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PAUL AND RACIAL RECONCILIATION: A POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH TO 2 CORINTHIANS 3:12–18

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> "If God is the Spirit of freedom for the least in society, then this spirit has to be active as an event and process of struggle even where the name of Jesus is not known... Among the cries of all the marginalized peoples, God reveals God's self in all faiths around the globe. To deny this is to possibly participate in a new form of imperialism—a Christo-centric imperialism against the majority of the other faiths on earth."[1]

I am passionately concerned about the contemporary theological and ideological implications of biblical texts in general and Pauline texts in particular. These concerns were formed by the inspiring worship and pastoral preaching in the African American Baptist congregation of my youth, where my father served as pastor and my mother as a strong lay leader. There, I witnessed how sacred texts shaped people's understanding of God and transformed their daily lives.

Later as I pursued university training, I began understanding more clearly the theological and ideological implications of Pauline interpretation. Under the exacting supervision of Professor Carl Holladay, I wrote a New Testament Ph.D. dissertation that gave expression to my interpretive concerns.[2] The dissertation investigated how Paul confronted the perplexing problem of Greco-Roman slavery in the Corinthian congregation. It also examined how nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpretive debates about 1 Cor 7:17–24 continued and expanded the theological and ideological struggles evident in that biblical text.

The present essay is a natural continuation of the work I began under Professor Holladay's tutelage: How might a reading of another text in the Corinthian Correspondence shape twenty-first-century conversations about racial reconciliation among people still affected by the Trans-Atlantic slavery of the fifteenth through the nineteenth

[1] Dwight N. Hopkins, "A Black American Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue," in *Living Stones in the Household of God: The Legacy and Future of Black Theology* (ed. Linda E. Thomas; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 171–72.

[2] *The Tyranny of Resolution: I Corinthians 7:17–24* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000).

centuries? I hope that my current handling of these theological and ideological concerns pays appropriate homage to Professor Holladay's investment in and enduring influence upon my calling to be a scholar for the church.

Postcolonial Studies: Moving from the "Ancient" and the "Academic"

Given my theological and ideological concerns, postcolonial approaches to biblical interpretation provide an excellent way forward. Postcolonial studies is a diverse and expanding set of interpretive practices and theories that place the colonialism and neo-colonialism of Europe and the United States at the center of interpretive conversations. Broadly defined, postcolonial studies engage "the overlapping issues of race, empire, diaspora, and ethnicity."[3] More specifically, postcolonial studies are concerned with colonialism—"the organized deployment of racialized and gendered constructs for practices of acquiring and maintaining political control over other social groups, settling their lands with new residents, and/or exploiting that land and its peoples through military and administrative occupiers."[4] Closely associated with colonialism is imperialism, which consists of a "more coherent organizational form" by which colonizers present themselves as missionaries to the world.[5] Postcolonial studies also examine the attempt of the literal and figurative descendants of former colonizers to re-assert their colonial influence ("neo-colonialism" or "neo-imperialism"), as well as the political and cultural possibilities that emerge when formerly colonized people resist and transcend colonialism's oppressive effects ("decolonization").[6]

Recently, Pauline scholars have explored ancient imperialism as an inescapable aspect of early Christianity.[7] For example, attention to

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[3] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), 15.

[4] Mark Lewis Taylor, "Spirit and Liberation: Achieving Postcolonial Theology in the United States," in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (ed. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera; St. Louis: Chalice, 2004), 42.

[5] Seamus Deane, "Imperialism/Nationalism," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (2d ed.; ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 354.

[6] Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000).

[7] Notable examples include: Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and*

ancient Roman imperialism has prompted interpreters to rethink key Pauline terms such as "righteousness/justice" (δικαιοσύνη), "gospel" (εὐαγγέλιον), and "faith" (πίστις). These studies also have reminded us of the blurry boundaries between religion and politics in the first century CE Mediterranean world.

In the main, however, the emphasis in many recent political readings of Paul's letters has been upon the ancient world. Yet postcolonial studies invite interpreters to acknowledge more readily the current manifestations of imperialism that abound in many cultures. To read Paul against the backdrop of ancient Rome is intellectually profitable, but the Roman Empire crumbled centuries ago. A more intriguing question is: What happens if postcolonial critics begin to engage Pauline texts more fully with respect to the neo-imperialism of the twenty-first century?

