"A Postcolonial Approach to Biblical Pedagogy"

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I. Introduction

Contextual pedagogy, teaching context as text, is not a new idea to religious educators. Both public educators and religious educators emphasize the importance of "connecting students' learning to the context of life and also connecting the realities of present life to a reinterpretation of the texts." Especially, in contemporary biblical pedagogues, the connection between the text and life contexts of participants is regarded as one of the most critical elements. For example, in her book *The Art of Teaching the Bible: A Practical Guide for Adults* (2001), Christine Blair repeatedly highlights that adults learn best when their learning is grounded in life experience. Based on that principle, she presents a biblical pedagogy that connects the text and the life contexts of participants through reinterpreting of the Bible in present realities. A contextual model of the biblical pedagogy is also supported by many biblical scholars, such as Mary A. Tolbert who contributed to the volume, *Teaching the Bible: The Discourse and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy* (1998). These scholars focus on contextual approaches to the Bible, ones that seriously consider the diversity of readers and contexts, especially those individuals who have been marginalized by Western Christianity-led biblical hermeneutics.

This paper explores challenges and implications of postcolonial hermeneutics for biblical pedagogy. First, I introduce and explore fundamental hermeneutical principles of postcolonial biblical criticism. Second, I utilize postcolonial hermeneutics, using the story of Hagar. Third, I make suggestions for a liberative biblical pedagogy.

II. Postcolonial Biblical Hermeneutics

Hermeneutical Principles

Postcolonial biblical critics use a multilayered biblical hermeneutic, one that emphasizes "the demythologization of the biblical authority, the demystification of the use of the Bible, and the construction of new models of interpretation of the Bible" (Kwok, 30). Fernando Segovia, a postcolonial New Testament scholar, for example, pursues such a hermeneutics as he argues that there are three different and equally important worlds that readers of the Bible should

investigate and analyze: the world of the text, the world of modernity, and the world of today (Segovia 2002, 119-132).

First, readers should analyze the world of the Near East or of the Mediterranean Basin in which the Bible was written and edited. This was a world of colonial empires, those of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The political, economic, cultural, and religious dynamics in those empires between centralized power or authority, and those without power, heavily influenced the production of the Bible. Questions about culture, ideology, and power are *sine qua non* (*quibus*, really) for understanding the text. For example, in a study of the People of God, it is crucial to analyze the power relationship between Israel and the Near Eastern Colonial Empire.

According to Biblical Archaeologists whose research defines contemporary biblical scholarship's debates on the origin of Israel,[1] the biblical depiction of the rise of early Israel, such as stories of the Patriarchs, Exodus, and Conquest, was re-cast by the Deuteronomic historians to serve their ideology and historical-national convictions. Based on excavation, the survey of material culture, especially pottery and architecture, ecological data and ethnographic studies of Palestine, biblical archaeologists present several new perspectives on the origin of Israel (Finkelstein 1988; 1998; 2001): First, the formation and settlement of Israel was a gradual one starting from the 16th century BCE. Second, the confederating process was a regional phenomenon. Most settlers were indigenous nomads who sparsely inhabited frontier zones that were suitable for pasturage, such as the Transjordanian plateau, the Jordan Valley, the desert fringe and the hill country. Although some of the settlers were from outside of the country including the eastern desert and the coastal plain, the majority of the settlers were local nomads, ones that had a symbiotic relationship with the city dwellers in Canaan (Finkelstein 1988, 332-335).[2] Although pottery types and architectural structures found in the Canaanite cities and the hill regions show a certain connection between the two, their distinctive features do not support the peasant revolutionary model. Third, the biblical depiction of the origin of early Israel, such as Exodus and Conquest, constituted a "mythical memory of a Golden age" produced by orthodox, nationalist reform parties during the Assyrian crisis in the brief reign of Josiah, late in Judah's history (Finkelstein and Silverman 2001, 123-145).

Therefore, it is crucial for Bible readers to ask and analyze why the Deuteronomic historians idealized the Exodus. What was Israel's political situation relative to Near Eastern powers? Why did they choose an invasion story to express their visions and beliefs? By asking these questions, we can better understand the world of the text while also demythologizing -- contextualizing -- what would appear to be the Bible's reverence for centralized power (Kwok, 30).

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1 A private conversation with Dr. Jeffrey Kuan, Professor of Hebrew Bible and Dr. Aaron Brody, Professor of Bible and Archaeology at Pacific School of Religion on November 11, 2003. For detailed debates among the four approaches (the Military Conquest Theory, the Peasant Revolution Theory, the Peaceful Infiltration Theory and Archaeological Approach), see Israel Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 1988).

2 Finkelstein says that approximately 10% of ancient Palestine's population had always been pastoral nomads who he considers ancestors of later Israel.

The second world that Bible readers should examine, according to Segovia, is the world of modernity which dominates biblical readings and interpretations. He particularly urges readers to pay attention to the expansion of Western imperialism, which is one of Western Christianity's attendant spirits.

