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Jacquelyn Grant

WHITE WOMEN'S CHRIST AND BLACK WOMEN'S JESUS Feminist Christology and Womanist Response

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WHITE WOMEN'S CHRIST AND
BLACK WOMEN'S JESUS
Feminist Christology and Womanist Response
by
Jacquelyn Grant

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*In memory of my grandmother,
Mrs. Eliza Ward,
Who in the stillness of a coma,
When she heard the name Jesus,
moted.*

*To my parents,
The Rev. Joseph J.
and
Mrs. Lillie Mae Grant*

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³⁰ *Ibid.* Heyward actually progresses to a relational Christology in which redemption is found in (human) relationships, Total beings. Thus, Heyward joins Tom Driver in a paradigm shift from the fixed, exclusive Christ who stands at the center of history to an inclusive Christ which resides within humanity. See Heyward, *The Redemption of God and Tom Driver, Christ in a Changing World* (New York: Crossroad, 1981). For a discussion of these two perspectives see Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Metaphors for the Contemporary Church* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983), chapter 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 46. See earlier discussion of Rita Brock's perspective. For her the christological impact of Jesus is to be the healer; but he is not the only healer and not the only Christ. I would characterize Brock as a liberationist moving toward radical.

³³ William Jones, *Is God a White Racist?* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1973).

³⁴ This question will be explored in Chapter VII as we will see it emerge in Black women's struggle for recognition (and ordination) in the Black church.

³⁵ See Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary Unabridged, second edition.

³⁶ Ruether, *New Woman*, passim.

³⁷ Reconciliation is a favorite topic of oppressors which has the effect of reducing the emphasis on liberation. See James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* and *A Black Theology Liberation*.
³⁸ Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary.

VII

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE REVISITED: THE CHALLENGE OF THE DARKER SISTER

Although feminist theology has made an important critique of the sexist limitations of the dominant theologies of Europe and North America, it is not without serious limitations, especially when evaluated in the light of Black women's experience. What are these limitations and how serious are they, especially as they are related to Christology? In this chapter, I will discuss these limitations and, in my concluding remarks, point the way towards a theology that is grounded in Black women's experiences.

A. Limitations of Feminist Theology

Feminist theology is inadequate for two reasons: it is White and racist.

1. Feminist Theology as White Theology

Feminist theologians are white in terms of their race and in terms of the nature of the sources they use for the development of their theological perspectives. Although there are sharp differences among feminist theologians, as we have seen, they are all of the same race and the influence of their race has led them to similar sources for the definition of their perspectives on the faith. Of course, chief among the sources is women's experience. However, what is often unmentioned is that feminist theologians' sources for women's experience refer almost exclusively to White women's experience. White women's experience and Black women's experience are not the same. Indeed all experiences are unique to some degree. But in this case the difference is so radical that it may be said that White women and Black women are in completely different realms. Slavery and

segregation have created such a gulf between these women and that White feminists' common assumption that all women are in the same situation with respect to sexism is difficult to understand when history so clearly tells us a different story.

a. *Black Women's Experience Compared to White Women's Experience During Slavery*

The first two and a half centuries of Black presence in the United States was characterized by servitude and slavery,¹ and even owned as property, subject to be sold at the owner's will. Slavery in the United States has been described as one of the most abominable systems in history.²

Because Black women were not considered the sisters of White women during slavery, they were not exempt from the tyranny of this system. In fact when we read narratives of slaves and ex-slaves, current "sisterhood" rhetoric appears simply as one of two possibilities: (1) a crude joke, or (2) the conciliatory rhetoric of an advantaged class and race. The life and times of Black women gives evidence of the fact that Black women and White women lived in two very different worlds. The biographies, autobiographies, and narratives reveal many of the stories of how Black women (and men) withstood the physical and psychological violence of slave existence.³ They also reveal how Black women experienced White women. White women in slave and ex-slave narratives are always identified as members of the oppressor race. The terms "misus" and "mistress" implied for White women a status which Black women did not have.

Black women, as a part of the servicing class, were not awarded the protection of White patriarchy. Apparently purpose in life was to serve their mistresses, Black women's and very little different treatment was accorded slave women because they were women. The Victorian concept of ladyhood was not applied to slave women. They were treated like slave men as a lower species of animals.

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 ... was administered not only by masters and ... but also by mistresses, reflecting the fact that White women were just as much participants in this system of slavery as were White men. For every Angelina and Sarah Grimké there were numerous of those like their mother who not only condoned slavery but thought that abolitionists like Angelina and Sarah were agitators, if not in fact heretics.

b. *Black Women's Experience Compared to White Women's Experience After Slavery*

The abolition of slavery left intact the basic relationship between Black women and White women in particular and Black people and White people in general. For many Black people, emancipation meant slavery without chains.

The end of slavery as a formal, legal institution brought neither change in the image of, nor significant change in the condition of Black people in the United States. The image that Blacks were inferior and that they were intended to service white America remained intact. Consequently, when freed Blacks sought work they were relegated in the labor market to the same service jobs and menial work which had been forced upon them during slavery. For Black men this meant plantation/ farm work, factory work, other menial jobs and often unemployment.⁴ For many Black women this meant doing the same work as Black men as well as employment as domestic servants. Black women made up a significant percentage of domestic service workers.⁵

In David Katzman's description, domestic service in the South was a caste system, and domestic labor a part of the larger racial-caste structure which reproduced the social relations of slavery. Blacks were servants and Whites were masters and never were the two to be changed. The domination/subordination relationship within the household mirrored the White/Black relationship in general and especially in the South.⁷

In this privatized world of the family the continuation of many of the oppressive practices of slavery can be detected. Though legal slavery was abolished, the relations of Blacks and Whites characteristic of slavery, remained for decades thereafter. Three dimensions of this situation are important for our topic: 1) Physical brutality toward Blacks was continued, and even extended to violence outside of the work context. 2) The immediate relationship between Blacks women and Black women did not change. White women were still oppressors and Black women were still the oppressed. 3) As a part of this continued relationship, Black women were still treated as property. These dynamics between White and Black women represent some of the negative dimensions of Black women's experience.