Biblical scholarship must engage more thoroughly the impulse of empire that runs through so much political, economic, academic, and religious life in the United States and other so-called "first world" countries in the Northern hemisphere. If biblical scholarship avoids such engagement, it will fall prey again to that sharp critique leveled by Walter Wink more than three decades ago: "The outcome of biblical studies in the academy is a trained incapacity to deal with the real problems of actual living persons in their daily lives."[8]

As a politically engaged African American, I cannot ignore the contemporary empire. It is the legislative decisions made on the Potomac River and the financial decisions made on the Hudson River—not the ancient machinations of the Caesars on the Tiber River—that currently threaten the well-being of so many people in the United States and abroad. Thus, this essay unapologetically moves the interpretive conversation concerning Pauline texts from an emphasis upon ancient imperialism to an emphasis upon contemporary imperialism.

Power in Roman Imperial Society (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997); idem, ed., *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000); and idem, ed., *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2004).

[8] Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 6.

A Contemporary Social Struggle: Racial Reconciliation and Trans-Atlantic Slavery

In light of my interest in postcolonial approaches, I began pondering how a postcolonial reading of a Pauline text might facilitate the demanding, but necessary, work of contemporary racial reconciliation.[9] Two recent events galvanized my efforts to create dialogue among a Pauline text, a postcolonial methodology, and the issue of racial reconciliation. First, 2007 marked the bicentennial commemoration of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in the British Empire.[10] Second, in conjunction with this international commemoration, I was selected to give the 2006–2007 Bray Lectures.

Bicentennial Commemoration of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

In 1807, courageous social agitation and revolt and coordinated abolitionist efforts finally brought an end, at least in legal principle, to the international trading of Africans as slaves in the British colonies.[11] For centuries, this "triangular trafficking" had shipped whiskey and guns from England to West Africa; slaves from West Africa to the Caribbean and the Americas; and sugar and cotton from the Caribbean and

[9] Social scientists and cultural critics debate the meaning of the term "race." Many scholars have refuted the validity of "race" as a marker of fixed biological differences. Still, "race" as a social construction by which individuals and communities differentiate themselves remains a powerful and viable cultural force, especially in the United States. For further discussion, consult Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), and Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003). For another attempt to merge Pauline scholarship and dialogue about contemporary racial reconciliation, consult my *No Longer Slaves: Galatians and African American Experience* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2002).

[10] The bicentennial commemoration occurred in Great Britain in 2007 and in the United States in 2008. While this historic legislation was signed in the British Parliament and the United States Congress in March 1807, the legislation did not become effective officially until January 1, 1808.

[11] The abolition of the Trans-Atlantic *slave trade* and the abolition of Trans-Atlantic *slavery* were distinct events. Many British merchants continued in the illegal trade of African slaves for years and, in some cases, decades after the parliamentary act of 1807. Also, from 1807 to 1865, the violence of chattel slavery in the United States intensified, unleashing an escalating savagery against Africans in the so-called "New World." This savagery culminated in the United States' Civil War. Thus, even after 1807, the carnage of slavery led to ever more carnage, as the fledgling American nation fought internally about the fate of its enslaved.

the Americas to England. On March 25, 1807, an act of the British Parliament abolished this international trade.[12]

This event in 1807 forecasted the possibility of a more humane era in interpersonal and international relations, especially between people of African and European descent. Abolitionist activities—before and after 1807—released palpable positive energy into the moral universe. However, for two centuries, many well-intentioned people have ignored, resisted, or failed to operate fully under that moral energy. Two hundred years later, genuine reconciliation between groups estranged by slavery is still, in many regards, an unrealized hope. Thus, the bicentennial commemoration seemed to me an opportune occasion to address the role of the Bible, and especially of Paul's letters, in contemporary efforts to heal past injustices concerning slavery.

The use of Paul's letters in the ideological justification of slavery is well-documented.[13] In light of the bicentennial commemoration, I raised a different question: How might Paul's letters provide theological and ideological energy for contemporary conversations about racial reconciliation? Instead of ignoring Paul or maligning him for the role of his letters in promoting the "iniquitous institution" of slavery, I wanted to engage his letters for the healing balm they might possess.[14]

Bray Lectures in Ghana and England

The United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (USPG) and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), two London-based missionary organizations, selected me as the 2006–2007 Bray Lecturer. Named in honor of Thomas Bray, a seventeenth-century

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[12] For excellent historical accounts of the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery, consult Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (Boston: Mariner, 2006), and Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[13] Consult, for example, Clarice J. Martin, "The Haustafeln (Household Codes) in African American Biblical Interpretation: 'Free Slaves' and 'Subordinate Women,'" in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Cain Hope Felder; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 206–31; C. Michelle Venable-Ridley, "Paul and the African American Community," in *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation* (ed. Emilie M. Townes; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 212–33; and Braxton, *The Tyranny of Resolution*, 235–64.

[14] For a cogent analysis of the African American engagement with Paul's ambiguity concerning slavery and freedom, consult Allen Dwight Callahan, "'Brother Saul': An Ambivalent Witness to Freedom," *Semeia* 83/84 (1998): 235–62.

