

# Exile and Return: Trauma and the Unfinished Theological Task of Christian Preaching of the Hebrew Bible

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## Abstract

*David Stark argues the problem of Christians preaching the Hebrew Bible remains stuck in a binary between historical-critical approaches and christological allegorization. I view the problem as also a homiletical-theological one: Christians narrating the two-part canon unidirectionally, e.g., promise/fulfillment. In light of a rethinking of the reception of Jeremiah 31:31-34 in practice, I propose an alternative metaphor, “exile and return,” influenced by Cathy Caruth’s work on trauma, narrative, and history. I then concretize the complexity of trauma and history in the two-part canon itself through David Carr’s Holy Resilience. As for the other part of Stark’s binary, I propose revising our homiletical Christologies to emphasize Jesus’ Jewishness in differentiated relation to us, following J. Kameron Carter’s Race: A Theological Account. My revisions loosen Stark’s binary by relating Christology across differences of identity today within a trauma-informed hermeneutic. I conclude by proposing a homiletical model that (1) embraces a trauma-informed “not yet” in Christian proclamation of the Hebrew Bible, (2) re-focuses preaching “in Christ” as an identity-related homiletical point-of-view, and (3) acknowledges how struggles with trauma and point of view can foreground relations with inter-religious others today.*

**Keywords:** christian preaching; old testament; trauma; hermeneutics; christology; identity

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## 1. Introduction: Exile and Return and an Unfinished Theological Task

The Exile and return represent a key narrative event in the Hebrew Bible associated with the Babylonian destruction of the first temple and the later Persian permission to return to the land. Because of its pairing as “exile *and* return,” we are tempted to read such an event narratively, as if it were a simple plot. The reality of exile and return, however, was anything but simple. On the one hand, exile itself was a painful, recurring event in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I prefer the term Hebrew Bible because of its dislocating nature in Christian contexts. I am aware of its limitations as an adequate descriptor of the books that comprise it, especially parts of Daniel! Nonetheless, I wish to resist reinscribing what is for me a problematic use of the term Old Testament. Readers will note that I use that term below, but mostly because of the

The ten tribes in the northern kingdom of Israel, for example, were exiled years earlier as a result of the Assyrian onslaught. And as for return, well even the subsequent return from Babylon was a complex reality. Many of those who went into exile were leaders; yet many other people remained among the ruins. What about *them* and the so-called narrative of “exile and return?”<sup>2</sup> Richard Lischer quotes favorably literary critic Hugh Kenner when he argues that narrative plot tends to work like a broom—it sweeps everything in one direction.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. A critical example in Christian homiletical practice: Jeremiah 31:31–34

This sweeping problem with narrative seems even more acute to me here when I as a Christian preacher reflect on how to interpret a text in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>4</sup> I make brief reference here to Jeremiah 31:31–34 as a case in point:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

This lection shows up on Reformation Sunday in some North American churches. Its reference to old and new covenants becomes in the hand of later Christian interpreters a way of turning Christianity itself into the “new covenant.” The history of reception is bad enough in that the text and the terminology become a means of rendering Jewish persons invisible: Jeremiah was

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way I think its function in relation to New Testament is analogous to my chief critique of simple narratives. I will be using the terms successively, but I do not view them as interchangeable.

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Sharp calls exile and return a trope, especially within recent work of developing an Old Testament theology which has deployed it naively in readings of history, contemporary theological appropriation, or aesthetic rhetorical strategies. See *Carolyn Sharpe*, “The Trope of Exile and the Displacement of Old Testament Theology,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 31 no. 2 (Summer 2004): 153–169. By reading exile and return through trauma studies, I aim not to rehabilitate a trope for biblical theology, but to press against any narrative-theological master reading of the two-part Christian canon.

<sup>3</sup> Hugh Kenner as quoted in *Richard Lischer*, “The Limits of Story,” *Interpretation* 38, no. 1 (January 1984): 29.

