness of birth control and capitalism, but also to their pre-destined salvation; and in a few cases, some corporations have suggested that their prosperity correlates with faith in traditional interpretations of "family" that exclude birth control (Burwell v. Hobby Lobby, 2014; Weber, 2002). On the opposite extreme, numerous Christian nations are socialized, such as France, Sweden, and Canada. They provide free and low cost birth control, which may demonstrate their compassion for the masses supposedly cared for by Jesus in the Bible (e.g. feeding the multitudes by distributing five small barely loaves and two fish in Matthew 14:13-21).

Margaret Sanger and Planned Parenthood helped expand the Fifth Amendment right to privacy to include reproductive rights (Ayotte v. Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, 2006; Gonzales v. Carhart, 2007; Planned Parenthood v. Casey, 1992; Planned Parenthood v. Danforth, 1976; Roe v. Wade, 1973). Planned Parenthood, which primarily promotes contraception not abortion, has criticized liberalization of family planning

rights (Bellotti v. Baird, 1976; Cusack, 2012; Eisenstadt v. Baird, 1972). Privacy rights, including, procreation, contraception, and abortion, have been developed using precedence from constitutional case law, such as Pierce v. Society of Sisters (1925), which struck down a law requiring children to attend public school after nuns sued the government because it violated parents' rights to choose how to educate and train their children. Sanger's socialistic disavowal of Catholicism was Marxist, insofar as it was revolutionary; insinuated a denial of Catholicism; and "blasphemed" the Church (Cusack, 2016; O'Hare, 2016). However, her renegade activities continue to be viewed by many Catholics as being more akin to Sinead O'Connor, who disavowed aspects of her own religion on *Saturday Night Live* when she tore a picture of Pope John Paul II and has "rallied" against the Catholic Church for more than 20 years (O'Hare, 2016).

At the beginning of the new millennium, a publication in Canada foresaw socialistic doctrinal and attitudinal shifts in the contexts of traditional Catholic rigidity, the utopian placebo, and a capitalist undertow (Ruge & Marx, 1973). *"The spirituality behind those Lenten practices was based on a dualism that set in opposition the church and 'the world,' the former ruled by Christ, the latter by the devil"* (Seljak, 2001). *"The church" was "concerned" with "the spirit, not the material world, the soul and not the body. Only by conquering the body could the soul be liberated. That is why it was so important to conquer" "appetites" for fish* (Seljak, 2001). The author could *"no longer see how" Christians could "sustain" the "Christianity against the world" spirituality in its traditional form; and, drew a parallel with "the temptations of Christ"* (Seljak, 2001). In an *"optimistic culture, Christian asceticism was seen as a" behavioral "manifestation of a Christian neurosis: self-negation"* (Seljak, 2001). *"[M]any pressed Christianity into the service of self-esteem building"* (Seljak, 2001). The result was manufactured *"theology of hope"* (Seljak, 2001). The synthetic thrust *"was the religious equivalent of the 'I'm okay, you're okay' psychology of the time"* (Seljak, 2001). Despite nonchalance and plastic optimism, it *"was a necessary corrective to the overly spiritual and oppressive Catholicism"* (Seljak, 2001). It infiltrated heavy attitudes that for too long had made *"people guilt-ridden, neurotic and passive in the face of poverty and injustice"* (Seljak, 2001). Some Christians were *"happy to be liberated from it"* (Seljak, 2001). One negative effect is that *"culture of optimism, especially with regard to human progress, has dulled" believers' "sense of sin"* (Seljak, 2001). People *"create systems" to "serve" personally beneficial "interests and defend them as being in the interests of humanity. One need only listen to those who promote globalization of the free market to see" the blatant substitution of self for the greater whole* (Seljak, 2001). *"With this expanded consciousness," forsaking "consumerist desires makes sense"* (Seljak, 2001). Christians *"tithe for the sake of the poor, not for*

the sake of "souls" (Seljak, 2001). Self-denial, which is the practice of "following Jesus' example of self-sacrifice, becomes an affirmation, not a negation, of God's creation and our humanity" (Seljak, 2001). Sacrifice "make much more sense in the light of consumerism, racism, militarism, the widening gap between rich and poor, and, worst of all, the fact that we as a global community are moving" "from rather than towards solutions to these problems" (Seljak, 2001). Despite immense consensus that capitalism and socialism may embody and facilitate Christianity, some Christians have implemented other political regimes, such as populism (e.g. in Venezuela) and fascism (e.g. in Germany and Spain); and have even positioned a Christian church as the official state church.

Often, the spirit of the law in diverse political systems may be interpreted according to Christians' beliefs in good and evil; and legal responses in nearly every functional political system may be based on some religious principles. Yet, the Bible was edited, influenced, and written by an untold number of contributors, who likely possessed distinct points of view that are braided into more than 31,000 verses. Like Sanger's father, who espoused the golden rule found in Matthew 7:12, some progressive Christians may promote rehabilitation and second chances; however, the golden rule is not a foundational maxim of law and policy in Christian societies. More relevant are notions of restoration and retribution based on "eye for an eye" described in Exodus 21:23-28, but challenged in Matthew 5:38. These distinct approaches to law and justice illustrate how moving and interlocking factors cause individuals, families, adherents, and nonreligious members of societies founded on Christian history literally and symbolically to become living interpretations of Biblical narratives and principles.

