Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion

Resisting Imperial Peace by Resisting the Biblical Text

Randall C. Bailey
rcb526@comcast.net

Part of *JRER* Volume 1, Issue 13

Resisting Imperial Peace
by the US Ecumenical Association of Third-World Theologians
edited by Michel Andraos and Andrea Smith

There is much in the Black Religious Traditions in the US which points to efforts to use Christian documents as a source for fighting our oppression. In these attempts, found most prevalent in the so-called Negro Spirituals, there is a radical reframing of biblical narratives as

well as playfulness with the biblical text so as to encourage resistance to oppression. While living within a context which claims to be grounded in the Judao-Christian ethic and which practices heteropatriarchy[1] in all its manifestations and complicit ideologies, such as racism, sexism, classism, militarism, heterosexism, agism and the like, these traditions sought to destabilize these oppressive forces. While the Christian missionary appeal to the enslaved Africans was to find peace within this religion, the peace was grounded in submission to these oppressive forces. This Peace in Christ was promoted in service to the needs of the budding empire, much on the form of *Pax Romana*.

As Wengst convincing argues, the great wealth and luxuries which the upper classes enjoyed during the centuries of Roman Imperial rule were predicated on the exploitation of the colonies and the suppression of the under classes. In essence the wealth came with a great cost to those who were being exploited.[2] As he states,

> [T]he Pax Romana is indissolubly connected with the *imperium Romanum* with the authority which goes forth from Rome. Thus the concepts themselves already make it clear that this is a peace determined from above, appointed by the center of power.[3]

Thus, this peace was gained by war and military control, which empowered some at the expense of others. The peace was concerned with subjugating some for the benefit of others. In

---

[1]The term heteropatriarchy is utilized to draw attention to the reality that patriarchal privilege is given to self identified heterosexual men. It draws attention to the collusion of patriarchy and heterosexism both in their control of women's bodies, but also in the control of men who do not identify with the need to control women's bodies..

[2]Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ,* Translated by John Bowen. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), pg. 5.

[3] Wengst, 10.

addition, he argues that the peace was the major goal and if force was used to maintain it, it was justified. As he notes,

> The fact that [Pontius Pilate] had Jesus executed on the cross shows that the death of Jesus is indissolubly bound up with the political peace that there was at that time, the Pax Romana, produced and guaranteed by Roman power. In the view of the procurator this execution, like many others, was virtually an act to secure the peace.[4]

The fact of crucifixions shows that there were those who resisted this peace at the cost of subjugation. As Horsley argues, crucifixion was used by the Romans to terrorize those in the colonies by lynching traitors to the state, runaway slaves, and political revolutionaries.[5] Thus, those who were oppressed as a technique of securing the peace and prosperity of the upper classes, have a trajectory of resisting the Imperial Peace, even when it was at the cost of their lives in struggle.

Wengst argues that in the New Testament and other Early Church Writings there are writers who resist and writers who embrace *Pax Romana* in their writings. He lists Jesus, as portrayed in the Gospels as one who resists as well as Paul, while Deutero-Pauline and Early Church Fathers seem to embrace it, especially Clement.[6] Interestingly he presents the writer of the Third Gospel as one who embraces the Imperial Peace. [7] What is not clear is how he differentiates the ideology of the writer and the portrayal of Jesus. In other words, is not the

---

[4] Wengst, 2.

[5] Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 29-30.

[6] Wengst, 54-90.

[7] Wengst, 100-1.

portrayal of Jesus in the Gospels under the construction of the writers? If so, how does the reader extrapolate from the text that which are "Jesus' actual actions and speech" from the ideological construction of the writer. In contrast to Wegner's claim, Mitzi J. Smith argues that the Gospels and the Pauline writings accept many Roman constructions of reality, especially as regards slavery, and embrace much of the Pax Romana.[8] As she argues,

> In general the oppressive ideals of ancient Roman slavery are reinscribed upon some biblical texts. The social reality of ancient Roman slave ideology is reflected in biblical texts in spite of attempts by biblical authors to recontextualize master/slave relations in parables and other narratives by employing them as examples for the Christian's relationship with Jesus and/or God. African Americans have historically considered as offensive and unconscionable Pauline and deuteropauline texts mandating slaves to be content and servile in their legal status...But African Americans must treat with suspicion other biblical texts, such as parable narratives that also reinscribe ancient slave/master ideology.[9]

In similar fashion in modern times there is pressure to conform to oppressive forces for the purpose of securing peace. In the Civil Rights Movement, there was pressure on Martin Luther King Jr. to stop demonstrations which disrupted the peace. As he argued in the *Letter*

---

[8] Mitzi J. Smith, "Slavery in the Early Church," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary,* ed Brian K. Blount et al., (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 11-22.

[9] M. Smith. 19.

from a Birmingham Jail, peace at the cost of justice is not peace, it is oppression.[10] Similarly, ACT-UP was started to address issues of HIV and AIDS, through the use of civil disobedience in the face of government policies which strove for peace while many PWA's were dying ignominious deaths.[11] It is these strains of resistance to oppressive forces and their trajectories which Diasporan African groups in the US have practiced and have in some ways lost, which this article seeks to explore.

In 1989 Itumeleng J. Mosala, the South African Biblical Scholar and former President of AZAPO, leveled serious challenges to Black Theology as it was practiced in the US and South Africa in his book *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*.[12] His two major critiques relate to engagement in the struggles of poor and oppressed people and the claiming of the Bible as "the Word of God." Mosala argues that Black theology has remained primarily middle class and has not engaged in the struggles of the underclasses and then theologized from

---

[10] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* (New York: Overbrook, 1968). It is most interesting that in this most powerful document, King only makes three passing references to the biblical text. He first defends his being called and outside agitator with claiming the 8th C. prophets and Paul were called this. In defense of civil disobedience he refers to the three Hebrew boys in the book of Daniel. Finally in defense of being called an extremist he cites Amos 5:24, Gal 6:17, and the crucifixion. In each instance of citing a biblical passage, he is utilizing a rhetorical strategy to push the recipients of the letter to consider his points by referencing passages which might move them to his side. Thus Amos and Paul are called "outside agitators." Jesus, Amos, and Paul are called extremists. In these ways his reading of these biblical texts spins them in an ideological reading. It is interesting, however, that these are minor points in his major argument. The majority of his arguments, however, were sociological, political, and economic in nature. He does reference theologians such as Augustine, Luther, and Buber, but these are to speak to moral arguments, which is the locus of his argumentation.

