



# THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

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## Knowing in the Dark: Sin, Race and the Quest for Salvation Part 1: Transforming Theological Anthropology in a *Théologie Totale*

Sarah Coakley

*Dr. Sarah Coakley is Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge. The following lecture is the first in the six-lecture series of the Annie Kinkead Warfield lectures, delivered on March 23–26, 2015. A revised and expanded version of these lectures will be published as the second volume of Dr. Coakley's systematic theology.*

### Introduction: The Legacy of Annie Pearce Kinkead Warfield

Let me start by offering my sincere thanks to President Barnes, to Professor Bruce McCormack, and to all the faculty and students of Princeton Theological Seminary for the gracious invitation to be with you this week, for this introduction, and for all your kind hospitality. The honour accorded to me in being invited to give the Warfield Lectures of 2015 is one that I accepted with huge delight, albeit tinged with a certain “fear and trembling,” as the apostle Paul would put it. For not only do I stand in a long tradition of distinguished speakers to this lectureship going back to the middle years of the last century, but also in the longer shadow of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield himself (1851–1921), one of the most celebrated and long-serving professors in the history of Calvinist thought at Princeton Theological Seminary (teaching here from 1887 to his death in 1921), and also one of the most multi-gifted, with rigorous academic skills reaching right across the theological curriculum, conjoined with a deep and affective piety. As you know, he is best remembered for his spirited defence of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, but always in the most sophisticated intellectual conversation with both European and American interlocutors in that exciting modern era of emerging historical-critical consciousness.

However, it is not Benjamin Warfield whose memory we serve in these lectures, but his more mysterious wife Annie Pearce Kinkead Warfield (1852–1915), whose so-called “neurasthenia” kept her a semi-invalid for much of their married lives. Being caught out in a dramatic thunderstorm in Germany soon after their wedding supposedly shattered Annie’s nerves for ever thereafter; but there is some reason to think that this account has been retroactively mythologized: it was only in the last years of her life that she became completely bed-ridden, it seems, her husband ministering to her tirelessly and turning down all invitations to spend any time away from Princeton. But Annie’s life clearly was, as we might say with contemporary feminist consciousness, “erased” by psychosomatic illness (her affliction was seemingly of the sort that Freud was to explore with such explosive insight, as the very notion of the “unconscious” was first worked out in this

same period by him—precisely in relation to prostrate women’s bodies). And perhaps that is one reason why what I am going to attempt in these lectures is not inappropriately offered in Annie Warfield’s memory, as we shall see: the complexities of gender and spiritual vulnerability will remain at the heart of my analysis of theological anthropology.

But secondly, the Warfields’ much younger lives (childhood and early adolescence) were also affected by the Civil War, in which their wealthy families – both from Kentucky—did not, as it happened, ecclesiastically line up with the same side of the correlated Presbyterian split, even though both the Warfield and Kinkead families personally supported emancipation. Since it is the remaining open sore of America’s past history of slavery that I shall also be attending to centrally in these lectures, this historic root of the Kinkeads and Warfields in divided Kentucky is equally apposite as background. “Race” is a shrouded backcloth in their history: they lived through those painful stages of Civil War and post-Civil War that Cornel West and Eddie Glaude have described as the eras of the “Problems of Emancipation,” first, and then (the early) “Challenge to Racism.”<sup>1</sup> These could hardly have been more significant and problematic years for the American history of “race.” Finally, and thirdly, I cannot forebear to mention a remarkable comment on Paul’s epistle to the Romans, chapter 8, made by Benjamin Warfield in connection with the long-term sufferings of his marriage, and the illness and death of his wife: this has quite recently been unearthed by John Piper. “The fundamental thought is the universal government of God,” writes Warfield, commenting on Romans 8:28. “Though we are too weak to help ourselves and too blind to ask for what we need, we can only groan in unformed longings. He [God, the Spirit] is the author in us of these very longings ... and He will so govern all things that we shall reap only good from all that befalls us.”<sup>2</sup>

The complex problems and sufferings of gender and race, then, and the inscrutable enigmas and longings of prayer in the Spirit: these are the themes and dilemmas that—by strange providence—I share with the Warfields in their own time, and now take forward in what I have to offer you this week.

## Theological Anthropology, *Théologie Totale* and the Constellations of Desire

In this opening lecture tonight I want to lay out some of the main themes to be covered in this series on theological anthropology—to give you a vantage point on the whole—and to clarify the methodology which undergirds it.

