

EMANCIPATION DAY

AUGUST 1, 2021 CELEBRATION



Imperfect People Shaping
a More Perfect World



**Do you feel that
you can make a
difference in
addressing some
of the injustices
in today's world?**

As a student preparing for leadership in the Church, a colleague and I were given an assignment to research and analyze the collections that the Apostle Paul had initiated to help poor Christians. On the surface it seemed simple, but further research led my colleague and me to see hidden dynamics and greater

complexities. On the face of it, Jewish Christians were experiencing hard times and Paul asked some Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians to contribute to a collection to help the poor Jewish Christians. ((1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8:1-9:15; cf. Gal 2:10; Rom 15:25-31) It became apparent that underneath this simple request were questions that existed at the time about Paul's legitimacy. Paul had not been one of Jesus' original disciples and after Jesus' death Paul had persecuted Christians before Paul's conversion. Not everyone trusted Paul. There were disputes within the leadership of the believers as some Jewish Christian leaders thought that purity laws

observed by the Jews should be mandatory for Gentile converts. Paul disagreed with that position and as Paul had made many converts among Gentiles, the difference of opinion, and more so the failure of Gentile Christians to send the collection as promised, could potentially undermine Paul's work and reputation.

I was astonished at the picture of Paul which unfolded during the research. As we made the presentation to the class, I asked the Lecturer, where was the un-mixed motive in this seemingly altruistic initiative by Paul? Pausing for a while, the Lecturer eventually said, 'Marjorie, if you wait for the

un-mixed motive, you will not do anything." I have had occasion over the ensuing decades to reflect on this response. Beyond our intentional efforts at ethical behaviour, factors such as the cultural context and psychological dynamics within ourselves, often hidden from our awareness, can and do shape us. The result sometimes is that we miss the mark with respect to our conscious intentions and, we may in time realize the humbling fact that we are not perfect, and that no other human being is perfect. With awareness and hard work, we can develop the faith, hope, love and courage to try to make this world a better place, regardless of our limitations.

These five reflections on emancipation from enslavement offer the opportunity to consider and be inspired by imperfect people working to shape a more perfect world. Emancipation of enslaved Africans in Canada & the whole British Empire became effective on August 1, 1834. Enslaved Africans and their allies fought for and won this victory. Canada had enslaved Africans within its borders and the Canadian government has acknowledged this fact. In Canada and many other countries of the world, the struggle to end all forms of anti-Black racism continues into this generation. The government of Canada, at the end of July 2020, in recognition of Canada's Black history, announced four new historic designations. For more information about these new designations, see:

 <https://bit.ly/30lrVAT>

This reflection on Emancipation: *Imperfect People shaping a More Perfect World*, is divided in five parts. The reflections cover music, the role of the Church in emancipation and anti-Black racism, Human Trafficking as a modern-day form of slavery and a Bible Study on the Epistle to Philemon. The fifth part is a Review.

Senator Wanda Bernard successfully lobbied for Emancipation Day, August 1, to be officially recognized in Canada. In March 2021, Members of Parliament voted unanimously in the House of Commons to designate Emancipation Day across Canada. More information can be found at:

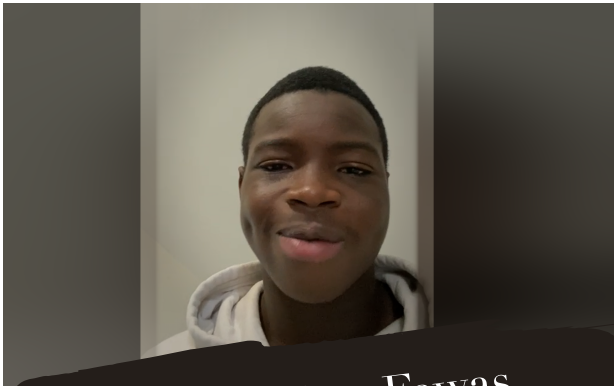
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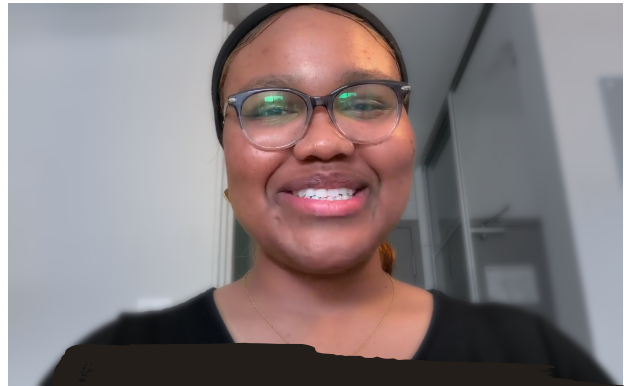
Portrait of "Bla(K)ness. V.I. vocal artist Emogen "Bla(k)ness"