What is apparent in this historical context is how Black women's experience involves a convergence of racism, sexism, and classism. Within the limited arena of domestic labor, the sexist assumption that women's place is (only) in the home is reconfirmed, as well as the classist practice of paying those who do "menial" jobs little or nothing, and the assumption that such work is more appropriately done by those of the servant class. These patterns are compounded by the racist assumption that White women need protection from actual work and therefore should function in a supervisory capacity.⁸ Consequently, as Hooks observes,

many Black women experienced white women as the white supremacist group who most directly exercised power over them, often in a manner far more brutal and dehumanizing than that of racist White men. (Even) today, despite predominant rule by White supremacist patriarchs, Black women often work in a situation where the immediate supervisor, boss, or authority figure is a White woman.⁹

Thus when theologians speak about women's experience as the source for doing feminist theology, it is necessary to

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specify which women's experience is being referred to, for the above discussion demonstrates that the experiences of White women and Black women have been far from the same.

2. *Feminist Theology as Racist*

It would be inaccurate to assert that because feminist theology is White, it is also racist. To be White does not necessarily mean to be racist, though the behavior of Whites makes the distinction difficult. Nevertheless, my claim that feminist theology is racist is best supported by a definition of racism.

Racism, according to Joel Kovel "... is the tendency of a society to degrade and do violence to people on the basis of race, and by whatever mediations may exist for this purpose."¹⁰ These mediations are manifested in different forms, and are carried on through various media: the psychology, sociology, history, economics and symbolism of the dominant (White) group. Racism is the domination of a people which is justified by the dominant group on the basis of racial distinctions. It is not only individual acts but a collective, institutionalized activity. As C. Eric Lincoln observed,

[f]or racism to flourish with the vigor it enjoys in America, there must be an extensive climate of acceptance and participation by large numbers of people who constitute its power base. It is the consensus of private persons that gives racism its derivative power.... The power of racism is the power conceded by those respectable citizens who by their actions or inaction communicate the consensus which directs and empowers the overt bigot to act on their behalf.¹¹

Even if some individual feminists are not racists, the movement has been so structured, and therefore takes on a racist character. In a racist society, the oppressor assumes the

power of definition and control while the oppressed is objectified and perceived as a thing.¹² As such, White women have defined the movement and presumed to do so not only for themselves but also for non-White women. They have misnamed themselves by calling themselves feminists when in fact they are White feminists, and by appealing to women's experience when in fact they appeal almost exclusively to their own experience. To misname themselves as "feminists" who appeal to "women's experience" is to do what oppressors always do; it is to define the rules and then solicit others to play the game. It is to presume a commonality with oppressed women that oppressed women themselves do not share. If White women's analysis were adequate, they would be more precise in naming their own movement and would not presume to name or define the experiences of others. They have simply accepted and participated in the racism of the larger American society when they have done so. This partially accounts for the negative response which Black women have had with respect to feminism.

Brenda Eichelberger identifies five categories of reasons that lead to Black women's rejection of White feminism.

- 1) Class differences mean that while Black women are dealing with "survival" issues, White women are dealing with "fulfillment" issues.
- 2) Negative imagery of Black women derived from physical and cultural stereotypes has resulted in the debased treatment of Black women.
- 3) The naive, or basic lack of knowledge of Black women about the women's movement results in their inability to see the relationship between feminist issues and the Black struggle.
- 4) Black women perceive White feminists to be racists who are interested in them only in order to accomplish the White women's agenda.
- 5) There is a concern that an alliance of Black women with White women in a feminist agenda may be "detrimental to black men" and therefore divisive of the Black community.¹³

The hostility towards the feminist movement elaborated by some critics focuses on its implications for family life.

Many view feminism as a direct threat to Black family life. ... The feminist Iva Carruthers refers to feminism as "one of the most serious assaults on African familyhood."¹⁴ This feminist movement, she maintains, is a "White-family affair" and is therefore totally irrelevant "to the real needs of Black women."¹⁵ Deborah Hines distinguishes between Black women's reality and White women's reality.

Black women find it extremely difficult to ally themselves with those who say, "We have all suffered the same," when we know it isn't so. ... We are being told that apples and oranges are the same, when we can see that they are not. You cannot easily substitute one for the other in a recipe. Their odors are different. They appeal to people differently. Even a blind person can tell them apart. Yet, a steady stream of rhetoric is aimed at convincing Black women how much alike their lives, experiences, wishes and decisions are to those of our sisters.¹⁶

To say that many Black women are suspicious of the feminist movement, then, is to speak mildly about their responses to it. Put succinctly, women of the dominant culture are perceived as the enemy. Like their social, sexual and political White male partners, they have as their primary goal the suppression, if not oppression, of the Black race and the advancement of the dominant culture. Because of this perception, many believe that Black feminism is a contradiction in terms.

B. Towards A New Black Women's Consciousness

In spite of the negative responses of Black women to the White women's liberation movement described, there has been a growing feminist consciousness among them, coupled with the increased willingness to do an independent analysis of sexism. This is creating an emerging Black perspective on

feminism. Black feminism grows out of Black women's multidimensional reality of race/sex/class. It holds that full human liberation cannot be achieved simply by the elimination of any one form of oppression. Consequently, the liberation must be "broad in the concrete."¹⁷ It must be based upon a multi-dimensional analysis. Recent writings by secular Black feminists have challenged White feminist analysis and Black race analysis, particularly by introducing data from Black women's experience that has been historically ignored by White feminists and Black male liberationists.

