



THE GRADUATE JOURNAL
OF
HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL

2017, VOLUME 12

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THE PRINCE LEAVES THE PALACE: KENOSIS AS ONTIC FULFILLMENT IN EXODUS 2 AND BEYOND

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History and Background

In his commentary on Exodus 2, William Propp makes the observation that the Moses narrative follows “a common folkloric pattern: a naive prince ventures outside the palace to witness the common life and is permanently transformed.”¹ This paper will seek to explore and develop Propp’s assertion in three parts: first, an inquiry into the Jewish exegetical depiction of Moses in Exodus 2, primarily in the narrative expansions of the midras him; second, a survey of other biblical personalities, notably Abraham and Jesus, whose biographies conform in different ways to Propp’s observation; and third, a theological dialogue with Martin Buber’s *I and Thou*.² Through these three parts, Propp’s thesis will be expanded to the general biographical pattern of an individual born in a position of inherited leadership, who suddenly and precipitously descends into an era of servitude and obscurity, and who emerges eventually on the other side to occupy a position of leadership greater than the one to which their birthright gave them claim. Both literary and theological dynamics will be scrutinized in support of the constructive argument that an era of kenosis in the life of a young

¹ William Propp, *Exodus 1-18* (New York: Random House, 1999), 165.

² Had there been space for it, a fourth section might profitably have been added to this paper considering parallel narratives in world mythology and literature. Several accounts are relevant, namely Siddhartha Buddha, Saint Francis of Assisi, Prince Rasselas, the Little Mermaid, and Beauty and the Beast. This fourth part, however, would focus on Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*; through the protagonists Andrei Bolkonsky and Pierre Bezukhov, Tolstoy employs the more flexible literary conventions of the modern novel to develop a powerful midrashic expansion of the very theme this paper will argue is present in Exodus 2 and its Jewish exegesis.

royal, entailing a radical breakdown of their concept of self, society, and truth, is requisite for their own ontic fulfillment.³ As this argument is tested against different biographies within the Bible and in Buber's thought, attention will be oriented consistently towards Exodus 2, asking the central question of how any parallels might illuminate the personality of Moses and its Jewish exegesis. Ultimately, the conclusion will be offered that in learning to read Moses' story carefully, we come to see similar kenotic patterns unfolding in unlikely places, even within the lives of the nameless characters of Exodus 2 itself.

I. Moses in Exodus 2 and its Jewish Exegesis

After reading the biblical text of Exodus 2, curiosity naturally arrives to the question: What was it like for Moses to grow up in the palace of Pharaoh? Characteristically laconic on this point, the biblical text offers no clues. The midrashic imagination of the early rabbis, therefore, is directed to this very question. And seeming almost to follow the logic of the saying "the bigger they are, they harder they fall" (attributed, naturally, to a boxer, Robert Fitzsimmons, who made the quip in 1902 before fighting a much heavier opponent⁴), the rabbis describe Moses' palatial upbringing as lavish and his development as preternatural, thereby raising his status to a height from which his subsequent kenotic fallout will seem even more drastic.

Exodus 2.10 reads, "When the child grew older, she [Moses' mother] brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son,"⁵ and the midrash follows up quickly with an alliterative string of piel participles: היתה בת פרעה מנשקת ומחבבת ומחבבת ("And Pharaoh's daughter was kissing and hugging and cuddling him"). Moses was spoiled; that is, cuddled and adored not only by the princess, but ironically also by Pharaoh himself, the very man who decreed the death of Hebrew boys: "And Pharaoh was kissing him and hugging him."⁷

³ I use the term "kenosis" in its Greek etymological sense of "emptying," and by "ontic" I mean "real as opposed to phenomenal existence." (New Oxford American Dictionary (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1226. (In the course of the paper I will further develop these terms and concepts.

⁴ Google search, April 29, 2015.

⁵ All English biblical quotations are from the English Standard Version.

⁶ All midrashic quotations are from Moshe Mirkin, *Midrash Rabbah* (Tel Aviv: Yavneh Publishing House, 1972), 32-54. The English translations are my own.

⁷ והיה פרעה מנשקו ומחבבו

These royal helicopter (grand)parents shelter their foundling inside the palace walls — “They were not allowing him to leave the palace of the king”⁸ — which was natural enough, given the rare beauty of Moses — “Because he was beautiful, everyone was desiring to see him”⁹ — and onlookers are mesmerized: “Whoever saw him was not able to pull himself away.”¹⁰ He grows abnormally fast — “He was not growing according to the way of all the earth”¹¹ — and the angel Gabriel often intervenes on behalf of the precocious child at critical moments, twice assaulting Moses’ body in order to impact the direction of the story, once in verse 6 — “Gabriel came and struck Moses so that he would cry and she would have compassion on him”¹² — and once in verse 10: “Gabriel came and thrust [Moses’] hand and he grabbed the burning coal.”¹³ Divine intervention occurs again in the midrash of verse 15, an angelic doppelgänger standing in at the hour when Pharaoh’s troops were to arrest Moses for murder: “An angel came down from heaven and appeared to them as Moses, so they seized the angel and Moses fled.”¹⁴ And the prince has access not only to heavenly power, but also to the apex of earthly power and the object symbolizing it, Pharaoh and his crown. Young Moses takes the crown away from the monarch and sets it on his own head, an action court advisors take as prophetic of more serious usurpations to come: “And he took the crown of Pharaoh and set it on his own head, as he would do in the future when he had grown.”¹⁵ Altogether then, these midrashic expansions of Moses’ youth invest the reader with an impression of extraordinary *mazal*¹⁶ — all the constellations of beauty, privilege, and power are aligned directly over this young man. It is a glowing image which serves to heighten the contrast with the next phase of the story: “When Moses had grown up, he went out to his people” (Exodus 2.11).

⁸ לא היתה מוציאתו מפלטרין של מלך

⁹ ולפי שהיה יפה הכל מתאווים לראותו

¹⁰ מי שהיה רואהו לא היה מעביר את עצמו מעליו

¹¹ שהיה גדל שלא כדרך כל הארץ

¹² בא גבריאל והכה למשה כדי שיבכה ותתמלא עליו רחמים

¹³ ובא גבריאל ודחה את ידו ותפש את הגחלת — This statement comes in the narrative of a test constructed by Pharaoh’s advisors: Before baby Moses are set a nugget of gold and a burning coal. If Moses were to grab the gold, it would be known that the boy had intentions of usurping Pharaoh’s throne, and he would be killed. Gabriel therefore saves Moses by thrusting his hand toward the burning coal.

¹⁴ ירד מלאך מן השמים ונדמה להם כדמות משה, ותפשו את המלאך וברחו משה

¹⁵ הוא נוטל בתרו של פרעה ומשימו על ראשו כמו שעתיד לעשות כשהיה גדול

¹⁶ מזל, “luck,” a word ultimately deriving from the idea of stellar “constellations.”

In the course of time, when Moses goes out to his brethren and witnesses their suffering, the midrash suddenly injects new qualities into Moses' character profile that had not appeared before: empathy, solidarity, and initiative. Immediately upon seeing the distress of the Israelites, the first verb in the midrash is בוכה,¹⁷ followed by the lament: "Woe is me because of you! O, that I could die in your place!"¹⁸ Rather than identifying with his own royal position and exclaiming offhandedly – טוב שזה לא אני!¹⁹ – Moses identifies rather with the enslaved,²⁰ and this is perhaps the first indication of the kenotic motion Moses will ultimately make, for he does not merely empathize with the slaves, but wishes somehow to exchange his own life for theirs. And that this is no capricious flourish of semitic hyperbole is demonstrated in the next phrase of the midrash, wherein Moses invests his being in the slaves, lending his own shoulder to each one,²¹ laboring with them in the mud: "There is no work harder than mud work, and he was giving his shoulder and helping each one of them."²² The empathy that produces solidarity soon gives way to activism, as Moses employs his royal privilege to rearrange the burdens of the slaves in a more equitable distribution. In order to do this, he importantly leaves his retinue behind, an action to which the Holy One responds in mirrored fashion: [God speaking to Moses] "You left your business and went to see the suffering of Israel, and acted toward them as a brother. Therefore I will leave the great ones and the small ones, and speak with you."²³ Such reciprocity of human and divine kenosis is in fact only a precursor to the more famous episode of the burning bush, a connection to which the midrash is attuned: it is because Moses "turned from his business"²⁴ to care for the slaves and "turned to see"²⁵ the strange flame that the Divine turned aside from lofty affairs and condescended to identify with a bush.

¹⁷ Moses "weeps."

¹⁸ חבל לי עליכם, מי יתן מוהי עליכם

¹⁹ "Good thing that's not me!"

²⁰ Professor Jon D. Levenson made this observation during class on April 21, 2015.

²¹ In a relevant theological parallel, Karl Barth argues extensively in the *Church Dogmatics*, particularly at §28, that being is fundamentally *actus purus*, and therefore that action is constitutive of being itself.

²² שאין לך מלאכה קשה ממלאכת הטיט, והיה נותן כתפיו ומסיע לכל אחד ואחד מהן

²³ אתה הנחת עסקיך והלכת לראות בצערן של ישראל ונהגת בהן מנהג אחים, אני מניח את העליונים ואת התחתונים ואדבר עמך

²⁴ סר מעסקיך

²⁵ סר לראות

Before the fully theophanic encounter can happen, however, the process of kenosis must be completed. First attempting administrative activism (in addition to rearranging the burdens for the slaves, the midrash of verse 11 also depicts Moses negotiating on behalf of the Hebrews for a weekly Sabbath), Moses soon resorts to violence, killing an Egyptian and fleeing the justice of Pharaoh. While the midrashic writers are careful to justify and idealize Moses at every turn (claiming, for example, that the Egyptian killed by Moses was an adulterer and that Moses therefore is not given to vigilantism but is rather a prudent executor of God's law), the most significant contribution which the midrash makes to the character of Moses is his depth of identification and participation with the slaves. Reading the biblical text alone, which rushes directly from witnessing anguish to killing an oppressor, the reader may understand something of Moses' empathy and activism, but will completely miss this step of solidarity between. Yet this step is at the heart of kenosis, for by participating and identifying with the suffering of the slaves, the prince is undergoing a transference of identity, rejecting his inherited alignment with power in favor of the powerless. The midrashim therefore help us to understand why Moses was considered worthy of the unique role he would come to occupy. Between problem and solution stood the nonlinearity of extended sorrow. Moses *felt*. His solidarity preceded his activism. And by the end of Exodus 2, the biblical text itself advances Moses' kenotic progression to its final level by rendering one further detail: After Moses flees to Midian and marries Zipporah, she gives birth to a son whom Moses calls Gershom. Why? Verse 22 tells us that Moses "called his name Gershom, for he said, 'I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.'"²⁶ As a prince of Egypt, any solidarity Moses may have extended to the Hebrew slaves would have been fundamentally artificial, for he understood himself as originating from the native elite whereas the slaves understood themselves as a foreign people deracinated from their homeland. Only when Moses names his son Gershom is the process complete. His self-image is now of a man in exile.²⁷ The insider has become an outsider, and is thus qualified to become a leader of outsiders.

By walking (or running) away from his position of inherited leadership in Pharaoh's house, and falling far below it, Moses activated the possibility of

²⁶ In the name Gershom, גרשם, the letters גר mean "sojourner" and the letters שם mean "there."

²⁷ The midrashic insistence on idealizing Moses is transparent here, as the rabbis look past the פשט (the simple reading) of Moses' difficult situation and see in the name גרשם, a reference to, of all things, success: גר היה בארץ נכריה והצליתו הקדוש ברוך הוא משם: ("He was a sojourner in a foreign land, and the Holy One, blessed by He, made him succeed even from there.")

rising far above it. This is what Exodus 2 and its midrashim help us understand; the expanded depiction they offer of the internal character of Moses is of an individual defined by the existential inversion of kenosis, followed in time by the ontic fulfillment of theophany and inspired leadership. All the prerogatives to which his royal upbringing gave him access were rejected, and as I will argue later, it is precisely at such a nadir that the bush can burn and God can speak — a speech investing the now-empty human with his own true voice.

II. Biblical Parallels

Moses is not the only biblical figure whose leadership was preceded by an era of self-emptying. On the contrary, several key personalities in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament follow the same trajectory. This section will look briefly at five such personalities — Abraham, Joseph, David, Paul, and Jesus — and, pivoting between literary and theological considerations, will observe how these figures bear similarity to Moses, and how setting them alongside each other sheds light on the theme of kenosis.

Abraham — The two personalities whom the writer(s) of Genesis develops most fully were individuals who came into their own only upon leaving their father's house behind. The first and most paradigmatic of these is Abraham. And while Genesis 11–25 narrates the saga of this 'father of faith' who leaves successive homes in Ur and Haran, it is again in the Jewish exegesis that a more developed logic is found for this individual's worthiness to be chosen. Philo, for example, writes about Abraham's upbringing in a Chaldean culture that worshipped the mathematical properties of the heavens. In the darkness of this idolatrous confusion between Creator and creature, Philo writes, Abraham's eye slowly began opening to the dim light of God. Interestingly, before the first divine communication to Abraham, and in the communication itself, several features are present in Philo's text which mirror Exodus 2. I will reproduce the short passage, then comment on it.

[...] beginning to see the pure beam instead of the deep darkness, he followed the ray and discerned what he had not beheld before, a charioteer and pilot presiding over the world . . . And so to establish more firmly in his understanding the sight which had been revealed to him the Holy Word follows it up by saying to him, "Friend, the great is often known by its outlines as shown in the smaller, and by looking at them the observer finds the scope of his vision infinitely enlarged. Dismiss, then, the rangers of the

heavens [that is, the planets] and the science of Chaldea, and depart for a short time from the greatest of cities, this world, to the lesser, and thus you will be better able to apprehend the overseer of the All."²⁸

Several similarities to Exodus 2 are present in Philo's text. First, similar to Moses in Midian, Abraham was already dislodged from his native setting before his theophany, having rejected the wisdom of his culture and on a quest for deeper understanding.²⁹ Second, Philo points out that before God speaks to Abraham, this latter "followed the ray." The phrase is reminiscent of the midrashic notion in Exodus 2:11 that God speaks to Moses because Moses "went to see,"³⁰ which, as was mentioned above, the rabbis connect directly to the fact that Moses "turned to see"³¹ in the presence of the burning bush. This willingness to turn aside and follow the strange light unites the exegetical rationalization of the worthiness of Abraham and Moses to be God's friend (cf. Exodus 33:11, and the first word of God's address to Abraham in the Philo text). Third, Philo has God calling on Abraham to "dismiss the rangers of the heavens" and "depart from the greatest of cities." This dual imperative highlights the way in which the spatial relocation of kenosis (*depart...*) is coupled with an intellectual relocation (*dismiss...*), and perhaps the former is for the sake of the latter. That is, within the kenotic preparation of both Moses and Abraham, each must undergo a profound deconstruction of their former ways of thinking, and such a deconstruction can best take place at a distance from the countervailing influence of their home culture. Fourth, Philo's text has God inviting Abraham to a willful demotion "from the greatest of cities... to the lesser." Such demotions are constitutive of kenosis, and the divine communication with Abraham ends with a promise that is consistent with the thesis of this paper: by leaving what he perceives to be great, Abraham may discover a second, higher greatness, apprehending "the overseer of All." This shadows Moses' own itinerary from prince, to shepherd, to prophet of God.

Joseph, David, and Paul—These three figures will be treated briefly and together, attention being paid to biographical harmonies. First then, Joseph,

²⁸ Philo, *On Abraham*, 68-71. This passage is reproduced from a handout at Jon Levenson's March 24, 2015 lecture at Harvard Hillel, entitled "Why does God love the Jewish People? A Midrashic and Philosophical Debate."

²⁹ Levenson, lecture, Harvard Hillel, March 24, 2015.

³⁰ הלכת לראות

³¹ סר לראות

whose tale is told in the elaborate novella of Genesis 37-50. The favorite son of a wealthy man, his childhood is defined by a colorful coat and a silver spoon, along with a series of dreams about future dominance. But he overplays his hand, provokes his brothers, and is removed from his position of privilege. After years of obscurity, he climbs the ladder on his own. A self-made man in a foreign country, he rises eventually to the viziership of Egypt, a position of such greater status than his birthright that he is empowered even to care for his own father's lack. And one interesting parallel between Joseph and Moses is this: whereas Joseph's story *ends* with his inclusion into the family of an Egyptian noblewoman, Moses' story *begins* in just this way. One wonders what this quite-literal embrace of the Other (and no less an Other than the classic antagonist of Israel³²) has to say about theologies of encounter; I will revisit this theme later on.

Secondly, David — and the narrative shape of 1 and 2 Samuel is by now familiar. Anointed by the prophet and felling the ogre, the young David is brought into the inner circle of the king's court. His confidant is the heir apparent, his bride is the princess, and he leads the army. Then the fallout occurs — the king's jealousy flares, and David is driven from power. Years of obscurity follow, David becoming the *persona non grata* of Israel (or at least of Saul), feigning insanity abroad and slumming through caves. Significantly, according to the biblical tradition and similar to the narratives of Moses and Abraham in Philo, it is at this juncture that David begins writing inspired poems, Psalms 57, 63, and 142 being attributed to David in the wilderness and cave.³³ Although “the Tannaim consider that David's leaving the land of Israel was extremely dangerous for David's faith due to his separation from the Torah,”³⁴ it is again precisely at the nadir that God speaks. And a zenith is predictably soon to follow: David emerges from the wilderness to become Israel's prototypical king and emblem of messianic hope.

Moving now to the New Testament, the Apostle Paul, who in his years as 'Saul' studied the lives of Moses, Abraham, Joseph, and David, would undergo experiences quite similar to theirs. According to Luke's account of Paul's early

³² This may be true particularly of Pharaoh and the Egyptian elite, but there is also a certain empathy with Egypt in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Deuteronomy 23:8 [23:7 in English]).

³³ I am aware that psalmic superscriptions are later editions and bear little historical authority. However, this paper is seeking to understand how the biblical figures are presented by the tradition, not how they are refracted through categories of modern scholarship. The superscriptions of the psalms may in fact reflect a certain midrashic process of constructing a biography for David.

³⁴ Yuzuru Miura, *David in Luke-Acts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 141.

life, the Apostle received an education as a young man under an elite scholar in Jerusalem, and enjoyed access to the highest circles (Acts 22:3, 5:34, 9:1). Later, while working to expunge the nascent Christian sect, he had his “Damascus Road experience” (Acts 9) and thereafter went subterranean, passing up to fourteen silent years in Arabia, Antioch, Tarsus, and Damascus.³⁵ Only afterwards does he become *Saint* Paul, the so-called founder of Christianity and writer of such paradoxically kenotic statements as “when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10) and “I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8).

With these biographical sketches in mind, let us turn now to the theological question of what they mean together and specifically in regards to Exodus 2. According to one scholar, such stories share a similar logic: “It has to be shown that you deserve what you are born with. Aristocracy is not inherited. You must demonstrate your rank.”³⁶ This is why, for example, David must fight the battles of his people. He was anointed king *de jure* as a boy, but before becoming king *de facto* he needed to prove that he is worthy of the kingship. Furthermore, it might be argued that David’s season of exile within his own country and later in Philistia accomplishes what Moses’ exile in Midian accomplishes, for a people on the fringe can only be led by one who has deeply internalized what it means to be on the fringe. Casting the same notion in theological strokes, we might say that humanity’s “fallenness” disallows the possibility of a spiritual leader who has not themselves experienced the gravity of that fall. We are able, then, while considering this biblical theme of training in humility, to read the Talmud’s words in a straightforward manner:

The Holy One (blessed by He!) said to Israel: I set My heart on you because even when I bestow greatness on you, you make yourselves small before Me. I bestowed greatness on Abraham, and he said, “I am but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27); on Moses and Aaron, and he [Moses] said, “We are nothing” (Exodus 16:8); on David, and he said, “But I am a worm, less than human” (Psalm 22:7).³⁷

³⁵ New Testament narratives, like those of the Hebrew Bible, are highly elliptical, and chronologies are difficult to establish. Several theories exist regarding the length of Paul’s kenotic era, and fourteen years is the highest number I have encountered, in a sermon many years ago by a pastor whose scholarship I trust, Reverend Richard Bishop.

³⁶ Levenson, conversation with student, March 2015.

³⁷ Babylonian Talmud, *Hullin* 89b; reproduced from handout at Levenson’s March 24, 2015 Harvard Hillel lecture.

Biblical heroes appear on the scene not despite the fact but because of the fact that they have already disappeared, a disappearance crucially conditioning the later appearance. That is, these figures enter so decisively into a season of kenosis and remain there such a length of time that kenosis is no longer a phase, but an identity. This is the empty flute through which God's breath blows,³⁸ and also the reason why, beginning with Moses, there is a motif in the Bible of the savior not being recognized by the people that he (and in some instances, she) is saving.³⁹ The Israelites revolt against Moses; Joseph's brothers do not recognize him in Egypt; David is hunted by his erstwhile comrades; Paul is regarded with suspicion by the early church. Why is this? One might speculate on a variety of reasons, but one of them must be the fact that humans naturally look to traditional loci of power for their salvation, and not to one emerging from a wasteland of negativity. For the kenotic has nothing of his own to offer, having already given himself entirely away — or, reflecting the active-passive dialectic of this strange movement — having had his self stripped away. In this context it is helpful to remember the original sense of the term *generous*. The New Oxford American Dictionary has this entry: "from Latin *generosus* 'noble, magnanimous,' from *genus, gener-* 'stock, race.' The original sense was 'of noble birth,' hence 'characteristic of noble birth, courageous, magnanimous, not mean' (a sense already present in the Latin).⁴⁰ 1 The etymology contributes then to our argument: one who is wellborn, an aristocrat, is someone who knows how to give, to be *generous*; and if this is so, then the highest aristocrat (the term itself is superlative in origin, from *αριστος*, 'best, bravest, noblest'⁴¹) is the one who knows how to give away not only things, but their very self. Consequently they are often not recognized by the people they serve, for the fulfilling of their own identity has rendered them invisible.

Jesus — The central figure of the New Testament brought a message sometimes described as an "upside-down kingdom," and on closer inspection, both the form and essence of that message are seen to support the thesis of this paper. First the essence, the actual content of the message:

³⁸ A classic Sufi metaphor; e.g., Coleman Barks, *The Essential Rumi* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995), 138.

³⁹ An observation of my fellow student, Stacy Kokot.

⁴⁰ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 723.

⁴¹ *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon, Abridged* (Croydon: Oxford University Press, 1891), 102.

Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20.25-28)

One recalls in this context the Moses of the midrash, who "was giving his shoulder and helping each one of them."⁴² The saying of Jesus suggests that Moses began his ascent to leadership at the moment he began his descent to servitude. And the same midrash, as mentioned earlier, includes the exclamation from the mouth of Moses: "O, that I could die in your place!"⁴³ Reading through the lens of the Matthean aphorism, it is possible to understand this midrashic utterance as suggesting Moses' calling not only to a certain greatness, which would entail becoming a servant to others, but even to the apex of greatness, which entails becoming a slave. The radical wish to die for his brethren shows Moses intuiting the heightening of stakes within Jesus' logic, and his generosity in the manner of the highest aristocrats.

It is a heightening of stakes which figures prominently in Christian theology. For on the face of it, the New Testament makes untenable claims, such as Hebrews 3:3: "Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses." Given that Jesus had much less to say than Moses, lived a far shorter life, had a far smaller following, and possessed far less political power, such claims seem defenseless. Yet Christianity cares more about the form of Jesus' message than its essence, and that form, according to the New Testament, was more highly charged than that of Prince Moses. I will not reproduce in full the Christ Hymn of Philippians 2, but it is from this poem that the term 'kenosis' derives. Positing at the outset that Jesus existed in the μορφή, form, of God, the hymn asserts that Jesus ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν, emptied himself, and instead took on μορφήν δούλου, the form of a slave. The motion Jesus makes is thus identical with Moses in Exodus 2, ascending from a height of inherited power to a position of slavery, yet the New Testament simply pulls the pendulum further back: Jesus' divinity renders his kenosis more absolute — crucifixion — which rebounds proportionally, not to the level of social leadership, but ontologically further: resurrection. Thus the New Testament pushes Propp's thesis to its extreme limit, beyond historical dimensions and into the realm of mythology.

⁴² היה נותן כתפיו ומסיע לכל אחד ואחד מהן

⁴³ מי יתן מותי עליכם

III. Martin Buber's *I and Thou*

One aspect of Propp's thesis which has not been emphasized in the foregoing is the impact within kenosis of "witnessing the common life." But that is not an insignificant aspect of the dynamic. Indeed, it was an *encounter* outside the walls of the palace that set in motion that first, solitary exodus from Egypt into Sinai. And although the instigation for self-emptying was somewhat different for each of the other biblical figures, the era of kenosis surely brought each former elite into contact with the alienated, the suffering, and the poor. This section of the paper will investigate the meaning of that contact by turning to the theology of encounter presented in Martin Buber's *I and Thou*. It should be clarified at the outset that the thrust of the argument will not be towards any unique significance in the encounter between rich and poor, prince and pauper; rather the thrust will be towards the significance of encounter qua encounter. It will be argued that encounter itself, the meeting of *I and Thou*, is the incendiary *moment* at the genesis of a kenotic blaze, and that it also directs one to a particular ontic fulfillment.