[11] Cf. ACT UP, "Civil Disobedience Manual," http://www.actupny.org/documents/CDdocuments/CDindex.html

[12] Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 13-42.

the engagement in these struggles. Key to his argument is the ways in which Black Theology has not addressed critically conflicting ideologies in the biblical text and assumed that the text contains timeless, ahistorical claims. As he notes,

> There is a trajectory of struggle that runs through all biblical texts, and a recognition of this fact meant that it is no longer accurate to speak of the gospel or the Word of God unproblematically and in absolute terms. Both the Word of God and the gospel are such hotly contested terrains of struggle that one cannot speak in an absolutizing way of being alienated from the gospel. What one can do is take sides in a struggle tht is not confirmed by the whole of the Bible, or even of the Gospels, but is rather encoded in the text as a struggle representing different positions...[13]

Examples of these struggles in the text can be seen by Luke having Jesus say, "Blessed are you who are poor" (6:20b) and Matthew having Jesus say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (5:3). In this way there is a struggle as to whether the Gospel messages are directed mainly to those who are economically oppressed or those who have spiritual problems.[14] Similarly, while Ex 20:2 has YHWH say, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" in Gen 16:9b the angel of the LORD tells Hagar, "Return to your mistress and

---

[13] *Biblical Hermeneutics,* 27.

[14] As Crowder states, "Unlike Matthew's 'Sermon on the Mount'...[Luke's] Beatitudes address the causes of social, political, and economic oppression: poverty, hunger, sadness, and hatred...Luke's presentation of the blessings also differs from Matthews;s end-times approach. Marginalizing circumstances must not be ignored, because they affect those who would follow Jesus." Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, "Luke," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary,* Brian K. Blount, et. al., eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

submit to her [oppression]."[15] Thus, one text portrays YHWH as a God of Liberation, while the other portrays YHWH as the God of the oppressor. Thus, Mosala states that adhering to a view of the Bible as the Word of God requires one to support oppressive texts.

In this essay, I shall explore ways in which some of the Negro Spirituals have at their core the Resistance to Imperial Peace. Some of the language is coded and needs to be recovered. A key to the argument being presented is the ways these songs conflate biblical references, which result in a recasting of the narrative or reframing the symbolic language. While most interpreters read these songs within dogmatic categories, it appears that these songs were attempts at resisting the dogma and even resisting the text.

I shall next explore other traditions of interpretation within the Black religious traditions which did not resist, but instead capitulated to the imposed Imperial Peace as practiced in the US and the Imperial Peace ideologies imbedded in the text, both during enslavement and after. Finally I shall explore specific biblical texts which need to be resisted today because of their imbedded theologies which appear to be sanctioning oppression and promoting submitting to unacceptable codes of Imperial Peace, especially around gender, class, and sexuality. In this way, I shall argue that what has been seen by liberationists as a helpful ally in struggles against

---

[15] As Phyllis Trible argues, "Double imperatives underscore the severity. By itself the order 'Return to your mistress' might mean reversion to the beginning when servitude existed apart from harsh treatment. But the second command negates such and interpretation: 'Suffer affliction under her hand.'… Without doubt these two imperatives, return and submit to suffering, bring a divine word of terror to an abused, yet corurageous woman. They also strike at the the heart of Exodus faith. Inexplicably the God later, seeing (*r'h*) the suffering (*`oni*) pf a slave people. comes down todeliver them *out of the hand* of the Egyptians (Exod.3:7-8) here identifies with the oppressor and orders a servant to return not only to bondage, but also to affllliction (*Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives,* OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 16.

imperialism in all its forms, the biblical text, is a two edged sword, which often ends up cutting the oppressed and keeping the Empire intact. I shall also point out ways that parts of the current Black Religious traditions as exemplified in Pop Gospel music and liturgical practices often cooperate with Imperial Peace and further oppression, showing definite rejection of the subversive traditions left to us by our ancestors.

While I am concentrating on African American resources as a source of data for exploration, the same exercise can be done on other cultural data sources. I am not arguing that the Black Christian religious experience is monolithic. Nor am I arguing that there is only one way of interpreting that experience. I am, however, arguing that one can read the text through one's experience and from that raise questions of the text and its varied possible meanings. I am also arguing that the biblical text is a construction of debates over centuries by "forerunners in the faith." While canonizing of these debates suggests that the debate was not settled, these debates have been defused by a hegemonic construction of the Bible as "Word of God." Thus, each generation is welcomed into the debate to react to it.

Since in my view the biblical text is a human construction, we must approach it from varied sociological vantage points and screen it through those hermeneutical lenses, especially as it relates to race, sexuality, class, gender, nationality, age, and the like. Thus, if one claims that liberation is a key theological construction, then one has to assess the biblical text to see if it is supporting liberation or sanctioning oppression. Similarly, within the bible[16] there are varied

[16] As a way of pointing to the deconstruction of the doctrine of the "word of God" and to show that this collection of books is a human construction, I shall utilize bible uncapitalized as a signifier throughout this article.

constructions of the deity which are in contest with each other. One, therefore, needs to engage these portrayals as to whether they support liberation or oppression. This is more productive in promoting liberation than trying to use the Imperial Power of the text as a way of sanctioning a theological idea, which ultimately may not be supported in the text.

