

AFRICAN AMERICANS

and the Bible



WITH FR. JAMES CHUKWUMA OKOYE, CSSP

Our Lady of Peace Parish
Arlington, Virginia
April–May 2022

SATURDAY, APRIL 30, 2022

The Gospel of John 9:25–27 — At the Foot of the Cross

²⁵ STANDING BY THE CROSS OF JESUS were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.



Jesus, A Black Messiah
Suffering Servant but also Son of Man

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." (James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Orbis, 2011, 166.)

- When Bible used to justify slavery of Blacks, they read Bible differently that shows God loving slaves, affirming their human dignity
 - Read Scripture critically and selectively. Granma of Howard Thurman: Read me nothing Paul, only 1 Corinthians 13
 - True Central message in the Cross, as God's liberation of the "poor," siding with the little people



A Bit of History

1441 – The Portuguese started the Atlantic slave trade

1501 – Spanish throne approved the use of black slaves in the Americas

1619 – A Dutch captain dropped off twenty Blacks at Jamestown, Virginia

Until about 1658, white and black indentured servants were treated equally all were assigned land at the end of indenture, which was usually seven years

1664 – The Maryland Legislature: law that Baptism does not alter the civic status of a slave a slave remains a slave even after Baptism. Some resisted baptizing slaves for fear they would claim freedom after Baptism (Galatians 5:1) or equality with whites.

Slaves to serve *durante vita* (for entire life)

Note: By law in many States, slaves forbidden to learn to read or write!



I was preaching to a large congregation on the Epistle of Philemon: and when I insisted upon fidelity and obedience as Christian virtues in servants and upon the authority of Paul, condemned the practice of running away, one half of my audience deliberately rose up and walked off with themselves, and those that remained looked any thing but satisfied, either with the preacher or his doctrine. After dismission, there was no small stir among them; some solemnly declared ‘that there was no such an Epistle in the Bible’; others, ‘that they did not care if they ever heard me preach again!’...There were some too, who had strong objections against me as a Preacher, because I was a master, and said, ‘his people have to work as well as we.’

[Charles Colcock Jones on a sermon he gave in 1833, in Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*. OUP, 1978, 294]



Paul's Letter to Philemon



Philemon 15-17: "...as a brother..."

PAUL, A PRISONER FOR CHRIST JESUS, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon, our beloved and our co-worker, ² to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church at your house. ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I give thanks to my God always, remembering you in my prayers, ⁵ as I hear of the love and the faith you have in the Lord Jesus and for all the holy ones, ⁶ so that your partnership in the faith may become effective in recognizing every good there is in us[f] that leads to Christ.

⁷ For I have experienced much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the holy ones have been refreshed by you, brother. ⁸ Therefore, although I have the full right in Christ to order you to do what is proper, ⁹ I rather urge you out of love, being as I am, Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus. ¹⁰ I urge you on behalf of my child Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment, ¹¹ who was once useless to you but is now useful to [both] you and me. ¹² I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. ¹³ I should have liked to retain him for myself, so that he might serve me on your behalf in my imprisonment for the gospel, ¹⁴ but I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that the good you do might not be forced but voluntary. ¹⁵ Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, as a man[m] and in the Lord. ¹⁷ So if you regard me as a partner, welcome him as you would me. ¹⁸ And if he has done you any injustice or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹ I, Paul, write this in my own hand: I will pay. May I not tell you that you owe me your very self. ²⁰ Yes, brother, may I profit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

²¹ With trust in your compliance I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. ²² At the same time prepare a guest room for me, for I hope to be granted to you through your prayers.

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, ²⁴ as well as Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my co-workers. ²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Genesis 9:18–27 — Cursed be Canaan

¹⁸ THE SONS OF NOAH WHO CAME OUT OF THE ARK were Shem, Ham and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. ¹⁹ These three were the sons of Noah, and from them the whole earth was populated.

