

BEFORE A HEARING PANEL
IN IN THE DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA
THE MATTER OF
THE REV'D DR. B. CAYCE RAMEY, RESPONDENT

Response to Statement of the Church Attorney

In accordance with Canon IV.13.2 Respondent, the Rev'd B. Cayce Ramey responds as follows to the Church Attorney's Statement of Alleged Offenses:

Prefatory Statement

In September 2003, as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, I deployed to Baghdad, Iraq, serving as a US Marine Communications Officer on a coalition military staff headquartered at Saddam Hussein's palace. The chaplain assigned to my unit happened to be an Episcopal priest. One Sunday, as I stood in the front row during service, the priest, a "full-bird" colonel,¹ caught my attention. He had just finished the Eucharistic prayer and was motioning for me to come forward. I had no idea what he was doing, but I stepped forward as ordered since he was my priest *and* a senior officer. He handed me the chalice filled with consecrated wine and gave me a "battlefield promotion" to the position of Lay Eucharistic Minister. He and I then distributed the body and blood of Christ to people I knew would risk their lives that very morning on convoys down IED Alley² and across central Iraq. I had heard often about life, death, and resurrection in the Church. Yet the gift and grace of Jesus' incarnate life, death, and resurrection embodied in Holy Eucharist were never more real to me than in that moment.

Less than a year later, having returned to the United States and civilian life, I began the process of discernment that would lead me to accept God's call to ordination as an Episcopal priest. Five years later, through many more discussions, multiple conversations with clergy and lay leaders, and various interviews with ecclesial authorities, I realized that my faith, gifts, and passions intersected and integrated in the vocation of priest.

Carrying my military training with me to Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS) in Alexandria, Virginia, I created a detailed plan to organize my three-year course of study. VTS required all students to take at least one class from a different member institution of the Washington Theological Consortium. For no reason I could articulate, *The History of the Black Church* (being taught the following term at the Howard University School of

¹ For comparison of rank, I was a 1st Lieutenant, O-2, while a Colonel is an O-6, approximately four levels and 15-20 years of service my senior.

² Improvised Explosive Device Alley – the stretch of road between the Green Zone, which housed the headquarters of Ambassador Bremer and the US State Department, and the Baghdad airport. As the "insurgency" in Iraq grew, IED Alley was one of the deadly stretches of roadway in the world.

Divinity) sounded incredibly interesting to me, so I registered. Only when I compared notes with my classmates did I realize how far from normal my plan was at VTS. Only when I attended my first class did I realize how far from normal my plan was at Howard. I was introduced to faith, peoples, and worlds that my church experience and seminary education had ignored. The experience shattered my concept of church and shaped a nascent understanding of life outside of my privileged white male heterosexual cisgender existence.

Having been sent to seminary from an affluent majority-white congregation, I continued at VTS with a growing sense that my formation for ministry needed to go beyond the confines of my home parish. I believed that God was calling me, for no reason that I understood, to serve as a seminarian-intern at a parish different than my own. Holy Comforter Episcopal Church, Washington, DC, welcomed me warmly. A historically Black Episcopal Church led by the Rev. Dr. Canon Kortwright Davis and the Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, Holy Comforter helped me fill the next two years with love, lessons, mistakes, corrections, learnings, and the amazing movement of the Holy Spirit. More aware than I had ever been yet still woefully ignorant of so much of white supremacy's history and ongoing effects, I marveled at the grace Holy Comforter poured out on me week after week. They allowed me to assist at the altar and to serve as a chalice bearer, every Sunday sharing in some of the most intimate moments of worship – the celebration and reception of Holy Eucharist.³ What's more, five different people from Holy Comforter allowed me to interview them for my Master's thesis, exploring how their family's memories of slavery affected their contemporary Christian faith. At the end of the internship, as I questioned how and with whom to apply what I had experienced, the Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas admonished me, "Go to your people."

