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THEOLOGY AND RACE

Jesus the Jew in the Americas: The Promise of Post-Colonial  
Barthianism

Peter Goodwin Heltzel

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Womanist Theology and Ethics: Black Women's Poverty and the  
Increasing Significance of Class

Keri Day

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# PROLEGOMENA

Yvette Joy Harris

Social constructions of race and critical theological modes of thought come together in this fall issue of the *Princeton Theological Review*, inspired in part, by J. Kameron Carter's work *Race: A Theological Account*. Carter's book is a clarion "voice crying out in the wilderness (Jn. 1:23, Matt. 3:3, Mk. 1:3)" in this post-modern era. Through his own fecund interpretation, Carter challenges Western Christian theological thought for privileging one group over and against another. Carter's interpretation serves to foster dialogue on these subjects and expose the unhealed wounds of many people's past and present realities.

Where we find ourselves situated, socio-historically, or where we choose to situate ourselves, theologically, has a bearing on how we approach the biblical text and engage the discourse of theology. The articles demonstrate what the apostle Paul points to in 1 Corinthians 13:12 (NLT): for "now we see things imperfectly, like a puzzling reflection in a mirror." The articles attempt to make sense of the ways in which theology and race have impacted society, both in America and throughout the world. Regardless of ethnicity, denomination, or geographical location, race has *infected* and *affected* our existence and our relations with one another.

This issue is divided into two parts. In the first section authors offer analyses and critiques of Carter's work while articulating their own formulations on theology and race. The first article, "Jesus the Jew in the Americas: The Promise of Post-Colonial Barthianism" by Peter Heltzel and Christian T. Collins Winn, establishes a foundation by offering a brief recapitulation of Carter's work, particularly his dialectic with Karl Barth. Heltzel and Winn argue that Carter does not do justice to the continued historical presence of the Jewish Jesus articulated in Barth's theology.

In "Covenant, Creation & Christ," David Congdon directly addresses Carter's reading of Barth. Though supportive of Carter's theological task, Congdon argues that Carter misunderstands Barth's position on the subjectivity of creation, and that the theological assumptions that come to light through his misunderstanding "threaten to derail Carter's overall argument." Congdon explores two related issues which require clarification in Carter's future work: whether Carter's is a work of natural theology; and how Carter understands the relationship between creation and covenant. Congdon believes the success of Carter's understanding of Barth requires Carter to further engage the mature Barth found in the later volumes of *Church Dogmatics*.

In "J. Kameron Carter's Contribution to Theological Reflection," Beverly Mitchell addresses Carter's work through a discussion of the development of Anti-Semitism and white supremacy throughout modern philosophical and religious discourse. While providing analysis of influential theologians such as Karl Barth

and James Cone Mitchell praises Carter's treatment of modern racial thought supplementing his thesis with greater attention to the manner in which the pseudo-theologies of Anti-Semitism and White Supremacy deny the sovereignty of God.

The second section deals with varying issues of theology and race in an array of contextual spaces. David Mowers and Timothy Senapatiratne, in the "The 'Pentecostalization' of the World: Race, Theology and the Classical Pentecostal Tradition," offer the voice of a denomination that is seldom heard in Western theological discourse. They argue the original Pentecost and the 20<sup>th</sup> century restorationist groups indeed share a commonality, "the formation and empowerment of groups of believers no longer bound to culturally enforced racial norms."

In, "Race and Recapitulation: A Christological Challenge," Andrew Harmon argues that embedded within America's pictorial representation of Jesus is its own racialized reality. Drawing from the wisdom of 2<sup>nd</sup> century church father Irenaeus for answers to the controversy plaguing modernity and its talk of race, Harmon illumines how cultural groups have identified with the biblical text in various ways and how biblical interpretation has, in turn, impacted these ethnic groups. Readers are urged not to lose sight of the Jewish distinctiveness of Jesus through which we are able to respect all of the particularities in the body of Christ.

The final article entitled "Womanist Theology & Ethics: Black Women's Poverty and the Increasing Significance of Class" by Keri Day demonstrates the practical way in which theology and race impact the lives of people today, particularly poor black women. While Day upholds a Womanist theology and ethic, she critiques it for its silence regarding the treatment of black women by the American political economy and suggests ways Womanist theologians can better advocate for them. It is important that Womanist theologians give voice to the ways in which black women have had to reinterpret theology to give them hope and the ability to transcend their "interlocking oppressions."

This issue on Theology and Race reflects the multiplicity of human experiences on these subject matters. We are all affected by the social construction of race and its effects, particularly upon theology. The question raised now is the same one that Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Through academic ecumenical discourse and fellowship with the body of Christ let us allow God through Jesus Christ to reveal God's self anew.

Our hope is that this issue contributes to building bridges to our brothers and sisters in Christ who look and think differently than we. In Christ's name we offer the Spring 2009 issue of the *Princeton Theological Review* on theology and race.

Yvette Joy Harris

# JESUS THE JEW IN THE AMERICAS: THE PROMISE OF POST-COLONIAL BARTHIANISM

Peter Goodwin Heltzel  
Christian T. Collins Winn

Vital to the task of theology today is the construction of a post-colonial Christology that can move beyond the problematics of modern racial reasoning. This is especially needed in the context of the Americas, given its long history of violence and oppression legitimized and deployed through the categories of race and what one might call the "racial imagination." This line of argumentation has been formulated decisively in the recent work *Race: A Theological Account* by J. Kameron Carter.<sup>1</sup>

Carter's work simultaneously deepens our understanding of the problem of race while offering a theological alternative to the modern racial imagination. Indeed, Carter's central contention is that racism is first and foremost a theological problem, and thus racial thinking and racism constitute contemporary theology's greatest challenge. However, the solution he offers is quite novel, even counter-intuitive.

The theological solution to the problematics of race, Carter argues, is to be found in a reconsideration of the Jewishness of Jesus. More specifically, reflecting on the specific import of the Jewishness of Jesus and precisely what is entailed in the Jew/Gentile distinction, Carter portrays modernity as a promethean attempt to relocate the ground of human identity in a stable human nature and human subject who is lord and master of its own self-constitution. Key to this mastery are the protocols of race which index and map the development of humanity as it seeks to realize itself. At the pinnacle of this construal is modern "Enlightenment" man, who is of course, white.

In contrast to this philosophical anthropology of modernity, Carter argues that the biblical understanding of the source and ground of human identity is the God of Israel who ever and again must give to humanity its identity and self-constitution. The context in which this gifting takes place is in covenant, which is fundamentally a dramatic history, wherein humanity receives its identity as that which ever precedes it. Human identity is, so to speak, an identity "on the way," which must be given ever and again.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Cited through the publication as *Race*.

The people of Israel, of course, are such a community “on the way” and are therefore the quintessence of what it means to be human. By extension then, the Jew/Gentile distinction should not be construed as a racial distinction, since such a distinction implies a stable identity that one can possess. Rather, the Jew/Gentile distinction is a covenantal distinction, which means that Jewish identity, rather than being a racial and therefore stable identity, is radically open and can only be received from the creator and redeemer of the people of Israel. Reflecting on Jesus’ Jewishness, therefore, unveils the *aporia* of a racialized modernity while simultaneously opening a path by which all people may inhabit the story of Israel, the people whose history is, “the only truly human history, the history of man [sic] with God.”<sup>2</sup>

In the following essay we will consider Carter’s argument for the theological significance of Jesus’ Jewishness in our age of globalization, but with a very specific issue in mind which bears on the future direction of Carter’s constructive project: the role of the theology of Karl Barth in the consideration of the Jewish Jesus. Our contention is that though Carter is in dialogue with Barth, he has not yet drawn from the deepest streams of the doctrine of reconciliation where Barth’s social ethical vision becomes more and more historically concrete.<sup>3</sup> Because Carter only reads the Barth of the *Römerbrief* period and the early volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, he misses some of the most significant material in Barth which connects the ongoing presence of the Jewish Jesus to history. We want to push him in this direction, and to make a suggestive move through a brief comparison of Barth’s claim that “Jesus is Victor” with the narrative of Jarena Lee, which figures prominently in Carter’s *Race: A Theological Account*. By so doing, we are suggesting that Barth needs to be an ongoing and even constitutive dialogue partner in Carter’s future constructive project.

#### THE JEWISHNESS OF JESUS AND MODERN THEOLOGY

Carter argues that a key aspect of the development of Christian theology under the constraints of modernity and the Enlightenment has been the severing of

Christianity and Jesus from their historical and theological connection to Judaism. Howard Thurman in *Jesus and the Disinherited* argues that concealing Jesus’ Jewishness was Western Christianity’s greatest theological sin. Carter opens Part I of *Race* with an epigraph from Thurman:

How different might have been the story of the last two thousand years on this planet grown old from suffering if the link between Jesus and Israel had never been severed. . . . [For] the Christian Church has tended to overlook its Judaic origins, . . . the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew of Palestine.<sup>4</sup>

Thurman’s theological insight into the organic connection of these two religious traditions functions as the first salvo in a razor-sharp critique of Immanuel Kant and the subsequent development of modern theology in the “West.”

By carefully refining, expanding and deepening Thurman’s critique, Carter demonstrates that the problem of modern racism is fundamentally a theological problem. Specifically, it stems from a racialized Christian supersessionism—an ancient Christian doctrine whereby God’s relationship with the Christian Church is understood to have displaced God’s covenant with the Jews. Carter argues that at the dawn of modernity, this construal of God’s relationship to Israel and the Church was developed and deployed through the categories of race and racism. This transformation produced a kind of double-bind: the Jew/Gentile distinction was construed as a racial distinction, thereby racializing Jewish identity, while simultaneously Christianity became the cultural property of the West, which thereby racialized Christian identity in the image of Europe.<sup>5</sup> Under the racialized logic of supersessionism, whiteness (i.e., the new “Israel”) subsumed and displaced Jewishness in the modern world.

In an effort to inhabit a world beyond whiteness, beyond a racialized Christianity and the modern Western world, Carter strategically aligns the black freedom struggle with the history of the Jews, opening up a new horizon for trans-Atlantic Christian theology. Vital here is the link that is made in the African American social gospel between Jesus and the disinherited. In particular, Thurman’s contention that Jesus was a poor Jew in a minority culture within Israel herself opens up a point of theological connection with oppressed people of African descent in the Americas.<sup>6</sup>

#### BARTH AND THE GOD OF ISRAEL

There are deep streams of theological anti-Semitism that run from modern

4 Carter, *Race*, 79. See Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976).

5 Edward W. Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993) has been influential in Carter’s attempt to deconstruct the “westernized” character of much modern theology.

6 Thurman, *Jesus*, 17-19. Thurman writes: “Jesus was a poor Jew . . . The economic predicament with which he was indentified in birth placed him initially with the great mass of men on the earth. The masses of the people are poor” (17).

2 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 218.

3 Our understanding of Barth’s ethics of reconciliation has been shaped by the writings of John Webster; however, we seek to expand Webster’s account of Barth’s ethics of reconciliation by giving greater dogmatic prominence to the doctrine of the Trinity and greater historical prominence to the influence of the Blumhardts on Barth’s ethical vision. See John Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); idem, *Barth’s Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth’s Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Other helpful studies of Barth’s ethical vision include Robert E. Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979); John Macken, *The Autonomy Theme in the ‘Church Dogmatics’: Karl Barth and His Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); P. D. Matheny, *Dogmatics and Ethics: The Theological Realism and Ethics of Karl Barth’s Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening that Waits* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and Paul T. Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth’s Ethical Vision* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2007).

Europe back into the patristic era.<sup>7</sup> These streams played no small part in the concrete evil of the Nazi “final solution” to the *Judenfrage* or “Jewish question.” It was not until the extent of the Shoah became known—the brutal killing of approximately six million Jews—that theologians in Germany and around the world began to face a number of theological and ethical questions: Why and how did this genocide take place? How did the Church and Christian theology contribute to the genocide? In what ways had Christian theology led to the widespread cultural logic of being “against” the Jew? After the Shoah, global Christian theology has a vital responsibility to give a theological account of Israel and the Messianic One it birthed—Jesus of Nazareth.

For Barth, the 1930s marked a decade of awakening; the *Judenfrage* quickly became an urgent ethical dilemma. Though indications of concern are evident earlier, a key turning point in Barth’s thinking about the Jews was unveiled in “a widely distributed sermon he preached in 1933 (which he sent to Hitler), [in which he] interpreted the Jewishness of Jesus as a nonnegotiable item of faith, and emphasized that he regarded both Jews and Gentiles as children of the living God.”<sup>8</sup> For Barth, Jesus’ Jewishness had a theological and, by implication, a political dimension. Given this early concern and the historical context, Barth would not have been unaware of the significance of his 1942 *Church Dogmatics* II/2 for the *Judenfrage*, as it was focused especially on the doctrine of election.<sup>9</sup> In his elucidation of the election of the people of God, which includes both the Jew and the Gentile, Barth turns first to the Jewish Messiah.

7 The literature on anti-Semitism is massive; some of the works that are critical to Carter’s project include Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); L. Poliakov, *the History of Anti-Semitism*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity 1988), and *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1991); Leon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth* (London: Sussex University Press, 1974); Gerstman Schockem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1971); George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Paul Lawrence Rose, *Revolutionary Anti-Semitism in Germany from Kant to Wagner* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990); Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science*. Trans. Sonia Wichmann (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006).

8 Eberhard Busch, “Indissoluble Unity: Barth’s Position on the Jews during the Hitler Era,” in *For the Sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 55; 53-79. For the helpful discussion of the early Barth’s understanding of the Jews see Eberhard Busch, *Unter dem Bogen des einen Bundes: Karl Barth und die Juden, 1933-1945* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1996).

9 Barth’s initial formal discussion on the Jews is found in the *CD* II/2, trans., G.W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Press, 1936-1969). For a thoughtful discussion of Barth’s theology of Israel see Chris Boesel, *Risking Proclamation, Respecting Difference: Christian Faith, Imperialistic Discourse and Abraham* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008); Katherine Soderegger, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew: Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Israel* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

In Barth’s theology, Jesus is both electing God and elect humanity.<sup>10</sup> That which holds the two together is the one divine Subject, the second person of the Trinity. As such, Jesus is both the primary Subject of election, as well as its primary object. Through this reformulation, Barth placed the doctrine of election on a new Christocentric foundation.<sup>11</sup> Important for our discussion is the fact that Barth did not understand this “Christocentric” foundation in general terms. That is, Jesus is not the embodiment of a Christ-principle; rather, it is in and through the specificity of the life-history of Jesus of Nazareth that we know what it means to be the Christ, a specificity which is distinctly *Jewish*. As such, we can say that it is in his very Jewish specificity that Jesus Christ is God’s electing will. When considered soteriologically, this means that in a very real sense the Jewishness of Jesus plays a role in mediating salvation to all of humanity.

In regard to election, then, because Jesus, the concrete fulfillment of God’s eternal electing will, is of the people of Israel, there can be no conception either of election or of the Church without the Jewish flesh of Jesus and the Israel that gave him birth. It is this Jewishness which binds the Church to the people Israel such that the Church cannot be the body of Christ unless it is understood in an ongoing relation to, indeed as an expansion of, the people of Israel. By implication, Jesus’ Jewishness is indispensable to the salvation of all flesh, such that without the particularity of the people of Israel, there is no redemption for the whole of humanity. Israel and the Church are united in a single covenant.

Placed in the context of the 1930s and 1940s, this thesis provided Barth with critical leverage against the anti-Semitic Christian imaginary at work at the time, for as he said at the time,

We cannot, therefore, call the Jews the “rejected” and the Church the “elected” community. The object of election is neither Israel for itself nor the Church for itself, but both together in their unity. . . . What is elected in Jesus Christ (His “body”) is the community which has the twofold form of Israel and the Church.<sup>12</sup>

Israel and the Church together constitute the object of God’s election held in indissoluble unity in Jesus, the Jew from Nazareth.

For Barth, then, the Jewish flesh of Jesus serves a positive function as that particularity through which salvation is mediated. There is, however, another side to this coin, for Israel in its ongoing existence serves a negative function in Barth’s

10 See Barth, *CD* II/2, trans., G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 94-145.

11 Barth presents a Christocentric resolution to the problem of double predestination which plagued Reformed dogmatics after Calvin. Bruce McCormack writes, “For classical Reformed theology, the decree to elect some human beings and to reject others (i.e., election and reprobation) *precedes* the decree to effect election through the provision of a Mediator (viz. Jesus Christ).” Bruce McCormack, “Grace and Being: The Role of God’s Gracious Election in Karl Barth’s Theological Ontology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2000), 97.

12 *CD* II/2, 199.

thought: “Israel is the people of the Jews which resist its election; the Church is the gathering of Jews and Gentiles called on the ground of its election.”<sup>13</sup> For Barth the community of God has a twofold shape: Israel and the Church, who though elected in indissoluble unity, nevertheless represent two forms of the one people of God: the one passing away, the other future. Through this construal, the people Israel, or what we might call modern Judaism or the modern Jewish people, are framed in a decidedly negative fashion as the people “which resists its election.” This way of framing the ongoing people of Israel points to what can only be described as kind of “soft supersessionism” in Barth’s thinking, the perdurance of which, for Carter, discloses the deeper problem of racism within Western theology.

#### JESUS THE JEW IN THE AMERICAS:

##### MOVING THROUGH AND BEYOND BLACK THEOLOGY

Carter’s work includes an illuminating analysis of the internal relationship between the so-called “Jewish question” and what might be termed the more general “race question.” His contention is that the anti-Semitism that permeated early-modern Europe took a new form as the European nations entered the so-called “new world.” The internal boundary between the Jew and the Gentile within Europe, which was a boundary delineated along the lines of Christianity vs. Judaism, was exported, reconfigured and deployed as a useful tool to demarcate the boundary between the “heathen” and the “Christian.” Thus, the European racialization of the “black” other in Africa, Asia and the Americas was based on a prior racialization of the “Jewish” other in “Christian Europe,” a process of othering that was ultimately rooted in Christian supersessionism.<sup>14</sup> This interconnection between the “Jewish question” and the “race question” means that in contemporary theology, the status of Judaism and the Jewish people has direct implications for the status of people of “color.”

Carter’s attempt to untie this Gordian knot involves a re-conceptualization of Christology which foregrounds Jesus of Nazareth understood as the Messiah of Israel. In this, Carter’s Christology shares much in common with the Christology of Barth. The centrality of Christology, a pronounced emphasis on the “otherness” of the Word of God encountered in Jesus, as well as the inextricable relationship between Jesus and Judaism are all important places of contact between Carter and Barth. At the same time, however, Carter’s project could be described as the attempt to push Barth’s Christological concentration beyond the boundaries of Christology, a gesture whose expression comes clearly into focus in his elucidation of the Christo-pneumatological dimensions of prophetic Black Christian thinkers in Antebellum America.

While Carter applauds the attempt to give a theological accounting of Jesus’ Jewishness, he ultimately finds Barth’s construal wanting. First, Barth’s construal of election problematizes the ongoing existence of the people of Israel, whom, as

Carter has argued, are the biblical and modern archetype for “black” flesh under the constraints of modernity. Second, Carter understands Barth’s emphasis on the primacy of divine action in revelation to represent a fundamental occlusion of human subjective experience in the reception of revelation, the purported implications of which are a lack of concern with on-going history and a general devaluing of creation. It is the latter—the lack of concern with creation “from the side of creation”—that Carter suspects ultimately leads to the “loss” of Israel in Barth’s doctrine of election.<sup>15</sup> James Cone figures prominently in this critique.

In *God of the Oppressed*, Cone, under the influence of Barth, constructs a Christology and theology particularly attuned to black experience. This necessarily produces a theology that is aware of the different contexts out of which and in which theological ideas arise, which in Cone’s project includes a careful focus on the original context of the biblical story and an assiduous concern for the contemporary context of theology in the United States, i.e., one shaped by white supremacy. When brought together, the concrete Jewish background of Jesus’ context functions as the basis for a contextual theological analysis of the present. In this, Cone attempts to work through Barth’s logic, and ultimately beyond him, by elucidating the *concrete* significance of Jesus’ Jewishness with an eye to its implications for African American experience. Cone writes,

The historical Jesus emphasizes the social context of Christology and thereby establishes the importance of Jesus’ racial identity. *Jesus was a Jew!* The particularity of Jesus’ person as disclosed in his Jewishness is indispensable for Christological analysis. On the one hand, Jesus’ Jewishness pinpoints the importance of his humanity for faith, and on the other, connects God’s salvation drama in Jesus with the Exodus-Sinai event.<sup>16</sup>

By thinking through the concrete particularity of Jesus—a poor Jew in Palestine—Cone developed a broader critique of Christian theology which seemed to say little about Jesus’ ministry to the poor.<sup>17</sup> For Cone, however, the issue is not just that Jesus was poor and ministered to the poor, but that the living Christ continues to minister to the poor and the oppressed, such that the place where Jesus can be said to be experienced and discerned presently is in the community of the poor and oppressed. When applied to the North American context in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this community is the African-American community, and its experience of oppression and poverty is the experience of “blackness.” The black community and its experience of “blackness” come to serve as a historical extension of the very Jewishness that had marked the ministry of Jesus in Palestine. As such, Jesus is in their midst. But the experience of blackness and the black community not only conform to the Jewishness of Jesus as Cone understands it, the ongoing

13 Idem.

14 See Carter, *Race*, 80-121.

15 Ibid, 181.

16 James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 119.

17 Ibid, 116. Cone is indebted to Howard Thurman’s *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949) on this point.

experience of the African American community actually fills out the Jewishness of Jesus with further specificity and concreteness.

Carter interprets Cone's application of the Jewishness of Jesus to the problem of blackness in the United States as a distinctly Barthian Christocentric gesture, which also moves beyond Barth by allowing the ongoing experience of the community of the oppressed to in effect retro-actively fill out the meaning of Jesus' humanity.<sup>18</sup> In this, he applauds Cone, noting that, "the breakthrough" in his thought is that, "the humanity that the God of Israel assumes in Jesus of Nazareth is the location from which God secures and affirms all of creation in its historical unfolding," a humanity, it must be remembered, which is specifically Jewish.<sup>19</sup> Yet for Christianity to be liberative for all humanity it has to break out of the racial binaries that have driven it, both Jew/Gentile and black/white. It is here that Cone flounders in Carter's estimation.<sup>20</sup> Carter links this failure in large measure to Cone's turn from Barth's Christocentric orientation, to Tillich's theology of correlation. Though this turn was understandable, the theology of the "ground of being" is ultimately unable to overcome the racial logic of modernity, but rather, reinstates it. That is, the experience of "blackness" which is an experience determined in large measure by the racialized logic of modernity. What is required is an articulation of the Jewishness of Jesus that is able to undo the racialized logic of modernity. To move beyond the racial binaries, Carter argues for a Christology that takes seriously the Jewishness of Jesus, but one that is narrated within a Pentecostal *Ordo Salutis* ("order of salvation").

#### BARTH, THE BLUMHARDTS AND JARENA LEE:

##### TOWARD A PENTECOSTAL *ORDO SALUTIS*

Carter's own constructive alternative owes much to Cone, for he argues for a very specific role for the black experience of faith under the conditions of modernity. One of the key differences, however, is that "oppression" is not the primary marker of Jewishness, and by extension, black existence. Rather, what Carter detects in the black church tradition is a willingness to enter into what might be called a "covenantal existence." To demonstrate this Carter performs a series of theological readings of different slave-narratives, culminating with *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*. Lee was the first female preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and Carter interprets her journal as animated by a Christological-pneumatology, which crystallizes in her ongoing search for Zion.

Zion, the hoped for destination of the people of Israel, signifies a future or destination of freedom wherein African people will stand with dignity, liberated from the shackles of slavery, free to seek happiness as healthy and whole selves.

Carter argues that not only does Lee's journal offer details of her own historical struggle for this freedom, but also functions as a literary analogy for the larger black freedom struggle, and specifically as a theological narration of identity. As such, "freedom" means entering into another economy, a theological economy determined not by the protocol's of race, but by covenant.

The path into this new economy is Jesus himself, and Lee's account of her call to ministry includes within it a narration of her experience along explicitly Christological lines. As such, "Lee grasps that in unfolding within the history of Jesus, the self unfolds inside YHWH's covenant with the people of Israel and thus inside Israel's ongoing election."<sup>21</sup> What connects the flesh of Jesus and its covenantal determination to ongoing history and therefore to the experience of Lee is the Pentecostal Spirit.

The Spirit of Pentecost is the Spirit of Jesus, which means that, "those who are not of Israel and thus do not speak Israel's covenantal language can nevertheless through one from among this people—Jesus the Jew from Nazareth—be drawn into Israel's speech, the speech of YHWH's promises with this people."<sup>22</sup> Lee's pursuit of Zion, then, reveals a kind of Pentecostal liberation in which she seeks her freedom from the demonic powers of slavery that not only possess her physical body, but her entire existence. Carter describes this process of transformation as a movement from a traumatic dismembering of her body toward a recovery of authentic memory, including the physical pain of her enslaved childhood as well as the messianic vision of hope presented by the Hebrew prophets of old. Carter writes, "Lee's *dismembering* of her childhood and by metaphoric existence, the *disremembering* of a black past that is violently brought into the New World, is a peculiar *remembering* or reconstituting of it as well."<sup>23</sup> This remembering-disremembering functions as a kind of exorcism, though exorcism has been reconceived as being set free from the unjust social structure of chattel slavery, an expression of the "powers and principalities" that systemically oppress people of color.

Lee offers a contrast between modernity's narrative of white accomplishment, which as Carter shows utilizes biblical motifs to achieve its goals, and another way of construing the narrative of the liberation of the people of God in redemptive history. "Lee grasps that it is precisely the eclipse of biblical narrative, an eclipse by which Scripture is caused to aid, abet, and articulate the narrative of modernity as a narrative of white accomplishment that lies at the root of black scriptural enslavement."<sup>24</sup> In contrast, Lee's own theologically narrated life functions as a call back to the biblical narratives, which is ultimately a call to the freedom of the God, which is revealed to all in Jesus' Jewish flesh. For Carter, Lee's vision of Zion opens onto a broad theological horizon through which one can begin to see glimpses of God's saving Spirit moving to help the unfree find true

18 See Carter, *Race*, 157-193.

19 Ibid., 158.

20 Carter argues that this is tied in large measure to Cone's adoption of Tillich's theology of the "ground of being," which in Carter's estimation emptied Cone's Christology of any content that could be said to be transcendent. See Carter, *Race*, 181-191.