On the first page of his short treatise (or extended poem), Buber asserts two fundamental attitudes or "primary words" with which humankind approaches the world: I-It and I-Thou. The former signifies the axis of experience between human and object, the latter the axis of relation between human and being. The human I interacting with these two axes is fundamentally different, and it is the relational axis of I-Thou that allows a human actually to become human, to self-realize: "As I become I, I say *Thou*,"⁴⁴ writes Buber; "Through the *Thou* a man becomes I."⁴⁵ These brief statements function almost as a précis of the book, and while Buber develops them at length, the core insight is never amended: the I-Thou moment *transforms*.

Who is Thou for Buber? Is it God? Humans? He answers: "The extended lines of relation meet in the eternal Thou. Every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou."⁴⁶ That the eternal Thou is found *through* human Thous fits well inside Exodus, for circuitous as the midrashim and biblical texts may be, there is a connection between Exodus 2:11⁴⁷ and Exodus

⁴⁴ Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner Classics, 2000), 26.

⁴⁵ Buber, 39.

⁴⁶ Buber, 77.

⁴⁷ "One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people."

3:4,⁴⁸ an encounter with a human Thou initiating the motion towards an encounter with the eternal Thou. Such linkages bear more than anecdotal significance for Buber, who seems to consider encounters with human Thous as a type of spiritual midwifery, bringing forth an awareness of and access to the eternal Thou. "The inborn Thou is realized in each relation and consummated in none. It is consummated only in the direct relation with the Thou that by its nature cannot become It."⁴⁹ Therefore the continued feeling of incompleteness attending human relationships is part of this structure of encounter, for the only encounter of genuine telos is with the eternal Thou.

According to Buber, there are several characteristics of an encounter with Thou. First, knowledge of the Thou is strictly not possible. "Only as It can it enter the structure of knowledge."⁵⁰ Buber seems almost to have the analogy of temperature in mind, as if only once the incandescence of existential presence has cooled to the empirical contours of an It may anything of that presence be known, and then only in a hardened, essentially modified form. Such an epistemic assertion, driving together with every apophasis towards the humility of circumscribed certainties, is coupled by Buber with a claim about the second order activity of language. He writes of the Thou: "You cannot make yourself understood with others concerning it, you are alone with it. But it teaches you to meet others, and to hold your ground when you meet them."⁵¹ In this way meeting Thou enables one to exist as an individual within a community, because it simultaneously restricts and encourages communication with others, separates and joins together. When considering a religious figure like Moses, then, and asking what psychological dynamics might instill someone with the confidence to stand alone before a nation, to be immersed among them yet resist their influence, to speak with final authority yet always have more to say, it is possible that the very energies behind Moses' actions are those produced by an encounter with Thou.

Also germane to the discussion are Buber's observations that "the primary word I-Thou can only be spoken with the whole being"⁵² and that

⁴⁸ "When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.'"

⁴⁹ Buber, 77.

⁵⁰ Buber, 50.

⁵¹ Buber, 43.

⁵² Buber, 19.

“any action of the whole being [...] is bound to resemble suffering.”⁵³ Saying this primary-word, therefore, is an ultimate act, and such acts require *time* to master. Existential training of this sort may be behind the biblical testimony that for Moses, along with Abraham, Joseph, David, and Paul, the era of kenosis extended over many years. It takes time to speak Thou properly. And moreover, it requires pain. The legacies of spiritual heroes in many traditions, not just those of this paper, record that intrepid souls undergo much suffering, and perhaps Buber indicates part of the reason: in order to position oneself in direct relation to the eternal Thou, much of one’s own superfluous humanity must be cut away, and such cutting can only be painful. This divestment borders on kenosis, and indeed, Buber seems to be approaching the idea itself with this remark: “When Thou is spoken, the speaker has no *thing*; he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation.”⁵⁴ The argument is hereby supported that Moses approaches the bush *empty*; that Abraham discerns the overseer of the All while *away from the great city*; that Joseph interprets dreams *in prison*; that David writes poems *in a cave*; that Paul has a vision of the third heaven in Arabia;⁵⁵ that the Word realizes itself in the form of a *slave*. Thou may be encountered in many situations, Buber seems to be saying, but the definitive communication between I and Thou occurs precisely when I has released all things, internal and external, entering at last empty and naked before the Presence.⁵⁶

The encounter is not benign; it has a shattering effect: “Moments of the Thou appear as strange lyric and dramatic episodes, seductive and magical, but tearing us away to dangerous extremes, loosing the well-trying context, leaving more questions than satisfaction behind them, shattering security — in short, uncanny moments we can well dispense with.”⁵⁷ This description, again, aligns

⁵³ Buber, 26.

⁵⁴ Buber, 20.

⁵⁵ 2 Corinthians 12:2; the text does not explicitly say Arabia (imported from Galatians 1:17), but the inference seems to be that this vision occurred during Paul’s invisible years.

⁵⁶ Consider Psalm 23 in this context, and the grammatical feature that only in verse 4, בגיט צלמות (the “valley of the shadow of death”), does the pronoun shift from third person to second person, as if the poet learns to address God as Thou only in the kenotic waste. Arbitrary shifts in grammatical person are of course common in biblical poetry, and one should be cautious about investing them with too much exegetical weight; yet the tidy grammatical bifurcation of Psalm 23 (discounting the summary line in verse 6) seems intentional, and therefore meaningful.

⁵⁷ Buber, 44.

with Exodus 2, for while it is possible to deconstruct the narrative of Moses' youth into discrete strands of authorial calculation — a pretext was needed to relocate Moses from the palace to the desert, so fleeing a murder trial would do, etc. — it seems entirely plausible within the logic of the story that encountering Thou in the common slaves powerfully dislocates the prince from himself, “tearing him away to the dangerous extreme” of Midian. Also surfacing here is a suggestion why this movement often involves a kenotic *prince*, for only someone inside royalty may become aware of the vacuum royalty is. Whereas those on the outside look to royalty as a kind of ultimate fulfillment, the young royal venturing beyond the palace walls encounters the human and eternal Thou and soon realizes the false infinities of the palace. Only a young royal can know from within the false position of royalty, and in a move of ontic courage, escape the palace in order to escape that falsity, abandoning himself to the masses of startling Thous beyond the walls of regal propriety.

The eternal Thou does not abandon the prince when he is shattered and immobilized in his own falsity. On the contrary, the eternal Thou reassembles and activates the prince in truth. And that truth is *love*: if an encounter with the human Thou draws one towards the eternal Thou, this subsequent encounter is in fact a reversal, a commissioning to return to the human Thou in a life of total commitment. “The Thou appeared to the man out of deeper mystery, addressing him even out of the darkness, and he responded with his life.”⁵⁸ The feeling of awe in the presence of that which is beyond language and knowledge is accompanied by a sensation of ultimate obligation to that unspeakable, unknowable being. “Love is responsibility of an I for a Thou,”⁵⁹ Buber writes. The ethereal thus gains traction, becoming praxis. Yet because the engagement with the human Thou is necessarily a second engagement, subsequent to and thus conditioned by an encounter with the eternal Thou, the quality of that engagement transcends human norms of morality, intellect, and aesthetics. “In the eyes of him who takes his stand in love,” says Buber, “and gazes out of it, men are cut free from their entanglement in bustling activity. Good people and evil, wise and foolish, beautiful and ugly, become successively real to him; that is, set free they step forth in their singleness, and confront him as Thou.”⁶⁰ This, then,

⁵⁸ Buber, 51.

⁵⁹ Buber, 29.

⁶⁰ Buber, 29.

is the mass appeal of spiritual heroes: established in love, they see not masses, but single souls. Universal acceptance in the heart of the hero is the spiritual reality behind the literary motif of a troop of beloved vagabonds, present in the peripheral vision of each biography discussed in this paper.

Conclusion

Joshua Berman, commenting on the myth of the foundling which appears in Exodus 2, writes: "The ubiquity of the motif suggests that it is rooted in a social reality [...] it is best attributed to what Jung called the presence of archetypes within our collective unconscious."⁶¹ This observation also holds true, I believe, for the myth of a kenotic prince realizing ontic fulfillment. The reason the theme occurs repeatedly in the Bible, and the reason generations of readers have found illumination and solace in it, is that it is not restricted to the experience of a select few but rather is lodged in our collective unconscious. Said differently: I and Thou is not an esoteric manual for princes, but an exoteric manual for humanity. That a narrow objective genitive 'love of God,' when pushed to its telos, erupts into the totalizing colors of the subjective genitive 'love of God' is a common experience. And although certain privileged (or doomed) figures seem destined to make their whole life a parable of this theme, the reason the theme itself is embedded in populist religions is that these stories confront us with our own true selves, or better: with what our true selves could be.

With this possibility in mind, let us return to Exodus 2 one final time. Now we are ready to see that the story shows not one but two young royals venturing outside the palace of Pharaoh: "And Pharaoh's daughter went down to wash at the Nile" (Exodus 2:5).⁶² Ibn Ezra's commentary clarifies any confusion: "And she went down. From her palace."⁶³ Now, placing ourselves for a moment within the rabbinic mindset, and reasoning that the Hebrew slaves surely accessed the Nile at a different point than the royal family did, we are left with one of two options: either 1) Moses' mother intentionally placed her son in the reeds by the royal access point, or 2) the princess is venturing beyond the royal sphere. Given Ibn Ezra's blunt note, and corroborating it with the obvious

⁶¹ Joshua Berman, *Created Equal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 146.

⁶² תרד בת פרעה לרחוץ על היאר

⁶³ ותרד מארמונה. All mediaeval commentary quotations are from *Torat Hayim*, (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 5753/1993), 15. English translations are my own.

fact that by adopting a Hebrew boy the princess demonstrates willingness to violate her father's wishes, perhaps the latter option is to be preferred.

A short exegesis of verse 6 is further suggestive of what is taking place, and it is helpful here to look at the Hebrew: ותפתח ותראהו את-הילד והנה-נער בוכה: ותחמל עליו ותאמר מילדי העברים זה זה תראהו, זה ילד, נער, עליו, זה.⁶⁴ The text is notably awkward; in one verse, five grammatical signs point to Moses, producing a syntactic iridescence: תראהו, זה ילד, נער, עליו, זה.⁶⁵ In the midrash, Rabbi Joseph draws the conclusion: "She saw with him the *shekinah*."⁶⁶ However, Rashi's mediaeval commentary corrects this, considering the straightforward reading to be that the princess saw the child (ילד) not the *shekinah* (שכינה). But one wonders: might the emphatic stacking of nouns and pronouns indicate that the princess, a naive royal venturing outside the palace to witness the common life, is undergoing an I-Thou encounter? Or to reframe the suggestion by incorporating rabbinic categories: might the I-Thou mode usher one into the midrashic register of experience wherein the *shekinah* is found?

This is admittedly speculation, against which a counter-argument might easily be made. Yet another voice influences me towards the midrashic reading. The poet Henri Cole is currently a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, and in a recent edition of the Harvard Gazette he was asked the question: If you weren't a writer, what would you be? Cole answered: "I think a mother is the holiest thing."⁶⁷ This, then, is my conclusion: Pharaoh's daughter, regardless of any pressure exerted on her by Miriam,⁶⁸ chooses to be the mother of this slave child, whom she will call Moses. She does not merely encounter a Thou in the slave child; she responds to that encounter with the ultimate act of generosity, emptying herself to become herself. Being a mother — a supreme gift of self — is a universal experience not limited to royalty. And such a gift is holy.

⁶⁴ "When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.'" Exodus 2:6.

⁶⁵ "Saw him," "child," "baby," "on him," "this."

⁶⁶ שראתה עמו שכינה — The *shekinah* is believed to be a divine light emanating from God's glory.

⁶⁷ Colleen Walsh, "Revealed in verse," *Harvard Gazette*. March 10, 2015.

⁶⁸ Berman, 143-166, contains an insightful discussion about this.

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PROLEGOMENON TO ASIA AS A SYMBOL:

RE-SIGNIFYING KOREAN AMERICAN IDENTITY

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This paper offers a prolegomenon to how Asia can be used as a reontologizing device for Korean Americans¹ to resist harmful racializations of Asian Americans, and to construct an alternative religious, political and racial identity. To accomplish this task, I first turn to Tracey Hucks's continuation of Charles Long's examination of Africa as a religious symbol in black religious nationalism to define the strategy of reontologizing. In particular, I look at how physicality and land as religious 'index symbol' enables Korean Americans to reclaim the religious, cultural and philosophical resources of Asia to resist colonizing processes of signification. Second, I turn to Asian American studies to examine how Asian American racial identity has been signified by mainstream American society, and why these models of racialization are problematic for Asian Americans. Specifically, I look at how these models have affected Korean American identity formation processes in both working and middle class families. I argue that middle-class Korean American Christians adopt the 'model minority' model of racialization, and that the link between evangelicalism and this signification have buried the theological narratives of working-class Korean Americans. Following this, I examine what it means for Asia to be taken as an index symbol, how it affects diasporic Korean religious identity formation, and its effects on the understanding of religion.

¹ I have deliberately chosen not to hyphenate Korean American, Asian American or African American to resist associations with categorizing people from these groups as 'hyphenated Americans.' Such associations have often discounted the Americanness of nonwhites in the U.S. and normalizes whiteness.

Hucks, Long and Index Symbol

Tracey Hucks picks up Charles H. Long's project of examining how Africa was used as a symbol by those outside of the black church tradition to politically mobilize in various forms. She refers to these mobilizations as examples of black religious nationalism, and her project specifically is tied to how the Yoruba/Ifa tradition is appropriated by African American communities in the 20th Century as a reontologizing symbol. Africa functions as a religious symbol, specifically an 'index symbol' as defined by Ernst Cassirer,² allowing for black religious nationalist movements to recenter Africa as the epistemic criterion from which all forms of knowing, being and embodying are derived. The religious reflections, metaphysics and theologies of African religious culture and practice lead to a creation of a new ontology for African Americans. Africa taken as a religious symbol exposes the "complex relationship between religion and geo-symbolism."³ "Physicality and land (i.e., Africa, Jerusalem, Mecca, Rome, and so forth) are infused with 'geo-theological' meaning and geo-sacrality."⁴ In other words, for a given diasporic community, claiming one's homeland as a religious symbol sacralizes and theologizes the given space and its religious, cultural and philosophical resources.

What is at stake in this 'reontologizing' project? According to Charles H. Long, non-Western religions, cultures and people were signified by Western academic discourse.⁵ Accompanying colonization was signification, or the naming, categorizing and objectification "through categories and concepts of those realities which appear as novel and 'other' to the cultures of conquest."⁶ This process of naming and othering is problematic because it is an exercise of power on the colonized by the colonizer. The colonized's ability to self-define,

² See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 159. Cassirer understands the God concept to be the index symbol from which all Western discourse on knowledge is deduced up until the 18th Century. The turn of the 18th Century, in its abandonment of traditional Christian metaphysics and theology, is accompanied by defining "concept on the basis of their specific form" rather than its relation to the God concept. This destabilizes traditional understandings of God, epistemology, ethics and law from being foundational givens or epistemic criteria to concepts among a sea of other concepts that requires an external justification.

³ Hucks, XVIII.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 4.

⁶ Ibid.

to articulate one's existential condition and ontological reality is not only denied, but overwritten by the signifying activity of the colonizer. Signification intentionally highlights differences of the 'other' to categorize the other as culturally subordinate or inferior. The 'other' is filtered through the values and ideals of the West, reifying Western normativity. Long noted that this othering and signification affected the perception and identity of African Americans. "The cultural reality of blacks in the United States has been created by those who have the power of cultural signification...blacks are a part of the same structures of cultural categories that create the categories of the primitive and the colonized peoples of the contemporary world."⁷ Through making Africa as an index symbol, black religious nationalists undermine the signification process that have harmed non-White bodies in the United States.

Long points out that the same structures that signify and dehumanize African Americans in the United States are signifying non-Western cultures and people. The strategy used by black religious nationalists to redeem black bodies in the United States has some relevance and applicability to other people of color.⁸ The geo-symbol of Africa plays a significant role in the construction of religious identity/practice and in black nationalist movements. "The image of Africa, an image related to historical beginnings, has been one of the primordial religious images of great significance. It constitutes the religious revalorization of the land, a place where the natural and ordinary gestures of the blacks to could be authenticated."⁹ This can be seen in Huck's analysis of the role of Yoruba/Ifa in black religious nationalism of the 20th Century. "Yoruba religion invokes a meaningful connection to Africa as 'originary space' that substantiates human value and provides restorative ontological, historical, and spiritual integrity."¹⁰ Africa as an index symbol enables African diasporic communities to access the religious, cultural and spiritual resources of Africa such as Yoruba/Ifa to allow the reclaiming of humanity and self-determination. "Africa was positioned as a reontologizing device and revalued as a sacred, philosophical, cultural, and religious resource for African American Yoruba in the United States."¹¹

⁷ Ibid. 7-8.

⁸ Abbreviated POC for the rest of this work.

⁹ Ibid., 176.

¹⁰ Hucks, xix.

¹¹ Ibid., 49.

This process resists demonizing blackness, essentializing 'African traditional religions', and the signifying process internal to colonization.

Asia as an index symbol can be a strategy for Asian Americans to also overturn problematic significations of the cultures and people of the Asian diaspora. These problematic significations include problematic racializations of Asians within the black/white binary of racial discourse in the U.S., romanticization of Asian religious and cultural resources, and colonization of Asian American minds that normalizes Western religious, ethical and philosophical values. Korean Americans are part of the Korean diaspora, under pressure to either fully assimilate into mainstream American culture or self-segregate within racial-ethnic enclaves and cultural influences. "Diasporic religious cultures can also be viewed theoretically as "a sociohistorical site or 'space of resistance' ...to racially and ethnically-based forms of social domination."¹²

Just as Yoruba religious culture in black religious nationalism offered a space of resistance to problematic significations of black racial and religious identity, I call for a development of a Korean diasporic religious culture that also can become a space of resistance. Within a Christian framework, this requires a rejection of American evangelicalism, which has continued to promote problematic racializations for Asian Americans based on class and color-lines. Constructing a new ontology through reclaiming Asia as an index symbol allows Korean Americans to form a new identity neither imposed on them by "those who have the power of cultural signification"¹³ nor by embracing the religiocultural values and identities found in contemporary South Korea. Just as contemporary Africa has delegitimized Africans of the Atlantic world, South Koreans delegitimize Korean Americans as not retaining one's true Korean identity. Korean American reality is shaped by the migration experience, and the various socio-political factors that necessitated emigration. This migration experience differentiates the identity formation process for Korean diasporic communities from contemporary South Koreans. By turning to the religious, cultural and philosophical resources that have shaped pre-modern Korea, Korean Americans can simultaneously resist signification by mainstream American society and the rejection of their Korean-ness by contemporary South Korean society.

¹² Ibid., xx.

¹³ Long, 7.

To work towards using Asia as a 'reontologizing device', I first review studies on Asian migration history, particularly for Korean Americans. Next, I examine problematic racialization of Asian Americans by mainstream U.S. culture. Third, I turn to the experiences of working-class Korean Americans to problematize the narratives of middle-class Korean Americans, who predominantly adopt both the 'model-minority' racialization and evangelical Christianity. The experiences of pre-1965 Korean migrants and working-class Korean Americans today are placed as the site in which Asia can be revisited as an index symbol. It is in these communities that the values of American meritocratic capitalism, indifference to racism, and sexism can be critiqued. It is in this space that a non-evangelical religious identity can be constructed, to develop religious identities and practices that construct meaning and knowledge that decenters Western index symbols as normative.

Asian Migration History Studies of Asian migration has been dominated by narratives of migrant communities on the West Coast and Hawai'i. Contributors to Khyati Y. Joshi and Jigna Desai's *Asian Americans in Dixie: Race and Migration in the South* challenge the study of Asian American migration narratives to the East and West Coasts by intentionally examining migration, racial formation and identity formation of Asian Americans in the South. When we examine the question of Korean American migration history, it is easy to see how a geographical bias affects the study. Edward T. Chang notes that the study of diasporic Koreans in the United States is dominated by Los Angeles and California based research. A sampling of studies on Korean American religious communities also reflects this trend. Similarly, Joshi and Desai's observation of the Coastal domination in the study of Asian Americans is evident in the strong representation of studies of Korean Americans in the New York metropolitan area after the studies focusing on the West Coast and Hawai'i. Studies of Korean-American communities have "neglected the studies of second-generation Korean Americans, adoptees, army brides and non-immigrants."¹⁴ General periodization of Asian migration has been divided into two periods: 1) early migration from the 19th Century to the closing of the US border to Asian migrants in the Immigration Act of 1924, and 2) second wave migration following the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which reopened borders to immigrants.

¹⁴ Edward T. Chang, "Diaspora Korean in the United States: An Introduction" in *Korean Diaspora: Central Asia, Northeast Asia and North America* ed. Hesung Chun Koh et. al (New Haven: East Rock Institute, 2006), U3.

Korean Migration History

A quick review of Korean migration history is necessary to understand how Korean migrants have become Korean Americans. A recollection of Korean migration history problematizes the ways in which Korean Americans have been racialized in the US, particularly the 'model minority myth' racialization. Chang's study of Korean immigration history to the US looks at three periods of migration. These divisions are related to US domestic policy and military intervention, as pull factors contributed to migration patterns of Korean immigrants. I will briefly recap the first two and focus on discussing the most recent wave of immigration.

The First Wave of Korean immigration to the United States was between 1903 and 1924. Approximately 8,000 Korean laborers comprising of mostly young urban, single male workers migrated to Hawai'i.¹⁵ During World War I, some Korean migrants migrated to the mainland.¹⁶ The last group of Korean immigrants before the Immigration Act of 1924 were students and political exiles escaping Japanese rule. This group included young male intellectuals coordinating independence movement. The close affiliation of Korean churches to Korean independence¹⁷ from this period persists in the consciousness of Koreans today, especially in South Korea as conservative Christians portray themselves as the vanguard of Korean democracy resisting the socialistic tendencies of the enemy Communist 'other.'¹⁸ The First Wave of Korean immigrants is the only group that has experienced the loss of national identity; this focus on returning or

¹⁵ See Edward T. Chang, "Korean Kaleidoscope: An Overview of Korean Immigrants to the U.S." in *Korean Diaspora: Central Asia, Northeast Asia and North America* ed. Hesung Chun Koh et. al (New Haven: East Rock Institute, 2006), U6. During this period, the Joseon dynasty was on the verge of collapse, rife of corruption and heavy taxation. Natural disasters and famines led to migration from rural farms to port cities. Japan annexed Korea as a protectorate in 1905. Asian laborers, including Koreans, were imported into Hawai'i to be strikebreakers at sugar plantations.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, U9.

¹⁷ "Korean churches in this period served not only as religious centers, but more importantly, as gathering places for independence activities among early Korean immigrants," (Chang, U10).

¹⁸ See Wi Jo Kang, *Christ and Caesar in Modern Korea: A History of Christianity and Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 91-98; Eun Young Lee Easley, "Taking Jesus Public: The Neoliberal Transformation of Korean Megachurches," in *Encountering Modernity: Christianity in East Asia and Asian America*, ed. Albert L. Park and David K. Yoo (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 57-61. According to Lee Easley, this close association of Korean Christianity to anti-labor policies and practices can also be seen in recently emerging Korean megachurches, which has a theological posturing that legitimizes the effects of neoliberalism in South Korean society as part of God's will.

restoring the homeland distracted this community from making long-term plans to make the US their home.¹⁹

The Second Wave of Korean migration (1945-1964) was comprised of over 17,000 women and children of American military personnel, war orphans and adoptees, and Korean international students.²⁰ The nearly 6,000 Korean women who migrated to the US as war brides experienced racial discrimination, social isolation and physical abuse.²¹ The modernization of Korean society under military dictatorship fractured Korean society “by displacing the rural population and producing a high unemployment rate among the educated sector of the population.”²² Ji-Yeon Yuh speaks strongly about the effects of the Korean War and its aftermath in a strong-arm modernization of South Korea setting policies encouraging Korean emigration.²³ As US policy severely limited the number of Koreans entering the States,²⁴ the Korean diaspora scattered to Europe, South America, Japan and China etc.

The Third Wave of Korean migration the US brought a much larger and characteristically different group of Korean immigrants. In 1970, there were fewer than 70,000 Korean Americans in the US.²⁵ By 1990, the figure had ballooned to 800,000.²⁶ Today, there are over 1.7 million Koreans in the United States.²⁷ There were several reasons for emigration:

- 1) Limited economic opportunities and mobility in face of rapid economic restructuring
- 2) Limited educational opportunities, especially for children

¹⁹ Chang, “Korean Kaleidoscope,” U10.

²⁰ Ibid., U12. “McCarran-Walter Act set quota of 100 immigrants from Korea for purposes of family reunification.”

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., U11.

²³ See Ji-Yeon Yuh, “Moved By War,”. “Migration was pushed by the Park Chung Hee government, specifically through the 1963 Emigration Act, to relieve perceived pressures of unemployment and to increase foreign exchange earnings... war was an ever-present threat in the decades following the 1953 armistice that ended military hostilities, and those who could grabbed the chance to escape,” (20).

²⁴ Save the three groups mentioned earlier

²⁵ Chang, “Korean Kaleidoscope,” U15.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, “The Asian Population: 2010,” Asian Population by Numbers of Detailed Groups: 2010 Table 5, <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-11.pdf> (accessed December 16, 2015).