In the first volume of my systematic theology, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, I ventured

- 1 See the historical periodization in Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., eds., *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2003).
- 2 Cited in John Piper, *Future Grace* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 1995) 176. See my own *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), especially chapter 2, for the pivotal significance of Romans 8 for my own account of pneumatology, providence, and the doctrine of the Trinity.

near the beginning of the book a contentious remark that came to constitute a central lynchpin in the unfolding argument: “Desire... is the constellating category of selfhood, the ineradicable root of the human longing for God.”<sup>3</sup> That anthropological supposition, however, became subservient in *God, Sexuality and the Self* to a newly-worked trinitarian vision of the Godhead, in which the “interruption” of the Holy Spirit in the inchoate human prayer of longing, such as Paul describes in Romans 8, became a fresh and transforming way to an understanding of God as ontological progenitor of desire. Ultimately, it is God’s desire for us (in God’s case, a desire uniquely without lack, as clarified later in the 6th century by Dionsyus the Areopagite) which originates and sustains our desire for God, in an eternal circle of outgoing and returning trinitarian love. Desire, on this view is the “precious clue” woven into our created existence that, I suggested, ever “tugs at the heart,” reminding us of our ultimate source in God and our fundamental dependence on God.

It was a central theme of *God, Sexuality and the Self*, that sustained, ascetic contemplative attention to this working of desire in us—the ongoing outworkings of the “eager longing” of Romans 8 — could not only regenerate our thinking about the Trinity but potentially also transform some of the most destructive and divisive contemporary dilemmas about “sex” and “gender.” Desire, I argued early in *God, Sexuality and the Self*, is more “fundamental than gender,” not because gender does not “matter” (clearly we remain deeply exercised with its enactments), but because deep, contemplative engagement with the triune God ultimately “ambushes” and transforms these anxieties about the gender binary, rendering them subservient, through the Spirit and in Christ, to the more labile and mysterious workings of divine desire. Indeed, according to a rendition of Galatians 3:28 (“there is no longer Jew or Greek, male and female”) that gained a hold in the ascetic circles of Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century, such was the vision of gender ultimately to be envisaged eschatologically, labile to desire.

So far (perhaps) so good. But there was something I quite intentionally did not mention in this analysis of the relation between gender and God in *God, Sexuality and the Self*, something I was deliberately and strategically keeping in my back pocket. Not only did I not claim to provide a fully-fledged understanding of how desire in the human relates to reason, consciousness, and freedom, and to the full dignity of what is called in Genesis 1 the “image of God”; but I manifestly failed to complicate this picture of human desire and its source in divine desire with any mention of that painfully contentious topic which we now call “race.” Was this an unconscious repression on my part? No, I can truly say it was not, although it was a conscious decision to delay. Did it imply that I regarded the divisions and contestations of “gender” as somehow more basic than so-called “racial” divisions? Again, no. Rather, my omission was the result of a strategic and intentional

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3 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, 26, see 58.

suspension, an initial disentanglement of what is now called “gender” from what is now called “race” in order to give each of them (and “class” will duly follow in the third volume) a distinct, and distinctly different theological analysis. In practice, of course, these categories—each with its own increasingly secular modern history and attendant debates and contestations—meld confusingly together in painful reality in what has come to be called “intersectional” entanglement. As Vicky Spelman memorably put it in the late 1980s, race and gender and class are not like individual pop-beads that we variously thread onto our anthropological necklace, and then divide again (pop, pop) at will. They intersect all the way across and down.<sup>4</sup> Yet the history of each of these categories, it must be acknowledged, is *not* the same; and in particular, the part that has been played by Christianity itself in *producing* these terms and modes of thinking, whether overtly or more covertly, is importantly different in each case.

“Sex class,” Shulamith Firestone once memorably averred, “is so deep as to be invisible.”<sup>5</sup> Yet arguably today “race” is yet more inscrutable and “deep,” not because it is ontologically more fundamental, but because its multiple workings and forms are so profoundly hidden, yet so strangely evanescent. As Willie Jennings puts it, “race remains one of the most difficult areas to confront, discuss, and think through for Christians, and especially for theologians. The central reason for our difficulty is that the Western Church has yet to grasp fully its deep involvement in the formation of the modern racial condition.”<sup>6</sup> Race, says Jennings, is fundamentally “*a way of seeing the world*” (my emphasis—we shall come back later to this insight about “race” as perceptual, epistemological); yet it remains a wholly “elusive” concept, Jennings goes on, especially for those who think it is entirely clear what it means—yet cannot, when pressed, supply any convincing definition.<sup>7</sup> “The central tragedy of the racial condition,” Jennings concludes, “is how it has stolen from the Church its revolutionary power of belonging in Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

Jennings’s prophetic theme will be crucially taken up in these lectures, albeit with a subtly new twist relating precisely to the special “darkness” of desiring contemplation. In particular, it will be a supposition of these lectures that “race” represents in our time the most hidden and unconsciously-rooted propulsion in our mutual human projections and negotiations—a “surd,” as I put it, that still seems to defy rational or analytic comprehension.<sup>9</sup> For how else can we explain the manifest failure of the (seemingly entirely “liberal” and rational) civil “rights” movement, more than fifty years after it first

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4 See Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 136, for an analysis of what she calls “pop-beads metaphysics”.