The Negro Spirituals

As I have argued in other contexts,[17] the Negro Spirituals give us a playful way of reading and interpreting the biblical text. Much has been written on the political nature of the discourse in these songs.[18] Thus, "People Get Ready, There's a Train a 'Comin" has been interpreted to speak to a notice to the enslaved Africans on the plantation that the Underground Railroad was in operation, and "Steel Away to Jesus" was an announcement that there was going to be a prayer meeting in the brush arbor that evening. Similarly, "There's No Hiding Place" was sung on plantations by enslaved Africans as a signal to others on the run that the slavers were looking for runaways on the plantation, "so do not stop here." In other words, these songs, which by their name, "Spirituals", gave the sense of being primarily religious in nature, became a way of communicating to those of the "in group" and fooling the oppressor. As Wimbush has

---

[17] Randall C. Bailey, "The Danger of Ignoring One's Own Cultural Bias in Interpreting the Text." in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1998), 66-90; idem, "The Biblical Basis for a Political Theology of Liberation." in *Blow the Trumpet in Zion: Global Vision and Action for the 21st-Century Black Church,* eds. Iva E. Carruthers, Frederick D. Haynes, III, and Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 91-6.

[18] Brian K. Blount, *Cultural Interpretation,* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); James Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (New York, Seabury, 1972); James Weldon Johnson, ed., *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, (New York: Viking, 1925); Howard Thurman, *Deep River: The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death* (Richmond, IN: Friends United, 1973).

argued, they gave a language world for arguing for manumission and a means for communicating among the initiated.[19] As he states, "The spirituals reflect the process of the transformation of the Book Religion of the dominant people into the religion reflective of the socio-political and economic status of African slaves."[20]

At the same time, I have argued that when these songs quote biblical passages, we often interpret them as though the song was "reading the text" in an orthodox or dogmatic way. For instance in the song, "O, Mary, O, Martha," we find the words,

> Oh, Mary, don't you weep, don't you mourn
> Tell Martha not to moan
> Pharaoh's army got drownded.
> Oh, Mary, don't you weep
> Tell Martha not to moan
> If I could I surely would
> Stand on the rock where Moses stood
> Pharaoh's army drowned in the Red Sea
> Oh, Mary, don't you weep
> Tell Martha not to moan

It appears that the enslaved Africans on plantations identified with the plight of Mary and Martha, whose brother, Lazarus, died and Jesus wasn't showing up. This seemed to fit their existential situation in which women, children and men were being sold off to other plantations,

---

[19]Vincent L. Wimbush, "The Bible and African Americans: An Outline of an Interpretive History," in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation,* ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 81-97.

[20] Wimbush, "The Bible." 87.

never to return; men and women were being raped and killed; death was all around and Jesus wasn't showing up. No one was coming out of the graves nor were they returning to their families. Thus, the Enslaved Africans could well identify with the anguish of Mary and Martha in John 11. What they seemed not to be able to identify with was the response of Jesus that he was the "resurrection and life" (Jn 11:25), for they switch to another biblical passage, the drowning of Pharaoh at the Sea of Reeds in Ex. 14, as the reason for Mary not to cry.

Thus this song has conflated both the death of Lazarus narrative in John 11 with the drowning at the Sea of Reeds in Exodus 14. Gilkes has argued that in this spiritual we see the claim of the enslaved Africans that the God of the Exodus is also the God of Resurrection.[21] This is assumed since Jesus' response to the cry of Mary and Martha in Jn 9:21 that had he shown up, their brother would not have died, was, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (vv. 25-6).[22]

A problem with such an interpretation is that the spiritual does not refer to this quotation of Jesus. While it does speak to the anguish of Mary and Martha, instead of giving Jesus' reason for them not to cry, the spiritual switches to the Exodus narrative. In doing such a switch, however, it does not refer to the escape from Egypt by enslaved Hebrews. Rather it switches to

---

[21] Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "'Go and Tell Mary and Martha': The Spirituals, Biblical Options for Women, and Cultural Tensions in the African American Religious Experience," *Social Compass: International Review of Sociology of Religion* 43 (1996): 563-581.

[22]Cf. R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII,* AB (Garden City: NY: Doubleday, 1970); R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary.* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971); L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971). For a more extensive exegetical treatment of the John 11 passage in relations to Spiritual see Bailey, "Danger of Ignoring."

the drowning of the oppressor in the sea. In other words, they do not tell Mary and Martha not to weep because Jesus is the resurrection or because the Lord delivered the Hebrew Children from enslavement. Instead they focus on the killing of Pharaoh's army described in Exodus 14 in narrative and Exodus 15 in poetry, both in the Song of Moses and the Song of Miriam.

Similarly in the second verse of the song there is reference to the "rock on which Moses stood". While there is no exact reference in the Hebrew Bible to Moses standing on a rock, in Ex 17:2-6 there is a reference to God standing on a rock and Moses getting water out of it to nourish the people, while later in the chapter in vv. 9-16 we get the story of Moses going up on a "hill" and sending the army to fight Amalek[23]. As he holds his rod high, the Israelites prevail in the war. As he gets tired, he sits on a stone and Aaron and Hur hold up his arms so the army wins the battle. It appears that in the minds of the community which produced this song, they conflated Moses physically taking care of the former enslaved people with a rock and Moses, the general of the army, on the hill battling Amalek. This is reinforced by their repeating the refrain of "Pharaoh's army getting drownded". In other words, they have left Jesus behind in the song and have moved to the divine destruction of the enslavers and Moses the one leading the people to future military successes for the formerly enslaved. Thus, the Hebrew Bible references in the spiritual are to events post-Exodus, in the realm of liberated existence.

---

[23]Brevard Childs notes, "The battle in the valley is briefly described, but the interest of the writer focuses on Moses. The outcome of the battle depends on what Moses does. As long as Moses held up his hands, Israel gained the advantage in battle," in *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary.* OTL. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 314. See also John L. Durham, *Exodus,* WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 236-7; W. Propp, *Exodus 1-18,* AB (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 620 for similar comments.

By the same token, the song is directed to Mary and Martha and acknowledging their situation of crying and addressing it. On the contrary, John 11 presents Jesus as responding to their crying with statements of *his* efficacy and ignoring their emotional state. The community which composed this spiritual felt this focus needed to be corrected in the representation of the spiritual, so the focalization is on Mary and Martha and not on Jesus. In this way the spiritual is trying to inspire the enslaved Africans to struggle against their oppression and not to be caught up in religious texts and ideas which promote accommodating to Imperial Peace.