21 Ibid., 315.

22 Ibid., 316.

23 Ibid., 318.

24 Ibid., 322.

freedom, “on earth as it is in heaven.” By extension, because modern humanity as a whole is caught within the destructive racialized logic of modernity, the path illumined by those on the underside of modernity shows the way to the liberation of all of humanity, one that is properly described as a Pentecostal liberation. This liberation is one in which human identity is no longer understood as a stable identity, but rather, an identity that is anticipated and seen only in the light of the covenantal promise of God.

Carter chides Barth for a lack of Christological concreteness—which refers to what he sees as a “loss of Israel” in Barth’s doctrine of election, and therefore a loss of the Jewishness of Jesus—and an undervaluing of God’s activity in ongoing history, which refers especially to a purported loss of creation “from the side of creation.” This critique must be challenged on the basis of Barth’s later work. To mount this challenge we will briefly draw attention specifically to Barth’s discussion of “Jesus is Victor” as well as his consideration of the Christian life through the lens of invocation, both of which demonstrate a deeper concern with God’s triune action in human history as well as an account of human nature which is remarkably similar to Carter’s own construal of “covenantal existence.” In addition to this, we will supplement our discussion with some passages that evidence a rethinking of the significance of the people of Israel.

In *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1, Barth discusses the prophetic office of Christ under the heading of “Jesus is Victor”—a phrase he took from Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805-1880). Barth was especially fascinated by the story of the exorcism that Blumhardt found himself involved in 1842-1843 in southwestern Germany. Gottlieben Dittus, a local woman, had come to Blumhardt complaining of strange events in the night. This thrust Blumhardt into what can only be described as a spiritual odyssey. As the story goes, when the struggle with the demonic powers reached its crescendo (after almost 2 years!) the demon was purported to have yelled “Jesus is Victor!” as the sign of its acquiescence in the presence of the risen Jesus.

Blumhardt’s exorcism of Gottlieben Dittus came to represent for Barth a concise interpretation of the life-history of Jesus, as well as the ongoing presence of the risen Jesus in history.<sup>25</sup> In his life, Jesus struggled with, and ultimately vanquished (exorcised) the “powers and principalities”, triumphing over them by his cross. But just as importantly, the very Jesus who lived and died is also the Jesus who is present now, working for the liberation of humanity. Thus, the history of struggle finds expression in the here and now through the resurrected Jesus’ ongoing struggle with the “powers and principalities” which continue to oppress humanity.

Importantly for our discussion, the history of struggle is the history of the covenant.<sup>26</sup> Jesus’ history of struggle is the fulfillment of the covenant between God and Israel and through his ongoing resurrected presence Jesus draws the

25 See Barth, *CD* IV/3.1, §3, 165-275. Cf., Christian T. Collins Winn, “*Jesus is Victor!*”: *The Significance of the Blumhardts for the Theology of Karl Barth* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Press, 2008).

26 See *CD* IV/3.1, 166.

rest of humanity into the covenant. The Blumhardt episode, then, functions as a concise illustration of the struggle between God and the chthonic powers which enslave humanity and the final outcome of that struggle in the victory of Jesus as it occurred there and then in the life-history of Jesus and continues to occur in the midst of ongoing history, a struggle whose dénouement is already foretold.

Christ’s healing intervention is conducted through the power of the Holy Spirit. Taking up the categories of Blumhardt himself, Barth interpreted the event of the exorcism through the lens of a fresh outpouring of God’s Spirit, “in new intercession with the unquenchable expectation and indestructible hope that there will be fresh declarations of this lordship and a fresh outpouring of the Holy Ghost on all flesh (of which Blumhardt saw the beginning in this event and the utterance of this cry).”<sup>27</sup> The presence of the risen Christ was understood as a pneumatologically mediated liberative presence, or put differently, Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, is in our midst to set free the captives, to set humanity at liberty to freely become the children of God.

If, as noted above, the history of struggle and liberation is the history of the covenant, then it is as the liberator of the oppressed that Jesus is the presence of the history of the covenant. His is a history, “which embraces and integrates into itself that of every other man [*sic*];”<sup>28</sup> and importantly, it is a history and a covenant which is “to the Jew first, and also for the Greek” (Romans 2:9). For Barth, to be set at liberty, to be included in the covenant, is to be enfolded into the people Israel through the Jewish flesh of Jesus: “We have to learn that in order to be elect ourselves, for good or evil we must either be Jews or belong to this Jew.”<sup>29</sup> That this history is indeed identified with Jesus the Jew does not mean that humanity—i.e., our individual humanity—has nothing to offer as a further specification of “covenantal existence.” Rather, the risen presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, who is himself the history of the covenant, becomes determinative of human identity and is prescriptive of a certain kind of life, one marked by prayer.

For Barth, prayer or invocation becomes the mark of the Christian life, indeed of human nature itself.

As we have described it thus far, the invocation of God by his children in which the spiritual life and also the witnessing ministry of Christians in the world have their basis, root, and norm, and which is the nerve of their whole Christian existence, is an integral part of the history of the covenant between God and men. It is an integral part of the dealings which God in Jesus Christ, beyond what he has done and does for all men in him, and on the basis of what he wills to do with all, has opened and continues to open with these specific people in the specific movement and act of the Holy Spirit. The invocation of God by Christians is the

27 *CD* IV/3.1, 170.

28 Karl Barth, *The Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), 74.

29 *CD* III/3, 225.

subjective, or, as one might simply say, the human factor and element in this history and these dealings. . . . The grace of God is the liberation of these specific people for free, spontaneous, and responsible cooperation in this history.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, the ongoing prayer for the coming of the kingdom, which is a petition for liberation, further specifies what it means to be in covenant with God, for our prayer is not just for the appearing of the kingdom of God, but for our own existence or nature or identity as those who are included in that kingdom.<sup>31</sup> However, when we pray, we do not just hope for that which is ahead of us, we live into it in the here and now. In prayer we actualize our “partnership in this history”—i.e., in the history of the covenant or history of struggle—which means that invocation includes human action which corresponds to the covenantal history of revolt against the “lordless powers.”<sup>32</sup>

For Barth, the “lordless powers” are those forces that have not yet surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Both Jarena Lee and Gottlieben Dittus were women who struggled against the “lordless powers” of their day, finding liberation through invoking the name of Jesus. Furthermore, when viewed through Barth’s analysis of the Blumhardt exorcism, one could say that the theological content of Lee’s trope of Zion could be understood as “Jesus is Victor.” As the historical enactment of the covenant, a covenant whose history is marked by the divine and human struggle for human liberation, the presence of the risen Jesus is that of a child of Israel. When Lee herself called on Jesus, she was both acknowledging Christ’s lordship and disrupting the logic of domination, through invoking the liberative power of the living God of the covenant. She flourishes as a black woman because of a turn to Pentecost, a material event that involves speaking in multiple languages, which frees both oppressor and oppressed. While Christ embodies and mediates salvation, it is the Spirit that works within to save individuals and communities that have been battered and broken in a violent world.

In all of this, for Barth, as for Carter, we are not our own, our humanity is not reducible simply to the categories of race, gender, class or culture, but is determined through this history of partnership which we live with God, the history of the covenant, whose concrete historical expression is seen penultimately in the people Israel and ultimately in *the* son of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus the covenant is fulfilled and those who are not originally of Israel, nonetheless, are invited into God’s covenant. The ongoing invocation that marks Christian and therefore human existence, is the actualization of that history in the here and now insofar as we acknowledge, long for, and give thanks to God that though we do not possess ourselves, nonetheless, God gives to us our being.

## CONCLUSION

Carter’s *Race: A Theological Account* offers a new agenda for theology. Carter writes,

This book calls for a new *habitus*, a new Christian theological-intellectual practice, one that arises from the everyday practices of the very people the forgetting of whom is the condition of the scholastic universes of “homo academicus.” Their lives and the practices through which they negotiate their real worlds of pain and suffering and life and death must become the locus or the disposition out of which theology does its work. . . . In connection with the poor one, at the various sites of the underside of modernity, and, in short, from the places of suffering—this is the locus from which theology must be renewed.<sup>33</sup>

North American theology needs to be more intentional in seeking to bring to light the dark-skinned underside of a Euro-American modernity. It is here, from these places of suffering, that we can witness God’s reconciliation and redemption through the shed blood of his Son Jesus Christ and the hovering Holy Spirit of healing and justice.

It is through the particularity of Jesus’ Jewish covenantal flesh that we can re-root Christianity in Jewish soil so as to lean into a truly prophetic, intercultural future. Carter’s highlighting the particularity of Jesus’ Jewish flesh challenges Christian theology to be distinctively Christian, instead of exclusively Western and white. Jesus’ Jewishness means that his followers in the Christian movement are included in the story of the people of Israel, a story in which identity is not determined by race, class, national origin, etc., but rather in a history of struggle against those “powers and principalities” which enslave humanity. Karl Barth’s theology, far from being a detriment, has much to offer to Carter’s constructive project. Barth’s theology of reconciliation in general, and his discussion of “Jesus is Victor” and invocation in particular, provide new resources to further Carter’s project of a prophetic intercultural theology that seeks to theologize beyond the West’s obsession with white racism and the black-white binary that sustains it.

In the United States and around the world, Christians need to be reminded of the Jewish particularity of Jesus and of the significance of what it means to have one’s identity in covenant. Such a rethinking will go a long way towards freeing us from thinking of our identity primarily through the categories of the various national, racial and ethnic mythologies that have come to shape our world, shaped as they are by colonial hubris and white racist hegemony. Our liberation from the bondage of modernity’s racial imagination will only happen when we embrace the Jewish Jesus through whom we can exit an identity determined by race, and enter the glorious freedom of the children of God.

30 *The Christian Life*, 104.

31 Barth understood the kingdom of God and covenant as synonymous. See *The Christian Life*, 50-51.

32 *Ibid.*, 85, 212-213.

33 Carter, *Race*, 374.

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# COVENANT, CREATION, AND CHRIST: A CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH J. KAMERON CARTER IN CONVERSATION WITH KARL BARTH David W. Congdon

J. Kameron Carter's *Race: A Theological Account* is a remarkable work of theology. The sheer scope—ranging from philosophical history to patristic exegesis to systematic theology—is both breathtaking and intimidating. In this book, Carter is not merely criticizing a particular argument or school of thought; he is out to subvert an entire mode of theological discourse, viz. modern (i.e., post-Kantian) Western theology. As he notes in the prologue, by “helping to racially constitute the modern world,” Christian theological discourse became a “modern racial discourse.”<sup>1</sup> Carter claims that the basis for the racialization of theology is found in “Christianity’s quest to sever itself from its Jewish roots.”<sup>2</sup> Western Christianity accomplished this by racializing (and Orientalizing) Israel, turning the Jewish people into a race group over against “whiteness.” From there, it was an easy step to assign the Jews an inferior status. With the ontic-racial divide established in Western Christian culture, the colonial project of white supremacy was effectively born. What began as anti-Jewish supersessionism became a generally racist perspective rooted in the onto-theological superiority of “whiteness.”

Carter identifies the problem of race as fundamentally a problem of the theological imagination. Like any other social reality, Christianity is an act of the imagination. More specifically, as William Cavanaugh has rightly argued, it is a “theopolitical imagination.”<sup>3</sup> Our theological perspective is intrinsically sociopolitical in nature. Christian faith involves a new vision of God, the world, and ourselves; it is a radically counter-cultural aesthetic. Consequently, when Western Christianity racialized Israel and established the basis for modern

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1 Ibid., 3.

2 Ibid., 4.

3 Cf. William Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (New York: T & T Clark, 2002).

colonialism, “the *racial*, which proves to be a *racist*, imagination was forged.”<sup>4</sup> As Carter rightly stresses, with every theopolitical imagination comes a particular ontology. The racial imagination, he says, is an ontology of closure: it reifies racial categories as objectifiable substances that are closed off from each other. Carter’s alternative vision of reality is rooted in a covenant ontology of openness to others. It is a *visio Dei* rooted in the nonracial and participatory nature of YHWH’s covenant with Israel, which is concretely manifest in the Jewish flesh of Jesus of Nazareth. Carter’s proposal is thus “a new theological imagination for the twenty-first century, one that sutures the gap between Christianity and its Jewish roots and thereby re-imagines Christian (intellectual) identity.”<sup>5</sup>

Carter’s *Race* is without question a seminal work in the field of theology. There is much to glean from his insightful theological analysis of the problem of race. And yet, at the same time, there are glaring issues that need to be addressed. In this short space, I will focus my assessment around Carter’s critique of Karl Barth, found in the chapter on “Theologizing Race” in which Carter examines and critiques the work of James Cone. Many of Carter’s key theological claims are either summarized or anticipated in those pages about Barth, and thus I will use this section to then branch out and address other parts of the book. To make my claim more concrete, I will argue that Carter’s reading of Barth is not only mistaken but driven by certain theological assumptions and interests which threaten to derail Carter’s overall argument. At the heart of this dilemma in Carter’s work is the relation between creation and covenant, or creation and redemption. I will suggest that Carter wants to have his cake and eat it, too: he wants creation and covenant to be interrelated, and yet at certain key points, he wants to make them independent of each other for the purpose of facilitating his constructive theological claims.

#### CARTER’S ASSESSMENT OF BARTH

Carter situates his analysis of Barth’s theology in the context of dealing with the development of James Cone’s theology. In short, Cone began within a generally Barthian framework before moving toward a more Tillichian understanding of theology. Cone found in Barth a way to distinguish between the gospel and culture, and later, when Barth seemed to be a dead end, he found in Tillich an understanding of transcendence that funds an ethic of liberating courage. Despite these positive elements, Carter finds both Barth and Tillich to be lacking in important ways. For our purposes here, we will focus solely on what Carter, following Cone, finds problematic about the Swiss theologian.

According to Cone, the problem with Barth is that his Christocentrism does not make explicit the connection between Jesus and the black community. As he puts it, “No matter how seriously we take the carpenter from Nazareth, there is still the existential necessity to relate his person to black persons.”<sup>6</sup> Or as Carter

says, Barth’s view of theological transcendence makes it “difficult to understand the relationship between God and creation.”<sup>7</sup> What exactly is “the relationship between black persons—their history, struggles, and so forth—and the fleshy, yet transcendent, person of Christ”? How does “creaturely truth participate in God’s truth”? According to Carter, the problem with Barth, in a nutshell, is that he offers an unsatisfactory answer to these questions.

At this point we need to investigate what exactly Carter understands Barth’s answer to be. Here is where we run into problems. Carter correctly points out that Cone’s criticisms are simply a contextual variation on the critique already propounded by Hans Urs von Balthasar many years previously. According to Balthasar, Barth’s Christocentrism comes perilously close to Christomonism: it is “the *narrowing* of everything to that one point.”<sup>8</sup> Balthasar calls this “an exaggeration, an overstatement, a failure of balance” regarding the relation between Christ and creation. In a key passage, cited by Carter, he writes:

The priority of Christ over creation and sin in no way requires that the whole work of creation has to be so painfully forced to occupy the Procrustean bed of Barth’s Christological schema. This straitened schematization becomes evident at that juncture in his argument where we notice that he has not left enough breathing room between creation and covenant. Barth certainly *pre-supposes* creation, but it is still too much merely a presupposition: he does not give it its proper due.<sup>9</sup>

Balthasar here is concerned about acknowledging the independent significance of creation as a distinct reality apart from Christ. The creature, he argues, has a positive identity outside of the covenant of grace. Or as he puts it elsewhere, in another passage cited by Carter, “Only from Christ will Barth learn that there is room for a genuine and *active* human nature alongside God.”<sup>10</sup> In short, the creature is active *qua* creature. The creature has a relation to the Creator that is not strictly determined by the relation between the creature and Christ. According to Carter, “Barth is unable to approach the truth of creation from the side of the creature. Barth can thematize creation as having objective meaning in Christ; however, he cannot Christologically account for the subjectivity of creation.”<sup>11</sup>

Before I show why this view is mistaken, we need to note that Balthasar has two good “excuses,” neither of which apply to Carter. The first is the fact that his book about Barth was published in 1951, when the most recent book by Barth was *Church Dogmatics* III/3. He had yet to finish the third volume, much less write the fourth volume on reconciliation, which “was both a massive recapitulation

4 Carter, *Race*, 4.

5 Ibid.

6 James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 20th Anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 119.

7 Carter, *Race*, 175.

8 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 242. All emphasis is original unless otherwise noted.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 106.

11 Carter, *Race*, 180.

and a thorough revision of Barth's entire dogmatics."<sup>12</sup> Part of this "thorough revision," as I will show, is a new approach to the "subjectivity of creation." Balthasar did about as good a job as one could hope for considering he had not yet seen the magisterial conclusion to Barth's dogmatic project. Carter, however, has no excuse. While Balthasar's *Theology of Karl Barth* is a modern classic, it is nevertheless fifty-year-old scholarship. Carter undermines the credibility of his argument by failing to take into consideration any of the recent Barth scholarship. More importantly, relying on Balthasar means that he also fails to take *CD IV* into consideration. The second excuse is that Balthasar was trying to bring Barth into ecumenical dialogue with Catholic theology, and therefore his critiques of Barth are rooted in a uniquely Catholic ecclesiology and soteriology and cannot be divorced from this context. We can easily see this by looking at the wider contexts of the two passages cited above. In the first, after speaking about the need for "breathing room between creation and covenant," Balthasar goes on to criticize Barth's Protestantism for the way it differentiates between Christ's "being for others" and our "being with others": "For we ordinary mortals can only be 'with' others; only Christ is 'for' us. But that means we cannot be 'with' his being 'for' us. We cannot share 'with' his merits, thereby helping to be 'for' others."<sup>13</sup> Balthasar criticizes Barth for getting rid of merit and the notion of the church as a "means of grace." Balthasar wants "breathing room" for the Catholic Church to participate in the sharing of Christ's benefits—something Barth obviously rejects. In the second passage cited above, Balthasar immediately follows his call for a "genuine and active human nature" with the question: "Will not Barth's whole ecclesiology now have to be reconstructed from the ground up?"<sup>14</sup> He continues by claiming that Barth's ecclesiology "forgets that the Church is not only the *Body* of Christ but also his *Bride*. . . . [T]he Church's relational otherness to Christ is . . . a freedom in which she truly and *officially* represents Christ."<sup>15</sup>

While many other examples could be found, my point is simply that Balthasar's criticisms of Barth's view of creation are part of a clearly Catholic polemic. They are grounded in questions of soteriology and ecclesiology. Carter, on the other hand, is not Catholic—nor is he writing in the 1950s when Barth had yet to make his most radical contributions to theology. Even so, we need to interrogate the role that ecclesiology and soteriology play in his theological account of race. Does his concern about the subjectivity of creation carry with it unstated soteriological assumptions? What is the relation between Christ and the church, or between Christ and creation? Is there perhaps a Protestant, contextual analogue to Balthasar's emphasis on ecclesial merit to be found in Carter's work? To answer these questions, I will first briefly present a different view of Barth in light of his mature doctrine of reconciliation (*CD IV*), where he gives substantial attention to the subjectivity of creation. Then I will examine what it is,

12 Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth, a Theological Legacy*, trans. Garrett E. Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 46.

13 Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth*, 243.

14 *Ibid.*, 106.

15 *Ibid.*, 107.

precisely, that Carter wishes to gain from the "breathing room" between covenant and creation. I will argue, finally, that what we end up losing in Carter's work is precisely the concrete reality of Jesus Christ as the event of reconciliation.

BARTH'S DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION:  
SECULAR PARABLES AND CREATED LIGHTS

Barth's mature doctrine of reconciliation has three facets or moments which are dealt with in part-volumes IV/1, IV/2, and IV/3 of the *Church Dogmatics*, respectively. In traditional terminology, these are justification, sanctification, and vocation. Barth connects these three aspects of Christ's reconciling work with the three Christological offices (priest, king, and prophet), three sins (pride, sloth, and falsehood), three ecclesiological modes of being (gathering, upbuilding, and sending), and three virtues (faith, love, and hope).<sup>16</sup> None of these aspects is complete apart from the other two; they form an integrated whole in the historical event of Jesus Christ. Of these, it is the third part on vocation, which represents Barth's most significant statement on the subjectivity of creation. In the paragraph on Jesus as the "Light of Life," Barth introduces two concepts into his dogmatics that give a much more robust place to creaturely activity beyond the sphere of the ecclesial community: (1) secular parables of the kingdom, and (2) created lights.

The section on the "Light of Life" occurs in §69 on the "glory of the mediator," in which Barth discusses the prophetic, radiant, and self-communicative character of God's self-revelation. The justifying and sanctifying work of reconciliation "declares and glorifies itself" in the victorious proclamation of Jesus Christ in the kerygma.<sup>17</sup> Jesus is the one Word of God, the one Light which, by the power of the Spirit, glorifies the world and illuminates the truth. And yet this does not mean that Jesus is the *only* true word, the only shining light. There are other words which, "even in their whole creatureliness and human frailty either are or may be true words, and are not therefore to be overlooked, let alone rejected."<sup>18</sup> The creature is not simply the recipient of God's Word; it is also the active speaker of its own words. While Barth already affirmed this in his concept of the threefold Word of God (*CD I/1*), here he goes beyond that to speak of true human words outside of Scripture and preaching. He refers to these as "secular parables of the kingdom." These "secular parables" are in *material* harmony with the Word of God, but they come "from a different source and in another tongue."<sup>19</sup> They "illuminate, accentuate or explain the biblical witness in a particular time and situation, thus confirming it in the deepest sense by helping to make it sure and concretely evident and certain."<sup>20</sup> These parables of the kingdom confirm that

16 For a more complete look at what Barth covers in these three volumes, see the chart in Jüngel, *Karl Barth*, 48-49.

17 *CD IV/3.1*, 10. As Barth says later, "In itself and as such this life [of Jesus Christ] is Word, revelation, *kerygma*" (*Ibid.*, 106).

18 *Ibid.*, 110.

19 *Ibid.*, 115.

20 *Ibid.*

the world “is not wholly destitute of the Word” that the church proclaims. The world is rather within the sphere of Christ’s reign; it lives within the realm of his prophetic dominion. If Christ is indeed the reconciliation of the world, then his reign extends beyond the witnessing community. Barth speaks of two spheres: the “lesser sphere” of the church and the “greater sphere” of Christ’s dominion.<sup>21</sup> While those in the “lesser sphere” are “given to know what others do not know,” God nevertheless speaks outside the church to those able to hear:

We can and must be prepared to encounter “parables of the kingdom” in the full biblical sense, not merely in the witness of the Bible and the various arrangements, works and words of the Christian Church, but also in the secular sphere, i.e., in the strange interruption of the secularism of life in the world. In the narrow corner in which we have our place and task we cannot but eavesdrop in the world at large. We have ears to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd even there too, distinguishing it from other clamant voices, and therefore, as we hear it, not moving out of the circle and ministry of His Word, but placing ourselves the more definitely and deeply within it, that we may be the better and more attentive and more convincing servants of this Word.<sup>22</sup>

It is important to note that these secular parables cannot be heard outside of the gift of faith. There is no natural theology here, no apologetic proof. Barth is instead affirming that for those who have encountered the Word of God, testimonies to this one Word can be found beyond the boundaries of the visible community of faith. They are “secular” in their creaturely origin, but not in their content or reception. Of course, even the notion of “secular” is problematic if left unqualified, because “there is no secular sphere abandoned by Him or withdrawn from His control, even where from the human standpoint it seems to approximate most dangerously to the pure and absolute form of utter godlessness.”<sup>23</sup> The fact is that “while man may deny God . . . God does not deny man,” and therefore we may encounter “true words even from what seem to be the darkest places.”<sup>24</sup> Barth’s point is simply that no segment of humanity is bereft of Christ’s gracious and radiant presence. No place is absolutely cut off from the prophetic dominion of Jesus. Even those who are most adamantly opposed to the church may in fact speak a true witness to the Word of God. Despite some people’s intentions, there are indeed “real parables of the kingdom of heaven” which constitute a “particular refraction” of the one light of Jesus Christ.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, the church must be attentive to every sphere of human existence, always ready to hear a new word from God.

21 Ibid., 116.

22 Ibid., 117.

23 Ibid., 119.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 122, 123.

Closely related to the concept of “secular parables” is the notion of created “lights.” In a way that anticipates Balthasar’s magisterial *Theo-Drama*, Barth begins this topic by defining the reality of Christ as “the unfolding of a drama.” And as a drama, Christ requires “a theatre [*Schauplatz*] and setting [*Rahmen*] for His being, activity and speech.”<sup>26</sup> This creaturely sphere is the *theatrum gloriae Dei*, or as Barth notes, in reference to the third volume, it is “the external basis of the covenant which conversely is its internal basis.”<sup>27</sup> Understood in this way, “it can be called the cosmos or nature,” the totality of created life. This cosmic theater is ontologically distinct from the Christological play, and therefore it is “a problem of its own demanding independent consideration.”<sup>28</sup> Creation is not merely the presupposition of the reconciling event of Christ, but it also has “its own dynamic and movements.”<sup>29</sup> All of this leads up to the following key statement:

The simple point is that the creaturely world, the cosmos, the nature given to man in his sphere and the nature of this sphere, has also as such its own *lights* and *truths* and therefore its own *speech* and *words*. . . . It is true that by the shining of the one true light of life, by the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, they are exposed and characterised as lights, words and truths of the created cosmos, and therefore as *created lights* [*geschaffene Lichter*] in distinction from this one light. Yet as such they are not extinguished by this light, nor are their force [*Kraft*] and significance [*Bedeutung*] destroyed. . . . It [the cosmos] does not do so independently of the epiphany of Jesus Christ. But it does so independently of man’s relationship and attitude to the latter. As the divine work of reconciliation does not negate the divine work of creation, nor deprive it of meaning, so it does not take from it its lights and language, nor tear asunder the original connexion between creaturely *esse* and creaturely *nosse*.<sup>30</sup>

Contrary to Carter’s assessment, Barth does not merely presuppose creation; he in fact recognizes and affirms creation as a distinct and active reality worthy of its own attention. Barth stresses the fact that creation has its own independent truth and significance—not independent of Jesus Christ as the light of the world, but independent of our subjective relationship with Christ. As he says, “no faith is needed to grasp” these creaturely truths, “only the application of the good but limited gift of common sense.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, that there is truth and light in the world is due to God as the origin of all truth, but this truth is graspable outside of faith.

