

## Emancipatory Hope Reloaded

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*In Trouble Don't Last Always: Emancipatory Hope Among African American*

*Adolescents* (2003) I argued for a theological framework for youth ministry and a particular type of spirituality as *emancipatory hope*. It 'is expectation that the forms of hegemonic relations – race, class and gender dominance – will be toppled and to have emancipatory hope is to acknowledge one's personal agency in God's vision for human equality.'<sup>1</sup> This theological framework was a constructive response to the problem of hopelessness found in the life stories of twenty African American teenagers from the Chicago area. The spirituality of these teens was defined by their inability to articulated God's care for and transformative activity of problems most troubling for them while at the same time they expressed God's salvific power in their lives. I viewed this spirituality as unwholesome, self-serving, and inconsistent with a healthy spirituality rooted in the liberative power of God, incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, and at work in the world as the Holy Spirit. The spirituality I proposed through ministry with black teens, *emacipatory hope*, "fosters an intricately woven life of Christian hope, holiness, and social activism against injustice."<sup>2</sup>

During the period of 2006 through 2008 I partnered with four Pan-Methodist congregations<sup>3</sup> concerned to develop their youth ministry with *emancipatory hope* as the theological framework. We focused on nurturing the spirituality of the teens in the congregations as the youth practiced leadership in worship, teaching, and service that is liberating for their faith communities and the communities that surrounded their churches. As a

result of this project I am compelled to revisit the concept of *emancipatory hope*. While the idea is still viable for the type of youth ministry necessary for fostering hope in black teens some aspects need deepening ideologically, theologically, and biblically given the challenges black youth face in the church as well as society. The tentacles of racism and other forms of marginalization that youth encounter are long and permeate both members of congregations and people of the wider society. Internalized racism – practices and rituals that are shaped by subtle unconscious ways of perceiving the world that privileges those who are white – is just as alive among adult and teen members of congregations as it is in secular settings. The problem of internalized racism among adults and teens in the Emancipatory Hope Project begs questions regarding ideology that shape African American life. So, I must ask: What are ideological issues that need accounting for if we are to nurture a Christian spirituality that is grounded in hope that holds together piety and the politics of resisting oppression?

Additionally, observing the teens, their adult counselors, and senior pastors in the Emancipatory Hope Project attempt to shape youth leadership helped me search for concrete ways God's work for dismantling powers of domination is at work in the world. What is the role of the Holy Spirit, God in us and with us in the world today, in *emancipatory hope*? How can we claim agency to resist and confront racism in and through God's Spirit? What new biblical texts as well as familiar ones can raise our awareness about the nature and work of the Holy Spirit that addresses the problem of hopelessness in the face of oppression, marginalization, and domination?

Lastly, given that the problem of racism cannot be fully understood without carefully considering the interlocking and interrelated problems of gender, class, and sexuality such questions are also important. Race and class were considered in *Trouble Don't Last Always*.

However, analysis of the connection or relationship between race, class and gender was not considered. Gendered aspects of racism and classism are particular for girls of the African Diaspora. Also, I was challenged by the omission of sexuality and I argued that it was not a motif in the life stories of the teenagers I interviewed therefore not appropriate to analyze. However, I've since learned that sexuality is intertwined with race, gender and class. As mentioned above, the particularity of African Diasporic girls insists on an analysis that includes sexuality. The idea of *emancipatory hope* is broad enough to not only include sexuality but all other marginalizing conditions and an explanation of this concept should reflect such breath. This paper does not seek to offer an in-depth reflection on the interlocking aspects of race, class, gender, and sexuality, but to acknowledge the need for more reflection as it focuses on ideological, theological, and biblical concerns.

A Word on Methodology as Womanist Practical Theology.