- 3) Anti-government sentiment resulting from political repression
- 4) Perceived economic and political security, and peace of mind that many Koreans believed they would find in the US.²⁸

Twenty-eight percent of educated male college graduates in South Korea were unemployed. Modernization led to emerging middle-class and large property holders. But the income equality gap between the economically stable and the lower-income workers widened. Migration in the Third Wave differed from previous waves in that it was 1) a voluntary migration to build future livelihood for self and children, and 2) unaware of multiracial, multiethnic, and socially complex reality of the US. From 1965 to 1976, the majority of Korean immigrants were middle-class urbanites. Eighty-four percent of Korean immigrants in 1965 had professional, managerial, sales or clerical fields.²⁹ This is in line with the preference for white-collared professionals as immigrants. The Immigration Act of 1976 restricted entry of immigrants to certain occupations, and opened more extended families to be petitioned to enter the US. After 1976, ninety percent of immigrants entered the US through family connections. Most of these were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.³⁰ Rather than being white-collar professionals, many resorted to low-profit margin entrepreneurship in depressed urban areas, shopkeepers who became the center of tension between the Korean-American and African-American communities in the aftermath of the 1992 LA riots. We will discuss the implications of these class distinctions in the narratives of second generation Korean Americans in a later section.

Asian American Racialization

Asian Americans have been racialized in many harmful ways in the context of American racial discourse, which to this day has been centrally fixated on the bifurcation of white/black identity politics. Because Asian Americans, in its motley of regional ethnic and cultural differences,³¹ do not fit clearly into either dominant racial category, the racialization of Asian Americans has often been done in relation to the white/black bifurcation. I argue that the primarily

²⁸ Ibid., U14.

²⁹ Ibid., U16.

³⁰ Over half of the Koreans who entered the US in the 1980s were laborers and farmers.

³¹ Consider that the category Asian American is used by the US Census to describe persons of the Asian diaspora of East Asian, Southeast Asian, South Asian, Central Asian, Northern Asian descent.

harmful racializations of Asian Americans include the 'model minority' model and the 'perpetual foreigner' model. Brandzel and Desai define three general approaches of racializing Asian immigrants in "Racism without Recognition."³² The first approach is to look at Asian Americans in terms of one racial category. The second is a 'racial hierarchy' model, in which Asian Americans are placed between whites and blacks in an ambiguous space. The third approach discusses the status of Asian Americans in terms of citizen/alien-other binary in the U.S. legal system and public culture.³³ The first approach fails because it does not address the intersectionality of race with gender, sexuality, class, disability, and nation.³⁴ Asian American identity is 'signified' through isolating race from other aspects of identity formation. The second approach, which includes the model minority and perpetual foreigner models, reifies the bifurcation of American racial discourse and perpetuates white normativity and black abjection.

In its relation to the model minority myth, the second approach places Asian Americans as the buffer class between whites and blacks. Successful Asian Americans are rewarded with the privileges of 'near whiteness' for climbing the mythic meritocratic ladder and rejecting/abjecting blackness. Thus, 'near-whiteness' pits Asian identity against Black identity that inhibits solidarity and collective pursuit of justice against systemic marginalization and oppression amongst minority ethnic/racial groups in the U.S. Leslie Bow argues that 'model minority' models of Asian American racialization presuppose successful assimilation and successful social elevation. There is a sense of irresistibility of using Asian assimilation success stories in a post-Civil Rights U.S. as 'evidence' of a progressive narrative of integration and the end of racism. Such a narrative is perpetuated by assimilated Chinese Americans, who seek to identify with whiteness for the benefits of social elevation that identification with blackness seems to not provide.³⁵ This 'color blind' approach to racializing Asian Americans has been harmful, as evident in the exploitation of Asianness in white evangelical circles.³⁶ The third approach reifies the notion of Asian as an unassimilable alien-

³² See Amy Brandzel and Jigna Desai, "Racism without Recognition: Toward a Model of Asian American Racialization" in *Asian Americans in Dixie: Race and Migration in the South* ed. Khyati Y. Joshi and Jigna Desai (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

³³ Brandzel and Desai, "Racism without Recognition," 81.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

³⁵ Leslie Bow, "Racial Interstitiality and the Anxieties of the "Partly Colored": representations of Asians under Jim Crow" in *Asian Americans in Dixie: Race and Migration in the South* ed. Khyati Y. Joshi and Jigna Desai (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 72.

other, a perpetual foreigner whether or not one has been naturalized or born as a U.S. citizen. Signification in this way erases Asian American participation and contributions to mainstream U.S. culture, and further exotifies the Asian 'other'.

Contemporary Korean American Struggles

Both the model minority and perpetual foreigner models have impacted second generation Korean American identity formation. Sara S. Lee points to how both significations affect Korean Americans differently based on class-lines³⁷ Middle-class Korean Americans, in contrast to working-class Korean Americans, were more readily willing to embrace the 'model minority' racialization, along with a positive sense of Korean ethnic identity. Working-class Koreans reject this racialization based on life experiences. "The power of the model minority stereotype and the middle-class Korean community's unrealistically high academic and occupational expectations made working-class Korean Americans feel inadequate, ashamed, and ostracized from the co-ethnic community."³⁸ Affirming the model minority myth has had adverse effects on the self-esteem of working-class Korean Americans, leading many of them to distance themselves from the Korean American community.

Lee also finds college-educated, middle-class Asian Americans embrace a Pan-Asian American identity.³⁹ In contrast, working-class Korean Americans tended to identify politically⁴⁰ with other ethnic minorities.

³⁶ See "An Open Letter to the Evangelical Church," accessed September 30, 2016, http://nextgenerasianchurch.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Open-Letter_AAU_PDF1.pdf.

³⁷ See Sara S. Lee, "Class Matters: Racial and Ethnic Identities of Working and Middle-Class Second-Generation Korean Americans in New York City" in *Being New Yorkers: Ethnographies of the New Second Generation* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 314.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁴⁰ "Working-class Korean Americans also tended to define their racial or ethnic identity as a political identity. To them, being Korean American meant being politically active and involved in efforts to improve the lives of the oppressed and of marginalized peoples (that is, the 'other')," (Lee, 329).

Working class minor working-class Korean Americans feel most strongly connected to and identify with other racial minority groups who have a history of racial and economic oppression here in the United States; their class-based connection to other minority groups cause them to regard ethnicity-based identity, particularly one that is based on what they regard as a false sense of group superiority, as ill-representative of their more complex and layered senses of self and subsequently, as politically stifling.⁴¹

Thus, the aversion to Pan-Asian Americanism is related to the rejection of a middle-class Korean American narrative of social mobility. Middle-class Korean Americans connected with other Asian Americans not only because of interactions on college campuses, but also through “their ability to construct a common narrative about the Korean American penchant for success, an idea that corresponds well with their own mobility experiences and the model minority image ascribed to them by the larger society.”⁴² They ascribed this success to the Korean work ethic, and cultural valuing of education and family. Middle-class Korean Americans don’t account for their family’s class status, which confers social capital that aids and enables upward mobility.

Although cultural difficulties and discrimination led many college-educated, middle-class Korean immigrants to experience downward mobility upon their arrival in the United States, their class resources and ensuing entrepreneurship enabled many of them to recover relatively quickly and achieve upward mobility... Many middle-class Koreans seemed unaware of their parents’ class advantage. Instead, they believed that their parents immigrated to the United States with no resources but ultimately achieved success because of their hard work and desire to succeed—characteristics they attributed to being Korean.⁴³

Another common thread in the middle-class narrative was the myth that parents sacrificed everything in order to provide better lives for their children. This does not take into the account that push factors for Third Wave immigrants include “authoritarian military regime and restricted educational and career opportunities,”⁴⁴ as well as the class distinctions between post 1965 and post 1976 immigrants. This myth contributed to the narrative of ‘self-made success’

⁴¹ Ibid., 320.

⁴² Ibid., 320.

⁴³ Ibid., 322.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 323.

creates a sense of aggrandizement of the Korean American identity as a model of ethnic success, without taking into account the narratives of the working class.

Consider in contrast the subaltern narrative of working-class Korean Americans. Both models of racialization have been harmful to this group. Working-class Korean Americans see academic and economic success through a class lens. "Middle-class respondents touted ethnicity as the reason for their academic success, but many working-class respondents recognized that the type of college they attended and their limited academic success had much to do with their family's financial circumstances."⁴⁵ Working-class Korean Americans had a "lack of vital information crucial to mobility among their parents and the people in their social networks."⁴⁶

In addition, working-class Korean Americans reject the vanity and materialism that seems to be promoted in Korean American middle class narratives both inside and outside the church. "Working-class respondents often disagreed strongly with what they regarded as the Korean people's need to own and flaunt their material wealth. They preferred not to associate with Korean Americans, whom they characterized as 'rich, spoiled, upper-class people.' "⁴⁷ Lee concludes by stating working-class Korean Americans disassociated from their ethnic identity because of the negative social status and shame levied on them. The lower-class needs to embrace their ethnic identity to overturn the middle-class alignment with the model minority racialization. "If only the successful members self-identify as Korean American and the less successful members do not—and consequently, 'drop out,' of the Korean American community—it may begin to appear as if ethnicity is indeed the fulcrum of their success."⁴⁸ The challenge remains whether the subaltern voice will be heard loud enough as a rallying cry for working-class second-generation Korean Americans to articulate their experience to counter the middle-class narrative.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 326.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 327.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 328.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 334.

Limitations of Asian American Evangelicalism

There is a strong correlation between the embracing of evangelicalism,⁴⁹ the acceptance of 'model minority status,' and the embrace of middle-class lifestyle and class narrative as a marker of Asianness for middle-class Asian Americans. Jerry Z. Park talks about patterns in the Korean American religious elite. His study focuses on "the changes in religiosity that happens in college for 'elite' Korean Americans."⁵⁰ Based on Lee's essay, one can infer that more Korean Americans who attend these elite institutions are from the middle-class than working-class backgrounds. There are several markers that support such a claim. "Elite Korean Americans are strongly inclined toward coethnic solidarity, and as such their postcollege outcomes...may rely more heavily on their Korean and Korean American circles compared to other Asian groups."⁵¹ Korean American students are predominantly Protestant, and attend coethnic religious student organizations. Rebecca Kim notes that second-generation Korean American evangelicals "opt to participate in ethnically homogenous organizations,"⁵² including religious groups.

Rudy V. Busto attempts to explain the link between Asian Americans and evangelical Christianity on college campuses. One thread is the "aggressive

⁴⁹ See Russell Jeung, *Faithful Generations: Race and New Asian American Churches* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005). For the purpose of this paper, evangelicalism is a 'subcultural identity' developed as early as the mid 1980s that is distinguished from past evangelical and mainline Christian denominations. "Most scholars agree that evangelicalism has three tenets: (1) the literal interpretation of scripture; (2) a born-again experience; and (3) the commitment to converting others...these tenets have their own internal logics that translate into a peculiar form of American religiosity that is engaged with the world, therapeutic, and market oriented," (Jeung 64).

⁵⁰ Jerry Z. Park, "Racial Insularity and Ethnic Faith: The Emerging Korean American Religious Elite" in *Sustaining Faith Traditions: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion Among the Latino and Asian American Second Generation* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 136. The students are considered elite because they attend twenty-seven of the most prestigious universities in the US including: Barnard College, Bryn Mawr College, Columbia University, Denison College, Emory University, Georgetown University, Howard University, Kenyon College, Miami University Northwestern University, Oberlin College, Penn State University, Princeton University, Rice University, Smith College, Stanford University, Swarthmore College, Tufts University, Tulane University, University of California (Berkeley), University of Michigan (Ann Arbor), University of Notre Dame, University of Pennsylvania, Washington University, Wesleyan University, Williams College, Yale University.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 142.

evangelism that took place in Asia after World War II.”⁵³ This has set the theological posturing of many post-1965 Korean immigrants, who were predisposed to evangelicalism, conservative Protestantism, and had in some way influenced the spiritual climate in which second-generation Korean Americans grew up in. Second, there is a paradoxical embrace of both an Asian American Christian fellowship and an evangelical belief that places ethnic identity secondary to Christian identity. “A sampling of Asian American evangelical fellowship websites reveal mission statements targeting Asian and Asian American students for outreach and membership while simultaneously affirm a non-race-specific evangelical identity.”⁵⁴ Busto cites the ‘model minority’ myth as a motivating factor for this.

Campus Christian organizations, besides offering a supportive and familial structure for Asian American students, reinforce an upwardly mobile middle-class ethnic consonant with the model minority image—an image... that results in Asian American students feeling pressured to conform to the picture of success and caving in to the denial of individual diversity.⁵⁵

Nearly 80% of Korean Americans are affiliated with a Korean American church. As a prime institution of Korean American identity and culture, Korean American churches embody the dominant narrative of upward mobility, sacrifice and shaming of deviant failures in the lower-class. This becomes more plausible when one reflects on the fact that the largest church in the world is located in South Korea, and subscribes to the Word of Faith theology.⁵⁶

Consider another case in point. Most Korean Americans tend to study at conservative or evangelical seminaries to prepare for ministry. “Korean Americans are the largest nonwhite group in American evangelical seminaries. For example, they make up over 25 percent of the student body at Fuller Theological Seminary

⁵³ Rudy V. Busto, “The Gospel according to the Model Minority?: hazarding an Interpretation of Asian American Evangelical College Students” in *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans*, ed. David K. Yoo. (Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 172.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 178.

⁵⁶ See Milmon F. Harrison *The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2005), 8, 165n13. “Three basic points form the core of the Faith Message. These are: the principles of knowing who you are in Christ; the practice of positive confession (and positive mental attitude); and a world view that emphasizes material prosperity and physical health as the divine right of every Christian,” (8).

in California.”⁵⁷ Another worrying facet of Asian American evangelicalism is its de-emphasis of solidarity amongst racial minorities. “Mainline Protestant Asian American churches view themselves as belonging to a racial minority group that shares a common history of racial oppression, while evangelical Asian American churches see themselves as a group bound by personal networks and similar lifestyles.”⁵⁸ Similarly, there was a lack of interest in the problem of structural racism, ignoring this as long as it did not hinder their ability to be socially mobile.

Only 52 percent of them indicated that they felt that racism against Asian Americans was a significant social problem...second-generation Korean Americans believe that the form of racism they encounter...does not significantly hinder them in their pursuit of economic advancement and upward mobility.⁵⁹

This conforms with the middle-class narrative. The problem with the alignment to the model minority racialization for Korean Americans is that it divests interest or responsibility to those that are deviating from their experiential norms. Second-generation Korean Americans in the Los Angeles area that attend both Korean immigrant and Korean American churches do not find racism to be a problem as long as it does not hinder one’s social mobility. This self-interested narrative emerges from these conservative and evangelically postured churches.

Most evangelical ministers recognize that Asian Americans have faced racism and discrimination in the past and this legacy continues today...however, most evangelical ministers do not view racism as a sin that Christian need to address on a systemic level. Instead, they tend to view sin in terms of its consequences for the individual, not for the group.⁶⁰

In other words, evangelical ministers in Asian American churches do not emphasize structural sin like Liberation Theologians, but rather reify a classical Augustinian understanding of sin. Injustices are understood in terms of

⁵⁷ Sharon Kim and Rebecca Y. Kim, “Second-Generation Korean American Christians’ Communities” in *Sustaining Faith Traditions: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion Among the Latino and Asian American Second Generation* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 183.

⁵⁸ Sharon Kim, *A Faith of Our Own: Second-Generation Spirituality in Korean American Churches* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 9-10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁰ Jeung, *Faithful Generations*, 68.

individual moral failings, which must be corrected first by establishing the right relationship with God, then with others. Structural sins such as racism, classism or sexism therefore must be resolved through spiritual/interpersonal means rather than through transforming the institutions that perpetuate oppression. By spiritualizing systemic issues such as racism, the Korean American Christian's commitment to political agency and advocacy is diminished and rerouted to a soteriology grounded in having faith in God. Signifying Korean American Christians as a 'model minority' further isolates them from other racial/ethnic minorities, leaving structures of oppression intact.

Towards Asia as Index Symbol

Asia as a religious symbol can function as a 'reontologizing device' to resist problematic racializations and religiosities. Korean Americans have in some ways been demeaned by problematic racializations that pit them against other POC in the United States, and erase the narrative of the working-class Korean Americans. The model minority racialization of Asian Americans has divided Korean Americans on class lines; those in the middle class find no impetus to oppose the theodicy of the privileged as they have benefitted from it. Those in the working class have undergone similar experiences with other working class POC, and therefore can identify with other marginalized people. In addition, working class Korean Americans tended to dissociate themselves from their racial/ethnic identity because of the middle-class hegemony of Asian-ness as equivalent to the model minority myth of "pulling oneself up by the bootstraps." Working-class Korean Americans have been shamed by their middle-class counterparts for failing to achieve success in higher education and lucrative professional white-collar careers. Harmed by this rhetoric, working-class Korean Americans are dissociated from their ethnic/cultural heritage as members of the Korean diaspora.

Working-class Korean American Christians can benefit from rediscovering the cultural heritage of their ancestors to discover the spiritual and philosophical wisdom necessary to re-conceive Korean American identity not in terms of being on the margins of American society, but as diasporic communities reclaiming their heritage. Of course, this comparison has its limitations. The philosophical, spiritual and religious resources of Asia have been long studied by Western scholars with some degree of romanticizing, in contrast to the initial demonization of African religious culture in the 19th Century. Furthermore, spiritual practices from traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism have been heavily commodified in the American spiritual marketplace; such appropriations

by mainstream America have made it difficult to overcome the orientalist gaze of Asian religious cultural resources. However, as Hucks has noted, this struggle is also present in Yoruba as Anglo-Americans are increasingly getting a foothold in Yoruba religious culture as they establish institutions and seek to be authoritative by being initiated directly at Yorubaland.

For Korean Americans, group origins and identity can be rehistoricized to move away from the middle-class narrative of parental sacrifice and the narrative of the American dream toward the symbol of Asia as a space where neocolonialism continues to operate in perpetuating poverty, political instability and warfare. Narrowly construed, Korean American immigrant narratives must shift towards the reality of Cold War political maneuvering of the United States and the Soviet Union as part of the push/pull factors that led to Korean diasporic migration. Korean Americans have not migrated merely out of 'voluntary purposes;' war has had a prominent effect on Korean diasporic movement of seeking refuge. The Korean peninsula is still technically a warzone, a reality that is constantly being reminded by North Korean nuclear and missile tests as well as recent strong-arm maneuverings by the Trump administration that threaten to break the armistice and destabilize East Asia. Furthermore, the authoritarian regimes in South Korea until the early 1990s spurred rapid modernization that benefitted the few land-owning class and the aspiring professional middle-class.

Third, the present U.S. context of political activism such as Black Lives Matter in the foray of a swath of issues⁶¹ as the 'hermeneutical situation' that Korean Americans can reevaluate its understanding of itself as a community and its relation to the broader US society. The recent police assault of Dr. David Dao on United Express Flight 3411 and the racist Airbnb cancellation on Dyne Suh have been covered by various news outlets, including Korean and Chinese American websites, and it serves as a reminder that Asian bodies continue to be devalued and seen as 'other,' no matter how achieved or assimilated you are perceived to be. By identifying the internal colonization that Korean Americans experience with both the internal colonization of other POC in the US and the oppression of persons of the Global South under neoliberalism, Korean

⁶¹ Such as mass-incarceration of POC, xenophobic attitudes towards immigration and refugees, discrimination of American Muslims as the religious 'other,' the strong denial of Climate Change affecting public policy to curb irreversible damage of the environment, de facto racial discrimination and microaggression on college campuses and public spaces, the movement towards 'color-blindness,' 'men's rights movement,' and 'anti-LGBTQIA' hate crimes and attitudes.

Americans can participate in interracial and transnational solidarity and political action with communities suffering under the ideologies of white supremacy.

Fourth, Korean Americans can subvert the pejorative categories of race, particularly in the endless white/black bifurcation in American racial discourse and the exclusion or dangling of Korean American bodies in the broader discourse by identification with a broader Asian diaspora and transnational POC diaspora. Lastly, Korean American scholars must contribute to academic scholarship by challenging old racial/religious/cultural orthodoxies to develop new historical identities through recovering texts and narratives that have often been overlooked or signified in problematic ways by Western religious scholarship. Korean American scholars can become scholar-activists that reject orientalist depictions of Asian bodies, religions and cultures and recover a new historical identity that is liberative. Particularly, in the religious sphere, Korean Americans must wrest Asian religions from constant objectification in both academia and consumer culture so that the sacred resources of our ancestors can be liberative for millions of Asians around the world that suffer abject poverty under globalization. The appropriation of Asian resources by mainstream American society through transgressing cultural boundaries must be challenged by developing critical hybridities that are liberative for Korean Americans rather than useful for American spiritual consumers.

There are, of course, limitations to developing a pan-Asian American religiopolitical identity grounded in Asia as an index symbol. First is the problem of the broadness of the category 'Asian American.' In common parlance, Asian American has almost become synonymous with middle-class Asian Americans of East Asian descent. However, Asian Americans as a category encompasses a much broader group of persons, including South Asians, Southeast Asians, Central Asians, North Asians and so on. In the flattening of Asian American identity perhaps due to overrepresentation of East Asians, we neglect the unique struggles and situations of ethnicities such as Filipino Americans, Vietnamese Americans, Tibetan Americans, Thai Americans, Sri Lankan Americans, Indian Americans, Mongolian Americans etc. Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans and Korean Americans have had hegemony on the category Asian American due to the Pan-Asian solidarity found in middle-class second generation East Asians and its large representation in immigration rolls.

Southeast Asian Americans, particularly with its immigrant history as political refugees, have often been perceived more readily as impoverished, external others in American society than post-1965 East Asian migrants. Thus, the solidarity that can be constructed amongst Asian Americans to form Asian

American nationalism is limited compared to African Americans. Furthermore, the unique hermeneutical situation found during the Civil Rights movement, particularly in the strong solidarity across racial, ethnic and religious lines might be impossible to reconstruct in an extremely polarized, fragmented American society. As much as Black Lives Matter has been a rallying cry for conscientious Asian Americans to be politically allied with African Americans, there are an equal vocal number of Asian Americans who resist shedding their model minority status and choose to continue to abject blackness by pointing out the 'violence' and 'harm' caused by Black Lives Matter activists. Thus, there is difficulty in amassing critical mass and the risk of universalizing particular appropriations of Asia's religious, cultural and philosophical resources.

Furthermore, adopting Asia as an index symbol enables Korean Americans to understand religion as a fluid, continually reshaped category that has never been isolated from syncretism and cross-cultural exchange. One of the strongest mainstays in conservative and evangelical Korean American Christian communities is the denial of religious syncretism and the rejection of any form of contextualization or negotiation of Christianity through the lens of the cultural legacy of our ancestors. Ironically, certain facets of conservative Korean American Christianity which both the immigrant church and second-generation church reify is the practice of 'prayer mountains.'⁶² Both Korean immigrant churches and Korean American congregations engage in this free-form ecstatic prayer, which is reminiscent of the practice of releasing han in Korean shamanistic rituals, which were incidentally done corporately by encouraging unrestricted outpouring of grievances, petitions and cries. Adopting Asia as an index symbol is a move from unconsciously forming hybrid rituals to intentionally developing hybrid identities that redeem Asian bodies. There is much complementary potential found in embracing both the religious resources found in the Abrahamic faiths and Asian religious traditions/practices. By embracing the veneration of ancestors found in traditional Asian culture, Korean Americans can reclaim agency and autonomy much like African Americans have benefitted in grounding the new ontology in the legacy of their ancestors. The potential to overcome the harmful racializations of 'model minority' and 'perpetual foreigner' by reclaiming agency is immense. By accessing the wellsprings of Asian religious cultures, Korean Americans can engage in a continual process of reconstructing their communal identity in ways that resist and subvert external significations of Korean American identity.

⁶² Otherwise known as *tongsungkido* (통성기도), the practice of corporate extemporaneous prayer.

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PENITENCE, PLANTATION AND THE PENITENTIARY:

A LIBERATION THEOLOGY FOR LOCKDOWN AMERICA

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Introduction

The critical examination of sacrificial atonement elucidates how religious interpretations of punishment can have death-dealing consequences for Black and Brown bodies.¹ In a socio-historical and theo-ethical study, this essay expounds a compendium of atonement models of the early church in the East and West and interrogates Christian understandings of punishment and mass incarceration. The main argument posits that pervading interpretations of Anselm's sacrificial atonement theory normalized scapegoating logic and reified racialized pathologies of punishment that undergird penal systems of sacrifice from the plantation to the penitentiary. In response, the final analysis proposes a Liberation Theology for Lockdown America. Over and against systems of sacrifice designed to break Black bodies, a Liberation Theology for Lockdown America jettisons sacrificial theology completely. Instead, it emphasizes the divine qualities of persons incarcerated to transcend criminality, restore social standing and eradicate systems of sacrifice to secure human flourishing.

Hitherto, the theological underpinnings of punishment juxtaposed with the scapegoating of Black bodies and the U.S. prison industrial complex has received scant attention in academe, Church and society. Thus, the ensuing task is to unveil the symbiotic relationship between the cross and the Carceral State. The point of departure begins with a trenchant theological inquiry: how do criminalized Black bodies find liberation in Jesus who died a criminal's death?

¹ The term, "Black and Brown bodies" generally refers to African-Americans, persons of the African Diaspora, Caribbean and Latinos who are located in the U.S.

