

Title - Rushdie's Picture of Coexistence: Faith and Doubt in "The Parting of the Arabian Sea"

Program of Study – English

Presentation Type – **Choose one of the following:** Oral Presentation

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Abstract: In *The Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie includes a dream sequence in the chapter "The Parting of the Arabian Sea" that shows a picture of coexistence between faith and doubt. As the Ayesha Haj makes their pilgrimage to Mecca, Mirza Saeed follows, giving reasonable questions that oppose the Ayesha Haj's faith claims. In the narrative, Rushdie validates the believers of the Ayesha Haj and the doubt of Mirza Saeed. For instance, the Ayesha Haj have solid reasons for faith in their pilgrimage—through the unexplainable phenomena of the butterflies, of seeing the face of Lakshmi in the face of Ayesha, of the rains clearing out the opposing miners, of the Arabian Sea parting underwater, and of the lack of dead bodies after the Ayesha Haj walks into the sea. Saeed, however, has reasonable justifications for not taking part in the faith journey—questions about the conflict-ridden group led by an increasingly aggressive leader, distaste about the child sacrifice, and the fact that Saeed himself cannot see the butterflies. Though Rushdie validates both groups with good reasons for finding roots in either side, he also shows the problematic elements of both groups. The Ayesha Haj is indeed conflict ridden, its leader does grow aggressive, and the group does sacrifice a child. Saeed, however, struggles to find any real contentment as he grows increasingly cynical of the group and of life. I propose that in this fictional narrative, Rushdie gives a compelling picture of coexistence within a pluralistic culture. Rushdie gives us this picture of coexistence as he does not privilege faith or doubt, and he

encourages all people of faith, including Christians, to confidently coexist within a pluralistic culture, for in proper coexistence, fruitful discourse can ensue.

Christian worldview integration:

Christians often demonize pluralism as it presents a potential affront to truth or orthodoxy. Postmodern pluralism entitles every individual to his or her own belief system, leaving no system of belief elevated over another. Pluralism taken to its logical end leads to truth becoming relative to each individual, which ultimately devalues the Christian claim to the absolute truth of the Gospel. With postmodernism on the rise, pluralism shows no immediate signs of departing from the cognitive framework of contemporary society's approach to religious beliefs. The Christian, therefore, must learn to properly coexist with those of other beliefs, even when others' beliefs seem irreconcilable with the Christian narrative. Since contemporary culture champions the freedom of religion—i.e. the freedom to believe what we want to believe—, Christians can love their neighbor as themselves by giving them the freedom to believe as they desire (even if our goal is to show them a better way). This belief has influenced my research, and has led me to examine Rushdie's work as a picture of confident coexistence within our pluralistic society. While Rushdie himself is not a Christian, his picture of coexistence still provides the Christian with a picture that shows how groups of both faith and doubt (or unbelief) might coexist well. If we learn to coexist well, then we give Jesus space to move in the coexistence and bring redemption through the relationships we might create. Therefore, while Rushdie's picture of proper coexistence is not complete, it does show the Christian how we might better create space to properly coexist with those of other beliefs, giving more space for fruitful discourse in which the Spirit might move.