Practical Theology is an “engaging process between theology, theory, and practice.”<sup>4</sup> A Womanist practical theological method adopts this notion as a starting point for expressing a method that interweaves experiences of women and girls in congregations and communities, the practices and rituals that shape their lives as well as theory from theology, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. This interweaving is in light of race, class, gender and sexual oppression that infiltrates and shapes the sociopolitical, sociocultural, and socioeconomic terrain in North America. A Womanist practical theological method builds on Alice Walker’s three part definition of being a black feminist, aware of and confronting oppression against African peoples of the entire community, both female and male. All of this is for the purpose of analysis that

swings in and between the new and old practices yielding a “praxis” process and the construction of new and old theology and theory.

As such, the breadth and depth of a Womanist practical theological method facilitates analysis of the experiences of teenage girls and boys of African descent. This method gives us needed tools for revisiting the concept of *emancipatory hope* as a theological framework and a type of spirituality for African American teenagers.

### Internalized Racism

In the United States of America (USA) internalized racism is born out of an ideology of what bell hooks calls a white supremacist capitalist patriarchal<sup>5</sup> society. I consider this as a white supremacist ideology. This can be understood as practices and rituals compatible with a worldview where whites have privileges and power that shape all relationships in the USA. In the essay “Teaching for Color Consciousness” I defined white supremacist ideology in this way:

It is a political ideology that advocates social and political dominance for whites and frames both liberal and conservative political ideologies in the U.S. It is the ideology by which those with white privilege and power act towards African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino/a Americans, and other people of color. Such practices are evident in the exploitation and dehumanization of other women and men based on their racial/ethnic identity.<sup>6</sup>

White supremacy is evident in relations among those racial/ethnic European Americans who hold beliefs, values, and attitudes of entitlement, power, and dominance. These men and women engage in relations of exploitation against those who are racially/ethnically different. “White supremacist relations of exploitation engage in ‘practices that are governed by the rituals in which the practices are inscribed, within the material existence of an ideological apparatus,’ which include the church, the family, educational institutions, political parties, literature, visual

and performing arts, and communications media.”<sup>7</sup> As such, one can argue that white supremacy resides in communities of faith and “ its practices are manifest in the actions of white individuals or beneficiaries of white privilege.”<sup>8</sup> The situatedness of a white supremacist ideology depends on relational practices, human to human ways of being in the world. Relational practices rooted in a white supremacist ideology can be identified in USA institutional systems when certain persons or groups are singled out as producers of knowledge, the authority of how knowledge is obtained, and control the financial resources that determine who will receive knowledge and when knowledge will be obtained. We can examine the No Child Left Behind educational policies developed under the Bush administration (2000-2008) to support this point. Likewise, USA educational public policy on local, state and national levels since the beginning of institutionalized public education in the USA has been shaped by white supremacist relational practices. The same arguments can be made about Christian Protestant and Catholic Churches in the USA. Their relational practices have also been rooted in a white supremacist ideology that shaped church polity, liturgical rituals, common rituals of Koinonia, rituals of acquiring and disseminating money, and many others. We can point to the liturgical practice of altar prayer in the Methodist Church where African enslaved members of congregations were not allowed to kneel at the altar to pray alongside white members. To site a case in point, this practice led to the resistance and revolt of Richard Allen who walked out of the Methodist Church with a number of other African Americans and eventually founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1787.

The history of relational practices grounded in a white supremacist ideology among educational, religious, and other institutions in the US crystallizes the notion that African Americans have been affected by a white supremacist ideology in a deep psychological,

epistemological, ontological, and spiritual way. I posit that an effect of relational practices of a white supremacist ideology is internalized racism among African Americans. It can be described historically during the transatlantic slave trade as well as the moment Africans were placed on auction blocks and sold as chattel labor. Internalized racism can be categorized in many ways. I want to describe three ways that have been themes in my work with the four churches implementing *emancipatory hope* as the theological framework for youth ministry.