This is coupled with an ethical query: what does it mean to be Black, Christian and criminalized in a Carceral State founded on religious ideals? With these foci questions in mind, section I explores a cursory survey of atonement theories of the early church in the East and the West to suggest that interpretations of Anselm's sacrificial atonement theory gained hegemonic influence. Section II surveys the socio-historical realities of the plantation as one system of sacrifice that evolved into a larger system of sacrifice: the penitentiary. Section III, concludes with a Liberation Theology of Lockdown America that emphasizes the meaning of Jesus' death as a site of both retribution and resistance demonstrated by his defeat (dying an ignoble criminal's death) and his victory (transcending criminality). Hence, in a Liberation Theology of Lockdown America, the cross and the resurrection reveal God's solidarity with the incarcerated and the restorative possibilities for transformation and freedom.

Atonement Theories of the West and East

The earliest accounts of atonement theory are found in the letters of Paul the Apostle. According to these primitive writings there is the sinner who is saved by Jesus Christ because, "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."² Paul also states, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!"³ In the former, Paul suggests atonement by sacrificial death. In the latter, Paul suggests a more legal and economic model presented in a ransom or substitution theory. In addition to these two disparate understandings of atonement, Paul provides an incarnational theory found in the Philippians hymn (2:5-8), which unites humanity to divinity. From these three accounts, in the earliest Christian writings Paul "uses multiple metaphors and models to illustrate the meaning of the death of Christ."⁴ The ambiguity of Atonement conveys the complexity of understanding the true nature of God. From the earliest Christian writings to subsequent postulations there emerged

² Romans 3:25

³ Romans 5:8-9.

⁴ Stephen Finlan, *Problems with Atonement* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2005), 39.

the martyr model (Christ died for us), the penal substitution model (Christ died in our place), the ransoming model (Christ paid the price to buy our freedom), the sacrificial model (Christ died as the new place of atonement) and the scapegoat model (Christ took on our curse and bore away our sins). Hence, "Paul's soteriological formulas about the death of Christ provided the seedbed for those frightening and rigid theologies of atonement that came later."⁵

In the West during the High Middle Ages, the dominant Atonement theories belonged to Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard and Gustaf Aulen. Anselm's 'objective' view and satisfaction theory of Atonement claimed that, "God is the object of Christ's atoning work, and is reconciled through the satisfaction made to His justice."⁶ According to Anselm, Christ's death is an atoning for sinful humanity by paying a debt to God.⁷ Anselm's feudal structure of salvation creates a hierarchy that predicates on the disenfranchisement of a lower class. In Anselm's substitutionary theory the Lord's serfs become dispensable and a byproduct of salvation for the sake of the offended Lord. Abelard, on the other hand, subscribed to a 'subjective' view, which directly responded to Anselm, and by which Christ became the Exemplar, even unto death. Subsequently, Abelard "explains the atonement as consisting essentially in a change taking place in men rather than a changed attitude on the part of God."⁸ Anselm and Abelard are generally contrasted as polar opposites, which as Gustaf Aulen contends, proved problematic to the recognition of other views. Aulen contributes a classic view where *Christus Victor* represents Christ's death as a victory over and against the evil powers of sin, death and the devil. Hence, from Anselm's Satisfaction to Abelard's Moral Influence and Aulen's Ransom models, there emerged a continuity of tradition which included the atonement theories of mediaeval scholasticism, the reformation period and protestant 'Orthodoxy' of the seventeenth century.

While the main argument suggests that Anselmian sacrificial atonement gained hegemonic influence, in "The Social Covenant and Mass Incarceration," Rima Vesley-Flad argues for the prominent Calvinist traces supporting legal and juridical punishment that undergird slavery and the criminal justice system. Here,

⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁶ Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1931), 2.

⁷ Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Quaestio Disputata The Atonement Paradigm: Does it still have explanatory value?", *Theological Studies* 67 (2007) 418-32, at 418.

⁸ Aulen, 2.

she constructs a liberationist ethic to challenge the penal industrial complex by primarily focusing on the influences of reformists theology and Calvin's doctrine of moral law and civil law. Vesely-Flad argues that covenantal theology established a theocratic, racially stratified society inclusive of slavery:

Calvin's doctrine of moral law and civil law, along with his theology of idleness and work, were inseparable from recommendations for a hierarchical social order in which religious leaders occupied powerful positions within the civil sphere. His theological descendants — the English Puritans who sought to establish a moral order in the "New World" colonies — built a theocratic racially stratified society that included slaves from the coast of Africa.⁹

Vesely-Flad maintains that Calvinist adherents, such as Puritans, applied understandings of divinely sanctioned moral law to punitive philosophies that established prisons and the American penal system. In considering theologies of race and punishment in systems of sacrifice Vesely-Flad is correct in pointing to the connections between reform theology, social hierarchy and the establishment of prisons. In comparison, however, Anselm's feudal economy of salvation demonstrates not only the influences of social hierarchy and racial caste, but differently it underlines the consequences of *sacrifice* in Christian influences of punishment that justify the scapegoating of Black bodies from the plantation to the penitentiary. Thus, Vesely-Flad explores the juridical penal theories developed in the wake of Calvin, but for the purpose of understanding vicarious punishment it is critical to look through the lens of Anselm.

In the shadow of the 'objective,' 'subjective' and 'classic' (and Calvinist juridical) views of atonement are liberationists. More particularly, feminists and womanists contested the violent nature of atonement theories and challenged the salvific meaning of Christ's death for surviving and thriving. Rita Brock, for example, argues against the glorification of suffering because it has influenced abuse experienced by women in intimate relationships. For Brock, an atonement model that has at its center an omnipotent child abuser God cannot be salvific for women. Dorothee Soelle challenges the medieval worldview of a hierarchical cosmology that extols a divine sadist. Soelle reimagines the cross as a symbol of the love of life in justice.¹⁰ Delores Williams' makes her point of departure the coerced and voluntary surrogacy of African-American women. For Williams,

⁹ Rima Vesely-Flad, "The Social Covenant and Mass Incarceration: Theologies of Race and Punishment," *Anglican Theological Review* 93, 4 (Fall 2011), 543.

¹⁰ Dorothee Soelle, *Essential Writings* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 110.

as evidenced by the story of Hagar, vicarious suffering is never redemptive and God is not always a liberator. Similarly, Joanne Terrell rejects retributive atonement theology that imposes violence onto the bodies of Black women. Terrell instantiates the prison industrial complex and argues that sacrifice under state sanctioned violence perpetuates Black nihilism. Thus, she jettisons a “Hermeneutic of Sacrifice” and constructs an ethic centered on life, love and liberation. Feminists and womanists provide a diverse theological spectrum in understanding the meaning of Christ’s death for gendered bodies. While some feminists contextualize this only for white female bodies, womanists and Black feminists engage the intersectionality of race, gender and class to reconstruct life-sustaining paradigms that secure wholeness and quality of life for survival and thriving. Collectively, dissidents of sacrificial theology challenged a “paradigm of Jesus’ death as atoning sacrifice, especially if seen as penal substitution, which seems to compromise God’s mercy, to make God demand and even engineer innocent suffering, and to make a suffering death the entire purpose of the incarnation. It sets up violence as divinely sanctioned and encourages human beings to imitate or submit to it.”¹¹ Hence, in response to Anselmian logic of sacrifice, later thinkers wrestled with finding alternative cosmologies of salvation.

In the East, the early church fathers articulated models of redemption that emphasized restorative qualities of the divine within human activity. In this vein, the eastern church fathers introduced the concept of deification and *theosis*, which sharply contrasted the West’s fetishization with sacrifice and retribution. Namely, Irenaeus’ argument of recapitulation emphasized the restoration of humanity to the image of God. Origen of Alexandria, (c. 186-255) likely the most influential thinker of all Greek theologians, argued for the process of deification where, “Christians can be transformed into the likeness of Christ. Human nature can now be divinized because God, in Jesus, came into human nature. It is the incarnation of the divine Son that enables and empowers ordinary people to allow the Spirit to be incarnated in their lives.”¹² Thus, Christ and his resurrection are “life-giving fountains” from which salvation springs. Similar to Irenaeus, Origen used language associated with ransom theory, such as a payment to the devil, innocent blood having redeeming value, and a substitutionary death on behalf of sinners. He, however, is ultimately concerned with the restoration and the transformation of humankind. Athanasius (c. 296-373), a bishop of Alexandria

¹¹ Cahill, 419.

¹² Finlan, 67-68.

in Egypt and chief architect of the Nicene faith, also leans toward *theosis*. For Athanasius, “The Incarnation is the key to the restoration of the human race to the divine life.”¹³ In his soteriology, Athanasius emphasizes the incarnation and its effect on humankind. Essentially, he argues “As God became man, so did mankind become deified.”¹⁴ Finally, Cyril of Alexandria (c. 378-444), one of the most important theologians on the person of Christ in all Greek Christian writing,¹⁵ expands Athanasius’ concept of deification. In his argument, he suggests that, “The divine power present in the humanity was also an archetype of how God had intended to ‘divinize’ the human condition in the act of the incarnation. Thus, Christ is the pattern of the world’s salvation.” Like the theologizing of the West, the church fathers in the East presented various interpretations of the meaning of the nature of God. Differently, however, *deification* became central to Eastern Orthodoxy’s theology and it emphasized the divine restorative qualities of human nature.

Atonement theories in the East and West are not isolated ideologies. Applied interpretations of atonement became foundational to understanding society and human experience. This underlines a significant parallel between doctrine, punitive philosophy and social hierarchy. Namely, the doctrinal dominance of Anselm’s satisfaction theory produced modern systems of sacrifice as a reflection of social caste. Seen this way, “Society is used as an allegory, with God as a feudal lord and humanity as serfs. In this analogy, sin breaks the agreement since it dishonors God; sin is fundamentally an affront, and does damage to the lord’s honor. God, then, is like an offended Lord who cannot afford to let his servants show disrespect; there must be *satisfaction*, so God’s honor may be restored.” In this model, which is generally referred to as a substitutionary sacrifice model, Christ’s death becomes the sacrifice for human sin.

Applied allegorically to the contemporary social context of the Carceral State, not Christ but Black bodies become the sacrifice for human sin. This is to say, in the feudal economy as in the Carceral State there is an analogous hierarchical relationship where lords can be understood interchangeably with dominant privileged society and serfs with the criminalization of the subaltern.

¹³ Ibid., 68.

¹⁴ John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 35.

¹⁵ McGuckin, 93.

Subsequently, Black bodies become a byproduct of salvation. They are vilified so that the powerful can be venerated; humiliated so that the privileged can be honorable; criminalized so that the chief custodians of empire can concretize their exceptionalism; and sacrificed for the preservation of white superiority and the perpetuation of structural evils. J. Denny Weaver asserts, "For oppressed people, satisfaction atonement reinforces their status as victims rather than undergirding them in the struggle for liberation from the oppressed."¹⁶ It is the victimhood of oppressed people by mechanisms of vicarious punishment that precludes freedom.

America requires a sacrifice for the Carceral State to function. Prisons are therefore needed to systemically produce delinquents by disenfranchising, disqualifying and dehumanizing the least of these. This normilization of criminalization engenders a liturgy of punishment that essentially legalizes the sacrifice of Black bodies. This is premised by Anselmian logic. J. Denny Weaver asserts, "If Anselm's satisfaction atonement reflected a cosmic image of feudal assumptions, in the modern world satisfaction atonement appears to project into the cosmic realm the assumption of the criminal justice system that depends on retributive violence,"¹⁷ Hence, Anselm's feudal cosmology of salvation and the U.S. criminal justice system have this in common: both are religious, retributive, and require the sacrifice of a lower class.

Black bodies as a sacrificial requirement is inextricably linked to the satisfaction of Jesus. Mass incarceration, then, is not only an American phenomenon but it is a religious problem and is further plagued by racialized punishment. To establish the ontological relationship between Jesus' satisfaction in antiquity and the sacrifice of Black bodies in the Carceral state, it is salient to examine Jesus' social location and proximity to the oppressed while understanding the cross as a first century lynching. Jesus suffered from state sanctioned violence and died a deplorable criminal's death because symbolically and literally Jesus is Black. In *God of the Oppressed*, James H. Cone (the Fathers of Black Theology) substantiates this claim. He posits, "Christ is black, therefore, not because of some cultural or psychological need of black people, but because and only because Christ *really* enters into our world where the poor, the despised,

¹⁶ J Denny Weaver, "Violence in Christian Theology," Crisis Currents Summer (2001), 163.

¹⁷ Ibid., 161-162.

¹⁸ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Orbis Books, 1975), 125-126.

and the black are, disclosing that he is with them, enduring their humiliation and pain and transforming oppressed slaves into liberated servants.”¹⁸

Cone further makes the argument of Jesus’ blackness by first asserting his Jewishness. He states, “...Jesus was a Jew. It is on the basis of the soteriological meaning of the particularity of his Jewishness that theology must affirm the Christological significance of Jesus’ present blackness. He *is* black because he *was* a Jew (italics are original).”¹⁹ Jesus’ Christological identity as Black is derived from his past identity, present activity and future coming.²⁰ By this, Cone makes the trenchant claim that Jesus’ Jewishness connects him to Israel’s history of the Exodus and the liberation of the oppressed Israelites from captivity. Jesus, then, acts in solidarity with the oppressed and engages in the struggle for the liberation of all. Thus, Christ’s identification with the outcasts in the exodus corresponds to his solidarity with those under the control of the U.S. criminal justice system. Both Jesus and the oppressed encountered the cross of a retributively punitive system of sacrifice and were scapegoated because they occupied Black flesh.

Blackness as associated with sin and crime is therefore a theological and existential dilemma. It rationalizes prisons as a house of sacrifice needed to repair a breached social contract between the oppressed and dominant society by restoring law and order through the ransoming of subaltern flesh. It is critical to connect the cross of Jesus to the cross of history and to those who suffer vicarious punishment in the Carceral State. Seen this way, Calvary’s cross and modernity’s prison industrial complex are the same. They each require a sacrifice that victimizes Black bodies to preserve the oppressive authority of dominant society. As a result, racial logic distorts Christian identity and limits the salvific power of Christ for the oppressed. Hence, the parallels between race, soteriology and punishment, is the linchpin that holds together the tensions of the cross, plantation and penitentiary.

The Plantation

The deposit of Africans into the New World through the middle passage was an entryway into a depraved interlocking system of sacrifice. In the Antebellum South, Black bodies hanged from trees just as Jesus hanged from a cross. In *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* Cone states, “crucifixion was clearly a first-century

¹⁹ Ibid., 123.

²⁰ Predating Cone’s assertion of Jesus’ blackness is Albert Cleage’s “Black Messiah.” New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968. (Reprint: Africa World Press, 1989.).

lynching. In the lynching era, between 1880 to 1940, white Christians lynched nearly five thousand black men and women in a manner with obvious echoes of the Roman crucifixion of Jesus.”²¹ Extending the lynching era by just thirty years to the beginning of the prison boom in the 1970s, the country’s state prison population grew by more than 700 percent.²² From 1980 to 2008, the number of people incarcerated in America quadrupled—from roughly 500,000 to 2.3 million people. In 2008, African Americans constituted nearly 1 million of the total 2.3 million incarcerated population.²³ While Black men are overrepresented in prisons, Black women are overlooked. Making up the fastest growing prison population, Black women represent 30% of all incarcerated women in the U.S and only 13% of the female population.²⁴ The warehousing of Black bodies to the prison industrial complex eerily evokes echoes of lynching and it affects men and women alike. Cone concludes, “The lynching of black America is taking place in the criminal justice system.”²⁵

Absolutely, the cross was reserved for ethnic minorities—the outcast and outlier—not the Roman citizens. Similarly, prisons are disproportionately occupied by Black and brown people, not white people. The beams of a rugged wooden cross, the branches of a splintered tree and the cold of a concrete cell with unmalleable metal bars all point to a sobering reality: there cannot be any understandings of Jesus’ messiahship without first accepting him as a malefactor and in relationship to the marginalized. This is because Jesus’ first century lynching as a despised Palestinian Jew was a deplorable criminal’s death that conjoins the lynching of Africans to the scapegoating of Black bodies in the Carceral State.

By the end of the Civil War and the emancipation from slavery the freed slaves did not have any land and few possessions. Although the end of slavery promised great things, the meaning of freedom was uncertain and uncontested. Ironically, the legal status of the emancipated slaves became tenuous and “freedom subjected African-Americans to new forms of legal control.” Consequently,

²¹ James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 30-31.

²² Henrichson, Christian and Delaney, Ruth. “The Price of Prisons: What Incarceration Costs Taxpayers” in Vera Institute of Justice Center on Sentencing and Corrections 2012, 2.

²³ <http://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/> (accessed 23 April 2017).

²⁴ <https://www.aclu.org/other/facts-about-over-incarceration-women-united-states> (accessed 23 April 2017).

²⁵ Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 163.

the Black Codes emerged as an extension of slave law and with the purpose to control and criminalize Black bodies. The Black Codes made it a crime for a freed person to have a gun, be out after a certain hour, or utter ‘offensive language’ in the presence of white women.²⁶ Hence, “the Black Codes created a new class of prisoners known as county convicts: men and women incarcerated for misdemeanors and sentenced to up to two years of hard labor.”²⁷ In the end, the reality of the abolition of slavery was not freedom.²⁸ From the plantation, a new system of sacrifice emerged: the lease system.

The emergence of convict leasing in the antebellum south called for the ransoming of Black bodies and black labor. Blacks were coerced to lend their bodies to farmers and miners for the economic viability of prisons, preservation of servitude, perpetuation of race suppression, and sustenance of nineteenth-century segregation and industrialization. By the late 1870s and until the early twentieth century, Blacks constituted 90 percent or more of those sold in labor. Forced labor became a way for persons incarcerated to pay their debt to society. In return, the prison became a house of sacrifice that scapegoated Brown bodies for economic gain.

In a study about Alabama’s Black prisoners, Mary Curtin argues that there is a “deep association between criminality, convict mining and race.”²⁹ She states:

Slavery was a multifaceted institution defined by much more than the bad treatment bestowed upon its victims. Nevertheless, southern slavery was a violent institution that undoubtedly bequeathed certain traditions that shaped the treatment of prisoners. To control prisoners, southern states copied methods of labor control perfected under slavery, including torture, whipping, patrols, and cash rewards for runaways. Dissatisfied with emancipation, white landowners turned to the lease to produce crops with a captive workforce.

²⁶ Mary Ellen Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World, Alabama, 1865-1900* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 6.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander supports the myth of the Thirteenth Amendment, which she argues did not abolish slavery but allowed for slavery to remain appropriate as punishment for a crime. In systems of sacrifice—albeit the roman empire, slaveocracy or Carceral State—the declaration of freedom is not always realized liberation.

²⁹ Mary Ellen Curtin, *Black Prisoners and Their World, Alabama, 1865-1900*, 2.

Females were also victimized by this wretched system of forced labor. Female prisoners cooked, cleaned and worked as servants for prison contractors at the same mining camps and farms that employed male prisoners. In these apparatuses of punishment, men were constructed as dangerous but women were socially construed as deviant and desirous. Consequently, men were exploited by the convict leasing system for their labor and women were doubly exploited as a source of labor and sex.

Angela Davis writes,

This perversion of the criminal justice system was oppressive to the ex-slave population as a whole. But the women were especially susceptible to the brutal assaults of the judicial system. The sexual abuse they had routinely suffered during the era of slavery was not arrested by the advent of emancipation. As a matter of fact, it was still true that 'colored women were looked upon as the legitimate prey of white men...'—and if they resisted white men's sexual attacks, they were frequently thrown into prison to be further victimized by a system which was a 'return to another form of slavery'.³⁰

Prisons, as an extension of slavery, exacted violence for women often more egregiously than it did for men. Thus, there are deep associations with criminality, convict mining, race and gender.

Sarah Hale, in *No Mercy Here*, asserts, "By examining the gendered complexities of the Carceral State, new continuities with slavery emerge. Although black women's reproduction was not directly responsible for the reproduction of prisoners, the rape of black women was crucial to the establishment of white superiority and black women's representation as subjects who reproduced black criminality was critical to black criminalization."³¹ With slavery as its model, the convict lease system did not discriminate between male and female labor. It affected prisoners as well as free miners and families left behind. Countless men and women suffered illness, death, brutality, exploitation, violence and wretchedness. From the bloody middle passage to the atrocities of slavery, forced labor evolved into a new legal system of sacrifice that birthed the penitentiary. As a result, former slaves were leased into a system that made Black prisoners, men

³⁰ Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 89.

³¹ Sarah Hale, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 251.

³² My use of sin here is to connote the "absence of justice."

and women, the scapegoats to atone for a punitive and patriarchal world marred by injustice.³²

To clearly establish the connections among feudal economy in Anselm's cosmology of salvation, social hierarchy in Antebellum lynching, and the atrocities of mass incarceration, it is critical to consider the role of social caste in apparatuses of punishment. Michelle Alexander purports, "Like Jim Crow (and slavery), mass incarceration operates as a tightly networked system of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate collectively to ensure the subordinate status of a group defined largely by race."³³ Alexander makes the lasting claim that prisons are the New Jim Crow and thereby an extension of slavery based on racial caste. In all three—the roman empire, plantation and penitentiary—a logic of racialized punishment is an imperial mechanism of control that constitutes systems of sacrifice. This is to suggest, without a lower-class, Anselm would have no serfs to sacrifice to restore the Lord's honor, the Antebellum south would have no Black bodies to lynch to preserve white goodness, and America would have no criminals to imprison to safeguard the privilege and power of dominant society.

Classical atonement theories do not factor these social implications of Christian doctrine. The a-historical orientation of doctrinal claims is dangerous for Black bodies. Jesus' cross, then must, be connected to the crosses of history—including the lynching tree and all forms of vicarious punishment that proliferate systems of sacrifice. In this manner, it is critical to hold together Christian interpretations of punishment and social contexts to understand the relationship between Jesus' sacrifice and the scapegoating of Black bodies in an overlapping system of sacrifice from the plantation to the penitentiary. Critically, the first-century lynching of Jesus hanging on a cross and the strange fruit hanging from poplar trees in the southern breeze are located in the same depraved system of sacrifice as Black and Brown bodies who are warehoused to the prison industrial complex. Hence, religion and sacrificial logic is the fundamental basis for the penal process.

Penitence and the Penitentiary

From its inception, the penitentiary served as a house of sacrifice where bodily punishment was divinely sanctioned to secure spiritual redemption. In a social analysis of the history of modern prisons, Michel Foucault

³³ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, 13.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 3.

begins *Discipline and Punish* with an account of an execution where a man is tortured and condemned to death. The priest administered an execution as surrounding spectators watched. The man cried out in deepening despair and attenuating agony, "My God, have pity on me! Jesus, help me!"³⁴ The torture, however, persisted and with each brutal blow he begged "Pardon, my God! Pardon, Lord." These wails were considered an act of penitence. Consequently, prisoners endured the gallows, pillory, scaffold, wheel and flogging as a vicarious 'liturgy of punishment' that was justified in the name of God and for the sake of divine penitence. Hence, earthly punishment was believed to have predicted eternal punishment

In this vein, Foucault states:

The eternal game has already begun: the torture of the execution anticipates the punishments of the beyond; it shows what they are; it is the theater of hell the cries of the condemned man, his struggles, his blasphemies, already signify his irremediable destiny. *But the pains here below may also be counted as penitence and so alleviate the punishments of the beyond:* God will not fail to take such martyrdom into account, providing it is borne with resignation. The cruelty of the earthly punishment will be deducted from the punishment to come: in it is glimpsed the promise of forgiveness (*italics mine for emphasis*).³⁵

Accordingly, torture was understood not only as a legal sanctioning but also divinely legislated. Essentially, a system of sacrifice became divinized. Persons who participated in torture as a form of punishment were considered actors of God's justice. As a result, a socially constructed system of sacrifice justified a cosmic scheme of salvation that required the bodily satisfaction of the oppressed.

Foucault further states:

If one commits something that the law forbids, even if there is neither harm nor injury to the individual, it is an offence that demands reparations, because the right of the superior man is violated and because it offends the dignity of his character. Besides its immediate victim, the crime attacks the sovereign: it attacks him personally, since the law represents the will of the sovereign; it attacks him physically, since the force of the law is the force of the prince.³⁶

Similar to Anselmian logic, Foucault describes the consequences of a condemned man who offended the sovereign with his disobedience to the Law. Subsequently, reparations or a satisfaction is required. In turn, the malefactor was tortured, executed and burned alive on the stakes. Hence, Foucault supports

³⁵ Ibid., 46

³⁶ Ibid., 47

the argument that western social hierarchy is reified by religious cosmologies of salvation.

David Garland also engages a social theory study that explores the religious influences of punishment. He asserts,

Religious mentalities of ancient societies and 'primitive' social groups often invested the penal process with a wholly religious meaning, *so that punishment was understood as a necessary sacrifice to an aggrieved deity*. In such cultures, crime is associated with sin, impurity, and danger and the act of punishment involves a process of expiation as well as a ritual cleansing of polluting elements in society...something of that earlier, religious culture still remains, and from the Middle Ages right up to the present, religious belief has been an important force in shaping the practice and evolution of punishment³⁷ (italic mine for emphasis).

Garland underlines the relationship between crime and sin in the penal process. In ancient societies, punishment is used as a corrective to purify the sin of criminality. Subsequently, the cleansing of sin is the washing away (or whitewashing) of those associated with sin. Purity, then, as a form of exceptionalism becomes a tool to secure the power and privilege of the Carceral State. This is achieved through a penal process that uses criminality to separate the impure from the pure to cleanse an otherwise polluted crime-ridden society. This association of crime with sin is not limited to the ancient world, but has relevance for contemporary contexts. It shows how deeply religion and punishment is ingrained in the cultural fabric of American society.