A review of a selected group of literature follows: The first of these publications, *The Black Woman* (1970), an anthology collected by Toni Cade¹⁸ was representative of a variety of disciplines and perspectives. It broke the silence of Black women, declaring that they have a voice that must be heard apart from Black men and White women. Later Ntozake Shange published *For Colored Girls Only Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* (1975).¹⁹ Following controversial responses to its production on Broadway. In this choreopoem, Shange exposes the pains and struggles of Black women in Black male/female relationships. Criticized for lacking a social and political context, her poem focussed exclusively upon the physical and especially psychological strains of Black women. The work's significance, however, is that it exposed some of the internal problems of the Black community as they relate to sexism.

Barbara Smith's essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism"²⁰ (1977), should be noted because it represented the beginnings of an emergent Black feminist theoretical perspective. She articulated an "approach to literature that embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the words of Black women writers...."²¹

In 1978, Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn edited *Afro-American Women*,²² a book of historical and biographical essays which addressed some issues of race and sex in the labor force, the women's movement, and the White

community and Black communities. They also provided some data on the contributions of Black women. In the same year Michelle Wallace, from a perspective similar to Shange's, published a controversial critique of the Black Liberation Movement. In her book, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*,²³ she attributed the plight of Black women to an exaggeration of White patriarchally prescribed Black men's exaggerration in Black male machoisim.

Black men's, which results in Black male machoisim. By 1981 several other major publications appeared that developed a critique inclusive of the issues of racism, sexism and classism. Angela Davis' *Women, Race and Class*²⁴ explored the interrelationships between racism, sexism, and labor issues, and is aimed particularly at identifying the class bias that affects the analysis of women's histories. Bell Hooks' *Ain't I A Woman? Black Women and Feminism*²⁵ simultaneously challenged the White woman's liberation movement for its racism and the Black liberation movement for its sexism. The following year, this tri-dimensional analysis was extended in *All the Women are White, and all the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave*,²⁶ a volume edited by Gloria Hull, Patricia Scott and Barbara Smith. These essays seek to advance Black women's studies, by clarifying how analyses of racism, sexism and classism may genuinely illumine Black women's reality. More recently Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*,²⁷ which received the Pulitzer Prize, portrays the troubles of a Black girl/woman entangled in an oppressive web created by the racism of White America, but in doing so she focused clearly upon the brutal sexism of Black men. In her subsequent collections of prose, *In Search of Our Mother's Garden*, Walker proposes the term womanist, in contradistinction to feminist, to denote feminists of color.²⁸

The publications of Black feminists continues to escalate. In 1984 a significant historical volume on Black women appeared by Paula Giddings, entitled *When and Where I Enter*.²⁹ This work is an historical account of the impact of Black women on race and sex in America. She chronicles these struggles through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Another significant work of literary analysis is Gloria Wade-Gayles' *No Crystal Star: Visions of Race and Sex in Black Women's Fiction*.³⁰ Wade-Gayles examines the conditions, contradictions and challenges of Black women from 1946 to 1976, through literature. Most recently, Bell Hooks published her second volume, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*,³¹ that continues to identify the limitations of bourgeois White feminism and explores the broader implications of a feminism based upon multi-dimensional analysis of oppression.

In few of the above mentioned writings do Black women employ only a gender analysis to treat Black women's reality. Whereas Shange focuses chiefly upon sexism, Wallace, like Walker, presumes that White racism has had an adverse affect upon the Black community in a way that confuses and reinforces the already existing sexism. Harley, Terborg Penn, Giddings and Wade-Gayles all recognize the inclusiveness of the oppressive reality of Black women as they endure racism and sexism and economic oppression. Smith, Hull (et al.), Hooks and Davis particularly explore the implications of this tri-dimensional oppression of Black women. It is clear that through these and other works, Black women have either articulated Black feminist perspectives or develop grounds for doing so. These perspectives, however, have not led to the resolution of tensions between Black women and White women.

On the contrary, the possibly irreparable nature of these tensions is implied in Walker's suggestion that the experience of being a Black woman or a White woman is so different that another word is required to describe the liberative efforts of Black women. Her suggestion that the word "womanist" is more appropriate for Black women is derived from the sense of the word as it is used in Black communities:

Womanist from womanish. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A Black feminist or feminist of color. From the Black folk

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expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interest in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown."

Responsible. In fact, O
Womanists were Sojourner Truth, Jarena Lee, Amanda Berry Smith, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Mary McLeod Bethune, Fannie Lou Hamer and countless others not remembered in any historical study. A womanist then is a strong Black woman who has sometimes been mislabeled as a domineering castrating matriarch. A womanist is one who dominating survival strategies in spite of the oppression has developed sex in order to save her family and her of her race and Walker's notion suggests not "the people." Walker's womanist notion suggests that makes feminist," but the active struggle of Black women that may involve them who they are. For some Black women that may involve being feminine as traditionally defined, and for others it involves being masculine as stereotypically defined. In either case, womanist just means being and acting out who you are. It is to the womanist tradition that Black women must appeal for the doing of theology.

Womanist Theology with

C. Conclusion: The Beginnings of a Womanist Theology with Special Reference to Christology

Special (never)

Womanist theology begins with the experiences of Black women as its point of departure. This experience includes not only Black women's activities in the larger society but also in the churches and reveals that Black women have often rejected the oppressive structure in the church as well. A brief review of the literature demonstrates this fact.

1. *Emerging Black Women's Literature in the Church*

Several works have recently appeared which lay the groundwork for the development of a Black woman's perspective in theology, although at this early stage, they have appeared primarily in collections of essays in Black and feminist theological works.