British missionary, this lectureship provides an opportunity for an academic theologian with church connections to learn and give lectures in two international contexts.[15]

I traveled to Ghana in December 2006 for the first part of the lectureship. In addition to the bicentennial commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade, in March 2007, Ghana would mark its fiftieth year of independence from British colonial rule. While in Ghana, I learned about the history of the country before and after European slavery and colonialism. I met with religious leaders and presented seminars on the role of religion in the oppression and liberation of people of African descent. My itinerary also included visits to historical sites, such as the home of W. E. B. Du Bois in Accra;[16] the memorial to Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president; and the slave castles in Cape Coast and Elmina, where thousands of Africans were imprisoned prior to being shipped to the Caribbean and the Americas.

The second part of the lectureship occurred in England in March 2007. I gave numerous presentations throughout England, including formal lectures exploring how communities still affected by Trans-Atlantic slavery can strive for reconciliation and a more just and peaceful world.[17]

My selection as the Bray Lecturer provided an ideal opportunity to pursue a postcolonial reading of a Pauline text in two cultural contexts dramatically influenced by colonial and postcolonial realities. The itinerary of the lectureship permitted me to retrace geographically and theologically parts of the triangular route of slavery. Furthermore, the

[15] The inaugural Bray Lecturer was Gerald West of the University of Natal in South Africa. He visited India and the United Kingdom in 2005. I am grateful for the generous support of USPG, SPCK, and the Anglican Communion that facilitated my travel, research, and lectures. For the history of USPG and SPCK, consult Daniel O'Connor et al., *Three Centuries of Mission: The United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel 1701–2000* (London: Continuum, 2000). The Bray Lectures are a noteworthy effort by USPG to address its role in promoting a "colonial" Christianity in its early years. In this regard, USPG is facilitating contemporary conversations for justice and reconciliation.

[16] W. E. B. Du Bois expatriated to Ghana and provided important inspiration and counsel to Kwame Nkrumah. Both Du Bois and Nkrumah were passionate advocates of African nationalism and staunch critics of European colonialism. Consult David Birmingham, *Kwame Nkrumah: The Father of African Nationalism* (rev. ed. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998), 95.

[17] I delivered formal lectures at Kings College, London; Ripon College, Cuddesdon; The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, Birmingham; York University; and Manchester Cathedral. I appreciate the hospitality I received at each of these locations.

slave castles in Ghana—those dark, suffocating dungeons designed to brutalize the bodies and spirits of their inhabitants—have indelibly influenced my exegetical and theological agenda.

Paul and Reparations for Slavery

Social activists and scholars in many disciplines are intensely debating reparations for slavery.[18] While some religious leaders and theologians have added their voices to this debate, I am not aware of many overtly exegetical approaches to this important conversation.[19] In the Bray Lectures, I wanted to address the lack of exegetical resources concerning reparations for slavery.

My initial thinking about reparations followed this logic: Trans-Atlantic slavery inflicted cultural, economic, and psychic wounds upon the African continent and the African Diaspora. The African continent and Diaspora have been hemorrhaging ever since. In spite of this massive bleeding, African people the world over have transformed every aspect of global culture, from commerce to cuisine. As a Ghanaian clergy said to me in Ghana during the Bray Lectures, "The whole world has been made rich by Africa."

Yet to ignore conversations about reparations is akin to enjoying the riches from people of African descent, while simultaneously allowing those people to bleed profusely from the wounds of slavery. To continue with the metaphor, reconciliation is often depicted as an embrace or

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[18] For example, in political science and legal studies, Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (New York: Plume, 2000), and Roy L. Brooks, *Atonement and Forgiveness: A New Model for Black Reparations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); in sociology and cultural studies, Winbush, *Should America Pay?*; in philosophy, Janna Thompson, *Taking Responsibility for the Past: Reparation and Historical Justice* (Polity: Cambridge, 2002).

[19] For a compelling exposition of the South African Truth and Reconciliation process in the 1990s, which involved reparations, consult Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Image, 1999). For a discussion of reparations from the perspectives of pastoral theology and Old Testament exegesis, consult Homer U. Ashby, Jr., *Our Home Is Over Jordan: A Black Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2003), 134–40. For a rationale for reparations from the perspective of ethics and critical race theory, consult Jennifer Harvey, "Race and Reparations: The Material Logics of White Supremacy," in *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within: White People on What We Need to Do* (ed. Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline; Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2004), 91–122.

hug that overcomes hostility. But hugging a person bleeding profusely, without attending to the gaping wound, is more a kiss of death than a hug to end hostility.