Acadia Students Reflect On & Share Ideas On Faith, Slavery and Emancipation in Canada

click to watch videos



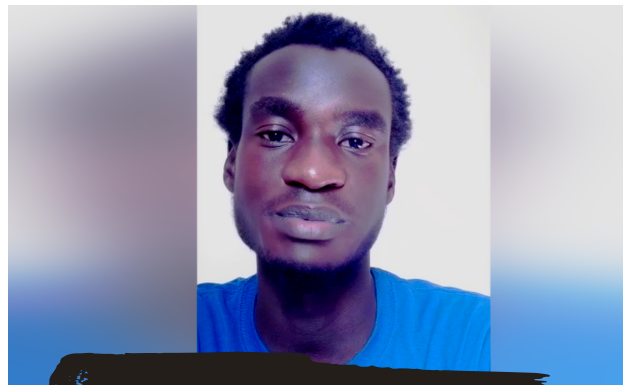
Abduljabar Fawas



Samaria Paynter



Excellence Sowunmi



Awongngi Andrew

MUSIC AND EMANCIPATION

Music has played, and continues to play a role in people's struggle for self-determination. Creativity, comfort, and courage are aspects of music that have been harnessed by Africans on the continent, in the

Caribbean and the Americas and the wider African Diaspora. You are invited to listen to the music at the links below.



Lift Every Voice and Sing
Aretha Franklin



Bob Marley - Redemption Song



Peter Tosh - Creation



Cynthia Erivo - Stand Up



Odetta - Motherless Child



Lift Every Voice And Sing
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre

Questions for Reflection

- ◆ How did you respond to the different pieces of music? Were there feelings of sadness, anger, confusion, joy, peace, warmth, curiosity, other? No emotions at all?
- ◆ Can you include these feelings in your prayer / meditation / reflection?

Prayers

Pray using the following guide:

I am thankful for...

I ask God to help me with...

I am sorry for...

I ask God to forgive and heal...

I have hope and sense God's power when...

Pray The Lord's Prayer in your first language...



GLIMPSES OF THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN EMANCIPATION

This section introduces Richard Preston's story of agency to end enslavement and counter racism, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries CE; and modern stories of some churches' action to apologize for participation in the past enslavement of Africans and resolve to work for an end to current anti-Black racism.

◆ **Richard Preston (1791? – 1861)**

a Black Baptist Minister bought his freedom from enslavement. He founded the African Abolition Society and was Pastor of the Cornwallis Street Baptist Church (now known as New Horizon Baptist Church). He had many other achievements, and a biography written about him also noted some flaws in his work. The biography can be read at the link below:

 <https://bit.ly/33hPNXX>

◆ **The United Church of Canada**

has a United Against Racism initiative. Their website offers information about the initiative including, a Message from Moderator, Rt. Rev. Dr. Richard Bott, a blog and Learning Resources. These can be found at:

 www.unitedagainstracism.ca

Some churches have apologized for the past involvement of the Church in slavery and anti-Black racism, and in some cases offered restitution. Here are links to actions taken in this regard by Roman Catholic, Church of England and Baptist leaders:

◆ **Roman Catholic**

 <https://bit.ly/3zVtyUR>

◆ **Church of England**

 <https://bbc.in/2DbSAHE>

◆ **British Baptists**

 <https://bit.ly/2BRVwsd>

Questions for Reflection

- ◆ What feelings did you experience as you explored the material?
- ◆ How do you assess the responses of the respective individuals and groups within the Church regarding slavery and anti-Black racism?
- ◆ What do you think should be done now at Acadia University and across Canada to address anti-Black racism?

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ACTION TO COMBAT MODERN DAY SLAVERY – HUMAN



Human Trafficking is seen by some as a modern-day form of slavery.

Human trafficking exists in Nova Scotia, across Canada and in many countries of the world. A Halifax based Charity, the Open Door Centre includes among its programmes support for victims of sexual exploitation. The Helping Exploited Youth (HEY) programme is the main vehicle used. The Open Door Centre explains sex trafficking in this way:

WHAT IS SEX TRAFFICKING?

According to the Criminal Code of Canada, trafficking occurs when someone recruits, transports, transfers, receives, holds or harbours a person; or exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of a person for the purpose of exploiting them or facilitating their exploitation.

Sex Trafficking is the use of force, violence, threats of violence, deception, coercion, or emotional manipulation to influence a person to perform sexual acts for money.

You can get more information on the HEY programme via the website:

 <https://opendoorcentre.com/sexual-exploitation>

A CBC documentary looks at the work of the Police in countering sex trafficking.