In the Fall of 2014, I began serving as the rector of All Saints Episcopal Church Sharon Chapel in Alexandria, Virginia. The following year, I was sent as a substitute to a meeting with Bishop Shannon Johnston at which he mentioned the Triangle of Hope (ToH), an initiative between the Episcopal Church in Virginia and the Anglican dioceses of Kumasi, Ghana, and Liverpool, United Kingdom, working to recognize, repent of, and address the historic and ongoing effects of the transatlantic slave trade. At that meeting, I offered the assistance of Sharon Chapel to the Bishop. Our congregation had a number of Ghanaian-Americans from Kumasi who were willing to help strengthen the bonds between our dioceses. In the Spring of 2016, Bishop Shannon asked if I would be willing to attend a series of meetings in Liverpool, England, to help plan the relaunch of the ToH. Honored and with the enthusiastic support of my congregation, I traveled to Liverpool to meet my new colleagues. The work of the ToH International Planning team at those initial meetings, focused on clarifying the mission of

³ Many parishioners at Holy Comforter practiced receiving the elements without touching either the bread or the chalice, asking the priest or lay Eucharistic minister to place the bread directly in their mouths and tip chalice for them. This required me to be the hands of Christ, literally feeding his people his most precious body and blood.

the ToH in a draft statement the three diocesan bishops could agree on and issue jointly at their meeting a few months later. Together we agreed that the Triangle of Hope be, “dedicated to transforming the long history, ongoing effects and continuing presence of slavery in our world through repentance, reconciliation and mission.”

The following year, I traveled to Ghana, for a ToH planning meeting and a tour of our partner diocese. Landing in Accra, we drove along the coast of Ghana to Cape Coast where we toured the Cape Coast Castle slave trading fort.

Our tour started in the male slave dungeon. We proceeded through the female slave dungeon, walked through the Door of No Return, saw the British living apartments, and ended at the former chapel. The chapel at Cape Coast Castle is the site of the first Anglican celebration of Holy Eucharist in Ghana.

The chapel is built on top of the male slave dungeon.

The site of the first Anglican celebration of Holy Eucharist in Ghana, was directly above hell on earth. Men stood in the dungeon, surrounded by and on top of bodies and blood, while an Anglican priest and a congregation of worshipers received the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The chapel was even constructed with a large shaft in the floor outside the doors so that guards could attend service while monitoring the people captive below.⁴ Standing in that chapel, all the claims of my Anglican sacramental theology seemed utterly insufficient, “Christ was in both places! Weeping with the captives below while yearning for His transformative love to touch the worshippers above.” After standing in that abyss I could only feel a hollow incompleteness in such theology. Nothing I was taught in church or in seminary could truly answer the question-cries I heard arising from the dungeon below. Where was Christ in that moment of Eucharistic celebration?

Returning to the Diocese of Virginia and my parish, the questions surrounding Holy Eucharist never left me. I continued to reflect and wonder, my doubt and frustration growing. How would our Episcopal theology be different if we had to answer the questions posed by our treatment of the people we enslaved at Cape Coast Castle? Amidst these questions, I rediscovered the history of my own parish. Our property was donated by a wealthy Virginia plantation owner. We had known for decades the names, ages, and genders of nineteen people held enslaved by the family who donated our land, and had done nothing in response.⁵ The altar at which I consecrated bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ sits atop land saturated with the bodies, blood, sweat, and toil of people enslaved, just like at Cape Coast Castle.

⁴ According to a docent at the site.

⁵ Historic Records Division, Will Book W, No. 1, Fairfax County Circuit Court, Fairfax County, Virginia, 211-212.

My experiences in Ghana, my questions about Holy Eucharist, and the admonition of Charlottesville stayed with me in the following years and by the Summer of 2019 lead me to consider graduate studies. When I began researching DMin programs, I stumbled across a seminary I had never heard of, The Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University (STVU). As an HBCU built on the former site of Lumpkin's Slave Jail, a notorious slave-breaking prison in Richmond, STVU takes as its primary lens of theological reflection "liberation from transatlantic slavery." What's more, STVU not only offered a concentration in organizational transformation but also were hosting an information session that Monday night. So, with the support of my wife and some juggling of our kids' schedules, I drove to Richmond to learn more. That Monday night, following a brief presentation, the program director asked those of us in attendance which degree we were considering. When two of us raised our hands for the DMin, she announced that while it was rather unusual, they had a few open slots for the Fall DMin class and that if we could get our applications submitted within the next three weeks, we could be considered for admission.

So began what would be three life-changing years studying scripture, learning, and having my world turned upside-down. My professors encouraged and challenged me. My advisor pushed me to move beyond a self-centered approach to my work into a community-centered effort, asking me continuously, "Where are your people in this?" and helping me focus my research question and my project proposal ever more clearly on the links between Cape Coast Castle and the Diocese of Virginia, between the Eucharistic moments in the chapel-dungeon and at the altar-plantation of Sharon Chapel.