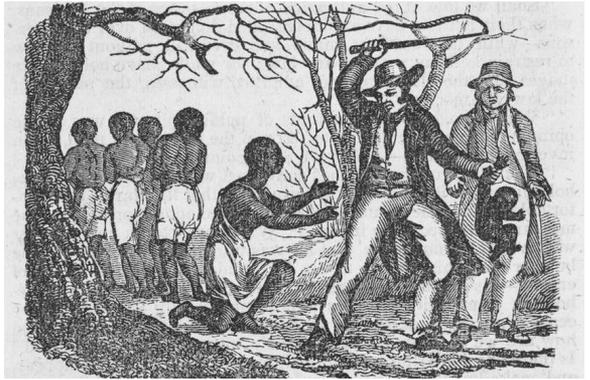
²⁰ Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. ²¹ He drank some of the wine, became drunk, and lay naked inside his tent. ²² Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness, and he told his two brothers outside. ²³ Shem and Japheth, however, took a robe, and holding it on their shoulders, they walked backward and covered their father's nakedness; since their faces were turned the other way, they did not see their father's nakedness. ²⁴ When Noah woke up from his wine and learned what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵ he said:

“Cursed be Caanan!
The lowest of slaves shall he
be to his brothers.”

²⁶ He also said:

“Blessed be the Lord, the
God of Shem! Let Canaan
be his slave.

²⁷ May God expand
Japheth, and may he dwell
among the tents of Shem;
and let Canaan be his
slave.”



More History

1740 — The **Great Awakening**: Baptists and Methodists Revivals in the South in which Blacks experienced the Holy Spirit and sometimes the call to ministry

1776 — Declaration of Independence. The Founders' amendment eliminated Jefferson's denunciation of slavery

1840 — Pope Gregory XVI condemned slavery and the slave trade

1863 — Abraham Lincoln: Emancipation Proclamation (January 1)

1870s — Jim Crow laws across the South effectively excluded Black Americans from civic life

1889–1899 — 1,240 Blacks were lynched

A Pro-Slavery Catechism

Reproduced in the African American Newspaper *The National Era*
(Washington, D.C.) on July 8, 1847

- Who was the first negro? *Cain*. How did he become so? *The Lord set a black mark upon him*.
- Did the Southern slave come from him? *Yes*. How did they get through the flood? *O, no! they didn't come from him; they came from Ham*.
- How do you know that? *Because Ham means black*. Upon whom did Noah pronounce a curse? *Upon Ham*. Does the Bible say so? *No, it says Canaan, but then it means Ham*.
- Does that curse make it right that the blacks should be enslaved? *Yes*. Why? *Because they should be*.
- Don't the Bible say that Christ should be crucified? *Yes*. Well, did that make it right? *No; but the cases are not parallel*.
- From what country did the slave come? *From Africa*. Did the descendants of Canaan people Africa? *No; but that makes no difference*.
- Who were the happiest men that ever lived? *The Patriarchs*. Why? *Because they didn't have to work*.
- Who was the first Patriarch? *Abraham*. Why were not Methusaleh, Enoch, and Noah, Patriarchs? *Because they didn't hold slaves*.
- How do you know that Abraham's servants were slaves? *Because he whipped Hagar*. How do you know that? *Because she ran away*.
- How do you know that it is right to flog slaves? *Because God sent Hagar back*.
- When Abraham took three hundred and eighteen slaves, and pursued the kings, why did they not run away, as slaves now do? *Either because Abraham had his hounds along, or because God had taught them better*.
- Were the Israelites allowed to hold slaves? *Yes*. Whom might they hold? *The heathen round about*. How long? *Forever*. Whom else might hold them? *Their children after them*.
- Who are those children? *Southern slaveholders*.
- How does that appear? *The Jews were cut off, and the Gentiles grafted in, in their place*. But are not the slaves Gentiles, too? *Yes, but they are heathen*.
- Who ere the heathen whom the Jews might hold? *The Canaanites*. How does that make it right to hold negroes, then? *O, because they come from Ham*.

