

INTERPRETING 2 PETER
THROUGH AFRICAN AMERICAN
WOMEN'S MORAL WRITINGS

SBL Press

EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND ITS LITERATURE

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Shively T. J. Smith

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To our daughters.

Every day you remind me that what we see, hear, feel, and know through our embodiments matter. Thank you for holding me steady.

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Preface

In the fall of 2020, the Society of Biblical Literature curated an unprecedented and courageous moment—we hosted an international virtual panel called “#BlackScholarsMatter: Visions and Struggles, Lessons and Hopes.” As a learned society whose founding did not include scholars of African descent and other minoritized peoples, the Society of Biblical Literature paused to listen to their stories and experiences as members, and we reflected on matters of inclusion, diversity, and humane treatment of our diverse, global membership. In the wake of the internationally publicized George Floyd murder, while our guild was home and quarantined like the rest of the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we sat with the unsettling reality that our community has unaddressed histories of omission, prejudice, aggression, silencing, and harm. I was a panelist included in that 2020 forum. I sat at the virtual table among a senior generation of African diaspora biblical scholars—Renita Weems, Randall Bailey, Vincent Wimbush, Madipoane Masenya, and Cheryl Anderson.

Many of them were the stuff of legend for me. I had read them as a study abroad student at Oxford University from the bookstore floor in the city center. I could not afford to purchase the books myself, so I sat and read *Stony the Road We Trod* and other books by African Americans such as Frederick Douglass, James Baldwin, and Octavia Butler for a change of venue from my usual place of study, the Radcliffe Camera library. Those books and their recollections reminded me of why I had to persist in my studies. However, I suffered from extreme culture shock and a new awareness of my intersectional identity. Short of my year-long study abroad, my undergraduate studies occurred at the historic Fisk University (Nashville, TN). It is the school of W. E. B. Du Bois, Aaron Douglas, Virginia Broughton, and even Ida B. Wells (for a short time). I did not realize how lonely and silencing the field of critical biblical studies could be outside the classrooms of my college until I found myself in the United Kingdom. A southern African American woman studying exegesis, languages, and

patristics in the halls of one of the oldest institutions of higher learning in the Western world—I was an anomaly in many of my seminars and the library. So, I sat on the bookstore floor to remind myself I had predecessors in my story. I was not the only African American student (and international student of color) who aspired to master the interpretive endeavor with its multiple chronological and contextual histories, translations, and epistemologies. I was one among others.

Almost twenty years later, as I participated in the society's #Black-ScholarsMatter Symposium, I purposely left the story-telling about the journey of being a scholar-teacher of African diaspora descent in our learned society to those with seniority. I opted, instead, to imagine the determinants for my colleagues, allies, and guild to act as though those cultural sites mattered now. Thus, I took my courageous step and invited our learned society to join me on that bookstore's proverbial floor. What might happen to our collective scholasticism if we avail ourselves of the opportunities provided by two thousand years of contextual interpretive history that is not overly determined by the cultural records and epistemological artifacts of the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Reformation, or even the Enlightenment (to name a few)? I invited us to consider the power of leveraging our intellectual skills to learn something new by using a passage from the moral discourse of a nineteenth century African American woman biblical interpreter, Anna Julia Cooper (1858–1964). She was a biblical scholar our learned society did not recognize as an exegete and interpreter of the Bible in her lifetime. However, she finally received such recognition from womanist and feminist biblical scholars over a century later, starting in the early 1990s. Cooper encouraged her readers to practice the “gospel of intelligence,” which seeks to serve the disenfranchised, oppressed, and silenced populations of the world through education. In my paper, I tailored Cooper's descriptions of the social responsibilities of educators to serve communities and society for our intellectual community by saying:

It is the work of our guild—as arbiters and interpreters of not just ancient texts and histories but arbiters and interpreters of knowledge—to articulate the contextual dimensions and biases of our traditional hermeneutical approaches and contemporary hermeneutical developments. Moreover, our collective responsibility is to work at interpreting from new centers of biblical history and literature, new centers of contextual meaning and significance, and new centers of epistemological inquiry and reason, particularly centers that are not our own. It is no longer

merely the task of African diaspora scholars to resource and center our interpretive histories, sources, and epistemologies. Rather it is a shared dilemma and responsibility that should be taken up by the entire field that reframes the hierarchies of knowledge and scholarship historically omitted and disregarded by traditional studies in biblical history, exegesis, theology, and hermeneutics.

Now, over two years later, I am more convinced that it is our collective responsibility to explore, describe, and model new centers of interpretive knowing and history. The feedback I received from colleagues representing diverse social locations, orientations, and cultures worldwide inform my confidence. An intellectual resolve appears to be forming globally. We want to participate in the tasks of our guild differently, with academic study reflecting the totality of our membership. That response encouraged me and encourages me still. This book is my contribution to that endeavor from the site of my research interests in Petrine studies, translation-based exegesis, rhetorical studies, cultural and social history, and African American literature. That which I proposed from the Society of Biblical Literature's virtual table while recalling my floor-reading book experience approximately twenty years earlier, I now do. It is my contribution to our collective scholasticism as we continue to expand our interpretive borders and become the globally engaged learned society represented by our membership and beyond it.