<sup>4</sup> The article here lays the groundwork with dealing with a specific Hebrew Bible text that shows up in many Christian lectionaries, Jeremiah 31:31–34.

prophesying the new covenant that Jesus would bring in. Yet some contemporary commentators of Jeremiah do more than simply place the text in its historical context to disabuse interpreters of such supersessionist tendencies. In the last decade several Hebrew Bible scholars have used trauma studies to unpack the troubling book of Jeremiah and commented specifically on our North American Reformation Day lection from the “Book of Consolation” in Jeremiah 30–31. For Dr. Kathleen O’Connor, Jeremiah talks about the new covenant *largely in terms of the old covenant* as a way of restoring an intimate relationship between God and people—in keeping with the “survival strategy” of the Book of Consolation.<sup>5</sup> She warns about the tendency to turn Jeremiah’s word of promise amidst trauma and disaster into something it’s not: “I need to stress the continuity between the new covenant and the old one because Christians have so often perceived it as an invalidation of God’s covenant with the Jews, replaced by the new covenant in Jesus.”<sup>6</sup> The significance of this is tied to the notion that Jeremiah prophesies about Israel, yet lives at a time when the northern tribes are more of a dispersed memory. Dr. Corrine Carvalho, who likewise draws on trauma studies, points out the tragic shape of the longing that underlies the Book of Consolation’s reference to Israel: “...the poems depict God as desiring the return of *all* the tribes and families ...”<sup>7</sup> This specific longing underlines, to my mind, the way memory plays such a clear role in understanding the old covenant/new covenant language for our text. The specific communal tragedy and trauma of Jeremiah haunts this text in ways we can only struggle to understand.

In a similar fashion, though from a very different power perspective, this spectral aspect of the narrative interpretation of the Hebrew Bible/New Testament relation just keeps coming back to haunt Christian preaching, too. On a popular level, it can become manifest in ahistorical readings of Hebrew Bible texts that end up making every such text a preview of coming christological attractions: the Hebrew Bible predicts Jesus, or the mistaken idea that the Hebrew Bible is Law and the New Testament is gospel, and often even unchecked christological typology or allegory. In other words, Jesus in such a view must somehow or other make a cameo in every Hebrew Bible sermon—he’s the redemptive end point of the narrative plot. Among scholars the discussions go deeper, but still struggle with a kind of plotted narrative overlay: the Hebrew Bible relates to the New Testament as promise/fulfillment, shadow/substance, or a version of salvation history’s mighty acts of God that reaches its apogee in Jesus Christ. Either way, the theological narrative sweeps in just one direction.

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<sup>5</sup> Kathleen O’Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 93–114.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>7</sup> Corrine Carvalho, *Reading Jeremiah: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2016), 94.

How can exile and return help us deal with such problematic hermeneutical tendencies for Christian preaching of the Hebrew Bible today? Homiletician David Stark helps launch the kinds of questions that I want to ask about how to narrate theologically Christian proclamation.<sup>8</sup> In his article, Stark notes that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century much Christian preaching of the Hebrew Bible has been working one side or the other of a historical-christological binary. Historical approaches tend to isolate the uniqueness of the Hebrew Bible as a product of a distinct history that cannot be subsumed under Christian understandings.<sup>9</sup> Christian preaching may want to deal with Hebrew Bible texts but needs to respect their Jewishness or their witness to Israelite faith by letting such texts be what they are: not a collected preview of coming christological attractions, but the product of their own unique un-subsumable (and yes, un-supercedable) history. The christological part of the binary is apparent in many of the models we have touched on so far. Stark speaks of the attempt to use Christ as a figure to solve the problem of Christian preaching of the Hebrew Bible. But to Stark's credit, he ventures the outlines of an alternative: Christian preachers need to engage the task of history and Christology by revising or remixing their hermeneutical claims. In this way, it seems to me, the knot that is Stark's binary can be loosened.<sup>10</sup>

The potential of Stark's loosened binary brings me once again to the notion of exile and return. I warned early on that exile and return could just as easily as other hermeneutical approaches to interpreting the Hebrew Bible could be read as an event in the form of a simple narrative plot. That, however, is not my goal. In fact, I wish to read the notion of exile and return from a quite different perspective, not as a linear narration, but in light of trauma studies on narrative and history. I turn to literary theorist Cathy Caruth to help us to revise, or better complexify, the way we narrate and represent history *in light of trauma*. Her work will help to push back against the sweeping, linear narrative models that haunt Christian homiletical reflection on this enduring hermeneutic problem. Caruth helps us, by means of appeal to psychoanalysis and studies of literature, to grasp the nature of traumatic events for memory and history. As she does so, Caruth both lays a groundwork and loosens the ground that "permits history to arise where immediate understanding may not." The end result for us