- Have the negroes been sold as slaves in all ages of the world? *Yes*. Were the Roman slaves negroes? *Yes*.
- How do you know? *Because it is impossible to make anybody else slaves but negroes.*
- Did Christ and his apostles approve of Roman slavery? *Yes*. How do you know? *They didn't say anything against it.* (No; but the Bible does; for it says, "the merciful man spareth his beast.")
- Was Paul a good man? *Yes, he was a holy saint.* What did he do? *He sent back a runaway slave.*
- What was his advice, and that of the other apostle, to the slave? *To abide in their calling, and be obedient to their masters.*

A plain and easy Catechism: Designed chiefly for the Benefit of coloured Persons, to which are annexed suitable Prayers and Hymns. Benjamin Morgan Palmer, 1828

"Help me to be faithful to my owner's interest...may I never disappoint the trust that is placed in me, nor like the unjust steward, waste my master's goods."

Deuteronomy 7:1-6 — Kill them All

¹WHEN THE LORD, YOUR GOD, BRINGS YOU INTO THE LAND which you are about to enter to possess, and removes many nations before you — the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and powerful than you — ²and when the Lord, your God, gives them over to you and you defeat them, you shall put them under the ban. Make no covenant with them and do not be gracious to them. ³You shall not intermarry with them, neither giving your daughters to their sons nor taking their daughters for your sons. ⁴For they would turn your sons from following me to serving other gods, and then the anger of the Lord would flare up against you and he would quickly destroy you.

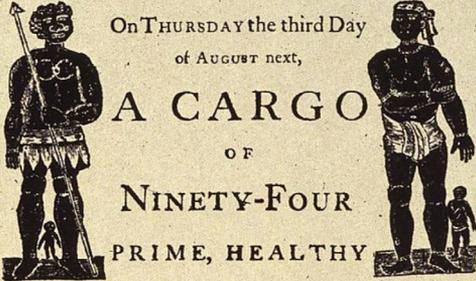
⁵But this is how you must deal with them: Tear down their altars, smash their sacred pillars, chop down their asherahs, and destroy their idols by fire. ⁶For you are a people holy to the Lord, your God; the Lord, your God, has chosen you from all the peoples on the face of the earth to be a people specially his own.

Charlestown, July 24th, 1769.

TO BE SOLD,

On THURSDAY the third Day
of AUGUST next,

A CARGO
OF
NINETY-FOUR
PRIME, HEALTHY



NEGROES,

CONSISTING OF

Thirty-nine MEN, Fifteen BOYS,
Twenty-four WOMEN, and
Sixteen GIRLS.

JUST ARRIVED,
In the Brigantine DEMBIA, *Francis Bare*, Master, from SIERRA-
LEON, by
DAVID & JOHN DEAS.

Foundations

- Affirming our values in a manner that others can share, without self-hatred, rancor, or revenge - “forgive and forget,” or “remember” in transformative way?
- The Black experience cuts across denominations and class. Before 1900, except for Louisiana, Maryland and parts of Florida, most Blacks here were Baptist or Methodist

Some Principles

- Interpretation must be life-giving; Scripture shines light on African American lived experience, past and present
- Every single biblical passage does not necessarily contain the full revelation of God
- God speaks through the biblical text and apart from the biblical text
- Canons: ecclesial, literary (e.g., Slave Narratives, Folklore), historical, cultural (values)
- African American religious creations—Spirituals, Liturgy, Preaching, Gospel music, Oratory
- African substratum: Herskovits versus Frazier (God, unity of life, body-soul nexus...) - See Peter Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples. The Search for a Common Moral Discourse*. Fortress, 1995



Exodus 1:8–22 — Oppression in Egypt

⁸ Then a new king, who knew nothing of Joseph, rose to power in Egypt. ⁹ He said to his people, “See! The Israelite people have multiplied and become more numerous than we are! ¹⁰ Come, let us deal shrewdly with them to stop their increase; otherwise, in time of war they too may join our enemies to fight against us, and so leave the land.”