First, miscegenation or the biological human genetic mixing is one form of internalized racism in the form of colorism among African Americans and Latino/as. Other terms used to describe persons born from miscegenation are biracial or mixed-race. The term mulatto has been applied to biracial persons, particularly during the antebellum period. Colorism – what Katie Cannon defines as interiorized color consciousness regarding skin color, shades of complexion, hair texture, and physical features<sup>9</sup> – impeded our potential for mutual exchange between Diasporic Africans with various skin colors. Colorism also prohibits mutual exchange among Latinos/as and African Americans. Historically, whites who politically and economically controlled society allowed mulatto persons to advance in education and professional opportunities. White culture recognized and affirmed lighter skin tones than those who were darker. The masters' enslaved children born of enslaved mothers would work in the masters' house rather than in the fields. The shameful legacy of passing among mulattos/mulattas (blacks passing as whites) still lingers. Womanist scholar Emilie Townes, among others, continues to reflect on the issues of embodiment in light of the tragic mulatta. Today there is still evidence of colorism in the black community.

As a teenager Barak Obama struggled with his racial identity as a biracial person. In his memoir he reflects honestly on this difficult period in his life. Psychologists have argued that

biracial teenagers may be forced to choose one ethnic group over another as their identity. Dr. Beverly Tatum indicates that this is usually during early and middle adolescence (ages 12-15).<sup>10</sup> The choice of ethnic group is based on parents' ethnic background, class, ethnicity, influence of peer group, physical appearance, among other factors. They feel ashamed, guilty, angry, and disloyal because he or she feels they must choose one identity that does not represent the totality of the individuals background. I wonder what would have been his fate if his physical appearance was much lighter, where we could not tell by gazing on his face, hair, and lips, that he had African genes?

Second, African American Ethicist Riggins Earl argues that Blacks have struggled to love their bodies as God's luminously dark temple and we have rationalized our God-consciousness in four ways: 1) that reflect internalized white racism, 2) color-blind God consciousness that God does not see our black bodies, 3) black power God consciousness, 4) and black restorationist God-Consciousness where blacks understand that the blackness and whiteness is good-in - itself and is-good -to-God.<sup>11</sup> While this position uses language reflective of the black-white paradigm the concept of "God's luminously dark temple (black or brown) makes we wonder what people in our communities of faith and beyond think about the Holy Spirit that dwells in our bodies.

Feminist scholar bell hooks makes a similar argument to that of Riggins Earl. She posits that the black power movement of the sixties worked intensely to address the issue of internalized racism specifically by challenging "black folks to examine the psychic impact of white supremacy."<sup>12</sup> The leaders of the black power revolution pointed to the need to "decolonize our minds and imaginations" in spite of the countless "ways white supremacy had assaulted our self-concept and our self-esteem."<sup>13</sup> The black militant leaders of the time admonished black people to see ourselves with new eyes and imaginations, to love ourselves, our

black bodies. By doing so, black folks would establish a “politics of representation which would both critique and integrate ideals of personal beauty and desirability informed by racist standards and put in place progressive standards, a system of valuation” that would embrace all the variety of shades of black people.<sup>14</sup> A new politics of representation where black is beautiful in a white supremacist society has always been gendered. “A mixture of racist and sexist thinking informs the way color-caste hierarchies detrimentally affect the lives of black females differently than they do black males.”<sup>15</sup> This was discussed earlier with regards to colorism. Loving the black body, both female and male, continues to be an unachieved reality among black people. The uphill battle to decolonize our minds and imaginations so that we love the black body is complicated by media culture that represents the ideal for beauty and sexuality as European or biracial. There is a need to educate for critical consciousness among African Americans.<sup>16</sup>

Third, internalized racism is associated with persons from African ancestry who consciously/unconsciously preference white people, white perspectives, white knowledge/ways of knowing, and many other epistemological and ontological aspects of European American people. Prior to the Black Liberation Movement many blacks exercised preferences for white doctors, lawyers, dentists and other professionals, believing they were better trained than the same types of African American professionals. This form of internalized racism was particularly in regions of the USA (i.e. the South) where there were few such professionals. Far too often the only opportunity for receiving services was from white doctors, lawyers, and dentists who had segregated waiting rooms, bathrooms, and instruments designated only for black clients/patients. After the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements more and more Black professionals set up their practices in the South. However, masses of Black patients distrusted Black professionals and refused to use their services. Whites’ use of the services of black professionals was none



existent. Over the last 40 years the problem of black people distrusting black professions has almost faded away, but not completely. Internalized racism is residual among African Americans who feel European professionals are superior to African American professionals.

