



SEEING OURSELVES IN HOLY TEXTS

BLACK IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

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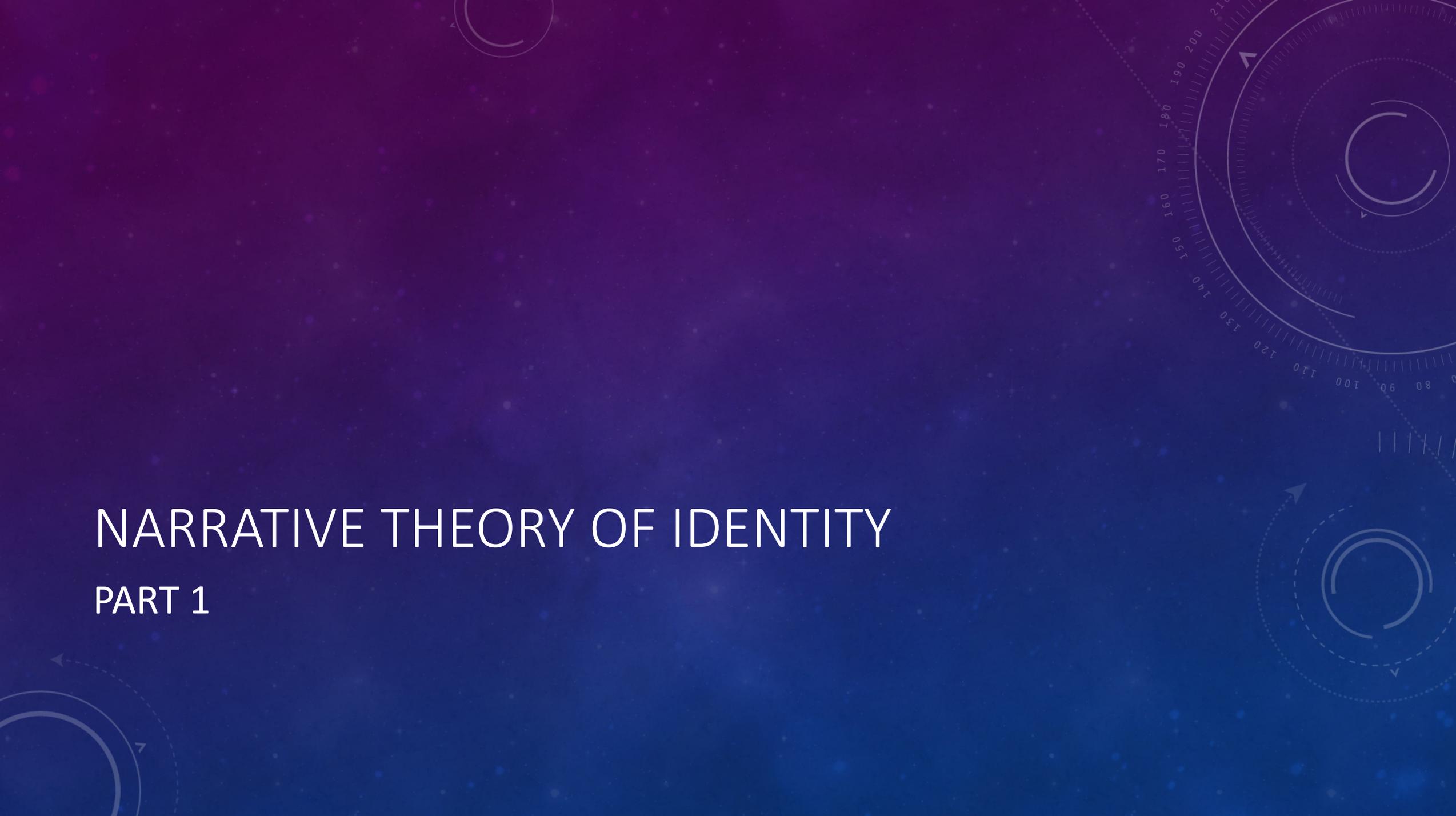
UNION INSTITUTE & UNIVERSITY, CINCINNATI, OH

PRESENTATION GOAL

- The goal of the presentation is to give the learner tools to interpret scripture with culture in mind. Furthermore, the learner will understand the need to look at the cultural component of faith as important to the spiritual maturity of the faithful.