Such an endeavor has been an act of research, resilience, and hope. I am grateful for the intellectual and personal communities that encouraged this project at different stages in its development. My first notion to analyze early Christian literature, in conversation with the literary canon of African American women, occurred during a coteaching experience with Josiah Young at Wesley Theological Seminary (Washington, DC). While facilitating the Introduction to African Diaspora Religious Thought, I found myself in discussions about the interpretive practices and significance of women like Maria Stewart, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, and others. The course was designed for masters-level students, but it set me on a path that gave birth to this project. It transported me to my ethics courses taught by Marica Riggs at Columbia Theological Seminary. To discuss ethics required engaging African American women's literary production and vice versa. In Riggs's courses, ethical theory and black women writers contributed to the same conversation. She equipped me with the beginnings of a model for how to blend translation-based exe-

genesis in early Christian literature with African American women's moral discourses as a singular pursuit. Thank you, Josiah and Marcia, for curating learning communities in which I imagined the sources of knowledge for my exegetical endeavor differently.

Various organizations and institutions have supported my research. The Louisville Institute's (LI) First Book Grant for Scholars of Color provided the research year I needed to conceive and write this book. I am grateful for the kinds of scholarly projects LI continues to support, including mine. I also appreciate the work of The Wabash Center and the directorship of Dr. Nancy Lynne Westfield. Wabash's virtual venues have created platforms for me to explore how my research may serve scholarship and teaching spaces. The editors of SBL Press and of the *Early Christianity and its Literature* series were wonderful colleagues throughout the process. They made room for my exegesis, sources, and interpretive approach to be counted as a volume in our learned society's scholarly listing. I am particularly thankful for the editorial feedback and time Nicole L. Tilford and Shelly Matthews committed to my project. Furthermore, my institution, Boston University School of Theology, supplied the resources, time, and support I needed at all levels—from deans, faculty, staff, and students—thank you. Boston University's Howard Thurman Center offered me space to escape and focus on preparing the manuscript for publication, and I am grateful.

The life of the mind and the work of a scholar is often imagined to be a lonely path. This book, however, has been accompanied by a great cloud of scholarly witnesses beyond institutions. Thank you to Meghan Henning, Candida Moss, Juan Hernández Jr., Margaret Mitchell, Laura Nasrallah, Rodney Caruthers II, Rob von Thaden, Kimberleigh Jordan, Stephanie Crumpton, Luis Menéndez Antuña, Nicolette Manglos-Weber, Jonathon Cavillo, Filipe Maia, Courtney Goto, Charlene Zuill, and Shonda Jones. Also, I give special thanks to Vernon K. Robbins, who read many iterations of my research and provided multiple feedback forms. I also extend humble gratitude to my research assistants—Zoe Towler, Austin Washington, and Amber Jogie—for their scanning, citation, and review hours. Of course, I am grateful for my first two Fisk University professors who, together, set me on the path of the life of the mind and introduced African American literature and biblical interpretation to me as one conversation: Drs. Karen Collier and Lean'tin Bracks.

Last, I am thankful for my family and all the ways you have accompanied me through this project. Among them, I position my scholarly

sister-friend, Dr. Kimberly D. Russaw. Thank you for my daily encouragement. You listened to me read and think aloud while constantly reminding me to “take care of yourself.” You were an anchoring presence who cleared the way so I could keep working. I am also humbled by the gift of my family anchors: Wenefer and Tony White; Deborah Washington and Victoria Downs; Gwen and Ed Thomas; Brian and Cheryl Smith; “The Clarks”; Claudine Smith; Frank S. Jackson Sr.; Angela Sims and family; Satira Streeter Corbitt and family; Dana Williams and family; Theresa Thames and Dawn Hand; Christian and Alexandra Rose; Autumn and Joi Wilson, Julia Buckner, Alisa Parker-LaGrone and family; the Flukers; my Lee family; my Belin-Ingram family; my Nebo Christian Ministries church family (Baltimore, MD); and Metropolitan AME church family (Washington, DC). I am most thankful for “The Crew”: Brian R. Smith and our daughters. The three of you believed, read, listened, and joked, and you never stopped supporting.