This form of internalized racism also includes denial that racism still exists. Some African Americans refuse to believe that relations between black and whites are still fraught with racism and white privilege. This is a Post-Civil Right Era phenomenon that exists because the visible egregious forms of dehumanization of black people no longer happen continuously. As such, some blacks think the major problems surrounding racism have disappeared. The cause of this thinking is an absence of critical consciousness among blacks that would empower them to see the complexities of a white supremacist capitalist patriarchal society. The Civil Right Era brought upward mobility for middle class African Americans who moved into white suburbs and executive positions. We rarely hear of or see lynchings of black boys/men and rapes of black girls/women, among other flagrant acts of racism. The news media chooses not to show us those images when they do happen. Therefore, our sensitivity to racism is mostly individualized, recognized only when it happens to a single African American through acts of a single white person on the job and in the school.

The politics of denial about the existence of racism is particularly problematic for black people who have experienced good personal relationships with white people. Intimate bonds of friendship between blacks and whites in contexts that include jobs, clubs, neighborhoods are common in the post-Civil Rights Era. These friendships can cloud critical judgment of racial prejudice and institutionalized racism. Here is a case in point. I was confronted by a disgruntled African American churchwoman shortly after my presentation to her congregation that included my understanding of racism in USA society. This woman, adorned in her Missionary Society

white dress, scolded me about my understanding of racism. She said she had worked for a white family for more than forty years and they had been nothing short of good to her and her family. They had helped her obtain a car when all other possibilities failed and financially supported her daughter as a college student, when her family was unable to do so. She was with them at the birth of all their children, took care of them, watched them grow up, and felt they were like her own. This church mother either misunderstood the difference between black/white relationships and institutionalized racism or she understood and was in a state of denial about her own experiences of racial prejudice, discrimination, and affects of white privilege and power. The politics of denial about racism is problematic for African Americans in general and black congregations in particular if they seek to be a prophetic witness of *emancipatory hope* in the church and greater society.

I have described at length three forms of internalized racism that are caused by a white supremacist ideology. All three forms of internalized racism were found the congregations participating in the Emancipatory Hope Project and pose a severe challenge to the type of spirituality that the *emancipatory hope* theological framework promotes. Some youth, their pastors, and adult counselors that sought to implement emancipatory hope in their ministry were unaware of internalized racism among their parishioners and within themselves. On the other hand, those who embraced the idea of *emancipatory hope* sought to understand the concept and deepened the idea through a praxis method. A case for the later is where an African American teenager from North Hill CME Church and his Latino friend (Roman Catholic) team taught chapter two, “Stop All This Racism” in *Trouble Don’t Last Always*. This is an example of two teens who critically embraced the ideas of the chapter, deepened the thesis with creative methods and personal stories while providing leadership in teaching. The boys first taught the chapter to

participants in the Emancipatory Hope Project and receive strong affirmation for their teaching content and process. Shortly thereafter they taught the same lesson at North Hill. During their teaching session a few adults resisted the content of the lesson indicating it was irrelevant to life in the contemporary USA society. This form of teacher resistance puzzled and angered the teens and stimulated extensive conversation and critical reflection during my interview with the North Hill teenager.