This conflation of texts in the spiritual is similar with what happens in biblical texts such as 1 Chronicles 16:8-34. In this passage there is put in the mouth of David parts of several Psalms. VV. 8-22 directly quote Ps. 105:1-15 and vv. 23-34 quote Ps. 96:1-9 (See Chart 1). In Ps 105 we have a recitation of the "History of Israel." The citation in Chronicles stops this recitation at the point that the Psalm speaks of the enslavement in Egypt and the liberation from Egypt. The Chronicles passage then switches to a YHWH hymn which speaks of YHWH as creator and judge. Since Chronicles does not wish to exalt the Exodus Traditions, it stops the first recitation as soon as it gets to the problematic part of the history.[24]

In similar manner, as noted above, for enslaved Africans whose men and women were being raped and whipped, whose children were being sold off to other plantations, never to be seen again, who were being killed and maimed, and Jesus wasn't showing up, the response of being the "life and resurrection" was not meaningful to them. Instead of this response, they told

---

[24] W. Johnstone, contends that the shift in the Psalm is to celebrate YHWH's universality in line with the Chronicler's theology (cf. *1 & 2 Chronicles: Volume 1*. JSOTSS 253. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic,1997), 194-5.

Mary and Martha not to weep and moan because in the end the oppressor will be killed. In other words, if the text didn't fit their religious experience, they would change it and reconstruct another text which spoke to what they were experiencing as God in their lives.

The spiritual "We are Climbing Jacob's Ladder" also contains a conflation of a Hebrew Bible story and a New Testament passage.

> We are climbing Jacob's ladder
> We are climbing Jacob's ladder
> We are climbing Jacob's ladder
> Soldiers of the cross.

The other verses are

> Ev'ry round goes higher, higher
> Sinner do you love my Jesus?
> If you love him, why not serve him?[25]

The refrain for each verse of the song is "soldiers of the cross." In this spiritual they conflate the dream of Jacob on the run from Esau where he receives a theophany in Gen 28:11-17. In that text angels are going up and down the ladder. In the spiritual, however, the angels have been replaced with soldiers. By the same token in the Genesis account the angels are going to and from heaven denoting a linkage between heaven and earth.[26] In the spiritual heaven has been replaced with the cross. Finally, in the divine oracle in Genesis 28:13-16 the deity promises to Jacob that Jacob will return to the home land and occupy that territory. Thus, the spiritual has changed the Genesis passage and replaced the heavenly beings with military combatants and has

---

[25] Dolores Carpenter, *African American Heritage Hymnal* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2001), 464.

[26] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 454-5.

interpreted the cross as a symbol of struggle against oppression. Given our depoliticized readings of the cross and crucifixion, we miss the political claim of the spiritual and the engagement not only with the trickster motif of Jacob[27] but also the politicized military interpretation of the cross event.[28]

In effect the spiritual is claiming that, like Jacob, Enslaved Africans have been in hope of returning to their homeland, but it would be by assuming the role of soldiers that such would be possible. One could argue that the trick of the song worked because the biblical text itself depoliticizes the cross event in its language and on the narrative level it is the Pharasees and the Priests who are blamed for the death of Jesus on the cross and not the Romans (cf. Matt 27:24-24; John 8:42-47; and Acts 2:22-30).[29] Thus, the enslavers who would hear this sung would not interpret this as a military hymn to struggle. Rather they would interpret the cross as suffering and not as a political act of resistance to oppression.

---

[27] Wallace S. Hartsfield, II, "The Ethical Function of Deception and Other Forms of Intrigue in the Jacob Cycle" (PhD diss, Emory University, 2005).

[28] R. C. Bailey, "Biblical Basis," 95. In this article I argue that Jesus was killed by the Romans because he was forrmenting a rebellion against Roman in Judea and claiming the throne in Jerusalem. In this way his being called Son of David bespoke his political intentions and the use of Son of God, which in Hebrew Bible language was a title for the king in Jerusalem (2 Sam 7:14). The narratives in the Gospels, however, consciously depoliticize the crucifixion and make into an internal religious struggle between Jesus and the Pharisees and Sadducees. It appears from the language, "soldiers of the cross," that the community that produced the spiritual saw the event in socio-political terms.

[29] For a discussion of the "problematizing of the Jews" in the Gospels see Robert R. Carroll, *The Bible as a Problem for Christianity,* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1991), 89-116 and Tina Pippin, "For Fear of the Jews': Lying and Truth Telling in Translating the Gospel of John," in Randall C. Bailey and Tina Pippin, eds., *Race, Class and the Politics of Bible Translation, Semeia 76* (1996), 81-97.

As the verses continue, however, there is first a claim that the stakes are rising, since "ev'ry round goes higher and higher". There is then a question to the hearer as to whether s/he loves Jesus, which is followed then by the challenge to serve Jesus. All of these claims of the song, however, are followed with the refrain that to enter this situation one must be willing to become a soldier who is committed to the cross. In this way they have re-politicized the cross and stated their claim that the ones who end up on the cross are not "criminals" (Lk 23:32) but rather soldiers. This is in line with Horsley's explanation of the Roman use of crucifixion as a means of lynching and terrorizing the people of the colonies.[30]

The trickster nature of the Spirituals is seen in "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."

I looked over Jordan and what did I see
Coming for to carry me home.
A band of angels coming after me.
Coming for to carry me home.

If you get there before I do,
Coming for to carry me home.
Tell all my friends I'm coming too,
Coming for to carry me home.

The brightest day I ever saw,
Coming for to carry me home.

[30] As he states, "The Romans deliberately used *crucifixion* as an excruciatingly painful form of execution by torture (basically suffocation), to be used primarily on upstart slaves and rebellious provincials…The principal purpose, of course, was to terrorize and control subject peoples…" (Horsley, *Jesus and Empire,* 28-9).

When Jesus washed my sins away,
Coming for to carry me home.

I'm sometimes up and sometimes down,
Coming for to carry me home.
But still my soul feels heav'nly bound
Coming for to carry me home.