In "Black Women and the Churches: Triple Jeopardy," Theresa Hoover analyzed the position of Black women, predominantly White denominations, though she also mentions some of the problems in Black denominations.³³ She locates the source of Black woman's survival in a faith which has always strengthened them to struggle against the odds. Pauli Murray, in "Black Theology and Feminist Theology: A Comparative View," employs the "inclusionary" principle of White feminist theology to challenge proponents of Black theology to adopt a spirit of cooperation towards liberation and reconciliation and to take women's role more seriously.³⁴ In "Black Theology and the Black Woman," I challenge Black theology and the Black church to realize its own proclamation of liberation as the central message of the gospel by extending this principle to Black women.³⁵ In "Tasks of a Prophetic Church" I define the task of Black feminist liberation theology to be that of exposing the various forms of oppression: racism, classism, sexism and imperialism.³⁶ I contend that they are all eliminated by challenging them separately. At the request of a group of Black seminarian women, James Cone has published an essay entitled "New Roles of Women in the Ministry: A Theological Appraisal," which challenges the Black church to divest itself of traditional oppressive attitudes towards women.³⁷ Later Cone treats the theme of feminism in the Black Church in two of his books in Black theology. In *My Soul Looks Back*, he includes a discussion of "Black Theology, Feminism and Marxism" and in *For My People*, he devotes a chapter to "Black theology, Black Churches and Black Women."³⁸ He traces Black feminism in

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the 19th and 20th centuries and elaborates some of the forms of sexism in the Black Church. Cone moves to challenge Black male ministers and theologians to advance Black women's liberation in the church and society. James Evans has written an essay entitled "Black Theology and Black feminism."³⁹ Like Cone, he challenged Black theologians to address sexism.

Other articles helped to fill the historical vacuum of Black women's contribution to Black religion particularly in Pentecostal traditions. Pearl Williams-Jones in "Pentecostal Women: A Minority Report," identifies Black women leaders of the 19th and 20th centuries who have held positions and power beyond the spheres usual for women.⁴⁰ James S. Tinney in "The Feminist Impulse in Black Pentecostalism"⁴¹ has provided an "historical theological overview of women in Black Pentecostalism." Cheryl Gilkes' "Together and in Harness: Women's Tradition in the Sanctified Church," specifies the activities and strengths of women in Black holiness traditions and identifies how their contributions are irreplaceable, especially in light of how patriarchy and racism impinge upon their participation.⁴²

A number of graduate theses have also appeared to contribute to the development of Black women's theological perspective. Delores Williams' *The Black Woman Portrayed in Selected Black Imaginative Literature and some Questions for Black Theology*,⁴³ explores Black women's image (as mother) through the antebellum slave narrative literature and post-bellum literary material such as blues and spirituals. Williams suggests that given the peculiar reality of Black Women, perhaps the dominant Jewish and Christian biblical story of woman which focuses on Sarah, wife of Abraham, is an inadequate model for Black women. She proposes Hagar, the slave woman, as the correlative of Black women's experience. She challenges Black theologians to re-examine the biblical sources of Christian traditions for a Black liberation Theology that could be inclusive of the liberation of Black women.

Acknowledging Grounding in both Black and Feminist

analyses, LaTanya Maria Bynum, in *Black Feminist Theology: A New Word About God*,⁴⁴ compares the theology of James Cone and Rosemary Rueher and concludes that neither is sufficient to illumine the reality of Black women. Black women must develop a perspective which is both Black and feminist, and which affirms the revolutionary message of Jesus as freedom.

In her dissertation, *Resources for a Constructive Ethic for Black Women with Special Attention to the Life and Work of Zora Neal Hurston*,⁴⁵ Katie Cannon explores the possibility of the literary tradition of Black women as the most adequate source for a constructive Black women's ethic. Having engaged some dimensions of Hurston's work with Black theologians Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr., Cannon concludes that even though Black theologians generally ignore the "victimization of gender discrimination," these two theologians have identified three themes (*image dei*, love and justice, and community) which Black women need in order to ensure their dignity as persons. These themes, she concludes, were operative in Hurston's work and in the literature of many Black women writers.

Jualynne Dodson has contributed research tracing the history and development of the African Methodist Episcopal Church that gives central attention to the limited data about women's activities in the 19th century. *Women's Collective Power in the African Methodist Episcopal Church*,⁴⁶ focuses upon "preaching women" and "missionary women." She offers a historical synopsis of their contribution to the church, particularly as these initiated structural changes in church life.

In a similar vein, Evelyn Brooks in *The Women's Movements in the Baptist Church, 1880-1920*,⁴⁷ traces the development of Black Baptist women's activities, exploring the intersection and interaction of race, class and gender consciousness of those women who created the Women's Convention Auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention,

... The Challenge of the Darker Sister provided an arena for the leadership of and who thereby provided a more descriptive than Black Baptist women.

Though diverse and somewhat more descriptive than normative, these works lay the historical foundation that is needed for the development of a constructive black woman's theological perspective. This perspective in theology which I am calling womanist theology draws upon the life and experiences of some Black women who have created meaningful interpretations of the Christian faith.

2. The Starting Point for Womanist Theology

Because it is important to distinguish Black and White women's experiences, it is also important to note these differences in theological and Christological reflection. To accent the difference between Black and White women's perspective in theology, I maintain that Black women scholars should follow Alice Walker by describing our theological activity as "womanist theology." The term "womanist" refers to Black women's experiences. It accents, as Walker says, our being responsible, in charge, outrageous, courageous and audacious enough to demand the right to think theologically and to do it independently of both White and Black men and White women.

Black women must do theology out of their tridimensional experience of racism/sexism/classism. To ignore any aspect of this experience is to deny the holistic and integrated reality of Black womanhood. When Black women say that God is on the side of the oppressed, we mean that God is in solidarity with the struggles of those on the under side of humanity.