My summary of the case of teacher resistance experienced by the teenagers suggests the need for emancipatory hope to include theory and practical methods for addressing internalized racism when encountered in our congregations as well as within our individual psyches as African Americans. The psychic impact of a white supremacist ideology that was most death dealing during slavery in the US continues to perpetuate internalized racism.<sup>17</sup> Although there have been some efforts to change the psyches of African Americans such as the Black Power Movement the process is slow and arduous. In *Trouble Don't Last Always*, chapter six, "I Snapped, Man: Teenage Rage," I discuss the anger the teens expressed in their life stories. Using theory from William Grier and Price Cobbs' *Black Rage* I analyzed the teens' stories regarding the psychological impact of racism on blacks since slavery and the deformation it caused to their black ancestors and has been pass on to them. My constructive response to the problem of teenage rage was the idea of embracing the anger that black youth feel as "good anger" that has the power to transform their lives and others in their congregations if the youth are allowed to express the anger in the "sanctuary," the church. This practice of expressing anger was defined as "Holy Indignation," "anger aroused by something unjust within a human relationship."<sup>18</sup> I continued to build on the idea of "Holy Indignation" in the chapter "Sanctified Rage: Practicing Holy Indignation with Teenagers in the Black Church," in Mary Elizabeth

Moore and Almeda M. Wright's edited volume *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*. The chapter examines the root causes of black teenage rage, the effects on their spirituality, and practical ways a church/congregation can be the setting for the transformative power of teenaged holy indignation.<sup>19</sup> I am satisfied that the chapter does what was intended but troubled that it does not include an analysis of the psychic impact of a white supremacist ideology and the results of internalized racism. Practices that address internalized racism in black congregations are needed if *emancipatory hope* as a theological framework for youth ministry is to be effective. The practice of teaching for critical consciousness about racism, internalized racism, and white supremacy, somewhat like the event at North Hill CME Church, is a good starting point.

Analysis, critical reflection, and possible practical ways to address ideological questions with regards to *emancipatory hope* are important if the theological framework for youth ministry is to be strengthened. Theological and biblical questions also need exploring to fortify *emancipatory hope*.

### The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Emancipatory Congregation

So what empowers *emancipatory hope* to work in a congregation? How does God, known in the liberative deeds of Jesus Christ, and in us and with us in the world today as the Holy Spirit work in *emancipatory hope*? What biblical resources give us clues to the work of the Spirit that addresses the problem of hopelessness in the face of oppression, marginalization, and domination? The answer to what makes emancipatory hope work is presupposed in my questions, the Holy Spirit.

I claim that the Holy Spirit makes *emancipatory hope* work for several reasons that include the nature and activity of the Holy Spirit. When I speak of the nature of the Holy Spirit I

wish to explore the fruit of the Spirit, specifically. By activity of the Holy Spirit I want to examine the manner by which the Holy Spirit works within us to give us agency for hope-filled activities and transformative actions of dehumanizing powers.

There have been many pneumatologies published in recent years. Jürgen Moltmann's *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* has been an important resource for understanding the nature and role of the Holy Spirit since its publication in 1977. Moltmann's *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, 1992/2001, translated by Margaret Kohl is his more recent contribution to the discourse on the Holy Spirit. Some pneumatologies seem to have been inspired by the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches, particularly Chung Hyun Kyung's address. It remains as type of benchmark for feminist pneumatology.<sup>20</sup> Womanist scholar Karen Baker-Fletcher offers a profound and prophetic pneumatology in her book *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective*. I offer a brief descriptive review of the book as a backdrop for my reflections on the nature and activity/action of the Holy Spirit and its relevance to *emancipatory hope*.

Karen Baker-Fletcher's work is central to my reflections on the work of the Holy Spirit in *emancipatory hope*. She self-identifies as a "womanist theologian steeped in both United Methodist (Wesleyan) and charismatic evangelical interpretations of the Christian message."<sup>21</sup> In *Dancing with God* Karen is concerned to ask: "How might we understand God's response to hatred and violence? Where is God in the lives of those who lose loved ones or barely escape losing themselves and loved ones to racialized hate crime, lynching, rape as a form of hate crime, acts of terrorism, war, and other types of violent sin?"<sup>22</sup> If "...creation exists within the promise of God's providence,...[which] is based on the presupposition that God is good and that God provides for the ongoing good or well-being of creation...[then] what happened to the good