Just as reconciliation is a complex process that must involve reparations, so too reparations is a complex term with many nuances. Opinions about the meanings and possible administrations of reparations are wide-ranging. For instance, Molefi Asante, a progenitor of contemporary African-centered scholarship, maintains that there should be four dimensions of reparations: the moral, the legal, the economic, and the political.[20] While a discussion of the multiple dimensions of reparations will not detain us now, there is a growing consensus among some scholars and activists that reparations should involve financial compensation for African people or institutions. Since chattel slavery reaped untold *economic* profits for many Europeans and Americans, it seems only just that the currency of reparations should also be at least partly economic.

Nevertheless, slavery exacted from African people not only an economic toll but also a psychic toll. In that regard, British pounds and U.S. dollars alone will be insufficient to redress the wrong. In my research and reflection about reparations, I left open the question of the form of reparations. Yet I have grown increasingly convinced that without reparations there will be no genuine, abiding reconciliation among those estranged by the violence of Trans-Atlantic slavery.

Thus, I initially set out to offer a postcolonial reading of a Pauline text that would support the cause of international reparations for persons affected by slavery. I soon discovered, however, that my desire was premature. It began to occur to me how uncomfortable some people were with even the mention of reparations.

As I pondered the cultural discomfort that even the term "reparations" can create, another question occurred to me: If we can barely mention the term "reparations" in polite, cultural conversations, let alone seriously entertain it as a socio-economic reality, how will reparations ever come to pass? At this point, I altered my exegetical agenda for the Bray Lectures. No longer would I read a Pauline text to address directly the issue of reparations. Instead, I would read a Pauline text

[20] Molefi Kete Asante, "The African American Warrant for Reparations: The Crime of European Enslavement of Africans and Its Consequences," in *Should America Pay? Slavery and Raging Debates on Reparations* (ed. Raymond A. Winbush; New York: Amistad, 2003), 4.

to discern why it is so difficult even to have the conversation about reparations in the first place, especially in cross-cultural settings. How might Pauline exegesis create the conditions for a much-needed conversation about the dimensions of racial reconciliation in the twenty-first century?

A Postcolonial Approach to 2 Corinthians 3:12–18

In many Christian conversations about reconciliation, 2 Cor 5:17–21 is a touchstone text, especially v. 19: "In Christ God was reconciling the world to [God's] self." Christian proponents of reconciliation are right to make 2 Cor 5:17–21 central. Yet it occurred to me that conversations about 2 Cor 5 are premature without sustained attention to 2 Cor 3, especially vv. 12–18.

In 2 Cor 3, Paul plumbs the depths of the challenges facing the Corinthian congregation and the world. The deeper issue in 2 Corinthians is epistemology, how we know and think.[21] To investigate epistemology is to ask this question: What characteristics allow us to know truth from falsehood? As I grappled afresh with 2 Corinthians, Paul seemed to be saying that the world will never arrive at truth or reconciliation without a transformation in our way of knowing and thinking. Before there can be a new world, there must be new ways of thinking about the world. Second Corinthians 3 was and is a call for repentance—an apocalyptic action that transforms our thinking.

In 2 Cor 3:12–18, Paul identifies the epistemological obstacle that must be removed: "the veil"! The veil distorts how we know and obscures right perceptions of the world. Paul's interpretation of the veil is filled with exegetical intricacies. God has ushered in a new moment in salvation history.[22] This new era, whose chief architect is Jesus Christ,

[21] In a classic essay, J. Louis Martyn argues that epistemology is a fundamental concern in 2 Corinthians. According to Martyn, Paul urges the Corinthians to join him in a new way of knowing God's actions ("Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages," in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1997], 89–110).

[22] In 2 Cor 3:6, 14, Paul uses the word διαθήκη, which is normally translated "covenant." By "covenant," Paul seems to mean something like "era." He distinguishes between the ministry of the old era and the new era. The Christ event (i.e., the life, death, resurrection, and impending return of Jesus Christ) is the dividing line between these eras. The Scripture of Judaism is still an important feature within the new era. However, Paul reads that Scripture in a new way, namely, through his experience with Jesus Christ.

is both similar and dissimilar to the old era, whose chief architect was Moses. Both the old and new eras reflect God's glory. Yet there is a crucial distinction between the old and new eras. The old era actually places a veil over people's thinking. A relationship with Jesus Christ removes the obscuring veil and bestows upon persons a radically new orientation. With the veil removed, people are able to detect God's surprising plans.

What does the veil in 2 Cor 3 have to do with contemporary reconciliation among people still affected by Trans-Atlantic slavery? An answer emerged as I read 2 Cor 3 from the contextual framework of my trip to Ghana in the fall of 2006. I led a seminar for scholars and clergy at St. Nicholas Seminary, an Anglican Theological School, in Cape Coast, Ghana. On the Thursday night before that Friday seminar, I read again 2 Cor 3:12–18, the principal text for the seminar, and I also read again the text upon which that passage is predicated, Exod 34.