26 Ibid., 136.

27 Ibid., 137.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 138.

30 Ibid., 139. Italics are in the original German, but not in the English translation.

31 Ibid., 143.

While creation's sinful estrangement from God undermines any ability for the cosmos to naturally bear witness to God, this does not mean, as Barth says, that "its self-witness and lights" are extinguished.<sup>32</sup> The truths of creation are not "divine disclosures or eternal truths," but neither are they meaningless.<sup>33</sup> The creaturely sphere has "its own revelations"; there is "a luminosity of the creaturely world," because it has "lights which constantly shine and words and truths which are constantly perceptible."<sup>34</sup> If Barth seemed overly pessimistic about the fallen world in his early work, here he corrects himself. Even "in the gloom caused by the sin of man, there is still a measure of brightness."<sup>35</sup> Of course, this brightness does not mean there is reconciliation outside of our relation to Christ. Nor does this truth provide the basis for an apologetic defense of the faith. These lights "cannot be regarded as identical with, or even a parable of, the peace of the kingdom of God. The world as such can produce no parables of the kingdom of heaven."<sup>36</sup> Here we see the distinction between the "secular parables of the kingdom" and the "created lights." The former are recognizable as parables only from the standpoint of faith, while the latter are accessible to all. While Barth does not directly state this, it seems that the created lights may, in fact, be parables of the kingdom, though this could not be known outside of one's existential relationship with Christ.

What this brief engagement with Barth's mature doctrine of reconciliation shows is that he is perfectly able to affirm the subjectivity of creation within the sphere of God's covenant of grace. Creation is not merely a passive presupposition; it is rather an active participant in the creaturely witness to truth. Creation is illuminated by the light of Christ and sanctified by the Spirit for the sake of providing parables of God's reign. Moreover, because creation is the theater of God's glory, it also has its own lights and truths which are significant in themselves. As the external basis of the covenant, creation is not simply posited by Barth in a logically necessary sense; it is endowed with its own subjectivity and significance. For all these reasons, when Carter claims that Barth's doctrine of the incarnation "precludes the rest of creation from being brought into that union and leaves creation effectively in a no-man's land,"<sup>37</sup> we can only respond with a clear "No!"

REVELATION, COVENANT, AND CHRIST'S FLESH:  
DO THEY STRETCH OR WILL THEY BREAK?

At this point, we need to ask: if Carter gets Barth wrong, what else does he get wrong? Or, more specifically, what does his misreading of Barth illuminate about his constructive theological project? Is his thesis actually opposed to Barth

32 Ibid., 139.

33 Ibid., 141.

34 Ibid., 140.

35 Ibid., 141.

36 Ibid., 143.

37 Carter, *Race*, 181.

or should it rather be viewed as consonant with the Barth of *CD IV/3*? I should state up front that the richness of Carter's work precludes easy answers to such questions. There are passages which lead me to the conclusion that his misreading of Barth is at the heart of his project. But there are other passages which seem to suggest that his theological missteps are simply part of the fecundity of his thought, and they simply need to be trimmed back. Since I cannot claim to have mastered Carter's material, in what follows, I will raise what appear to be the problematic points that need to be clarified in his future work. I will do so in the form of two interrelated questions: (1) is Carter seeking to rehabilitate a kind of *theologia naturalis*?; and (2) what is the relationship between covenant and creation, between the one Christ and the many creatures?

*1. Is this a work of natural theology?*

It would seem that Carter is not interested simply in accounting for the subjectivity of creation. As we have seen, Barth himself can account for this in his *Church Dogmatics*. Carter's critique of Barth instead seems to aim at a *separation* between creation and reconciliation for the purpose of rehabilitating a natural theology of "dark flesh." We are initially alerted to the problem in the midst of his treatment of Barth. Interestingly enough, Carter does indeed recognize that there is an alternative picture of Barth, one that interprets him as giving full weight to the subjectivity of creation. He cites a lengthy passage from George Hunsinger's *How to Read Karl Barth* toward this end. But then he states, rather tellingly, that "I am not fully convinced by Hunsinger's reading of Barth on this point."<sup>38</sup> Why? It appears that it is not creation's subjectivity *per se* that he wants to secure. Instead, he wishes to affirm "how creation even from the vantage of its subjective activeness *could yet reveal God*" (180; emphasis added). We must stop for a moment and register this point of clarification: everything Carter says before and after this ambiguous statement argues only for creation being active in its relationship to God, and not merely being a passive presupposition. He claims that this cannot be found in Barth—without offering any textual support—but as I have shown, that claim simply cannot be sustained. What this isolated statement seems to indicate, however, is that Carter's intentions lie elsewhere. What he wants is not merely an active creature, but rather a sophisticated form of *theologia naturalis*.

But is this indeed the case? It is clear that Carter has no intention of establishing a philosophical-apologetic proof for Christian faith. He has no interest in constructing a rational foundation for belief. His work is an exercise in theological imagination. At the heart of his thesis is a new theological hermeneutic of Scripture. It is the covenantal drama of Scripture that funds an alternative vision of creation and re-narrates black experience within the "mulatto" flesh of Jesus. If anything, Carter's position is, at times, very close to Barth's "secular parables of the kingdom." In the same way that Barth interprets creaturely truth within his parabolic theological imagination, Carter interprets the experience

38 Carter, *Race*, 179.

and subjectivity of “dark flesh” within his uniquely covenantal theological imagination. If he had engaged with *CD IV/3*, Carter might have found ample material to support his thesis. He could have spoken of “black parables of the kingdom” or of the creaturely lights of “dark flesh.” Perhaps this was even his real intention.

Nevertheless, the specter of natural revelation appears again later in the work, this time in the context of his discussion of the pentecostal Christology of Jarena Lee. In this chapter he explores the way Lee uses the account of Pentecost as a template for reimagining her identity as a black woman. Carter calls this “a counterautobiographical exegesis of the self.”<sup>39</sup> Lee allows the narrative of Scripture to reshape her existence within the new context of “the pentecostal community of Zion, the *ecclesia* or church.”<sup>40</sup> All of this is quite insightful, but then Carter points out that Lee “imagines herself as a revelation of the economy of the flesh of God in Christ.”<sup>41</sup> Later, in the conclusion to this chapter, Carter raises the notion of a “Mariology of the self,” which connects the problem of gender to the problem of race. Here he advocates “a Christological doctrine of Mary as the one who in summing up, or recapitulating, Israel’s history ties Jesus to that history.” The church, according to Carter, exists within “the Christological horizon of Mary-Israel.”<sup>42</sup> But then he says that this horizon is displayed and made visible “in despised dark (and especially dark female) flesh.” He continues:

[T]he poverty of dark flesh is where one finds the wealthy God. This is where one must turn to find redemption . . . [O]ne might say that it is particularly in the poverty of dark, despised flesh that one finds the “new creation in Christ” . . . In taking on the form of the slave, the form of despised dark (female) flesh there is the disclosure [*sic*] of divinity, a disclosure that undoes the social arrangement of the colonial-racial tyranny . . . that is the darker side of modernity.<sup>43</sup>

In the end, we are left with a problem that demands clarification: what exactly is the nature of this “disclosure”? Does “dark flesh” display the new creation apart from the eyes of faith? Is Carter suggesting that God is objectifiable

39 Ibid., 331.

40 Ibid., 330.

41 Ibid., 335. Carter clarifies this statement—another very ambiguous phrase—by stating that the Spirit “orients the person toward Jesus of Nazareth so as to draw her or him into the particularity of Christ’s earthly life. . . . [I]n [Lee’s] narrative, Christ and the believer come under pneumatic proscriptio. Pneumatically qualified, Lee as a black woman along with all of creation is united to God through God’s embrace of the creature’s condition in the humanity of Jesus” (335-36). This raises the issue of the relation between Christ and humanity that I will take up below.

42 Ibid., 340, 341.

43 Ibid., 342.

in “dark, despised flesh”? Most problematically, perhaps, in what sense do we find “redemption” in “dark flesh”?<sup>44</sup>

If Carter’s *Race* is an exercise in so-called “natural theology,” it is because he is reconceiving nature and history itself as unfolding within the sphere of Christ’s covenantal flesh. This much is not problematic, since Barth and Balthasar before him could already affirm this. What Carter seems to be doing, however, is suggesting that creation itself—apart from the perspective of faith—is revelatory. We can find the “new creation” objectified within the history and experience of “dark flesh,” and we can find “redemption” by participating in this history and reconfiguring our identity in accordance with the “underside of modernity.” To borrow Barth’s terminology from *CD IV/3*, it seems that Carter wants the created lights to function not only as secular parables but as actual revelations of God. In light of all this, I would argue that Carter has wedded a high ecclesiology—in which the church, as an *incarnatus prolongatus*, is identifiable with the new creation—with a kind of liberationist perspective that directly identifies the church with the oppressed. The result is that the suffering black community is the visible manifestation of the reign of God. The flesh of Christ is identified with “dark flesh.” Carter is able to do this because of his creative Christological proposal which allows all of creation to manifest God, because all creation exists within the social space of Christ’s covenant flesh.<sup>45</sup>

44 A fuller examination would need to address the ambiguous nature of redemption in Carter’s work. There is a rather problematic relationship between Christology and soteriology in this book. In the block quote above, for example, after Carter says that it is in the poverty of dark flesh that we find redemption, he continues: “for it is here that one finds a theological-social imaginary that fundamentally disrupts the theological-social imaginary of whiteness” (341). Redemption in many places seems to be equivalent to receiving/adopting a new theological imagination. This, of course, is not the only statement on soteriology. He employs the notion of “recapitulation” extensively throughout the book. But he does so because this concept emphasizes the character of Christ’s life as a pattern to emulate. Jesus, he says, “inaugurates a redeemed pattern of life” (27); he “recapitulates the creation of humankind in such a way as to imprint a new modality of existence on it, a modality of the cross, the ascetical mode of life that refuses to tyrannically possess the world” (28). In stereotypically Abelardian fashion, the cross in Carter’s account serves to model a new way of life rooted in love. Nowhere in the book does Carter speak of reconciliation, and in the few instances where he mentions sin, it is defined as the “structure of dominance and slavery” (30) and “the tyrannical exploitation of the exposure and risk of love” (165). “God’s soteriological action” in Christ, he says later, is “the liberation of dark flesh” and involves “exit[ing] the power structure of whiteness” (250). To be clear: I do not wish to diminish the importance of these ideas, but at the same time I find them insufficient. Despite his emphasis on Christ’s concrete flesh, Carter’s soteriology means that the focus of our attention is really not on Jesus as the event of reconciliation but on us as those who embody this new modality of existence through the Spirit.

45 It is perhaps not surprising that Carter explicitly endorses the *analogia entis* as defined by Erich Przywara: “I am using ‘analogy’ here in the theologically technical sense of the analogate actually participating in, but within a broader difference from, what it is analogous to. This is precisely what makes it an analogy and not a mere

## 2. *What is the relation between Christ and creation?*

Carter should be commended for recognizing that a theological solution to the problem of race can only be developed on the soil of Christology. He understands that the only way beyond the ills of modernity is *through* the flesh of Jesus. And for this reason, despite the brilliance of his solution, the problem with Carter's theological account of race is also to be found at this concrete point. He develops his Christology in three key sections—a prelude on Irenæus, an interlude on Gregory of Nyssa, and a postlude on Maximus the Confessor. While there are other important passages in the book to which I will turn, the focus in this part of my paper will be on these three sections.

Carter presents Irenæus at the start of the book as an “anti-Gnostic intellectual.” Because the debate with Gnosticism concerns material existence, Irenæus is forced “to distinguish Christianity’s way of imagining the body (politic) as tied to Christ’s flesh from Gnosticism’s vision of the body (politic).”<sup>46</sup> To accomplish this, Irenæus develops his notion of recapitulation, which Carter then takes up in creative ways. At the heart of Carter’s proposal is the relation between Creator and creature, a relation which he locates in this Christological recapitulation. He brings all these elements together in a key passage that summarizes the thesis of the whole book:

But herein lies Irenæus’ significance, for he says that human language across time and space gets recapitulated in Christ. . . . The words of creation (the *logoi*) are not lost in the Word of God (the *Logos*). Rather, they pentecostally or interlinguistically articulate each other. Given this, one must speak not merely of Christ’s humanity. One must speak of his humanity as an *interhumanity* that constitutes a new, *intrahumanity*. That is, Christ’s humanity is the historical display of an intradivine communion between Father and Son in the Holy Spirit that itself opens up, by the same motion of the Holy Spirit in Christ’s flesh, a new communion internal to human existence. In short, Christ’s flesh as Jewish, covenantal flesh is a social-political reality displayed across time and space into which the Gentiles are received in praise of the God of Israel. Given this, we must say that Christ’s flesh in its Jewish constitution is “mulatto” flesh. That is to say, in being Jewish flesh it is always already *intersected* by the covenant with YHWH and in being *intersected* it is always already *intraracial* (and not merely *multiracial*). Its purity is its “impurity,” which is the “impurity” of its being covenantally *intersected* by YHWH as its life-giving limit. . . . In his interhumanity, which is an intrahumanity, Jesus as the Israel of God is the living [*sic*] reality of the covenantal promises of the God of Israel. He therefore is the discourse (*Logos*) of creation, the one in whom all of

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semblance” (434n19). Carter then goes on to cite two works by Przywara. Against this conception of analogy, and in defense of Barth, see Keith Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis* (London: T & T Clark, forthcoming 2010).

46 Carter, *Race*, 11.

the words of creation (*logoi*)—its differences, one might say—inhere. In the specificity of his Jewish, covenantal flesh, he is creation’s life-giving limit. He is the living reality of YHWH’s promises to Israel and thereby for the world. Jesus’ existence, which is covenantally Jewish, is therefore Pentecostal.<sup>47</sup>

Because this passage presupposes a certain conception of the covenant between YHWH and Israel, we need to cite one other passage from much later in the book in order to assess the complicated theological moves that Carter is making here. This passage comes at the end of his treatment of Cone, and in it he sets forth his basic disagreement with dialectical theology and presents his alternative participatory ontology:

Beyond an ontology of separateness, I propose a theology of participation, the content of which is YHWH’s covenantal relationship with the one to whom YHWH has elected YHWH’s self. This one is the covenantal and theological—and therefore, to say it again, not the racial—people of Israel. . . . The problem with dialectical thinking and related forms of philosophical thinking is that they begin from closure and then have to negotiate passage through an “ugly broad ditch” between things that are closed. . . . The covenant witnesses to the fact that for God, and only because of God’s identity as God for us, there is no ditch to be crossed by us. God has from the first bound Godself to us in God’s communion with Israel as a communion for the world. This is the inner logic of the identity of Jesus, the inner logic by which Israel is always already a mulatto people precisely in being YHWH’s people, and by which therefore Jesus himself as the Israel of God is Mulatto. . . . What the covenant framework discloses, then, is this: Because YHWH is on both the Creator and creaturely sides of the covenant holding it, a dialectical framework of I-Thou, while useful in some regards in responding to problems in the world, proves ultimately inadequate. Indeed, it is not radical enough.<sup>48</sup>

In order to get a handle on what Carter is up to, we need to understand (1) what he means by “covenant,” (2) what the relation is between the covenant and Jesus Christ, and finally (3) what the relation is between this covenant and the rest of creation. To begin, it is clear that Carter defines the covenant as the theological relationship between YHWH and Israel. More importantly, at the heart of the covenantal relation between YHWH and Israel is the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:1-3), in which Israel is elected to be a blessing to “all the families of the earth.” For Carter, at the origin of Israel’s identity we already find this “intersection” of Jewish identity, this covenantal “impurity,” in which Israel’s communion with God includes within itself Israel’s communion with the Gentile world. There is an openness to Israel’s identity. As Carter puts it, Israel is a “mulatto people.”

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47 Ibid., 29-30.

48 Ibid., 191-192.

Second, following Irenæus, Carter understands Christ to be the recapitulation of the covenant with Israel. Jesus sums up in himself the “intersected” and thus “intra-racial” covenant with YHWH. The covenant with Israel is “concentrated in Christ’s flesh.”<sup>49</sup> Jesus is the “concise word” which includes all the words of creation.<sup>50</sup> Despite misunderstanding Barth’s dialectical theology again, Carter’s proposal does differ from Barth here in a very significant way. The difference can be summed up thusly: for Barth, *Israel is included in the election of Christ*; for Carter, *Christ is included in the election of Israel*. The object of election is different, and thus the nature of the covenant is different. Barth understands all creation to be included in the election of Jesus Christ; Carter understands all creation to be included in the election of Israel, which is then recapitulated in Christ. Carter does not seem to grasp this point. He frames it as a distinction between two different ontologies: an ontology of “separateness” and an ontology of openness and participation. But this completely misunderstands Barth’s project. Barth’s theology does not reinforce or presuppose Lessing’s divide; it is rather an attempt to subvert and overcome it. Like Carter, Barth also has a theology of participation: creation participates in the history of Jesus Christ as the concrete event of reconciliation. Carter’s theology of participation is simply “Israelocentric,” where Barth’s is “Christocentric.” It does not follow from this, though, that Barth’s theology is supersessionistic. Even where Barth might make mistakes in his theological understanding of Israel, one can correct those problems without dispensing with his overall theological framework. In fact, by dispensing with that framework, as Carter does, one ends up creating new problems regarding the soteriological relation between creation and Christ.

Third, Carter addresses the relation between covenant and creation more directly in the interlude and postlude. In his analysis of Gregory of Nyssa, he speaks of Christ as the “One-Many,” the “concrete universal.” Christ is the one in whom all others “live and move and have their being.” The *Logos-logoi* distinction, prominent within Eastern theology, is used again by Carter in an important way: “the Word (*Logos*) of God already contains within itself all of the possible words (*logoi*) of creation. In their creaturely modalities of freedom, all of the words of creation are needed to fully articulate or image the eternal Son, who is himself the Image of the will of the [*sic*] God the Father.” He continues by stating that the historical Christ “is, in fact, in his historical concreteness and particularity at the same time the many of human existence.”<sup>51</sup> Further on he says that “all particular persons . . . are of eternal and salvific significance. Christ as prototype frees creation in its fullness—from persons and their histories, to the ecological order, to the animal kingdom—to be a symphonic expression of the freedom of God. . . . He [God] is the tune—a jazz or blues tune of suffering divine things—that the symphony of creation, the many, plays” (248). Israel’s covenant

with YHWH is “a covenant with creation,” and thus Christ’s covenantal flesh “is the harmonic or cadence of creaturely existence” (248).

Carter’s conception of the Christ-creature relationship reveals why he can seem at times to be advocating a kind of natural theology. Creation is included in Christ in such a way that creation is the manifestation or articulation of the Word. Christ the *Logos* not only ontologically includes the creaturely *logoi*, but he is identified with them. The *Logos* is expressed by the *logoi*. As Carter puts it, Jesus Christ is in himself “the many of human existence.” We can draw another comparison with Barth, this time using the musical metaphor. For Carter, creation is the “symphonic expression” of God; each particular creature “is an intonation or musical note sounding within the amphitheater of his [Christ’s] flesh.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, creation plays the symphony of Christ. For Barth, by contrast, Christ plays his own unique, concrete symphony, and the many creatures, in their distinct intonations, may then correspond to the true and perfect symphony displayed in the history of Jesus. The *logoi* participate in the *Logos*, for Barth, but this does not mean that the actions of the many *logoi* themselves actualize and manifest the one *Logos*. What seems to happen in Carter’s Christology is that the historical Jesus Christ becomes a blank sheet of music—to continue the musical analogy—which creation then fills up with its harmonious counterpoint. Jesus does not have his own soteriologically distinct melody; rather, almost like a cosmic music teacher, he makes it possible for us to play our new songs of nonracial humanity.

Carter brings his thoughts together in the concluding postlude on Maximus the Confessor. Here, as is the case throughout the book, there is both much to commend and much to question. Positively, Carter spends more time clarifying Christ’s soteriological significance. Christ, he says, “reopens” human nature both to God and to itself; he “reintegrates human nature,” thus “drawing the rest of humankind into the specific modality or intonation of his existence, into the unique way in which he enacts being human.”<sup>53</sup> This reopening of humanity has both a “vertical” and a “horizontal” dimension: vertically, God’s assumption of human flesh in the incarnation is the “divinization” of human nature (as well as the “hominization” of God); horizontally, “Christ inaugurates a revolution . . . in which Christ performs or embodies a new way (*tropos*) of being human or of embodying and performing human existence.”<sup>54</sup> At this point, we also see the problematic side of Carter’s Christology. In Christ’s flesh, he says, “creaturely flesh as such is healed from its fallen condition”; “his flesh transfigures all flesh,” with the result that other creaturely bodies “signify divine realities” and “can be reconceived iconically as disclosing God.”<sup>55</sup> Returning to the *Logos-logoi* relationship, Carter quotes Maximus as saying, “We affirm that the one *Logos* is many *logoi* and the many *logoi* are One.”<sup>56</sup> So here the identity between the

49 Ibid., 27.

50 Ibid., 26.

51 Ibid., 247.

52 Ibid., 248.

53 Ibid., 351.

54 Ibid., 353.

55 Ibid., 359-360.

56 Ibid., 364.

Word of God and the words of creation is made explicit. It is thus no surprise when Carter, commenting on Maximus, states that “the garments Christ wears to mediate his divinity are Scripture and creation itself, conceived together.”<sup>57</sup> This leads to the important summary statement: “What Maximus ultimately describes is the unity of the natural law and the scriptural or written law, the world of creation and the narrative world of Scripture.”<sup>58</sup>

In light of all this, it seems that Christ’s importance rests in the fact that he makes it ontologically possible to find God anywhere in creation. Christ is ontologically significant, but not epistemologically—and almost not even soteriologically. Carter makes it clear again that Christ exists *within* the covenant with Israel. As he puts it, “The distinctive harmonics of Christ’s flesh therefore lies in Israel’s covenantal story.”<sup>59</sup> Christ simply “open[s] even further Israel’s openness” by drawing the Gentiles into Israel. Carter’s creative Christology fails to give the historical event of Jesus Christ its own distinctive reconciling importance. He fails to recognize that in the New Testament, the rest of creation *cannot* participate in God’s reconciliation of the world, since this happens “while we were still enemies” (Rom. 5:10). There is a moment in which it is necessary for us to be closed off—or, rather, we close ourselves off through our bondage to sin—but this closing off occurs so that we can truly and fully participate in God (cf. Rom. 11:32).

To return to where I started, Carter wants creation and covenant to be connected, but against Barth and with Balthasar he wants there to be some “breathing room” between the two. The connection is located in YHWH’s covenant with Israel, rather than with Jesus Christ, as is the case for Barth. Jesus functions, for Carter, as the one who sums up and furthers the covenant with Israel. What about the “breathing room?” For Balthasar, this room is filled by the Catholic Church. Carter also fills the space with ecclesiology, but his ecclesiology has no institutional boundaries. As I noted above, he has a rather high ecclesiology, but the church is identified with “despised, dark flesh.” The church is the world viewed from the margins. Carter accomplishes this theologically not by bifurcating creation and covenant, but rather by (1) redefining the covenant so that it is a covenant with creation as such, specifically with “dark flesh,” and (2) removing the need to norm our theological discourse in accordance with Scripture’s witness to Jesus Christ. The “breathing room” thus opens up a space for creatures to actively disclose God, but because Christ’s covenantal flesh is itself the “social space” of creation, these creatures disclose God “inside” Christ, so to speak.<sup>60</sup> And yet, crucially, the fact that creatures live within the “social space” of Christ’s flesh adds little to nothing materially, so far as I can tell, to what we can say theologically on the basis of creaturely reality. That is, Christ does not add anything beyond what we already learn from the covenant with Israel-

creation; Christ simply makes this covenant, defined apart from him, actual for all flesh. He extends and fulfills it, in some sense, but he certainly does not define and constitute it.

At the risk of being reductive, it seems that, in the end, Carter’s massive and complex theological account of race is simply a creative attempt to provide a Christological grounding for engaging in so-called “contextual theology,” in which God-talk is constructed and normed on the basis of the religious experience of a particular people group. Theology no longer has Christ as God’s sole self-revelation with Scripture alone as its testifying norm, since creation itself mediates Christ’s divinity.<sup>61</sup> The end result is that, with this Christology in our back pocket, we can construct our God-talk from any creaturely starting-point that we wish—though it is preferable and perhaps essential that our starting-point take the “underside of modernity” into account. None of this is meant to diminish the very real accomplishments of the book, which are indeed many. But it does make very clear what is finally at stake in this project. What Carter gains through his Christology is the ability to “locate” God in creation; he gains a sophisticated form of “natural theology.” Yet this comes at the expense of a Christ whose concrete historicity is epistemologically normative, existentially disruptive, and has redemptive significance independent of our embodiment of Israel’s covenantal story.

To conclude, Carter has framed his theological account of race as a conflict between two ontologies: an ontology of closure, represented by dialectical theology, and an ontology of participation. Taken on its own terms, this conflict fails to hold up. For starters, dialectical theology is not a uniform entity with a single ontological framework that can be dismissed so easily, especially when it is misinterpreted as I have shown above. Moreover, Barth’s version of dialectical theology has a robust ontology of participation that affirms the subjectivity of creation within the covenant of grace. What dialectical theology, in all its forms, seeks to uphold is the affirmation that God is not a given thing within the world that human beings can control or manipulate. Carter’s proposal contrasts with dialectical theology not in its ability to ensure participation, but in the way it construes the nature of God as capable of being read off the face of history—specifically, off the “underside of modernity.” Barth, of course, developed his dialectical theology, at least in part, in order to protect against the anti-Jewish ideology of Nazism. But while he accomplishes this by focusing on the singularity of Jesus Christ as the event of reconciliation (in whom all creation participates), Carter accomplishes this by focusing on the “dark flesh” of modern colonialism (which participates in Christ). This shift of perspective is crucial: Barth emphasizes Christ as an independent concrete reality, whereas Carter emphasizes Christ as a

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61 This, I admit, is a contentious and perhaps over-simplistic claim on my part. Carter throughout emphasizes exegesis as the means by which to reorder our theological imaginations. He also stresses that Scripture and creation *conceived together* mediate Christ’s divinity. And yet there are simply too many passages where Carter speaks about creation as such disclosing the divine that it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Scripture is not really normative in the way that perhaps it ought to be.

57 Ibid., 361.

58 Ibid., 362.

59 Ibid., 354.

60 Cf. Carter, *Race*, 242, 338, 366.

reality whose concreteness is identified with that of all other creatures. Framing the debate in these terms provides a more accurate picture of where the actual conflict is located.

Because of space limitations, I have focused on points of critique, but that should not take away from the brilliance on display in this work. I have, perhaps unavoidably, oversimplified many of his points in order to make my case. There are plenty of passages which complicate matters significantly and some which even offer grounds for alternative readings. In fact, Carter's theological account of race would only need a simple refinement to make it consonant with Barth's "secular parables of the kingdom." Carter would merely have to emphasize Christ's singularity as a concrete event that has its own narrative shape and significance which is constitutive of the true being of creaturely existence—a truth which each individual creature can illuminate and correspond to by the Spirit. None of this is to suggest that one *needs* to be consonant with Barth; rather the comparison is meant to show the similarities between his position and that of the mature Barth, while also pointing out the differences—differences which, I am suggesting, are crucial. In the end, I have learned from much this book, and I expect the church in America will continue to profit enormously from Carter's work.