NARRATIVE THEORY OF IDENTITY

PART 1



NARRATIVE THEORY OF IDENTITY OBJECTIVES

- The Learner Will...
 - Understand the roll of narrative in shaping the identities of individuals and communities.
 - Identify how a misinformed narrative can dismantle a person's, or a community's identity.

NARRATIVE THEORY OF IDENTITY

- The Role of narrative in constructing identity

NARRATIVE THEORY OF IDENTITY

- The role of shame in silencing identity

NARRATIVE THEORY OF IDENTITY

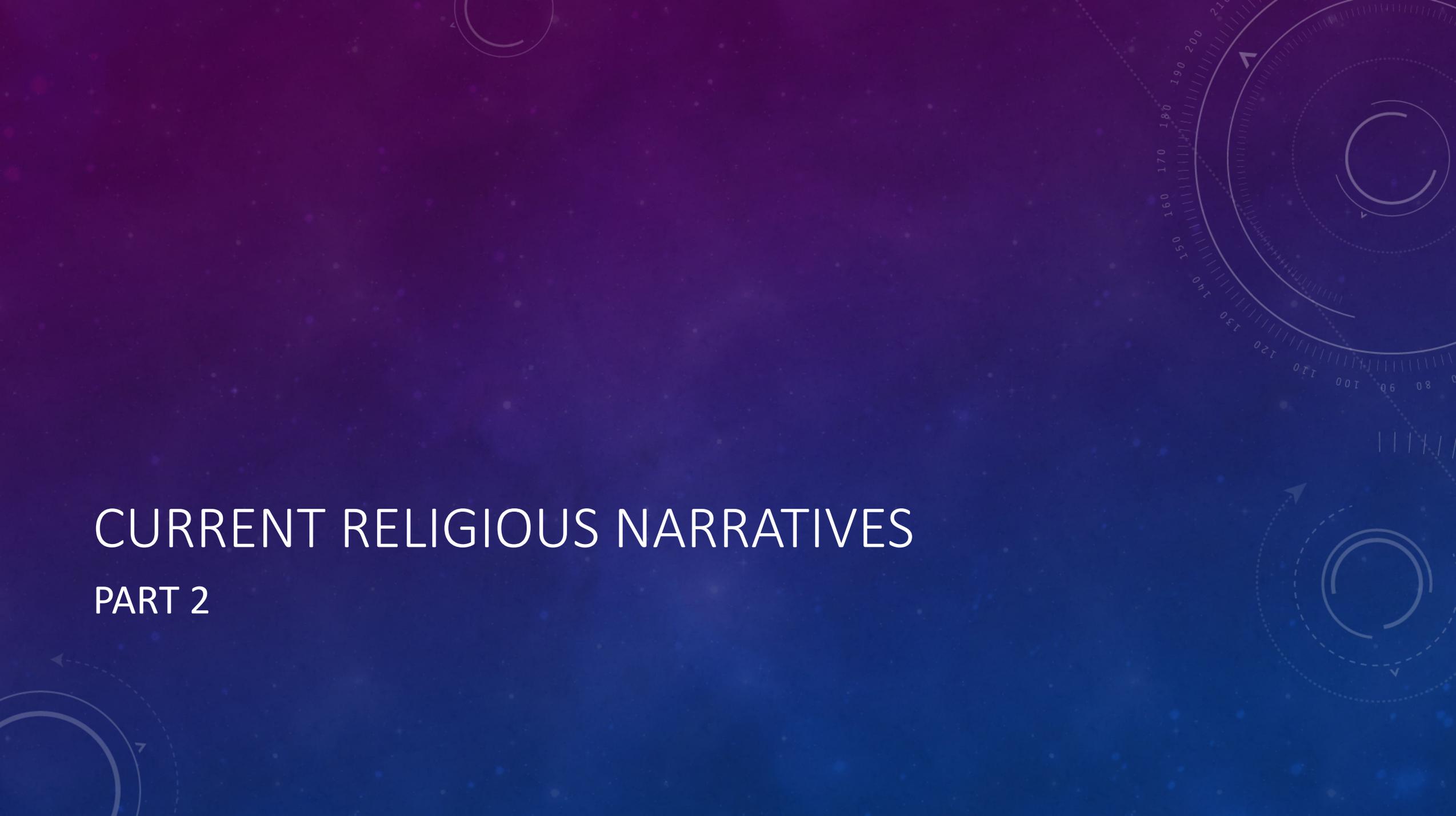
- The role of re-narrating in recapturing a fresh identity

NARRATIVE THEORY OF IDENTITY

- The Role of Images, Film, & Literature as narrative.