Exodus 34 concludes a pivotal three-chapter section. In Exod 32, Israel commits idolatry, thus provoking God's fierce judgment. In Exod 33, Moses pleads with God to restore God's presence to Israel, for without God's presence, Israel would cease to be. God promises to allow God's face to go with Israel, but God refuses to allow Moses to see God's face. In Exod 34, God renews the covenant with Israel on Mount Sinai. At the end of the covenant renewal, there is a mysterious reference to a veil that Moses places on his face in Exod 34:29–35. Moses' direct encounter with God's transcendence left Moses' face shining. Thus, when speaking with the people after this divine encounter, Moses put the veil on. Moses then took the veil off when he spoke to God.

Scholars debate the significance of the veil. For instance, Walter Brueggemann suggests that the veil might be a protection for Israel or an instrument to prevent God's glory from being profaned by contact with masses of people.[23] Thus, the veil appears to fulfill some positive or at least protective purpose. However, as Paul interprets Exod 34 in 2 Cor 3:12–18, this veil is not positive. Instead, the veil prohibits the proper perception of reality. It is an instrument of concealment. Moses uses the veil to hide from people his fading glory, which for Paul signals the inability of the old era to provide ultimate life. Therefore, when Paul interpreted Exod 34 in his context, the veil assumed new, negative significance.

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[23] Walter Brueggemann, *The Book of Exodus* in *New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. I (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 953.

On that warm Ghanaian night, I, too, began to realize that the veil was problematic and was hiding something. The veil was hiding the horrific colonial violence that Exodus places in the mouth of God. In Exod 34, the covenant is renewed, but at the expense of indigenous people. There had been a veil on my mind in previous engagements with Exod 34. When I read Exod 34 in a Ghanaian context, this text was no longer an innocent affirmation of covenant renewal. In Ghana, a country only fifty years removed from the bondage of British colonialism, Exod 34:11–16 arrested my attention.

In the seminar with my Ghanaian colleagues, I played "jazz" with the scriptures, inserting different ethnic or tribal names in Exod 34:11–16. My "improvisation" revealed how dangerous this text could be:

> Observe what I the God of colonial violence and greed command you—my colonial British missionaries to the Gold Coast of Africa. As you invade the Gold Coast to enslave the people and pillage their resources, I will drive out before you the Akan, and the Fante, and the Ga, and the Ewe, and the Mossi, and the Yoruba...
>
> Tear down their altars of African Traditional Religion where they have met the Great God for centuries; cut down their sacred poles where they have named and dedicated their children to the Great God and raised their families in righteousness.
>
> And in the name of colonial religion, refer to their sacred traditions as "fetishes," and call those dark people "pagans." Even though those indigenous Africans were the architects of religion and knew the Great God millennia before the Christian religion was formulated, convince them that their sacred traditions are demonic rituals.

My improvisational reading revealed that for indigenous West Africans, Exodus 34 could be a "text of terror,"[24] which employs "a theological justification in order to serve the vested [and violent] interest of a particular ethnic/racial group."[25] Indeed, religious faithfulness in Exod 34 required the destruction of indigenous peoples. My point was not to impugn Moses or by extension to foster contemporary anti-Judaism. My aim was to unmask the colonial violence at the center of Exod 34. Paul in the first century and the twenty-first century African participants in my seminar had a strong premonition that the veil posed a serious problem.

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[24] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

[25] Cain Hope Felder, "Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives," in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 128–29.

The veil prevents us from perceiving reality properly. This lack of proper perception has created the conditions for cultural chauvinism and violence. The veil is not a cloth fabric for the face. It is a philosophy that cloaks the mind. Until we lift the veil in our contemporary cultural conversations, we cannot have probing conversations about reparations and genuine racial reconciliation. If religious communities and social activists want to be ambassadors of justice, they must lift the veil from their own attitudes and actions. Then, with sharpened moral perception, these religious communities and social activists will be empowered to guide global conversations about justice and reconciliation.