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<sup>8</sup> David Stark, "New Approaches for Old Testament Preaching" *Homiletic* 43, no. 2 (Winter 2018). <https://doi.org/10.15695/hmltc.v43i2.4605>

<sup>9</sup> Stark uses the phrase "historical background" to describe the history side of the binary, "New Approaches," 13. To my mind, the history side of the binary is tied to an Enlightenment conception of historical criticism that operates as a critical principle against Christian allegorization and its consumption of the "otherness" of the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>10</sup> Stark finds key variations on the historical/christological binary in the work of Walter Brueggemann (Christological-Allusion), Charles Campbell (Inverted Typology), Ebony Marshall Turman (Scriptural Mash-up), Alexander Deeg (Intertextual Dialogue), and Eunjo Kim (Transcontextual Spiral) in "New Approaches," 14ff.

is history, revised—by means of traumatic experience and memory. In this way, exile and return are not merely a sweeping linear narrative, but a returning to the *site* of trauma. In support of this argument, this section will also appeal to the work of David Carr in *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins*. With his careful work on the role of trauma in the canon, Carr helps to locate trauma as a decisive element in the content and in the tensions at play across both parts of the Christian canon and the way they relate. Carr's careful and differentiated work on the roles of trauma in the two-part canon and its development helps me to see the problem of the Christian preaching of the Hebrew Bible in terms that make sense of exile and return in a traumatic sense.

Stark's wisdom about the unresolved binary of history and Christology informs the second half of this investigation as well, which means revising Christology—and in a direction that takes the Jewishness of Jesus more seriously and in connection with our own identities today. If Jesus is the apogee of preaching narratives, the high point of a progressive revelation emerging out God's mighty acts in history, much more than Jesus's contrast with Israelite and Jewish faith must be addressed. Here, the work of Paula Frederickson and J. Kameron Carter will call us forward. And as they do so, they will press our reflections on the *way* Christology shapes our hermeneutical problem to include matters of Jewish/gentile and ultimately racialized identities even today.

Yet this careful two-fold revision of what has been hitherto binaried is itself preliminary to the real task at hand. My explorations aim for a revised vision for Christian preaching of the Hebrew Bible: one that accounts for our received traumatic histories uttered on Sundays between ambo, font and table; and one that foregrounds Jesus' Jewish identity and in turn our more fluid Christian identity "in Christ."

### 3. Cathy Caruth: Trauma, Narrative, and History

We approach revising our sense of history aware of the kind of investigation we are conducting. Trauma studies emerges out of literary studies, which typically reflects on the discourse of trauma in literature, film, and culture. Trauma complexifies simple timelines of healing and lifts up precisely that which remains un-integrated in memory. Trauma theologian Shelly Rambo writes:

The emerging discourse of trauma at the end of the twentieth century provided a new framework in which to interpret suffering. A new understanding of trauma, as distinguished from other forms of loss, dispelled existing assumptions that trauma follows

a timeline of healing—that in time one can just get over or beyond it. Instead, trauma came to be identified as what does not get integrated in time, and thus returns or remains ...<sup>11</sup>

This language of “return” and the unintegrated is particularly important for understanding how Cathy Caruth helps us to rethink narrative and history for our unique theological and hermeneutical purposes for Christian preaching. In her book, *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth begins by focusing on Sigmund Freud’s retelling of Tasso’s story of Tancred and Clorinda in *Gerusalemme Liberata* as a way to understand the phenomenon of trauma.

...Tancred unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders’ army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again.<sup>12</sup>

Freud’s psychoanalytic reading of a story drenched in trauma, suffering, and loss surfaces the disorienting experience of wounding in memory. Freud is aware of many patients who experienced crises or wars or abuse “returning” to the wounding in an attempt to re-integrate and understand. Caruth draws out an important implication of Freud’s insight, “... trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or a truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but to what also remains unknown in our very actions and our language.”<sup>13</sup> Trauma complexifies simple, sweeping narratives and thus also tweaks our understanding of our Hebrew Bible texts, their encompassing in a Christian two-part canon, and its themes, yes, even “exile and return.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 4.