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# J. KAMERON CARTER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON RACE

Beverly Eileen Mitchell

*Kudos and Hallelujahs* should be directed toward J. Kameron Carter for his extraordinary contribution to the subject of theology and race. Although black and womanist theologies have sought with much persistence to bring the problem of race to the forefront of theological reflection in the last few decades of the twentieth century, there has not been a probing, comprehensive theological account of the problem of race which approaches that of Carter. He has contributed more than his share toward lessening the gap in modern knowledge of how theological discourse contributed to the process of rendering humanity as a racial being in modernity. Carter is a formidable conversation partner who is philosophically rigorous, pays significant attention to historical developments, and shows a theological breadth and depth in his understanding of a wide range of thinkers. He manages to include such historically disparate figures as Maximus the Confessor and Jarena Lee as resources for what he believes is a theologically and philosophically adequate framework for a theological account of race.

In my reflection on Carter's book, *Race, A Theological Account*, I will focus on three issues which emerge from the text, and which I have also addressed in my own writings about theology and race. These issues are as follows: 1) the theological connection of Anti-Semitism and white supremacy; 2) the development of racialism in modernity; and 3) Karl Barth and James Cone as resources for a theological critique of racialism. My essay will close with a brief assessment of Carter's theological method for explaining the emergence of modern racism.

## THEOLOGICAL CONNECTION OF ANTI-SEMITISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY

Carter views *Race, A Theological Account* as an "initial installment" in filling the large gap in modern knowledge of how the discourse of theology contributed to the process of rendering "man" as a racial being in modernity.<sup>1</sup> His fundamental contention is that "modernity's racial imagination has its genesis in the theological problem of Christianity's quest to sever itself from its Jewish roots."<sup>2</sup> When Western Christians cast Jews as a racial group, with the help of both theology and philosophy, they forged a racial imagination which proved racist. This racist imagination is what Carter terms "the problem of whiteness." The problem of

1 Ibid., 3.

2 Ibid., 4.

race, as we experience it in our time, originated with the Western historical attempt to resolve “the Jewish problem.” Modernity is the historical moment in which a mature racial-anthropological theory congealed. He develops his argument—that modern racism is a by-product of the split between Christianity and Judaism in the first century—through a discussion of the works of the philosophers Michel Foucault, Cornel West, Etienne Balibar, and Immanuel Kant, among others.

My account of the emergence of the recent manifestations of Anti-Semitism and white supremacy also identifies modernity as the crucial historical moment when the foundations for a more virulent form of both are laid. These modern forms of racialism, of course, led to the systematic attempt to exterminate the European Jewish population in the twentieth century, in the case of the former; and led to the support of the enslavement and continued oppression of African Americans in the United States from the nineteenth century forward, in the case of the latter. However, my depiction of ancient black antipathy and anti-Jewishness portrays these phenomena as running parallel or concurrently, rather than viewing white supremacy as an outgrowth of severing the ties between Judaism and Christianity or Christians from Jews. A significant part of the difference between Carter’s and my respective interpretations of the history of racism in the West may have to do with the differences of our intentions as we examine the role of religion in modern racism. Carter seeks to demonstrate how race, religion, and the state became connected. My intention has been to establish a common theological grounding for Anti-Semitism and white supremacy, and to illustrate that these two phenomena were distinct expressions of *one* theological heresy.

With regard to Carter’s discussion of Cornel West, I note that he and I cover the same territory.<sup>3</sup> However, while Carter is appreciative of aspects of West’s depiction of the development of racism in modernity, as articulated in *Prophecy Deliverance!*,<sup>4</sup> he judges West’s effort toward crafting a genealogy of race to be inadequate. In answer to the question as to how it is that the notion of “*homo racialis*” comes to fruition in modernity, Carter writes of Cornel West’s genealogy of race as follows:

His genealogy is important because in probing the factors that made “the emergence ... of the idea of white supremacy ... within the epistemology field of modern discourse [in the West],” he offers an answer to the questions [regarding how the notions of “*homo racialis*” and “*homo ethnicus*” came to be.]<sup>5</sup>

3 I discuss Cornel West’s account of racism in modernity in both my books, *Black Abolitionism, A Quest for Human Dignity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005) and *Plantations and Death Camps, Religion, Ideology, and Human Dignity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

4 Cornel West, *Prophecy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982).

5 Carter, *Race*, 44.

Carter maintains that West’s genealogy seeks to account for the features of Enlightenment knowledge that were conducive to the idea of white supremacy.<sup>6</sup> Crucial to West’s analysis of the structure of modern discourse on race is the revival of classical aesthetics, where classical ideals provide the ultimate authority in the modern world. An aesthetical norm is then established that determines that blacks fail to live up to the standards of truth (in science), the good and morality (in philosophy), and beauty (aesthetics in culture).<sup>7</sup> Modern discourse, by the infiltration of European values based on a retrieval of classical aesthetics and cultural values, has “embedded within itself the conditions for the coming-to-be of modern racism.”<sup>8</sup> In Carter’s view, the chief limitation of West’s analysis is that it cannot answer unequivocally whether the idea of white supremacy, and thus the phenomenon of modern racism, would or would not have inevitably arisen, given the structure of modern discourse and the forms of rationality, scientificity, and objectivity it spawned.<sup>9</sup>

Whether or not this perceived flaw in Cornel West’s analysis is fatal is open to debate. My interest in West’s analysis (particularly where he argues concerning the classification categories and the descriptive, representation aims of natural history in the emergence of the social sciences) lies only in whether this depiction is the likely starting point for the crystallization of the idea of white supremacy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> West’s depiction of the genealogy of race is plausible to me in light of what I have learned about the impact of the Enlightenment on racial theory. However, what concerns me more as I look at the Enlightenment are the factors that contributed to modernity’s pseudo-theological pretensions.

#### MODERNITY AND RACIALISM

In his narrative of the development of racism in modernity, Carter employs a heavily philosophical analysis to explain what is religious or “pseudo-theological” about our modern forms of sociopolitical life in general, and the modern state in particular.<sup>11</sup> He contends that race functions to support the coming-to-be and the sustaining of modern society at an inarticulate level. To enunciate this level of modern social and political life is really to give attention to the modern problem of race.<sup>12</sup> To account for the modern problem of race in relationship to “the Jewish question,” is to account for the problem of religion, since “the Jewish question” is “at the core of the modern problem of race, religion, and the politics of the modern state.”<sup>13</sup> It is in the context of political philosophy that Carter identifies the ways in which modernity and the Enlightenment exercise quasi-

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 49.

8 Ibid., 49-50.

9 Ibid., 50.

10 Mitchell, *Plantations and Death Camps*, 74.

11 Carter, *Race*, 39.

12 Ibid., 40.

13 Ibid.

theological or pseudo-theological pretensions. These pretensions are related to the ways in which Enlightenment philosophers developed racial theories as a consequence of their insistence on completely separating Christianity from its Jewish roots. Carter's discussion of modern racial thought is shaped in part by his analysis of the work of Michel Foucault, who, Carter maintains, characterizes the Enlightenment, exemplified in the Protestant Reformation, as a renunciation of the perceived despotism of the (Catholic) church and the tyranny of political rulers.<sup>14</sup> Carter employs Foucault in his discussion because he believes that the latter "taps into the deep structure of the problem of modern racial reasoning by raising the question of race, religion, and the mythical."<sup>15</sup> Carter's development of the emergence of mature racial theory strikes me as a *philosophical* treatment of the birth of modern racism.

In contrast I lodge the pseudo-theological pretensions of modernity in certain attitudes toward particular Christian doctrinal assertions I find present in the thought of both religious and philosophical thinkers from the Enlightenment. The muting of the familiar Reformed theme of the sovereignty of God shapes my narrative of the emergence of white supremacy and Anti-Semitism in modernity. In *Plantations and Death Camps* I draw from philosopher Peter Gay's depiction of the emergence of the view of "man" in the Enlightenment.<sup>16</sup> One phrase especially characterizes the anthropology of that movement: *the autonomous human*. The portrait of humanity I view as characteristic of Enlightenment thinking is as follows:

Rebellion against the stricture of religious tradition in this world come of age brought about a change of view regarding human nature and the relationship of humankind to God. The Christian view of human beings recognized the dependence of humanity before God its creator and its fallenness as a result of sin. Human beings owed their existence to God and were incapable of participating in their own salvation. The view of humanity begun with the Renaissance, strengthened by the Enlightenment, and reinforced in modernity is that human beings are autonomous and, whether innately decent or innately power-hunger, responsible for their own destiny. No longer was human dependence on

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14 Ibid., 73. I take issue with this characterization of the Protestant Reformation. The spirit that shaped the sixteenth century magisterial reformers was not despotism of the church or the tyranny of political rulers. Doctrinal issues related to questions regarding justification, the nature of the church, and the sacraments were the guiding impetus of their reform; and a certain socio-political conservatism marked the reform of Martin Luther in particular. However, I would agree that aspects of the teachings of these reformers would begin a trajectory in which rebellion against the despotism of the church and the tyranny of political rulers might be a logical conclusion.

15 Ibid., 68.

16 Peter Gay. *The Enlightenment: The Science of Freedom* (New York: Norton, 1969).

God emphasized. Rather, human beings were now viewed as responsible for themselves.<sup>17</sup>

One element stands out for me in this passage on Enlightenment anthropology: the absence of an explicit notion that the human being is a human being *coram deo*, before God. I contend that in reality human beings have no autonomy; they are ever tethered to God for their very existence. A view of the human being as autonomous suggests a human being who is sovereign over himself or herself (and tends to lead to the attempt to exercise sovereignty over others). In addition to the view of humanity as autonomous and sovereign, modernity exhibited an over-confidence in the capacity of human reason to solve human problems. Such a human being takes on divine pretensions. The human being becomes a god – or at least the measure of all things. The theological issue at stake in this kind of anthropology is the first commandment of the Decalogue, that is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."<sup>18</sup> Racialism, whether it is the Anti-Semitic variety or the white supremacy brand, which has deformed and diminished American religious and political life, remains at its core a theological problem. The key theological offense is a violation of the First Commandment. This offense arises out of the failure of human beings to accept the idea of their creaturely limitations and live within them.

The theological significance of modernity is found in the difference brought about by the cultural shift from a biblical view and the modern view of humanity.<sup>19</sup> I contend:

The notion of the human creature subservient to God was no longer emphasized. Supreme confidence in the human capacity to reason brought much confidence in scientific method, technological advances, and a gradual shift from an agrarian society to urbanization. These swift changes would inspire much confidence in human ability to master the environment as well as the notion that human beings were steadily progressing toward moral maturity. . . . Overconfidence in human progress and a mistaken belief in human autonomy masked moral failures that modernity was blind to predict and incapable of avoiding without recognizing the need for grace.<sup>20</sup>

Once social groups live under the assumption that human autonomy is even a possibility, other insidious, pseudo-theological pretenses are not far behind.

#### BARTH AND CONE ON IDEOLOGY

At an early point in his theological account of race, J. Kameron Carter assesses the contribution of James H. Cone to the discussion of theology and race. In doing so, Carter also engages the work of Karl Barth, which was known to

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17 Mitchell, *Plantations and Death Camps*, 72.

18 Exodus 20:4.

19 Mitchell, *Plantations and Death Camps*, 73.

20 Ibid.

have had an influence on the early writings of Cone. Here again, Carter and I have traveled on some of the same theological ground.

In my unpublished dissertation on Barth and Cone,<sup>21</sup> I sought to establish a theological framework for addressing the ideologies of National Socialism in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s and white supremacy in the United States. I perceived certain commonalities between the approaches of Barth and Cone in terms of their protest against what I called “ideologies of death.” My hope was to establish a framework that avoided what I believed to be shortcomings in the theological approaches of Barth and Cone in their respective contexts, and which would provide the scaffolding for what I termed at the time a “trans-liberative theology.” My own work on this grew out of a tremendous frustration with academic theology, which I believed failed to connect theological reflection with concrete economic, social, and political issues.

I chose Barth for his explicitly theological grounds for opposition to National Socialism, and I believed his Christocentric method had validity for addressing the problem of white supremacy in the United States. However, I found it difficult to employ Barth’s method with respect to my interest in addressing the impact of white supremacy on black existence because I felt that Barth’s theology did not allow for adequate discussion of human experience.

Carter employs Hans Urs von Balthasar’s critique of Barth, which attributes Barth’s inability to give nature its due to his uncompromising Christocentrism. Carter quotes von Balthasar on this point:

[Barth’s Christological] starting point is quite legitimate—indeed if we want to take the Bible seriously, it is absolutely essential. But it is a big step from there to the narrowing of everything to that one point. The priority of Christ over creation and sin in no way requires that the whole work of creation has to be so painfully forced to occupy the Procrustean bed of Barth’s Christological schema. This straitened schematization becomes evident at that juncture in his argument where we notice that he has not left enough breathing room between creation and covenant. Barth certainly pre-supposes creation, but it is still too much merely a presupposition: he does not give it its proper due.<sup>22</sup>

Based on my reading of Barth’s doctrine of creation, and his doctrine of humanity in particular, von Balthasar’s assessment of Barth seems accurate.

Carter summarizes the implications of von Balthasar’s critique of Barth as follows:

For Barth, Christ’s humanity united with the divine nature in such a way that precludes the rest of creation from being brought into that union

21 Beverly Eileen Mitchell, *Karl Barth and James Cone: The Question of Liberative Faith and Ideology* (PhD dissertation, Boston College, 1999).

22 Mitchell, *Karl Barth and James Cone*.

and leaves creation effectively in a no-man’s island. Creaturely nature becomes a sublime residue that the divine nature refuses to harness.<sup>23</sup>

Such a conception of the union of Christ’s two natures would make it difficult to think of the humanity of Jesus as having anything other than an abstract connection to creation. Of course, this was certainly not Barth’s intent, but it does seem to be an unintended consequence. As I returned to Barth’s thought again through reading Carter’s book, I found that his inclusion of von Balthasar’s critique has helped illumine the nature of what frustrated me with regard to Barth in my dissertation project.

In contrast to my own experience of some of Barth’s theology, I found that James Cone’s insistence on black experience as a source for theological reflection was liberating, rather than restricting, and I began to work on my own method for a theology of liberation that was attentive to particular human experiences; namely that of economic, social, and political injustice. However, as I examined Cone’s work on liberation more closely, I found that he diverged from Barth in a way that left his own theological reflection vulnerable to ideological distortion. In my dissertation, I made the following conclusions after I assessed Cone’s method:

Whether or not one is entirely convinced that Black Power is indeed consistent with the gospel. . . . Cone has not presented a full-scale theological critique of the ideology of white supremacy [in his theology]. [I have] argued that a fuller critique would help the black community to clarify its goals with regard to its quest for full liberation. [I have] suggested that such a critique would also provide more of the self-critical reflection needed to assess the means used toward the goal of full liberation. This criticism of Cone aside, it must be said that Cone has initiated a much-needed start with regard to the church’s challenge to the harmful effects of white supremacy. Nevertheless, an even greater concern emerges as one examines Cone’s stance toward ideology. It is not his position on the ideology of white supremacy that is troublesome, but *his apparent dismissal of the need to be concerned about possible ideological distortion on the part of proponents of Black Theology that raises concerns*.<sup>24</sup>

What stood out in my mind then, and what continues to raise red flags for me now, is that it seemed as if Cone felt no compunction about ignoring the possibility that his own conviction regarding the compatibility of the aims of Black Theology and Black Power might have constituted the same ideological taint that German National Socialism represented for German theology in the 1930s. Cone’s first commitment was to a philosophical viewpoint that favored black liberation at any cost. This is a danger that I believe any theology of liberation, which links its foundation to the gospel of Jesus Christ, can ill afford to ignore. I came away from my dissertation project dissatisfied with *both* Barth and Cone, although I remained indebted to them for the strengths of their approaches to theology.

23 Carter, *Race*, 181.

24 Mitchell, *Karl Barth and James Cone*, emphasis added.

Carter's mixed assessment of Cone's theology centers around concerns other than ideological captivity. Carter sees the "brilliance" of Cone's thought in its analysis of Being's "concreteness," which is revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. Carter writes:

A concrete conceptualization of Being stands over against abstract conceptualizations of Being, along with their attendant racial politics. Central to Cone's analysis is the place he accords, especially in his early thought, to Jesus' Jewishness. Hence, the breakthrough in his thought: the humanity that the God of Israel assumes in Jesus of Nazareth is the location from which God secures and affirms all of creation in its historical unfolding.<sup>25</sup>

However, a central critique for Carter is that Cone is unable to say what makes whiteness a theological problem.<sup>26</sup> I concur that this is a significant weakness in Cone's exploration of theology and race. Carter's analysis of Cone and Barth, and the degree to which either theologian's method of addressing ideologies which rival the gospel message of freedom, was illuminating for me because he very clearly articulated certain weaknesses in Barth with regard to the ability to lend concreteness to his reflection (a concern which plagued me to no end). But Carter was also astute in his explication of what he believed were the shortcomings in Cone's treatment of the problem of race. In Carter's discussion I found confirmation of my own thinking.

Although I moved on to other theological and historical projects after I completed my dissertation, I never abandoned the conviction that theological reflection must connect with economic, social, and political realities in concrete ways. I also never abandoned the idea of writing about the connection I saw between the ideology of National Socialism and the ideology of white supremacy. It took nearly ten years, but finally I made my contribution to the subject of theology and race in the book, *Plantations and Death Camps: Religion, Ideology, and Human Dignity*. In that book I argue that anti-Semitism and white supremacy are different expressions of racialism. Racialism is an idolatrous ideology that designates that one human group has complete authority to determine the economic, social, and political life of another group, based upon a dubious concept of race. The group which assumes false and illegitimate authority over the socio-historical life of the other assumes the kind of authority that only God possesses. This ideological move against the designated inferior group is indicative of a false faith that rises up in opposition to God. I believe this assessment constitutes a theological critique of racism that explains why racialism is *theologically* problematic. Although I looked for an explicit articulation of how racism impacts the relationship between God and humanity, I have not uncovered it in my initial read of *Race, A Theological Account*.

<sup>25</sup> Carter, *Race*, 158.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. See *Race*, 159.

It seems appropriate at this point to reiterate that although in some way J. Kameron Carter and I have both traversed some of the same ground, our goals in our respective books are quite different. His goal was to give a thorough and comprehensive theological (and I would add, philosophical) account of race; and so theology and race are the central issues of his text. My intent was to present a theological grounding for what it means to be human, and to define human dignity from the context of African American slavery and the Jewish Holocaust. In my discussion of white supremacy and Anti-Semitism, these racial ideologies are discussed as concrete illustrations of acute assaults on the human dignity of particular human beings. A theology of race, as such, is secondary to the goal of constructing a theology of human dignity that is not determined by the socially constructed concept of race.

#### PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF CARTER'S METHOD

One of the biggest surprises I encountered as I examined Carter's discussion of race from a theological perspective is the absence of any mention of Christian ethicist George Kelsey and his theological explication of race in *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*.<sup>27</sup> Although it has been forty-seven years since its initial publication, and some aspects of Kelsey's discussion are dated, it nevertheless remains for me a very compelling, explicitly theological articulation of racism as a rival "faith" that constitutes idolatry. Kelsey understands racism as a pseudo-faith which grants an ultimate status to an accidental characteristic of the human being and which judges critically God's act of creating diversity within the human family.<sup>28</sup> Although Kelsey's discussion of race was focused on the socio-historical context of African Americans in the United States in the early 1960s, he perceived racialized Anti-Semitism as analogous.<sup>29</sup> Kelsey also perceived the connection between white supremacy and anti-Semitism, which Carter and I also share. Kelsey's insistence upon race as a theological error and not merely an anthropological one deeply impressed me as I worked on my dissertation, and I incorporated Kelsey's work not only in that project, but also in *Plantations and Death Camps* and my earlier book *Black Abolitionism, A Quest for Human Dignity*. I am convinced that one cannot speak about the *theological* character of racism without acknowledging the contribution of George Kelsey to the discussion of race and theology.

As I reflect on my preliminary reading of Carter's discussion of the development of modern racial theory and its emergence as full-blown modern Anti-Semitism and white supremacy in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, I come away with the sense that his theological approach is highly dependent upon philosophy, and that this may have an impact on the way he explicates the problem of these ideologies as pseudo-theologies. His instinct that Anti-Semitism and white supremacy are

<sup>27</sup> George D. Kelsey, *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man* (1965; Reprint, Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 23

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 24, 66.

“pseudo” or false theologies is correct, in my view. However, the foundation for his discussion leaves me feeling that his *theological* analysis of these ideologies could be strengthened by his assessment of how, and to what degree, they deny the sovereignty of God. For example, his discussion of nation-state sovereignty is formulated in politico-philosophical terms. He does not seem to tie nation-state sovereignty to the ultimate sovereignty of God, nor does he demonstrate that any political sovereignty is derivative and a grace bestowed by God, with certain *provisos* regarding its treatment of the governed. His discussion of sovereignty without explicit reference to God’s sovereignty makes it *appear* as if he perceives political sovereignty as an autonomous given. The strongest critique against any notion of human sovereignty, whether it is political or religious, derives from the idea that all such sovereignties exist under the judgment of divine sovereignty. In my reading of Carter, I do not see this concept articulated. Without this, his arguments regarding the pretensions of Enlightenment thinking regarding the state remain in the realm of the philosophical, rather than theological.

In any theological account of race, idolatry is a central issue. This assertion brings to mind a 1934 essay of Karl Barth, “The First Commandment as an axiom of Theology.”<sup>30</sup> Of particular note is Barth’s statement:

By nature theology belongs to the sphere of Holy Scripture and thus to the sphere of the first commandment. Where axioms have their place in other sciences, in theology, prior to any theological thought or speech, there stands as its foundation and criterion (as we have seen, a very different foundation and criterion than all other axioms) the commandment “You shall have no other gods before me!” I think and speak with theological responsibility when I know myself to be responsible to that commandment in what I think and speak as a theologian; when I perceive that responsibility as a responsibility to an authority above which there is no appeal, because it is itself the last and highest, the absolutely decisive authority. “You shall have no other gods before me!”<sup>31</sup>

I quote this passage at length because for me it has become a crucial principle for analyzing theological pretensions. This should in no way be construed as a slavish allegiance to Barth, but rather it reflects my conviction that his theological posture toward an ideology which rivals the gospel of freedom remains compelling. It seems to me that a theological account of race would, at bare minimum, have to address this dimension of the problem of race in an explicit way, whether the concern is for human dignity, preservation of an oppressed community, or the way in which racialism infects the workings of a nation-state.

I am still wrestling with and processing Carter’s huge undertaking as he seeks to lay the foundation for a theological account of race. Some of my

30 Karl Barth, “The First Commandment as an Axiom of Theology,” in *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth*, H. Martin Rumscheidt, ed. (Allison Park, Penn.: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 63-78.

31 *Ibid.*, 73.

preliminary assessments are bound to change. Though his approach to the subject of theology and race differs from my own, I am grateful for the intellectually rigorous way in which he has filled a large gap in Western Christian theology’s reflection upon racialism. Unfortunately, Carter is right in his view that Christian theological discourse has, in some ways, helped to perpetuate this theological heresy, even in the Christian church. The shame is that this collusion has been to the detriment of those peoples classified as outsiders against the norm of whiteness.

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# “THE ‘PENTECOSTALIZATION’ OF THE WORLD”: RACE, THEOLOGY, AND THE CLASSICAL PENTECOSTAL TRADITION

David Mowers

Timothy Senapatiratne

J. Kameron Carter’s 2008 book *Race: A Theological Account* attempts to answer the question raised by James H. Cone’s landmark book *A Black Theology of Liberation*<sup>1</sup>: “What makes white theology white, and what do we do about it?” Carter’s answer to what he terms “the theological problem of whiteness” is that “the languages and practices of dark people, most especially when they seek to comport themselves as Christians in the world, must be engaged in their theological specificity.”<sup>2</sup> Because Carter encourages theologians and practitioners to focus on the Christian practices and reflection of marginalized peoples, we believe that his proposal is worthy of serious engagement by Pentecostals. This is not only because we find his solution to the theological problem of whiteness helpful, but also because his proposal seems to resonate with the Christian practices and reflections associated with the rise of classical Pentecostalism. Carter himself anticipates this very move, employing imagery found in Acts 2 to claim that Pentecost represents a vision of Christian community that transcends racially construed identities. We take Carter quite literally at his word here, arguing that the “Pentecost” experienced by the first century disciples and the “Pentecost” experienced in the baptism in the Holy Spirit by the 20<sup>th</sup> century restorationist groups now termed “classical Pentecostal” shared at least one important result: the formation and empowerment of groups of believers no longer bound to culturally-enforced racial norms. These groups’ practices and reflections on the baptism in the Holy Spirit made certain racist attitudes and practices inappropriate in their communities; we believe further reflection on the practices of these groups might provide insights for escaping the problem of whiteness which Carter identifies.

Carter provides three examples of persons whose Christian language and practices potentially subverted the traditional ways of thinking about and, more importantly, doing theology by expressing a human identity which is rooted in Christ rather than in racial categories. Carter’s first two constructive examples, Britton Hammon and Frederick Douglass, struggled with the conflict between

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1 James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990).

2 Carter, *Race*, 378.

this reconstituted identity and their identity as black slaves owned and controlled by whites. Carter's final constructive chapter features Jarena Lee, an African American woman who construed the self in light of a Christology supported by her own imaginative form of exegesis. Together, these individuals simply point toward ways to undertake the theological enterprise which are not beholden to a Kantian racial metaphysics.<sup>3</sup> Our contention is that certain strands of the Pentecostal tradition provide helpful examples which complement Carter's own thesis. Furthermore, we hope that careful attention to and reflection on the practices of these Pentecostal communities might help both contemporary Pentecostals and the larger Christian world to further theologically- and ecclesially--driven discussion on the problem of racism.

After engaging with Carter's examples, we will show that William Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival, Charles H. Mason and the Church of God in Christ, and Pastor Paul and the Pentecostal Mission (formerly the Ceylon Pentecostal Mission) all provide provocative examples of a social ethic which, for a time, served as an embodied critique of dominant racial norms in their respective contexts and cultures. This paper will shed light on these social ethics — and their underlying theological assumptions — in the hope that the further analysis of the “languages and practices” of these “dark people”<sup>4</sup> might provide resources for theological discourse after Carter. We also hope that this discussion will serve as a resource for contemporary Pentecostals concerned with the problem of racism in their contexts. Before we move to these Pentecostal communities, however, we now turn to Carter's constructive chapters in *Race: A Theological Account*.