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Abbreviations

1 Clem.	1 Clement
1 En.	1 Enoch
2 Clem.	2 Clement
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Freeman, David Noel, ed. <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
<i>Abr.</i>	Philo, <i>De Abrahamo</i>
ABYRL	Anchor Bible Yale Reference Library
AcBib	Academia Biblica
Acts Pet.	Acts of Peter
<i>A.J.</i>	Josephus, <i>Antiquitates judaicae</i>
ANF	Roberts, Alexander, and James Donaldson, eds. <i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325</i> . 10 vols. New York: Christian Literature Company, 1885–1887.
<i>Ann.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Annales</i>
Apoc. Ezek.	Apocryphon of Ezekiel
Apoc. Pet.	Apocalypse of Peter
AYBRL	The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
Barn.	Barnabas
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	Bauer, Walter, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BDF	Blass, F. and A. Debrunner. <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Translated and revised by Robert W. Funk. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
<i>B.J.</i>	Josephus, <i>Bellum judaicum</i>

BibInt	Biblical Interpretation
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BSNA	Biblical Scholarship in North America
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CEB	Common English Bible
<i>Comm. Rom.</i>	Origen, <i>Commentarii in Romanos</i>
ConBNT	Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series
ConC	Concordia Commentary
<i>Conf.</i>	Philo, <i>De confusione linguarum</i>
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
<i>De an.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Soul</i>
<i>De or.</i>	Cicero, <i>De oratore</i>
<i>Decal.</i>	Philo, <i>De decalogo</i>
<i>Deus</i>	Philo, <i>Quod Deus sit immutabilis</i>
Digest	A compendium of Roman law drawn together from laws long in force by (eastern) Emperor Justinian in the sixth century
Diogn.	Letter to Diognetus
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
<i>Ep.</i>	Pliny the Younger, <i>Letters</i> ; Seneca, <i>Epistles</i>
<i>Eph.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Ephesians</i>
ESEC	Emory Studies in Early Christianity
GPBS	Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship
<i>Haer.</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Adversus haereses (Elenchos)</i>
<i>Her.</i>	Philo, <i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
HKNT	Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HvTSt</i>	<i>Hervormde Theologiese Studies</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	Buttrick, George A., ed. <i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . 4 vols. New York: Abingdon, 1962.
<i>IDBSup</i>	Crim, Keith, ed. <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume</i> . Nashville: Abingdon, 1976.
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Inst.</i>	Quintilian, <i>Institutio Oratoria</i>
<i>Ios.</i>	Josephus, <i>Iosepho</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>

<i>JFSR</i>	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
KJV	King James Version
LBLA	La Biblia de las Américas translation
<i>Leg.</i>	Philo, <i>Legum allegoriae</i>
LXX	Septuagint
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
<i>Leg.</i>	Athenagoras, <i>Legatio pro Christianis</i>
<i>Legat.</i>	Philo, <i>Legatio ad Gaium</i>
Liv. Pro.	Lives of the Prophets
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
Mart. Pol.	Martyrdom of Polycarp
<i>MELUS</i>	<i>Multi-Ethnic Literature of the US</i>
<i>MM</i>	Moulton, J. H. and G. Milligan. <i>Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament</i> . Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995 [1914–1929].
<i>Mos.</i>	Philo, <i>De vita Mosis</i>
MT	Masoretic Text
NA28	Aland, Barbara, and Kurt Aland, et al., eds. <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . 28th rev. ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Biblegesellschaft, 2012.
NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint
<i>NIB</i>	<i>New Interpreters Bible</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NRSVue	New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition
NTL	The New Testament Library

NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
Prob.	Philo, <i>Quod omnis probus liber sit</i>
Pol.	Aristotle, <i>Politica</i>
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
Praem.	Philo, <i>De praemiis et poenis</i>
Praescr.	Tertullian, <i>De praescriptione haereticorum</i>
Prob.	Philo, <i>Quod omnis probus liber sit</i>
RBECS	<i>Reviews of Biblical and Early Christian Studies</i>
RBS	Resources for Biblical Studies
Rhet.	Aristotle, <i>Rhetoric</i>
Rom.	Ignatius, <i>To the Romans</i>
RRA	Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity
RSV	Revised Standard Version
Re&T	Religion and Theology
RVR	Reina-Valera Revisión de 1909
Sacr.	Philo, <i>De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLGNT	Holmes Michael, W., ed. <i>The Greek New Testament SBL Edition</i> . Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010.
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
Scorp.	Tertullian, <i>Scorpiace</i>
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
Sobr.	Philo, <i>De sobrietate</i>
SP	Sacra Pagina
Spec.	Philo, <i>De specialibus legibus</i>
SREC	Sociorhetorical Explorations Commentaries
SRI	Sociorhetorical Interpretation
Strom.	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Stromateis</i>
T. Sim.	Testament of Simeon
T. Zeb.	Testament of Zebulun
TDNT	Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976.
Theog.	Hesiod, <i>Theogonia</i>
UBS4	Aland, Barbara, et al., eds. <i>The Greek New Testament</i> . 4th rev. ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1994.

<i>Virt.</i>	Philo, <i>De virtutibus</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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