5 Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), 1.

6 Willie Jennings, “Being Baptized: Race”, in Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (rev. ed.; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 277.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *ibid.*, 284.

9 West and Glaude similarly describe race and racism as “absurd”: eds. West and Glaude, *African American Religious Thought*, xx.

took hold? What has been unconsciously created here by Christian culture (“race” in modern, Christian mode) must somehow now be *undone* by Christianity; but to do so the problematic “white” consciousness within it must once again plumb the depths of its own “darkness,” both noetic and moral. It must confront that which shelters and condones hidden violence, even as it – paradoxically and curiously – also eroticizes that which it demeans. Only a theological account of Christianity, which explores the unconscious depths, glories, deflections, and distortions of desire, I shall be arguing, can reach to the level of analysis that is required of us here. As with the modern construction of “gender,” so with the modern construction of “race”: desire, in all its ambiguity, is somehow more fundamental than either of them. This is not to suggest (as I must immediately insist, for fear of a serious misunderstanding) that “race” is somehow less significant, more epiphenomenal, than the more general cultural “commodifications of desire,” let alone to imply that the negative social, economic, and political implications of “race” are not disturbingly and demeaningly pervasive. The point is, rather, that these effects are so profound and occluded that only an “interruption” of the Spirit can destabilize what has, under the *aegis* of sin, come to appear as “normal.” It follows that divine desire is the purgative force that alone can change and transform what ails us. Or so I shall continue to urge in this lecture series.

But let me now remind you, if I may—though in very brief compass—of the distinctive methodological features of the systematic theology I began to unfurl in *God, Sexuality and the Self*, and which will also pervasively inform my lectures on theological anthropology, sin, and salvation this week.<sup>10</sup> I called that method “*théologie totale*,” risking an obvious possible misunderstanding that this would be heard as “totalizing” in a hegemonic sense, but in fact alluding to the French *Annales* school of historiography, *l’histoire totale*, which sought in its distinctive investigation of every level and type of human evidences—textual, historical, archaeological, anthropological—to do richer justice than ever before to the complexity of historical remains and their contemporary reconstruction. The same multi-leveled and multi-disciplinary richness, I argued, could also attend “systematic theology” in new guise, yet without succumbing to any merely “correlational” vision of theology in which the world, rather than God, would supply the starting point. Thus, I give the primary emphasis on the practice of contemplation, on the one hand (as a principled refusal to false “mastery,” or false speculative ambition, in deference to the Spirit’s primary invitation), and on the other hand, desire for God as a constellating anthropological category. At the same time I urged that this new genre of writing should creatively straddle conversation with a number of different disciplines—both to enable spiritual and intellectual renewal within the Christian faith itself, and to draw into critical

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10 See Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, 88–92, for a résumé of the key methodological features of my proposed *théologie totale*; and *ibid.*, 340–343, for the related methodological questions left hanging at the end of volume 1 of the systematics.

conversation those who hover agonizingly at its edges or are even initially resistant to it. Interdisciplinary exchange is at the heart of my endeavour, both in *God, Sexuality and the Self* and even more pressingly in these lectures. As we shall see, contrapuntal insights from the social sciences, from evolutionary biology, and most significantly, from secular philosophy will be engaged at crucial apologetic moments in the discussion. In no way, however, is this in order to “found” my theological claims in these discourses, or to displace the primacy of pneumatological revelation in what I try to speak; but rather, as I put it in *God, Sexuality and the Self*, to illustrate how a theology *in via* (progressively en route to its goal through change and transformation) is able to risk the expansion even of its own presumed “rationality” by allowing the Spirit to “blow where it wills.”

In short, we cannot presume that the Spirit operates only within the Church, let alone only within the ecclesiastical academy. Hence, engagement with “fieldwork” investigation of any particular doctrine-at-issue becomes a key motif of my method. If *théologie totale* is to overcome various baleful divides in the theological curriculum (“practical” versus “systematic” theology, “spirituality” versus theology, Christian theology versus “religious studies,” philosophical versus historical theology), then it needs to touch down in earthed manifestations of religious thought and practice. Only here will the method find its particular validation as retriever of buried treasure in the extraordinary “ordinariness” of lived faith. Finally, *théologie totale* witnesses also to the irreducible contribution that the aesthetic realm brings to systematic theology. In *God, Sexuality and the Self* that involved an excursus into the art history of representations of the Trinity, without which a whole dimension of my argument about reclaiming a non-mimetic perception of the trinitarian persons would have been lost. Likewise, in these lectures I shall find myself unable to do justice to the painful paradoxes of Fall, sin, and salvation without the assistance of poetic expression, so appropriately attuned to the broken ambiguity of human sin and human glory; and in the later volumes the contributions of music and liturgy will also be brought to bear.