“DARK FLESH AND THE DISCOURSE OF THEOLOGY”:

J. KAMERON CARTER'S CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSAL

In the final portion of *Race*, Carter offers Britton Hammon, Frederick Douglass, and Jarena Lee as three examples of marginalized persons whose theological reflections “suggest an alternative intellectual imagination” and “offer a critique of the pseudotheological<sup>5</sup> foundations of modern racial reasoning, a critique that would reclaim Christology and, a fortiori, exegesis of the Bible from

3 Carter devotes a significant amount of space to a reading and interpretation of Kant on this particular point. We concede this discussion here for lack of space. Carter's basic premise is that modern racial identities were conceived when Kant and others separated Jesus from his ethnic identity as a Jew, paving the way to remake Christianity as a thoroughly modern, European religion, Marcionite insofar as it bore no connection to the Jewish people. These theological moves enabled Westerners to conceive of the Jews as an other, inferior race. This conception of the Jews as a race, argues Carter, comes to life fully in racial narratives about whites and non-whites. See *ibid.*, 79-124.

4 *Ibid.*, 378.

5 Carter defines the term “pseudotheological” as the “deformation of the Christian narrative grammar” by *metalêpsis* (the Greek term meaning the “use of one term for another”). Carter says that Irenaeus's description of how the Gnostics “deformed and thereby parodied Christian theology by abstracting Christianity from its Jewish roots, “is similar to his definition of *pseudotheology*. Carter believes that Irenaeus' view was

their deformed statuses.”<sup>6</sup> Carter's selection of these texts accomplishes several aims. First, each literary text represents a significant exemplar of African American literary history, allowing Carter to integrate African American literature with the more traditionally theological elements of his book. Second, Carter believes these examples highlight the theological problem of whiteness and possible intellectual responses to it; Carter claims that each example “[helps] us see that success in destabilizing race as a founding and grounding category of existence is tied to how one imagines the person of Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

Carter's constructive proposal is very clear, and we commend Carter for his selection of examples of theological discourse which not only fall outside the realm of the classically-considered theological academy, but also fall outside the range of genres generally considered theological.<sup>8</sup> However, at least one significant question is raised by the individualistic nature of these examples. None of the three figures provided by Carter can be said to bear witness to a shared form of Christian community that embodies a Christocentric identity that escapes the problem of whiteness. It may be argued that the institution of slavery simply did not allow for this sort of shared life to exist at the time each of these narratives was composed. Or, alternately, it is possible that even if this sort of shared life did exist, it would be difficult to demonstrate its existence based on the few sources we have extant. Either way, our proposal of some community-driven examples should be seen as an extension of Carter's logic on this point.

To examine one example in light of this concern, Carter's interaction with the life of Britton Hammon draws a number of conclusions. Carter establishes that Hammon's *Narrative* is theologically framed, that Hammon's story is used by others to justify American nationalism and exceptionalism, and that Hammon counternarrates this nationalistic tendency in precise opposition to Kant. Unlike Kant, who discards Christology, Hammon uses Christology to “counternarrate... the modern construction of self, nation and world and the codes of whiteness.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, Carter's use of Hammon accomplishes Carter's stated objectives of using major exemplars from African American literary history as signposts which point toward the theological problem of whiteness. This re-narration, however, does not lead to the sort of “freedom” that Hammon or Carter envisions without a convictional community whose life together bears witness to their corporate

that Gnosticism was “metaleptic or pseudotheological in character.” Carter, 385-386, n 1.

6 *Ibid.*, 256.

7 *Ibid.*

8 A similar move has been pushed for the last few decades in Wesleyan circles, as scholars who consider John and Charles Wesley to be significant theologians at the fountainhead of a distinctive theological tradition derive their theologies as such from diverse genres such as sermon, hymn, letter and journal. This same *ad hoc* theologizing must be employed as well by scholars of the Pentecostal tradition, since very little in the way of written theology as such exists. Carter's interest in (re)discovering autobiography as theological genre may prove to be helpful in both of these scholarly circles.

9 Carter, *Race*, 272-75.

identity as people of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve the world and to be reconciled to those who are culturally different.

To be clear, this critique is not (a) a critique of the content of any of the examples; (b) a critique of Carter's reading or analysis of each example; nor is it (c) a rejection of Carter's thesis and intuitions. Carter writes that "To be in Christ, both [Maximus and the early Afro-Christians considered in Carter's examples] contend, is to be drawn out of the tyrannical narratives of identity (and the social orders they uphold), such as modernity's narrative of racial identity generally and the pseudotheological narrative of whiteness particularly, and into the identity of Israel as performed in Christ's Jewish flesh."<sup>10</sup> Thus our critique of Carter is that his thesis rings is even more true when examining examples from the Pentecostal movement and their attempts to do theology outside the confining norms of theological systemization (which early Pentecostals adamantly rejected as dead and without spirit).<sup>11</sup>

"WHITE PEOPLE IMITATING THE UNINTELLIGENT, CRUDE NEGROISMS OF THE SOUTHLAND"<sup>12</sup>: WILLIAM J. SEYMOUR AND THE AZUSA STREET REVIVAL

In the City of Angels in 1906, a series of Holiness Bible studies in a small home grew in a matter of months into a thriving revival at the Azusa Street Mission, a revival featuring frequent speech in "tongues of men and angels" (*glossalalia*) along with surprising interracialism: the Azusa Street Revival drew scores of people from different racial backgrounds, worshipping under the spiritual authority of an African-American holiness evangelist. Indeed, the racial harmony evident in the early days of the revival drew praise from participants and scathing condemnation from critics: Frank Bartleman, whose autobiography remains one of the most important eyewitness accounts of the Revival, marveled that at Azusa Street, the "'color line' was washed away in the blood of Christ,"<sup>13</sup> while detractors condemned the meetings' interracial character as "blacks and

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 181; Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 9.

<sup>12</sup> Taken from Charles Parham's autobiography, this quotation describes Parham's reaction to arriving at the Azusa Street Mission in 1906. Parham's Jim Crow sensibilities were offended – to put it mildly – by the interracial worship services that he witnessed there. Sarah E. Parham, *The Life of Charles F. Parham, Founder of the Apostolic Faith Movement* (Joplin, MO: Tri-State Publishing Company, 1930), 160-63; cited in Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 100-01.

<sup>13</sup> Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 51. See Robeck's survey of the history of racism within the Assemblies of God in "The Past: Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism," *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 14 (May 2005). Accessible at <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj14/Robeck.pdf>.

whites [joining] together and [shouting] themselves into insensibility."<sup>14</sup> The interracial worship of the Azusa Street Revival, and the starkly counter-cultural form of life to which it witnessed, was presided over by William J. Seymour, to whose critique of the pseudotheological foundations of modern racial reasoning we now turn.

William J. Seymour (1870-1922) was born in Louisiana to former slaves.<sup>15</sup> As a result of poverty, Seymour moved north to Indianapolis in hopes of finding better employment. It was here in Indianapolis that Seymour, working as a waiter at several different upscale hotels, came under the influence of the holiness movement within the Methodist Episcopal Church and had a conversion experience. In the fall of 1900, Seymour moved to Cincinnati to attend God's Bible School, operated by holiness preacher Martin Wells Knapp. At least one historian believes that one of the most important factors in Seymour's decision to attend Knapp's school was that the school was "racially inclusive; blacks and whites studied side by side."<sup>16</sup> Having learned holiness theology and perhaps racial inclusivity from Knapp, 1905 found Seymour in Houston, studying with Charles Fox Parham, a holiness preacher who had begun to teach about a "baptism in the Holy Spirit," with accompanying empowerment for service and ministry along with the "Bible evidence"<sup>17</sup> of speaking in other tongues (*glossalalia*). Seymour had attended Parham's meetings, even though he was made to sit or stand at the back of the room because of Parham's insistence on following the Jim Crow laws. Parham also began teaching classes with the intention of starting a Bible school. In deference to the Jim Crow laws, Parham allowed Seymour to sit in the hallway outside his classroom and listen through the open door. While in Houston, Seymour was invited to the pastorate of a small black holiness congregation in Los Angeles. Seymour traveled to Los Angeles, but the congregation did not accept

<sup>14</sup> Whittier (*Calif.*) *Daily News*, September 8, 1906; cited in Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 228.

<sup>15</sup> Until only recently Seymour has been a neglected member of the history of Pentecostalism. Most scholars attribute this neglect to the fact that Seymour was black, and most early recorders of Pentecostal history were white. The two most important academic sources of Seymour's history are Douglas J. Nelson's unpublished dissertation *For Such a Time as This: The Story of Bishop William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 1981) and Cecil M. Robeck's *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006). Other important histories include William Menzies, *Anointed to Serve: The Story of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971) and Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*.

<sup>16</sup> Robeck, "The Past: Historical Roots," 33.

<sup>17</sup> Following Parham, many early and contemporary Pentecostals hold that the "Bible evidence" or the "physical evidence" for a person's experience of Baptism in the Holy Spirit is *glossalalia*, or speaking in other tongues. Pentecostals who hold this doctrine have generally supported it using a normative reading of the baptism in the Holy Spirit passages in Acts. That is, Pentecostals holding this doctrine interpret the Acts narrative as describing a normative experience for Christians today. Whether Seymour himself held this doctrine is contested.

his teaching of a baptism in the Holy Spirit. Undeterred, Seymour began holding a regular Bible study in the home of one of the members of the congregation. These meetings grew rapidly to the point where a building was needed. A converted stable located at 312 Azusa Street was procured, and the Azusa Street Revival, and the beginnings of the modern Pentecostal movement, was on.

Seymour's theology critiqued dominant white pseudotheology in a number of ways, but one element of Seymour's critique is especially important. Namely, there is evidence to suggest that Seymour, intentionally conscious of his African American identity, chose to establish a mission that was not based on racial identification. Describing the early days of the revival, Seymour wrote,

Very soon division arose through some of our brethren, and the Holy Spirit was grieved. We want all of our white brethren and white sisters to feel free in our churches and missions, in spite of all the trouble we have had with some of our white brethren in causing diversion and spreading wild fire and fanaticism... We find according to God's Word to be one in the Holy Spirit, not in the flesh; but in the Holy Spirit, for we are one body... If some of our white brethren have prejudices and discrimination we [Black members] can't do it because God calls us to follow the Bible.<sup>18</sup>

The most prolific historian of the Azusa Street Revival, Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., characterizes Seymour as a visionary who rejected the segregated template of society, envisioning a "multiracial, multiethnic congregation."<sup>19</sup>

In the only dissertation written on Seymour to date, Douglas J. Nelson argued that "Seymour's far sighted leadership harnessed the power related in glossalalic worship to break the color line barrier – along with other serious divisions of humanity – and created a new dimension of Christian community."<sup>20</sup> One of Nelson's unique arguments was that *glossalalia's* major function at Azusa Street was the uniting of races, rather than the endowment of power, as later white Pentecostals would interpret the event.<sup>21</sup> This argument can be supported by pointing out that Seymour's pastoral staff was interracial from the very beginning of the revival, meaning that a number of whites served under the leadership of an African American pastor, a circumstance which must be labeled noteworthy.

18 William J. Seymour, "The Apostolic Address," in *Apostolic Faith Mission of Los Angeles, California*, ed. Larry Martin vol 7 of *The Complete Azusa Street Library* (Joplin, MO: Christian Life Books, 2000), 29.

19 Robeck, *Azusa Street*, 88. Robeck adds: "In keeping with that vision, the mission quickly attracted – and for an extended period of time, it welcomed and maintained – a membership that was broadly representative of various racial and ethnic groups... it became one of the most racially inclusive, culturally diverse groups to gather in the city of Los Angeles at that time."

20 Douglas J. Nelson, *For Such a Time as This: The Story of Bishop William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival* (Unpublished Ph.D. diss. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 1981), 9.

21 *Ibid.*, 12.

Indeed, contrary to many later interpretations of the Revival, Robeck implies that the Azusa Street Mission was in essence a black church that opened its doors to the white people wanting to experience baptism in the Holy Spirit. This state of affairs continued for at least a year or two, but tensions racial and otherwise began to chip away at the Revival's vitality.

Seymour was eventually forced to limit ordination and leadership roles to black individuals, not because he had ceased to believe in interracial worship, but more because whites in leadership roles had caused too much trouble. Here is where the story turns sad. Ithiel Clemmons claims that Seymour died an unhappy man because he was unable to break down the walls of racism that existed in the American church.<sup>22</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger agrees: "For [Seymour] Pentecost meant more than speaking in tongues. It meant loving in the face of hate – overcoming the hatred of a whole nation by demonstrating that Pentecost is something very different from the success-oriented American way of life."<sup>23</sup> Evaluating Seymour in light of Carter's thesis, it is clear to see that Seymour was critiquing the segregation of Jim Crow laws as a Spirit-filled black preacher who envisioned an integrated Bride of Christ.<sup>24</sup> This integration was enabled by his theology of baptism in the Holy Spirit, which, among other things, resulted in a rejection of both cultural norms surrounding race and theologies which undergirded these racial dynamics. Seymour's vision of the interracial character of the Azusa Street Revival is a profound picture of the form of life sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit. This shared communal life, fleeting though it was, bore powerful witness to a Christology configured outside the pseudotheological foundations of much theology being done during this time.

"A SPIRITUALITY OF DELIVERANCE"<sup>25</sup>:

CHARLES H. MASON AND THE CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST

Our second example of a Pentecostal figure who successfully escaped the theological problem of whiteness is Charles Harrison Mason (1866-1961), the founder of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). Just as with Seymour above, our contention is that C.H. Mason provides an example of a black person whose

22 Ithiel Clemmons, "True Koinonia: Pentecostal Hopes and Historical Realities," *Pneuma* 4 (Spring 1982, 46-56), 54.

23 Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Development Worldwide* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 20. Hollenweger argues contra James Goff's thesis that Seymour could not be the pioneer of Pentecostalism because "his ecumenical, race- and class-transcending understanding of Pentecost was by and large unsuccessful in the United States" by saying that "with this kind of argumentation one can of course prove that Jesus Christ is not the founder of Christianity, because the Christian church very soon gave up important aspects of Christ's example and teaching" (22).

24 See one of Seymour's sermons entitled, "The Holy Ghost and the Bride," in *The Words that Changed the World: The Azusa Street Sermons* (ed. Larry Martin: The Complete Azusa Street Library, vol. 5; Joplin, MO: Christian Life Books, 1999), 115-6.

25 Ithiel C. Clemmons, *Bishop C.H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ* (Centennial Edition. Bakersfield, CA: Pneuma Life, 1996), 68.

theological reflections both escape the theological problem of whiteness through a Christologically-formed identity and give form to a distinctly Christian communal life. While marginalized by mainstream scholars in both African American studies and religious studies circles,<sup>26</sup> Mason's theology nevertheless provides a wonderfully coherent example of a theology which arose outside dominant academic, "white" theologies of his day, drawing instead upon traditions from slave religion, from the Holiness Movement, and from Seymour's Azusa Street Mission, a potent combination which led to a theologically conservative, socially radical movement which was significantly interracial through at least two decades.

The son of former slaves, Charles Mason was born in the midst of Reconstruction in Shelby County, Tennessee on 8 September 1866. The story of Mason's theology begins not far from Shelby County with perhaps the single greatest influence on Mason's theology. His parents, Jeremiah (Jerry) and Elizabeth (Eliza) Mason were devout Baptists and had significant—but different—impacts on the theology of their fifth child.<sup>27</sup> At about age nine, Mason joined his father to sharecrop in the cotton fields. Thus, early in life, Mason became personally acquainted with the injustices of the sharecropping system, the blight of intertwined racism and poverty, and the exploitation of former slaves' lack of education by white landowners.<sup>28</sup> From his mother, Mason deeply imbibed the traditions of slave religion. During slavery, Eliza Mason was the leader of a community prayer band and led her family in prayer long after emancipation. Deeply impressed with his mother's spirituality, Mason "[joined] in prayer with his mother, praying that God would give him a religion like that he had heard the former slaves talk about and [seen] manifest[ed] in their lives."<sup>29</sup>

These two strands of poverty and slave religion were to be joined by at least two more significant strands in Mason's early adulthood: the doctrine of entire sanctification from the Holiness Movement and the doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit from William Seymour's Apostolic Faith Movement. At age fourteen, Mason had a conversion experience in a Baptist camp meeting in Arkansas and was ordained a few years later. In about 1893, Mason read the autobiography of black Holiness evangelist Amanda Berry Smith and shortly after claimed his own

26 This gap in published scholarship on both Mason and COGIC is widely acknowledged; cf. e.g. Alonzo Johnson, "Researching the Church of God in Christ," in *African-American Religion: Research Problems and Resource for the 1990s* (New York: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 1992), 67-79; 69 and passim. This problem has improved slightly but not significantly in the two decades since Johnson's article; cf. the bibliographical survey in Elton Hall Weaver III, *Mark the Perfect Man: The Rise of Bishop C.H. Mason and the Church of God in Christ* (Unpublished Ph.D. diss. Memphis, TN: The University of Memphis, 2007), 3-16.

27 Weaver, "Mark the Perfect Man," 19-48, esp. 32-33.

28 Ibid., 28-32.

29 J.O. Patterson, German R. Ross and Julia Mason Atkins, *History and Formative Years* (Memphis, TN: COGIC Publishing House, 1969), 14; cited in Weaver, "Mark the Perfect Man," 36.

experience of entire sanctification.<sup>30</sup> Disagreements about entire sanctification led to Mason's departure from the Baptists and the formation of his own denomination, later called the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), in 1897.<sup>31</sup> A five week visit to Seymour's Azusa Street Mission in 1907 provided a fourth strand to Mason's theology, that of the Pentecostal baptism in the Holy Spirit. While there, Mason witnessed the interracial worship, reconciliation, and empowerment that resulted from the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and their impact upon him was profound.<sup>32</sup>

Together, this combination of experience of injustice and poverty, slave religion, Holiness sanctification, and Pentecostal reconciliation and empowerment formed a vibrant denomination which proved to be deeply attractive to the working classes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century American South. COGIC grew so rapidly that by the time of Mason's death in 1961, the denomination boasted a membership of more than four hundred thousand in the United States as well as an additional two million overseas.<sup>33</sup> Mason's theology, disseminated throughout the organization, was vital to this growth. Mason preached the importance of sanctification and living a pure Christian life, believing that this sort of life was the foundation for the transformation of the injustices of society. The influence of the Holiness movement, echoing John Wesley, can hardly be escaped at this point.<sup>34</sup> Mason

30 Anne H. and Anthony B. Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 113.

31 COGIC was cofounded by Charles P. Jones, one of the more prominent black holiness evangelists of his day. Jones and a number of clergy departed COGIC upon Mason's embracing Seymour's doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit in 1907.

32 Mason's interracialism may very well have predated his experience at the Azusa Street Mission; one possible source could have been William Christian, who founded the Church of the Living God of the Christian Friendship Workers in Wrightville, Arkansas in 1889. Christian was a popular speaker, and Weaver suggests that Mason came into contact with his style of preaching in the 1890s. Christian was arrested on at least one occasion for speaking out against racism, social oppression and denominationalism. By 1902, both Mason and Christian had founded churches in Memphis. See Weaver, *Mark the Perfect Man*, 95-97.

33 In the late 1990s, Synan called COGIC "the fastest growing denomination in America" in light of a 1996 study that put total US membership at 6,750,000 and growing at the rate of nearly 200,000 new members (in 600 new churches) every year. See Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 170, 181.

34 Contra Weaver, "Mark the Perfect Man," 99 note 23, who claims that Mason's concept of higher development "did not merely [mimic] Wesleyan, Keswick and other higher life sanctified doctrines" because Mason's teaching "surpassed inner spiritual progress and stressed progress for the entire person including mind, body and soul." We disagree Weaver's characterization of standing outside the holiness movement because he stressed the importance of the whole person rather than just spiritually-oriented, internal sanctification; indeed, we assert that this concern for the whole person in fact characterized much of the holiness movement. See Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America: Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), passim but see especially chs. 10, 11 and 14; and Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), chs. 9-10.

joined to this emphasis on sanctification a message of progress and development for blacks living under Jim Crow laws: if African-American people strove to live holy lives, then social progress would surely follow. Because of Mason's belief that Christians who lived sanctified lives would work on behalf of the poor and the socially marginalized, Mason's organization worked from its very inception to improve the conditions of poor blacks in inner-city Memphis and other major cities.

As Bishop Ithiel Clemmons characterized Mason's theology, Mason believed that the "essence of religion" was the "experience" of "knowing how to release interior powers adequate for life." In short, for Mason the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit and the accompanying empowerment for service and ministry formed the essence of Christianity.<sup>35</sup> The empowerment, provided by the baptism in the Holy Spirit,

makes it possible for both the individual and the community to substitute confidence for fear, a sense of security for a life lived for a life lived on the ragged and vulnerable margins of an oppressive society. It takes a people who thought they had to lift life's maximum load with a minimum of human strength, and transforms them into a people who through the Holy Ghost are put in touch with strength and the death-defying courage needed to lift life's load. This experience . . . inevitably affects health, integration of personality, moral drive, character, radiance and hopefulness.<sup>36</sup>

For Mason, the baptism in the Holy Spirit did not merely make it possible for blacks to live confidently in the world; it also empowered black persons to counter black classism and worship side-by-side with whites. At the same time, the baptism in the Holy Spirit provided a way for the black migrant workers in Mason's church to "freely voice their protest (social sufferings) [as *glossalalia*] without fear of white backlash."<sup>37</sup> Thus, the movement arose out of the profound social marginalization of turn of the century migrant workers in Memphis, and Mason's message of sanctification and empowerment gave shape to a Christian life that rejected the white-controlled system of oppression. Mason's theology developed a form of shared Christian community around which both blacks and whites gathered.<sup>38</sup>

35 Clemmons, *Bishop C.H. Mason*, 69.

36 Ibid.

37 Weaver, *Mark the Perfect Man*, 137, 156.

38 From 1912-1914 Mason issued ministerial credentials to "large numbers" of white ministers who were affiliated with Pentecostal bodies in other states. However, until 1916 COGIC was the only legally incorporated Pentecostal body in the United States. By 1914, these white ministers became dissatisfied with this arrangement; Synan suggests this dissatisfaction was racist in character and provided the impetus for the meetings which would eventually mark the beginning of the Assemblies of God. See Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 171-172.

As with Seymour above, Charles Harrison Mason represents a man whose theology arose out of the everyday experiences of people who lived on the "ragged and vulnerable" edges of society.<sup>39</sup> Mason's emphasis on the baptism in the Holy Spirit as providing empowerment for ministry and healing for racial reconciliation gave shape to a vibrant Christian community whose legacy extends into the present day.

We now turn to a final example of a Pentecostal community, whose theology influenced a form of shared communal life that rejected the racial metaphysics provided by modernity, living instead out of a Christologically-centered identity.

"THE OTHER LANGUAGES RECEIVED EQUAL STATUS"<sup>40</sup>:

PASTOR PAUL AND THE PENTECOSTAL MISSION

While American Pentecostalism has continued to struggle with racial injustices and inequalities, our final example is a contemporary non-American example. The Pentecostal Mission, founded in 1923 as the Ceylon<sup>41</sup> Pentecostal Mission (CPM), is an indigenous Pentecostal church which has grown dramatically, both in Sri Lanka and internationally. The Pentecostal Mission was founded by Pastor Paul, a Hindu converted under the ministry of Assemblies of God missionary Walter E. Clifford and Freda deAlwis, a Methodist, who was healed under the ministry of Clifford.<sup>42</sup> Today the church claims over nine million adherents around the world with churches in various places including India, Australia, and the United States. The genesis of the Pentecostal church in Sri Lanka began with several missionaries including Alfred Goodrich Garr, Anna E. Lewini, and Walter Clifford.<sup>43</sup> Other important people in the early Pentecostal work in Sri Lanka include Sadhu Sundar Singh and Smith Wigglesworth, who often stopped in Sri Lanka in his travels between England and Australia.<sup>44</sup>

Garr, Lewini, and Clifford all had various ties with the Assemblies of God; however, in 1923, for unknown reasons, Pastor Paul and Freda deAlwis along with a group from Clifford's church (including Freda's sister Alwin) broke away from Clifford.<sup>45</sup> G.V. P. Somaratna hypothesizes that part of the division was likely caused by Clifford's increasing imposition of the Assemblies of God's rules

39 Ibid. Cf. Carter, 374.

40 G. P. V. Somaratna, *Origins of the Pentecostal Mission in Sri Lanka* (Nugegoda: Margaya Fellowship of Sri Lanka, 1996), 43.

41 Ceylon became Sri Lanka in 1972.

42 Somaratna, *Origins*, 27-8. Somaratna's book is not readily accessible in the United States, thus another short history of the CPM can be found in Paul C. Martin, "The Ceylon Pentecostal Mission," in *Christianity is Indian: The Emergence of an Indigenous Community* (ed. Roger E. Hedlund; Delhi: Mylapore Institute for Indigenous Studies, 2004), 429-38.

43 See G. P. V. Somaratna, *Walter H. Clifford: The Apostle of Pentecostalism in Sri Lanka* (Nugegoda: Margaya Fellowship of Sri Lanka, 1997).

44 Somaratna, *Origins*, 11, 23.

45 J. Samuel Wickramaratne was a Sri Lankan colleague of Clifford who remained with the Assemblies of God after Clifford's departure from Sri Lanka. Samuel's

for foreign missions being placed on the work. This new group, under the indirect influence of Sadhu Sundar Singh, desired to create an indigenous church that would reflect the values of the Ceylonese culture rather than those of an American culture.

Today those values of culture include the wearing of white when going to church, which mirrors the practice of Buddhists in Sri Lanka, wearing white when they visit the temple.<sup>46</sup> Their forms of worship continue today to reflect their society as well. People sit on the floor when worshipping and use instruments indigenous to Sri Lanka, including traditional drums and tambourines.<sup>47</sup> One rather unusual practice is to insist that their full time workers remain celibate, which mirrors the celibacy requirements of holy men within Buddhism and Hinduism.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the Pentecostal church in Sri Lanka has served as an example of interracial mixing amidst a severe ethnic war that has plagued the country for several decades. It is not uncommon for people to come to the churches for shelter during the worst times of ethnic violence for protection. Somaratna writes,

The CPM had an identity of its own. It did not follow the European missionary societies found in Sri Lanka during this time. It was very much a Sri Lankan organization with indigenous characteristics. Although the English language played an important part in the communication among the believers, the other languages received an equal status from the beginning in the work of CPM. In an age when all the Christian organizations were managed by Europeans, the CPM was led by indigenous leadership, and was run on indigenous funds.<sup>49</sup>

Here again is an example of a Pentecostal church, this time in Sri Lanka, which has rejected the “pseudotheological-theology” of white theologians and developed their own theology that has meaningful impact in their context. By rejecting, in this case, the white theology of an American denominational structure, the CPM has developed a truly indigenous church that promotes racial and cultural harmony.