From the early mercantile phase of European imperialism of the 15th century to the Western empire-building era of the 19th century, to the contemporary capitalist stage of high imperialism, Western imperialistic traditions and Christian missionary movements traveled hand-in-hand. Missionaries, who were protected by the empire, justified foreign domination as God's will. Relying on texts like the Exodus, many Christian missionaries entered and took the lands of non-Christian Asians, Africans and Native Americans either to convert them, or to promote self-serving claims of superiority and election (Dube 2000, 17). For example, most American Protestant missionaries, who came to Korea in the 19th century, identified American civic religion and its life style with Christianity, and taught Koreans to follow American ways of life as examples of Christian living.[3] In short, the text not only has its own historical world and environment, but also "travels in the world and participates in history, continuing to write its story far beyond its original context and readers" (Dube 2000, 17).

So in biblical pedagogy it is essential to analyze how the West reads and interprets the Bible, and to study the Bible's modern day interpreters' socio-political-economic assumptions. As Kwok Pui-lan writes, we must seek to demystify the Bible (Kwok, 30). This arguably takes hermeneutics a step beyond demythologization, for it requires a heightened level of suspicion about the text, its culture, one's own culture, one's own biases, and postmodernism. This segues to my next point.

The third world that we should take into consideration is the world of today's readers. Segovia points out that the reality of imperialism and colonialism is never imposed or accepted passively. Admittedly, there are people who readily accept Western domination, but there also are those who rail against imperialism. By analyzing how contemporary readers engage with the Bible and interpretations, we place the Bible in the context of their life situations, and investigate the dynamics of the center and margin among themselves. In short, in biblical pedagogy the analysis of the reality of the readers' world and their reactions are as important as the worldview(s) of the Bible's writers.

Echoing Segovia, Musa Dube offers a similar hermeneutical methodology, one with a feminist perspective (Dube 2000, 3-21). Since the Bible was written in imperialist contexts, interpreted by Western imperialists, and used to colonize readers' minds, Dube insists that the essential task of biblical criticism is to decolonize the Bible and its readers. Methodologically, she focuses attention on seven areas of inquiry: 1) Whether the lands in the Bible are empty, unoccupied, and waiting to be discovered (Land); 2) whether the text legitimizes white imperialism, and the victimization of other races (Race); 3) whether the Bible endorses unequal power, and the distribution of land based on race (Power); 4) whether there is biblical authority for Westerners to invade and take non-Christians' lands (Readers); 5) whether modern-day

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3 I have discussed this matter in detail in somewhere else. See my "From a Margin Within the Margin: Rethinking The dynamics of Christianity and Culture from a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective," *Journal of Theologies and Cultures in Asia* 3 (2004), pp. 3-23.

notions about the text prevent Westerners from understanding imperialism, its nature and its scope (International Connections); 6) whether biblical texts have any relevance to the modern political world (Contemporary History and Liberation); 7) whether the Bible only imagines women as oppressed voiceless victims rather than as the subjects of their life, albeit a harsh one (Gender).

Utilizing above categories, Dube analyzes imperial messages explicitly and implicitly reflected in the Gospel of Matthew (Dube 1998, 224-246). After the temple's destruction in 70 C.E., Matthean community had to come up with survival strategies in the Roman Empire by distinguishing itself from its winning rival, the Pharisees-led Jewish community. Matthew tried hard to present the Christian community as something not dangerous to the order of the Roman Empire. Therefore compared to the Pharisees, readers find that Matthew's contention for imperial power is not strong at all to the extent that it was almost condoned: "the Matthean Pilate is absolved from the guilt of crucifying Jesus, while his wife is characterized as a divine instrument who receives dreams regarding the innocence of Jesus" (Dube 1998, 231). That is, while victims of the imperial power such as Mary, the mother of Jesus is almost invisible and silent, imperial figures are portrayed as divine instruments. Dube also argues that Jesus' commission in Matthew 28:19-20, commonly known as the Great Commission is completely resonating with the territorial expansion policy of the Roman Empire (Dube 1998, 230-232). When Christianity became the state religion of Rome and later empires, the Great Commission was often used for religious justification of imperial expansion and domination.

In short, like Segovia, Dube suggests a multidimensional biblical hermeneutic that conjoins the sociopolitically complicated imperial world of the Bible, the politically motivated interpretations of the West, with today's readers and their life situations.

A New Understanding of the Authority of the Bible

The above postcolonial hermeneutical principles seem to diminish the authority of the Bible. However, according to postcolonial critics, it depends on how one understand the authority, and they, along with feminist and postmodern critics, suggest a different view of the authority of the Bible: a dialogical and contextual view.

In her book *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, feminist theologian Sandra Schneiders points out that when the term authority is used, it always involves two parts: a claim to be addressed and someone who must respond to it (Schneiders, 55-57). In other words, authority presupposes certain relationships whether it is power-laden or not. Differentiating unilateral and absolute authority from dialogical and relative authority, Schneiders contends that unilateral and absolute authority is coercive, and demands obedience and assent from its addressees. It imposes someone's will on someone else. For the one-who-is-addressed, to hear the claim means to recognize the absolute necessity to carry out the other's command. Here only the one who claims jurisdiction and, hence, authority has the power to make final decisions.