The song seems to reference the ascension of Elijah in a chariot as described in 2 Kings 2:11-12. While the biblical text concentrates on Elisha and his reactions to the ascension, the song concentrates on the figure of Elijah, as it uses first person references to the one to be carried up in the chariot, claiming "Comin' for to carry me home." While the third and fourth verses speak to Jesus washing away sins and the singer entering heaven, the first verse speaks of looking across Jordan, with a band of angels coming for the singer. Jordan has been noted to be a reference in the Spirituals to both the Ohio River and the Atlantic Ocean, both of which bring one to "the land of freedom."

The second verse speaks of meeting up with others who have preceded the singer in making it across. As noted above, such songs make references to the Underground Railroad, while at the same time covering the tracks of the singer by making references to atonement and heaven. In other words, when the enslaver heard the song, the references to the ascension and being heaven bound were seen as the major focus, while the initiated would hear the double message of political liberation.[31] In this way, we see a possibility of reading these songs as both

[31] Cf. Herbert R. Marbury, "Ezra and Nehemiah" in *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora,* ed. Hugh R. Page, Jr., (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 281.

political in nature, while at the same time giving us a view how the bible was used by those communities who composed these songs.

The Spirituals are noted for the lack of Christmas or birth of Jesus, songs. One of the exceptions is "Jesus, Jesus, O, What a Wonderful Child."

> Jesus, Jesus, Oh, what a wonderful child.
> Jesus, Jesus, so lowly, meek and mild,
> New life, new hope, new joy he brings,
> Listen, listen to the angels sing,
> Glory, glory to the new born king.

In this chorus we see the identification of Jesus as a king. It appears this community took seriously the genealogies in Matthew and Luke claiming Jesus as part of the lineage of David. In this way the text is laying a political understanding of Jesus, as son of David. While we have been taught not to take such language seriously, the hope of enslaved Africans was that Jesus, as king, would free them. The same identification with Jesus as political leader is seen in "Ride on King Jesus". In this Spiritual the triumphal entry into Jerusalem is depicted as a king on his way to claiming his throne. For those caught in the slavocracy institution, these songs bespoke a political nature to the religion and interpreted/used the text in line with those expectations.

If such interpretations are valid, we can argue that some portions of the US Black Religious tradition in its early stages were playful with the text. It was not all dogmatically driven, nor was it orthodox in its renderings of Jesus and the focus of the religion. As Wimbush has argued, this form of interpretation was expedient to the cause of manumission and was not necessarily intended to signal full embrace of the tradition. Rather the biblical text provided

according to him a language world for expressing hopes for liberation and manumission.[32] He further argues for a marronage approach to interpreting these "dark readings."[33]

This possible understanding of the tradition and interpretation opens the door for continuing within it and the development of reading strategies for today which give guidance to the usages of the biblical text. I have argued that biblical stories were combined in ways that give new interpretations to the text and which also change texts to create a new story. I have also argued there was a political interpretation to these songs, which keys in on the political nuances within the text. In other words one of the ways in which enslaved Africans used the biblical text was to resist its oppressive meanings and reformulate it to support liberative life and the sustaining of struggles against oppression. In other words, I am arguing that these songs and their use of biblical texts and textures model "Resisting Imperial Peace" both in their life situation of enslavement and in their encountering Christianity. But this is not the only way of reading the bible within the black religious tradition.

Other Black Religious Readings within US Enslavement

In his book, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible*, Callahan tells the apocryphal story of the enslaved African, Albert Gronniosaw, who saw the slaver captain on the ship reading from the Bible. He assumed the book was talking to the captain. One day, in the captain's cabin Gronniosaw lifted the book to his ear so it could talk to him. When he heard

[32] Wimbush, "The Bible and African Americans," 89-93.

[33] Vincent L. Wimbush, "Introduction: Reading Darkness, Reading Scriptures," in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Tests and Social Textures* ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Continuum, 2000), 1-43.

nothing, he determined that something was the matter with him and that the book didn't talk to him because he was black.[34] Abraham Smith also relates a similar story of an enslaved African on a plantation putting the book to his ear to see if it would talk to him with similar results.[35] In these examples we see how some enslaved Africans used the biblical text as a means of supporting internalized oppression and degrading themselves.

Callahan's analysis of the role of the Jubilee laws in Leviticus 25 in the Black religious traditions helps to further clarify one of the problems of the reading strategies of enslaved and formerly enslaved Africans in the Americas and other parts of the Diaspora. These laws claimed that those of the Hebrew group who fell into debt slavery were to be released in the fiftieth year. Callahan claims that having converted to Christianity and thereby become heirs to Abraham (Rom. 4:16), enslaved Africans in the US saw the laws regarding Israelite slaves in vv. 29-32 relating to them.[36] This is amazing to me since the laws of Jubilee in Leviticus 25 relate to those who were sold into debt slavery and not to those who were stolen from their land and transported to chattel status in a "foreign land."[37]

Following these laws, however, are laws which state that non-Israelite slaves will remain slaves forever. While Callahan notes the resonance with the first set of laws was the practice, it

---

[34] Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 13.

[35] Abraham Smith, "I Saw the Book Talk: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Ethics of an African American Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Bible and the Ethics of Reading,* eds. Gary Phillips and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Semeia* 77 (1997), 115-38.

[36] Callahan, *Talking Book*, 84.

[37] Martin Noth, *Leviticus,* OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 191-93; G. E. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus,* NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 322-23.

was "ironic" that the enslaved Africans did not relate to the subsequent laws. As he states, "If [the Jubilee] verses were the dream of the slaves, the verses that immediately followed them were their nightmarish reality."[38] It appears to me, however, that since their experience was that of the Canaanite slaves and not the Israelite slaves, "irony" hardly gets to the description of this resonance. It appears more to be an act of self-deception, since their experience was more akin to that of the Canaanites than the Israelites.