*RACE: A THEOLOGICAL ACCOUNT AND CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN PENTECOSTALISM:*  
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

As we conclude, we would like to explore two implications that this interaction with Carter’s book might have for contemporary Pentecostals. First, while we have shown in this paper that Seymour, Mason, and Pastor Paul and their communities embodied a social ethic which evidenced certain theological

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son Colton Wickramaratne effectively led an almost indigenous Assemblies of God for many years.

46 Somaratna, *Origins*, 34.

47 *Ibid.*, 40.

48 Paul M. Collins, *Christian Inculturation in India* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 161.

49 Somaratna, *Origins*, 43.

assumptions about race and diversity which may be largely absent in contemporary North American Pentecostal communities, we wonder if Robeck’s sobering assessment is correct when he writes, “In a very real sense and to a great extent, the Pentecostal Movement has lost its prophetic promise, the ability to provide a viable model in which disparate races dwell together in harmony as the reconciled people of God. This has happened due to fear of the unknown, coupled with a capitulation to contemporary culture. We have, in fact, conformed to the world.”<sup>50</sup> As Carter reminds us, doing theology within one’s own context is first and foremost a development of how one views the person of Jesus. Do contemporary white Pentecostals view Jesus as the Jewish carpenter from Nazareth whose life and death brings about the salvation of all peoples, Jewish and Gentile? Or have they conditioned themselves to worship a white, non-Jewish Jesus of American society to the point that their theology has become pseudotheological? It is imperative that white Pentecostals recover a vision of Jesus which embodies the Jewish identity of Jesus and which rejects the social structures that have worked to oppress those they most claim to serve.

A second implication concerns non-Western Pentecostals. In recent years the non-Western elements of Pentecostalism have experienced staggering growth. It is not insignificant that Yoiddo Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea has fully one-fourth the number of members as the Assemblies of God in the entire United States. The time may be ripe for a re-interpreting of the Western elements of Pentecostalism and a re-alignment of this part of the movement to its correct place as a small part of World Pentecostalism. There is a pressing need among non-Western Pentecostals to (re)imagine their theological roots as being those not bound to the “pseudotheological- foundations of whiteness”, but rather as an accurate reflection of the church envisioned by the author of the book of Acts.

For both of these groups, it is our sincere hope that serious discussion about racism and racial issues in Pentecostal communities might help Pentecostals to “once again lead the way in ecclesiastical race relations.”<sup>51</sup> One small way in which this important task can be started is through Pentecostals’ reflection upon their interracial heritage in the light of Kameron Carter’s important book.

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50 Robeck, “The Past,” 68.

51 Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 186.

# RACE AND RECAPITULATION: A CHRISTOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

Andrew M. Harmon

## INTRO: A RACIALIZED CHRISTIANITY

This article will explore Christian theology as it has influenced, shaped, and furthered a racialized expression of the American Church. To this end I will seek to challenge the false dichotomy created in America between the white and black exodus stories, which have been instantiated, in-formed, and perpetuated by a Gnostic or spiritualized Christianity. By way of solution I hold forth the ancient concept of recapitulation, explicated by the second-century church father, Irenæus, especially as it speaks to a deep Christological controversy plaguing America's talk of race. This article's contention is that the profoundly Gnostic problem of a racialized American Church can begin to be addressed by means of a renewed vision of Jesus and his Jewishness.

## GNOSTICIZING THE TEXT: COMPETING EXODUSES IN AMERICA

As J. Kameron Carter puts forth: Black theology “admirably began... in [an] effort to dislodge white supremacy and, thereby, to rename America theologically.”<sup>1</sup> This attempt by African Americans to dislodge the white, colonial establishment set in motion a new, reworked exodus story. A nuanced, black exodus narrative ran counter to the exodus narrative assumed by the European settlers, which provided a framework for understanding a young country. America was the New Israel, the Promised Land. The new settlers were freed from the throes of European “Egyptianism,” and they found themselves in the land of milk and honey. This mythos of Americanism provided lasting stability, and became deeply engrained in the nation's religious and socio-political fabric. The WASP exodus story filled the vacuum of desirable identity for colonial America. This exodus was the deliverance of God's people from Europeanism, escaping Pharaoh's bonds across the Atlantic and entering into the Promised Land; the earliest European Americans were unabashedly segregated in this exodus narrative.<sup>2</sup> It was necessary for whites and blacks to be distinct, so as to carefully conserve the deep civic religiosity of this mythos as it informed “Canaan.”

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1 J. Kameron Carter, “Christology, or Redeeming Whiteness: A response to James Perkinson's Appropriation of Black Theology,” *Theology Today* 60 (2004): 528. Cited as “Redeeming Whiteness.”

2 Carter, *Race*, 147.

The black exodus story grew out of and in stark opposition to this white story. It utilized the same biblical imagery, but its emphases are different from that of the WASPs. Contrary to white civic religion, the black exodus story was one that embraced old slave songs, whose cantors identified themselves as God's Old Israel wandering and oppressed.<sup>3</sup> Combining the early American evangelicalism of Whitefield and Edwards with the specificity of the slave context and African religion afforded blacks the opportunity to forge a reinterpreted Christianity, which lauded the Jewishness of its founder and the necessity for Old Israel's deliverance. African-American historian, Albert Raboteau, explores this dichotomy: "From the earliest days of colonization, white Christians had represented their journey across the Atlantic to America as the exodus of a New Israel; slaves identified themselves as the Old Israel, suffering bondage under a new Pharaoh."<sup>4</sup> In seeing themselves as Diaspora Jews, African Americans used the Exodus story to argue that

slavery was against God's will and that slavery inevitably would end, even though the when and the how remained hidden in the providence of God. Christian slaves thus applied the Exodus story, whose end they knew, to their own experience of slavery, which had not yet ended, and so gave meaning and purpose to lives threatened by senseless and demeaning brutality. Exodus functioned as an archetypal myth for the slaves. The sacred history of God's liberation of his people would be or was being reenacted in the American South.<sup>5</sup>

Regarding the people's identity empowered those stuck in Egypt, i.e., the slaves under the tyrannical power of oppression. And so, the "exodus became

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3 African American illiteracy, in part, dictated the interesting genesis of these spirituals. They were filled with exodus imagery. See Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 47ff. "Hindered from learning to read and write by law or by custom, slaves learned the Bible by hearing it preached. Bible passages were memorized and became part of the slaves' folktales. . . . Spirituals brought together Protestant hymns and African music styles into a distinctly creative and expressive synthesis."

4 Raboteau, *Canaan Land*, 28.

5 *Ibid.*, 32-3. "For African Americans the opposite was true: whites might claim that America was a new Israel, but blacks knew that it was Egypt because they, like the children of Israel of old, still toiled in bondage...Exodus proved that slavery was against God's will and that slavery would end someday...the slaves...like the Israelites of old, were a special people, chosen by God for deliverance" (Raboteau, *Canaan Land*, 44). See Dennis Dickerson, "African American Religious Intellectuals and the Theological Foundations of the Civil Rights Movement, 1930-35." *Church History* 74:2 (June 2005): 218-219. Dickerson writes that segregation, thusly conceived, was a "sin and an evil that was inimical to God's perfect plan for humankind." To treat one as less than *imago* is to treat them as a means rather than an end, thereby butchering "the sacredness of the human personality."

dramatically real, especially in the songs and prayer meetings of the slaves who reenacted the story."<sup>6</sup>

In attaching the ancient exodus to a modern situation of slavery, black theologies collapsed time and distance; the slaves became Old Israel, and Jesus *became* black. They longed expectantly "with the Hebrews, they traveled dryshod through the Red Sea.... They stood beside Moses on Mount Pisgah and gazed out over the Promised Land; they crossed Jordan under Joshua and marched with him round the walls of Jericho. Their prayers for deliverance resonated with the experiential power of these liturgical drums."<sup>7</sup> Faith allowed one to transcend the moment while dealing with the frustration and difficulty of the present. Blacks were the people of God and the white, American, European exodus was a barrier to slave deliverance.

The adaptation of the Israelite story—both black and white—was a unique and thoughtful application of the spiritual import of deliverance and freedom written between the lines of the text. Particular meaning was extracted from the original text such that it mattered not that the people were Israelites, but only that they were oppressed and wandering, or not that Canaan was *the* Promised Land, but only *a* promised land. White, American exceptionalism can only promote a pro-America God and a Caucasian Jesus robed in an American flag who happens to make cameos on national currency and in public prayers. On the other side, slave theology can only talk of race as something to be definitely recognized by a black God or a God that favors blacks. These moves further perpetuated a racialized Christianity in America, one driven by and beholden to social, political, or contextual constructions.

While it is hard to dispute that the African-American exodus story aided in rupturing the slave narrative, highlighted the necessities and realities of deliverance and freedom, and granted meaning to black suffering and oppression; and the white exodus story bespoke promise and hope for a developing nation, both the white and black exodus stories Gnosticize the biblical text. That is, the two competing narratives of the modern American Church parallel the heresies of the early Christian Church, which "claimed to be offering a superior and more authentic exposition of the Holy Scripture."<sup>8</sup> Gnosticism purported an alternate understanding of a dichotomous universe, a battle between evil materiality and corporality and a "higher, spiritual world which in their view was all that was excellent, the only thing worth cultivating."<sup>9</sup> It afforded adherents with a new hermeneutic, one in which Jesus, as the true power and spirit of God, was

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6 *Ibid.*, 33.

7 *Ibid.*, 33-4.

8 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus Against the Heresies* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 1.

9 *Ibid.* The Church's teaching of Jesus as one who came in the flesh was scandalous. Thus, the Gnostic solution was that "the teaching of Jesus has been mixed up by the evangelists with elements from the Old Testament, from which it must be set free" (Balthasar, 3).

pure, unfettered by fleshiness. Gnosticism thus proffered a new cosmology and anthropology, radically distinct from early orthodox teaching.

Therefore, the further these colonial exegetes—black and white alike—were from the original text and its Jewish distinctiveness, the greater the tendency to conflate God’s actions with those of the American settlers or African slaves, leaving an alternate theopolitics and concomitantly creating a false exodus dichotomy. While an adapted exodus text was not particular to colonial America, the evolution of an identity theopolitics was unabashedly modern.<sup>10</sup> Jesus’ Jewishness cannot simply be overcome to get at equality, but neither should it be a typology, which could easily become a fixation. These curious moves do little but create a Christology that undercut their very agendas.

The two American exodus stories are undoubtedly unique, for they speak to the empowerment of two different peoples in two different situations. However, they uphold the same vision of reality, working within a modern—rather than covenantal—framework so as to free the individual for autonomous purposes. Their theological origins and influences are similar, merely highlighted in distinctive places: For the white, the pursuit of the New Israel; for the black, a deliverance from Egypt and oppression. It could be argued that these are two sides of the same coin, making Canaan or Israel the center of the story rather than the God that has provided, delivered, and remained faithful. This Gnostic move is one in which Christ is reinterpreted as a racial-moral figure that is to overcome the Orient.<sup>11</sup> This thought severed Christianity from its roots, making it, as Carter says, “pro-racial . . . support[ing] the supremacy of the pneumatics over the other species of humankind.”<sup>12</sup> It is, therefore, a rational Christ figure that gives “reason for the human species to hope. . . . Herein lies the theopolitics of religion, or more specifically, of Christianity converted into modern, rational reason.”<sup>13</sup> And so, as a result of a spiritualized and Gnostic turn, Jesus’ flesh was overcome by Christ’s divinity or heavenly power.

#### RECAPITULATION: REGAINING JESUS’ JEWISHNESS

This disjointing was made possible through a rational interpretation of law and covenant.<sup>14</sup> It excised Jesus’ covenantal Jewish flesh in favor of his words of higher spiritual wisdom, and by this divine rationalized reductionism, Christ

10 See Carter, *Race*, 43-68 for a connecting the ideas undergirding sexual (or other categorical) essentialism and the racialized imagination, which helpfully emphasizes the work of Foucault (esp. *The History of Sexuality*) and Kant. Carter points to Foucault for his insights into essentialism in the West and to Kant for his ruggedly modern vision of a rationalized Jesus, which re-fuels racialized categories and perpetuates an improper theopolitics.

11 Carter, *Race*, 117. Carter highlights the idea of the rationalized Jesus as one “cloaked in occidental wisdom of oriental garb.”

12 Ibid., 22.

13 Ibid., 107, 113.

14 Ibid., 108. Carter argues that a similar move has occurred in modernity: “Christianity came to be ‘rationally’ repositioned within the framework of modernity’s

became beholden to racial imagination. Amidst this timeless issue, Irenæus holds up a counter-exegesis by envisioning

Christ’s covenantal flesh as disrupting the substantialist hierarchy of cosmological and anthropological essences that marked Ptolemæic-Gnostic thought. His goal was not simply to defeat the Gnostic argument. His larger goal was to rescue theological discourse from what in Gnostic hands it was becoming: a discourse of death, the death of embodied life.<sup>15</sup>

In speaking against Gnostic heresies of ante-Nicene Christianity, Irenæus realized the very problem encountered in modernity: Jesus, being distinctly God, was a Jewish man.<sup>16</sup> The infinite God chose to unite Godself in hypostatic union with finite humanity, so as to restore the covenant transgressed by Israel and redeem the world unto God. Irenæus saw the Gnostic grasp on the Church as a deep Christological problem, discarding of Jesus’ humanity in favor of his spiritual or mystic essence. As such, when Christ is made a revolutionary *force*, Jesus ceases to be Jewish, able to evolve into any race, gender, or ethnicity. And so, by recasting the idea of race in terms of the ancient concept of Irenæus’ Christological recapitulation, a fuller understanding of Jesus—born Jewish, yet as the Christ for the world—comes into view.

In particular, Irenæus’ Christological recapitulation deals with the severance of the covenant between humanity and the God of Israel. Jesus must not only be radical teacher, but the One in whom all things are fulfilled or summed up in order to reconstitute and redeem this fractured covenant. Recapitulation is thus the fulfilling of the covenant; it is the infinity of the God of Israel lumped together in the person of Jesus. This notion offers a unique view of holistic redemption and healing of God’s communion with humanity, a transformative concept of the *imago*’s renewal, and the fulfillment of the narratives of both Israel—including its Exodus—and creation itself.

Irenæus first maintains that his notion of recapitulation was for the healing of the world, for the salvation and restoration of all things. The need for redemption or healing was not simply a righting of the wrongs but a reconstitution of God’s covenantal relationship with creation.

For in what way could we be partakers of the adoption of sons, unless we had received from Him through the Son that fellowship which refers to Himself, unless His Word, having been made flesh, had entered into

political economy and, in the process of this repositioning was decoupled from its Jewish roots (*Race*, 80).”

15 Ibid., 23.

16 The scriptural import of Jesus’ Jewishness, by Patristic lights, is not an issue to be overcome or transcended. John’s gospel recounts Jesus’ teaching to a Samaritan woman that “salvation is from the Jews (Jn. 4:22).” The Apostle Paul explicates the connection between God’s all-encompassing salvific plan as it is connected to the Gentiles (Rom. 3:29; Gal. 3; Col. 3:11).

communion with us? Wherefore also He passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, by means of taking on flesh, God re-entered into communion with humanity. As a result, the deadened creation is thus restored, recapitulated by the work of God in Jesus Christ. Life emerges and brings incorruptible healing: God, who confers this healing, “does also confer life; and He [who gives] life, also surrounds His own handiwork with incorruption.”<sup>18</sup> As a result of Jesus’ atoning death, humanity is capable of being saved. But it is only through the summing up of things in the sinless, fleshy Christ that brokenness can be whole, and the cancerous is healed and given life.

Now blood could not be required unless it also had the capability of being saved; nor would the Lord have summed up these things in Himself, unless He had Himself been made flesh and blood after the way of the original formation [of humanity], saving in his own person at the end that which had in the beginning perished in Adam.<sup>19</sup>

It is entirely necessary that God should send or should become a man, “for as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.... as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, Irenæus offers first the concept of redemption by the recapitulation of the world through Christ’s flesh and blood, reconstituting humanity’s salvific union with its Creator.

Secondly, the recapitulating Christ, in healing the world and its covenantal connection to God, necessarily renews the *imago Dei*. That is, in Jesus all of humanity is summed up. Individuals are fully redeemed by the full God-man. Christ’s entire life, starting with the scandalous incarnation, achieves redemption, not only his atoning death and resurrection. Jesus perfects the ancient form of humanity; he retraces Adam’s steps.<sup>21</sup> That which was broken, in pain and agony, Jesus came to restore and renew by following Adam’s life, sympathizing with our weaknesses.<sup>22</sup> All of Jesus’ human expressions: hunger, weariness, and weeping, Irenæus calls “tokens of the flesh,” pointing to their necessary significance in the *imago*’s renewal: “For all these are *tokens of the flesh* which had been derived

17 Irenæus, *Against Heresies* in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1, Translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Erdmann, 1986), III.18.7. Cited as *AH*.

18 *AH*, V.12.6.

19 *AH*, V.14.1.

20 I Cor. 15:21-22.

21 *AH*, III.23.3. It is not simply that Jesus retraces Adam’s steps, but Irenæus offers a vision of those that are called to follow Christ as entering into a life caught up in the Israelite story: “...we, who have the same faith as Abraham, take up the Cross, as Isaac took up the wood, and follow Him” (*AH*, IV.4.3-4).

22 Hebrews 4:15. While many quote this verse as one that speaks to the propitiatory work of God, Jesus’ sympathy and compassion should not be overlooked. Jesus Christ is not only one who redeems, but one that has felt all of humanity’s temptation, and thus, retraced its fragmented footsteps.

from the earth, which He had recapitulated in Himself, bearing salvation to His own handiwork.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, contrary to the Gnostic heresy of ethereal knowledge and ascension to the Good, God restores the *imago* by re-doing and re-working fallen humanity’s existence.

All of life in Christ is recapitulated by the “same man, who was at the beginning made after the likeness of God.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, God could not have come in the form of any other thing.

But if the Lord became incarnate for any other order of things, and took flesh of any other substance, He has not then summed up human nature in His own person, nor in that case can He be termed flesh...but the thing which had perished possessed flesh and blood. For the Lord, taking dust from the earth molded man; and it was upon his behalf that all the dispensation of the Lord’s advent took place. He had Himself, therefore, flesh and blood, recapitulating in Himself not a certain other, but that original handiwork of the Father, seeking out that thing which had perished.<sup>25</sup>

Christ descended into humanity’s death and was not conquered as the vanquished Adam, but rose incorruptible “so we may ascend to life again through a victorious one.”<sup>26</sup> God, through Jesus, has recapitulated life and death; thus, in “summing up in Himself the whole human race from the beginning to the end, He has also summed up its death.”<sup>27</sup> For it is not only Christ’s death that brings healing, but his years of total personhood in all its delight and weakness. And so, by means of the incarnation, Jesus is the summation of every individual. Jesus, being both fully God and human, sacrifices his own body for the healing of the world, which includes the restoration of the *imago*. In him, the history of every individual is recapitulated, and the Life that has overcome death grants life to the world.

Thirdly and finally, Jesus is the *logos*, the fulfillment of the covenantal promises of God. That is, Jesus is the summing up of the narratives of Israel. He is more than the bridge between the testaments—Jesus is “unity of the testaments.”<sup>28</sup>

23 *AH*, III. 22.2. Emphasis added.

24 *AH*, V.12.4.

25 *AH*, V.14.2.

26 *AH*, V.21.1.

27 *AH*, V.23.2.

28 Balthasar, 9. Irenæus continues: “The writings of Moses are Christ’s own words. He shows this Himself when He says to the Jews, according to the testimony of John: ‘If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings how will you believe my words?’ He makes it abundantly clear that the writings of Moses are His own words” (*AH*, IV.2.3). “The founder of the Law and the Gospel is shown to be one and the same. The commandments of the perfect life are the same in the two Testaments and point to the same Lord. True, He promulgated particular precepts appropriate to each, but the highest and most excellent, without which one cannot be saved, He proposed in both Testaments” (*AH*, IV.12.3).

This is perhaps Irenæus' most poignant idea: Jesus is the perfected narrative of Israel, "the biography of this people."<sup>29</sup> That is, the incarnation of God did not sever the New Testament from the Old but rather continued the story of God's cosmic redemption. So then, the narrative of Christ, the history of Jesus, the whole story of the incarnation is the un-doing and re-working of the narrative of Israel. God is re-telling the story of redemption in Christ. It was essential then that Jesus was born in the lineage of David, birthed by a virgin, suffered upon a tree.

The Lord then was manifestly coming to His own things, and was sustaining them by means of that creation which is supported by Himself, and was making a recapitulation of that disobedience which had occurred in connection with a tree, through the obedience which was upon a tree.<sup>30</sup>

That is, the same God that had sustained Israel has reconstituted her drama by the Christ, who is Jesus. It was through the re-iteration of symbols, re-tracing of genealogies and histories, and theophanic re-interpretation, that Jesus is this recapitulation of Israel.

Further, Christological recapitulation is not simply the summary of Israel, but the summary of the entire creation, of all history. Carter follows Irenæus' argument, "Creation—contrary to the claims of the Gnostics—does not exist 'outside' of God in a region beyond the *pleroma*."<sup>31</sup> The story of Israel and that of creation are not two different stories, but one centered and summed up in the narrative of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. Israel is the abstract of creation, explicated and yet condensed in the *logos* of God. Israelite ethnicity is not therefore to be overcome or treated as an end but to be seen as an open border, a particularity of a people chosen to universally bless the world. The history of God's chosen people is therefore analogous to history of creation, which is continually replayed, and of which Christ is perfection.

This people [Israel] is an analogy of creation itself, for its existence testifies to the "contaminated" relationship between God and what God has created. The covenantal people of Israel witnesses to creation its own fruitful "contamination"

29 Carter, *Race*, 33.

30 *AH*, V.19.1. "What is joined together could not otherwise be put asunder than by inversion of the process by which these bonds of union had arisen, so that the former ties be cancelled by the latter, that the latter may set the former again at liberty (III.22.4)."

31 Carter, *Race*, 25. *Pleroma* refers to all the divine powers. Used typically within Gnostic writings, the term was occasionally interchanged with "realm of Light." Elaine Pagels has argued that Paul (e.g. Col. 2:9) upholds this notion throughout his epistles in her book, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters*. Some scholars have noted the similarities between the *pleroma* and Platonic dualism, pointing to a radically dichotomous relation between *gnosis* and materiality in both schools. This connection serves to show the borrowing of thought on ideas of ontology, personal ascent, and mystic union with the divine realm. See John M. Dillon, "Pleroma and Noetic Cosmos: A Comparative Study" in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, R.T. Wallis, ed. (State Univ. of New York Press, 1992).

before YHWH as its life-giving limit. And hence, this people cannot be superseded, for to supersede it represents the effort to establish fictive lines of purity within creation and thus supersede the Creator.<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, universality is found imbedded in the particular, but the particular is not overcome by it. Jesus, to this end, calls all nations back to himself without ceasing to be Jewish: "It is He who has summed up in Himself all nations dispersed from Adam downwards, and all languages and generations of men, together with Adam himself."<sup>33</sup> More succinctly, the many words of creation are recapitulated in the Word, in the "discourse of creation."<sup>34</sup> The person of Jesus definitively restates the utterances of myriad languages, cultures, eras, and contexts.

Christ is thus tied to all of humanity. Jesus' flesh, while of the earth, is too recapitulated in God, such that "YHWH's story with Israel is the hermeneutic of creation."<sup>35</sup> Although God is fulfilling the covenant through Jesus, the entirety of creation is nonetheless caught up in the Messiah. That is, the recapitulation of creation in Christ's flesh is, at the same time, a recapitulation of Israel, the law, and the prophets. "For in regenerating the patriarchs of Israel . . . Christ in effect became Adam again. Having passed through the theology of Israel, Christological discourse expands back out to creation."<sup>36</sup> Encapsulated in the redemptive narrative of Israel is the narrative of creation itself, the renewal of the *imago*, and the healing of the world. This implies that history itself is concentrated in God; it is an outworking of what God by nature *is*. Being and act are synonymous therefore, and Jesus Christ is the very summation of existence.

32 *Ibid.*, 30. Irenæus argues that all earthly things, Christ "recapitulated in Himself: by uniting man to the Spirit, and causing the Spirit to dwell in man, He is Himself made the head of the Spirit, and gives the Spirit to be the head of man: for through Him we see, and hear, and speak" (*AH*, V.20.2). He furthers this argument when talking of creation as a means of salvation (*AH*, V.18.1).

33 *AH*, III.22.3.

34 Carter writes: "In his interhumanity, which is intrahumanity, Jesus as the Israel of God is the living reality of the covenantal promises of the God of Israel. . . . He therefore is the discourse of creation, the one in whom all the words of creation—its differences, one might say, inhere. In the specificity of his Jewish, covenantal flesh, he is creation's life-giving limit. He is the living reality of YHWH's promises to Israel and thereby for the world. Jesus' existence, which is covenantally Jewish, is therefore Pentecostal (*Race*, 29-30). See Jn. 1:1 for an exploration of Jesus as the *logos* become flesh.

35 Carter, *Race*, 31. See Jn. 4:6, 11:35, 19:34; Matt. 26:38; Lk. 22:44.

36 *Ibid.*, 32, 33. Carter continues: "Creation itself is a concentrated expression of the love of the Father has for the eternal Son through the Holy Spirit. That is, it is a *condensed narrative* that captures without diluting the rhetorical plotline of the depths of God's love for the Son, a love that embraces within itself even that which is not God (i.e. creation)." To grasp Israel is thus to grasp creation. "Christ himself 'cuts short' the story of Israel into the resume of his own material body and historical life, only then to have this loop back to the story of creation, but now under the aspect of the second Eve. He is the biography of this people and as such is the biography of creation. But in so being, he proves to be God's own autobiography, God's writing of Godself (33)."

## CONCLUSION: RE-CHARACTERIZING GOD'S PEOPLE

But what are the implications for this Christological vision of recapitulation?