Spiritual Inspiration from W. E. B. Du Bois

My emphasis on the veil as an instrument of oppression seemed especially appropriate in a Ghanaian context. W. E. B. Du Bois—the distinguished African American scholar who emigrated to Ghana and died there in 1963—had likened the psychic and social oppression of African Americans to a "veil" in his classic work *The Souls of Black Folk*. This veil prevented African Americans from accurately perceiving who they are, leaving them instead with the distorted self-images propagated by white racism. Scholars suggest that Du Bois constructed the image of the veil partly from Paul's words about seeing through a glass dimly in 1 Cor 13:12 and partly from the veil of the Tabernacle in Exod 26:33.[26] Du Bois believed that the veil would have to be destroyed or transcended in order for African Americans to achieve the psychic and social wholeness that allowed them to integrate their "Negro" identity with their "American" identity.[27]

Interestingly, during my stay in Ghana for the Bray Lectures, the first historical site my tour guide arranged for me to visit was Du Bois's home in Accra. This visit occurred two days before the seminar at St. Nicholas Seminary discussed above. As I walked through Du Bois's house, sat in his study, and knelt at his grave outside his home,

[26] For further discussion of the "veil" in Du Bois's work, consult Stanley Brodwin, "The Veil Transcended: Form and Meaning in W. E. B. Du Bois' 'The Souls of Black Folk,'" *Journal of Black Studies* 2 (March 1972): 303–21. Also, consult Vincent L. Wimbush, "'We Will Make Our Own Future Text': An Alternate Orientation to Interpretation," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (ed. Brian K. Blount; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 44–47.

[27] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1903; repr., New York: Dover, 1994), 2.

I began a "postcolonial conversation" with his spirit. My thoughts went like this:

> Dr. Du Bois, you turned, at least in part, to the Apostle Paul for a powerful image describing the oppression of African Americans—the veil. In spite of the courageous, pioneering work of you and other freedom fighters, the veil still exists. With your blessing, I want to explore another Pauline text dealing with the veil, with the hopes that these lectures in Ghana and England will move us closer to the final removal of the veil.

As I shared these thoughts at Du Bois's grave, with tears falling from my eyes, I felt a numinous presence surrounding me. I believe it was Du Bois's spirit blessing my efforts to wrestle, once again, with the Apostle Paul and with the veil for the sake of liberty and justice for all, and especially for all African Americans. Inspired by this "visitation" with Du Bois, I set out in my lectures and seminars to understand afresh the nature or "texture" of the veil.

The "Fabric" of Colonialism

There are at least two interlocking "fabrics" that comprise the veil. As I intimated above, the first fabric of the veil is colonialism and neocolonialism. Indeed, "colonial" Christianity was a primary ideological pillar of Trans-Atlantic slavery.

The collusion of colonial Christianity and slavery became viscerally real to me as I visited the Ghanaian slave dungeons in Cape Coast and Elmina. In Cape Coast, the male slave dungeon was literally beneath the chapel in which Europeans were holding their worship services. In Elmina, the slave auction block was literally beneath the chapel for worship. Colonial Christianity, along with its hegemonic biblical hermeneutics, was propped up by the backs and bones of enslaved Africans.

Religious organizations such as USPG should be commended for inviting various contemporary communities to ponder the diverse roles of Christianity in the support and abolition of chattel slavery. Yet reconciliation will never come unless we, in the words of the ethicist Barbara Holmes, move beyond "polite and reserved academic discourses."[28] According to Holmes, such "discourses are inappropriate responses to genocide."[29] Thus, as we address the lasting legacies of

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[28] Barbara A. Holmes, *Race and the Cosmos: An Invitation to View the World Differently* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), 76.
[29] Ibid.

the colonial genocide of Trans-Atlantic slavery, we cannot only speak politely about USPG's mark on contemporary conversations. We also must risk being impolite and remember that USPG's historical antecedent, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), marked people in the eighteenth century in a much more infamous way. Slave holders associated with SPG branded the mark "Society" into the skin of the slaves they owned in the Caribbean.[30] An eighteenth century African slave on that *Christian-sponsored*, Caribbean plantation could have uttered words from another Pauline text: "I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body" (Gal 6:17). Indeed, some colonial slave holders transformed the symbolic "branding" of Jesus into an excruciatingly literal practice. In the name of Jesus, Christian missionaries "marked," maimed, and murdered countless Africans.[31]

The historian Christopher Brown has examined the role of Anglo-American religious groups, such as the Quakers and Evangelical Anglicans, in the anti-slavery movement.[32] Yet Brown also reminds us that many Anglo-American Christians condemned slavery, while rarely, if ever, questioning the colonialism and empire-building that inflicted another kind of violence on the African continent and Diaspora.

Additionally, it must be noted that neo-colonialism is alive and well and being fostered by policies implemented by nations such as the United States. One example substantiates the claim. In Ghana, in order to pay their loans from international banks, local farmers must charge higher prices for their rice than the cheaper rice imported from the U.S. Consequently, Ghanaians tend to buy rice from the U.S. rather than from their own farmers. When I addressed a group of clergy in Ghana, they spoke passionately about how these trade policies were bringing slow but certain economic and physical death to their communities. For these clergy eager to resist neo-colonial policies and practices, abstract musings about Pauline themes such as "death" and "resurrection" were meaningless. So many Ghanaians continue to die. No longer are

[30] Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, 67–68.