On the contrary, dialogical and relative authority invites the addressee to commitment and engagement. The authority invites respondents to investigate the truthfulness and morality of claims before making any commitments. Therefore, the validity of the claim is tested and

evidences for the authority of claims are pursued. The validity of the claim is not permanent because whenever new evidence is presented, the credibility and authenticity of a claim can be overturned. Schneiders argues that the authority of the Bible is a relative and dialogical one; it calls for commitment and engagement rather than imposing obedience. It does not use physical force or intimidation, but, rather, it arouses reaction from the depth of one's being.

The relative and dialogical authority means that scripture is also contextual (Bird, 36): it is relative to particular situations and relationships. Depending on contexts and audiences with different needs and expectations, the same person, the same statement, and the same institution may have different types and degrees of authority. This means that the Bible has different meanings when it is addressed to people living in different situations. Their culture, social class, political situation, religious backgrounds, and life experiences provide different tools thus to understand and interpret the Bible. The authority of the Bible does not and cannot remain the same to one and all. It should change through time and is also subject to new social, historical and cultural interpretations as human consciousness evolves. Hence, David Scott argues that the authority of the Bible should be understood in the context of God's relationships to all God's people(s) -- the church and the world (Scott, 13).   In sum, the contextual and dialogical approach to the authority challenges the Bible's normative or authoritative status upheld by traditional biblical pedagogues.

Postcolonial scholars emphasize that such a view of authority is especially important for the pedagogy of the marginalized. It highlights God's justice and love for all people by lifting up the silenced voices; it analyzes their struggles for self-determination by problematizing the authority of the text, one which sometimes suggests that they are lesser beings, and by emphasizing the importance of readers' responses -- the contexts of the text and its writers' hermeneutics: "texts point beyond their origin, inviting their readers to act them out in history and cross-culturally" (Dube 1997, 11). The Bible is a sacred book not because of its infallibility, but because of God's presence and life-giving messages for all people, persons living in all sorts of different and challenging situations.

Implications of Postcolonial Hermeneutics for the Biblical Pedagogy

The above postcolonial biblical methodology suggests several implications for a liberating biblical pedagogy, especially for the marginalized. First, religious educators should recognize that the Bible is a culturally conditioned book whose authority is not absolute, but, rather, it is contextual and dialogical. This means that the Bible invites contemporary Christians to reinterpret it relative to modern day realities. The contents of religious education should not only include discussion about culture, but it also should engage cultural traditions. The educational methods should be culturally appropriate, in other words. The question that Christian religious educators should ask is not whether the Bible is literally binding; rather it is how best to bring God's life-giving message to God's people in their own culture, time, and place.

Second, Christian scripture is not the one-and-only, but it is one text among several. To many marginalized, especially those who are living in non-Christian contexts, other religions have been dominant for much longer than Christianity, and have greatly influenced the

formation of people's minds. Without considering other faith traditions' perspectives, true transformation cannot happen. Tolbert asserts that the Christian cannot and should not insist on a "special hermeneutic" for the Bible, one that exempts it from the same type of scrutiny given to non-Christian texts (Tolbert, 168-189).

Third, religious education should challenge the universalizing forms of Western models inasumch as their assumptions and biases sometimes present a limited worldview. This task includes challenging Western colonial theology that often identifies Western theories with the Gospel. This task requires religious educators to be familiar with the history of Western colonialism and its influence on doctrines of biblical authority and the development of biblical hermeneutics such as historical, literary, and cultural criticism.

Fourth, religious education should be a countercultural discipline, paying special attention to the hidden and neglected voices both in church and society. The Bible has been both "bread and stone" for the marginalized, such as for women. For example, to teach women about the Bible, the Korean church and the missionaries provided modern education for women that was good. However with the same Bible, the church also decreed that women are lesser beings than their male counterparts, and so they cannot take leadership positions in the church. The voices and contributions of women and the poor, those who are in a margin within the margin, are critical for religious education's pursuit of truth, liberation and justice. Any biblical pedagogy that purports to be a liberative one should critically examine whether the pedagogy brings justice and peace to the most marginalized in society.

Fifth, religious education needs to analyze social ordering such as hierarchy, factionalism, and sexism, that effectively support oppression. Religious education needs to provide counter hegemonic tools and views so that Christians can learn to challenge imperialistic and oppressive Western traditions. The church needs to train its members to be conscious of social ordering, and to analyze how power is utilized and by whom.

Sixth, bringing hermeneutics of decolonization to the reading and study of the Bible is key to understanding the text, which was written in imperial contexts, and has power dynamics between ancient empires and Israel, and Israel's reactions and responses to power. As in the above analyses of Israel's origins and Matthew's Gospel, power dynamics influenced both content and rhetoric, effectively decreeing imperial policy. Without analyzing such implicit imperialism in its historical context, a truly liberative biblical pedagogy is not possible.

II. A Praxis of Postcolonial Biblical Pedagogy

What would the postcolonial biblical pedagogy look like in praxis? Here I present a postcolonial analysis of the story of Hagar, a story which addresses the place of one who lives in the margins of the margins, and make several suggestions for a liberative biblical pedagogy in faith communities.