¹¹ Accordingly, they set supervisors over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor. Thus they had to build for Pharaoh the garrison cities of Pithom and Raamses. ¹² Yet the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians began to loathe the Israelites. ¹³ So the Egyptians reduced the Israelites to cruel slavery, ¹⁴ making life bitter for them with hard labor, at mortar and brick and all kinds of field work—cruelly oppressed in all their labor.

¹⁵ The king of Egypt told the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was called Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶ “When you act as midwives for the Hebrew women, look on the birthstool: if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she may live.” ¹⁷ The midwives, however, feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt had ordered them, but let the boys live. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, “Why have you done this, allowing the boys to live?” ¹⁹ The midwives answered Pharaoh, “The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women. They are robust and give birth before the midwife arrives.” ²⁰ Therefore God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and grew very numerous. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, God built up families for them. ²² Pharaoh then commanded all his people, “Throw into the Nile every boy that is born, but you may let all the girls live.”



Exodus 5:1–9 — Let My People Go

*Oh, let us all from bondage flee, Let my people go;
And let us all to Christ be free, Let my people go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land;
Tell old Pharaoh to let my people go.*

AFTERWARDS, MOSES AND AARON WENT TO PHARAOH and said, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Let my people go, that they may hold a feast for me in the wilderness.”² Pharaoh answered, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go.”³ They replied, “The God of the Hebrews has come to meet us. Let us go a three days’ journey in the wilderness, that we may offer sacrifice to the Lord, our God, so that he does not strike us with the plague or the sword.”⁴ The king of Egypt answered them, “Why, Moses and Aaron, do you make the people neglect their work? Off to your labors!”⁵ Pharaoh continued, “Look how they are already more numerous than the people of the land, and yet you would give them rest from their labors!”

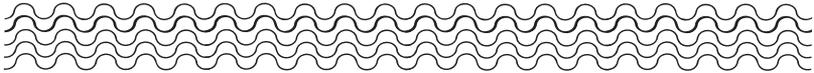
⁶That very day Pharaoh gave the taskmasters of the people and their foremen this order:⁷ “You shall no longer supply the people with straw for their brickmaking as before. Let them go and gather their own straw!”⁸ Yet you shall levy upon them the same quota of bricks as they made previously. Do not reduce it. They are lazy; that is why they are crying, ‘Let us go to offer sacrifice to our God.’⁹ Increase the work for the men, so that they attend to it and not to deceitful words.”





“I’ve been to the mountaintop [...] We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn’t matter with me now. Because I have been to the mountaintop [...] I just want to do God’s will. And he’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we as a people will get to the Promised Land.” By the providence of God, civil rights came to us. Let us make our own the words of the spiritual, “Let My People Go.”

*Last Sermon of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., United Church of Christ,
April 03, 1968*



Still More History

1954 — Supreme Court: “separate but equal is inherently unequal”; case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. **Ended segregation in schools**, not in buses, hotels, restaurants, etc.

1964 — The Civil Rights Act

NB: 1960-1970 most African nations attain freedom

1965 — Voting Rights Act

1968 — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated (April 4)

2008 — Barack Obama elected President of the United States

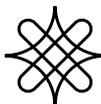
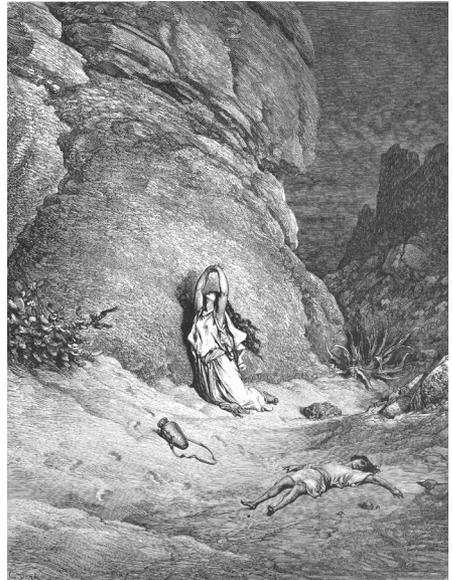
Sarah and Hagar, Genesis 16