Today, the same logic precariously casts criminalized Black bodies as a social aberration, an existential pollutant, a corporeal danger in need of cleansing through discipline and punishment to restore law and order. Black bodies are counted among a sinful humanity who are an affront to social normativity. It is therefore necessary for criminalized Black bodies to become a satisfaction to restore law and order to safeguard the privilege and power of dominant society. This association of sin as a social blemish to blot out with sacrifice, however, is a theological burden for racialized bodies. In such case, the subaltern become scapegoats. The Black body as a site of sin is the source of sacrifice. The two, sin and sacrifice, go hand-in-hand. They share a cause and effect relationship. To cast Blackness as sinful is to precipitate the Black body as an unholy sacrifice. It is, therefore, critical to consider how the confluence of western Christianity, race

³⁷ David Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 203-204.

and punishment in the context of sin and sacrifice inform notions of criminality to demonize Black bodies in the penal process.

In response, it is imperative to rethink theological categories of sin. A Liberation Theology for Lockdown America disassociates sin from crime because Jesus, the one who knew no sin died a criminal's death and yet resurrected as Savior. Thus, the analogy of sin and crime is not sustaining. In fact, "Atonement" does not denote punishment or sacrifice sacramentally or socially. Defined, it simply means to "bring into unity, and in a Christian theological context it refers to the creation of a mutual relationship of love between God and humanity."³⁸ In the Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 'atonement' has roots in Middle English and means to be "at one" or "in harmony." It is therefore a disservice to reduce atonement and punishment to conceptions of sin or sacrifice that divides society through social caste. Rather, atonement must deemphasize sin. Conversely, in its truest sense it is to be at one, in harmony; it is to bring into unity as Jesus did on the cross.

God acted in solidarity (unity) by assuming a criminal body and making space for criminals to find life amid state sanctioned persecution. At the moment of his death, Jesus extends salvation to the penitent thief sharing in the persecution of those victimized by the Carceral State. This act of reconciliation demonstrated by Jesus essentially restores the penitent thief from criminal into unity with the divine. In similar fashion, Jesus transcends criminality on the cross when he dies a malefactor but is raised as the Messiah. These two events, Jesus' proximity to criminals and his position of criminality, make the cross and resurrection a site of retribution and resistance that points to the possibilities of transformation in all systems of sacrifice, including Lockdown America. From penitence to the plantation and penitentiary, A Liberation Theology of Lockdown America responds to the breaches of systems of sacrifice and reimagines alternative paradigms of unification to invoke transformation and liberation through God's solidarity with lockdown America.

A Liberation Theology for Lockdown America

The greatest work of Liberation Theology examines the life, ministry and death of Jesus in relation to the existential realities of the oppressed. In theory and in praxis, Liberation Theologies contests doctrinal claims of sacrifice, challenges oppressive systems of power and constructs paradigms and practices to secure

³⁸ Michael Winter, *The Atonement* (Collegetown, Minn.: Liturgical, 1995); Cahill, 424.

quality of life and freedom. For liberation theology to remain relevant, however, it must respond to the perennial problem of mass incarceration as a theological and moral dilemma. It is imperative that it wrestles with how do criminalized Black bodies find liberation in Jesus who died a criminal's death? And, what does it mean to be Black, Christian and criminalized in a Carceral State founded on religious ideals? It is with hope that these guiding questions serve as a catalyst for the Church, academe and society to rethink religious implications of sacrifice undergirding the prison industrial complex and forge solidarity with the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated by expanding ministries, pedagogies, policies and community to relentlessly engage in the liberation for lockdown America.

The task of A Liberation Theology for Lockdown America is to prioritize the experiences of Black and brown persons who are disproportionately warehoused to the U.S. prison industrial complex.³⁹ It is to interrogate the association of theological categories such as sin and sacrifice with social phenomena such as criminality and punishment. It is to reimagine the soteriological significance of liberation for those who are crucified in an Age of Mass Incarceration. At its core, A Liberation Theology for Lockdown America juxtaposes Jesus and the cross to Black bodies who are surveilled, criminalized, and subjected to state sanctioned violence by ruling imperial powers. It conjures space for movements of resistance to probe the intersections of race, gender and class to abolish prisons, overthrow the Carceral State, eradicate the scapegoating of Black and Brown bodies and restore the humanity of persons incarcerated. As a response to the death-dealing doctrines of sacrificial theology, A Liberation Theology for Lockdown America recasts Jesus's relationship to the cross, criminality and the Carceral State as a model of prophetic resistance and transformative justice to secure freedom and human flourishing.

The main theological suppositions supporting the congruence of the cross and the Carceral State begin with God's breaking into history to assume a criminalized black body (incarnation). God does this through Jesus who identifies and forges solidarity with criminals in his life, ministry, and death (Christology). Precipitated by hanging between two criminals on the cross, Jesus extends salvation to a penitent thief before he himself dies as a malefactor and raises as the Messiah (soteriology). Both events, Jesus' encounter with the penitent thief and his persecution as a criminal, demonstrates the possibilities

³⁹ While apparatuses of punishment in the West is of primary focus, also salient is the shared struggle of a global oppressed who are surveilled and subjugated to state sanctioned violence.

of resistance to transcend criminality and overcome systems of sacrifice. Thus, the three-day event for a Liberation Theology of Lockdown America entails Jesus' hanging between two thieves and dying a deplorable criminal's death (Good Friday), descending into the deep dark depths of injustice with righteous resistance (Holy Saturday), and conquering the Carceral State by subverting oppressive social orders until those who are criminalized are restored to the *imago dei* for human flourishing and freedom (Easter).

In this cosmic and human event, suffering is not redemptive. There are no redeeming qualities of an unjust system of sacrifice that demands the scapegoating of Black bodies to preserve white goodness and perpetuate oppressive structures of "law and order." Instead, A Liberation Theology for Lockdown America holds together the tensions of the cross as both a site of retribution and a source of resistance. Through acts of resistance a conversation of redemptive suffering shifts to transformative restoration. This is not to minimize suffering or too hastily divert attention away from victims of vicarious punishment; neither is it to overlook the cross and crucifixion. Rather, it is to persist to a relevant and critical question: how do we overturn the system so that Black bodies are no longer branded as a sacrifice for the sake of white superiority but are transformed to the fullness of their humanity for the realization of liberation? Hence, the theological significance of the cross and the resurrection is that, in the former, God's solidarity is revealed with those who are victimized by vicarious punishment and, in the latter, God demonstrates a cosmic and temporal victory that completely eradicates the Carceral State. Taken together, Jesus' death and resurrection encapsulates the defeats and depravities of vicarious punishment and state sanctioned violence while disclosing the mystery of God's presence with criminality to reveal the possibilities of eradicating systems of sacrifice. These acts of resistance are not redemptive as much as they are transformative—no one benefits on account of vicarious punishment and thereby redeemed from sacrificial suffering (redemption) but in persisting to dismantle systems of sacrifice criminalized Black personhood transformed to the *imago dei* and lockdowns become liberation.

Scripture is an essential source to contextualize the theological underpinnings of the cross, criminality and the Carceral State. Consonant with biblical witness, God broke into history and assumed a criminalized Black body. As a result, the suffering of Jesus on a cross is inextricably linked to the crucifixion of people of color on the plantation and in the prison industrial complex. Jesus of Nazareth was surveilled by the Roman empire and considered seditious because he occupied subaltern flesh while proclaiming the Kingdom of

God. Subsequently, Jesus did not die nobly; but he died a deplorable criminal's death. Cone asserts, "Both Jesus and blacks were publicly humiliated, subjected to the utmost indignity and cruelty. They were stripped, in order to be deprived of dignity, then paraded, mocked and whipped, pierced, derided and spat upon, tortured for hours in the presence of jeering crowds for popular entertainment."⁴⁰ He concludes, "The crucifixion of Jesus by the Romans in Jerusalem and the lynching of blacks by whites in the United States are so amazingly similar that one wonders what blocks the American Christian imagination from seeing the connections."⁴¹ The same perplexity applies to America's denial of the religious influences of slavery in relation to anemia logic of sacrifice undergirding mass incarceration. Without a noose or a tree but with bars, prisons are without a doubt a modern-day lynching. It is, therefore, incomprehensible to detach christology (the study of Christ), soteriology (the study of salvation) and ecclesiology (the study of the Church) from the suffering of those who are imprisoned.

There are three salient scriptural references that support the inextricability of the cross, criminality and the Carceral State. First, persons with a "criminal element" constituted the first Christian community and inaugurated the first Church. Karl Barth, in a sermon preached in Basel, Switzerland, told prisoners that, "The first Christian community was that between Christ and the crucified prisoners with him."⁴² Mark Taylor makes this claim when he asserts, "it is the solidarity of the executed Jesus with the imprisoned and other executed ones that make up the 'first certain Christian community.' The first community *was* this criminal element, all three, Jesus, and the criminals, hanging together."⁴³ The fact is, Jesus was associated with several criminals. There were the two common thieves who were crucified alongside of him. In addition, there were the other criminals who, like Jesus, were convicted of sedition and rebellion. Then there were Jesus' disciples. It was in the label of criminal and seditious that the church of antiquity derived its communal identity. Hence, the relationship between the criminal and the believer is foundational for the substantiation of the contemporary Church.

Second, also consonant with scripture is Jesus' prophetic ministry that included the liberation of prisoners. In Luke 4:18, Jesus read from the scrolls of Isaiah and declared, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed

⁴⁰ Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 31.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 143.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, xiii.

me to preach good news to the poor. *He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed*" (italics mine for emphasis). Unequivocally, Jesus acted in relation to and prioritized the liberation of persons incarcerated. This prophetic text is pivotal for particular liberation theologies and yet its proclamation of freedom for the prisoner is scantily analogized to the freedom of contemporary prisoners in the Carceral State. Importantly, Jesus begins his earthly ministry with a concern for the liberation of the prisoner and he ends his ministry on the cross between two thieves, to one of which he pardons and extends salvation before Jesus dies a criminal's death. Unequivocally, the quintessential task of liberation for the prisoner — those suffering state sanctioned violence and physical bondage under imperial rule — interposes and defines Jesus' life, ministry and death.

Third, Matthew 25 records a parable about the coming of the Son of Man (*parousia*) for final judgment. It suggests that the criterion for the final judgment is determined by humanity's relationship to the "least of these." In this text it states, "The king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, *I was in prison and you visited me*'" (italics mine for emphasis).⁴⁴ The disciples, however, wondered when they did these things for Jesus and Jesus responded, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." The Matthew 25 passage ends with a message of judgment. It suggests that any lack of regard for the "least of these" is equivalent to a lack of regard for God. In parallel, a disregard for criminalized Black bodies or any other constituent of the "least of these" will result in divine judgment. Only those who recognize the humanity of "the least of these" as members of the family of God will inherit eternal life. This underscores the biblical mandate to prioritize the mutuality and flourishing of individuals at the margin of society, notwithstanding the prisoner, because to serve God is to be in right relationship with the oppressed, especially those who are incarcerated.

In the gospels it is clear that the cross, criminality and the Christ are congruous. This connection has even greater implications when contextualized by the experiences of people of color in carceral crises. Understood this way, the tragedy of Good Friday is to see Jesus' and Troy Davis' Black bodies were stalled

⁴⁴ Matthew 25: 34-36. In Jesus' parables, the *king* usually represents God, but here the king is the Son of Man.

together between life and death as they suffered a state sanctioned execution. The corpse of the Messiah and Mike Brown were made publicly visible on a stage of terror to instill fear for a crucified people. The Savior and Sandra Bland hang together in a cell on Calvary's mountain. The Rose of Sharon, Renisha McBride and Rekia Boyd were killed because the gatekeepers of empire protect power but not peripheral people. In the Carceral State, Black bodies are surveilled, criminalized and crucified as was Jesus, who died a criminal's death and suffered state sanctioned execution. The cross today is, without a doubt, an emblem of the Carceral State. Subsequently, when Black and Brown bodies are disproportionately warehoused to a prison industrial complex one must rightfully ask, *Where is Jesus?* If Jesus was alive today, his copper-skinned body would not be on the cross, he would be on death row in a maximum correctional facility awaiting state sanctioned execution in solitary confinement of an 8 by 10 prison cell. Thus, Jesus' life, teachings and ministry demonstrates that God shares the insidious mark of punishment with people who suffer from carceral crises in systems of sacrifice.

Not only does Lockdown America and Jesus share the depravity of vicarious punishment, but they must also share in radical acts of resistance. This is Holy Saturday—between defeat and victory there is resistance. Even in death Jesus is countering hyper-criminalization and militarization by the Roman empire. Jesus in *The Executed God*, a title that plays on Moltmann's *The Crucified God*, Mark Lewis Taylor's fundamental argument is that remembering the executed Jesus and enacting the 'way of the cross' is "crucial for mobilizing effective resistance to lockdown America today and to the Christendoms that are complicit with it."⁴⁵ This is because the Executed God suffered imperial, state-sanctioned crucifixion, but was 'politically adversarial to religious backed imperial power.'" The Executed God organized "movements that can continue resistance and flourish even after imperial executioners do their worst."⁴⁶ Thus, the Executed God teaches us that liberation must entail a theater of counter-terror that results in resistance and restoration of humanity and a just civic order. A Liberation Theology of Lockdown America refutes the myopic idea that a sacrifice is necessary for the well-being of society. Hence, the scapegoating of Black bodies to a prison industrial complex is a theological problem in the plot for freedom; but it is not the end of the liberation story. There is resurrection hope in revolutionary acts of resistance.

⁴⁵ Taylor, xiii.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Resisting oppressive structures has been the strength of the oppressed. Under a campaign of Civil Disobedience during the Civil Rights Movement the oppressed used the prison as a tool for resistance. In a speech at the “Great March” in Detroit on June 23, 1963, Dr. King says to an audience of the officers and members of the Detroit Council of Human Rights and other distinguished guests, “But if he puts you in jail, you go in that jail and transform it from a dungeon of shame to a haven of freedom and human dignity.” Dr. King recognized the power of resistance to achieve justice. Importantly, he believed that those who found themselves in the dismal dungeons of shame had the power to resist such indignities. In the dismally deplorable dungeons of despair, prisons are not the tombs for the defeated but a catalyst for the hopeful to engage in the struggle for freedom. Transformation is possible in the resistance of those whose future is determinately doomed by a false narrative of sacrifice and punishment.

This transformative resistance is further instantiated by the protests of students who organized sit-ins in Jim Crow South. On February 1, 1960, in Greensboro, North Carolina four Black college students sat down at a counter reserved for whites only and refused to leave. This marked the beginning of sit-ins, which was a form of nonviolence and a movement that swept the nation in full force. These peaceful protests resulted often in police brutality and imprisonment. The threat of imprisonment, however, catapulted a movement of resistance. Diane Nash, one of the four student protestors, reports, “And no matter what they did and how many they arrested, there was still a lunch counter full of students there.” As student’s risked arrests by peaceful protests, the local Black community rallied even more behind them. Black merchants supplied food to those in jail. Homeowners put up property for bail money. For one student in particular, going to jail was a “badge of honor.” Dominant society’s attempt to use the prison as a dungeon of shame was not successful. During the Civil Rights Movement, Black people resisted imperial powers and used their imprisonment as a tool for resistance. In the words of Dr. King, they transformed a “Dungeon of Shame” to “a haven of freedom and human dignity.”

Jesus of Nazareth demonstrated this on the cross—a site of retribution and resistance that resulted in transformation. Jesus’ crucifixion was reserved for malefactors and yet he was also the Messiah. Jesus transformed criminality on the cross. On Good Friday, he was charged as a criminal and defeated by the State. Three days later he arose in victory as the resurrected Savior. He was in Pauline terms, “Christ Crucified.” In this regard, “The crucifixion *can* be connected with liberation, and not just with imprisonment and death penalties.”⁴⁷ Jesus’ life,

⁴⁷ Taylor, xiv

must be understood in relation to the criminal; his death must be understood as an imperial execution; and the cross must be understood as a space of resistance where there is life and liberation beyond the defeat of death-dealing circumstances in a Carceral State.

By extension, the Church as followers of Jesus must take up the cross and engage in radical acts of resistance to secure freedom. This does not include the priest who accompanies the prisoner to his execution, it does not include sacrificial liturgy that desensitizes the blood of those who are killed by state sanctioned violence and imprisoned by the Carceral State, nor does it include the church prison outreach ministry who visits prisoners but who does not receive them upon their release. Rather, this Church embraces a Christian community that includes a criminal element. It is committed to the liberation of the captives and mutuality with the least of these. This Church understands the cross, not on sacrificial terms, but conceives it as a life-altering space of resistance to restore social breaches and call into unity God and the oppressed.

The Greek Fathers captured this process of restoration through the concept of *theosis* or deification. As a Liberation Theology of Lockdown America jettisons the West's fetishization with sacrificial theology, the doctrine of *theosis* is a proposed corrective. Differently, the doctrine of *theosis* emphasizes the restoration of humanity to the *imago dei*. It supports the notion that Christians can be transformed into the likeness of Christ. This is powerful because *theosis* recasts Black bodies as divine and not degraded. Restored and not condemned. Transformed and not criminal. *Theosis* as a spiritual process of divine restoration and coupled with tangible solutions of transformation it also promotes the full humanity and liberation of lockdown America. Resurrection, then, signifies the hope of transformation that eradicates the Carceral State.

Transformative justice and community accountability through solidarity is the practical turn of a Liberation Theology of Lockdown America. Defined, "Transformative justice and community accountability are terms that describe ways to address violence without relying upon police or prisons. These approaches often work to prevent violence, to intervene when harm is occurring, to hold people accountable, and to transform individuals and society to build safer communities."⁴⁸ Organizations doing transformative justice are working

⁴⁸ Ejeris Dixon, "Building Community Safety: Practical Steps Toward Liberatory Transformation," *Truth-Out*, August 25, 2015, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/32489-building-community-safety-practical-steps-toward-liberatory-transformation>.

to restore relationships (bring into unity), amplify the voices of victims and survivors, and build a beloved community. Thus, from dungeons of shame emerges the courage to fight for human dignity and social transformation.

This fight begins with the incarcerated. The most transformative acts of resistance have emerged from people who are incarcerated. For example, there was the prison hunger strikes in California when “on July 8th, 2013, more than 30,000 California prisoners initiated an indefinite hunger strike in response to the CDRC’s failure to meet their 5 core demands. 50 days and 1 death later, strikers suspended the strike, and California legislators committed to hold public hearings.”⁴⁹ This demonstrates the power of agency. Liberation is an organic movement that begins on the inside. As room was made on the cross for the Penitent thief to initiate salvation, space must be afforded to Lockdown America to actively advocate for their humanity and dignity by resisting and challenging oppressive conditions of retributive punishment.

Another example is Glenn Martin, Executive Director of JustLeadership USA and formerly incarcerated, who organized a campaign to close Rikers Island jail complex in New York City. Rikers is the second largest jail in the country. JustLeadership USA’s campaign to close Rikers is steered by people who have been directly affected by the criminal justice system. As a result of their tireless protests, the Mayor of New York City, Bill De Blasio recently announced his ten-year plan to close Rikers.⁵⁰ Martin’s organized protest demonstrates that those closest to the problem are also closest to the solution. Again, this cannot be emphasized enough that organic movements of transformation amongst lockdown America is critical for the eradication of systems of sacrifice. Liberation happens on the cross among those who suffer, it is an inside job where the persecuted fight to overcome oppressive structures of power. Lockdown America are their own liberators and those on the outside must act in solidarity in ways that affirm their personhood, power and protest while facilitating freedom.

In this regard, Black life, condemned and transformed, is a valuable contribution to a just society and the kingdom of God. Incarcerated persons are made in the image of God. To accept this is to validate our shared humanity. It is to see our neighbor not as they are but as who they have the potential to become—because we are all becoming. Jesus saw the penitent thief and extended salvation because in the Carceral State his offense was a life sentences punishable

⁴⁹ <https://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com/education/the-prisoners-demands-2/> (Accessed 27 April 2017).

⁵⁰ <http://www.morejustnyc.com/the-report-1/> (accessed 27 April 2017).

by execution but with God it was the beginning of new life marked by grace and transformation. Importantly, Jesus did not initiate the conversation. Rather the thief exercised agency by recognizing Jesus as a source of salvation and thereby becoming an actor in his own liberation. Likewise, the church, academe and society cannot diminish the agency and voice of the incarcerated to act as their own advocates. We, however, like Jesus must be present and available to forge solidarity by providing resources and access that makes liberation and transformation possible.

Rethinking salvation through the doctrine of *theosis* emphasizes spiritual restoration of humanity to the image of God and the communal restoration of the Kindom of God on earth—it is both individual and systemic. In the Kindom there is no mandatory minimum prison sentences or draconian policies of punishment. There is no illusory war on drugs waged on Black people where a sentence for crack-cocaine (a drug associated with poor Black people) is longer than sentence for cocaine (a drug associated with wealthy white people) or where drug crimes are sentenced longer than murderers receive in other countries. In the Kindom of God there are no Stand Your Ground laws that can acquit George Zimmerman, a white-Latino man, of killing unarmed Trayvon Martin on his way home from a store-run to buy Ice Tea and skittles in Sanford, Florida but sentence a Black mother, Marissa Alexander, to sixty years in prison after firing warning shots in fear of the violent rage of her domestic partner in the same State. In the Kindom of God There are no jails but especially no apparatuses of punishment that detains more people unconvicted of a crime than those who are charged. There are no Kalief Browder's who was falsely imprisoned for three years on Rikers Island without trial in solitary confinement for a crime he did not commit and after two years upon release he commits suicide likely caused by the psychological trauma of false imprisonment. There are no coerced testimonies and charging of minors as adults that can lead to false convictions and wrongfully steal the childhood of five young men notoriously known as, The Central Park Five. In the kindom of God women are not criminalized for making alternative decisions to survive like Kelly Bolar who was imprisoned for sending her children to a better school district. There is no police militarization, hyper criminaziation, rogue policing that makes it deadly for a black man to sell CD's, cigarettes or cigarillos and for a black woman to forget to make a minor traffic infraction like forgetting to signal on a non-busy residential road. Rather, in the kindom of God there is liberation for Lockdown America who benefit from gainful employment, affordable housing, access to sound education, reunification with family, quality of life and first-class citizenship. In the kindom of God there

are alternatives to incarceration, there is prison abolition, there is freedom, there is all of humanity created in the image of God.

Hence the final and pressing question of a Liberation Theology of Lockdown America is: how can we act in solidarity with persons incarcerated through policies, practices and pedagogies that affirm their humanity according to the image of God, take seriously their agency and voice to lead movements of resistance to dismantle the prison industrial complex and gives hope for freedom through access to material resources to survive and secure quality of life? As purveyors of freedom, we are left with this charge.

Conclusion

From the plantation to the penitentiary, Anselmian sacrificial atonement theology gained hegemonic influence with understanding the nature of God. As a result of a feudal cosmology of salvation that reflected social hierarchy, salvation instituted a caste between lords and serfs. In this schema, the serfs are sacrificed as a satisfaction for the sins of society and to restore the honor of an offended lord. Applied allegorically to contemporary contexts, apparatuses of punishment from the plantation to the penitentiary essentially reified social hierarchy by scapegoating Black bodies to preserve the interests of dominant society. In the Carceral State Black bodies are dehumanized in the same manner that Black Jesus was despised by the Roman empire. It is therefore critical to examine religious contradictions of the cross and rethink theological categories of sin and punishment in relation to the criminalized and oppressed. It is imperative to construct alternative models of salvation that are transformative and discards vicarious punishment to secure liberation.

On the cross, Jesus died a criminal's death but he did not wake up one. Through the transformative power of resurrection, he arose not as a malefactor but as the Messiah. This event coupled with Jesus extending salvation to the penitent thief demonstrates Jesus' transcending positions of criminality on the cross. Thus, a critical first step in a Liberation Theology of Lockdown America is this relationship between Jesus on the cross and Black bodies in the Carceral State. This is consonant with biblical witness and the tracing of social caste from Antiquity to the Antebellum to the American penal system.

Importantly, Classical atonement theories are a-historical and a-ethical in that constructions of cosmologies of salvation do nothing to challenge injustice in society.⁵¹ Subsequently, a Liberation Theology underlines the relationship between Christian interpretations of punishment and mass incarceration by

interrogating atonement theories' influence on racialized punitive philosophies of retribution. Sin associated with blackness is problematic for the criminalization of Black bodies. In a religious and social parallel, sin is understood as breaking an agreement just as crime is understood as breaking a social contract. Sin and crime in the Carceral State are inextricably linked. Both are punishable and require a satisfaction. The disenfranchised therefore must pay a debt with their bodies and with their freedom.

When making the connection between Jesus' satisfaction and black body's sacrifice, the question of choice emerges. Is it sustaining to compare the two, one might ask, when Jesus chose to suffer but Black bodies who are brutalized by rogue policing, victimized by anti-black violence, demonized and dehumanized, *do not choose* to endure unjust, unwanted and unmitigated persecution? This is a fair question. In response, Cone seems to think that in both cases of messianic and marginalized suffering there is no choice. He argues,

The lynching tree is a metaphor for white America's crucifixion of black people. It is the window that best reveals the religious meaning of the cross in our land. In this sense, black people are Christ figures, not because they wanted to suffer but because they had no choice. Just as Jesus had no choice in his journey to Calvary, so black people had no choice about being lynched. The evil forces of the Roman State and of white supremacy in America willed it. Yet, God took the evil of the cross and the lynching tree and transformed them both into the triumphant beauty of the divine.⁵²

Cone states that black people are Christ figures precisely because they had no choice but to suffer. Thus, the Roman crucifixion is one and the same as white America's carceral state. Both legalized lynching and state sanctioned violence against Black bodies. Hence, there are two crosses burdening the black body: white supremacy and black criminality. By virtue of blackness there is no choice on the journey to Calvary or the carceral state—no matter pedigree, positionality or personhood black people are targeted as a sacrifice to preserve a false sense of white goodness.