Reclaiming Hagar's Name: A View from a Margin Within the Margin

A Critical Reflection on Traditional and Feminist Interpretations of Genesis 16

A Critique of Traditional Androcentric Interpretations

The story of Hagar in Genesis 16 has not been a main concern of scholars. The story has been regarded as only an incident in the larger Abraham story. Although Hagar is the only figure in the chapter who experiences dialogue with YHWH, many scholars focus on Abraham rather than Hagar. They regard the delay of God's promise of descendants to Abraham as the central theme of the story, and deal with characters other than Abraham peripherally (Von Rad 1961, 186). As a result, Hagar is often neglected or described solely as either Abraham's concubine or as a rebellious slave of Sarah who jeopardizes God's promise to Abraham. By accentuating the status of Hagar as a concubine or slave, scholars often ignore the profound religious experiences Hagar had with God.

Moreover, even when scholars deal with Hagar's religious experiences, their focus is on Ishmael rather than on Hagar. Even though Hagar was the first person who named God and the first woman who received the promise of descendants from God, the significance of Hagar's religious experience is hardly considered by those scholars. This attitude toward Hagar is well reflected by how these scholars reference her story: "Hagar. Ishmael's Birth" (Von Rad); "The Initiation Legend of Ishmael" (White); "The Child of Maid Servant" (Scullion); "Annunciation of Ishmael" (Coats); "The Birth of Ishmael" (Speiser); "The Promise to Ishmael" (Brueggemann). To these interpreters, Hagar is solely a wet-nurse, the mother of Ishmael.

Both groups of scholars are also very hard on Sarah. Even though God promised a son to Abraham, Sarah took the promise into her own hands. Sarah's initiative in circumventing the promise brought conflict to the household of Abraham (Gunkel, 185; Brueggeman, 151-153; Alter, 49). As a result, God's promise was jeopardized. Even though Sarah tried to follow the customs of that time and to protect her legal rights, most scholars describe her as an unfaithful servant of God, or as a jealous wife and merciless mistress. They miss the positive sides of Sarah: Actively resolving her problem; taking charge on the issue of offspring at the cost of sharing her husband with another woman; not backing away from issues that needed to be addressed. In sum, while scholars characterize Abraham positively in spite of his ambiguous and minor role in the story, they are very hard on both Sarah and Hagar. Between these two stubborn women, scholars insist that Abraham plays a woebegone role -- even though these two women play significant parts in the story, these androcentic scholars are only interested in Abraham. Arguably, the fact that women play a significant role at all in the 16th chapter, may make these scholars indifferent to Hagar and Sarah (The New Interpreter's Bible, vol 1, 454, hereafter NIB).

A Critique of Feminist Interpretations

Feminist biblical scholars challenge traditional androcentric interpretations of Genesis 16. They criticize androcentric interpreters for not paying attention to Hagar's experience in the desert. Hereto they emphasize that Hagar is the first woman in Genesis to be encountered by the angel of the Lord and the first person to name God in the Hebrew Bible. Additionally, Hagar is the first woman to receive the promise of descendants from God. Through this emphasis on the experience of Hagar, feminist biblical scholars help the reader to see the

significance of Hagar: that the story is primarily about her, and only incidentally is it about Abraham. To wit, the story in Genesis 16 is not a story about a patriarch, but, rather, it is a story about an oppressed "woman who complicated the history of salvation" (Tames). Or as Patricia Shelly writes, it is not a story about Ishmael's birth; rather it is a story of "Hagar and the God-Who-Sees" (Shelly: 265-268).

Moreover, feminist scholars interpret Hagar's attitude after pregnancy, not as a rebellion, but as an awakening experience (Trible, 12). Incident to pregnancy, Hagar experienced a new vision -- she newly realized her importance and dignity. Consequently and in sharp opposition to the legal customs of that time, Hagar insisted on her equality. And when she realized that these were unattainable, she emancipated herself -- she thereby refused to undergo the harsh treatment of Sarah.

Despite the contributions of feminist scholars, there also are some problems in their interpretations. Most feminists, especially Phyllis Trible, interpret the story based on the power which Sarah, the mistress, has over a slave, Hagar. Trible portrays Hagar as a powerless victim, and Sarah as a powerful, uncaring victimizer. Based on power dynamics, like traditional patriarchal interpreters, Trible negatively evaluates Sarah. Sarah the Hebrew is married, rich, and free. Hagar the Egyptian is single, poor, and a slave. Power belongs to Sarah. She is the subject of action -- the one who acts. On the other hand, powerlessness characterizes Hagar, the object. Hence, Sarah arguably abuses her power over the defenseless Hagar. Sarah is jealous of the young fertile surrogate of her husband and attacks her.

Herewith Hagar experiences a new vision of herself, while Sarah remains within the old structure and rejects Hagar's epiphany. Sarah is portrayed as a woman who gains power through her wealthy, powerful husband, but abuses that power over another powerless woman. In short, Trible reduces this story to the victimization of Hagar --which is clearly a story dynamic, but it does not put the victimization of Sarah in the broader context of the story, which is an ancient patriarchal society.