Required to select one bible passage as a central foundation of our project, I chose Matthew 5 and Jesus' teaching that if our siblings have something against us that we should leave our gifts at the altar and first go and be reconciled. The more I prayed with, reflected on, researched, exegeted, discussed, and lived with those verses the more the Holy Spirit challenged me about what they meant for me. How might I embody the radical love for our neighbors embedded in those teachings? How was I being called to live into the incredible love that Jesus was teaching me through this work?

My approach to ministry centers on identity, the sacraments, and racial justice. Identity defines who I am in relationship and in community – relationship to and with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and community between and among ever-widening circles of people around me. As we and I understand and experience more fully who we are as beloved children of God, we can become more fully who God created us to be in relationship. Identity in Jesus Christ encourages me to find more and more of myself in relationship with Jesus instead of in the values of white supremacy culture. As I continue to encounter more of the sinful foundational experiences and theologies of the white Church, even my human-formed Christian identity, my identity found in word and sacrament as defined by the white Church, must be surrendered to the work of the Holy Spirit and subsumed in relationship to God's justice.

The sacraments, primarily Holy Eucharist and Baptism, are the core of my priestly identity, vocation, and joy. I experience intimacy and holiness participating in the celebration of Holy Eucharist, whether celebrating or receiving. Communion encapsulates and enacts the ground of my being and the anamnesis of my salvation. It is the foundation of what it means to be loved and so to love, at once drawing me closer to the Source of Love and driving me into the world in obedience to that love. In Holy Eucharist and Baptism, I encounter God's movement toward all humanity, God's action in our lives, God's powerful initiative toward us who cannot comprehend and who do not reciprocate.

Driven by Jesus' incarnate example to grace and forgiveness through a sense of my sin and participation in sinful systems, I see racial justice as central to the Gospel and the only means of addressing the original sin of white supremacy in the United States and the Episcopal Church. Racial justice is inseparable from Gospel. There is no Gospel without justice – incarnate in our history and in this age as racial justice particularly. American's sins of white supremacy are existential – foundational to its own identity, mythology, history, and self-understanding – and so can only be addressed with a fundamentally existential reality, with the ultimate reality, with Gospel. Sin separates us from God, individually, as a church, and as a nation. Sin distorts our relationships and traumatizes our identity. The Gospel as racial justice is necessary if we and I are ever to eliminate the idols of white supremacy, (re)claim our identity in Christ, and participate fully in the holy relationship sacraments incarnate.

I value truth, authenticity, honesty, duty, and responsibility. God has told us, the Episcopal Church, has called us to end the trauma and violence we are visiting upon our siblings, sisters, and brothers and ourselves. Jesus calls us, secure in His promise of resurrection, to be honest with ourselves about our sin, our broken relationship with God, and about our human theology, particularly about our sacraments. We cannot be still and silent in the face of white supremacy and be faithful children of God. And in the face of such overwhelming realities, Jesus gives us a way of love to repentance and restoration and new relationship that can save and transform us and our church.

So it is that in prayerful conversation with my spiritual director, professors, mentors, colleagues, vestry members, my bishop, DMin advisor, friends, and family I have felt called to a prophetic voluntary fast, refraining from celebrating or receiving Holy Eucharist, leaving our gifts at the altar so that we could first go and be reconciled.

We, the white Church, have tried to do better as we know better. We have tried to make corrections in our liturgy and our leadership, our vestments and our investments, our processes and our polity, yet we remain beholden to our beliefs, practices, and, most dangerously, our theologies mired in white supremacy – most obviously and violently present in our unrepentant, unrestored, unreconciled participation in and support for the systems of chattel slavery. My church continues to cling to theology that affirms and

suggests rather than challenges and convicts. We must no longer call the church-sanctioned mutation of chattel slavery into peonage into Jim Crow into a prison-industrial system “justice” and believe that Jesus is pleased with our “progress.” It is past time to try another way.

Jesus shows us a way of humility and submission that actively acknowledges in our life together the authority of Christ and the authority of our siblings, sisters, and brothers in defining right relationship with God. Christ challenges us to tear down our idols of white supremacy, White Jesus, white theology and to submit to Christ who is incarnate love-as-justice, rejoicing for the grace bestowed on us through this process. Such submission in humility will lead us to recognize our need to leave our gifts at the altar and first go and be reconciled.