<sup>12</sup> From *Sigmund Freud*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, (London: Hogarth, 1953-74) vol. 18, chapter 3 as quoted in *Cathy Caruth*, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Caruth*, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> This insight about trauma is not just a literary experience or somehow limited to fiction. In a subsequent chapter, “Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History (*Freud*, *Moses and Monotheism*),” Caruth links her reading of Freud and the importance ascribed to the Exodus from Egypt as well as Freud’s own departure from Austria for England during WWII in *Caruth*, *Unclaimed Experience*, 11-25.

#### 4. History and Memory: Trauma, the Canon, and Reframing Identity

Hebrew Bible scholar David Carr seeks in his book *Holy Resilience* to understand the development of the two-part canon in light of trauma theory. Carr is sensitive to the reality that so much of the literature around trauma emerges out of the concern for individuals, whether in psychoanalytic theory or in neuro-biological studies of trauma. He wishes instead to consider the impact of trauma on groups, and not just those on whom trauma “explodes” but on groups who undergo identity-altering catastrophes.<sup>15</sup> In my view it is precisely Carr’s linkage of traumatized communities and identity that best serves the exploration of our question about Christian preaching of the Hebrew Bible.

In fairness, Carr’s argument is not about the universality of trauma in the Bible, nor that trauma is the only available frame for its traditions. For Carr, some of the canon “predates” trauma. He identifies two pre-traumatic bundles of scripture: northern traditions of Israel (Exodus, 1 Kings 12 and its establishment of the Northern Kingdom under Jeroboam) and southern traditions of Judah under a centralized kingship and worship in Jerusalem (creation narratives, wisdom traditions, royal psalms).<sup>16</sup> Going forward, much of the canon is torn by successive catastrophes: Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek, and eventually Roman, which impacted both Jewish nationalism and the subsequent Christian missionary impulse. Oddly, as these many traumatic catastrophes are borne, they also help render the preceding traditions valuable for re-use over time because, unlike heroic stories of national greatness, their stories of loss are still told and held close.

Key to the development of the canon is the way that experiences of trauma in catastrophe prompted profound reframings of identity along the way. For Carr, the Assyrian catastrophe is particularly important and comes to speech especially in the prophet Hosea—Carr also links this to a key moment in a decisive move toward monotheism.<sup>17</sup> The Assyrian empire sweeps in with its incredible military, sets up “covenants” with its defeated neighbors, and demands both tributes and loyalty. Further attempts at defection from Assyria through alliances or dalliances with other nations lead to ever more repressive rule and the installation of other puppet kings. Israel’s northern experience of worshipping Yahweh along with other gods in various cultic sites seems thus utterly repudiated in the catastrophe of their suffering. Hosea speaks into such a moment. Hosea is radical and misogynistic for enacting the relationship of God to the people as his wife by marrying a temple prostitute. According to Carr, Hosea’s takes the violent, abusive way of Assyrian (hypermasculine) kings deal with defeated (emasculated,

<sup>15</sup> David Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible’s Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 7-8.

<sup>16</sup> Here I am summarizing Carr’s argument from *Holy Resilience*, 11-23.

<sup>17</sup> Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 24-40. My summary follows in this paragraph.

feminized) nations and use the lack of loyalty of the feminized (victim) wife as the reason for suffering. The prophet thus imports Assyrian propaganda to reinterpret Israel's sin and to lift up an absolute call to monotheism.<sup>18</sup> Carr explains the value of this move in terms of how traumatized people deal with suffering. Some meaning is better than no meaning, he argues, especially if it means that “no one is in charge.” This history and experience of catastrophe, in turn, becomes reinterpreted in the Southern Kingdom of Judah as a warning. It is the first use of traumatic suffering as a means of redefining the more optimistic, rosy stories of the pre-traumatic history of the north (in Exodus) and in the south as well. Trauma becomes an engine for a radical reframing of identity in the event of Assyria and through the word of the prophet Hosea. To my mind, it is a painful, living example of what systematic theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson calls: “Theology as Response to a Wound.”<sup>19</sup>