This dichotomous analysis of two women is itself a patriarchal pattern of thinking (see Exum, 67). Trible sees the story as that of class dichotomy, so she fails to appreciate Sarah's efforts to protect her rights in a patriarchal world. By reducing the problem of victimization to one of class (i.e., the haves v. the have-nots), Trible victimizes Sarah who ironically is also a victim of a patriarchal system. Alternatively, if Hagar experiences a new vision and tries to keep her vision through emancipation, Sarah asserts her own rights and tries to protect them within the social structure (Teubal 1990, 76-81).

Even though Genesis 16 as a whole is a story about Hagar, it is also a significant story about Sarah. It is not just a story about two jealous women seeking approval from their husband, nor is it a story about conflict between two stubborn women from different social classes. Instead it is a story of two courageous women trying to reach self-realization. The conflict between the two women inevitably resulted from the patriarchal social structure which prevented them from realizing themselves.

A Reinterpretation of Genesis 16: A Story of Two Matriarchs

Introduction to the Story

1) The Story within the Larger Context

The story is located in the larger story about the promises of God to Abraham. The promise of descendants made by God in Genesis 12 has not been fulfilled yet. According to Hugh White and Savina Tuebal, the story of Hagar is originally from an Ishmaelite tradition (White: 305; Teubal 1990, 18). For several theological and political reasons, the author adopted, developed, and inserted the story of Hagar in the middle of the Abraham series.

With this insertion, the author could explain the motif of the delayed fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. Through this story, the author emphasizes that Ishmael is the fruit of the unfaithful. Although through Hagar, Abraham had a son, Ishmael is not the promised one; rather Sarah's offspring marks fulfillment by God of the promise.

Moreover, to provide this motif of delayed fulfillment of God's promise, the author also explains the presence of Ishmaelites in the desert and emphasizes implicitly that God gave Canaan to the descendants of Abraham, while the Ishmaelites have to live in the desert (Van Dyk: 305; Waters, 197). Hence, the Israelites, who are the descendants of the promise, are superior to the Ishmaelites.

The story was drawn mainly from P and J, and was redacted during and after the Babylonian Exile. According to Daniel Harrington, the writings from the postexilic and intertestamental periods emphasize particular commandments (such as prohibition of mixed marriages, circumcision of males, etc.). Thus they should be understood as late nationalistic efforts to forge a cohesive identity after the loss of political power to outsiders. In other words, comments and commandments about foreigners should be understood as part of a corporate identity crisis, rather than as per se antagonism toward non-Jews (Harrington,11-12).

2) Socio-cultural Backgrounds

In ancient times a woman's self-worth and social status were provided through her family; namely, through the reputation of her husband and, more importantly, through her offspring, particularly males. Childless women lacked dignity and respect (Weems, 2). They were subject to disgrace and even grievous wrongs. However, there was a legitimate way to avoid such difficulties and shame: the wife could give her husband her own personal maid. A wife's maid was not available to her husband as a concubine in the same way his own female slaves were. In this case, the child born of the maid would be considered the wife's child. Regarding this matter, there are various Near Eastern texts illustrating the legal background out of which Genesis 16:1-6 may have come. An adoption text from fifteenth century *Nuzi (east of the Tigris River)* says:

> If Gilimninu bears children, Shennima shall not take another wife. But if Gilimninu fails to bear children, Gilimninu shall get for Shennima a woman from the Lullu country (i.e., a slave girl) as concubine. In that case, Gilimninu herself shall have authority over the offspring (Speiser, 120).

The husband may not marry again if his wife has children. However, if the union proves to be childless, the wife is required to provide a woman to produce the offspring, and she will have all legal rights to the offspring. The Hammurapi code also provides a legal solution for conflicts between the barren wife and the slave girl (Hammurapi's Code, § 146):

> A priestess of the *naditum* rank, who was free to marry but not to bear children, gives her husband a slave girl in order to provide him with a son. If the concubine then tries to arrogate to herself a position of equality with her mistress, the wife shall demote her to her former status of slave; but she may not sell her to others (Speiser, 120).

The slave girl who bears an offspring to her mistress cannot share equality with her mistress.

Analysis and Interpretation

> vv. 1-2 *Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant[shifhah] whose name was Hagar..."Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her."... and gave her to her husband Abram as concubine.*

The story begins with the statement of a problem, namely Sarah's barrenness. As stated above, in the ancient patriarchal society, women's barrenness meant loss of dignity, loss of self-worth, and heaps of shame regardless of one's social status. Sarah was in this shameful situation. Sarah had two options to resolve it (Hamilton, 445): 1) to remain barren for the remainder of her life, tolerating shame, or until YHWH changed her circumstances; 2) to present her own maid, Hagar, to Abraham who would bear children on her behalf. Sarah chose the second option. Since the author of the story does not mention Sarah's reasoning, we do not know what made her choose the second option.

Additionally, Sarah could have interpreted her situation theologically: that God had promised Abraham offspring, but not necessarily by her (Hamilton, 445). So to accomplish the promise, Sarah made a self-sacrificing move, offering her maid, Hagar, to Abraham. However, Sarah also certainly knew that the son born of Hagar would be regarded as that of Sarah. So Sarah took the initiative with her husband, taking charge on the issue of offspring.