Publicly recognizing the broken state of our communion and voluntarily refraining from Holy Eucharist will not only require focus and energy but also will fundamentally challenge our definition of ourselves. I was asked recently by another Episcopal clergy person how my decision for voluntary excommunication fits with the vows I took at my ordination, particularly how it fits with the description of priesthood in the BCP “to preach, to declare God’s forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God’s blessing, to share in the administration of Holy Baptism and in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ’s Body and Blood, and to perform the other ministrations entrusted to you.”⁶ I now believe it was living into those very vows that brought me to the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University and to the work “my soul must have.”⁷ Standing in the chapel at Cape Coast Castle, Ghana, as an Episcopal priest, I carried with me the joy, exhilaration, profound gratitude, and deep love I had experienced in celebrating Holy Eucharist. Yet standing as a priest where my fellow priests once stood atop the male slave dungeon, I was confronted by Christ who knows the lash and the chains, who wept in the bowels of that castle with his beloved children, and I had to admit that I did not know, I could not answer, “where was Jesus in that Eucharistic moment?”

I was ordained into a part of God's church built on the wealth, power, and privilege gained from the enslavement and ongoing oppression and exploitation of Black people. At ordination, I promised before God, my bishop, my parish, and the Church to “endeavor so to minister the Word of God and the sacraments of the New Covenant, that the reconciling love of Christ may be known and received.” How then can I administer the sacraments at the whites-only lunch-counter-altar built on top of the bodies and blood of people our theology enslaved?

I promised at ordination to, “undertake to be a faithful pastor to all whom [I am] called to serve, laboring together with them and with [my] fellow ministers to build up

⁶ BCP, 531

⁷ A phrase often mentioned at STVU and attributed by many to The Rev. Dr. Katie Cannon in describing the work that is God's calling not just for a DMin but for the rest of one's life.

the family of God.” How then can I as a faithful pastor to all continue to perpetuate a theology and liturgy that is actively harming the people I am called to serve?

I promised at my ordination to, “do [my] best to pattern [my] life and that of [my] family... in accordance with the teachings of Christ, so that [I] may be a wholesome example to [my] people?”⁸ How then can I stand idle while White Jesus diminishes the imago Dei and authorizes the complacency and reassurance that forestalls the “fierce urgency of now” that Christ’s justice demands and threatens the very salvation of us all?

Rather than contradict my vows, this fast has finally shown me a way to fulfill them. Having encountered the Holy Spirit, having been convicted of and by the truth of Black joy, suffering, pain, experience, and love, having stood in the dungeons of Cape Coast Castle on top of 18 inches of compacted trash, excrement, and human remains, looking up to the where the altar of the Lord stood with a priest celebrating, having journeyed with a justice-centered community to redo theology, having experienced the gifts and grace that brought me this far by the faith of so many others when my faith, and the faith of my church failed, I must now pattern my life, in submission and humility, with the teachings of Christ. I must, and we must leave our gift at the altar and first go and be reconciled so that we may draw ever closer to the source of the love, justice, and grace we need to make the changes required for right relationship in ourselves, our church, and our world to be restored. This is Good News. God has not abandoned us nor barred the way or our return. We can rejoice that there is a path of redemption offered us to redeem even that which feels broken beyond repair between the peoples of the world. We can know the love and peace of restoration and resurrection. We can and will continue being, worshiping, and ministering together while we work out with fear and trembling the path ahead. We can and will be able to transform our theology from an affirmation of our superiority into a foundation of submission and humility that leads us to reconciliation. Then, in remade communion with our neighbors we will find communion with our God.


Further Response to Statement of Offenses

1. Respondent admits the statement as set forth in No. 1 of the Statement.

2. In response to the first sentence of No. 2 of the Statement, Respondent repeats his Prefatory Statement, above. All other allegations of the first sentence are denied. Respondent denies the second and third sentences of No. 2 on the grounds they are inapplicable to this matter.

⁸ BCP, 532

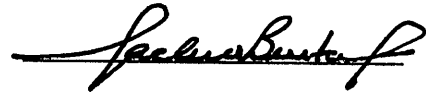
3. Respondent denies the allegations set forth in No. 3 of the Statement. Respondent states that he has fulfilled the promises and vows made when he was ordained, that he has neither refrained from nor neglected public worship and that he has participated in (although neither received nor celebrated) Holy Communion during any time in question, that he has conformed to the Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer and that he has engaged in no conduct unbecoming to a member of the clergy under the Canons of the Church.



The Rev'd Dr. B. Cayce Ramey

Date: 7/11/2023

I certify that a copy of this Response to Statement of the Church Attorney has been provided by email to The Rt. Rev'd E. Mark Stevenson, J.P. Causey, Esquire, Bradfute W. Davenport, Esquire, The Rt. Rev'd Susan E. Goff, The Rev'd Edward O. Miller, Jr.



Jack W. Burtch, Jr.

Date: July 11, 2023