CURRENT RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES

PART 2

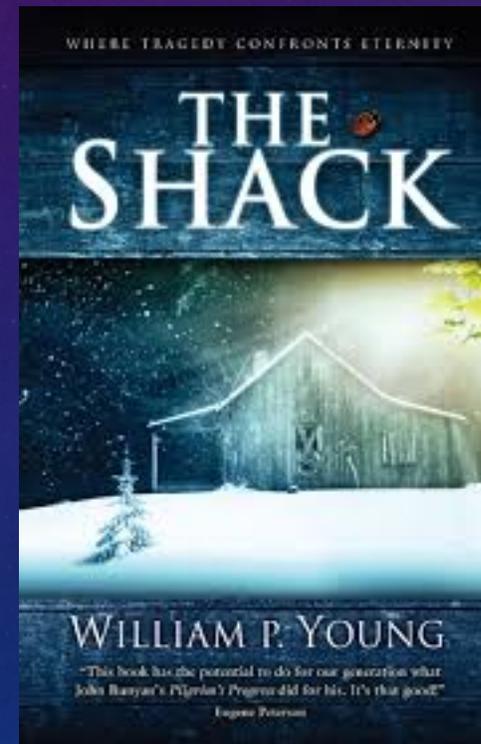


CURRENT RELIGIOUS NARRATIVE OBJECTIVES

- The Learner Will...
 - Develop an awareness of detrimental uses of Black Identity in religious literature
 - List ways that Blacks are portrayed negatively or as non-existent in religious art
 - Critique the psychological effects on Black religious persons.

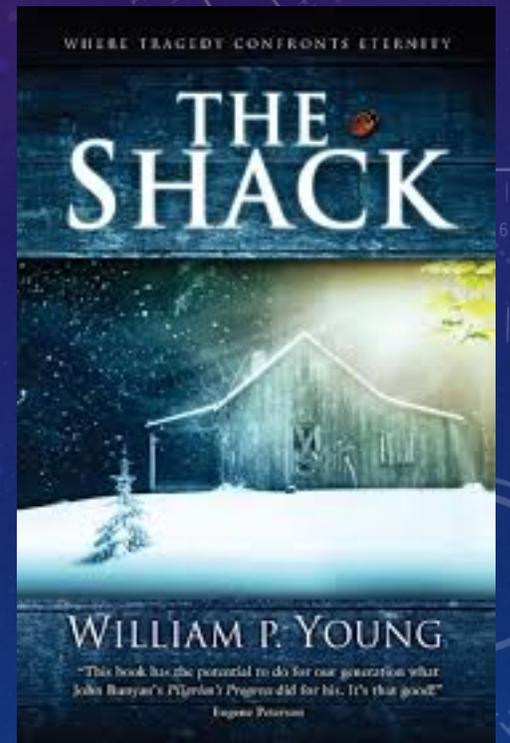
CURRENT RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES

- How does religious literature portray Black people?
- “Thoughts tumbled over each other as Mack struggled to figure out what to do. Was one of these people God? ... Since there were three of them, maybe this was a Trinity sort of thing. But two women and a man and none of them white? Then again, why had he naturally assumed that God would be white?
(*The Shack*, p. 87)



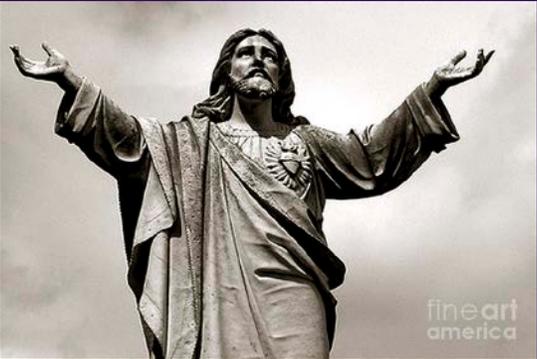
CURRENT RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES

- How does religious literature portray Black people?
- In her book "[Feminist Mysticism and Images of God: A Practical Theology](#)," author Jennie S. Knight explains:
- . . . many white, European Americans have experienced more unconditional love from an African American woman employed by their parents to take care of them as children than from their own parents. They have developed an image of God as an African American woman in connection with the teachings of their religious tradition that God is unconditionally loving. This image has emerged recently in U.S. popular culture in the novel *The Shack*, resonating with millions of readers. This raises the question, however, of whether this God-image enables them to challenge their inevitable internalized images of white people as superior in a white supremacist context. Perhaps the image of the less powerful, more loving African American woman coincides with an image of Christ as long-suffering and therefore does not challenge assumptions and inspire action to alleviate the suffering of African American people. Perhaps this image reinforces stereotypes of black women as a mammy or an earth mother, able to give endlessly, with superhuman strength, without challenging the racism of white people.