In sum, the hallmarks of my proposed “systematic” method are distinctive precisely in the sense that they paradoxically refuse the “closure” that the term “system” characteristically bespeaks: that is why I sometimes also playfully call this an “unsystematic systematics.” Because the undertaking is grounded in the ongoing practices of prayer (not “founded” in the modern philosophical sense of unquestionable epistemological certainties), it is intrinsically *in via*, as I put it, always being called “ecstatically” out of itself afresh by the lure of the Spirit. To what extent this is a novel contribution in the range of possible contemporary renditions of Christian “systematics” is doubtless open to debate. As you well know, the great Karl Barth dared to take to himself the task of “regular” (i.e., “complete” or “school”) dogmatics, but overall preferred the title of “Church dogmatics” for his own magisterial work (since he remarkably anticipated all the post-modern objections to the hubris of human speculative systems); and he made



it clear that no synthesizing Christian vision could rest on anything in human experience: the revelatory authority of Christ the Word could alone be the point of reference for theological renewal.<sup>11</sup> Barth's clash with the Catholic (and specifically Thomist and neo-Thomist) vision of revelation "perfecting reason" thus marked the most important divergent fork in 20th century accounts of human frailty and sin. Was the human to be regarded as essentially corrupted and altogether without any "capacity for God" [*capax dei*] (so Barth), or could there be a sense in which the human was naturally and existentially "absolutely open upwards" (so Rahner)?

The problem, as I see it, is that this choice precluded a further and more subtle alternative, which I have already tried to begin to spell out in my account of trinitarian theology in *God, Sexuality and the Self*. This is the idea that divine "desire" is that which yet undergirds and sustains the world in which fallen human desires are at best jumbled and ill-directed, and at worst truly vicious and satanic. The work of redemption, then, is one of accepting again the lure of the Spirit into the purging crucible of divine desire. And this is an ongoing, diachronic undertaking. In it, the practised work of prayer and attention—also itself a gift of the Spirit—forms the painful locus of transformation as human desires are brought into slow conformity with God's desires. That process of assimilation also brings the practitioner, perhaps implicitly and inchoately, into what might be called the "space of Jesus." If one makes room for the Spirit's "interruption" then there are certain unavoidable consequences, including finding oneself inexorably drawn into the cosmic travails of which Paul speaks so eloquently in Romans 8.

### Théologie Totale on Sin, Race, and the Quest for Salvation

So if what I have said so far provides a brief recapitulation of the central methodological underpinnings of *God, Sexuality and the Self*, let me now lay out for you the main systematic moves that will guide the cumulative reflections in the coming lectures on sin, race, and the question of salvation.

First, it rapidly came to me in planning these lectures that whereas in *God, Sexuality and the Self* I had left until fairly late in the unfolding of the textual argument the addition of the research from "fieldwork" and sociological analysis, here, in the case of sin, race, and atonement, the "fieldwork" dimension had to come, explosively, first. And this decision was in the first instance, I must confess, for autobiographical reasons: as I shall explain further in my second lecture, my own view of crime, sin and "race" in America was dramatically shattered and changed as a result of a period I spent ministering in a South Boston jail in 2000–2001. But in fact the autobiographical factor is not in itself

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11 See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1: The Doctrine of the Word of God* (tr. G.W. Bromiley; 2nd. ed.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 275–287, for Barth's discussion of "regular" and "irregular" dogmatics and their contrapuntal relation. I am grateful to Bruce McCormack for a critical discussion of this theme in Barth.

determinative: the main reason for placing this “fieldwork” adventure in jail to the fore in this discussion of Christian anthropology is that it lifts the veil on what is for the most part so carefully hidden from the eyes of all good, law-abiding citizens (whether black or white) in contemporary America—something basic to the nature of human life in this country, something determinative to the possibilities, or lack thereof, for human flourishing. But, if we lift this particular veil, the theme of “darkness” is immediately given multiple competing echoes: hiddenness, political oppression, economic collusion, obscurity, “race,” sin, and (possibly) secret revelation. It will be the task of the next (second) lecture, then, to untangle these allusions afresh, and to demonstrate that the American prison system (and perhaps especially the short-term lock-up jail in the more cramped and deprived areas of our inner-cities, where such a large proportion of young black and Latino men are regularly held) is the acid test of this democracy’s failing or flourishing in terms of its human population. And although I shall need to draw creatively here on the insights of social science to illuminate what happens in such “totalizing” institutions—how their hierarchies work, or fail to work, to enforce and patrol subordination by persuasion or violence—my interests will of course be mainly theological.