One last note before we leave Carr's work on the canon and trauma. The experience of what I am calling “exile and return” keeps happening over time. Babylonians, of course, but also Greeks and Romans bring traumatic catastrophes that occasion reframings of identity in Jewish communities who remember the plight of the ten northern tribes of Israel. This is true not only in what Christians usually call intertestamental Judaism, but in the Jewish reality that is the earliest Christianity. In doing so, Carr makes an important move for our task in particular: figuring out what it means for Christians to preach texts from the Hebrew Bible. Carr himself notes that the impact of trauma surrounds Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection as well as the traumatic event that ultimately sets into motion the writing of the gospels: the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.<sup>20</sup> Now, of course, the identity reframing issues are not just with other Jews (and gentiles), but also with Rome itself which shares an interest in how to define just who is Jewish and who is not in the years thereafter. The canon for Carr is not a book dropped out of heaven. It contains writings many of which themselves are born out of historical trauma and seek to pick up the pieces of identity and reconfigure them in the midst of a new struggle. For Carr, the crystallization into canon is itself a piece of this reworking of identity—whether in Jewish places like Jabneh or in gentile Christian places later as they begin imagining Christianity as a separate religion and view themselves as the rightful inheritors of Israel's legacy.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 35–37.

<sup>19</sup> Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 12ff.

<sup>20</sup> Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 225–26.

<sup>21</sup> Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 212.



The books that we have in the Christian Bible's two-part canon are themselves enmeshed in trauma through centuries of historical catastrophes. These traumatic moments have impact by causing surviving groups or re-emerging powers to reframe their identities in profound and culturally complex ways. To speak of a two-part canon is also to account for these historically traumatic and unintegrated *ruptures* that permeate them from Genesis to Revelation. The canon offers no sweeping, finished narrative but embodies in various ways the remaining trauma of my more jagged metaphor of "exile and return." It leaves us not with sweeping narratives in a single direction, but a haunting, unfinished narrative-theological task in Christian preaching of the Hebrew Bible—an unintegrated experience from a time of reframing of Jewish identity after the Temple's destruction.

### 5. Revising Christology: The Jewishness of Jesus and Christian Identity

In light of this trauma in history, we turn to the christological side of David Stark's knotted binary. Trauma certainly complexifies the way we think of a kind of narrative theology of scripture, as evidenced by Carr's work on the resultant identity issues coursing through the two-part canon. But with Christology we also move squarely into matters of identity that touch on the person of the risen, crucified One. And for the sake of corporate identity in what eventually becomes a dominant gentile Christianity, one thing about the identity of Jesus becomes crucial: the struggle over Jesus' Jewishness.

I use the adverb of time in the last sentence with some intention. Gentile Christians are the ones who in the end crafted the most enduring legacies of christological reflection. The only problem is that they easily cause us to gloss over the Jewishness of Jesus and the Jewish reality of what we too breezily call early Christianity. In a recent book, Paula Frederickson aims to reconstruct the first generation of "Christians" in Jerusalem in the New Testament, the circle of James. The almost tongue-in-cheek title of her book is *When Christians Were Jews*.<sup>22</sup> Yet contemporary Christians reflecting on how to interpret Hebrew Bible texts for preaching need to remember the Jewishness of Jesus and the Jewish environment of Ancient Christianity. All this is to say that the Jewishness of Jesus is itself bound up with vibrant Jewish traditions that existed together after Jesus' crucifixion and after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Our canonical Christian texts, which we now call the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, emerged in an environment where the Temple catastrophe had caused many Jewish groups, including a then small Christian sect, to reframe their identities—and a few of these were bound up with the identity of the Jewish Jesus.

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<sup>22</sup> Frederickson admits as much on the final page of her Epilogue, *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 191.

We recall that the 19<sup>th</sup> century christological resolution to Stark's knotted binary usually involved making Jesus the focus or the end of Christian preaching of the Hebrew Bible. We noted how this played out in ways that turned the Hebrew Bible into mere predictions about Jesus or a useful seedbed for christological figures, types, and allegories. But to turn to Christology does not require such a reductive move. A Christology rooted in Jesus' Jewishness offers opportunities for rethinking the task of preaching Hebrew Bible today.