In a chapter entitled "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory," Hooks elaborates the interrelationship of the threefold oppressive reality of Black women and shows some of the weaknesses of White feminist theory. Challenging the racist and classist assumption of White feminism, Hooks writes:

Racism abounds in the writings of white feminists, reinforcing white supremacy and negating the possibility that women will bond politically across ethnic and racial boundaries. Past feminist refusal to draw attention to and attack racial hierarchy suppressed the link between race and class. Yet class structure in American society has been shaped by the racial politics of white supremacy.⁴⁶

This means that Black women, because of oppression determined by race and their subjugation as women, make up a disproportionately high percentage of the poor and working classes. However, the fact that Black women are a subjugated group even within the Black community and the White women's community does not mean that they are alone in their oppression within those communities. In the women's community poor White women are marginalized, and in the Black community, poor Black men are also discriminated against. This suggests that classism, as well as racism and sexism, has a life of its own. Consequently, simply addressing liberation.⁴⁵ Even though there are dimensions of class which are not directly related to race or sex, classism impacts Black women in a peculiar way which results in the fact that they are most often on the bottom of the social and economic ladder. For Black women doing theology, to ignore classism would mean that their theology is no different from any other bourgeois theology. It would be meaningless to the majority of Black women, who are themselves poor. This means that addressing only issues relevant to middle class poor Black women will simply not do: the daily struggles of verification of the claims of womanist theology.

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⁴⁷ The Use of the Bible in the Womanist Tradition

Theological investigation into the experiences of Christian Black women reveals that Black women considered the Bible to be a major source for religious validation in their lives. Though Black women's relationship with God preceded their introduction to the Bible, this Bible gave some content to their God-consciousness.⁴⁸ The source for Black women's understanding of God has been twofold: first, God's revelation directly to them, and secondly, God's revelation as witnessed in the Bible and as read and heard in the context of their experience. The understanding of God as creator, sustainer, comforter, and liberator took on life as they agonized over their pain, and celebrated the hope that as God delivered the Israelites, they would be delivered as well. The God of the Old and New Testament became real in the consciousness of oppressed Black women. Though they were politically impotent, they were able to appropriate the certain themes of the Bible which spoke to their reality. For example, Jarena Lee, a nineteenth century Black woman preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Church constantly emphasized the theme "Life and Liberty" in her sermons which were always biblically based. This interplay of scripture and experience was exercised by many other Black women. An ex-slave woman revealed that when her experience negated certain oppressive interpretations of the Bible given by White preachers, she, through engaging the biblical message for herself rejected them. Consequently, she also dismissed White preachers who distorted the message in order to maintain slavery. Her grandson, Howard Thurman, speaks of her use of the Bible in this way:

"During the days of slavery," she said, "the master's minister would occasionally hold services for the slaves. Always the white minister used as his text something from Paul. 'Slaves be obedient to them that are your masters . . . as unto Christ.' Then he would go on to show

how, if we were good and happy slaves, Jesus would bless us. I promised my Maker that God ever learned to read and if freedom ever came, I would not read that part of the Bible."⁵¹

What we see here is perhaps more than a mere rejection of White preacher's interpretation of the Bible, but an exercise in internal critique of the Bible. The Bible must be read and interpreted in the light of Black women's own experience of oppression and God's revelation within that context. Womanists must, like Sojourner, "compare the teachings of the Bible with the witness" in them.⁵²

To do Womanist Theology, then, we must read and hear the Bible and engage it within the context of our own experience. This is the only way that it can make sense to people who are oppressed. Black women of the past did not hesitate in doing this and we must do no less.

4. *The Role of Jesus in the Womanist Tradition*

In the experiences of Black people, Jesus was "all things."⁵³ Chief among these however, was the belief in Jesus as the divine co-sufferer, who empowers them in situations of oppression. For Christian Black women in the past, Jesus was their central frame of reference. They identified with Jesus because they believed that Jesus identified with Jesus. Jesus was persecuted and made to suffer undeservedly, so were they. His suffering culminated in the crucifixion. Their suffering included rape, and babies being sold. But Jesus' understanding was not the suffering of a mere human, for Jesus was understood to be God incarnate. As Harold Carter observed of Black prayers in general, there was no difference made between the persons of the trinity, Jesus, God, or the Holy Spirit. "All of these proper names for God were used interchangeably in prayer language. Thus, Jesus was the one who speaks the world into creation. He was the power behind the Church...."⁵⁴

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Black women's affirmation of Jesus as God meant that white people were not God. One old slave woman clearly demonstrated this as she prayed:

"Dear Massa Jesus, we all uns beg Coner [you] come make us a call dis yere day. We is nutting but poor Etioipian women and people ain't tink much 'bout we. We ain't trust any of dem great high people for come to we church, but do' you is de one great Massa, great too much dan Massa Linkum, you ain't shame to care for we African people."⁵⁵

This slave woman did not hesitate to identify her struggles and pain with those of Jesus. In fact, the common struggle made her know that Jesus would respond to her beck and call.

"Come to we, dear Massa Jesus. De sun, he hot too much, de road am dat long and boggy (sandy) and we ain't got no buggy for send and fetch Coner. But Massa, you 'member how you walked dat hard walk up Calvary and ain't weary but tink about we all dat way. We know you ain't weary for to come to we. We pick out de toms, de prickles, de brier, de backslidin' and de quarrel and de sin out of you path so dey shan't hurt Coner pierce feet no more."⁵⁶

As she is truly among the people at the bottom of humanity, she can make things comfortable for Jesus even though she may have nothing to give him—no water, no food—but she can give tears and love. She continues:

"Come to we, dear Massa Jesus. We all uns ain't got no good cool water for give you when you thirsty. You know, Massa, de drought so long, and the well so low, ain't nutting but mud to drink.