CURRENT RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES

How does religious art and film portray Black people?



CURRENT RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES

- What are the psychological ramifications of the portrayals of Blacks in the current religious narratives?

A WAY FORWARD

PART 3

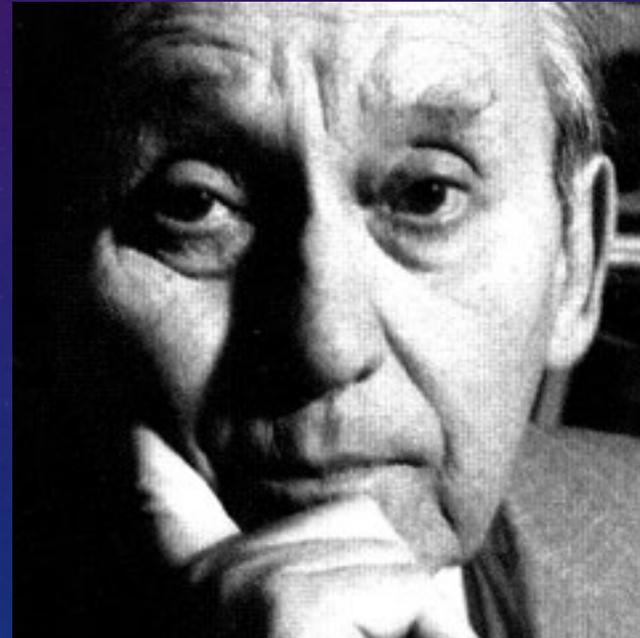


A WAY FORWARD OBJECTIVES

- The Learner Will...
 - Develop tools to finding the hidden diversity in scripture and theology
 - Concretize a Black Liberation Theology that recognized the beauty of Blackness in faith
 - Create a list of stories, both biblical and personal that restores the pride of Blackness in faith