An important recent example is J. Kameron Carter's discussion of his work in *Race: A Theological Account*. Carter's central claim is that Western Christianity's white supremacy has its roots in an abandonment of the Jewishness of Jesus. Carter argues that there is a deep connection between a Christology born of a struggle with Judaism that eventually discards the oriental Jesus at the dawn of modernity and thus helps make possible an elision of Christianity's essence with whiteness:

Christianity's central figure, Jesus Christ, came to be racialized ultimately as a figure of the Occident, though as regards his bodily status he was deemed to be not of the West. As regards his flesh he was of the Orient, an oriental Jew. Reconceived as an occidental (rational) religion, Christianity was transformed into the cultural property of the West. Christian civilization became Western civilization, and vice versa. Thus, embedded within the social imaginary of the civilizations of the West is the theological problem of the *Rassenfrage* [...]. Modernity/coloniality is quintessentially the product of an ideological usage of Jesus.<sup>23</sup> (emphasis author)

In a recent print interview, one writer summed up Carter's work tersely: "white supremacy is ultimately a cloaked version of supersessionism."<sup>24</sup> Yet Carter also goes on to describe a different way of doing Christology that undoes that supersessionism by reconnecting Jesus with his Jewishness—and in the face of subsequent colonial and racial claims that haunt Euro-American Christians still:

To account oneself a Christian who is, in theological terms, a Gentile, that is, a non-Jew, but nevertheless accounts their salvation as coming from the Jew who is Jesus, who himself is the culmination of the story of Israel's relationships with their God, and therefore is the Messiah of Israel, is, in many ways, an *interracial claim*. What this means in effect is that as a Gentile, I am in the position of Ruth in the Bible, where my family of commitment is in a

<sup>23</sup> J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 372.

<sup>24</sup> Adam McInturf, "Race: A Theological Account: An Interview with J. Kameron Carter," *Cultural Encounters* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2009), 77.

people who are not my people but who received me, and that is my salvation. What is a Gentile Christian? A Gentile Christian is one who echoes the promises of Yahweh to the people of Israel, which have redounded to the whole world. Now, in the racial terms of modernity, that sounds like *mulatto* existence.<sup>25</sup>

We notice the crucial shift of key here. For Carter this Jewish identity of Jesus continues to impact our interracial claims about him and through them our own identity today. In order to describe the way in which this can impact identity, Carter draws on the work of Maximus the Confessor: “Maximus conceives of human nature as being reopened in Christ, not simply to God but also to itself. Christ reopens humanity to embrace the many that is constitutive of created human nature, enacting it no longer within an order of tyrannical division but, rather, in an order of “peaceful difference,” the one-many structure of creation.”<sup>26</sup>

## 6. Beyond the Knotted Binary

Christian preaching of the Hebrew Bible is conditioned by the traumas of the first part of the canon and by the first-century trauma of the destruction of the Temple that affected many Jewish groups, forcing a painful reframing of identities. What was at that time a Jewish sect was morphing in time into a predominantly gentile religion. When today’s Christians interpret the Hebrew Bible by usurping texts in a supersessionist way, we too often find ourselves erasing Jewish life as well as the Jewishness of the Jesus whom we confess. Similarly, when we return liturgically to anti-Jewish New Testament texts and sentiments without recalling Jesus’ Jewishness, we are unknowingly returning to the site of trauma and publicly re-enacting it.

This may be why our haunted history with this hermeneutical problem has led us to re-narrate the trauma into something else: law and gospel, promise and fulfillment, shadow and substance, unidirectional typology, or even christological allegory. The danger with this re-narrating is that the Hebrew Bible functions more or less to prop up a smooth and sweeping narrative theology of Christian faith.

For this reason, the other side, the historical side, of Stark’s binary may still attract. It does remain tempting to distance historically so as not to usurp meaning with christological overlays or sweeping, tidy narratives. The problem with what I view as the historical-critical “hands off” solution is that actual *Christians* preach the Hebrew Bible. But when pursued this way homiletically the Hebrew Bible and its Christian interpreters run the risk of never really

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>26</sup> Carter, *Race*, 351.

meeting in our sermons. How can Christians preach the Hebrew Bible to honor its otherness, but as if we were not Christians—as if we were holding our identity in abeyance or suspension?