¹ ABRAM'S WIFE SARAI HAD BORNE HIM NO CHILDREN. Now she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar. ² Sarai said to Abram: "The Lord has kept me from bearing children. Have intercourse with my maid; perhaps I will have sons through her." Abram obeyed Sarai. ³ Thus, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, his wife Sarai took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. ⁴ He had intercourse with her, and she became pregnant. As soon as Hagar knew she was pregnant, her mistress lost stature in her eyes. ⁵ So Sarai said to Abram: "This outrage against me is your fault. I myself gave my maid to your embrace; but ever since she knew she was pregnant, I have lost stature in her eyes. May the Lord decide between you and me!" ⁶ Abram told Sarai: "Your maid is in your power. Do to her what you regard as right." Sarai then mistreated her so much that Hagar ran away from her.

⁷ The Lord's angel found her by a spring in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur, ⁸ and he asked, "Hagar, maid of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She answered, "I am running away from my mistress, Sarai." ⁹ But the Lord's angel told her: "Go back to your mistress and submit to her authority. ¹⁰ I will make your descendants so numerous," added the Lord's angel, "that they will be too many to count." ¹¹ Then the Lord's angel said to her:

"You are now pregnant and shall bear a son; you shall name him Ishmael, For the Lord has heeded your affliction. ¹² He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; Alongside all his kindred shall he encamp."

¹³ To the Lord who spoke to her she gave a name, saying, "You are God who sees me"; she meant, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after he saw me?" ¹⁴ That is why the well is called Beer-lahai-roi. It is between Kadesh and Bered. ¹⁵ Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram named the son whom Hagar bore him Ishmael. ¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

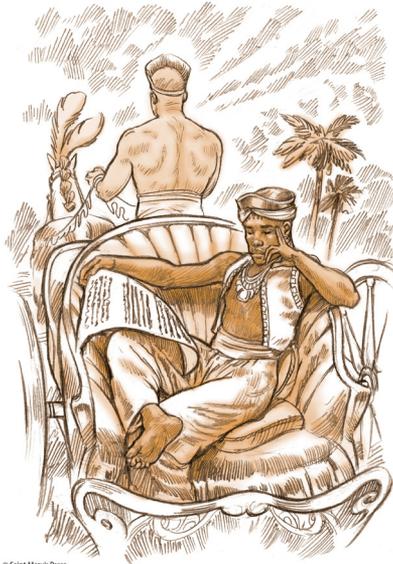


Black Spirituality and Values

- Intimate personal God: “It’s Me, It’s Me, It’s Me, O Lord”
- The *Living* God – “*makes a way where there is no way*,” hardship only a “*set-up for God to show up*”
- God acts also in events of world—salvation is spiritual + socio-political
- Church is extended family, “*beloved community*,” “*expansive universe*” versus dichotomy of this/other world; religious/secular; past/present/future
 - Structural unity: God, Community, Family, Person, Social Ethics (see Peter J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples. The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* [Fortress, 1994])

2011 Notre Dame Survey of Religious Affiliation and Practice: most religiously affiliated group in US

Acts 8:26-40: The Ethiopian Eunuch



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²⁶ THEN THE ANGEL OF THE LORD SPOKE TO PHILIP, “Get up and head south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert route.” ²⁷ So he got up and set out. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, that is, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury, who had come to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and was returning home. Seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ The Spirit said to Philip, “Go and join up with that chariot.” ³⁰ Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹ He replied, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?” So he invited Philip to get in and sit with him. ³² This was the scripture passage he was reading:

“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opened not his mouth. ³³ In (his) humiliation justice was denied him. Who will tell of his posterity? For his life is taken from the earth.”