[31] For poignant analyses of the often ignored colonial violence against black women, consult Traci C. West, "Spirit-Colonizing Violations: Racism, Sexual Violence and Black American Women," in *Remembering Conquest: Feminist/Womanist Perspectives on Religion, Colonization, and Sexual Violence* (ed. Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis and Marie M. Fortune; New York: Haworth, 1999), 19–30; and Katie G. Cannon, "Sexing Black Women: Liberation from the Prisonhouse of Anatomical Authority," in *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic* (ed. Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 11–30.

[32] Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*, 333–450.

they dying in violent forced slave marches to the Ghanaian coast or in the hulls of slave ships. Now, Ghanaians die from a lack of economic development. The slower economic development in Ghana—and in many other places around the globe formerly colonized by Europeans and North Americans—is related, in large measure, to the economic despondency and scarcity of social infrastructures (e.g., potable water, healthcare, sufficient roads and schools) left in the wake of Trans-Atlantic slavery and colonialism. Thus, in Ghana, a postcolonial approach to "resurrection" that overcomes "death" must take into account practical, tangible realities like the price of rice.

The "Fabric" of Fundamentalism

In addition to colonialism, there is another interlocking "fabric" from which the ideological veil has been woven: fundamentalism. Fundamentalism also obscures proper perceptions and poses a serious threat to racial reconciliation.[33] When I speak of fundamentalism, I am not identifying a particular segment within a religious community. Rather I mean an overall approach to reality that transforms *culturally-conditioned* criteria for truth and relevance into *universal criteria.* Furthermore, fundamentalism vigorously and, sometimes, violently compels acceptance of those criteria. Fundamentalism "replaces the awesome depth of Mystery with a flat surface of barren forms,"[34] and it tends to demonize diversity and ambiguity. While some scholars locate the formal emergence of fundamentalism in the late nineteenth century, the veil of fundamentalism had fallen over the minds of many a long time before that. Indeed, one could argue that fundamentalism provided ideological support for colonialism, and that colonialism was the political embodiment of fundamentalism.

The Fabric of 2 Corinthians 3

Fundamentalism does not restrict itself to *religious* doctrines. It can subsume *cultural philosophies* such as "white privilege" and invest them with a divine mandate. Thus, even after the abolition of the slave trade

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[33] For a more detailed discussion of fundamentalism, consult James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977); Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism* (New York: Ballatine, 2000); and Martyn Percy and Ian Jones, eds., *Fundamentalism: Church and Society* (London: SPCK, 2002).

[34] Patrick Laude, "An Eternal Perfume," *Parabola: The Search for Meaning* 30 (Winter 2005): 7.

and emancipation from slavery, white Christian missionaries felt "called by God" to enlighten and evangelize the "dark natives" in Africa and Asia. This historical collusion between fundamentalism and colonialism reveals the fine line between mutually edifying intercultural interaction and a patronizing "white man's burden" to civilize and "Christianize" the world.

Given my apprehension about fundamentalism, my emphasis on 2 Cor 3:12–18 could seem strange. This passage appears to support a kind of fundamentalism, where Paul seeks to flatten the mystery of his ancestral religion, Judaism, in the name of making everyone a "Christian." In some sense, Paul does to Judaism what later Christian missionaries did to African Traditional Religion: deny its enduring validity. Thus, at the very point where Paul assists us in lifting the veil of colonialism, he seemingly lowers the veil of fundamentalism further upon our minds.

However, 2 Cor 3:16–17 might provide a way forward. Verse 16 makes Jesus Christ central to the removing of the veil. But if the veil is raised only through Jesus Christ, then this passage becomes an instrument of fundamentalism, where only "Christians" have proper perception. Does Paul in v. 17 appeal to the language of the Spirit and, in so doing, unwittingly provide a way to avoid the dangers of fundamentalism? "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." Just when it appears that this text has clearly marked the boundaries of religious insiders and outsiders, this text moves into the boundary-transcending territory of the Spirit.

Jesus said that the Spirit blows where it wills (John 3:8). By invoking God's Spirit in 2 Cor 3:17, this text suggests that the Spirit's ultimate concern is not partisanship on the basis of religious group identity. Rather the Spirit's ultimate concern is the last word in the Greek text and English translation of 2 Cor 3:17: ἐλευθερία or "freedom." Where the Spirit is, there is *freedom*, and where *freedom* is, there is the Spirit. Thus, attempts to restrict sacred truth to any one religious scheme create inhospitable conditions for the Sacred Spirit who wants to inspire freedom and flourishing for the creation and all its inhabitants. Undoubtedly, for Paul, the phrase "Spirit of the Lord" possessed overt Christological meaning. For him, the Lord is Christ. Yet the Septuagint reveals that the term "Lord" (κύριος) is sufficiently flexible to include both a broader reference to God and a more specific reference to Jesus Christ.