> v.3 *So Sarai, Abram's wife, took her maid [shifhah], Hagar the Egyptian...and gave her to her husband Abram as concubine.*

In the story, Hagar is introduced as a *shifhah* of Sarah. Although many scholars translate *shifhah* as slave, *shifhah* is not an ordinary household slave, but, rather, she is the living, breathing property of her mistress. In ancient times, there were two different kinds of female slavery (Teubal 1990, 53-54). Female slaves of men always became concubines at the whim of their masters. However, the slaves of women or *shifhah* did not become the concubine of the husband unless the wife permitted this.

Some wives had female slaves who were their own property. These were generally purchased for them or presented to them before their marriage. They could not become the husband's concubines without their mistresses' permission, which was sometimes granted (as in the case of Hagar); but seldom was this done (Skinner, 285).

So Hagar the *shifhah* of Sarah was legally given to Abraham to bear a son for Sarah. However, according to legal customs (*Nuzi Text* and *Hammurapi Code*), Hagar did not have any legal rights over her own child and his upbringing.

Although Sarah gave her *shifhah*, Hagar, to Abraham as a concubine, Hagar was not a conventional concubine (Hamilton 445-446; Westerman, 124). The Hebrew word for concubine is *pileges,* which is used to refer to the concubines of Caleb, Gideon, Saul, David, Solomon, and Rehoboam. To distinguish the first wife from the concubine, the word *'issa* is used for the wife. *Pileges* and *'issa* are distinct terms and one never represents the other.

However, in Genesis both *pileges* and *'issa* are used to describe Hagar, Keturah, and Bilhah. They are described as "concubine-wife." For instance, while Genesis 16:3 calls Hagar Abraham's *'issa*, Genesis 25:6 calls Hagar Abraham's *pileges*. Unlike the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures, where women are either wives or concubines, these three women evidently are concubine-wives. So unlike traditional interpretations, Hagar was neither a slave, nor was she a conventional concubine of Abraham. Instead she was a *shifhah* of Sarah, and the concubine-wife of Abraham. Her function was to bear a son for her mistress.

> vv. 4-5 *When she[Hagar] saw that she had conceived, her mistress was lowered in her esteem - And Sarai said to Abram, "The wrong done me is your fault! - The Lord decide between you and me!"*

According to the legal customs, the offspring born of Hagar was Sarah's own. Moreover, Sarah would remain in a higher position than Hagar in the household. However, after pregnancy, Hagar's attitude toward Sarah changed. Renita Weems sees that the pregnancy awakened something in Hagar: her sense of self-worth -- her sense of purpose and direction (Weems, 5). Whatever the reason, Hagar could no longer see her relationship to Sarah her mistress in the same way as before. This change in Hagar threatened Sarah.

In her appeal to Abraham regarding the change of Hagar's attitude toward her, Sarah uses legal terminology, *hamasi aleka* ("the wrong done me is your fault"). The Hebrew word *hamas,* which is the root word of *hamasi*, is a strictly legal term denoting lawlessness and injustice (Teubal 1990, 78). Sarah was not simply complaining about the new situation introduced into her household, but she was invoking her legal rights.

Applying the above legal codes of the time, we can think of three possible conflicts between Sarah and Hagar. First, after her pregnancy Hagar could have insisted on mothering the child she was bearing, contrary to legal custom and Sarah's expectation. Arguably Hagar thought that God would bless her with a son, and she was not going to renounce her right to him and give him to her former mistress, Sarah. In this situation, Sarah invoked her legal rights to the child using legal phraseology.

Second, we can also guess that Sarah's motivation was to keep her status relative to Hagar. The Hammurapi Code states explicitly that a slave who becomes a concubine must not claim equality with her mistress. After her pregnancy, however, Hagar might have claimed equal status with Sarah. Then she would no longer be a *shifhah*; rather she would be the pregnant wife of Abraham, and thus destined with him in the completion of God's promise (Tames, 9). When this young and fertile concubine-wife of her husband insisted on equality with Sarah, Sarah -- the old and barren wife -- certainly must have felt threatened. Thus by invoking her legal rights, Sarah tried to protect her status.

According to Speiser, Sarah was not only appealing to Abraham but also accusing him of depriving her of rights: "The same force is reflected in the Akkadian verb *habalum* to deprive someone of his[her] legal rights" (Speiser, 117). Although Abraham's infraction is not clearly defined, Sarah's appeal to Abraham indicates that his behavior generated Hagar's claim to motherhood and equal status. In verse 6, Abraham seems to admit his responsibility and his lack of authority over Sarah's legal rights: "Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right."

In spite of his power as patriarch, Abraham acknowledges passively Sarah's appeal, and accedes to the legal authority which Sarah invokes.

In any case, whether Sarah was invoking her legal rights to motherhood, or trying to maintain a higher status, or both, the conflict between Sarah and Hagar was not because of mutual jealousy for Abraham's approval. Instead it was a conflict between two women who realized self-dignity, a personal quality which was discouraged in a patriarchal world. In spite of legal prohibitions, each woman required her rights to her own child *and* equality. In each instance, the women dared to appeal to the patriarch to protect their respective legal rights. In a nutshell, the conflict between them was inevitable in a society dominated by a patriarchal legal system.

