

Exodus Concept and Imaginal Education

Exodus Theology and Imaginal Education work well together. Imaginal Education was first developed by The Ecumenical Institute in Chicago in the 1960's. It was at the center of their *Community Reformulation Model* that was used in the 5th City Project on the west side of the city.

The imaginal approach is based on Kenneth Boulding's understanding of images, developed in his book entitled, The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society. There are five basic principles:

- 1) Everyone operates out of images
- 2) Images govern behavior
- 3) Images are created by messages that can be communicated
- 4) Images can be changed; and
- 5) Changed images can change behavior

The *Exodus Concept* is based on the Biblical story of Israel's journey from Egypt, through the wilderness, to the promised land. It involved living with little hope in a state of oppression and wandering lost in the wilderness. In our view, prison is the Egypt experience. There you learn to live without hope and become radically dependent upon a system. You internalize the image of victim. The street is the wilderness experience and there you internalize the image of the wanderer. In the wilderness you will wander if you have no plan or purpose. In prison, if there is no vision or hope, there is little difference between prison and the street. In one you are bound, in the other you are lost. In Exodus we believe that your promised land is the future hope that you create through life-giving goals. If your goals and hope for the future are strong, the quality of your life will be transformed and so will the nature of your journey.

In 1968, when we first started to develop the *Exodus Cadre Concept*, the group wrestled with a new life-giving image for the person in prison. One of our early study papers was based on a quotation from Frantz Fanon's book: The Wretched of the Earth. He ends with these words:

“For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man.”

For several months we wrestled with the question: “What would the new man in Green Haven Prison look like?” We concluded that he would be life-giving; intentional; disciplined; lucid and aware; and focused on the future... We began to develop The Exodus Contract, which gives a structure by which a person can set goals in six areas: [Family Ties; Education; Physical Fitness & Health; Community Involvement; Spiritual Growth; Vocation, Work & Money Management]. It also asks for: Three future events that will improve the quality of my life; to identify your Primary Issue; and include a Practical Project.

At the heart of all our effort was Image Theory, or Imaginal Education. As it applies to our Exodus Concept we use, as a way of explanation, the three story house. The Basement is where our *unconscious self-images* are formed. The Main Floor is where our *emotions* are developed and expressed. The Attic is where our *intellectual or rational thinking* takes place.

ATTIC
*Rational & Intellectual
Thinking*

MAIN FLOOR
*Feelings &
Emotional Expression*

BASEMENT
Unconscious Images

Our unconscious images directly affect our emotions and thinking. In the book The Hard Journey Home, a man who came to prison at a young age was called YG (Young Gangster). He had internalized the *gangster* image from life on the street. Twenty years later, in his 50's, he still was called YG. His gangster image had informed his emotions and his self-understanding. He was still operating with a negative image brought to prison from the street.

Another young man came as a result of being a gang member in Brooklyn. He wounded a member of another gang in a fight over gold chain. He received a 15-year sentence. After a few years in prison, he saw some of his friends go home and then come back. Others had gone home and he would hear that they were back on drugs, or had been killed. He decided to change, pick up his life and move in a new direction. He bought a notebook, wrote down his goals and the sacrifices he would make. He finished high school and college while still in prison. He then applied to Georgetown Law School and was accepted. He [began] practicing law in New York City.

Images can change when new messages are received and new avenues of hope are created.