For the antebellum South and mass incarceration, the Black body is a problem—and neither blackness or the cross is by choice. One does not choose Blackness or criminality. And yet one is a gift and the other is a curse. Every day, then, Black and brown people confront the paradox of their existential being:

⁵¹ Ibid., 160-161/

⁵² James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 166.

They must live boldly in the gift of Blackness against the curse of criminality that wills evil forces of death to annihilate Black bodies. The two are warring realities fraught with the despair of the Carceral State but there is hope in the eradication of systems of sacrifice. For this reason, it is a matter of life and death to understand that the relationship among religion, race and punishment is consequential for the black body. Hence, Christian interpretations of sacrifice must be interrogated to find a truth that will liberate Lockdown America.

As an intern for the Women's Advocate Ministry, a nonprofit in New York City providing crisis intervention for women incarcerated, I received a letter from prison where a client shared, "I want to tell you the passage that I always get stuck on in the Bible. No matter where I am at, something keeps me coming back to this one passage." In this passage, she referred to the gospel writer of John, who shares about freedom, particularly how "*the truth shall make you free.*" She wrestled with how, exactly, her freedom was tied to the freedom that God gives through faith. It is seemingly a religious contradiction and existential dilemma to read about God's freedom while physically confined to a prison. The essential questions then remain: how does criminalized Black bodies find liberation in Jesus who died a criminal's death and call him Savior? And what does it mean to be Black, Christian and criminalized in a Carceral State founded on religious ideals?

From the ancient ink of the gospel writer to the pen of a prisoner, Liberation begins with truth. James H. Cone, the Father of Black Theology asserts, "Truth is the transcendent reality, disclosed in the people's historical struggle for liberation, which enables them to know that their fight for freedom is not futile. The affirmation of truth means that the freedom hoped for will be realized."⁵³ The truth is that "throughout the history of penal practice, religion has been a major force in shaping the ways in which offenders are dealt with."⁵⁴ The truth is that sacrificial atonement theory has deeply penetrated penal philosophy, so "that one is in prison in order to 'pay one's debt'."⁵⁵ The truth is that Brown bodies are paying the debts of a morally bankrupt society that sanctions legal lynching for the purposes of domination and control. The truth is that the primary constituents of the U.S. prison industrial complex are African-Americans and Latinos who are scapegoated to preserve the privilege

⁵³ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 16.

⁵⁴ Garland, 203.

⁵⁵ Foucault, 233.

of a self-loathing America. The truth is that women incarcerated are the fastest growing population in prisons. Speaking truth from the underside of the cross and in relation to a criminalized Savior gives hope that there is a God who is on the side of persons incarcerated and transcends physical bondage with liberation.

There is, then, liberation in this God who entered into history through a criminalized body, formed the first Christian community with a criminal element, acted in solidarity with the least of these, visited the prisoner, set the captives free, died a criminal's death and transcended criminality on the cross. This God emphasizes restoration. To be Black, Christian and criminalized in a Carceral State founded on religious ideals is to know the liberating truth that God did not enter history through a Black body to proliferate prisons but to overcome state-sanctioned violence. It is therefore hopeful to cast faith in this God who promises liberation. The God of Lockdown America eradicates systems of sacrifice that scapegoat criminalized Black bodies and creates disruptive spaces of resistance to forge community, restore personhood, overthrow oppressive structures of power and secure human flourishing. Hence, from penitence, to the plantation and the penitentiary it is the essence of these revolutionary truths that will free Lockdown America and liberate us all.

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THE TEXTUAL TRANSMISSION OF 'SISTER-WOMAN' IN 1 COR. 9:5:

RECONSTRUCTING EARLY CHRISTIAN SOCIAL HISTORY
THROUGH *VARIAE LECTIONES*¹

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As part of a lengthy response to his detractors, the apostle Paul advances the following question in 1 Cor. 9:5: “Have we not the right to be accompanied by a sister-woman, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?”² The thrust of modern scholarship has tended to interpret this verse not only in light of Paul’s discussions elsewhere on marriage, but more significantly under the shadow of modern Protestant expectations of marriage, women, and clerical celibacy. It is no surprise to read in modern commentaries on the verse that Paul and the apostles were undoubtedly married, an *expected* practice amongst early Christians, which in turn has led to the conclusion that the earliest Christians neither led nor hoped for the celibate life. Telling is Richard Hays on the verse:

The reference to the wives of “the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas” shows that the apostles and other early Christian leaders were normally married—a fact that surely causes some embarrassment to those Christian traditions that later came to insist upon clerical celibacy.³

¹ I wrote this paper as a final project for Bart Ehrman’s New Testament Textual Criticism course in the Spring of 2016. Many thanks to my colleague Erin Galgay Walsh for reading a draft of the paper.

² μη οὐκ ἔχομεν ἕξουσίαν ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα περιάγειν ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ Κηφᾶς; (my trans.). All other NT translations are taken from the NRSV unless otherwise noted. Translations from the Septuagint are taken from A. Pietersma and B.G. Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under That Title* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians, series Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (eds. James Luther Mays, Patrick D. Miller, Paul J. Achtemeier, Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1997), 150.

Notwithstanding his first observation—a decisive instance of hermeneutic preemption—Hays’s suggestion that the verse surely caused anxiety amongst early Christians who emphasized continency will be explored and substantiated below. As we will see, 1 Cor. 9:5 served as a ballast for the early Fathers in either their advocacy or renunciation of lay and/or clerical celibacy. Of particular value for understanding the early reception and transmission of the verse are the Fathers’ remarks on the various attestations of the locution “sister-woman” (ἀδελφὴν γυναικα).⁴ By foregrounding the Fathers’ citations of 1 Cor. 9:5 within their remarks on its textual diversity, we are afforded insight into the early textual history of the verse. But more importantly, we clarify how the verse’s various permutations functioned within early Christian discourse to reify authoritative positions on lay and/or clerical marriage and celibacy.⁵ We will see that the Fathers’ endorsement of one textual form of the verse over another stemmed not from their insouciant acceptance of fossilized nor localized scriptural traditions, but from their anxiety to advance a biblical precedent that entrenched their respective theological claims. The result, in the words of D.C. Parker, was a “living text”⁶ sublimated by early Christian concerns not for orthodoxy, but orthopraxy.⁷

There is, however, one preliminary task requiring proper treatment. Rather than simply rendering ἀδελφὴν γυναικα as “a sister who is a wife” as modern interpreters are wont to do, I begin by surveying the phrase’s lexical shading in classical and post-classical antiquity. This analysis illuminates the Fathers’ exegetical remarks on 1 Cor. 9:5. The latter part of the essay is devoted to the rather large external evidence of the verse preserved by the Fathers and several late antique and early medieval manuscripts. I conclude with some remarks on the significance these witnesses have for reconstructing the social history of early Christianity and how the verse’s *variae lectiones* help achieve that end.

⁴ Throughout the article I refer to ἀδελφὴν γυναικα by a number of monikers: the collocation, the locution, the phrase, and so on. I translate the phrase “sister-woman” in order to leave unresolved its inherent ambiguity.

⁵ Too often this approach receives short shrift in favor of mining scriptural variants for recovering the “original text.” See Bart D. Ehrman, “The Text as Window: New Testament Manuscripts and the Social History of Early Christianity,” in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (2nd ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes; NTTSD 42; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 803-830.

⁶ David C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁷ See Jeffrey Kloha, “The Ethics of Sexuality and Textual Alterations in the Pauline Epistles,” in *Textual Variation: Theological and Social Tendencies?* (ed. D.C. Parker and H.A.G. Houghton; Text and Studies 3d series 5; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2008), 85-108.

Semantics: ἀδελφή, γυνή, and ἀδελφή-γυνή

What meager attention has been paid to these terms has placed undue weight on the New Testament's internal evidence. Much research has, of course, proved useful in demonstrating beyond any doubt that ἀδελφή ("sister") and γυνή ("woman"/"wife") can simply denote, *mutatis mutandis*, fellow Christians.⁸ Especially within the Pauline corpus the internal evidence indicates that the terms most often identify members of the Christian movement (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:10, 11, 26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6), sometimes missionary pairs (e.g. 1 Thess. 3:2), while other times they occur as a salutation (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Phlm. 1). But it must be emphasized at the outset that their precise meaning—especially γυνή as "woman" and/or "wife"—is only made clear by context. As I hope to show, such ambiguity not surprisingly caused many ancient authors, Christians and non-Christians alike, some anxiety when γυνή was deployed alongside ἀδελφή. It is, then, a desideratum that we first attempt to articulate the connotations of ἀδελφή, γυνή, and ἀδελφή-γυνή not merely within the New Testament, but outside as well, since the Fathers themselves are so explicit about their polysemy and thus opportunities to misapprehend them.

To state the obvious, their usage in antiquity was demanded by virtually every discussion of women, wives, and/or matters relating to the family. Indeed, were I to attempt to define these terms too narrowly I would lose sight of the linguistic uncertainty so integral to them.⁹ Certain broad trends in their application can nevertheless be surmised. For ἀδελφή four primary meanings will suffice, though it must be kept in mind that these definitions may in some cases intersect: 1) a biological sister or kinswoman;¹⁰ 2) a wife (but not a sibling);¹¹ 3) a term of

⁸ To take one recent development in scholarship, feminist approaches have proved salutary for our understanding of these terms. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York, Crossroad, 1983), 172; Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Women Partners in the New Testament," *JFSR* 6 (1990): 65-86, esp. 73.

⁹ On the ambiguity of kinship terms in the documentary record, see R.S. Bagnall and R. Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 85-87.

¹⁰ BGU 1 154 (161 CE); BGU 2 577 (203 CE); BGU 2 535 (ii CE); *P.Tebt.* 2.412 (ii CE); *P.Tebt.* 2.414 (ii CE); BGU 7 1680 (iii CE); *O.Mich.* 1 389 (iii CE). Cf. Job 42:11: ἤκουσαν δὲ πάντες οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ ἀδελφαὶ αὐτοῦ ("Now all his brothers and his sisters heard").

¹¹ See E. Dickey, "Literal and Extended Use of Kinship Terms in Documentary Papyri," *Mnemosyne* 57 (2004): 156-161.

endearment;¹² and/or 4) a co-religionist.¹³ While γυνή is more diffuse, we can isolate several broad meanings: 1) a woman;¹⁴ 2) a wife;¹⁵ 3) a term of respect;¹⁶ and/or 4) a concubine.¹⁷

Occurrences of the collocation ἀδελφή-γυνή in non-Christian literature are all but non-existent. What sources do survive convey two basic facts. The first qualifies that a woman or a wife (γυνή) is the sister (ἀδελφή) of another. Here the terms are closely linked in a sentence or clause, but they generally differ in case and number.¹⁸ The second type denotes that someone is both a wife and/or woman as well as a blood relative of another.¹⁹ At times, these registers lack

¹² SB 20 14132 (i CE); P.Oslo 2 62 (iv CE). See Bagnall, *Women's Letters*, 86-7; Peter Artz-Grabner, "Brothers' and 'Sisters' in Documentary Papyri and in Early Christianity," *RivB* 50 (2002): 187. Cf. *Cant.* 4:9: Ἐκαρδίωσας ἡμᾶς, ἀδελφή μου νύμφη ("You heartened us, O my sister bride").

¹³ Matt. 12:50: ὅστις γὰρ ἂν ποιήσῃ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς αὐτοῦ μου ἀδελφός καὶ ἀδελφή καὶ μήτηρ ἐστίν ("For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother"); Rom. 16:1: Συνίστημι δὲ ὑμῖν Φοίβην τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἡμῶν διάκονον τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κεγχρεαῖς ("I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae"). See L. Blumell, *Lettered Christians: Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 68-70. For examples of this usage by non-Christians, see P.Bingen 74 (ii CE); P. Col. 11 299 (iv CE).

¹⁴ BGU 2 648 (ii CE); P.Mich. 5 241 (46 CE); BGU 3 706 (119 CE); P.Mich. 8 476 (ii CE); P.Mich. 8 507 (ii CE); SB 6 9421 (iii CE).

¹⁵ PCorn. 6 (17 CE); P.Mich. 3 191 (60 CE); P.Col. 10 262 (160 CE); BGU 2 376 (ii-iii CE); O.Mich. 1 247 (iii-iv CE).

¹⁶ Perhaps best translated as "lady" or "mistress." See Euripides, *Med.* 290; Theocritus, *Poeta Bucolicus* 15.12; P.Mich. 3 203 (114-116 CE); P.Oslo 3 161 (iii-iv CE).

¹⁷ Homer *Il.* 24.497; P.Tebt. 1 104 (92 BCE). See Dickey, "Literal and Extended Use of Kinship," 162.

¹⁸ See, for example, LXX-1 Kgs 11:19; Herodotus, *Hist.* 9.110.13-15; Demosthenes, *Contra Spudiam* 9.1-5; Plutarch, *Aetia Rom. et Graeca* 295.2-5; Cassius Dio, *Hist. Rom.* 48.31.3-5; and in the Byzantine scholia on Sophocles (*Scholia in Sophoclis Oedipum tyrannum* 70.3).

¹⁹ For instance, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Lysias* 25.7-10: χρόνον δὲ ὕστερον καταλεγείς Διόδοτος μετὰ Θρασύλλου τῶν ὀπλιτῶν, καλέσας τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἀδελφίδην οὖσαν καὶ τὸν ἐκείνης μὲν πατέρα αὐτοῦ δὲ κηδεστὴν καὶ ἀδελφόν... "Some time later when Diodotus was enrolled for infantry service with Thrasyllus, he summoned his wife, who was his niece, and her father, who was also his father-in-law and his brother... (LCL 465). In other instances, the relationship of the terms is not altogether clear. See P.Oxy. 15.1798 F 44: (Col. I) [ἦσειν αὐτὸν φαρ[μά]κωι μέλλοντος δ' | αὐτοῦ διδόναι Παρμε[νί]ων διάφορος ὦν τῶι || [Φιλ]ίππωι γράφει πρὸς | [Αλ]έξανδρον κελεύων | φυλάξασθαι τοῦτον· ἀκούειν γὰρ χεῖλια τάλαντα Δαρεῖον αὐτῶι || διδόναι καὶ τὴν ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα, ἐφ' ᾧ αὐτὸν ἀνελεῖ. Αλέξανδρος δὲ λαβὼν τὴν ἐπιστολὴν καὶ οὐδενί | προσποιησάμ[ε]νος | πείν [εἰ]...him with a drug. While he was trying to

clear distinction, for instance, after a woman has acquired a husband she may be considered both a woman and/or a wife as well as a sister, specifically in the eyes of brothers-in-law.²⁰ Of interest for my purposes is when *γυνή* and *ἀδελφή* appear in the same grammatical case (coterminous), an author is offering the additional detail that a woman and/or a wife is also considered a sister.²¹ This usage might help clarify the relative paucity of the phrase in antiquity: for it comes dangerously close to suggesting illicit relations between siblings or endogamy more broadly.²² Because no specific term existed in either Greek or

administer it to him, Parmenion, who was hostile towards (5) Philip, wrote to Alexander asking him to guard himself from him. He had heard, in fact, that Dareios had promised him a thousand talents (10) and [his?] sister's hand in marriage on condition that he kill him. Alexander, taking the letter and without showing any reaction drank...” See B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt (eds.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 15 (London 1922), 122-35. Still other authors conflate the terms into one resulting in something like “sister-in-law.” See Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 55.1-3: i. Συνέβη ἄμα ὀδεύειν ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ Αἰλίας ἐπὶ τὴν Αἴγυπτον. προπέμποντας τὴν μακαρίαν Σιλβανίαν τὴν παρθένον γυναικαδέλφην Ρουφίνου τοῦ ἀπὸ ἐπαρχῶν. “It so happened that we (Melania and Palladius) traveled together from Aelia to Egypt, escorting the blessed Sylvania, the virgin, sister-in-law of Rufinus the ex-prefect.” See Bernadette Mc Nary-Zak, “Problematising Women and Holy Land Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity,” *Magistra* 8.2 (2002): 3-24.

²⁰ See the remarks of the lexicographer Aelius Dionysius (1-2 CE) (*Gramm. Lexicogr.* α.41): ἀέλιοι· οἱ ἀδελφὰς γυναικῆς ἔχοντες, <οἱ> συγγάμβριοι. “Brothers-in-law: Those who have women as sisters, [they are] joined by marriage” (my trans.); SB 14 12173 (iv-v CE). See also Dickey, “Literal and Extended Use of Kinship,” 163-64.

²¹ See Dickey, “Literal and Extended Use of Kinship,” 160-61: “When a sibling marriage needs to be explicitly described, the same term cannot be used for both sibling and spousal relationships; the situation can be clarified as in BGU 1.26 (II-III AD), in which the writer refers to Πτολεμαῖδα ἀδελφ[τὴν μου καὶ γυ]ν[α]ῖκα (7). It is notable that in this context ἀδελφή is replaced in the meaning ‘wife’ and not in the meaning ‘sister’; that shows that the meaning ‘sister’ remained primary despite the frequent usage of ἀδελφή for wives.” There are some instances where γύναιος (“little woman”) is paired with ἀδελφή to indicate something like “little [-woman-] sister” (e.g. Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.583: τὴν ἀδελφὴν γύναιον). Still, γύναιος does occur in the sense of “wife” (e.g. Aristophanes, *Vespae* 610; *Thesmophoriazusae* 792). Also note the use of the compound γυναικάδελφος (“wife’s brother”), e.g., in discussing the Emperor Gratian and his wife (*Chronicon paschale* 561.2).

²² By endogamy I mean marriage within one’s local community, clan, or tribe. In this usage, husband and wife could be related by blood or have legal ties such as adoptees and their parent had in the Roman legal system. Incest is, of course, a type of endogamy. For discussion of incest in the Roman legal system and in particular how fathers (and more rarely, mothers) were accused of the crime with their adoptees, see Hugh Lindsay, *Adoption in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 68-69.

Latin to denote such relations, the ability for interpreters to read *γυνή* as “wife” became particularly problematic when paired with *ἀδελφή*.²³

Indeed, just as many pagan writers of the imperial period,²⁴ Christians were so concerned with condemning endogamy because they were so often accused of the crime.²⁵ The second-century apologist, Athenagoras of Athens, states that pagans charged Christians with “Oedipean intercourse” and later in the same work he juxtaposes the innocent use of “brothers and sisters” by Christians alongside his condemnation of the Greek gods as guilty of a litany of unholy deeds, incest chief among them.²⁶ Theophilus of Antioch, also writing during this period, condemns Epicurus and the Stoics for teaching incest alongside his admission that Christians are also accused of the crime.²⁷

A century later pagans were still claiming that Christians regularly engaged in the act. Minucius Felix relays that pagans were fond of spreading tall tales of incestuous banqueting (*incesto convivio*) amongst Christians. Elsewhere the author relates a pagan view that Christians “introduce a kind of religion of

²³ In Greek, the closest we get to “incest” are *gamos anosios* (unholy marriage) and *gamos asebes* (unholy unions). See Jerome Wilgaux, “Consubstantiality, Incest, and Kinship,” *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (ed. B. Rawson; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 225. In Latin, *incestum* is used, at times, to indicate an incestuous relationship, although this usage often intersects with verbs such as *fornicare* (to fornicate) or *stuprare* (to debauch or ravish). See Minucius Felix’s use of *stuprare* and *incestum* in my discussion below. For a discussion of the Latin terms, see Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xiii-xiv.

²⁴ On Cicero’s rhetoric of denouncing his opponents on the basis on incest as well as being accused of the same crime, see Amy Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality & Aggression in Roman Humor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 97. Tacitus notes (*Annals* 6.19) the dire consequences faced when accused of such activity. He reports that a Spaniard named Sextus Marius had had sex with his daughter and as punishment was thrown from the Tarpeian Rock. Perhaps most widespread was gossip that the Roman emperors were engaged in or products themselves of incest. Suetonius, for example, records many such examples: Tiberius’ bastard as the father of Ortho (*Ortho* 1), Caligula engaged in incest with his sisters (*Calig.* 24, 36), Nero with his mother (*Ner.* 28), Titus with his sister-in-law (*Tit.* 10), and Domitian with his niece (*Dom.* 22).

²⁵ Tertullian famously remarks that Christians are accused of the crime (*Apol.* 7 [LCL 120]): “We are called abominable from the sacrament of infanticide and the feeding thereon, as well as the incestuous intercourse, following the banquet, because the dogs, that overturn the lamps, (our pimps forsooth of the darkness) bring about the shamelessness engendered by our impious lists.”

²⁶ Athenagoras, *Leg.* 3, 32 (ANF 2.130, 146).

²⁷ Theophilus, *Autol.* 4, 6 (ANF 2.112).

lust, a promiscuous 'brotherhood' and 'sisterhood' (*fratres et sorores*) by which ordinary fornication (*non insolens stuprum*), under cover of a hallowed name, is converted to incest (*fiat incestum*).²⁸ These accusations continued into late antiquity and beyond.²⁹ Not only did Roman legislation seek to curb incest during the Republic, but it did so well into the imperial period³⁰ even after the so-called Constantinian shift,³¹ suggesting that the act was perceived as an ongoing problem within Christian and pagan communities alike.

While hardly an expected practice, the census records from Roman Egypt yield plentiful evidence that sibling marriage was not only tolerated, but was a "cultural norm."³² That this practice was relatively unknown to many in the early centuries of the Common Era is deeply undermined by the fact that in the most well documented region of Arsinoe in the Fayum Oasis, 37 percent of marriages appear to have been between full siblings.³³ Not only does the documentary record of Egypt record a large number of marriages between full siblings, but it also attests to unions and divorces between half siblings. The resulting demographic picture from Egypt, as well as from contemporary Near Eastern traditions beyond the Roman frontier, indicates that endogamy was common in certain sectors of the ancient Mediterranean and was thus no

²⁸ Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 9, 31 (LCL 120).

²⁹ Jennifer Wright Knust, *Abandoned to Lust: Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 89-112.

³⁰ B.D. Shaw and P.R. Saller, "Close-kin Marriage in Roman Society?" *Man* 19 (1984): 432-444. For a survey of incest in the East and beyond the Roman Empire, see P.J. Frandsen, *Incestuous and Close-kin Marriage in Ancient Egypt and Persia: An Examination of the Evidence* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2009), 34-38, 102.

³¹ On laws prohibiting incestuous marriage during late antiquity see, for example, *Codex Theodosianus* 3.12 (438 CE) and *Digest of Justinian* 23.2 (533 CE). See Geoffrey Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity: The Rise of Christianity and the Endurance of Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 74-106.

³² Walter Scheidel, "Ancient Egyptian Sibling Marriage and the Westermarck Effect," *Inbreeding and the Incest Taboo: A Biosocial Approach* (eds. Arthur P. Wolf and William H. Durham; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 93.

³³ *Ibid.*: "Sibling marriage, attested for the second and the early third centuries AD, appears to have been more prevalent in urban settings than in the villages. In the most amply documented location, the district capital of Arsinoe in the Fayum Oasis (southwest of modern Cairo), seventeen of forty-six known unions, or 37 percent, are between full siblings. Owing to the limited availability of suitable sibling-spouses in any particular family and a strong preference for younger wives, the observed incidence approaches the feasible maximum."

doubt familiar to those who eschewed such unions in favor of exogamic marital relations.³⁴

While no extant source attests that early Christians reworked 1 Cor. 9:5 due to its potential for advocating endogamy, the problematic meaning “sister” might convey once paired with “woman/wife” is suggestive in view of the documentary record and the high frequency with which early Christians were accused of illicit sexual relations. As the literary evidence will make clear, the early Latin Fathers in particular were much more likely to omit “sister” from “woman” in their citations of and allusions to 1 Cor. 9:5. This tendency may have stemmed from the narrower linguistic field that “woman” (*mulier*) held in Latin and its likely association with the lower classes and in turn with obscene and ill-reputed acts. Unlike Greek, Latin had a number of words to describe women and wives of various social classes and ranks. The pairing of *mulier* with “sister” (*soror*) would have been even more problematic as the terms appear coterminously in classical literature to describe specific incestuous relations.³⁵ In either Greek or Latin, these lexemes, when taken together, could signify both a wife *and* a sister. When set within Greco-Roman expectations of marriage and sexual relations, we can easily imagine that scribes had cause to amend the verse.

External Evidence

Before turning to the Fathers, I present below a summary of their and several prominent biblical witnesses’ presentation of 1 Cor. 9:5’s ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα.³⁶

- 1) ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα (“sister-woman”): most biblical mss (see NA²⁸), Clement of Alexandria,³⁷ Origen,³⁸ Basil of Caesarea,³⁹ John Chrysostom,⁴⁰

³⁴ On brother-sister marriage in ancient Iran, see Walter Scheidel, “Brother-Sister and Parent-Child Marriage Outside Royal Families in Ancient Egypt and Iran: A Challenge to the Sociobiological View of Incest Avoidance?” *Ethology and Sociobiology* 17 (1996): 319-40.

³⁵ Francesca Santoro L’Hoir, *The Rhetoric of Gender Terms ‘Man’, ‘Woman’, and the Portrayal of Character in Latin Prose* (Mnemosyne 120; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 86-87, 93, 107.