Renee K. Harrison in her new book, *Enslaved Women and the Art of Resistance in Antebellum America*, discusses the ways in which enslavers used the bible as a means of promoting a servile class and caste in the US.[39] She also documents the ways in which enslaved Africans accommodated to these views. Attitudes, such as the claim that slavery was part of God's plan for the lives of Africans and meeting Jesus was a way of saving them from being African, were noted in slave testimonies. As she states,

> Christianity, in this sense, meant that their personhood (humanity, Africanness, blackness, bodies, flesh) possessed no value even after it was 'washed and cleaned by the blood of Jesus.' As legalized and biblically legitimized slaves in the New World their existence, and their bodies were meant for labor and enslavement: negation, neglect, and sacrifice of their bodies was the ultimate act of obedience and faithfulness to both their earthly (slavers) and heavenly (God, Jesus) master.[40]

---

[38] Callahan, 84.

[39] Renee K. Harrison, *Enslaved Women and the Art of Resistance in Antebellum America* (New York: Pelgrave MacMillan, 2009), 114-25.

[40] Harrison, 129.

Most important in this analysis by Harrison is the promoting of the awareness that adherence to Orthodox Doctrines of Christianity ran contrary to the impulses expressed in some of the Spirituals to resist "imperial peace" as promoted by the enslaver class. While she also notes the ways that biblical passages were used to promote and foster slave revolts, as does Callahan, she brings to the fore the problem that often the Enslaved Africans internalized the views of the enslavers about them by both adopting the enslavers' readings of the biblical text as well as accepting the oppressive ideologies embedded in the text.

Thus, we see that there were differing currents running within the theological winds of black religious communities. There were the trickster and liberationist winds which used the religion to critique the oppressive situations in which they were bound and to inspire rebellion and foster resistance to that oppression. At the same time there were the winds of accommodation to the oppression as the will of a God who desires their compliance. In essence there is evidence there was "resistance" and "accommodation" to Imperial Peace. The questions are how do we deal with these traditions in our current theologizing?

Resisting Oppressive Ideologies Embedded in the Text

As noted above, Itumeleng Mosala in his book, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* deals with the subject of imbedded theologies in the text and the ways in which, especially around issues of class, black theologies have ignored these problems in the text.[41] He argued for more awareness of tensions in the text and especially the ways in which

[41] Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 13-42.

upper class concerns overshadow the voices of the poor and oppressed, as seen in the hymn in Micah 4:1-4. In his analysis the song of the poor,

> they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
> and their spears into pruning hooks;
> nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
> neither shall they learn war any more;
> but they shall all sit under their own vines and fig trees,
> and no one shall make them afraid (vv. 3b-4)

has been co-opted by the rich. The beginning of the song in vv. 1-3a speaks to worship in the temple and teaching and learning which aggrandize the Jerusalem priesthood.[42] As Mosala claims, within the text there are ideologies which are competing. When one does not explore the implications of these competing ideologies, once can be led into supporting theological claims which work against the interest of the oppressed reader. Thus, the example he cites in Micah 4 presents a textual strategy which gets the reader to submerge the claims of the underclass in favor of the pietistic cover at the beginning of the song. It is against this type of reading strategy that the deconstructive spirituals explored above are resisting. Unfortunately, Mosala does not in this instance raise the patriarchal nature of the song of the poor, since the military and land owning situations described in the text are totally androcentric.

In similar fashion to Mosala's claims of problematizing the text around imperial claims which get the oppressed to buy into their own demise, Mitsi Smith deals with the subject of slavery in the first century CE and its impact upon the New Testament. In her analysis the harshness of the Roman institution of slavery is taken as a given by the writers of the text and

[42] Mosala, 125-53.

there is not a challenge against it. Thus, she raises not only the infamous "Slaves be obedient to your master" (Eph 6:5) but also the prevalence of slavery images in the parables of the "Kingdom of God" in the Synoptic Gospels.[43] It appears, however, that the Black religious tradition has given a pass to such problems within the text. As Orlando Paterson has argued, one cannot expect literature written in the 1st C. CE to challenge such an institution. In fact Patterson states, "…in the first-century Roman imperial world … abolition of slavery wsa intellectually inconceivable, and socially, politically and economically impossible."[44] Such reasoning flies in the fact of the resistance literature found in the biblical text itself, mainly apocalyptic literature. Unfortunately, however, even this genre of biblical literature is problematic in its treatment of slavery and gender,[45] since even in the "New Jerusalem" described in Rev 21:1-22:5 there will be *douloi*, slaves, all the names over the gates and walls are males (names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles), and the extravagant monetary expense expressed in the use of jewels, thus making the work more alter-Empire than contra Empire as Aymer argues.[46] Such arguments giving the 1st century CE texts a pass on their treatments of slavery and gender also go against the resisting tradition of the spirituals and endorse the capitulation strategy promoted in the other stances of the tradition.

---

[43] Mitzi Smith, "Slavery", 16-18.

[44] Orlando Patterson, "Paul, Slavery and Freedom: Personal and Socio-Historical Reflections," in *Slavery in Text and Interpretation,* eds. Allen Dwight Callahan, Richard Horsley, and Abraham Smith, *Semeia* 83/84 (1989), 266..

[45] Tina Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies: The Biblical End of the World in Text and Image* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

[46] Margaret P. Aymer, "Empire, Alter-Empire and the Twenty First Century," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 59 (2004), 140-6.

One notes that this line of reasoning which exonerates the biblical text on the ways in which it supports oppression through its imbedded theologies and ideologies is a mainstay of liberation theologies. As James Evans states,

> For African-American interpreters the Bible was understood as a historical narrative because it provided insight into their experience…The nature of their historical reality, the irony of the experience of slavery, the mystery of their oppression, they found mirrored in the biblical narrative … Materialist or deconstructionist approaches to the biblical text may indeed provide insight into its internal symmetry or the mode of its production, but it must be remembered that the Bible is primarily of …God's liberating and reconciling presence in the created order…[47]

Thus, from this perspective, one should read the text with the hermeneutic that the Bible is helpful and ignore the problems imbedded within the text or explain them away as really being liberative. While this has been, as shown above, a strategy of reading, it is not the only one nor is it one which helps the oppressed resist imperial peace.

One can look at the 10th Commandment to see how one can develop resistant skills and ways in which opposition to these skills are pushed to the rear. As the text reads,

> Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife. Neither shall you desire your neighbor's house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (Deut 5:21)

---

[47] James H. Evans, Jr., *We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 49-52.