creation?”<sup>23</sup> “...why is there evil in the world? If the earth and all that is in it, including humankind, were originally created good, then why is there so much sin, the violation or transgression of others that leaves us in a world of broken relationships? She approaches these questions as a Christian relational womanist in conversation with relational theologians. Her Trinitarian emphasis is integrative and interdisciplinary. Her approach is a “relational theology,” which engages the work of Charles Hartshorne, John Cob, Marjorie Suchocki, Andrew Sung Park, Thomas Jay Oord, Jürgen Moltmann, Katie Cannon, and many others. While she gives a respectful nod to process theists, but confesses she is “too committed to Christian orthodoxy to become an orthodox Whiteheadian or Hartshornian.”<sup>24</sup> She writes, “I am a Wesleyan Christian, with a Trinitarian understanding that has much in common with nineteenth-century Wesleyan, holiness women like Zilpha Elaw, Jarena Lee, Julia Foote and Phoebe Palmer.”<sup>25</sup>

Her questions of suffering and spiritual striving in a world of crucifixion are answered through her attention to and articulation of the Divine Dance of the Trinity. “The three *hypostases* of God indwell one another in one divine nature, the Greek *perichoresis*, which means ‘to dance around,’ or ‘indwelling or to envelope. The three hypostases dynamically, relationally dance around and within one another.”<sup>26</sup> I find this description of the Trinity most helpful. Here the metaphor helps me imagine, with greater clarity, the dynamic inter-relational nature of what I usually call God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. I am particularly appreciative of chapter three where Karen discusses the Trinity. First, she lays out the Divine Dance through the relations of God the Father/Mother and Provider/Nurturer. The second relation of the Divine Dance is the Word/Logos/Wisdom. And the third relation of the Divine Dance is The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. She offers supporting metaphors to help me see, feel, touch, taste, and smell the Trinity. The one quote that captures,

for me, the answer to her central question of spiritual striving in a world that crucifies the earth, women, men, and children is found in the preface where she writes,

Without God who loves us into loving God, there is no hope for this world. Therefore, I write about God's persuasive, inviting, ever-present loving activity. It is about the grace of divine community and the call to all creation to receive restoration to communion with God. It is about the loveliness and beauty of the dance of God in the midst of this "ball of confusion. It is about God's love and compassion for this earth with all its creatures and for us human creatures with our beautiful and ugly ways."<sup>27</sup>

This statement captures the metaphor *Dancing with God* as it responds to her questions.

It is within chapter six, "The Pulse of God: The Passionate Spirit of God," that we read about the "lamentation and the resurrection hope of Mamie Till-Mobley, mother of Emmett Till. Fourteen year old Till left Chicago for Money, Mississippi during the summer of 1955 to visit relatives. He was cruelly beaten and then thrown into the Tallachatchie River for whistling at a white woman. It was through the choreopoem about Emmett Till and his mother, written/produced/danced by Vanessa Baker and her colleague Cheryl Swann, that we understand the divine dance and what it means to dance with God. Karen writes,

In overcoming the sickness of the world with Christ, Mamie Till-Mobley did not let the world forget the sin of violating her son's life even as she participated in divine love. Moreover, the process of healing included seeking justice for the crimes against her son and child. She included the entire nation in the task of remembering the sin of unnecessary violence in the divine work of overcoming hatred.<sup>28</sup>

Baker-Fletcher offers a Womanist understanding of the Trinity as divine dance and her admonition for us to dance with God in the redemptive activities of justice and love. Her Trinitarian theological discourse helps me explore the character of the Holy Spirit.

The nature of the Holy Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit describes the nature of the Holy Spirit. These attributes are produced from the very core of God the Spirit. Just as a mango tree grows, flowers, and bears its fruit characteristic of the nature of the mango tree so are the fruit of the Spirit characteristic of the Spirit of God. In contrast to the works of humankind, the flesh, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23). The Spirit is life because of righteousness (Romans 8:9-11) and knowledge because of its goodness/righteousness (2 Peter 1:5-8). The Spirit of God dwells within us because we belong to Christ Jesus and we should seek to live by the Spirit. The Spirit offers to us aspects of the Spirit’s nature. The Holy Spirit is Love for God is love. “...those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” (I John 4:16) The list can go on and on describing the nature of the Holy Spirit, but I want to stop here and focus on the attribute of power.