This is why I think trauma studies begins to loosen the knot of Stark's binary. The unintegrated, traumatic event allows us to foreground both the wound and the struggle for identity. Theology begins with a wound and the struggle of the canon itself is one about re-framing identity in light of the wound. Yet this trauma also disrupts the closed narratives we usually run to smooth the transition in our Christian two-part canon. With trauma, narrative does not sweep to a tidy conclusion; there is rather still work to do. And as for gentile Christologies that neglect or gloss over or erase the particularity of Jesus' Jewishness, there is a tragically missed opportunity to place "peaceful difference" at the heart of our Christian homiletical work with the Hebrew Bible. As heirs of this traumatic moment, our theological task remains *unfinished*. When Christians preach from the Hebrew Bible, we revisit that which is unintegrated, that which *remains*.

In light of this unintegrated traumatic history, and in the name of the Jewish Jesus who addresses us across relational difference, it is high time to revise the task of Christian preaching of the Hebrew Bible for faithfully living out the gospel in our intercultural and inter-religious context today. Facing the trauma of our traditions and connected to the opened "peaceful difference" of our Christology, we who are "in Christ" preach Hebrew Bible acknowledging the following:

1. *Christian faith holds to the unresolved "not yet" of trauma and healing in our traditions, and not merely the sweeping, completed narrative of "already." Christians preaching the Hebrew Bible remain connected to the mysterious God whom Jesus Christ himself is still disclosing in relation to us. As such, Jesus is not merely an object of preaching let alone the "end" of the Hebrew Bible sermon. Just as for Jesus, the scriptures (Hebrew Bible) call us, without appeal to simple tropes or sweeping narratives, to struggle with the mysterious purposes of God in the midst of our struggles.*
2. *Even so, Christian preachers preach "in Christ."<sup>27</sup> In doing so, they point to Jesus Christ who, while himself the gospel (Mark 1:1), still preaches the "gospel of God" (Mark 1:14). Thus, Christian preachers*

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<sup>27</sup> I develop this idea inspired by the work of my teacher, David Buttrick. Buttrick argued in *Homiletic* that Christian preaching participated in a double hermeneutic and that the task of Christian preaching of the Hebrew Bible entailed acknowledging the preaching took place not from some disinterested historical frame, but from within what he called "Christian consciousness." I am not seeking to reclaim Buttrick's patchwork phenomenology for preaching, but I do think his notion of consciousness as a kind of theological point of view goes a long way toward mitigating the blunders of the Christian preaching tradition that Stark has been highlighting. See *David Buttrick, Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987), 258 and 356–57.

*preach theocentrically in relationship with Jesus rather than reproducing a Christocentric object in every Hebrew Bible sermon. Jesus is not the solution to every Hebrew Bible text, but we who preach Hebrew Bible in Christian communities acknowledge that we do so “in” a theocentric Christ. In this way Christian preachers acknowledge that we from our Christian perspective are interpreting this Hebrew Bible text from a Christian identity within Jesus’ theocentric orientation to God and God’s kin-dom.*

3. *To preach in Christ while holding to Jesus’ Jewishness, is analogous to engaging our own emerging identity in conversation with others. Preaching with the Hebrew Bible, we acknowledge now inter-religiously the way in which the Hebrew scriptures expand our vision of Christian identity—not as a narrowing act of Christian supersessionism. In this way, Christian preaching acknowledges its own identity as it dialogues with scriptures that belong also to other, living religious communities, especially Judaism. This sense of emerging, dialogical identity has an impact ultimately on oppressive discourses and representations of others as we preach from the Hebrew Bible.*

In conclusion, Christian preaching of the Hebrew Bible acknowledges the trauma around identity in Christian/Jewish relations and in the two canons themselves, preaches in Christ not as an authoritative object but as a point of view, and embraces the necessity of re-framing our Christian identity in ongoing conversation with both parts of the canon and with others’ traditions.

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