The documentary reviews

information about how vulnerable girls and young women are recruited

for sex trafficking, shares the story of one

survivor who was rescued by the Police and outlines the tactics used by Police aimed at disrupting and ending the trade.



The link to the video is:

 [*Canada A Target for Sex Trafficking*](#)

A women's organization, the Soroptimist Club in the USA, aimed at empowering women and girls, gets involved in action to end human trafficking. They note that 11 – 13 years of age is when many are recruited. Sexual exploitation of boys is under reported and sometimes even parents are involved...

An interview with Soroptimist Club members can be found at this link:

 [*Labor and Sex Trafficking*](#)

Questions for Reflection

- ◆ What feelings did you experience as you explored the material?
- ◆ Do you agree or disagree with the statement that 'Human Trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery'?
- ◆ How do you think students at Acadia University could help to build awareness of human trafficking?

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USING THE BIBLE TO GRAPPLE WITH GOD, THE COMMON GOOD AND GRACE

Bible Reading Philemon

The Epistle (letter) to Philemon is only one chapter long. You are encouraged to read Philemon in different translations if possible, and/or in your first language. You may also experiment with an audio version of the Epistle. Here are some links for reading this book of the Bible:



Philemon NRSV translation



Philemon NKJV Audio Bible



Épître à Philémon



Overview and Notes

Biblical scholars have different ideas about the background and meaning of this book of the Bible. Most agree that it was written by the Apostle Paul. Popular interpretations note that Philemon is a letter written about a man Onesimus who had been enslaved by Philemon. It seems that Onesimus ran away from enslavement and subsequently met the Apostle Paul and was converted to Christianity. In this letter Paul indicates that he, Paul, is in prison and Onesimus has been helpful to him. Paul requests that Philemon who is a Christian and hosts a House Church, receive Onesimus back as Paul's protégé and Philemon's brother. Running away from enslavement was an illegal act at the time.

How is this text to be interpreted?

Missionaries seeking to convert enslaved boys in the Caribbean to Christianity interpreted this book of the Bible as justifying enslavement and acceptance of their status by the enslaved. The Missionaries developed a catechism – instruction to Christian converts in the form of pre-prepared and often rote learned questions and answers - which reads:

Missionary: Was [Onesimus] a good and dutiful slave:

Class of boys: No, he was a very bad one, for he was a thief and runaway.

Missionary: and how did the slave behave himself after his repentance and conversion to Jesus Christ?

Class: He behaved himself well and was profitable to his master.

Missionary: Does religion produce the same effect now on slaves that have it?

Class: Yes, they neither rob nor run away, but are good servants.ⁱ

Black Christians in the Caribbeanⁱⁱ and other parts of the world interpret the Epistle to Philemon differently. They interpret this as an example of an enslaved man exercising agency to secure his freedom and in so doing, forcing the Church to re-think and change its attitude to legally sanctioned enslavement. Enslavement is understood to be contrary to the Christian understanding of human beings made in the image of God and freed from sin and all that enslaves by Jesus the Christ. Verses 11 – 14 suggest that Paul is hinting to Philemon that the right thing to do is for Philemon to give Onesimus his freedom. It also seems that Paul is using subtle persuasion rather than orders to get Philemon to see Onesimus in a different light. He establishes that Onesimus is a beloved family member, referring to him at different times with terms such as ‘my child,’ ‘my own heart,’ my beloved brother.’

Questions for Reflection

- ◆ How do you interpret the Epistle to Philemon?
- ◆ Which character do you most identify with and why? (e.g. Onesimus, Philemon, Paul, Apphia (a woman), Archipus, other?)
- ◆ Consider writing a letter from the perspective of one of the characters mentioned in the Epistle, other than Paul; and/or write a letter to God expressing how you feel about enslavement, Emancipation, or the Epistle to Philemon.

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A REVIEW



Review the session of the previous four which evoked the strongest emotions in you, or no emotion at all. What were your feelings then? What new insights do you have as you reflect on the session again?

Would you like to discuss one or more of these sessions with the Acadia Chaplain and/or some friends? You can contact the Acadia Chaplain via email at marjorie.lewis@acadiau.ca or by telephone: 902-585-1203 (Office) 902-599-2436 (Cell)

ⁱ Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787 – 1834* (Kingston: The Press, University of the West Indies, 1998) p. 77

ⁱⁱ Lewis, Marjorie. "The UNIA Catechism: A Resource for the Training of Caribbean Christian Educators" in Wint, Alvin and Perry, Anthony. Editors. *The UWI Quality Education Forum*, Office of the Board of Undergraduate Studies. Kingston. University of the West Indies. No. 15 (2009): pp 102 – 114.

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