> v. 6b *Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she ran away from her.*

The Hammurapi Code's existence probably suggests that Sarah knew her legal rights and thus reduced Hagar to her former position as *shifhah* and afflicted her. However, the law did not permit Sarah to send Hagar away. Thus Sarah treated Hagar harshly (*'innah)* to the extent that Hagar fled in spite of all the dangers of the desert (Skinner, 285). Hagar, who realized her dignity and experienced freedom for a short time, might have rejected her position as a second class citizen. Thus there were only two alternatives left to her: she could subject herself to utter humiliation or die in the desert. Hagar chose the latter. Hagar emancipated herself from Sarah's hand and took her future and her child into her own hands and fled toward her home in Egypt, fully realizing that she was putting her own life in danger (Westermann, 125).

> vv. 9-10 *And the angel of the Lord said to her, "Go back to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment." And the angel of the Lord said to her," I will increase your offspring, And they shall be too many to count."*

This command of God in v. 9 is a controversial verse among scholars. Many scholars avoid interpreting this verse, saying that verse 9 is not an original part of the story. For example, Westermann insists that verse 9 is a harmonizing insertion by a redactor, who found it necessary because chapter 21 presupposes the presence of Hagar and Ishmael with Abraham and Sarah (Westerman, 126). Many other scholars think that verse 9 is not an original part of the story because the command to Hagar in 16:9 to return to Sarah contradicts verse 11: "And the Angel of the Lord said to her, Now you have conceived and bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael, for the Lord has given heed to your affliction."

To many feminist scholars, the command of God in v. 9 has been a controversial verse too. Focusing on patriarchal revisions of biblical texts, they regard verse 9 as a divine word of terror (Trible, 16), or a legitimization of oppression in biblical texts (Fischer 1994, 79). For example, defining the story of Hagar as one of the stories of terror in the Bible, Trible says that in the Hagar story, "Suffering undercuts hope. A sword pierces Hagar's own soul. The divine promise of Ishmael means life at the boundary of consolation and desolation" (Trible 17)

Trible regards God's command to Hagar as a divine word of terror to the abused woman Hagar. While I agree with Trible and other feminist scholars that there are many examples of misogyny in the Bible, I also see limitations in their interpretation of the Hagar story, especially incident to the divine command to Hagar in verse 9.

If the story of Hagar were to end at verse 9, as with feminist interpretations, we might see the command as a divine word of terror. But the story does not end there. The divine command is followed by the promise of descendants to Hagar. The angel of the Lord said to her, "I will greatly increase your offspring, and they shall be too many to count" (v.10). Instead of following through on the curse, God responded to Hagar's affliction and made promises to her (vv.10-12) (NIB, 452). If Hagar would follow through on bearing the child for Abram, the possibilities for a future of non-oppression would thereby be opened up for her own family. For that future, Hagar and the child would be saved. At the moment, the only way to accomplish that was not in the desert, but by returning to the house of Sarah and Abram: Ishmael was not born yet, and the first three years of a child's life are crucial. Hagar simply must wait a little longer. Salvation for Hagar must take the form of waiting, but she also knew that God sees and hears the afflicted, and so she took comfort in the knowledge that God keeps God's promises (NIB, 453).

> vv. 11-14 *The angel of the Lord said to her further, "Behold, you are with child and shall bear a son -- and she called the Lord who spoke to her, "You Are El-roi, by which she meant, Have I not gone on seeing after He saw me!"*

To ensure the realization of this promise, Hagar would of course have to ensure the life of her son. And God guaranteed all of this to her, announcing ahead of time the baby's name; what he would be; and what he would do in history (Trible 16; Neff: 57-59; Tames, 15). Ishmael would grow, according to the annunciation, and would be a "wild ass of a man," one who would not be dominated, or domesticated (Tames, 16-17). Neither would he be a slave

like Hagar; rather he would be free in the desert. His hand would be against all, and all would be against him, but he could succeed in erecting his tent before all his siblings. All this confirmed the fact that God had responded to Hagar's suffering. So Hagar became the first woman in the Bible to be given the promise of numerous descendants (NIB, 454).

Hagar responded to God with a trusting spirit and faith. She recognized the angel of the Lord as the voice of God, and publicly confessed that God had come to her rescue -- "You Are *El-roi*, a God of seeing." Hagar named the God whom she encountered through the messenger, "The God who saw me in my distress" (Westermann, 126).

This name of God, *El-Roi* occurs nowhere else in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is Hagar's name for God, born of her own experience: that of having been given a future and a new hope, so this God gets a brand new name. Thus again, Hagar became the only person in the Hebrew Scriptures to name God (NIB, 454). Moreover, Hagar's confession and naming tell us that God has not exclusively committed Godself to Abraham-Sarah; rather God heard (the meaning of Ishmael) Hagar in misery and saw her suffering. God appeared to Hagar, conversed with her, and made promises to her that approximate those given to Abraham.

In sum, the story in Genesis 16 is a story about Hagar and her far-reaching future. It tells us how the descendants of Hagar began. It also teaches us that the descendants of Hagar are the promised people of God, like the children of Abraham and Sarah. Moreover, even though this story is primarily about Hagar, it also gives us significant insight into Sarah. It is a story about two courageous ancient women who realized and made efforts to keep their dignity in a patriarchal society.