As a Christian, I share Paul's belief that the Lord is Christ. Nevertheless, I do not want to be limited by that Christological understanding. Said differently, as a Christian, I believe that in Jesus Christ I

have all the sacred truth I can stand, but I do not have all the sacred truth there is. Others also have sacred truth, for example, those who practice African Traditional Religion or seek right relationships with God through the Torah. By linking with and learning from them, we all are enriched.

In one of my seminars in Ghana, an African Anglican clergy welcomed my attempt to loose the Spirit in 2 Cor 3:17 from a dogmatic Christo-centrism. He rightly sensed that my interpretation represented an embrace of religious pluralism. He is a Christian. His wife is a Muslim. In addition to their devotion to their respective religious traditions of Christianity and Islam, they are also seeking God through various approaches in African Traditional Religion. He has grown weary of neo-colonial, dogmatic Christianity that disparages the religious validity of other approaches to the sacred. Instead, he and his family are seeking approaches to religion that honor the particularities of various religious traditions, while acknowledging the complexity and ambiguity of the desire to grasp, or to be grasped by, the sacred.

Continuing the Conversation

The time has come to lift the veil—the veil of colonialism and fundamentalism. My reading of 2 Cor 3:12–18 can be refined, but I am energized about the possibility of engaging Pauline texts for their assistance in the demanding work of contemporary racial reconciliation. My current exploration has revealed several areas for further investigation, which I present as questions:

1. Given the interest in reconciliation in Paul's letters (e.g., Rom 5:10–11; 2 Cor 5:18–19; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20–22), how should Trans-Atlantic slavery influence contemporary exegetical and theological reflection about restorative justice (e.g., reparations), healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation?

2. How can postcolonial readings of the inter-ethnic dialogue in Paul's letters foster more probing conversations about the construction of ethnic identity in diverse twenty-first century contexts? Furthermore, to what degree are the similarities and differences in the understanding of ethnic and racial identity among Ghanaian, British, and U.S. audiences related to the experiences of slavery and colonialism, and how do these similarities and differences impact exegesis?[35]

[35] Michael Gomez, a historian of African Diasporic cultures, argues that certain West African understandings of "ethnicity" were replaced by the concept of "race" among enslaved African Americans. West African societies had (and still have) a

> 3. Given Paul's interest in "epistemology" and divine revelation, how can postcolonial readings of such themes address and correct the false perceptions perpetuated by white racism and other forms of xenophobia?

According to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza:

> Truth is not... a process of discovering the hidden or forcing into the open a divine that is buried. Rather, truth is a historical process of public deliberation for the creation of a radical democratic equality for every wo/man in the global village... A conception of "truth" in this sense comes close to the biblical notion of "doing the truth," a truth that "will set you free."[36]

Many colonial readings of Paul's letters facilitated the enslavement of millions of Africans. I believe that emerging postcolonial readings of those same letters can assist the heirs of the enslaved and of the enslavers in their quest for reconciliation. Let it be so in the name of that Spirit that brings ἐλευθερία—freedom!

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robust appreciation for ethnic diversity. This diversity involved the veneration of different ethnic deities, even though many African ethnic groups still believed in the one Great God who had created the universe. In order to frustrate communication and quell the threat of slave revolts, slave traders often mixed West African ethnic groups. Consequently, some ethnic customs and beliefs faded, including the beliefs in certain lesser ethnic deities. While the deities of various West African ethnic groups may have "died" in the middle passage of Trans-Atlantic slavery, there arose among the enslaved a pan-African understanding of God that placed the survival of *black* people atop the religious agenda. Hence, these enslaved people no longer identified themselves according to their ethnic heritage but rather by their "racial" heritage (e.g., black physical features). Thus, for ruling, white elites, "race" was a social construction for the perpetuation of "white privilege." For enslaved African Americans, "race" was a social construction to facilitate the survival of a people. This historical process partly explains why "race" is a cherished, albeit complex, concept among African Americans. By contrast, while colonial Great Britain was once the principal slave-trading empire, Britain did not experience the large influx of Africans that was more typical in the Caribbean and the United States. Consequently, notions of "race" developed very differently in Britain, even though British colonialism often resulted in the "white" domination of "dark" indigenous peoples. For further discussion, consult Michael A. Gomez, "The Preacher-Kings: W. E. B. Du Bois Revisited," in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures* (ed. Vincent L. Wimbush; New York: Continuum, 2000), 503–5; and Fenton, *Ethnicity*, 40–42, 48–50. For a similar argument about the social construction of "race" among Asian people as a result of their colonial oppression, consult Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 40.

[36] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 192–93.