But we gwine to take de 'munion cup and fill it
wid de tear of repentance, and love clean out of
we heart. Dat all we hab to gib you, Good
Massa."⁵⁷

For Black women, the role of Jesus unraveled as they encountered him in their experience as one who empowers the weak. In this vein, Jesus was such a central part of Sojourner Truth's life that all of her sermons made him the starting point. When asked by a preacher if the source of her preaching was the Bible, she responded "No honey, can't preach from de Bible—can't read a letter."⁵⁸ Then she explained, "When I preaches, I has jest one text to preach from, an' I always preaches from this one. My text is, 'When I found Jesus!'"⁵⁹ In this sermon Sojourner Truth recounts the events and struggles of her life from the time her parents were brought from Africa and sold "up an' down, an' hither an' yon ..."⁶⁰ to the time that she met Jesus within the context of her struggles for dignity of Black people and women. Her encounter with Jesus brought such joy that she became overwhelmed with love and praise:

Praise, praise, praise to the Lord! An' I begun to
feel such a love in my soul as I never felt before—
love to all creatures. An' then, all of a sudden, it
stopped, an' I said, Dar's de white folks that
have abused you, an' beat you, an' abused your
people—think o' them! But then there came
another rush of love through my soul, an' I cried
out loud—'Lord, I can love *even de white folks!*'⁶¹

This love was not a sentimental, passive love. It was a tough, active love that empowered her to fight more fiercely for the freedom of her people. For the rest of her life she continued speaking at abolition and women's rights gatherings, condemning the horrors of oppression.

5. *The Significance of Jesus in the Womanist Tradition*

More than anyone, Black theologians have captured the essence of the significance of Jesus in the lives of Black people which to an extent includes Black women. They all hold that the Jesus of history is important for understanding who he was and his significance for us today. By and large they have affirmed that this Jesus is the Christ, that is, God incarnate. They have argued that in the light of our experience, Jesus meant freedom.⁶² They have maintained that Jesus means freedom from the sociopsychological, psychological, economic and political oppression of Black people. In other words, Jesus is a political messiah.⁶³ "To free (humans) from words, Jesus is a political definition of his ministry."⁶⁴ This bondage was Jesus' own definition with the lowly of his day, he meant that as Jesus identified with the lowly of his day, he now identifies with the lowly of this day, who in the American context are Black people. The identification is so real that Jesus Christ in fact becomes Black. It is important to note that Jesus' blackness is not a result of ideological distortion of a few Black thinkers, but a result of careful Christological investigation. Cone examines the sources of Christology and concludes that Jesus is Black because "Jesus was a Jew." He explains:

It is on the basis of the soteriological meaning of the particularity of his Jewishness that theology must affirm the christological significance of Jesus' present blackness. He is black because he was a Jew. The affirmation of the Black Christ can be understood when the significance of his past Jewishness is related dialectically to the significance of his present blackness. On the one hand, the Jewishness of Jesus located him in the context of the Exodus, thereby connecting his appearance in Palestine with God's liberation of oppressed Israelites from Egypt. Unless Jesus were truly from Jewish ancestry, it would make little theological sense to say that he is the

fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel. But on the other hand, the blackness of Jesus brings the soteriological meaning of his Jewishness into our contemporary situation when Jesus' person is understood in the context of the cross and resurrection are Yahweh's fulfillment of his original intention for Israel....⁶⁵

The condition of Black people today reflects the cross of Jesus. Yet the resurrection brings the hope that liberation from oppression is immanent. The resurrected Black Christ signifies this hope.

Cone further argues that this christological title, "Black Christ" is not validated by its universality. The fact, by its particularity. Its significance lies in whether or not the christological title "points to God's universal will to liberate particular oppressed people from inhumanity."⁶⁶ These particular oppressed people to which Cone refers are characterized in Jesus' parable on the Last Judgment as "the least." "The least in America are literally and symbolically present in Black people."⁶⁷ This notion of "the least" is attractive because it descriptively locates the condition of Black women. "The least" are those people who have no water to give, but offer what they have, as the old slave woman cited above says in her prayer. Black women's experience in general is such a reality. Their tri-dimensional reality renders their particular situation a complex one. One could say that not only are they the oppressed of the oppressed, but their situation represents "the particular within the particular."

But is this just another situation that takes us deeper into the abyss of theological relativity? I would argue that it is not, because it is in the context of Black women's experience where the particular connects up with the universal. By this I mean that in each of the three dynamics of oppression, Black women share in the reality of a broader community. They share race suffering with Black men; with White women and other Third World women, they are victims of

... and with poor Blacks and Whites, and other Third World peoples, especially women, they are disproportionately poor. To speak of Black women's tri-dimensional reality, therefore, is not to speak of Black women exclusively, for there is an implied universality which connects them with others.

Likewise, with Jesus Christ, there was an implied universality which made him identify with others—the poor, the woman, the stranger. To affirm Jesus' solidarity with the "least of the people" is not an exercise in romanticized contentment with one's oppressed status in life. For as the Resurrection signified that there is more to life than the cross for Jesus Christ, for Black women it signifies that their tri-dimensional oppressive existence is not the end, but it merely represents the context in which a particular people struggle to experience hope and liberation. Jesus Christ thus represents a three-fold significance: first he identifies with the "little people," Black women, where they are; secondly, he affirms the basic humanity of these, "the least"; and thirdly, he inspires active hope in the struggle for resurrected, liberated existence.