Carter is of great help here:

The words of creation are not lost in the Word of God. Rather, they pentecostally or interlinguistically articulate each other. Given this, one must not speak merely of Christ's humanity. One must speak of his humanity as an *interhumanity* that constitutes a new, *intrahumanity*. That is, Christ's humanity is the historical display of an intradivine communion between Father and Son in the Holy Spirit that itself opens up, by the same motion of the Holy Spirit in Christ's flesh, a new communion internal to human existence. In short, Christ's flesh as Jewish, covenantal flesh is a social-political reality displayed across time and space into which the Gentiles are received in praise of the God of Israel. Given this, we must say that Christ's flesh in its Jewish constitution is "mulatto" flesh. That is to say, in being Jewish flesh it is always already intersected by the covenant with YHWH and in being intersected it is always already *intra*racial (and not merely *multi*racial). Its purity is its "impurity," which is the "impurity" of its being covenantally *intersected* by YHWH as its life-giving limit. Israel is the people that exists by virtue of being upheld in being by YHWH, and in so being upheld Israel witnesses to what it means to be a creature before the Creator.<sup>37</sup>

Jesus' "mulatto" flesh captures the totality of races; his specific Jewish constitution is the multivalent representation of creation, for the Jew and Gentile alike. His *intra* and *interhumanity* transcends linguistic or skin-pigment orientation. His universally Pentecostal flesh does not obliterate a particular individuality, but imbibes specific racial orientations and genders. Essentialism, as it is maintained by this-worldly categories, is thus surpassed. Therefore, it can be upheld that the call of Christ, the baptism into the Spirit, pushes one beyond language and classification: "Language itself is restored to its original freedom to signify its Creator. Christ enacts this linguistic liberation, the release of language and thus humankind from the slavery of conquest and tyrannical possession."<sup>38</sup> Recapitulation applied is that gathering up of all of creation concentrated in God's chosen people, Israel, and finally summarized in the Jewish Jesus, who re-orientes and "constitutes a new *intrahumanity*."<sup>39</sup>

And so, recapitulation offers a vision of race beyond that which black liberationist theologies or the American civil religion of exceptionalism can grant. The Exodus story is not a narrative to be adapted to and construed by a socio-political situation, simply bespeaking deliverance and/or freedom of different people at different times. This move merely perpetuates a theopolitics that

37 Ibid., 29.

38 Ibid., 30.

39 Ibid., 29.

obliterates the uniqueness of Israel and in so doing, the Jewishness and humanity of Jesus.

Some contextual theologies have sought to recast Jesus as the epitome of counter-hegemony, a "baptismal figure" whose descent into otherness and sociality becomes the basis for specific activism and a theological movement for social change.<sup>40</sup> But past the idea of deliverance, Carter insists that Christology is at the heart of understanding the idea of race. So, while many African American theologians identify Jesus as formerly being Jewish and presently being black, Carter posits:

The Jewish humanity of the Trinitarian Son, Jesus Christ, is analogically central in this reciprocal movement of giving and receiving. Thus, far from being inconsequential, Jesus' Jewish humanity is, in fact, a crucial element in what it means to exist concretely.<sup>41</sup>

Jesus' humanity *is* of consequence and import; his identity is not fluid. Carter goes so far as to say, treating Jesus' particular humanity as an add-on "suggests the Eucharistic 'absence' of Christ."<sup>42</sup> In much of modern church talk (as was the case with second century Gnosticism), Jesus' fleshiness has become an instrument, such that it merely exemplifies counter-hegemonic potentiality; he is the one who leads us through the forest of difference.

As such, Jesus becomes a possibility and not an actuality. He is the statement of what might be (*subjunctive*) and not what *was* and *is* and *is* to come (*indicative*). Contrariwise, Carter insists that Jesus' baptism affords the covenant community not a potentiality or possibility, but an actuality. It is an event, a foray into a different way of being in the world:

One that surpasses the mode of being whose nodal points are the hegemonic and the counterhegemonic. Christ . . . *does not symbolize the existential possibility* of receiving the other into oneself so that one no longer live hegemonically. He does not symbolize how whites can be

40 Carter, "Redeeming Whiteness," 535. Furthermore, Carter "explains the implications for baptism. More than being a sign of social difference, it is a step beyond the dialectic of hegemony: "To be baptized into Christ is to move beyond the hegemonic-counter-hegemonic polarity. Indeed, it is also to move beyond the dialogical I-Thou polarity, which is but another oscillating and, finally, oppositional metaphysic. It is to move, again . . . into 'a different form of power' precisely because it is entry into a different body-politic, namely, the Trinitarian body-politic of Christ . . . [which is] a reality that is a different way of being in the world (539)."

41 Ibid., 532. Carter also adds: "Jewishness, as the history of ancient Israel attests, is not a citadel to itself. It is an open border, a border open first and foremost to God—the God who established Israel and dwells among its people (531)."

42 Ibid., 534. Carter writes: "In this [the typical black theological] view, Jesus' humanity is of no enduring value in itself. . . . It has value insofar as it is a cipher for and representation of any 'other' who has been banished to the periphery of existence."

“redeemed” by expanding their existential horizons so that “black pain and power might be at work” in them.<sup>43</sup>

To carry out the Gnostic narratives of white, colonial America or the black search for Canaan is to obliterate the actualized import of the biblical narrative. These stories dynamically and irrevocably violate the true Exodus, along with the history of all creation, nullifying the uniqueness of the God who made it. It is to personalize that which goes beyond the personal:

Though the Father’s love is uniquely directed toward the Son in the Holy Spirit and therefore in this regard is exclusive, the Father’s love is not exclusionary. It entails within it the capacity to love and create . . . and to love what is created . . . The site from which God as Creator mingles with creation yet maintains his distinction from creation is Christ’s flesh.<sup>44</sup>

So the question is not simply one of personal salvation, but rather what it means to be “welcomed into ancient Israel’s covenant with the God of Israel.”<sup>45</sup>

The competing exodus stories present in America point to the deeper and more fundamental issue of Jewish-less, ruggedly Gnostic Christology. Christianity has become and will remain largely racialized unless a truer vision of Jesus is presented, unveiling the beauty and mystery of the hypostatic union between the Creator and a Jewish carpenter of the first century. For the modern Church to be gripped by the heresies of ancient Gnosticism is to perpetuate a gulf between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, forging and foddering a racist imagination. Carter furthers this idea that the modern Christ has become a Western construct:

For at the genealogical taproot of modern racial reasoning is the process by which Christ was abstracted from Jesus and thus from his Jewish body, thereby severing Christianity from its Jewish roots. Jewish flesh in this moment underwent a religious conversion: it was converted into racial flesh, positioned within a hierarchy of racial-anthropological essences, and lodged within a now racialized chain of being. In making Christ non-Jewish in this moment, he was made a figure of the Occident.<sup>46</sup>

The same problem Irenæus sought to overturn, Carter attempts to solve: “Namely, the inferiority of the God of Israel and the Old Testament Scriptures in which the story of this God in relationship to the people of Israel is told.”<sup>47</sup> With a vision of recapitulation, the category and problem of race and a racialized Church is sharpened. God offers up the summary of all humanity, of every race in the Jewish Christ. Israel’s covenant is fulfilled, the *imago* is healed and renewed, and creation is summed up in the perfected narrative of Jesus.

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43 Ibid., 537. Emphasis added.

44 Carter, *Race*, 25.

45 Carter, “Redeeming Whiteness,” 533.

46 Carter, *Race*, 7.

47 Ibid., 26.

This article has examined the exoduses of white Europeans and black slaves and competing views of Israel and Canaan and their perpetuating Christologies. The white narrative was fulfilled when America was founded, while the black religion proposed a movement of Old Israel as a people oppressed. In the former, Christ is recast as a rationalized Western, particularly Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, while the latter vision proffers Jesus as one who evolved with God’s chosen poor, and thus became a dynamic, counter-hegemonic potentiality. But herein lies the issue at hand: Jesus, while Jewish, presented, enacted, and fulfilled the *actuality* of existence. The incarnation was not simply a unique socio-political statement of meekness in a difficult time of Roman oppression, but a scandalous statement of healing, renewal of life, and recapitulation of God’s plotline for all of history.

The “flesh [of Jesus] is the hinge, the decisive criterion” on which all of creation rests.<sup>48</sup> Ancient attempts to sever Jesus’ flesh from his Christological divinity made Christianity largely spiritualized, de-emphasizing the necessity and actuality of the incarnation, death, and resurrection. By claiming Jesus to be a high moral-spiritual teacher, God’s redemptive-historical narrative of creation explicated in the Scriptures was altered and molded to particular space and time at the expense of the text’s integrity. Carter explains the challenge: “If any one of the aspects of the concentric relationships between creation, Israel, and Christ is lost, theology as a discourse becomes distorted into a Gnostic or Gnostic-like discourse of death.”<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the Israelite Exodus must be upheld for the sake of the Gentiles, and Jesus must remain Jewish to save the world. It is not only his atoning death but his fleshly incarnation, his first-century Nazarene life, and ministry as Rabbi that informs the entire cosmos of God’s fulfillment of Israel’s covenant, making all creation new, recapitulating and summing up all peoples, languages, and races in Christ.

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48 Balthasar, 3.

49 Carter, *Race*, 34.

# WOMANIST THEOLOGY AND ETHICS: BLACK WOMEN'S POVERTY AND THE INCREASING SIGNIFICANCE OF CLASS

Keri Day

Within womanist theology and ethics, theoretical discussion of “class” in relationship to poor black women begs for greater voice. Emerging as a critique to white feminist theology and black liberation theological scholarship, womanist discourse has charted the interlocking oppressions that black women uniquely encounter and endure in North America. Challenging early white feminist theology for its absence of racial analysis within its theological production, womanist theology and ethics also castigated black liberation discourse for not integrating gender into its analysis of racial oppression, which tended to silence the voices of black women and their authentic experiences of oppression. For womanist scholars, black women inhabit social spaces wherein their gender, race, class, and sexuality interact in structuring their experiences of oppression. Because these variables are interlocking and mutually expressive of black women's lives, one must analyze how these oppressions impinge upon the life-chances of black women.

Womanist scholarship constructively articulates the historical blight of black women and their subsequent longings for justice and liberation. However, this discourse would do well to explore the increasing significance of class, particularly when turning to the contemporary problem of black women's poverty in North America. Although womanist theo-ethical discourse provides analysis of the manner in which cultural representations and constructs contribute to the socio-economic subordination of poor black women, womanist theology and ethics would do well to provide a critique of the American political economy in order to address how cultural inequalities and economic inequities collude in excluding poor black women from the *objective goods* (shelter, food, clothing, etc.) and *subjective ends* (cultural respect, friendship, care, etc.) needed to flourish. Poor black women's experiences of deprivation cannot be singularly understood by racial and gender explanations. Class inequalities, exacerbated by the American political economy and its neo-liberal interests, have equally intensified the deprivation of these women.

This essay makes a central claim. The claim is this: womanist theology and ethics can better theorize poor black women's lives by exploring the relationship between culture and economy. Only through exploring the relationship between culture (for this essay, cultural representations) and political economy can one discern how cultural aspects of race, gender, sexuality, and the like converge

with economy in structuring the life-chances of poor black women. Alongside exploring the relationship between economy and culture, womanist theo-ethical discourse would also do well in attending to the lived experiences of poor black women in order to theorize about these women's lives and their modes of transcendence.

In order to substantiate this claim, I briefly review the manner in which womanist theologians and ethicists have deployed cultural arguments in explaining the poverty of black women. Though these cultural arguments are important in assessing black women's poverty, these women's poverty should not be *reduced* to such cultural aspects. Instead, exploitative attitudes and practices within the American political economy equally exacerbate poor black women's deprivation. I turn to black sociologists Patricia Hill Collins and Marcellus Andrews in discussing how a post-industrial political economy and its neo-liberal interests<sup>1</sup> perpetuate an American underclass, which includes persons across racial categories although poor black women are disproportionately represented. The American political economy and its neo-liberal interests collude with demeaning cultural representations and images of poor black women in exacerbating their poverty. Finally, I offer a constructive way forward for womanist theology and ethics in theorizing poor black women's modes of transcendence. Taking seriously Linda Thomas's heuristic suggestions of deploying ethnography in relationship to poor black women, I reinforce the importance of ethnographic approaches, which privilege poor black women's lived experiences in theorizing their lives of deprivation and the ways in which they make-meaning within their daily lives.

#### CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS AND BLACK WOMEN'S POVERTY

Womanist discourse has offered substantial critiques of cultural representations that are most often associated with poor black women and their families. Womanist theologians and ethicists such as Cheryl Townsend Gilkes and Kelly Brown Douglas provide insightful cultural critiques in relationship to poor black women in order to render visible black women's unique experiences of socio-economic oppression, which are qualitatively different from black men. Gilkes provides a contemporary critique of cultural representations that thwart

1 The term "neo-liberal interest" refers to hegemonic interests that undergird a vision of society wherein competition of wealth is the dominant value and social decisions are made by unregulated markets. For example, neo-liberal interests are integral to the myth of meritocracy which contends that personal success or failure is solely based on individual merit alone related to work, savings, investment, risk and the like. This meritocratic myth however does not uncover the institutional and structural constraints that impede individual flourishing, particularly flourishing among the most vulnerable members of society. This myth does not disclose how neo-liberal interests govern socio-economic structures and practices of American political economy. For more information on neo-liberal hegemony and its interests, see Dieter Plehwe, Bernhard J. A. Walpen, Gisela Neunhöffer (eds.), *NeoLiberal Hegemony: A Global Critique* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

African-American women's sense of thriving and flourishing. She states, "[An] image, associated with the covers of *Newsweek* and *Time*, is the image of the impoverished welfare mother, the resident of public housing projects, the teenage mother, and the neglectful, crack-addicted mother, usually rolled up into one monstrous body."<sup>2</sup> For Gilkes, such cultural representations of poor black women inhibit their quality of life. Because poor black women are rendered "monstrous" within American cultural life, measures towards justice and flourishing for these women are frustrated.

Whereas Gilkes acknowledges that cultural representations adversely affect poor black women's lives, Douglas delineates how cultural representations of poor black women such as jezebel, sapphire, and welfare queen contribute to these women's social, political, and economic subordination. In *Sexuality and the Black Church*, Douglas delineates the "Jezebel/Welfare Queen" cultural image that perpetuates the socio-economic and cultural subordination of poor black women. She states that "welfare mothers are characterized as promiscuous unmarried women who sit around, collect government checks, and give birth to a lot of children."<sup>3</sup> Douglas maintains that because the welfare mother image represents a woman of low morals and uncontrolled libido, poor black women are interpreted as perpetrators of their own impoverished status. They become the culprits of their economic woes.

Douglas gives a wonderful example of how the welfare image plays out in cultural and political discourses. The example of Clarence Thomas's speech at a conference in 1980 is worth quoting at length. She writes:

While still a congressional aide, Thomas shamelessly attacked the character of his sister, Emma Mae Martin. In front of a 1980 San Francisco conference sponsored by Black republicans, he depicted Ms. Martin as a quintessential welfare queen. He painted a false picture of her as a stereotypic Black breeder woman who shirks responsibilities for her children by going on welfare and consequently models this slothful behavior to her sons and daughters. He announced to laughter that his sister "gets mad when the mailman is late with her welfare check. That's how dependent she is. What's worse is that now her kids feel entitled to the check, too. They have no motivation for doing better or for getting out of that situation."<sup>4</sup>

Douglas explains the manner in which such cultural images are deployed in order to perpetuate a broader hegemonic logic used in service to social and economic institutions. Douglas notes that, "most significantly . . . the Black woman as welfare mother remains essential to White hegemony because the

2 Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't For the Women* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 197.

3 Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 53.

4 Ibid.

white culture blames the woman for her impoverished condition and again deflects attention away from White, racist, patriarchal structures.”<sup>5</sup> Douglas identifies how white American culture makes black women morally culpable for their poverty and deprivation, which ignores the real interests that white, racist, patriarchal structures have in maintaining the subordination of poor black women.

For Douglas, such cultural images that reinforce the socio-economic oppression of poor black women not only mystify objective reality on oppressive material conditions of these women but also function to “make White supremacy appear not only necessary but also natural, normal, and an inevitable part of everyday life.”<sup>6</sup> I agree with Douglas that these cultural representations are critical to the perpetuation and reinforcement of poverty among black women. I also agree with Douglas’s insights on how these cultural representations function as ideological distortions that mask the real interests involved in maintaining free-market ideology and its economic practices. Although Douglas acknowledges hegemonic cultural and economic practices, she reduces such practices to a re-instantiation of white supremacy (racist, patriarchal structures). However, I question whether oppressive economic practices that are upheld by free-market fundamentalism can be reduced to the over-arching logic of white supremacy.

Even though white supremacy plays a role in how race converges with gender and class, it is not *the* factor that grounds poor black women’s economic oppressions in the twenty-first century. White supremacy is one factor among other more non-racial, economic variables that contribute to the reasons *why* such cultural representations are used in the perpetuation of these women’s poverty. For example, the welfare queen image is not only deployed to maintain white supremacy, but is also used to reinforce free-market hegemony, which has interests beyond racism, as it affects persons across racial categories. When turning to shifts in the American political economy over the last four decades, one can see the ways in which political economy has exacerbated class inequalities, contributing to a growing American underclass.<sup>7</sup> Poor black women’s deprivation is best explored by turning to the relationship between such demeaning cultural representations and the economic inequities an American underclass continues to endure.

#### AMERICAN POLITICAL ECONOMY & ITS NEO-LIBERAL INTERESTS: BEYOND RACE-BASED ANALYSIS

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., 31.

7 An “American underclass” refers to a class of persons not incorporated into conditions that make class standing possible. This American underclass population suffers from a lack of participation in modes of production and division of labor. Moreover, this underclass population is often unemployed or under-employed; uneducated or under-educated; overly incarcerated; and homeless. Because of these problems, this population tends to experience intergenerational cycles of deprivation and poverty. What is important about the American underclass phenomenon is that it is not solely a “black problem,” as it comprises persons across racial groups.

Over the last four decades, economic inequities have been exacerbated by shifts in the American political economy as well as neo-liberal interests, which have affected poor groups across racial lines. Marcellus Andrews’s *The Political Economy of Hope and Fear: Capitalism and the Black Condition in America* describes the American underclass phenomenon as not reducible to a distinctively “black problem.” Andrews argues that racism abets the more basic problem of class inequalities among poor black communities because of the “shift in the structure of the American economy toward a knowledge-and-technology driven system that offers huge rewards to brains over brawn, [which adversely affects most of the poor regardless of race] because they remain an industrial labor force in a post-industrial country.”<sup>8</sup> This post-industrial economy is characterized by a greater demand for skilled labor and educated workers, which has led to a decline in the prospects for unskilled and modestly educated workers who are white, black and Latino.<sup>9</sup> In fact, growth of wage inequality *across color lines* reflects an underlying shift in the fortunes of skilled and unskilled workers since the 1960s.<sup>10</sup>

Because a wider post-industrial political economy is a knowledge-based and technologically-driven economy, the most qualified must have access to quality education, which is often denied to poor communities across racial affiliations. Consequently, the economic duress that poor black women endure is generated, in large part, by economic shifts that cannot be captured by racial terms alone. Dissimilar to scholars that attribute black poverty solely to white racism, Andrews maintains that the impoverished black condition in America is connected to capitalistic structures that have economically left behind an American underclass, pointing to greater class disparities that cut across racial lines in the twenty-first century.

Patricia Hill Collins also rejects the sole usage of racial/gender explanations to explain black women’s poverty. She notes that class became more significant among poor black women and men from 1970 onward. She writes that

It became increasingly clear that many problems that US Blacks faced were not due solely to racial discrimination. While many African-Americans benefited from the changed legislative climate, many others did not. Class factors were equally important. Many Blacks endured downward social mobility from the working class center. The downwardly mobile—those who lost their jobs and failed to find new ones—joined a growing population of poor Blacks that had been on the bottom all along. This growing group on the bottom, often referred to

8 Marcellus Andrews, *The Political Economy of Hope and Fear: Capitalism and the Black Condition in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 3.

9 Ibid., 23. Also refer to William Julius Wilson’s *The Truly Disadvantaged* and *When Work Disappears*. Wilson offers a succinct analysis on the problems of a black urban underclass, which is tied to a larger American underclass that goes across racial categories.

10 Ibid., 22.

as the “Black underclass,” was not the cause of Black economic disadvantage but, instead, constituted one outcome.<sup>11</sup>

Similar to Andrews, Collins acknowledges that there are intra-group differences within the “black community” in terms of life-chances and opportunities. While Civil Rights legislation benefited a group of middle-class blacks in the 1960s, such race-based legislation did not ameliorate the poverty of urban and rural blacks, who were being marginalized due to larger issues of American political economy. Into the twenty-first century, poor black women are still severely impacted by neo-liberal economic structures that frustrate their opportunities to thrive. Poor black women (as well as men) within an American underclass continue to spiral downward in terms of social mobility, which necessitates an exploration of economic hegemony in relationship to cultural oppression.

In particular, Collins notes that the poverty of black women has been intensified by the restructuring of the global political economy. Beginning in the late 1960s, the exporting of jobs to non-unionized American and foreign markets affected black women’s ability to find adequate paying jobs, particularly black women in urban areas. Job creation in suburban communities and outsourcing labor to foreign countries due to low wages and low-cost labor continue to adversely affect poor black women, who are unskilled workers that once depended on manufacturing employment.<sup>12</sup> Yet, this restructuring of the global political economy has also equally impacted an American underclass or poor communities across racial groups. Consequently, the economic experiences of an American underclass are central to understanding black women’s poverty. Poor black women are one group among other racial groups that have been affected by economic restructuring in the last four decades.

Although poor black women’s experiences of poverty reflect the economic hardships of a larger American underclass, I do want to maintain that the convergence of race, gender and political economy does reveal a different experience of poverty among poor black women within an American underclass. Andrews asserts that blacks “were so badly discriminated against by historic American racism that they were unprepared for the sea change in the American and world economy that has utterly transformed our lives over the past three decades.”<sup>13</sup> He notes that because blacks have been historically oppressed by white supremacy, when such economic shifts occurred, “black people were completely unprepared for, and unable to take advantage of these shifts.”<sup>14</sup>

While racism or white supremacy is significant to the experiences of poor black women, it is not what grounds these women’s deprivation into the twenty-first century. Although racism is integral to the impoverishment of black women,

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11 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 59.

12 Ibid., 59.

13 Ibid., 60.

14 Ibid.

it is important to acknowledge that “even if every racist white person in this country had a change of heart or moved abroad, most poor black people would be exactly where they are right now in the absence of major changes in government policy to address issues of poverty and economic inequality across color lines.”<sup>15</sup> Because neo-liberal economic institutions and structures within a post-industrial political economy hinder structural opportunities for an American underclass, combating white supremacy alone will not lift poor blacks out of poverty. There must also be a turn to critiquing economic structures and practices that vitiate the life chances of many racial members within an American underclass.

Collins and Andrews seem to be debunking a certain logic that makes racial oppression determinate of black poverty. Racial oppression is often articulated as the fundamental injustice that structures the poverty of blacks in America. For example, although womanist literature acknowledges the intersectional oppressions of race, class, and gender that black women confront, they do not uncover the complexities of how race, gender and class converge in defining the life-chances of poor black women locked within an American underclass contrasted with middle-to-upper class black women’s life-chances. The contemporary blight of poor black women is often collapsed into the historical oppression of black women in America, which obscures intra-group differences in terms of life-chances among black women. I appreciate Collins and Andrews’s nuanced articulation of the complexities associated with the manner in which American political economy adversely affects a black underclass and its experiences of poverty. I also agree with Andrews and Collins’s assessment that the American underclass phenomenon and its problems of unequal economic structures go beyond race, as this permanent class affects poor whites and Hispanics as much as poor blacks (although blacks are disproportionately represented).

I find Collins and Andrews’s contentions important for addressing poor black women within womanist theology and ethics. Poor black women’s experiences of cultural inequalities and economic inequities disclose how culture and economy converge in impeding their sense of flourishing, which points to factors beyond white supremacy and patriarchy. *Class possesses profound significance for these women.* In fact, poor black women’s experiences are qualitatively different than upper-to-middle class black women in terms of socio-economic life-chances, which throw into question the over-determinacy of racial explanations on black women’s poverty. While race and gender converge with poor black women’s experiences of economic inequities, these women primarily encounter the adverse effects of neo-liberal economic structures, which frustrate their ability to secure the objective goods (food, clothes, shelter, etc.) and the subjective means (cultural respect, reciprocity, etc.) needed to thrive.

For example, Kalina, a poor black woman, endures cycles of deprivation partly due to the absence of a living wage. Though race and gender may contribute to Kalina’s experience of wage discrimination, the absence of a living wage is due to free-market ideology that economic elites employ to protect their own interests

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15 Ibid.

of profit maximization. Free market ideology contends that social, economic, and political freedom can be secured by self-regulating markets. However, this logic does not account for the ways in which unregulated markets generate gross inequalities and inequities that circumscribe freedoms for vulnerable members within society. Wage discrimination reflects free-market logic aimed toward larger economic interests and goals, which affects poor communities across racial categories. Therefore, Kalina's experience of deprivation due to wage discrimination cannot be captured solely by a race-based analysis. An analysis of the American political economy and its neo-liberal logic (such as free-market ideology) must be explored in understanding the deprivation women such as Kalina endure.

Womanist discourse would do well to provide a critique of American political economy in disclosing the unique experiences of poverty among black women in order to debunk current free-market ideology that continues to blame poor black women for their impoverishment. Andrews and Collins disclose how neo-liberal economic structures intensify and exacerbate the poverty of black women in America. Black women's poverty is not due to their indolence and personal irresponsibility but is due to an absence of structural opportunities which impedes their flourishing and thriving. Moreover, black women's poverty should not be reduced to problems of white supremacy and patriarchy. Because current economic systems collude with destructive cultural constructs such as racism, it is important to explore how a post-industrial political economy perpetuates material miseries for these women. Womanist theology and ethics will be able to theorize poor black women's lives more rigorously when exploring class and its increasing significance for these women.

#### ACCOUNTING FOR POOR BLACK WOMEN'S MODES OF TRANSCENDENCE

Exploring the relationship between culture and economy allows womanist theology and ethics to better theorize poor black women's lives. These women are adversely affected by both cultural hegemony and neo-liberal economic institutions that continue to exacerbate cycles of poverty for them and their families. Although poor black women endure socio-economic and cultural deprivation, they are not determined by such deprivation. Womanist theology and ethics charts out how black women transcend their circumstances, disclosing their agential capacities despite such oppressions. When speaking about black women's modes of transcendence, I take up Victor Anderson's notion of transcendence as a conceptual short cut "referring to the ends and goods which contribute most generally to human flourishing."<sup>16</sup> Poor black women deserve to experience flourishing by securing both subjective and objective goods. While the language of transcendence is not intrinsically theological, it can be interpreted theologically – that is, transcendence can take on religious meaning within conceptual

<sup>16</sup> Victor Anderson, *Pragmatic Theology: Negotiating the Intersections of an American Philosophy of Religion and Public Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 59.

frameworks of religious experience.<sup>17</sup> Within the conceptual framework of poor black women's religious experiences, I refer to transcendence as poor black women's ability to be agential and make-meaning despite debilitating, inhumane socio-economic conditions.