For although “crime” is the category that takes one to jail, “race” is the category that most signally controls that passage in certain social conditions, such that the original “crime” becomes almost incidental to something else: a set of eventualities that are then played out along a more-or-less unconscious trajectory of repetitive ritual punishment. The trouble is that for the most part, the original theological (full reformatory and atoning) theory of the modern jail system has dropped by the wayside, giving way to a raw, secularized system of unmetabolized punitive violence. Thus, although “Houses of Correction” were originally spawned in Massachusetts out of a high-minded reformatory Calvinism, what remains today is a botched remnant of that original vision.

The theological thesis that will guide my analysis, then, is that “sin” is a basic theological notion which may unconsciously come to garner heavy “racial” baggage from its surrounding cultural arrangements, ones which are for the most part occluded from general public attention but build up all the associations of collective societal blame. (We might name this phenomenon, in shorthand, the problem of “whiteness”.) It follows that only a close analysis of what actually goes on in a jail, in the name of public order and justice, is capable of delivering insight into the veiled and distorted, but nonetheless still debased theological association of sin, punishment, “correction,” and atonement.

Yet the story I shall tell about the jail is also laced with hope of a most unexpected sort. Indeed, it is this aspect of what I discovered in the jail that transformed my own perspective as a theologian beyond anything I could have anticipated or imagined. What I encountered was a group of (mainly) young Afro-American men, who had been most manifestly submitted to a regime of continuing addiction, violence, and racist repression

in the jail, yet many of whom were extraordinarily determined, nonetheless, to re-imagine their “doing time” as purposive struggle—struggle with their own inner demons and passions, with addiction itself, and finally with the strange transformative divine “darkness” encountered in the communal practice of silence. And this simple contemplative sitting that they did together was shared with a number of white participants—a tiny handful of rather frightened white prisoners, and an even smaller number, on any given day, of white chaplains, volunteers, or sympathetic social workers who chose to take on this task in solidarity. Yet something extraordinary here was being undone as a result of this simple, repeated act of attention: a specifically modern view of race as epistemic “otherness” (beyond the “pale,” literally) was somehow being eroded and transformed in shared engagement with a divine, luminous darkness; yet it was that very notion of “dazzling darkness” which the Enlightenment philosophy and theology of modern “liberalism” and modern punishment had notably eschewed. In the strangely powerful metabolism of shared mutual attention to divine “otherness,” the devastating cultural projection of racial otherness was seemingly shifting. A certain tangible self-respect became manifest in the members of the group, a certain carriage of body which bespoke poise and new courage, a certain notable resistance, in the unwonted mutual peace and solidarity of the group, to the ritualized degradations of the jail system. Men even began to re-imagine their cramped and dangerous cells as places of ascetic transformation, of patience, and of hope.

Of course, none of this was either predictable or strictly manipulable. Nor is there any naive suggestion here on my part of a quick, transformative “fix” of racial consciousness that might be achieved by widespread inter-racial contemplative practice. How practical that could ever be remains in any case something of an unknown, although I would not want to abandon all hope of that possibility. My point here is the more modest but unassailable one: that something was shifted in the capacity of all involved in that jail group to see—to see each other and to see what was going on. The practices of silence “interrupted” and “bucked” the repression of the prison system and the mutual blindness of prejudice. They shifted our perspective on the ritualized arrangements of “race” in that place, and subtly turned the kaleidoscope to a new setting. Moreover when reflecting on all this later “in tranquillity” I realized that there might be an important historical background to this story. Could it be that the Enlightenment (which itself of course also supplied the modern reformatory system of imprisonment) simultaneously created a new and disturbing vision of “race” and also repressed the idea that a quite different sort of divine darkness could ever be inherently transformative spiritually? After all, it was Immanuel Kant who played a vital role in concocting the Enlightenment (scientifically-inflected) view of “race”; but it was also Kant who denied, again in the name of modern science, that any direct revelatory contact with the divine was possible, given the necessary “boundaries” of human knowledge. Beyond those boundaries lay only black/blank nescience, according to Kant, not the alluring, transformative divine darkness of the

Christian “mystical” tradition. In short (I now asked myself), could the specifically modern category of “race” be insidiously connected to a resistance to embracing “darkness” of a transcendent sort in a prayer practice that cedes human authority to the divine?