To locate the Christ in Black people is a radical and necessary step, but an understanding of Black women's reality challenges us to go further. Christ among the least must also mean Christ in the community of Black women. William Eichelberger was able to recognize this as he further particularized the significance of the Blackness of Jesus by locating Christ in Black women's community. He was able to see Christ not only as Black male but also Black female.

God, in revealing Himself and His attributes from time to time in His creaturely existence, has exercised His freedom to formalize His appearance in a variety of ways. . . . God revealed Himself at a point in the past as Jesus the Christ a Black male. My reasons for affirming the Blackness of Jesus of Nazareth are much different from that of the white apologist.

... God wanted to identify with that segment of mankind which had suffered most, and is still suffering.... I am constrained to believe that God in our times has updated His form of revelation to western society. It is my feeling that God is now manifesting Himself, and has been for over 450 years, in the form of the Black American Woman as mother, as wife, as nourisher, sustainer and preserver of life, the Suffering Servant who is despised and rejected by men, a personality of sorrow who is acquainted with grief. The Black Woman has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. She has been wounded because of American white society's transgressions and bruised by white iniquities. It appears that she may be the instrumentality through whom God will make us whole.⁶⁸

Granted, Eichelberger's categories for God and woman are very traditional. Nevertheless, the significance of his thought is that he was able to conceive of the Divine reality as other than a Black male messianic figure.

6. *Challenges for Womanist Christology*

Although I have argued that the White feminist analysis of theology and Christology is inadequate for salvific efficacy with respect to Black women, I do contend that it is not totally irrelevant to Black women's needs. I believe that Black women should take seriously the feminist analysis, but they should not allow themselves to be coopted on behalf of the agendas of White women, for as I have argued, they are often racist unintentionally or by intention.

The first challenge therefore, is to Black women. Feminists have identified some problems associated with language and symbolism of the church, theology, and Christology. They have been able to show that exclusive

masculine language and imagery are contributing factors

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... interpreting the oppression of women. In addressing the present day, womanists must investigate the relationship between the oppression of women and theological symbolism. Even though Black women have been able to transcend some of the oppressive tendencies of White male (and Black male) articulated theologies, careful study reveals that some traditional symbols are inadequate for us today. The Christ understood as the stranger, the outcast, the hungry, the weak, the poor, makes the traditional male Christ (Black and White) less significant. Even our sisters, the womanist of the past though they exemplified no problems with the symbols themselves, they had some suspicions about the effects of a male image of the divine, for they did challenge the oppressive and distorted use of it in the church's theology. In so doing, they were able to move from a traditional oppressive Christology, with respect to women, to an egalitarian Christology. This kind of egalitarian Christology was operative in Jarena Lee's argument for the right of women to preach. She argued "... the Saviour died for the woman as well as for the man."⁶⁹ The crucifixion was for universal salvation, not just for male salvation or, as we may extend the argument to include, not just for White salvation. Because of this Christ came and died, no less for the woman as for the man, no less for Blacks as for Whites.

If the man may preach, because the Saviour died for him, why not the woman? Seeing he died for her also. Is he not a whole Saviour, instead of half one? as those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach, would seem to make it appear.⁷⁰

Lee correctly perceives that there is an ontological issue at stake. If Jesus Christ were a Saviour of men then it is true the maleness of Christ would be paramount.⁷¹ But if Christ is a Saviour of all, then it is the humanity—the wholeness-of Christ which is significant. Sojourner was aware of the same

tendency of some scholars and church leaders to link the maleness of Jesus and the sin of Eve with the status of women and she challenged this notion in her famed speech "Ain't I a Woman?"

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman. Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.⁷²

I would argue, as suggested by both Lee and Sojourner, that the significance of Christ is not his maleness, but his humanity. The most significant events of Jesus Christ were the life and ministry, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. The significance of these events, in one sense, is that in them the absolute becomes concrete. God becomes concrete not only in the man Jesus, for he was crucified, but in the lives of those who will accept the challenges of the risen Saviour the Christ.

For Lee, this meant that women could preach; for Sojourner, it meant that women could possibly save the world; for me, it means today, this Christ, found in the experiences of Black women, is a Black woman. The commitment that to struggle not only with symptoms (church structures, structures of society), as Black women have done, but with causes (those beliefs which produce and re-inforce structures) yield deeper theological and christological questions having to do with images and symbolism. Christ challenges us to ask new questions demanded by the context in which we find ourselves.

The second challenge for Black women is that we must explore more deeply the question of what Christ means in a society in which class distinctions are increasing. If Christ is among "the least" then who are they? Because our foreparents were essentially poor by virtue of their race, there was no real need for them to address classism as a separate reality. Today, in light of the emerging Black middle class we must ask what is the impact of class upon our lives and the lives of other poor Black and Third World women and men.

Another way of addressing the class issue in the church is to recognize the fact that although our race/sex analyses may force us to realize that Blacks and women should share in the leadership of the church, the style of leadership and the basic structures of the church virtually insure the continuation of a privileged class.

Contemporary Black women in taking seriously the Christ mandate to be among the least must insist that we address all three aspects of Black women's reality in our analyses. The challenge here for contemporary Black women is to begin to construct a serious analysis which addresses the structural nature of poverty. Black women must recognize that racism, sexism and classism each have lives of their own, and that no one form of oppression is eliminated with the destruction of any other. Though they are interrelated, they must all be addressed.

The third and final challenge for Black women is to do constructive Christology. This Christology must be a liberating one, for both the Black women's community and the larger Black community. A Christology which negates Black male humanity is still destructive to the Black community. We must, therefore, take seriously only the usable aspects of the past.

To be sure, as Black women receive these challenges, their very embodiment represents a challenge to white women. This embodiment (of racism, sexism and classism) says to white women that a wholistic analysis is a minimal

requirement for wholistic theology. The task of Black women's Jesus then, is constructive.