³⁴ Then the eunuch said to Philip in reply, “I beg you, about whom is the prophet saying this? About himself, or about someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth and, beginning with this scripture passage, he proclaimed Jesus to him. ³⁶ As they traveled along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look, there is water. What is to prevent my being baptized?” [³⁷] ³⁸ Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water, and he baptized him. ³⁹ When they came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, but continued on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip came to Azotus, and went about proclaiming the good news to all the towns until he reached Caesarea.



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Ruth, Chapter 1

1 Once back in the time of the judges there was a famine in the land; so a man from Bethlehem of Judah left home with his wife and two sons to reside on the plateau of Moab. 2 The man was named Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and his sons Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem of Judah. Sometime after their arrival on the plateau of Moab, 3 Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah, the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Chilion died also, and the woman was left with neither her two boys nor her husband.

6 She and her daughters-in-law then prepared to go back from the plateau of Moab because word had reached her there that the LORD had seen to his people's needs^c and given them food. 7 She and her two daughters-in-law left the place where they had been living. On the road back to the land of Judah, 8 Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD show you the same kindness as you have shown to the deceased and to me. 9 May the LORD guide each of you to find a husband and a home in which you will be at rest." She kissed them good-bye, but they wept aloud, 10 crying, "No! We will go back with you, to your people." 11 Naomi replied, "Go back, my daughters. Why come with me? Have I other sons in my womb who could become your husbands? 12 Go, my daughters, for I am too old to marry again. Even if I had any such hope, or if tonight I had a husband and were to bear sons, 13 would you wait for them and deprive yourselves of husbands until those sons grew up? No, my daughters, my lot is too bitter for

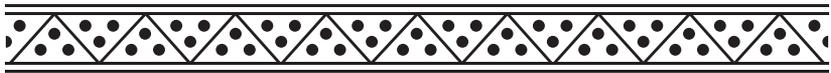
you, because the LORD has extended his hand against me.” 14 Again they wept aloud; then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her.

15 “See now,” she said, “your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her god. Go back after your sister-in-law!” 16 But Ruth said, “Do not press me to go back and abandon you!

Wherever you go I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God, my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there be buried.

May the LORD do thus to me, and more, if even death separates me from you!”

18 Naomi then ceased to urge her, for she saw she was determined to go with her. 19 So they went on together until they reached Bethlehem. On their arrival there, the whole town was excited about them, and the women asked: “Can this be Naomi?” 20 But she said to them, “Do not call me Naomi [‘Sweet’]. Call me Mara [‘Bitter’], for the Almighty has made my life very bitter. 21 I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why should you call me ‘Sweet,’ since the LORD has brought me to trial, and the Almighty has pronounced evil sentence on me.” 22 Thus it was that Naomi came back with her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth, who accompanied her back from the plateau of Moab. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

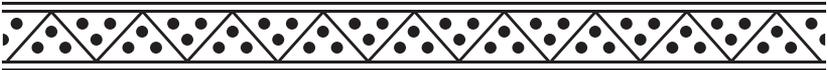


Latta Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American*, 54

- “Your people shall be my people” (1:16-17). What deep love and profound family loyalty. Israel had become narrow in its opinion of other peoples, their religions and customs. The book of Ruth is protest against ethnic and religious narrowness. It refutes the ban against intermarriage by showing that a Moabite was ancestress of David.
- (55) To blacks in liberation time, Ruth categorizes as human and not of God the efforts to segregate, ban, and proscribe the free movement and relationships of human beings. Ezra and Nehemiah speaking about the “*holy race*” that has been contaminated sound much like the Ku Klux Klan or the White Citizens’ Councils. Blacks must never back any efforts of government to segregate or decide who marries whom.
- (56) Secondly, blacks must cease copying the bigots’ theories and methods. Stop playing God to your own people, asking people to obey you or follow your liberation pattern like sheep, deciding with whom they can or cannot make friends, associate, love or marry. That would be for them to reject one kind of slavery for another. All theories and dogmas based on genes, race or ethnic makeup or physical accident must collapse.