The writer of the Gospel of Luke offers a provocative version of the power of Jesus Christ who is filled with the Holy Spirit. The writer intended to show evidence that Jesus through the power in the Holy Spirit has the ability to set people free. Luke chapters 3 and 4 specifically make this point. When Jesus had been baptized, while he was praying, “The heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.” (Luke 3:21b-22) Following this event “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness...” (Luke 4:1) After Jesus’ encounter with the devil in the wilderness “...Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee...” (Luke 4:14a) The author of Luke has convincingly argued that Jesus was filled with the power of the Spirit and in subsequent chapters the power of Jesus is because of the indwelling Spirit of God.

The Spirit of God incarnate in the flesh, Jesus Christ, performed many deeds of power. He healed the sick, calmed the seas, and rebuked demons. Though he was crucified and was



buried in a tomb God resurrected his body from the grave. As Jesus promised, after his ascension the Holy Spirit came with power and gave the same power to those in whom the Spirit of God dwells. The Spirit in the divine Godhead is power and offers us power to be in the world as transformative agents of injustice.

### The Activity/Action of the Holy Spirit

Power in the Holy Spirit is limitless and active in the world today. The Spirit of God is active in humankind and all of creation. In the creation of the earth the Spirit moved upon the void and formless earth and through the power of the Spirit created light, mountains, oceans and rivers, birds of the air and living creatures of every kind to walk upon the earth. God created humankind in the likeness of God, female and male. They were empowered to create and recreate life.<sup>29</sup>

The Spirit is active in the creation and recreation of the earth. The Psalmist reminds us of the lush refreshing earth in the presence of a protecting God. “He makes me lie down in the green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;” (Psalm 23:2). This is just one example of the green imagery of scripture. There are countless others. “The Spirit in nature...focuses us on the creating, recreating energy of God’s Spirit,” writes Rebecca Prichard.<sup>30</sup> She reminds us of the cycles of nature as “birth, death, and resurrection...”<sup>31</sup> “As earthworms transform nature’s refuse into rich soil, so God’s Spirit changes, remakes, redeems. This green, growing Spirit is creator, recreator, resurrection power.<sup>32</sup> I would suggest that even amidst humankind’s poor stewardship of the earth as well as climate change that causes unusual weather patterns the Spirit is active recreating the earth.

The Holy Spirit is active in our lives as she dwells in our bodies. "...do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God...?" (I Corinthians 6:19) The Spirit gives us breath and her attributes to live a fruitful life indicative of her own.<sup>33</sup> These attributes are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 6:22-23), "encouragement, leadership, generosity, and mercy according to Romans 12:8."<sup>34</sup> There are many other attributes of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The indwelling Spirit gives us power to know and speak the truth. John 14:16-17b states "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive..." In contrast to the powers of human cultural designs and norms, the Spirit has more power. "For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12). The role of the Holy Spirit is to offer us "the power of encouragement in Christ."<sup>35</sup>

### The Relevance to Holy Spirit to Emancipatory Hope

The theological framework of *emancipatory hope* intends to foster a spirituality in African American adolescents where they expect the transformation of hegemonic relations and they are God's agents of this transformation acting in ways that God's vision of justice and equality for all humankind is a reality. It does not matter if they fully experience this new reality in their lifetime, but that black youth act with faith in the Spirit of God who transformations injustice. Action for God's vision of *emancipatory hope* requires ultimate confidence in God and how God can act in our lives.

As one searching for words to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in shaping the spirituality of emancipatory hope in black youth, I embrace Karen Baker-Fletcher's ideas. She argues the distinctive action of the Holy Spirit that not only advocates but comforts or consoles, heals, encourages and empowers.<sup>36</sup> The Holy Spirit gives courage to those who struggle against the evil of racism, sexism, and all sorts of violations against humankind and creation. By appealing to the work of God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, as the advocate that provides courage in the world today I can strengthen my claim that *Trouble Don't Last Always*, particularly in the leadership of youth in church and society.