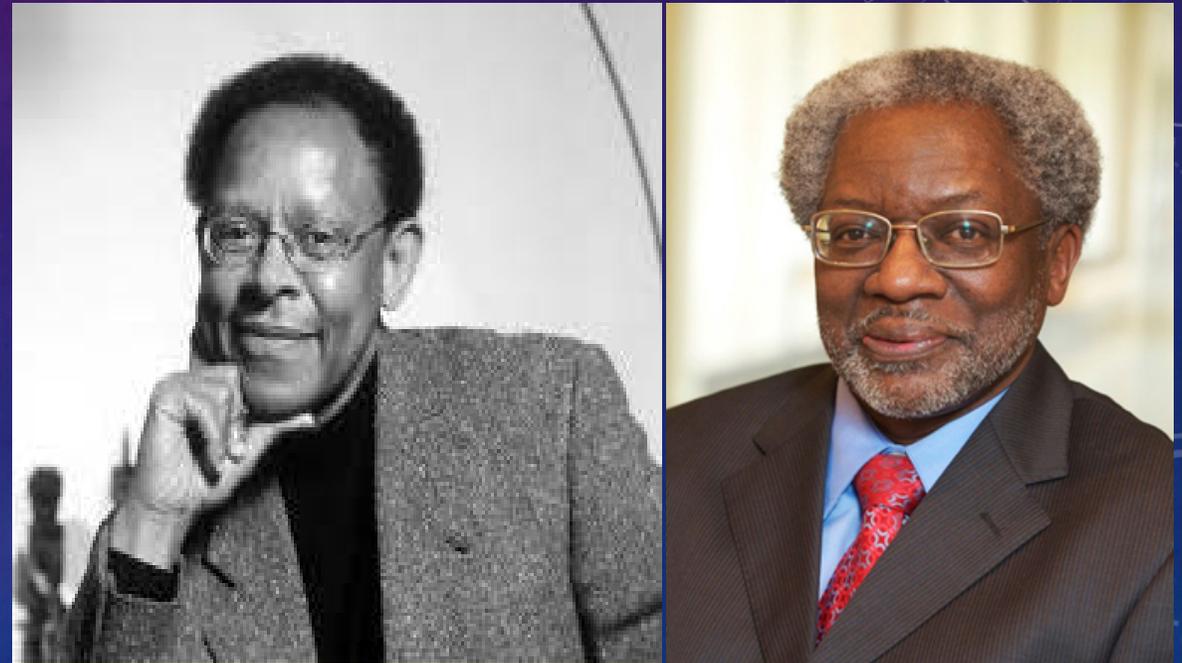
A WAY FORWARD

- Developing a hermeneutic of suspicion.
- The “hermeneutics of suspicion” is a phrase coined by Paul Ricoeur to capture a common spirit that pervades the writings of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. In spite of their obvious differences, he argued, these thinkers jointly constitute a “school of suspicion.” That is to say, they share a commitment to unmasking “the lies and illusions of consciousness;” they are the architects of a distinctively modern style of interpretation that circumvents obvious or self-evident meanings in order to draw out less visible and less flattering truths (Ricoeur 356).



A WAY FORWARD

- Developing a hermeneutic of suspicion.
- “ The final methodological element to be considered is the “Hermeneutic of Suspicion.”
Synonymous characterizations include Ideological suspicion, or the art of suspecting. This points to the need to see the connection between what is said in dominant circles and what is actually done. One should be suspicious when it become evident that what is being done is inconsistent with what is said...the very survival of African Americans (and other oppressed groups) has depended much upon their being suspicious of what Christians in the dominant Group say. Not what white Christians say, but what they do, is indicative of what they really believe.” (Burrow, 1994, p.47)



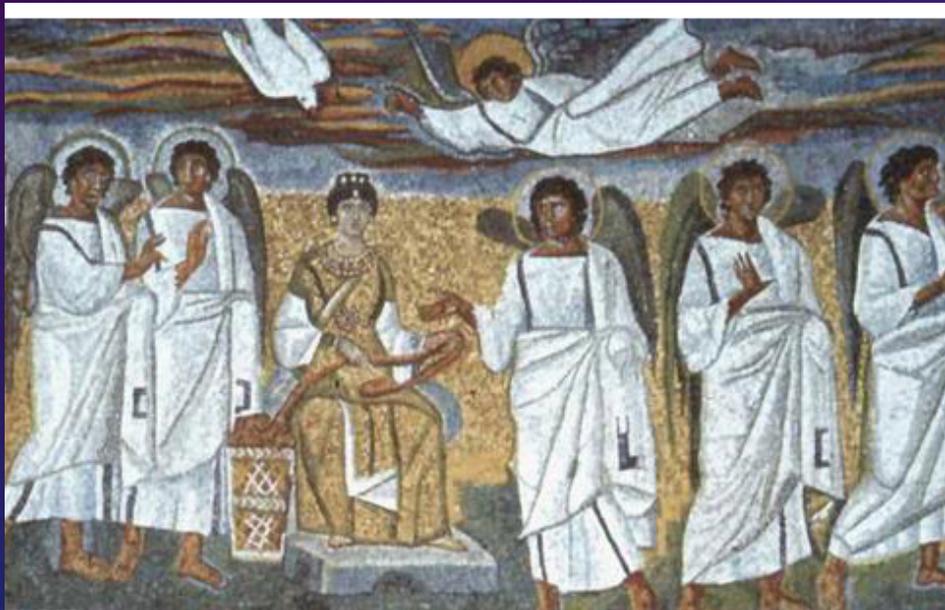
CURRENT RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES

- Developing a Black Liberation hermeneutic/methodology
 - Commitment & Involvement
 - Cultural Identity
 - Social Sciences
 - Praxis
 - Methodology of Liberation
 - Hermeneutic of Suspicion



CURRENT RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES

Re-Narrating your Black Christian Heritage



Dura-Europos synagogue painting: Moses and the Hebrews crossing the Red Sea, pursued by Pharaoh: 303 B.C. - 256 A.D.

CURRENT RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES

Re-Narrating your Black Christian Heritage

- Simon Cyrene – Luke 9:23
- Simeon called Niger & Lucius Cyrene – Acts 13
- Apollos of Alexandria – Acts 18:24
- Rufus of Cyrene – Mark 15:21, Romans 16:13