Black Bishops of the United States, Pastoral Letter,
What We Have Seen and Heard (pages 8–11)

1. Black spirituality is contemplative. **Prayer** is spontaneous and pervasive in the Black tradition. Our ancestors taught that we must **lean on God** and surrender to his love.
2. Black spirituality is **holistic** – religion involves the whole person: feelings, intellect, heart, head.
3. Black spirituality is **joyful**, a celebration in movement, song, rhythm, feeling, and thanksgiving. This joy is a sign of our faith.
4. Black spirituality is **communal**. In African culture, individual identity is found within the context of the community. The good of the community must come before personal profit and advancement. So, worship celebrates community, no one left out or forgotten. Community means social concern and social justice. Our spiritual heritage always embraces the total human person.



CONCLUSION



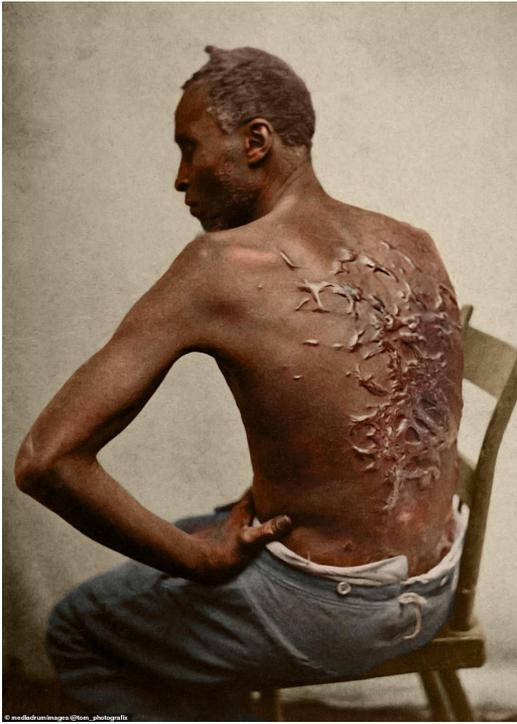
A Few Others

Seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33)

THEREFORE I TELL YOU, DO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR LIFE, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? ²⁷ Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? ²⁸ Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. ²⁹ But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. ³⁰ If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?' ³² All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. ³⁴ Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil. (Matt 6:25-34)



- The kingdom **not**: personal religion, individual righteousness, otherworldly
- **But**, *beloved community*, individual righteousness **and** social justice and compassion, wellbeing in this world **and** next
- Paul: saving righteousness of God versus righteousness unto holiness?
- Exod 5:23: From Selma to Soweto
- Amos 8:4-10
- **NB**: the truth of the Bible is **not** in propositions



An escaped enslaved man named Peter showing his scarred back at a medical examination in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1863 (colorized)

SLAVES, OBEY YOUR HUMAN MASTERS IN EVERYTHING, not only when being watched, as currying favor, but in simplicity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, do from the heart, as for the Lord and not for others, ²⁴ knowing that you will receive from the Lord the due payment of the inheritance; be slaves of the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:22–24).

SLAVES, BE OBEDIENT TO YOUR HUMAN MASTERS with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ, ⁶ not only when being watched, as currying favor, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ willingly serving the Lord and not human beings, ⁸ knowing that each will be required from the Lord for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. ⁹ Masters, act in the same way toward them, and stop bullying, knowing that both they and you have a Master in heaven and that with him there is no partiality (Ephesians 6:5–9).

NOTES