Fish in the Bible analyzes relevant cultural reflections on Biblical stories such as Jonah and the whale, Jesus feeding the multitudes, the miraculous catch, and Noah's ark, which have been imparted as children's allegories. These tales bring to life scholarly knowledge about ancient fishing industries and current fisheries and fishermen. *Fish in the Bible* thoroughly engages timely concerns such as animal rights, conservation, and poverty to look at fish as friends, foes, and food.

Chapter 1

Jonah

The tale of Jonah and the whale is well-known throughout various cultures, which have reshaped and adopted the tale. In some narratives Jonah is depicted as a hero and in others, he is depicted as a coward, who matures and comes to God because of his experiences. The whale is depicted as a fish, a servant of God, and as a beast. In some accounts, Jonah fears the fish. *“Jonah has been portrayed in Rabbinic texts as having asked the great fish to consume him”* (Goodhugh & Taylor, 1943, p. 760). In some accounts, Jonah, the fish, and God knowingly work together to achieve a mission. The Bible does not describe the fish as unknowing, unwilling, mean-spirited, hungry, mindless, hateful, accidental, unconcerned, remorseless, reticent, or any other negative quality. The Bible says that when Jonah had been hurled into the sea, he was overcome by waves, seaweed, and the prospect of death, so he prayed and God sent a fish to swallow him. *“Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm”* (Jonah 1:15). God *“provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights”* (Jonah 1:17). Jonah was sheltered by the fish for three days and nights, and then the fish vomited Jonah onto the shore when God commanded. *“From inside the fish Jonah prayed... ‘In my distress I called’”* to God, who *“answered me....I called for help, and you listened to my cry”* (Jonah 2:1-2). *“[C]urrents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers”* (Jonah 2:3). Jonah repeatedly attributes his circumstances to the “other” (i.e. “you”) (Jonah 2:2). Because the sailors believed that he needed to be sacrificed to calm the sea, a reader may interpret Jonah as blaming God and attributing his perilous surroundings to God or resulting from God’s commandment. *“The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you,...my God, brought my life up from the pit”* (Jonah 2:5-6). Jonah acknowledges that he may have lost sight of God before his trip, while on the boat, or after hitting the open waters. *“When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you....Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them”* (Jonah 2:7-8). Jonah learns the value and meaning of his mission to Nineveh while drowning. He may have been shouting from fear or for help while drowning in a storm, but he says that he *“will*

sacrifice to you” “with shouts of grateful praise” (Jonah 2:9). He “vowed” to “make good” to thank God for saving him (Jonah 2:9). Jonah was then vomited by the fish. The fish intentionally or unintentionally may have been obeying the will of the Lord.

Varying tales demonstrate how diverse interpretations may be. Ministers and scholars have extracted meanings and variations from single words, phrases, places, themes, and historical data. They have not changed the story as much as adopted a style of interpretation typical of Biblical scholars and Christians reading the Bible. Some Christians tend to interpret the Bible in a fun way—in a way that suits them (Habermas, 1987). This is an acceptable part of contemporary Christianity. Christian preachers may change stories to suit their parishioners. For example, some may describe Jonah as a prophet even though the book of Jonah may not refer to him using this word (Finger, 2015). Another example is that the original recording describes “*the leviathan as being twisted*” (Goodhugh & Taylor, 1943, p. 760). Some scholars have deduced that the original Hebrew identified a crocodile. As unlikely as this may have been “*due to crocodiles’ reclusive nature and their unwillingness to interact or interfere with humans,*” the interpreter is free to assume that the fish would have been a crocodile because Christian tradition and culture allows this interpretation (Goodhugh & Taylor, 1943, p. 760). This is particularly true because original Biblical texts are not written in most Christians’ native tongues (e.g. English). Due to linguistic and social interpretations, the leviathan proposed by some Christians may be much larger than a crocodile; and it may be a dragon or sea dragon described in Job 3:8 and Isaiah 27:1 (Easton, 2005). Therefore, it is possible “*that the crocodile, and not the whale, is spoken of in Genesis 1:21*” (Goodhugh & Taylor, 1943, p. 1357). “*The word in Job 7:12 must also mean crocodile. It [a]scribes some...animal, [who]...would be very destructive*” (Goodhugh & Taylor, 1943, p. 1357). “*[T]ranslators render it dragon in Isaiah 27:1, where the prophet gives this name to the king of Egypt: ‘He shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.’ The sea there is the river Nile, and the dragon the crocodile*” (Goodhugh & Taylor, 1943, p. 1357). Diverse interpretations may reflect distinct regional and national heritages among Christians, which may manifest in their imaginations and stories.