The answers to these questions can only be worked out in what follows in these lectures. But the crucial and initial point I urge tonight is that no convincing account of sin and the Fall can be given today which does not face head-on the ways in which the “surd” modern concept of race has been insidiously and often unconsciously read into them. Thus, from this opening “fieldwork” discussion of prayer-practice in the jail, and its suggestive account of the unconscious modern entanglements of “race” and “sin,” I shall turn back next, in Lecture III, to a fresh analysis of the Genesis Fall stories themselves, with a special focus on how the crucial category of “desire” plays in them and leads to various aporiai, including the uncertain question of who, finally, is responsible for sin and death. Drawing contrapuntal insights from Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, my two main patristic interlocutors in *God, Sexuality and the Self*, I shall argue that the different ways that they interpret the effects of the Fall and the implications for human flourishing (especially in their rendition of gender) are seemingly profoundly divergent, yet in some ways the main theodicy issues they struggle with remain equally unresolved. The genius of an unashamedly “mythological” understanding of the Fall in Genesis 3, I urge, resides in its irreducible structure as narrative and its capacity to hold and endure what seem to be “unbearable contradictions” in the vision of a God who both desires freedom and happiness for God’s subjects and yet sets them on a course which is doomed to failure. In interrogating patristic and rabbinic interpretations of the sin of the Fall, I shall argue that neither pride (Augustine) nor envy (Gregory of Nyssa) is obviously basic to sin, but rather the very act of desire going awry, missing its mark and thus implicitly engaging in idolatry. When the spotlight is again put on desire in the story of the Fall, it is found that this very ambiguity of desire is crucial to the irresolvable tensions of the narrative. The desire for the knowledge of good and evil is both the means of the human coming into its full stature as “image” of God, and yet also the propulsion of fundamental disobedience. The Genesis story, as such then, cannot resolve this difficulty. It simply holds it in a seemingly unbearable tension.

Ultimately, I shall argue, the resolution can only be found in the classic paradoxical idea of the *felix culpa* or “happy fault,” since out of the events of the Fall are ultimately brought the saving events of incarnation. However, once the Fall has occurred, and the punishment accrued has involved a distribution of ill effects according to a new “binary” of gender, Eve’s desire as woman takes on a different set of overtones from before, both further eroticized and tending to obsessive distortion. This again underscores the tensive ambiguity of desire in the Fall narrative, which Christians will finally resolve only in the figure of Christ as the true locus of (non-idolatrous) desire and the true prototype of the divine “image” in the human. Finally, written deeply into the story is a motif of

projective blaming—of the woman, of the serpent—as an integral part of the corruption of the same desire in the Fall. But is it Eve who attracts the greater blame for the Fall (as “the devil’s gateway,” so Tertullian) or the mysterious snake/devil himself? A further aporia lurks here, since God must ultimately be responsible too for the existence of this serpent and his deeds. It will be argued that the serpent may unconsciously be figured as anything or anyone who may be blamed for dark, creeping social “dis-ease”: as such, the serpent is implicitly a “raced” being in the modern sense, both cursed and simultaneously strangely seductive or erotic.<sup>12</sup> As we shall show in Lecture III, the elusive problem of “race” has never been far from the surface in modern interpretations of the Fall, although this is a motif that contemporary exegetes have done their best to forget.

So the return to the Fall narratives in Lecture III is freshly negotiated through critical attention to the notion of desire; but the Genesis Fall narrative, as such, cannot effect a resolution to the theological tensions on desire it itself proffers. Moreover, when Augustine literally “historicizes” Adam and identifies him and Eve as personally responsible for inherited, “original” sin, handed on down the generations via the sex act, he charts a way forward which will both end up on a seeming collision course with modern evolutionary science, but also “freeze” gender attributes in a way that the deeper complexity of the original biblical narrative does not appear to condone. On these points Gregory of Nyssa’s reading appears both richer and more malleable. But neither Augustine nor Gregory (for all the complexity of their differently-modulated theories of desire) deliver the sustained diachronic analysis of fallen and progressively saved desire that can be found in the early modern works of John of the Cross and his mentor and friend, Teresa of Avila. Here the story of desire, human and divine, becomes, we might say, the equivalent of what Paul and the Reformation tradition would rather differently call justification and sanctification.

