

SANCTIFIED PIRACY

So you shall plunder the Egyptians (Exodus 3:22).

At the burning bush God told Moses that he was about to deliver his people from bondage in Egypt. As if that wasn't enough, he promised that when they left, they would not go empty-handed. These poor slaves would not only be free, they would be rich! *You will plunder the Egyptians (Exodus 3:21-22).*

What could this mean? Was this a license to steal? Was God abrogating the eighth commandment even before it was given (Exodus 20:15)? No. God was simply giving a satirical description of what would happen when the Israelites finally left Egypt. After ten plagues of national catastrophe, the Egyptians would be so desirous for the Hebrews to leave that they would gladly give them gifts to encourage them to go away.

The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians (Exodus 12:35-36).

God had a purpose for all this booty. He wanted his people (dirt poor after centuries of slavery) to have the means to build a tabernacle worthy of God. God was redeeming not just the slaves of Egypt but the gold of Egypt as well! The wealth was intended to bring him glory by adorning the house where he intended to dwell. Alas, the people took the plunder and made a golden calf. God became very angry when the treasures of Egypt were used for the pleasures of sin.

In the third century, Origen of Alexandria used this Old Testament story to illustrate what he believed was the proper Christian attitude toward Greek philosophy. Just as the Hebrews were instructed to use the gold of Egypt for God's purposes, so the followers of Christ should not hesitate to borrow truth from non-Christian sources when it was helpful to communicate the Gospel to a pagan culture. Ever since Origen, "plundering the Egyptians" has been a cliché for describing any effort to use the treasures of this fallen world for Christian purposes.

Is there "Egyptian gold" in your world that God may be asking you to "plunder"? Don't let the devil have all the treasure. Redeem it! Plunder Egypt for the sake of the Gospel. Take what is best of the fallen kingdoms of this world (the wealth, the knowledge, the art, the music, the literature, the strategies, the methods, etc.) and use it for the glory of God!

There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human experience over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: "Mine!" (Abraham Kuyper: pastor, journalist, theologian and prime minister of the Netherlands (1901-1905).