As David Clines has correctly pointed out the neighbor in this law is male, since he has a wife. The social class of the neighbor is middle to upper class, since he owns property and slaves. Thus, this law is intended to protect the property rights of the upper class men.[48]

When one points out that the wife in this law is put on the level of being another piece of property of the neighbor, the classic response is, "That is just how it was in those days." In this way, women are encouraged/trained to defend misogynistic texts instead of standing for the dignity of women. By the same token this law notes that the neighbor is a slave holder. Thus, the claim of this text is that slavery is acceptable in the eyes of God, since the collection of laws labeled "The Ten Commandments" begins with the words, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Thus, these laws are presented as coming from the deity and the right of the deity to make such claims is the liberation from Egyptian slavery.[49] Doing so, however, presents a situation where formerly enslaved people are told they can become legitimate slave holders. Perhaps these horrifying parts of this text are the reasons why so many southern states in the US want to put these laws in court houses, since these laws support treating women as property of men and the reinstitution of slavery. Another troubling part of the usage of this text is that in most African Methodist Episcopal Churches this law is recited liturgically every first Sunday. There is no sense of the repulsion of this law with its gender and class biases nor is there a changing of the text as in the spirituals.

---

[48] David Clines, "The Ten Commandments: Reading from Left to Right," in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible,* JSOTSS 205 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press), 26-45.

[49] Jose P. Miranda, *Marx and the Bible* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

One of the Pop Gospel songs which is sung in many Black Protestant churches today is "The Blessing of Abraham." This song ignores that the promise to Abram in Gen 12:1-3 is one of dispossessing land from indigenous inhabitants. Similarly, Abram/Abraham gets rich by twice pimping his wife Sarai/Sarah (Gen 12:10-20; 20:1-18). He also rapes the slave in the family, Hagar (Gen 16:1-8). Thus, the Abram/Abraham cycle is replete with narratives which have the sexual abuse of women's bodies at the core of the plot and the devaluation of indigenous people. The current Pop Gospel song demonstrates that we have moved far away from the spiritual traditions of resisting the oppression in the text and fostering and promoting liberation and political understandings of the faith. Rather the song embraces the text with all of its watts, thereby diminishing the development of a people who can resist imperial peace. The political message of "Steal Away to Jesus" and "There's No Hiding Place" has been jettisoned for a pietism which embraces the oppression of women and a God who sanctions imperialist land grabbing.

In Matt 2:13-15 we find the story of Herod, after the visit of the Magi, deciding to kill the baby boys two years old and under as a way of eliminating a threat to the throne by someone from the lineage of David. In this part of the story an angel comes to Joseph in a dream and tells him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt to avoid the slaughter. This story has for me become a parable of churches today, for there is nothing in the story to say that the angel warned the other parents to save their children. Instead as v. 16 narrates, the infanticide is carried out by Herod. In this parabolic way we see churches today which are more concerned in protecting the image of Jesus and their dogmatic views than protecting the lives of children in the community who are

being recruited by gangs, who are struggling in underfunded schools, who are going to bed hungry, who are killed in drive-bys. It seems the hope expressed to Mary and Martha in both acknowledging their pain and a promised rectifying of the situation is absent from these churches. They have lost the connection to the resisting part of our religious tradition. As Monica Coleman argues they have disremembered the tradition.[50]

While much is made of the so called "Inaugural Sermon of Jesus" in Luke 4:18-19,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

there are some interesting questions regarding how this text may not support "Resisting Imperial Peace." Hendricks calls this the conflation of God's call and Jesus' mission "to proclaim radical economic, social, and political change."[51] In this regard he is following a long tradition of Black religious treatment of this unit both in Black and Latin American Theologies and in the preaching traditions.

There are several intriguing insights in this claim about the text, which is a quotation from Isaiah 61. First, the narrator only states, "He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written…And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down." (Luke 4:17b, 20a). One notes that the narrator never states that Jesus said these words. As Emerson

---

[50] Monica Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

[51] Obery Hendricks, *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of What Jesus Believed and How It Was Corrupted* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 7-8.

Powery, who pointed this out to me, states, this could be a narrative attempt to privilege the reader, where the reader knows more than the other characters in the narrative.

Secondly, some of this language from Isaiah is repeated in Jesus' response to the disciples of John as to whether he is the one or should they look for another. He states,

> "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good new brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." (Lk 7:22a*b*-23)

It is striking that the language of "release to the captives" and "let the oppressed go free" is absent in the speech in ch. 7 as to evidence of whether Jesus is the one hoped for. In addition these phrases are never repeated in Luke or Acts and Jesus is never openly presented as attempting to achieve their ends. While others have written about Jesus as a revolutionary figure fighting against Roman occupation of Judea,[52] such a reading is not gathered from the surface reading of the text. In the Gospels it is the Pharisees and Sadducees who are presented as Jesus' main opponents, not the Roman occupiers. In the Pauline literature, Paul always is traveling north and striving to get to Rome, the seat of the empire. He never goes to Africa. In the fact the surface reading of the text makes formerly enslaved Africans identify more with the Gentiles to whom Paul writes than to the occupied Jews in Jerusalem.[53] This could also help explain why so

---

[52] Richard A. Horsley with John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements at theTime of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985); Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988); W. Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Bailey, "Biblical Basis."

[53] Cf. Abraham Smith, "Paul and African American Biblical Interpetation," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary,* ed. Brian K. Blount (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 31-42.

many Black clergy in the Civil Rights Movement in the US did not support King and why SCLC had to be formed as a haven for Black Clergy who were being dismissed by their churches because of their agitating activities to bring revolutionary change in the US. This is not to say that using the Lk 4:18-19 statement as a liberation claim is not a possible read of the text. It is to say, however, that there is much counter evidence in the text to claim this as a stretch.