Thus, in the later lectures of this series (lectures IV–VI) I shall turn, as I also did in *God, Sexuality and the Self*, to a somewhat neglected set of textual resources (this time not from the patristic oeuvre, but from early modernity) in order to foreground the significance of sustained contemplative practice for the resolution of the riddles of desire, sin, and race that I have already laid out. In the writings of these great sixteenth-century Carmelites we see desire and contemplation brought to the foreground of reflections on an emerging modern selfhood of interiority and certitude, one destined for later “secularity,” yet strung out here along a dark diachronic path in which the individual must first submit to the purification of desires, both sensual and spiritual, before entering into full union with Christ. Here, I shall argue, is a model for salvific incorporation into the life of God which also, by slow and difficult degrees (in via, again), painfully removes all projective self-delusion and blaming of the “other.” In short, one is led on a dark journey

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12 There I discuss some of the disturbing evidences of David N. Livingstone, *Adam’s Ancestors: Race, Religion and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008).

in which initial “not-seeing” becomes the condition for an eventual recovery of “sight” of a new and higher order: human darkness, both noetic and moral, is purged by dazzling divine darkness. Moreover, as we shall see in Teresa and John of the Cross, accounts of race, gender, eroticism, sin, and contemplative purgation coalesce in a way extraordinarily apposite to the complex of contemporary problems already sketched in this outline. The personal and political implications of their remarkable accounts of human darkness and its transformation en route to union with Christ thus deserve to be rescued systematically from the marginalization often accorded to so-called counter-Reformation “spirituality” or “mysticism.” Whereas John provides a unique account of the “night of sense,” so called, in which epistemic darkness is embraced for the sake of its transforming, purgative power, Teresa’s account of the spiritual journey is less consistently “dark,” more riddled with gendered erotic play, yet as cognizant as John of the transformative Dionysian tradition of “mystical theology.” I shall be urging that their particular understanding of metabolized darkness and ascetic endurance holds enormous promise for a new theological anthropology founded in contemplative practice. “Darkness” here is both epistemic and moral; yet it is capable of progressive transformation-in-God. This approach unlocks afresh an older patristic teaching on “spiritual sense,” and thus opens up a vista of “theology in via” in which human epistemological and moral responsiveness expands and ascends through the processes of the purgation of desire. The profound implications for modern “gender” and “race” will once more be considered in the light of this progressively “interruptive” grace of the Holy Spirit; for (yet again) this approach seems to provide a way of shifting some of our deepest contemporary anxieties, of exposing the projective unconscious forces at play in our attempts to “fix” gender and race as immovable categories.

The Carmelites were writing, of course, at a critical juncture for the renegotiation of European “racial” reflection, as the New World opened up to the West. Although the developments of thought on racial “otherness” at this stage were later superseded by the important “Enlightenment” discussions, already noted, it has been well said that the implications of that early modern expansion still haunts Atlantic culture. Moreover, both Teresa and John had part conversos (Jewish) blood, making them specially aware of the dangers and associations of certain kinds of racial identity in the period after the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian peninsula. Further, they were both subject to inquisitional investigation during their lifetime, and their remarkable reforming work within the Carmelite order led to active persecution and— in John’s case—actual imprisonment in a tiny (dark!) lavatory for fully nine months before he effected an escape. Their ascetic analysis of desire, moreover, and the truth claims associated with this analysis, raised in sharp form the key issues of the day about the relation of personal spiritual “certainty” (such as Luther, too, had claimed) both to ecclesial authority and to inherent philosophical cogency.

Since those questions of (philosophical) justification and warrant have not gone away in contemporary theology, and indeed have been intensified and refined yet further in recent secular epistemology, I shall conclude my discussion of the Carmelites' spiritual programme with a critical, apologetic, and philosophical turn: under what epistemic conditions can the Carmelites reasonably claim such justifying "certainty" about their theological claims, given the various "darknesses" of their quest, both noetic and moral? How can these different darknesses be sorted and assessed? And how is human desire, specifically, motivated and changed in such a quest? Finally, what are the implications for human selfhood considered communally (in church and society) of an ascetic commitment to dispossessed desire? Why does such a project seem repulsive to many in an age of endlessly "commodified desire," and how is this form of "asceticism" to be rescued from the characteristic Protestant charge of works righteousness?

By the end of these lectures, however, certain resolutions of these issues will have emerged, not least because the incipient christological undertow of my anthropological proposal will have gradually made its presence felt. Let me state this boldly: Christology for me represents the heart and climax of the mystery of the systematic endeavour, not its starting point. To enunciate a Christology on this view requires a progressive invitation first from the interruptive Holy Spirit into the life of God, to join the realm of those being conformed to Christ, to learn even how to recognize Christ non-idolatrously (a topic which I am saving for the last of these current lectures). It follows that a "purgative" path of chastened desire such as that outlined by the Carmelites has precisely the trajectory of such a christological "conformation," always undertaken in the Spirit's grace. But this is what Ernst Troeltsch would undoubtedly have called a Christology of the "mystic" type. If Teresa's and John's testimony is true, actual "union" with Christ is possible even in this life, and technically for them it is only under those conditions that one may rightly enunciate what it is to speak of the mystery of the renewed "image" of God in the human, for that is what Christ is. To the Barthian of course all this is inside out: the revelation in Christ is the primary, and defining starting point; to the follower of *théologie totale*, however, contemplative pneumatology is in contrast primary, and only slowly do the full and pervasive christological implications of the "conforming" path emerge. In other words, only through repeated, attentive silence is a true response to the Word enabled.