Womanist theology and ethics has delineated the diverse historical ways in which black women have transcended the blight of interlocking oppressions such as racism and sexism. Womanist theology is a theology of hope and transcendence that is grounded in black women's defiance and disruption of power and privilege. For instance, Marcia Riggs' discussion of the black women's club movement and its work against racism, sexism, and classism disclose the ways in which these women came together to transcend white racism and make-meaning despite the ideological oppression and material deprivation blacks experienced in the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> Womanist discourse confirms that many black women have subverted and continue to challenge hegemonic realities and relations of power in order to experience transcendence. From slavery to American apartheid in the 1960s, black women demonstrated that they were able to sing songs of hope and fulfillment in the very heart of darkness. When the forces that raged against them seemed implacable, when God seemed silent, and when structural evil and corruption seemed like they had won the day so that all possibilities were shut down, many black women believed, defied, and disrupted hegemonic circumstances and conditions.

While womanist discourse provides historical accounts of black women's agency and moments of transcendence, this discourse would do well to attend to the contemporary realities and lived experiences of poor black women who endure economic and cultural oppression on a daily basis yet make-meaning within such conditions. Alongside exploring the relationship between culture and economy, poor black women's subjective interests, needs, and desires toward fullness of life and meaning are of paramount importance. I would like to return to a suggestion that Linda Thomas, a cultural, womanist anthropologist of religion, offers to womanist theologians and ethicists as they theorize about poor black women's lives and their pursuits for fullness of life.

Thomas argues that turning to the lived experiences of poor black women is essential for theorizing their lives and modes of transcendence. Thomas challenges womanist methodologies to integrate ethnography into its methods in order to make good on its own claim, namely, that its theology emerges out of the lived experiences of poor black women. In *Under the Canopy: Ritual Process and Spiritual Resilience in South Africa*, Thomas describes the experiences of poor South African women at St. John's Apostolic Faith Mission Church just outside of Cape Town, in Guguletu. In Guguletu, at St. John's, she listens to the testimonies and lived experiences of poor people "who earn less than 178 Rand (R) (U.S. \$51) per month," and "who create meaning in their lives through rituals of healing despite the poverty, unemployment, and violence that they endure." Even though

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>18</sup> See Marcia Riggs, *Awake, Arise, and Act* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1994)

Thomas does not apply her ethnography to poor black women within the United States, her heuristic suggestions for conceptualizing poor black women's lives by a turn to ethnography, nevertheless, can be useful to womanist theo-ethical discourse.

Thomas posits that while womanists have used texts, literature, and history in their theo-ethical constructs, it is equally important to use ethnographic *procedures* that allow Black women's testimonies to be a source of doing womanist theology. "Not only should womanist scholars include historical texts and literature in our theological constructs and reconstruction of knowledge," says Thomas, "but we should also embrace a research process which engages poor black women who are living human documents."<sup>19</sup> Thomas contends that the benefit of ethnography allows researchers to access the direct speech of women as primary textual narratives. In addition, their narratives allow poor black women's voices to emerge void of the researcher's interpretations.<sup>20</sup> For Thomas, "we can view books written about poor black women as secondary sources and employ anthropological techniques to collect stories and publish ethnographies of women who are still alive."<sup>21</sup>

Sources such historical autobiography, journals, research reports, and sociological statistics are invaluable sources in theorizing about poor black women's lives. I also agree with Thomas that ethnography is equally indispensable to understanding poor black women's subjective interests, needs, and desires toward spiritual meaning, transcendence and flourishing within political economy and culture. Ethnography is one necessary source among other essential sources that can be used to ascertain the manner in which poor black women experience deprivation and make meaning within their daily lives. In order to avoid theorizing poor black women's lives and moments of transcendence in a non-contextual way, womanist theo-ethical discourse would do well to utilize ethnographic approaches.

Thomas's suggestion that womanist theo-ethical discourse employ ethnographic procedures when speaking about poor black women is significant. The significance is this: poor black women's lived experiences, moments of transcendence, and meaning-making check how histories and narratives of these women are constructed and articulated. A suggestion that I draw from Thomas's position is that providing interpretive spaces within womanist theo-ethical discourse in which the lived experiences of poor black women can be articulated *gives substantive grounds on which to theorize these women's lives and their pursuits toward fullness of life*. For me, Thomas's heuristic suggestions offer some elements for a theoretical conversation on exploring how oppressions converge within the daily lives of these women as well as how they transcend such oppressions.

Marla Fredrick's ethnographic work, *In Between Sundays*, concretizes Thomas's heuristic suggestions by providing insight into how poor rural black

women experience deprivation and the ways in which they make-meaning in their daily lives. Fredrick discloses how poor rural black women make-meaning and subvert neo-liberal rhetoric through their spirituality. Fredrick explores the role of spirituality in the cultural production of rural black women's activism in Halifax County, North Carolina. As a poor rural area of the U.S. South, Halifax can be described as a place where racial divisions and economic injustices still threaten the economic stability and flourishing of most black residents. She remarks that blacks in Halifax endure social conditions that are "often characterized by limited access to job opportunities, community-health, health care, and equitable schooling."<sup>22</sup> She notes that poor black women in this county continue to use their faith and spirituality to influence and respond to such inhumane, social conditions. Fredrick asserts that studying the role of *spirituality* in these women's lives uncovers a key component of their motivation for acting in the world that liberationist notions of "religion" may not highlight, which may affect what analytic categories liberationist discourses might deploy as interpretive devices.<sup>23</sup>

Fredrick is treating these poor rural black women of Halifax as individuals who themselves articulate a form of spirituality that may be different from the black radical faith of liberationist theologies. The eight women's idea of spirituality, whom Fredrick studied, moves beyond liberationist notions of an exclusively political and radical black faith because it allows for what some refer to as desires that may seem "antithetical to power," such as love, tenderness, and the search for communion.<sup>24</sup> For these women, the idea of spirituality "conveys creativity, the ability to invent, to re-interpret, to move beyond some of the limitations of ritual and static notions of religiosity."<sup>25</sup> For example, Lynne did not trust the institutional life of the black church. Rather, she worked within the Citizens of Tillery, North Carolina (CIT), a community organization that promoted social action related to industrial inequities and other injustices citizens of Halifax experienced. My understanding is that Fredrick is saying that the world refashioned by these women did not always coincide with traditional interpretations of black faith as radical politics in connection with black church spaces, characteristic of liberationist theological expression.

Instead, the communities that these women create and the personal transformation they inspire speak to the agential and transcending possibilities of their faith.<sup>26</sup> Such ethnographic awareness discloses the complexities and ambiguities entailed in the variegated, pluralistic religious experiences of these women of Halifax County. Fredrick suggests that traditional categories of "religion" that might be deployed in explaining poor rural black women's experiences of faith might be re-thought in light of their lived experiences of *spirituality*. Moreover, as I read her, it is important to resist the imposition of

22 Marla Fredrick, *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), ix.

23 Ibid., 12.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 10.

26 Ibid., 12.

19 Linda Thomas, "Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm," in *CrossCurrents* 48, issue 4 (Winter 1998-1999), 7.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

categories on poor black women's experiences by turning to these women's lived realities. Finally, Fredrick's model may also be suggesting for careful readings of the lived experiences of poor black women, to see how they make spiritual meaning within their oppressive socio-cultural contexts.

Womanist theology and ethics can better theorize poor black women's lives not only by exploring the relationship between culture and economy but also by attending to the lived experiences of these women. Although poor black women experience both cultural hegemony and neo-liberal economic oppression, they are not over-determined by such socio-economic domination. Many of these women make-meaning on a daily basis, transcending their circumstances. Thomas and Fredrick's ethnographic suggestions provide an interpretive framework for womanist theology and ethics in articulating poor black women's blight and pursuit toward meaning and flourishing within capitalistic arrangements.

#### CONCLUSION

By having more theoretical discussions on "class," womanist theology and ethics can better theorize poor black women's lives and their modes of transcendence and meaning-making. I am certainly challenging the over-determinacy of cultural arguments (i.e. race and white supremacy) in describing the poverty of black women in North America. During the second half of the twentieth century, the historic reality of racial conflict and oppression singularly determined the life-chances and socio-economic opportunities of most black communities and therefore poor black women. However, into the twenty-first century, class and neo-liberal political-economic structures have become of increasing significance to the plight of poor black women in which these women may have more in common (in terms of economic life-chances) with poor white and Hispanic women than with upper-to-middle class black women. Poor black women experience cultural attacks and economic isolation that perpetuate intergenerational cycles of poverty for them and their children. Yet, many of these women remain resilient as they make-meaning within their daily lives, transcending such debilitating conditions. Womanist theology and ethics can bring to light and to coherence the unique experiences of deprivation poor black women endure as well as their modes of transcendence toward meaning and flourishing.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 504 pages. \$35.00 (hardcover).

J. Kameron Carter's book on race was published in the auspicious year of 2008, when Barack Obama was elected president of the United States. It could not have come at a better time.

Despite its ubiquity in all dimensions of U.S. life, few scholars have explored the theological origins of race as a phenomenon. Carter's approach in his long-awaited treatise on the subject is quite different from what most of his readers might expect. Instead of beginning with a discussion of the European encounter with Native Americans and Africans, Carter begins with the discipline of theology.

Carter is primarily interested in how theology contributed to the process by which humans came to be viewed as racial beings, and thus was a willing ally in the modern project of empire building. He contends that theology reconstituted itself in order to establish race as the defining characteristic of modernity. This shocking claim establishes Carter's argument as a revolutionary critique of theology's affirmation of modernity as a racial project.

More specifically, Carter argues that modernity's racial imagination originated in the process by which Christianity was severed from its Jewish roots. The modern West began viewing Jews as an alien, inferior race and their religion as the nemesis of Christianity. This type of reasoning implied the natural supremacy of white European peoples and the corresponding superiority of Christianity over Judaism. Carter's thinking dovetails to some extent with Cornel West's critical race theory and Michel Foucault's theory of sexuality.

Carter views Immanuel Kant as the theorist who provided the philosophical grounding for modernity as a racialized theological project. By placing white Europeans at the apex of the human order, Carter claims, Kant constructed a worldview that substituted whiteness for the doctrine of creation, a viewpoint that Western theologians readily adopted. Yet Carter fully realizes that the political dimensions of Kant's worldview were set in motion three centuries earlier by both European colonial expansionism in the Americas and the enslavement of African peoples. He concludes that Kant's racial theory is unintelligible apart from those earlier conquests of nonwhite peoples.

Going yet farther back in history, Carter discerns parallels between contemporary struggles against "European whiteness" and Irenaeus's second-century struggle against the Gnostics. Both the Gnostics and modern racists were bent on extricating Christianity from the Jewishness of Jesus; both distorted the theology of God's incarnation in a Jewish body to exemplify the covenantal relationship between the Jews and their God.

In short, Carter sees many similarities between the anti-Gnosticism of Irenaeus and the antiracism of African-American Christianity, as well as similarities between their respective Christologies. Both Irenaeus and African-American Christianity strive to dismiss all notions of Christian supersessionism and to restore God's covenantal relationship with the Jews as the anti-Gnostic and nonracist canopy under which all true Christians should live.

In his opening discussion of what he calls the drama of race, Carter lays out the modern problem of whiteness, discerning its genesis in the theopolitical wrestling of the Western world with the so-called Jewish question. He concludes that the modern problem of race cannot be understood apart from a full account of modernity's struggle to alienate itself from Jewish history, and that race, religion and the discourse about the modern state are thus integrally related. Any discussion of race and modernity, he contends, should give primacy to theological grounding.

Carter next analyzes appreciatively the scholarship of three African Americans who have engaged the problem of racism: Albert Raboteau, James Cone and Charles Long. He praises Raboteau's impressive insights in *Slave Religion* and other works, but notes the ambiguity that attends Raboteau's inability to move beyond the racial framework of blackness, which appears to be a cultural reflex of the problem of race that whiteness created.

Though Carter sees much to be admired in Cone's black liberation theology, he contends that his own approach goes beyond Cone's work, which leaves whiteness in place by converting blackness into a cultural power. Carter concludes that only a Christian theology of Israel grounded in the nonracial flesh of Jesus can overcome the theological problem of whiteness and transcend the binary categories of blackness and whiteness.

Carter's critique of black theology prepares the way for him to relate his own thinking to that of Charles Long, for whose "groundbreaking" thought he has the highest regard. Yet he finally concludes that Long's thought stands at odds with his own theology because Long's understanding of the opacity of blackness enables no encounter or conversation with the theology of whiteness. The aesthetic of black opacity, Carter concludes, simply mirrors the pseudo-theological aesthetic of whiteness.

After analyzing the work of Raboteau, Cone and Long, Carter pauses for what he calls an "Interlude on Christology and Race," a discussion of fourth-century church father Gregory of Nyssa, who, much to the surprise of many in his day, called for the abolition of slavery. Carter undertakes a rigorous exploration of Gregory's theological consciousness to account for his peculiar reading of scripture. Because Gregory recognized the Jewish Jesus Christ as the image of God, he viewed all humans as created in that image. He taught that existing in Christ entails being drawn into the covenantal relationship that God established with the Jews. That relationship is constitutive of human freedom and thus the basis for Gregory's opposition to slavery.

Carter then proceeds to analyze the autobiographies of three African Americans: Briton Hammon (published in 1760), Jarena Lee (1836) and Frederick

Douglass (1845). These writers interpreted their lives in relation to the historical person of Jesus Christ rather than the racial reasoning that dominated their environment; in Carter's view, their identities were integrally tied to the economy of Jesus' Jewish body. In their works one sees the historical specificity of Jesus Christ acknowledged as the concrete universal norm for all being. It is a claim that stands in opposition to the Kantian universal, which spiritualizes Christ by denying him his Jewish particularity. Hammon, Lee and Douglass understood their bodies as reinscribed in Christ's body. This placed their thought wholly outside that of Western theology, which, Carter argues, is based on the hegemony of whiteness.

Autobiography releases its subject from the confines of the isolated self to an expanded and revised self, Carter observes. Thus African-American autobiography is not an isolated experience but a two-sided dialogue between the writer and the reader. These autobiographers' way of doing theology represents the model for the new way of doing theology that Carter recommends.

Carter brings his massive study to a conclusion with a "Postlude on Christology and Race," in which he discusses Maximus the Confessor as an anticolonial intellectual who seems to anticipate the theological anthropology of African-American Christian faith as represented in the work of the three African-American autobiographers. Maximus taught that the triune God is love, and Carter focuses on how that theological virtue can become a moral virtue in persons who live according to love. Conversely, humans who do not live in accordance with love sow seeds of tyranny and oppression, which leads eventually to the whole creation rising up in rebellion against its Creator. Both Maximus and the autobiographers read scripture against rather than within the prevailing cultural ethos. Such an approach contains the key to the theological solution that Carter's argument seeks.

Clearly, Carter's endeavor to lift up the principle of love as both a theological and moral virtue has important implications for theological and ethical discourse in the 21st century. The type of theological imagination required for overcoming the pseudotheological problem of race and modernity can benefit greatly from such a renewed consciousness.

Carter's call for a new kind of theological imagination that moves beyond the traditional theology that strips Jesus Christ of his Jewishness is an insightful approach to the difficulty that confronts 21st-century theological discourse. Few scholars have demonstrated so convincingly how ancient theologians such as Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Great can be helpful resources for current theological discussions about race, colonialism, slavery, tyranny and oppression—to mention only a few major problems we have inherited from the theology of race and modernity.

As an ethicist, I look forward to future writings by Carter that relate his theological enterprise to the thought and practice of the social gospel movement, the various African-American religious struggles for racial justice, and especially the work of Martin Luther King Jr. It is more than a little troubling that Carter did not discuss such figures and events in this major work. Nevertheless, it is a great book by any standard. Its breadth and depth are impressive beyond measure.

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John Rawls, *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith: With "On My Religion,"* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2009, 288 pages. \$27.95 (hardback)

John Rawls (1921-2002) is known most notably for his monumental work on political and moral philosophy *A Theory of Justice*, published in 1971. Though he often expressed religious fervor, Rawls never published his personal faith commitments. As a result, the discovery of his 1942 Christian undergraduate thesis is both startling and exciting.

The present volume provides the full text of Rawls's thesis alongside the text of a private, autobiographical essay he wrote later in life entitled "On My Religion." This review considers the argument of the thesis and, referring to the introduction by Joshua Cohen and Thomas Nagel and the extensive commentary by Robert Merrihew Adams, suggests some opportunities and challenges the thesis and the essay pose for Rawlsianism and interdisciplinary scholarship.

In his thesis, Rawls presents a constructive ethical proposal regarding the relations of persons in a community that has God as its reference. Chapter 1 provides a prospectus of his argument. There are two kinds of relations: natural (person-object) and personal (person-person). By defining the character of personhood as communal, Rawls repudiates systems of thought that reduce persons to objects in any way. He denotes such systems as "naturalism" because they identify the personal, namely humans as the *Imago Dei* and God himself, in impersonal terms proper only to nature, such as "ultimate good" or "object of desire" (see 121). Chapter 2 sketches a history of ideas from early patristic sources and Greek philosophy to Augustine and Aquinas. With reference to the Incarnation, he argues that nature is necessary but not sufficient for community. Chapter 3 examines key figures that Rawls identifies within naturalism, such as Plato and Augustine, and demonstrates how "the assumptions and principles of the natural cosmos...can be falsely extended to include the entire universe" (157).

Chapter 4 develops the concept of sin as personal and not natural; it is a rupture of community in which the self, through egoism and egotism, is isolated. Rawls describes the isolated spirit as "turned in on itself to love itself from no external suggestion" (191). Sin is its own punishment and is not a condition from which humans can remove themselves. Chapter 5, then, presents faith as the flattening or unfolding of the self in conversion (see 235). Salvation is "[winning] the inside of personality, and then '[turning] it inside out'" (215). Through the conversion process, each human-God and human-human barrier is gradually

overcome until the givenness and mercy of God in the person of Christ and the presence of the Spirit elicit forth in the openness of Christian love that develops from Christian experience (see 251).

The thesis provides important links in Rawls's intellectual biography and development. As Thomas Nagel and Joshua Cohen say in the introduction, "the intellectual force and the moral and spiritual motivation that made Rawls who he is are already there" (4). While his friends were aware that Rawls had considered becoming an Episcopal priest before his experiences as a combatant in World War II, no one knew what comprised his religious convictions (2). While interviews also provide insight into Rawls' understanding of religion and society, "On My Religion" candidly exposes his religious convictions upon his return from the war and later in his life, connecting his personal experience and his political theory to his rejection of Christianity. Cohen and Nagel identify between the young Rawls and the later Rawls points of continuity, such as his resistance to Enlightenment social contract theories (13-14) and the rejection of merit (18), and discontinuity, such as the focal shift from egotism and egoism rupturing community to conflicting ideals complicating society (16). The fervor of the thesis, though, presses the following question: while the uneven writing and argumentation might be the product of his immaturity as a thinker, can his faith be explained this way? Or is Rawls consistent such that his repudiation of Christianity might be explained through a development of the terms of natural and personal that frame his thesis?

Furthermore, the confident integration of theology, psychology, ethics, and philosophy in the thesis provides an access point within Rawls's own corpus for interdisciplinary study. Adams's commentary within the present volume provides a helpful example of such scholarship. Adams analyzes Rawls's primary intellectual influences at the time, centrally Emil Brunner and "neo-orthodoxy"; evaluates Rawls's reliance on his interlocutors in the thesis, such as Anders Nygren, Philip Leon, and Reinhold Niebuhr; and engages the young Rawls at every turn of his argument, identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

The young Rawls also seems to contribute to contemporary discussions of political theology, particularly with reference to John Milbank, Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder, Romand Coles, and Jeffrey Stout. The young Rawls' conception of the universe as "community of Creator and created" (108) that is re-established when the "Cross dissolved sin and restored faith" (234) gives him an affinity with Radical Orthodoxy. Moreover, the emphasis on the communal and personal has notable resonance with Radical Orthodoxy's focus on the interpersonal, time-conditioned order of all things through participation in God such that their worldliness, or proper creatureliness, is relationally maintained. Rawls' description of sin as the spirit "turned in on itself" (191) and faith as the flattening of the self echoes Augustine's concept of sinful humanity as *turning toward itself*, though Rawls locates Augustine within his classification of naturalism. Nonetheless, Rawls's gradual, communal soteriology has an unmistakably Augustinian flavor in line with the Augustinianism Radical Orthodoxy avows.

Finally, the thesis of young and impassioned priest-to-be John Rawls is reminiscent of his slightly older contemporary Dietrich Bonhoeffer. While Bonhoeffer saw Nazism as a counter-religion, Rawls classified it as the most repugnant form of naturalism. Moreover, both condition the present possibility of community on Christ, though Rawls' ethic could be further developed from the person, rather than the principle, of Christ. While the later Rawls is invaluable for the 20<sup>th</sup> century landscape of moral and political philosophy, the young Rawls could make an unexpected but welcome contribution to the 21<sup>st</sup> century landscape of political and ethical theology.

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T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2009, 108 pages. \$9.99 (paperback)

In *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, T. David Gordon levels a crushing indictment against the current state of the American pulpit. Gordon, a current professor of religion and Greek at Grove City College, mainly engages conservative Reformed and evangelical churches, but his conclusions can be applied to a broad range of denominations because his argument addresses the causes of impoverished preaching.

The book applies the discipline of media ecology to homiletics. Media ecologists are primarily concerned with how shifts in dominant media affect cultural environments. Major contributors to the field include writers such as Marshall McLuhan, Jacques Ellul, and Neil Postman. The questions media ecologists raise are not new; indeed, Socrates criticized the value of writing for its ill effect on the memory (cf. Plato's *Phaedrus*). Gordon's application of media ecology to homiletics can be observed in the two main questions the book considers. First, how has the move from language-based media to image-based and electronic media changed our sensibilities? Second, how has this change in sensibilities changed today's preaching? As a pastor and professor of New Testament, humanities, and media ecology, Gordon is well qualified to address these questions.

The first chapter makes the case that there is indeed a problem in American preaching. Gordon not only draws on his own experience of bad preaching in various church settings, but he also cites members of pulpit committees who have given up hope of finding a pastor who can preach well. In terms of method, Gordon uses Robert Lewis Dabney's "Cardinal Requisites" as an evaluative tool and argues that these "Cardinal Requisites are Manifestly Absent" from today's preaching (23).

What then is the problem? If preaching does indeed largely lack coherence, form, and point, why is it so lacking? His answer: Johnny can't preach because

Johnny can't read texts (chapter 2), and Johnny can't preach because Johnny can't write (chapter 3).

Now many will object saying that preachers can, of course, read (usually). But Gordon responds arguing that there is a difference between reading for information and really reading a text. There is a difference between reading *what* a text says and reading *how* it is written. Gordon claims that present day readers almost always read for information or content and almost never for "the pleasure obtained by reading an author whose command of language is exceptional" (44). The problem is that when preachers try to read the Bible the way they read everything else, then they are bound to misunderstand the nuances of the text and fail to see what is really going on. Gordon claims that those unaccustomed to reading a text closely often just look for important words and the concepts associated with them. This sort of study will not yield preaching that is grounded in the text and which understands how the grammatical and syntactical elements in the text contribute to the text as a whole. Exposition is grounded in the preacher's ability to read a text closely and appreciate its nuance and shape. If the preacher only scans for information, then he or she will not be able to faithfully exposit the text.

This inability to read texts, Gordon argues, is a direct result of the media culture in which we live (50). The quick-paced nature of electronic media necessarily undermines the slow and laborious task of close reading. Significant things take time to communicate, but the quick pace of electronic media and the brief segments between commercials are hardly capable of conveying anything of significance. The shift in media from word to image has caused our culture to move from the significant to the trivial. Basically, Gordon says that Johnny can't preach because Johnny lives in a television saturated society which has inhibited his thinking and made him unable to fathom the great significance and richness of God's manifold and great glory which is to be the content of authentic and faithful Christian preaching. The result, according to Gordon, is mindless how-to preaching which absolutely fails to convey the significant things in the mind of God.

The second and briefer part of Gordon's critique is the claim that Johnny can't preach because Johnny can't write (chapter 3). In short, in this fast-paced culture, people tend to babble on telephones rather than take time to carefully compose their thoughts. Gordon points out that, in the past, people had to communicate by letter, causing them to compose with thoughtfulness. Here Gordon's argument might well be improved by considering the widespread use of text messaging and generally fragmented thoughts it conveys. He concludes that the telephone robs us of composition skills (65). What is the impact on preaching? Gordon says, "Today, we have become a culture of telephone babblers, unskilled at the most basic questions of composition; and it is simply too much to expect that a typical member of such a culture can be quickly trained to deliver well-composed, thoughtful sermons" (67).

What then are we to do? How shall we reclaim the pulpit for thoughtful and enlivened exposition of the Word of God? One of the first things Gordon

suggests is to cultivate pre-homiletic sensibilities. This suggestion means study of language and literature. One learns to read well by reading well. That is, one learns to read and think by reading great writers and thinkers. For those who want to preach, Gordon recommends studying literature first. Also, studying a highly inflected language like Latin or Greek would teach the preacher how language works and develop his or her ability to read and compose.

All in all, this is an outstanding and timely book. Gordon's introduction of media ecological questions to the field of homiletics is indeed a significant and original contribution. If the book has a weakness, it is only that it is all too brief.

One of the most important impressions one takes away from this book is the weightiness of the task of preaching. Yes, the author advocates the study of literature and classical languages as a *preparation* for the task of preaching. We, however, in our fast-paced culture, want to rush directly to the preaching without adequate preparation. We think that the study of Greek is a waste of time that keeps us from the real ministry that awaits, and we forget that if we cannot read Greek, we cannot read the New Testament but only translations of it (not to mention Hebrew and Aramaic). Preaching is a great responsibility. The preacher should be well-trained and well-prepared. An essential part of that training now includes the reading of *Why Johnny Can't Preach*. Every seminary student and preacher should read this book...at least twice.

*Matthew P. O'Reilly*  
*Jay United Methodist Church*  
*Jay, Florida*

## CALL FOR PAPERS

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