Finally in Genesis 19 we get the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The traditional read of this text is that these cities were destroyed because of homosexual activity, which was seen to be rampant in them. The basis of this claim is the request of the men of Sodom, who have surrounded Lot's house to send out the men "so that we may know them" (v. 7b). Lot's response in v. 8, that he would rather send out his daughters for the men of Sodom to do with as they please, gives rise to the claim of homosexual intensions. This reading seems plausible because we have been trained there is a "biblical meaning to the verb 'to know,'" which is sexual and also because Lot's interpretation of the request supports such a reading. The classic LGBT response to this reading is that the sin of Sodom is lack of hospitality and that what is being suggested in this text is sexual assault not male same-gender consensual sex.[54]

There are several problems to be posed to such readings. On the one hand, the only supposed hospitality to be exhibited in this narrative is Lot's offering his daughters to be gang raped. Secondly, there are several places, including in Gen 19:33 and 35, where sexual activity

---

[54] Peter J. Gomes, "The Bible and Homosexuality: The Last Prejudice," in *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1996), 150-52; Daniel A. Helminiak, *What the Bible* Really *Says About Homosexuality* (New Mexico: Alamo Square).

is described and the verb 'to know' is found in the verse, but it is not the verb for sexual activity, so Lot may have misinterpreted the request of the men of Sodom. Third, the plot line found here is used in other narratives in the Bible, such as Gen 12:10-20; Jud 1:12; Ezra 9:2; Est 2:7-11; and 10:3; Lk 1:30-35, where the use or disuse of women's bodies sexually is presented as a means to solve a male problem of perceived threat. Thus, the patriarchal understanding that women's bodies are disposable and should be used as currency to protect males is at the base of the story. Finally, the men of Sodom object to Lot's interpretation of their intentions.

Despite these problems with the "anti-gay reading of the passage," this reading is held as normative in the church and broader society. As noted even the LGBT response buys into parts of the hetero-normative reading. In all the concern for the abuse of women's bodies gets lost in the shuffle around arguing for or against same gender sex. In the process, what could be an alliance between same gender loving people and women who are resisting patriarchy gets lost, because each group is trying to save themselves and not everyone. In this way the empire still wins, for the fractionalizing of the oppressed keeps the empire in control. At the same time, it appears that what groups want to do is to dislocate the view that the biblical text supports their oppression, while at the same time keeping the *authority of the text* in shape. And this may really be the problem. In other words, when one approaches the text as authoritative, then one must find ways to accommodate to it, even when doing so does not move one to liberation from Imperial Peace.

As Renee Harrison so eloquently states,

> The question now is: What is the responsibility of black and womanist religious scholars who are caught in the web of '*I'm stuck/entangled in the Bible and I*

can't get out?' I argue that to break the cycle of oppression, one option is employ a *hermeneutics of rejection* to biblical texts tht suppress African American's wholeness, agency and liberation, and reify oppression.[55]

Conclusion

Empires often use religion as a means of carrying out their oppressive ideologies and practices. They often co-opt indigenous religions and religious practices. While there is a human impulse to be free and liberated, there are other forces which often work against this spiritual quest. At the same time, there are traditions within oppressed groups which work for such liberation, often appealing to religious sources and resources of the Empire to accomplish their goals and desires.

Within the Black Religious Traditions in the US, the spirituals have been shown to be a source for inspiring the hearer/member/agent to seek to deconstruct Imperial Peace in its forms of subjugation. These songs used coded language and often in employing the biblical text, found points of contestation within the text. At these points they "rewrote the text" by combining and collapsing different narratives, so that one reinterpreted the other. They also reframed meanings of symbols and keyed in on the political significance of Jesus as a figure and on his mission as military and political in nature.

I have also argued that this was only one of the forces which was at work in the Black Religious traditions and that contemporaneous with the spirituals were other sources and self understandings which worked in the opposite direction. I have argued how internalized

[55] Renee K. Harrison, "Hagar Ain't Workin', Gimme Me Celie': A Hermeneutic of Rejection and A Risk of Re-appropriation," *USQR* 58/3-4 (2004), 46.

oppression inspired other enslaved Africans to buy into the Empire's understandings of the faith and the traditions. I have also argued how contemporary sources used in Black worship and liturgy follow more this form of understanding than those presented by the spirituals. I have also argued how in a desire to keep the *authority of the text* in place, through the doctrine of the "Bible as the Word of God," so as to support liberative efforts of resistance to Imperial Peace, imbedded ideologies and theologies which are oppressive and found in the text get ignored. The price for this tendency of not exploring, exposing, and resisting these oppressive ideologies, is that the people have found that capitulation to Imperial Peace is more the norm than resistance to Imperial Peace.

The hope is that those forms of resistance which are still imbedded in our traditions and our souls can be reignited. This essay is a small attempt to rekindle that spark which helped to sustain those of us who at our cores are Resistors to Imperial Peace.

Chart 1

Psalm 105:1-15	1 Chron 16:8-34	Ps 96:1-9
O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. 2 Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. 3 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. 4 Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually. 5 Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered, 6 O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones. 7. He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. 8 He is mindful of his covenant forever, of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, 9 the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, 10 which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, 11 saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance." 12 When they were few in number, of little account, and strangers in it, 13 wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people, 14 he allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their account, 15 saying, "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm." 16 When he summoned famine against the land, and broke every staff of bread, 17 he had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave. 18 His feet were hurt with fetters, his neck was put in a collar of iron; 19 until what he had said came to pass, the word of the LORD kept testing him.	O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. 9 Sing to him, sing praises to him, tell of all his wonderful works. 10 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. 1Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his presence continually. 12 Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered, 13 O offspring of his servant Israel, children of Jacob, his chosen ones. 14 He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. 15 Remember his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, 16 the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, 17 which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, 18 saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance." 19 When they were few in number, of little account, and strangers in the land, 20 wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people, 21 he allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their account, 22 saying, "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm." 23 Sing to the LORD, all the earth. Tell of his salvation from day to day. 24 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. 25 For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods. 26 For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. 27 Honor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place. 28 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 29 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come before him. Worship the LORD in holy splendor; 30 tremble before him, all the earth. The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. 31 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, and let them say among the nations, "The LORD is king!" 32 Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. 33 Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. 34 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.	O sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. 3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. 4 For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods. 5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. 6 Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. 7 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts. 9 Worship the LORD in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.