I have argued that *emancipatory hope* yields a spirituality among black teenagers that is "an intricately woven life of both pious and political existence that focuses on critical consciousness and critical action so that racial, economic, social, and political domination is eradicated."<sup>37</sup> This argument only suggests processes and methods that raise awareness and critical thinking. These teaching methods are essential but a pious and political life requires more than critical thinking. It requires the gift of the indwelling Spirit of God, "the regenerating gift of... encouragement – the strengthening of the heart..."<sup>38</sup> The Holy Spirit empowers us with *courage* to confront evil political, economic, social powers. Black youth must use the skill of critical thinking as they act courageously in the power of the Holy Spirit. This action is found on the continuum of small acts of justice to monumental movements. Black youth need to exercise the gift of courage that the indwelling Spirit provides when they discern and confront injustice among their peers and in their schools. These are everyday forms of trouble. At the same time black youth may discern and be called to lead a movement like other youth that includes Ruby Doris Smith, civil rights activist and leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

The size of the challenge is not the issues. What matters is living in and acting through the power of the indwelling Spirit of God to bring about hope that liberates all humankind.

In this essay I have offered new thinking about the theological framework for ministry with black youth, *emancipatory hope*, which fashions a particular type of spirituality. This reassessment of emancipatory hope, or emancipatory hope reloaded, has focused primarily on ideological and theological/biblical aspects. Succinctly, I have argued that internalized racism must be taken into account in our ministry with black youth and we must look toward the role of the indwelling Holy Spirit to give us courage to act for *emancipatory hope*. In God's time *Trouble Don't Last Always*.

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<sup>1</sup> Parker, Evelyn L., *Trouble Don't Last Always: Emancipatory Hope Among African American Adolescents*. (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003) 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, viii.

<sup>3</sup> The congregations in the Emancipatory Hope Project were North Hill C.M.E Church, South Memorial A.M.E. Church, Southwest A.M.E.Z. Church, and Central U.M.C, all pseudonyms.

<sup>4</sup> Andrews, Dale, *Practical Theology for the Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002) 1.

<sup>5</sup> This is a classic phrase popularized by bell hooks.

<sup>6</sup> Parker, Evelyn L., "Teaching for Color Consciousness," in Randal I C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, Fernando F. Segovia (eds.) *They Were All in One Place: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009) 331.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 331.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 331.

<sup>9</sup> Parker, p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> Parker, pp. 61-78.

<sup>11</sup> Earl, Riggins R., "Loving Our Black Bodies As God's Luminously Dark Temples: The Quest for Black Restoration." In Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins (eds.) *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2004/2006) 259-267.

<sup>12</sup> hooks, bell, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995) 119.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 127.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 131.

<sup>17</sup> Franz Fanon develops the idea of psychic impact of colonization that is relevant to what I'm trying to argue. His book *The Wretched of the Earth* advances a psychological analysis of class, race, and culture in the struggle for liberation from colonization .

<sup>18</sup> Parker, Evelyn L. *Trouble Don't Last Always*, p. 141.

<sup>19</sup> Parker, Evelyn L. "Sanctified Rage: Practicing Holy Indignation with Teenagers in the Black Church," in Mary Elizabeth Moore and Almeda M. Wright, eds., *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*, (St. Louis MO, Chalice Press, 2008), 197.

<sup>20</sup> Prichard, Rebecca Button, *Sensing the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Feminist Perspective*. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press), 1 and 131.

<sup>21</sup> Baker-Fletcher, Karen. *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective*. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006) 6.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. xi.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 4

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. xi-xii.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 142.

<sup>29</sup> Genesis 1 paraphrased.

<sup>30</sup> Prichard, p. 124.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> I use the pronoun "she" for the Holy Spirit following the pattern/use of Prichaard.

<sup>34</sup> Baker-Fletcher, p. 162.

<sup>35</sup> Baker-Fletcher, p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>37</sup> Parker, p. 146.

<sup>38</sup> Baker-Fletcher, p. 162.