Christians’ deductive reasoning may result from their environments, which elucidate factors that seem possible and identify characteristics in animals that would have been complementary to God’s mission for Jonah. For example, to portray Jonah being a hero and coward, some Christians may suggest that a serpent fulfilled God’s command (Genesis 3:12-14; Psalms 24:106). Several species of serpents live symbiotically with humans, for example, as pets or as working snakes. Commentators have suggested that the

leviathan was whale, but pods may be unlikely to swim in the Mediterranean or nearby rivers. Yet, crocodiles inhabit *“the Nile and other Asintie and African rivers; [are] of enormous voracity and strength, as well as fleetness in swimming”* (Bergman, 1991; Goodhugh & Taylor, 1943, p. 760). This may be one reason why Southern Christians, for example, have played with the idea that Jonah may have been swallowed by a lake sturgeon. *“Lake sturgeons have been described as primitive. They live up to 150 years, are capable of growing up to eight feet long, and weighing 300 pounds. They are stocked in Tennessee by the [Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency] TWRA, and they travel great distances. They are considered to be endangered species in Tennessee, and therefore cannot be harvested”* (Tennessee Fishing Guide, 2016). *“Lake Sturgeon Certificates are issued to anglers who report the size of their catch, approximate weight, location, bait, and possible photograph fish, and release them to the wild”* (Tennessee Fishing Guide, 2016). Recognition from some states for documenting and aiding in the survival of the sturgeon may inspire fishermen to think about Jonah and the fish. Their thoughts may develop into cultural trends, for example sermons that influence their parishioners and their families. Christians tend to justify their beliefs with possibilities grounded in realism whereas Jewish tradition and culture may permit imaginative elaboration to demonstrate unlimited possibilities. *“The Talmudists represent leviathan to be a great fish, so great that one day it swallowed another fish which was nearly a thousand miles in extent. There were two, male and female, at first, but if they had both lived, the world would soon have been”* conquered (Goodhugh & Taylor, 1943, p. 760). *“[T]herefore the female was killed and laid up in salt for the great feast of the Messiah in the latter days”* (Goodhugh & Taylor, 1943, p. 760). Talmudist interpretations influence Christian scholars and ministers. Some Christians may interpret the great fish as a starfish, who later casts out Jonah; or as a squid, who holds and then releases Jonah. Some enormous tuna, grouper, and aquatic animals are capable of swallowing a whole human (Break Clips, 2014; Butler, 2016). Many Christians propose that *“Jonah says it's his fault,”* thus *“the sailors reluctantly throw him overboard”* (Finger, 2015, p. 37). *“Only entombment inside a ‘great fish’ will drive his bedraggled, stinking self to the city that needs to repent”* (Finger, 2015, p. 37). The allegory of entombment within a fish may be particularly interesting to Christians, who traditionally have funerary rituals involving the Earth, not the sea.

Christians may focus on entombment in this story. Jesus transcended death after three days, similarly to the story of Jonah, who should have died after being consumed. *“In 2014 the Islamic State destroyed the Mosul mosque in Iraq reputed to contain the tomb of the prophet Yunus”* known as Jonah to Christians (Jenkins, 2015, p. 36). *“Some Westerners saw this act as a blow against any surviving vestige of Christianity in the region, but of*

course Jonah is also venerated by Jews and Muslims” (Jenkins, 2015, p. 36). “Like many other patriarchs and prophets,” Jonah “is part of the common heritage of all three faiths, although these figures are imagined differently” (Jenkins, 2015, p. 36). Christians may find that Muslim interpretations of Jonah’s story also support the portrait of Jonah as a hero and a coward, who grows through God’s grace. “Similar mention is found in Koran 6:86. Finally, in Koran 68:48-50 there is another reference to Jonah only under the name of ‘Man of the Fish” (Steenbrink, 2002, p. 46). “[B]e not like the Man of the Fish, when he cried out in agony. Had not grace from his Lord reached him, he would indeed have been cast off on the naked shore in disgrace. Thus did his Lord choose him and make him of the company of the righteous” (Surah 68:48-50; Steenbrink, 2002, p. 46).

*Save an old woman among those who stayed behind;
Then We destroyed the others. And lo! ye verily pass by
(the ruin of) them in the morning. And at night-time;
have ye then no sense? And lo! Jonah verily was of those
sent (to warn). When he ran away (like slave from
captivity) to the ship (fully) laden. He (agreed to) cast
lots, and he was condemned: Then the big Fish did
swallow him, and he had done acts worthy of
blame....And they believed; so We permitted them to
enjoy (their life) for a while (Surah 37:135-148).*

*Or is the Unseen theirs that they can write (thereof)? But
wait thou for thy Lord's decree, and be not like him of
the fish, who cried out in despair. Had it not been that
[favor] from his Lord had reached him he surely had
been cast into the wilderness while he was reprobate.
But his Lord chose him and placed him among the
righteous. And lo! those who disbelieve would fain
disconcert thee with their eyes when they hear the
Reminder, and they say: Lo! he is indeed mad (Surah
68:47-51).*

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