### The Authorities of Scripture, Tradition and "Reason"; Two Styles of Approach to Salvation: the Explanatory and the Existential/Poetic

And that brings me finally to some very short concluding remarks about what vision of Scriptural and other authorities governs my systematic undertaking. You may have been wondering! But in fact my systematic method is for the most part quite conventionally committed to the understanding of the relation of primary scriptural authority to tradition and reason as set forth by Richard Hooker at the very start of the

17th century on behalf of his new, Elizabethan reformed church in England. For Hooker, Scripture has and retains unequivocal and primary authority; yet its unfolding meaning is always creatively negotiated in relation to the views of the “rational saints” of earlier generations (that is what he means by “tradition”), and in conversation too with reason itself and natural law. The novum in Hooker, however, is that reason and natural law—unlike in Thomist scholasticism, which Hooker knew well—are themselves dynamic and developmental. The result for theological criteriology is a rich triadic negotiation that constantly remakes and extends its own “tradition” even as Scripture is ever returned to with the aid of a supple and pliant reason. It is really only in my additional stricture that progressively transformed “reason” is accessed and enlarged by contemplative activity in the Spirit, that I gloss or add to Hooker’s basic picture.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, an admission of my special and continuing Scriptural focus in this second volume of systematics is in order. This matter may also seem a bit elusive, but is in fact strongly determinative for the project. Just as I returned repeatedly in *God, Sexuality and the Self* to the summation passages of Romans 8 as a fundamental guide to the encounter with the trinitarian God, so Romans will again, implicitly but pervasively, propel my project in these second and third volumes on theological anthropology. But I have been affected here by an insight that there are at least two different styles of reflection on the Christian life in Romans that need each other: that which explains the objective atoning achievements of Christ for us in a series of richly irreducible metaphors and explanatory models (justification and sanctification for the individual; satisfaction and sacrifice for the atoning work of Christ), and that which invites the Christian existentially into an indissoluble union with Christ through shared baptismal death and resurrection (Romans 6), the ongoing struggles with sin (Romans 7), shared prayer and travail (Romans 8), and shared interpenetration in the “mystical body” (Romans 12). The objective explanatory metaphors for salvation are of course impossible to dispense with, and I shall treat of them at some length in volume 3, on current plans, with deep engagement then with Calvin’s commentary on the Romans and his Institutes; for crucial there will be Calvin’s extraordinary vision, so important also for Hooker, of how the outworkings of this salvation play into the public institutions of the state—governments, prisons, hospitals. But the motif of existential “oneing” with Christ in Paul’s theology is arguably more fundamental still, and it is this with which I shall be primarily concerned in these first set of lectures on theological anthropology, even though, when we get to the jail, it will be immediately evident that we cannot avoid the public, political implications of any theory of salvation. Yet as we shall see, the mystery and suffering and glory of this underlying “oneness” motif is such that new poetic images are constantly needed to try and express it

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13 The influence of Hooker’s Ecclesiastical Polity on the discussion of theological criteria in chapter 1 of *God, Sexuality and the Self* is admittedly more implicit than explicit, since I am saving further discussion and reclamation of both Calvin and Hooker for volume 3 of the systematics.



in all its richness and agony. These may, as we shall see, be as various and paradoxical as the pained, eschatological longings for “new bright robes” in heaven in a black spiritual, or the equally passionate invocation by a 17th-century English poet, Henry Vaughan, for that “deep, but dazzling darkness...where I in him might live invisible and dim.” Poetic expression of this mystical oneness with Christ remains irreducible in this theological exploration of sin and salvation, I shall argue, precisely because it is a journey fraught with so many paradoxes and tensions. It is not for nothing that John of the Cross saw his own poetry (both simple and sublime, tortured and ecstatic) as the irreducible matrix from which to unfurl his own detailed theological commentary.

In my next lecture I shall attempt to show something of why and how modern “race” came to have the role it does in pervasive projective cultural blaming, and how— for a theological anthropology according to a *théologie totale*— the acknowledgement of this state of affairs within Christianity itself is a crucial transitus to understanding what “sin” fundamentally is. Learning how to see in and through the “dark” in a racist environment becomes a painfully purgative journey for both oppressor and oppressed —though differently—for along the way each individual slowly realizes all her own entanglement, whether as oppressor or oppressed, in a hidden system of social ills, mutual projections and collective blindness.