³⁶ A good number of these witnesses are taken from John Granger Cook, “1 Cor. 9:5: The Women of the Apostles,” *BSW* 89 (2008): 352-368.

³⁷ Clement. *Strom.* 3.6.53; 4.15.97.

³⁸ Origen, *Frag. ex comm. in epist. i ad Cor. (in catenis)* 28.4-5.

³⁹ Basil of Caesarea, *De virg.* 39; *Regulae morales* 31.752; *Sermo de contubernaliibus* 30.52-54.

⁴⁰ John Chrysostom, *In epist. i ad Cor.* 61.171.60-172.8.

- Augustine,⁴¹ Severian of Gabala,⁴² Macarius Magnes,⁴³ Isidore of Pelusium,⁴⁴ and John of Damascus.⁴⁵
- 2) γυναῖκας ἀδελφᾶς ("women-sisters"): Arethas.⁴⁶
 - 3) γυναῖκας ("women"): F, G, ar, b, and Clement of Alexandria.⁴⁷
 - 4) *mulieres* ("women"): Pelagius,⁴⁸ Ps. Cyprian ("religious women"),⁴⁹ Tertullian,⁵⁰ Ambrosiaster,⁵¹ and Hilary.⁵²
 - 5) *mulierem sororem* (transposed vis-à-vis the Vulgate): Hubertianus (Brit. Mus. Add. 24142), z* (Harley 1772), and vg^c.¹
 - 6) *sorores mulieres* ("sisters-women"): Jerome.⁵³
 - 7) *sororem mulierculam* ("sister-little-woman"): Biblia Latina.⁵⁴
 - 8) *sorores* ("sisters"): Sedulius.⁵⁵
 - 9) *uxores* ("wives"): Jerome.⁵⁶
 - 10)  ("women"): Aphrahat.⁵⁷

⁴¹ Augustine, *De op. mon.* 5 (CSEL 41.538-539).

⁴² See Cook, "1 Cor. 9:5," 356.

⁴³ Macarius Magnes, *Apoc.* 3.22.

⁴⁴ Isidore of Pelusium *Ep.* 3.176 (PG 78, 865-68).

⁴⁵ John of Damascus, *Comm. in epist. Pauli* (MPG 95).

⁴⁶ Arethas, *Scripta minora* (praecipue e cod. Mosq. Hist. Mus. gr. 315).

⁴⁷ Clement, *Paed.* 2.1.9.1.

⁴⁸ Alexander Souter, *Pelagius's Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of St. Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922-1926) II, 175, 5-7.

⁴⁹ Ps. Cyprian, *de singularitate clericorum* (CSEL 3/3; 196.3-8).

⁵⁰ Tertullian, *de mono.* 8 (CCSL 2: 1027.21-22); *de exhortatione castitatis* 12.1; *de pudicitia* 14.11 (La Pudicité, tome I. C. Micaelli, C. Munier [1993]).

⁵¹ Ambrosiaster, *Ad Cor. prima* 9.5 (CSEL 81.2, 98.4-5).

⁵² Hilary, *Psal.* 118, 14.14 (SC 347).

⁵³ Jerome, *Ep.* 123.14 (CSEL 56.1; 89.16); *Matth.* 27.55 (SC 259; 302.418).

⁵⁴ *Biblia Latina cum Glossa Ordinaria. Facsimile Reprint of the Editio Princeps Adolf Rusch of Strassburg 1480-1480/1*, vol. 4 (intro. By Karlfried Froehlich and Margaret T. Gibson; Turnhout: Brepols, 1992), 320.

⁵⁵ Sedulius, *Collect. In ep. 1 ad Cor.*: MVLIERES (9.5). In Greco 'sorores', non 'mulieres' legitur. "Women (9.5). According to the Greek it reads 'sisters,' not 'women'" (my trans.). See Hermann Josef Frede and Herbert Stanjek (eds.), *Sedulii Scotti Collectaneum in Apostolum: II. In Epistolas ad Corinthios usque ad Hebraeos, Vetus Latina: Aus der Geschichte der Lateinischen Bibel*, 31/32 (Freiburg: Herder, 1996), 516.

⁵⁶ Jerome, *Ep.* 22.20 (CSEL 54; 171.5).

⁵⁷ Aphrahat, *Dem.* 6.5 (PO I/1; 264.22-265.2).

The almost ubiquitous occurrence of “sister-woman” in the biblical manuscripts certainly recommends its “originality” or at minimum we might speak of its very early circulation.⁵⁸ This is the position taken by virtually every modern commentator.⁵⁹ What are frequently ignored, however, are the citations of and allusions to the verse by the Fathers. Clement, to take our earliest commentator on the verse, states that Paul certainly had a female companion (σύζυγον), a figure whom Clement soon after identifies with 1 Cor 9:5’s ἀδελφήν γυναῖκα.⁶⁰ Yet Clement excludes Paul’s companion from his missionary activity since she would have prevented him from fulfilling his obligations as an apostle.⁶¹ As for the other apostles, Clement writes that they were accompanied by women; but, like Paul, they remained continent so as to secure their contribution to their respective missions. The women, too, according to Clement, remained chaste in order to safeguard their function as caretakers and as missionaries to women and housewives, and it was on account of their

⁵⁸ In this study, I am not concerned with uncovering the “original/initial text” of 1 Cor. 9:5. For a recent discussion of issues related to these terms see Michael W. Holmes, “From ‘Original Text’ to ‘Initial Text’: The Traditional Goal of New Testament Textual Criticism in Contemporary Research” (ed. Bart Ehrman, et al.; *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, 2nd ed.; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 637-688; cf. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels*, 203-213.

⁵⁹ See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New International Commentary on the New Testament, Revised Ed.: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 444-445.

⁶⁰ For σύζυγον, I prefer more neutral terms such as “comate” or “companion” (cf. Phil. 4:3). For other translations see TLG (“yoked together”) and BDAG (“true comrade”). In the classical period, σύζυγον is used not only in the sense of “companion” (e.g. Aristophanes [LCL 180.446]), but also a “wife” (e.g. Euripides, *Alc.* 342 [LCL 12.432]).

⁶¹ Clement, *Strom.* 3.6.53. “Even Paul did not hesitate in one letter to address his comate (σύζυγον). The only reason why he did not take her about with him was that it would have been an inconvenience for his ministry. Accordingly, he says in a letter: ‘Have we not a right to take about with us a sister-woman like the other apostles (οὐκ ἔχομεν ἔξουσίαν ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα περιάγειν, ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπόστολοι);’ But the latter, in accordance with their particular ministry, devoted themselves to preaching without any distraction, and took along women as sisters with whom they had no marriage relations in order that they might be their fellow-ministers in dealing with housewives (ἀλλ’ οὗτοι μὲν οἰκειῶς τῇ διακονίᾳ, ἀπερισπάστως τῷ κηρύγματι προσανέχοντες, οὐχ ὡς γαμετάς, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἀδελφὰς περιήγον τὰς γυναῖκας συνδιακόνους ἑσομένας πρὸς τὰς οἰκουροὺς γυναῖκας). It was through them that the Lord’s teaching penetrated also the women’s quarters without any scandal being aroused.” See John E.L. Dulton and Henry Chadwick (*The Library of Christian Classics*, vol. II: *Alexandria Christianity: Selected Translations*; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), 65.

presence in women's quarters (γυναικωνίτης) that no suspicion arose of scandal.⁶²

Clement's account prompts several observations. First, while Paul did in fact have a female companion, she was not present throughout his missions. The other apostles, on the other hand, were accompanied by female fellow ministers (συνδιακόνους), although they were not traveling with the apostles as wives (οὐχ ὡς γαμετάς). Second, Clement understands δελφὴν γυναικα as a subject-predicate: the apostles led women *as* sisters (ὡς ἀδελφὰς περικηγον τὰς γυναῖκας). Whether these women had once been deemed the wives of the apostles and then while accompanying their husbands temporarily lost this status is not altogether clear from Clement's discussion. Nor is Paul's precise relationship with his female companion. What is clear is that these women did not fulfill marital obligations of any kind. Put simply, their status as sisters precluded them from any marital activity if and when they accompanied the apostles as fellow ministers. Moreover, Clement's handling of the verse, when set within his larger polemic against his opponents who equate marriage to fornication, proffers that he is sympathetic to interpreting 1 Cor. 9:5 as evidence that the early apostles, Paul among them, were in fact married. This becomes even more suggestive in light of later interpreters' fierce resistance to earlier traditions that Paul's use of σύζυγε referred to his wife.⁶³

The subsequent Fathers attesting ἀδελφὴν γυναικα only partially dovetail Clement. With the exception of Porphyry's comments preserved by Macarius Magnes,⁶⁴ all concede that Paul, the other apostles, and, when

⁶² To take one parallel of scandal arising from such activity, Plutarch (*Caes.* 9.3) discusses the ill intentions of a young man found in the women's quarters (γυναικωνίτης) where Caesar's wife and her female companions were held. M. MacDonald discusses the role of women in women's quarters and has additionally pinpointed the role of Christian women as the sole ministers to non-Christian women in the late second-century onwards in Alexandria. See M. MacDonald, "Was Celsus Right? The Role of Women and the Expansion of Early Christianity," *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (ed. David Balch and Carol Osiek; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 168.

⁶³ Much ink has been spilled over Paul's use of σύζυγε. See D.L. Eastman, "Epiphanius' and Patristic Debates on the Marital Status of Peter and Paul," *Vigiliae Christianae* 67 (2013): 502-504.

⁶⁴ Macarius Magnes, Apocrit. 3.22. In his dialogue with a pagan, perhaps Porphyry, Macarius suggests that some interpreters understood 1 Cor. 9:5 to speak of "wives." Macarius' pagan, while condemning Peter a false apostle, cites the verse as proof that Paul himself thought Peter a hypocrite and unworthy of apostolic authority. Macarius' pagan cites ἀδελφὴν γυναικα promptly after mention is made of the phrase meaning a "wife."

mentioned, their female companions, were continent. But, unlike Clement, later Fathers exploit the collocation as a convenient *locus probans* for the promotion of marital and sexual abstention beyond the apostolic floruit.⁶⁵ They envision themselves to have, like Paul, the authority—even the obligation as tradents of the apostolic tradition—to remain continent. They admit that, while Christians certainly have the right to marry, abstaining from the practice is in every case more noble and good. Apologists such as Origen and Chrysostom, for instance, while granting that marriage is tolerable and necessary, cite the verse as an *a fortiori* warrant in support of remaining unwed and celibate.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Clement portrays some Christian perspectives on marriage as without merit. These include the views of those who equate marriage with fornication and argue that marriage was introduced by the devil (*Strom.* 6.49). On the contrary, Clement argues, those who are not married face greater temptation by the devil (*Strom.* 6.51).

⁶⁶ Origen, *Frag. ex comm. in epist. i ad Cor. (in catenis)* 28.4-5: “Accordingly, those [apostles] lived a life with more distinction. ‘Do we not have,’ the apostle writes, ‘the right to our food and drink? Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a sister-woman, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas (μη οὐκ ἔχομεν ἐξουσίαν ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα περιάγειν, ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ Κηφᾶς);? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living [1 Cor. 9:5-6]? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right [1 Cor. 9.12].’ Surely then all of these practices came to an end with the apostle in the passages of scripture that I have just presented. On the other hand, the apostle, having enquired of these matters to his benefit and to the economy of the Church, he discerned that while it is lawful [to do the things detailed above]—although even if he did [those things he had a right to], he would not have sinned—but that he did what was better, <not> enjoying the use of [his] authority. To restate the issue: for every virgin it is lawful to marry. But the noble and good woman refrains from marriage...” (my trans.). Also see Origen’s citation of the same version of the verse later in the same work (33.44-49). Basil of Caesarea reflects a similar attitude (*De virginitate* 39): “Have we not the authority to be accompanied by a sister-woman (Μη οὐκ ἔχομεν ἐξουσίαν ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα περιάγειν);? But, the apostle says, I did not make use of this authority [1 Cor. 9:12]. It is more noble for me to be put to death than to boast of virginity, since [, being made virgins,] some might be left empty” (my trans.). John Chrysostom, too, echoes Origen and Basil (*In epist. i ad Cor.* 61.171.60-172.8): “Have we no right to eat and to drink? Have we no right to be accompanied by a sister-woman (μη οὐκ ἔχομεν ἐξουσίαν ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα περιάγειν);? But how is this a defense? Because when I appear to be abstaining from what is allowed, I would not be just according to those suspicious of me, thinking me a fraud or someone concerned merely with wealth. Therefore, from what was previous alleged against me, as well as from your teaching, and from this which I have spoken, it is sufficient to make my defense against you. All who examine me, I henceforth stand firm in what has been stated before and these that follow: Have we no right to eat and to drink? Have we no right to accompany a sister-woman (μη οὐκ ἔχομεν ἐξουσίαν ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα περιάγειν);? But I, similarly having [this right], I abstain” (my trans.).

Still others, while also exploiting 1 Cor. 9:5 for their apologetic programs, remark on the ambiguities associated with the collocation. Augustine, for his part, clarifies that faithful women (*fideles mulieres*)—namely, chaste, Christian women—accompanied the apostles to supply them with domestic necessities, but notes that they were certainly *not* wives as other interpreters have gleaned:

Have we not a right to eat and to drink? Have we not a right to take about with us a sister-woman (*sororem mulierem*) as do the other apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? See how first he points out what is lawful for him and permissible because he is an apostle... Paul states explicitly that faithful women (*fideles mulieres*), possessing the goods of this world, went along with the apostles and ministered to them from their own supplies so that the servants of God might lack none of those commodities which constitute the necessities of life. Paul asserts that he had the right to act in this respect as the other apostles were doing, but later on he states that he did not wish to use this power. Certain persons, not understanding the passage "Have we not a right to take about with us a sister-woman (*sororem mulierem*)," have interpreted it as "wife" (*uxorem*). The obscurity of the Greek word deceived them, since, in Greek, the same word is used for wife (*uxor*) and woman (*mulier*) [viz. γυνή]. Yet, the apostle has placed the words in such a way [viz. ἀδελεφῆν γυναικα] that people should not be deceived, since he says not merely "a woman" (*mulierem*), but "a sister-woman" (*sororem mulierem*), and not "to take in marriage" (*ducendi*), but "to take about" (*circumducendi*). In truth, this ambiguity has not deceived other interpreters who have translated it as "woman," not "wife" (*mulierem, non uxorem*).⁶⁷

Here we hear in no uncertain terms that some interpreters read not a "sister-woman" (*sororem mulierem*) in 1 Cor. 9:5, but a "wife" (*uxorem*).⁶⁸ According to Augustine, if Paul had intended to mean a wife (*uxorem*), he would simply have said a "woman" (*mulierem*, viz., γυνή), rather than "sister-woman" (*sororem mulierem*, viz., ἀδελεφῆν γυναικα). Moreover, had the apostle spoken of marriage, he would have paired "sister-woman" with the appropriate verb

⁶⁷ Translation adapted from Augustine, *Saint Augustine: Treatises on Various Subjects* (vol. 16 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*; ed. Roy J. Deferrari; trans. M.S. Muldowney; Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1952), 337-38.

⁶⁸ It is unlikely that Augustine's text has been harmonized to any of the biblical versions. See H.A.G. Houghton, *Augustine's Text of John: Patristic Citations and the Latin Gospel Manuscripts* (OECSS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 140-41.

⁶⁹ Augustine understands *ducendi* as appropriate for wives, while *circumducendi* for women. The lexeme *duco* is generally defined as "guiding" or "governing" but can indicate "leading a wife [home]" or can be used in the technical sense of "to marry" (see Lewis & Short). The lexeme *circumduco* is not used in discussions of wives or marriage.

(*ducendi*).⁶⁹ The addition of “sister” and use of the verbal phrase “to take about” (*circumducendi*) thus functioned as clarification for any ambiguity latent in the Greek. Not long after Augustine, Severian of Gabala⁷⁰ and Isidore of Pelusium⁷¹ similarly remark that, even if some of the apostles were married—a fact that Severian suggests as a possibility but does not discuss—Paul’s inclusion of “sister” (ἀδελφήν) in the passage merely indicates how unscrupulously chaste the apostles and their accompanying women were while on their missions.

That some were reading “wife” in 1 Cor. 9:5 and not “sister-woman” is further adduced from Jerome’s polemic against Helvidius. In refuting Helvidius’ promotion of matrimony to the equal footing of virginity, Jerome maintains that Paul was both a virgin and remained unwed throughout his life and, speaking *ex cathedra*, the apostle exhorted all men to be just as he was.⁷² What is unique in Jerome’s discussion is not his advocacy of continence, but that in one of his citations he gives “wives” (*uxores*), while elsewhere he cites the same “sister-woman” also attested by his Vulgate as well as other Latin authors such as Augustine.⁷³ It remains to be explained whether Jerome’s use of “wives” in a

⁷⁰ Cook, “1 Cor. 9,5,” 356: “Severian of Gabala... writes that ‘He, by saying woman and adding sister, makes clear what is fitting, decent, and pure (τὸ πρέπον καὶ σώφρον καὶ καθαρόν) for she who travels along, whether she was a wife (σύζυγος) or not. For it is clear that women travelled with Peter and the others yearning for their teaching.”

⁷¹ Isidore of Pelusium, *Ep.* 3.176 (PG 78, 865-68): “He [Paul] said sister (ἀδελφήν), in order to show that she was chaste, and woman (γυναῖκα) in order to reflect her nature.” See Eastman, “Epiphanius’ and Patristic Debates,” 511.

⁷² Jerome, *Ep.* 22.20 (CSEL 54; 171.5): “The apostle [Paul] says: ‘Concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord.’ Why so? Because he himself was a virgin, not by order but of his own free will. Those people must not be listened to who pretend that he had a wife (*uxorem*). When he is discussing continence and recommending perpetual chastity, he says: ‘I wish that all men were even as I myself.’ And later: ‘I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I.’ And in another place: ‘Have we not power to lead about wives even as the other apostles (*Numquid non habemus potestatem uxores circumducendi sicut et ceteri apostoli*)?’” See F.A. Wright, *Select Letters of St. Jerome* (1933), 95, 97. I have altered Wright’s translation of the verse slightly, since he quite curiously translates *uxores* as “women.” To the contrary, the use of “wives” suggests that Jerome understands only the apostle Paul to have been unwed, but not necessarily the other apostles.

⁷³ Jerome, *Ep.* 123.14 (CSEL 56.1; 89.16 Hilberg): *habebat utique potestatem sorores mulieres circumducendi*. Note that ms ζ gives the singular form found in the Vulgate (*sororem mulierem*). See also Jerome, *Matth.* 27.55 (SC 259; 302.418 Bonnard). Regarding the Vulgate, there are several instances where it and Jerome’s biblical citations diverge. See J.H.D. Scourfield, *Consoling Heliodorus: A Commentary on Jerome, Letter 60* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 10-11. It may be of further significance that the manuscript tradition of Jerome’s citation of “wives” includes some interesting variants, ones that mirror the same sort of textual pluriformity we see in the early Fathers’ citations of the verse.

citation of the verse stemmed from his knowledge of a now lost Greek or Latin source or even a collection of apostolic teachings. What is important here is that not only does Jerome himself preserve various renditions of the phrase—a fact that on its own challenges modern expectations of the method and occasion that biblical citation served in antiquity—but even the medieval manuscript tradition preserving Jerome's work manifests these very same textual inconsistencies.⁷⁴

Given the likelihood that "sister-woman" was an early, if not the earliest, reading of 1 Cor. 9:5, how might we explain the occurrence of "wives" in the sources? Here we have recourse to return to Clement, who in a second citation of the verse gives "women" (γυναῖκας) without (as he has it elsewhere) the predicate "sister(s)."⁷⁵ This second citation occurs within Clement's polemic against extravagancy, ultimately serving his argument that Christians should always turn from excess and prefer an abstemious lifestyle. That is, although Christians possess authority over themselves just as the apostle Paul did, their ability to eat and drink as well as "lead about women" (γυναικας περιάγεσθαι), if not properly managed, can lead to lustful desires (τῶν ἡδονῶν...τὰς ἐπιθυμίας.). In view of Clement's omission of "sister(s)" we might be inclined to read "wives" here rather than simply "women." In any case, the citation does imply that an early Greek version of 1 Cor. 9:5 circulated, perhaps orally, without "sister(s)," if even only because the awkwardness of the phrase offered interpreters some difficulty. The occurrence of γυναικας would—*ex hypothesi*—secure its use in Latin with the isomorph mulier, which, like the Greek, can be understood as either "women" or "wives."⁷⁶

We are, unfortunately, remiss of other corroborating Greek witnesses to γυναικας, biblical or otherwise, until the ninth-century Greco-Latin majuscules Codex Augiensis (F) and Codex Boernerianus (G).⁷⁷ Hatch's influential study

⁷⁴ The manuscript tradition of Jerome's letters includes variants similar to those discussed above. For example, several mss of Ep. 22 give not uxores, but mulieres (the ninth century Σ [Turicensis Augiensis] and the tenth century D [Vaticanus]). See CSEL 54, 170-171.

⁷⁵ This is the third and final instance Clement cites 1 Cor. 9:5, here omitting ἀδελφήν (Paed. 2.1.9.1): Μὴ γὰρ οὐκ ἔχομεν ἐξουσίαν φαγεῖν καὶ πιεῖν, φησὶν ὁ ἀπόστολος, καὶ γυναῖκας περιάγεσθαι;

⁷⁶ On mulier as "wife" see, for example, Suetonius' report (lil. 52) of Curio's remark that Julius Caesar was *omnium mulierum virum et omnium virorum mulierem* ("the husband of every woman and the wife of every man"; my trans.) Cf. L'Hoir, *Rhetoric of Gender Terms*, 177; and J.N. Adams, "Latin Words for 'Woman' and 'Wife,'" *Glotta* 50 (1972): 234-255.

⁷⁷ The Latin minuscules ar (ninth-century) and b (eighth-century) further suggest that this reading was not entirely unique in the Latin tradition during the early medieval period.

has shown that these manuscripts are related collaterally and that their common ancestor predates F and G by centuries.⁷⁸ Apparently this ancestor and Codex Claromontanus stem from an even earlier exemplar.⁷⁹ F and G are, then, quite valuable for understanding the earliest textual strata of Paul's letters and their transmission.⁸⁰ If included in Epp's D-cluster, F and G offer an even earlier *terminus a quo* for the reading $\gamma\upsilon\nu\alpha\tilde{\iota}\kappa\alpha\varsigma$.⁸¹

Extending our purview to other Latin Fathers we gain additional footing for the antiquity of this reading. Pelagius, for example, relates much of the same account as Augustine that interpreters have misconstrued the apostle's words, but here without any mention of "sister(s)": "He [Paul] did not say women 'led around' (*mulieres ducendi*) lest they should be thought of as wives (*uxoribus*); but rather they are 'led about' (*circumducendi*) he says, because of [their] duty, which is necessary, that they should provide support based upon their own abilities."⁸² Given their shared theological orbit, it should come as no surprise that Pelagius corroborates Augustine's remark that these *mulieres* were not "led around" as wives, but were "led around," as some Latin authors might have it, as soldiers.⁸³

Even more suggestive that *mulieres* circulated early on in the transmission of 1 Cor. 9:5 is Tertullian's extended discussion of the ambiguities latent in $\gamma\upsilon\nu\tilde{\iota}$:

⁷⁸ W.H.P. Hatch, "On the Relationship of Codex Augiensis and Codex Boernerianus of the Pauline Epistles," *HSCP* 60 (1951): 187-99.

⁷⁹ N.A. Daul, "0230 (= PSI 1306) and the Fourth-century Greek-Latin Edition of the Letters of Paul," *Text and Interpretation: Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black* (ed. Ernest Best and R. McL. Wilson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 211-230.

⁸⁰ Brent Nongbri, "Pauline Letter Manuscripts," *All Things to All Cultures: Paul Among the Jews, Greeks and Romans* (eds. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 91-92.

⁸¹ Eldon J. Epp, "Textual Clusters: Their Past and Future in New Testament Textual Criticism," *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essay on the Status Quaestionis* (2nd ed.; eds. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes; NTTSD 42; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 519-577; cf. D.C. Parker, *Codex Bezae. An Early Christian Manuscript and its Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 66-67. While I freely admit to the possibility that the Greek reading in the Greco-Latin manuscripts results from Latin's interference, I am nonetheless persuaded by the (early) citation of "women" by Clement and Aphrahat.

⁸² My trans. See A. Souter, *Pelagius's Expositions*, 5-7.

⁸³ *Circumduco* is frequent in military language or in judicial language, meaning "to draw lines around" (see Lewis & Short).

I am led to presume him [Peter] a monogamist by consideration of the church...[which] was destined to appoint monogamists within its orders. The rest [of the apostles], while I do not consider them married, I must necessarily understand them to have been either eunuchs or continent. Nor indeed, if, among the Greeks, in accordance with the carelessness of custom, women and wives (*mulieres et uxores*) are classed under a common name [viz. $\gamma\upsilon\upsilon\eta$]; however, there is a name proper to wives (*uxorum*). Shall we therefore interpret Paul as if he demonstrates the apostles to have had wives (*uxores*)? For if he were disputing about marriages...he would have said, "For have we not the power of leading about wives, like the other apostles and Cephas?" (*non enim habemus potestatem uxores circumducendi sicut ceteri apostoi et Cephas*)?" But when he subjoins those [expressions] which show his abstinence from the supply of maintenance, saying, "For have we not the power of eating and drinking?" he does not attest that "wives" (*uxores*) were led about by the apostles...but merely "women" (*mulieres*), who used to minister to them in the same way when accompanying the Lord.⁸⁴

Tertullian, just as we saw above with Augustine, notes that in Greek "women" and "wives" find expression with the same lexeme. Both exegetes state that some have mistakenly preferred the latter to the former. But unlike Tertullian's conclusion that Paul spoke of "merely women," Augustine prefers that the apostle "neither says a woman merely, but a sister woman."⁸⁵ Does Tertullian's commentary suggest he knew of the phrase "sister-woman" in either Greek or Latin?