The Story of Hagar and Its New Messages

What does the above reinterpretation of Hagar's story propose for the contemporary Christians? What new messages do readers find in the story interpreted from the perspective of postcolonialism?

The story of Hagar is a story about courageous people and their struggles. The story of Hagar can empower the reader, especially the marginalized, to realize and cherish their own importance, and to name God's place and future in and for their own lives. By reinterpreting the text, the marginalized can develop a critical social acumen and challenge the status quo.

The story of Hagar, which is also a legend of the origin of Ismaelites, can be utilized to emphasize the importance of non-Christian cultural stories as sources for Christian religious education. Other religious scriptures (e.g., folk tales, myth, and legends) can be helpful hermeneutical resources for Christians to reinterpret and to understand the Bible in their contexts. Without respecting one's own cultural stories, Christians cannot be "authentic" Christians since God calls all Christians to be faithful to God somewhere, which necessarily presumes a cultural setting.

The story of Hagar challenges Christian indifference to social injustice. It is a story of an outgroup member, Hagar being encountered and called by God. Hagar, a complete outgroup member -- a woman and a foreign maid -- is the first woman to encounter God in person, and the first person to name God. Her story clearly shows that God lifts up and works with the

marginalized, which in turn plainly shows that no one is an outgroup member to God: that God's social order is all encompassing and ours should be too.

In short, the story of Hagar reinterpreted from and by the margin, is a story that highlights the importance of each person in God's reign; it is a story that respects one's own cultural roots, and it is a story that challenges the status quo.

III. The Pedagogical Challenges of Postcolonial Biblical Hermeneutics

What are some of the challenges of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics?

First, Postcolonial biblical scholarship challenges pedagogy to remember that the purpose of Christian religious education is not to manufacture Western cultures abroad; but to fulfill the reign of God on earth where no one is marginalized. If justice, peace, grace, and divine will that we teach about does not address the least of these, it is a false justice, one that solely serves the interests of the powerful. Any biblical pedagogy that claims to be a liberative and just, therefore, should be one that causes critical social awareness so that people analyze and challenge the status quo. Hagar sweepingly challenged her culturally mandated role as a woman, a servant and as a foreigner.

Second, To bring justice and peace to the most marginalized, it is crucial to analyze colonial power dynamics of the text itself. Since the Bible was written in the ancient imperial world, without analyzing and challenging power dynamics, true liberation is not possible. The text itself can perpetuate marginalization of the already marginalized. The role of a good pedagogy is to find what is God's life-giving message in the text. The above analysis presents Hagar as integral to God's story of salvation – God first names God, which suggests that her role is pretty important in God's unfolding plan of salvation.

Third, a liberative biblical pedagogy should be one that respects people's own culture(s) and other religions. We contemporary Christians live in a multi-religious world. Other religious scriptures, folk tales, myth, and legends can be helpful hermeneutical resources for Christians to reinterpret and to understand the Bible anew. In short, multi-religious or multi-scriptual hermeneutics should be encouraged .

Fourth, a liberative biblical pedagogy should help each person realize her or his importance. Personhood easily gets lost to conformity. Thus, biblical stories that highlight both the communal nature of human existence and the importance of personhood are essential. Moreover, it is important for religious educators to use the voices of the hidden and ignored characters of the Bible. These have special appeal -- stories about those in the margin, who nevertheless prevail against the status quo and eventually have their stories canonized. After all, the Bible is a culturally conditioned book that carries heavy socio-political-economic agenda within it. "Demythologizing" the authority of the Bible and "demystifying" western interpretations should be two crucial principles for pedagogues to remember. Part of this process is to reassess the role of albeit lesser known biblical figures, ones who nevertheless and with God's grace prevail against tremendous odds.

Ultimately the goal here is to rename our lives and our world relative to a God whose hopes and dreams are ever unfolding. The tension is always between readily accepting

doctrine, dogma and their dominant interpretations, or thinking out loud again, and again, out of which new insights about God, community and our world arise. Here I am reminded of Thomas H. Groome's comments about the power of naming.

To set the scene: Thomas Groome once taught fourth grade students about the Catholic rite of reconciliation. Here Groome writes,

> In that class there was also an interesting example of a small story talking back to the big Story. One boy had difficulty pronouncing the words "Penitential Rite." Then it occurred to me that, for fourth graders, I had used very poor language. What does that big word *penitential* mean to children? And is it *write* or *right* or *rite*? They did not know. So I asked them to think of a better name for it. After some discussion, one girl volunteered, "It's the time for forgiveness." We settled for that name —— the time for forgiveness —— and that was how it was referred to for the remainder of the semester. They had come to name it for themselves far better than I had named it for them (Groome, 25).

This power of naming is integral to postcolonial pedagogy. Seldom are those on the margins allowed to name anything, let alone themselves. The notion of "a small story talking back to the big Story" is unthinkable. In terms of power, those on society's margins are the outgroup no matter what the political or social or economic arena. Yet this nugget from Groome dovetails nicely with a pedagogy of cultural and religious transformation, one that ever encourages persons to rename themselves, others and God.

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