It is difficult to determine whether Tertullian knew of *variae lectiones* outside of the Latin biblical traditions.⁸⁶ He may have excluded "sister" from his commentary because he too was troubled by the ambiguity of the phrase in Greek and/or Latin. On the other hand, when set alongside Augustine and other late antique exegetes, it appears more probable that Tertullian was not aware of the phrase in either language. If Tertullian's biblical source(s) included

⁸⁴ Tertullian, *de mono.* 8 (CCSL 2: 1027.21-22). See Rev. S. Thelwall, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Vol XVIII. The Writings of Tertullian. Vol III: with the extant works of Victorinus and Commodianus* (T&T Clark, 1870), 36-37.

⁸⁵ Elsewhere Tertullian attests to this same reading of the verse. See Tertullian, *de pudicitia* 14.11 (La Pudicité, tome I. C. Micaelli, C. Munier [1993]): *Aut non habemus potestatem manducandi et bibendi et mulieres circumducendi, sicut et ceteri apostoli et fratres Domini et Cephas?*

⁸⁶ I contend here that Tertullian held a working knowledge of the Greek scriptures. On Tertullian's education in Latin, Greek, and Greco-Roman philosophy, see Gerald Bray, "Tertullian," *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy: Engaging with Early and Medieval Theologians* (ed. Bradley Green; Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 64-67.

Concluding Remarks

To summarize the external evidence, most witnesses attest to “sister-woman” as the earliest reading of 1 Cor. 9:5. The clear majority of early commentators infer from this reading that the apostles practiced continency regardless of whether they were accompanied by female fellow ministers. That is, the apostles’ relationship with Christian women was marked by a negative valuation of marriage and marital relations and a positive valuation of material and spiritual support. Paul’s inclusion of “sister” therefore served double duty for many of the Fathers: it affirmed that these women were fellow Christians and, at least functionally, not wives, a status that in no uncertain terms precluded any scandalous behavior on the part of the earliest apostles.

The external evidence is also proof positive that competing readings of the verse were available to interpreters as early as the second-century. Questions remain, however, as to the extent of other pressures that weighed on Christians in their transcriptions. One important kernel we gain from the Fathers’ comments is that internal Christian debate regarding whether the biblical text endorsed or rejected the celibate life raged on well into late antiquity. There is little doubt that early exegetes who placed a high currency on continency, even if allowing sexual relations in the confines of marriage, were deeply troubled by the potential implications of the verse. This much is made sufficiently clear from the Fathers’ polemic against those who preferred competing interpretations of the verse. As to the impact of external pressures, I have mooted that the potential association of “sister-woman” with endogamy may have provoked scribes to deviate from their biblical exemplar(s), or at the very least, this association may have motivated them to amend an already obscure passage, especially from the second century onward.⁹⁵

The impact of other factors remains unexplored. Scholars have only recently begun to investigate the influence of the Fathers’ theological investments on the textual transmission of the New Testament. The Fathers’ biblical citations offer much to supplement our understanding of the New Testament’s textual diversity as well as the socio-historical contexts that spawned and subsequently sustained this pluriformity. Their exegetical insight only reinforces how intimately bound the textual transmission of biblical texts was to the social matrix of early Christianity.

⁹⁵ Dickey, “Literal and Extended Use of Kinship,” 165.

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TALKING POLICY:

LEILA AHMED ON BEING MUSLIM IN AMERICA

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The interview is published here with permission of the editors of WPJ.

With the recent “Muslim ban” fiasco in the U.S., polls that suggest many Europeans may support similar legislation in their countries, and reports that claim the number of Islamophobic hate crimes against women who wear a hijab has spiked, it is not easy to be a Western Muslim. *World Policy Journal* discussed this issue with Dr. Leila Ahmed, an Egyptian-born author of works such as *Women and Gender in Islam* and *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil’s Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* and the first appointed professor of women’s studies in religion at Harvard Divinity School.

World Policy Journal: *What would you say is the biggest misconception the Western world has about women in Islam?*

Leila Ahmed: This is not as simple a question as you’d think because in my own lifetime there’s been a huge change in how people think about Islam and women in Islam in America. The idea that Muslim women are oppressed beyond any other women in religion is a common belief here today, but it wasn’t 20 or 30 years ago. That’s important to know. In other words, back when I started working on women in Islam, say in the 1980s, there were many women—Christian women working on Christianity, Jewish women working on Judaism—who thought we were all oppressed. Nobody thought then that it was unique to Muslim women. My point is that we live in a time when the oppression of women in Islam as a unique feature has been fabricated. It’s not a reality. It’s become such a part of the media now that many people believe it. This is probably the greatest misconception: the creation of the uniqueness of Muslim women’s oppression. All women are oppressed by patriarchy, and the three monotheistic religions, in very similar ways. So the idea that Islam is uniquely oppressive is just nonsense.

WPJ: *The headscarves many Muslim women wear—be it a hijab, niqab, or burqa—are often the source of debate in many Western societies because it is assumed to be inherently anti-feminist or misogynistic. What are the true origins of this practice and how did it become such a political issue?*

LA: Nobody knows the real origins. But we do know that early Christianity practiced it. Think of all the images of the Virgin Mary we see everywhere. What is she wearing? A hijab on her head. This was the norm throughout the Middle East, whether you were Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. Judaism is much older than Islam and so is Christianity, so the hijab was common in all those societies before it became common in Islam. It's just a common, old-style way of dress. It's like asking why people wear jeans.

So why did it come back? That's another very complicated problem. Going back to the first question about the misconception of the unique oppression of women in Islam—that was a politically constructed misconception. It served a political purpose. It became very, very clear to those of us who study women in Islam that sometime immediately after 9/11, a hijab became a sign of women's oppression in America. It became prevalent in newspapers, TV, and everywhere in the media. Laura Bush and Cherie Blair made a statement about it when we were going to war in Afghanistan—not about the hijab in particular, but about liberating women from the oppression of Islam. They said that we were going to fight the war in Afghanistan in order to liberate women, which is obviously a political fabrication. We were not in either Afghanistan or Iraq to liberate women. So it was serving a political purpose and that's why it became an entire Islamophobia industry, which seeks to promote the idea that Islam is particularly bad or particularly oppressive to women.

Almost exactly 100 years ago when the Egyptians wanted independence from British rule, the British ruler, a man called Lord Cromer, said that Britain couldn't give the Egyptians independence until they began to become civilized like the British. And the sign of becoming civilized would be for women to throw off the veil. What's important to know about Lord Cromer is that he claimed to want the liberation of women in Egypt as a sign of Egypt becoming civilized, while at the same time in England he was president of a society opposed to women's suffrage. So he was an anti-feminist in England and a so-called feminist in Egypt. It was again another political ruse in order to justify an empire. The British were saying: We can't give you independence because you're too dumb, too backward, and too uncivilized. We have to rule you. And the sign of you becoming civilized is to let your women throw off their veil. In a way, we witness history repeating itself today. Again the veil is used as political power—as the justification for imperial power, imperial domination, and war. This combination of being anti-feminist at home and apparently feminist abroad applies to many

people in America, often the conservatives. I don't think President [George W.] Bush was a great supporter of women's rights in America.

WPJ: *Many Muslim women feel excluded from Western feminism, and they're not the only minority demographic that feels unwelcome. How can Western feminists be more inclusive and supportive for all women?*

LA: I think it is becoming more inclusive. I went to the Women's March partly to understand what was going on and to observe, and many of the signs participants held were supporting Muslims, ecological rights, and African Americans. So I think people are waking up here, including those in the feminist movement. I think what people fail to understand is that earlier feminists did not quite understand that racism and feminism are completely interconnected. It's essential for us to understand this now. There can be no real feminism if it's only for white women. Even back in the 1980s, there were many African-American and Latina women who stood up and said that. I think anyone who seriously considers themselves a feminist today understands that it has to address racism just as centrally as sexism.

WPJ: *You grew up in Egypt and moved to the West as an adult. What unique struggles do you think people who are from Muslim or Middle Eastern families and are the first-generation born in a Western country face?*

LA: For one thing, Islamophobia is much, much worse now than when I was young. So that's a very big hurdle. It's not very easy to find ourselves in a society where even intelligent people are brainwashed by the anti-Muslim nonsense in the media. So that is a very big obstacle. On the other hand, members of this generation are Americans or Europeans. They think like Americans in a way that some of us who came from abroad do not. If I look around now at the number of women who are visibly Muslim or who have a Muslim background, there's a huge variety of Muslim women now in the West. And there are many different kinds of voices. So I actually think it's a much more hopeful time, although Islamophobia has to be defeated and is a major obstacle.

WPJ: *What's your perspective on reports that Islamic State recruiting supposedly targets this demographic of Muslims, who are often believed to be especially vulnerable if they feel like they do not belong in their home countries?*

LA: ISIS is a horrible new development in our history. And I think it's tragic that young people are put in that terrible position of feeling like they don't belong. I

actually think that Muslims need to connect to other minorities: Hispanics and African Americans. It's the same story, just a slightly different inflection. But racism is racism, and I think maybe an important part for us to understand is that we need coalitions of people who are suffering from different versions of the same problem.

WPJ: There are some on both sides of the issue who believe that Islamic or Middle Eastern values are at odds with Western values and that they simply cannot coexist in the same society. How do you respond to such claims?

LA: Well, it depends on what Western values entail. The West doesn't seem to know itself what its Western values are. I think basic, wonderful, core human values are present in every society, in Islam just as much as in the West. But history has muddied the story. I don't think there's anything intrinsic to Islam that makes it incompatible with the good things in the West, and vice versa. There are some bad things in the West, too, like racism. Who wants that? What are Western values?

WPJ: You mentioned how there are many different kinds of Muslim voices today in the West, but they are often silenced by extremists on both ends. What can be done to empower these voices and make sure they are heard?

LA: I think their voices are deliberately excluded. That's my view. The thing we have to fight is Islamophobia and the media that allows Islamophobia or perpetuates it. But how can we do that? I haven't got the answer. I don't know. Because I think Muslims have been speaking out against all of the worst things that have been happening in the name of Islam. And nobody hears because we are not given the voice or publicity that would allow us to be heard. I do think it's a major problem. I don't know what the answer is. I think this generation needs to answer it. And it seems to be happening. Ten years ago, there weren't many people of Muslim backgrounds on NPR or British television or British news. Now I hear Muslim names all the time. Change is slow, but it's happening.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.
Interview conducted by Yasmin Merchant.

TALKING EDUCATION:

CORNEL WEST ON TEACHING IN THE AGE OF TRUMP

The Graduate Journal: So, part of the reason that we wanted to have this interview with you was because we wanted to talk about teaching in such a divided age. And as someone who is a public intellectual and also as someone who's a teacher to the masses, essentially—not just to me and everyone else at Harvard and Princeton, but you are in the public eye often. I'm just wondering what your experiences are teaching in such a time of division?

Cornel West: That's a wonderful question; I've never been asked this question. What does it mean to teach in a highly polarized time? Well one thing is that there are certain perennial features of good teaching. The first one is to let the students know at the deepest level of their being that you care about their thinking process, their feeling process, and their soul-shaping process. When students know you care, they're more likely to be more open, more vulnerable. They're more likely to take the more difficult challenges inside of them and to then respond at the depths of their being. You don't want just a cognitive response; you don't want just a cerebral response. Education at its deepest level is about finding voices undergoing certain kinds of transformations and trying to be better equipped in living well. That can be understood in a variety of different ways, but that is a tremendously painful and also a joyful process. Now, given our polarized times, it's much more difficult to create public spaces where people can enter those spaces without a sense of humiliation and somehow still be pushed, still be unsettled. And so, the caring for the other person as a human being and then the Socratic dialogues, the critiques, the arguments back and forth, the stories and the counter-stories that ought to take place in a conversation, we hope they are unleashed. That's what I try to do.

TGJ: So you and Professor Roberto Mangabeira Unger [at Harvard Law School] have been teaching your "American Democracy" class for a very long time. Have you felt this year especially that there was a different mood? How have you seen the students react to the course, and how has the course evolved with the literature that you have been using?

CW: Well, when we started, it was under President [Bill] Clinton, so we had a neoliberal president back then, and at that time, most of the students thought that things were relatively fine. Clinton has his personal problems, there were still some structural challenges, but for the most part things were moving in the right direction. Professor Unger and I were trying to let them know that we've got a serious critique of neoliberalism as put forward by Bill Clinton way back then. Then, as Republicans moved in, there was an openness, because when it moves to the right a bit, people think, "Oh, well now I've got to be really serious; we're not moving in the right direction," because this is basically a liberal crowd that we're talking about among the students. Not exclusively, because you always have some conservative students who are interested, and that's fine, they're welcome to come. But under Trump, all of a sudden there's a sense of crisis. Things are going the wrong way. Xenophobia is out of control. The Left started to talk seriously about what it means for him to target Muslims, Mexicans, women, gays, and so forth. And as you know from the class [on American democracy], we've got genealogy and we've got prognosis. And we're saying, you know, Trump didn't drop out of the sky. He's a product of some dominant tendencies that have been at work for a long time in American life. And the imperial policies, the inegalitarian policies, the xenophobic policies are all tied together, and we're trying to get people to see that so that they don't think that somehow once we've come to terms with Trump then the rest of the system is in place and we don't have to bring serious critique to bear. And that's what we've been talking about in various ways week after week. So it is a very different moment. That's why your question is so powerful, because it is difficult to teach at the level of excellence that you really want to teach at a moment in which it looks like things are falling apart.

TGJ: When it comes to the position of professors and teachers of color and their students, there's always a sense that the professors have to fulfill not only their profession of teaching, but also deal with the emotional toll that their students bring to them. And as students of color who look up to you and Professor Unger and other amazing people here, how do you deal with not only your actual job, but also the emotional work that you are required to do as a professor of your stature with the kind of students who look up to you in the way that they do.

CW: I think that being attentive to, sensitive to, willing to support students wrestling with whatever emotional weight that goes along with being a student of color at a predominantly white institution, let alone an institution with elite

status like Harvard, goes hand-in-hand with my first point about caring for students. That you care not just for their minds to unsettle, not just to open their hearts, but you also care about their souls. And I talk about soulcraft so much in my class. And soulcraft is cognitive, but it's also a matter of your passion, and it's also a matter of your soul. And therefore you just have to put in the extra time, extra energy, extra elements in your analysis in class and outside of class, because in the end we're all human beings and in the end we're citizens of the country and the world. We have to be attuned to all the various dimensions of our humanity and our citizenship. And that means, I think, that professors of color do often have a heavier load. There's no doubt about it.

TGJ: Yeah. And this is not something that most people consider of professors. They are always there doing their work, but the emotional work that you do is not what other professors would deal with as well.

CW: That's very true!

TGJ: Aside from the "American Democracy" class, you're also teaching a class on W.E.B. Du Bois, and I'm just wondering why you chose Du Bois specifically, and what values and what messages you think the work of Du Bois gives us in today's time?

CW: I think we live in an age of Du Bois, and a lot of our scholarship remains pre-Du Boisian. And by that what I mean is that Du Bois was preoccupied with empire, he was preoccupied with legacies of white supremacy, and he was preoccupied with class subordination. And the famous essay, "The Damnation of Women" was deeply concerned with patriarchal forms of domination. He knew that religion would play a very important role in terms of sustaining people's sense of sanity and dignity and so on. He knew religion was inseparable from these issues. How would religion in its prophetic form respond to empire? How would it respond in its priestly form? How, in fact, would women and patriarchy be able to either bring to bear empire or just fit into empire as certain kinds of progressive sexual politics became manifest and so a particular patriarchy became separated from a particular empire? Du Bois is dealing with all of this; we have yet to really come to terms with Du Bois in that regard. So when I returned to Harvard, I said, "It would be ideal and timely when I first come back to spend a whole semester just on Du Bois." And I'm so glad I did. Because he keeps me on fire—he lived 95 years, on fire for 75 years of his life. He makes me look like a teenager. [*laughs*] If he was on fire that many years, I'm going for 40—to reach

70, I've got 30 more, I've got to get moving! I've got to catch up with that brother. Absolutely! So he's just an unbelievable source of inspiration. Not because he's always right, not because he's pure, not because he's flawless, but because he's just such a grand, towering figure. He has his own kind of truth telling and witness-bearing.

TGJ: *Since you re-read him again and again, have you learned anything new this last time.*

CW: This last semester? Yeah, you know, I've discovered that Du Bois actually was bleaker in his earlier years than we give him credit for. We usually, in traditional scholarship, use *Souls of Black Folk*. Early Du Bois. It's much more optimistic, tied to the American dream, tied to black people becoming full-fledged citizens. It's not the powerful critique of empire we get later on. But in fact—I've noticed elements of this, but it's become much more crystallized in my reading that he's much bleaker and darker. On the edge of hopelessness, already, in 1903. And you say, "Ooh, the times do make a difference in terms of the context when you read a text."

TGJ: Of course. It must be very different reading it now.

CW: Very different in the Trump moment than it was in the first week of Obama when we thought he was going to be the progressive that he turned out not to be. A lot of people may have said, "We knew he wasn't going to be that progressive anyway," but some of us really thought that maybe we had a breakthrough here. So then, when you read Du Bois, you highlight the breakthrough. Now, coming after the neoliberalism that didn't deliver, and now it looks like the neo-fascism is trying to push us against a wall, and Du Bois is talking about the oppressive apparatus and the ways in which these structures seem to be so difficult to change.

TGJ: *In the class you've talked about how one of the issues we have now in this moment is our inability to be able to think of a different system. And that's why the strength of Trump's and of Bernie Sanders' messages was very meaningful to a lot of people. Because they gave an alternate vision of what America could look like in the future, whereas people like Hillary Clinton were more of the same.*

CW: Absolutely.

TGJ: *In terms of that, what do you think is an alternative to what you see as the ravages of neoliberalism today?*

CW: I do think the first step is a full-fledged left-wing populism. I don't like the use of the word populism in the corporate media because it makes it look as if populism equals right-wing populism. You get that in Europe, you get that talk in the United States. You get that talk in Latin America and in Asia. "Populism is a threat to the liberal order, and therefore it is always to be contained." Well, no, left-wing populism, the kind of thing that Bernie Sanders represented, is the first full step toward a democratizing effort in which everyday people wake up and really try to bring to bear some very significant mechanisms of accountability for elites in power. If we can move from this moment in which so much of elite power functions with impunity and does what it wants to do, and has very little sense of answerability outside of its own ranks—and that's the worst thing that any social order can have, when you have the most powerful and the most wealthy able to do what they really want to do with no sense of being answerable to people outside. If we can move from that to a strong left populism in which the major question is, "how will this policy affect poor working people?"—now, we have a long way to go, but that's the question for left-wing populism. And then beyond that, left-wing populism has become much more anti-imperial. That's my critique about Bernie. Bernie didn't have a chance or he was a little bit hesitant to lay out a set of foreign policies that were critical of military-industrial complex, critical of the killing machine, critical of—we can specify in terms of drone strikes to invasions to occupations to internal manipulations of government. I mean, they're upset with the Russians intervening in our elections? We've got such a long history in the United States of intervening in other countries' elections that we ought to be ashamed even when we point it out. If Russia did it, they're still wrong, and they need to be accountable. But my God, what kind of moral authority do we have, given the history of overthrowing democratically elected officials, let alone internally manipulating elections, providing resources for various political parties in Latin America and Europe and Asia and the Middle East and so forth? But those are the tough questions, and those are questions that, for me—Du Boisian questions? They can be pretty Du Boisian. Those are the questions we have to raise more directly. But those are the questions right now that are relatively limited to the radical left. They look at us and say, "Oh, the radical left, you are all crazy, you all are naive, you all are visionary." And you say, "Are we right? Are we truthful?" That's the key. It's like the abolitionists in the nineteenth century, there were just a few thousand of them: "Slavery is immoral, wrong." And they say, "Eh, you might have a point, but you all are crazy. You all are naive, you all

are visionary.” “Are we telling the truth? Are you going to argue that slavery is moral?” “Of course not, oh my God, I wouldn’t go that far. But, you know, it’s necessary, it’s inescapable, it’s unavoidable, it’s the only way we can function.” “Oh, so I see. We’re going to just succumb to fate as these people suffer. As we allow ourselves to be barbaric, bestial, brutal civilization. Because you believe that the people who are critical of that are just naive.” Well I say the same thing about the United States today in terms of its foreign policies. No discussion on the thousands of human beings lost in Iraq, Afghanistan. I mean, we haven’t even counted them. We don’t even know how many. I’ve talked about this in class. It’s just heartbreaking and mind boggling that somehow you think ISIS and Al-Qaeda just drop out of the sky. If 700,000 white people had been killed within 14 years, the Ku Klux Klan would probably be a major if not mass movement. And they are as thuggish as ISIS and Al-Qaeda in their history of killing innocent people. Now, for me, they’re all on a continuum of thugs, because anytime you kill innocent folk, whether they’re Muslims, non-Muslims, whatever, it’s wrong. It’s a crime against humanity. But the very fact that we can’t even acknowledge how US invasions and occupations have led to the killings of so many innocent Muslims? It’s like, “Doesn’t Muslim life mean anything to you?” I mean, good God almighty, if that’s the case then just come out with it. Then how are you different from any other right-wing xenophobe? That’s the critique of Netanyahu. It’s clear that the killing of Palestinian babies and innocent Palestinians doesn’t mean anything to him. We could have a debate, you know, about occupation, about two-state, one-state, and so forth. But if you come into the dialogue saying, “Palestinian lives don’t mean anything to us,” I say, “Oh, so we’re talking with gangsters, then.” That’s like me talking to the Klan! They’re making it clear: black lives don’t mean nothing to them. Now, if that’s the case, we need to know that. Now, of course that would mean that we would have to proceed in different ways in terms of what a dialogue looks like, but that’s really one of the starting points of too many US discussions. And so when Trump comes along and says all that explicitly, all he’s doing is just teasing out what has been latent in American public discourse, American corporate media, the American academy, American politicians, and American Wall Street people. That’s really what we’re talking about. Well, you know what, in Germany, Italy, or France they said that Jewish lives didn’t mean nothing to them, and that’s what made them gangsters. And the same principles need to apply across the board. Whether it’s Jewish lives, black lives, Muslim lives, Dalit lives in India—if the Brahmins say, “Dalit lives don’t mean nothing to us,” well, thank you for your honesty, but you’re a gangster too, and let us proceed thereon so that we’re clear about where things

are. And one just hopes — myself as a Christian, myself as a radical Democrat, myself as a radical Leftist — that somebody makes sure that whichever lives are being trashed and overlooked, that we're going to put a spotlight on that. No matter how weak we are at the moment or relatively impotent in terms of not being able to generate a social movement at the moment, we have to continually put a spotlight on that kind of blind spot. It's more than a blind spot really, it's a kind of immorality that's taken for granted in the name of sophisticated discourse. And therefore you know that you're going to be cutting against the grain and unpopular to a certain degree.

TGJ: You've talked about the abolitionists having a vision that other people thought was crazy, and us young people have a vision for the future that doesn't have us dying of climate change or black people incarcerated at such ridiculous numbers with people getting thrown into jail for small offenses. How can we communicate what we see as the vision for the future without seeming crazy, especially when we're having conversations with people who are starting from a different point from us, you know, people who don't care about black lives?

CW: Well, one thing is, even the people who are starting from a certain kind of moral blindness are in some way affected. Because there's ways of starting at other moments of moral blindness that relate directly to them. See, when they're in the position of black folks in America, Dalits in India, Muslims in America, Mexicans in America, Jews in Germany in the 1930s, when they're in that position, all of a sudden a moral given has weight in gravity. So, when it hasn't yet come to their house, when it hasn't come to their neighborhood yet, then they can have a level of privilege and entitlement of proceeding in such a way, "I'd like to come to terms with all of those innocent lives of people who were killed or under occupation or under domination or whatever." When it comes to them, you either do a thought experiment or it could be through a friendship. You know, you could date somebody, meet somebody, and think "God, I didn't like [that guy named] Muhammad very much, but he's telling everybody his family's undergoing all of this. That's hard to believe; how have I overlooked this all these years?" Well, you're growing, you're getting exposed; you haven't been open enough to what's going on. And there's ways of getting at that; the same is true of patriarchy. You know, patriarchy affects women at the top; when patriarchy hits women at the top, then all of a sudden we're on fire for justice! But what about these other women in Gaza? What about these other women in Kashmir? What about women on reservations? You see what

I mean? It's not just your women—I thought you were a feminist! And so you try to get some immanent critique and you kind of pull out the principle. Oh, I see when it affected your corporate sisters, you were very upset about that! But what about the hood sisters? Oh, you don't really care for the hood sisters? So you've got "boss feminism," you've got "corporate feminism," you've got "white feminism," and let's just be honest about that. Let's just be candid; I ain't trying to trash nobody! This is a conversation. But it's clear from your actions, deeds, and reflections that you're locked into a narrow silo and a narrow bubble, and that needs to be burst. And of course, you would think that's what education is all about! How do you burst that bubble?

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.
Interview conducted by Meral Kocak.



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