As we organize in this constructive task, we are also challenged to adopt the critical stance of Sojourner Truth with respect to the feminist analysis as reflected in her comment:

I know that it feel a kind o' hissin' and ticklin' like to see a colored woman get up and tell you about things, and woman's rights. We have all been thrown down so low that nobody thought we'd ever get up again, but we have been long enough trodden now; we will come up again, and now I am here....

... I wanted to tell you a mite about Woman's Rights, and so I came out and said so. I am sittin' among you to watch; and every once in a while I will come out and tell you what time of night it is.⁷³

NOTES

- ¹ Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States: From Colonial Times thru the Civil War* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1971); Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States: From Reconstruction Years to the Founding of the NAACP* (Secaucus, N.J.: The Citadel Press, 1972); Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Deal, 1910-1932* (Secaucus, N.J.: The Citadel Press, 1973). For a binarization of historical and sociological studies see August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, eds., *The Making of Black America: The Origins of Black Americans, I* (New York: Atheneum, 1969); and Meier and Rudwick, *The Making of Black America: The Origins of Modern America, II* (New York: Atheneum, 1973).
- ² For a comparative study of American Slavery and slavery in other places, see Stanley M. Elkins, "Slavery in Capitalist and Non-Capitalist Cultures" in *The Black Family: Essays and Studies*

(Berkeley, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1971), pp. 23-14. Elkins says: "Neither in Brazil nor in Spanish America did slavery carry with it such precise and irrevocable categories of perpetual servitude, 'durante vita' and 'for all generations,' as in the United States. The presumptions in these countries, should the status of a colored person be in doubt, was that he was free rather than a slave," quoted from William Lau Mathieson, *British Slavery and its Abolition* (London: Longmans Green, 1926), pp. 37-38. A slave could be free by a number of ways: (1) he could buy his own freedom. (2) In Cuba and Mexico, the Negro could demand a price declaration which he/she could pay by installments. (3) In Brazil the parent of 10 children might demand his/her freedom. (Johnston, *Negro in the New World*, p. 89) (4) The medieval Spanish code provided for termination of the slave's service if he denounced cases of treason, murder, counterfeiting, or the rape of a virgin or if other meritorious acts are performed (p. 15).

³ Several biographies of Black women slaves have appeared. Among them are: John Collins, *The Slave-Mother* (Philadelphia: #31 North Fifth Street, 1855). This is a brief account of a runaway slave mother who strategically gave up her infant to gain freedom for them both. Victoria Earle, *Aunt Liddy: A Story Founded on Real Life* (New York: J. J. Little and Co., 1893). This is the story (fictionalized) of an ex-slave Black woman (and Black man) who discovered that a burn victim placed in her care was her ex-master. After a religious meeting she decided to nurse him rather than let him die, consequently in appreciation he helped them to locate their son whom he had sold years earlier. Sarah R. Levering, *Memoirs of Margaret Jane Black of Baltimore Md.*, (Philadelphia: Innes and Son, 1879). Levering gives her a brief account of the life of Blake. Blake's mother is said to prefer slavery to freedom for herself and her daughter, Margaret. Levering's paternalistic/maternalistic and racist perspective made it impossible to see that perhaps Margaret's mother was not rejecting freedom, but the unbearable difficulties her weakening and sickly daughter would have to experience as a freedperson right after the war. Jim Bearden and Linda Jean Butler, *The Life and Times of Mary Shadd Cary*

(Toronto, Ontario: New Canada Publication, a division of NC Press Ltd., 1977). This is a biography of a free Negro woman, who was dedicated to education of Blacks, abolition and women's rights. See Conrad Earl, *Harriet Tubman* (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1943); Sarah Bradford's *Life of Harriet Tubman* (1869). Aunt Sally: A Narrative of the Slave Life and Purchase of the Mother of Rev. Isaac Williams of the Michigan (Wheaton, Illinois: Syndale House Publishers, Inc., 1979). First published in 1858 by the American Reform Tract Book Society of Cincinnati, Ohio.

The interplay of racism and sexism is more dramatic in autobiographies and slave narratives. Among the published ones are: Linda Brent, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (New York: Harvest Book, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., ed. L. Marie Child (originally published in 1861). New introduction and notes by Walter Teller, 1973. Brent speaks of the physical and mental violence of slavery and other injustices. She appeals to northerners to stop sending fugitive slaves back to the South. Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes: Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (New York: G. W. Carleton and Co., Publishers, 1868). Though attempting to be kind and restrained in her accounts, nonetheless Keckley likewise reveals many of the atrocities of slave existence. Susie King Taylor *Reminiscences of my Life in Camp* (Boston: The Author, 1902). This is an account of Taylor's work among the 33 U.S. Colored Troops.

⁴ From the point of view of White men, Black women existed not only to serve White women's domestic needs but also to bear the brunt of their sexual exploitation. See discussion in Mary Berry and John Blassingame, *The Black Experience in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), chapter 4. Also see Calvin Henton, *Sex and Racism in America* (New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1965).

⁵ See statistics as summarized in the U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *The Social and Economic Status of the Black Population in the U. S.: American Historical View, 1790-1978* (Current Population Reports Special Studies Series #80). To see the consistent high unemployment rates of Blacks relative to whites (and Black men relative to White men), see reports from the U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

⁶ Major studies on Domestic servants are: David Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978);

Daniel Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants: Domestic Service in the United States From 1800-1920* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1981). Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Masters: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983). For particular Black emphasis see: Elizabeth Ross Haynes, *Negroes in Domestic Service in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc., 1923). Reprinted from *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. VIII, #4 (October 1923). W. E. B. DuBois included in *The Philadelphia Negro* a study of Domestic Servants conducted by Isabel Eaton, "Special Report on Negro Domestic Service in the Seventh Ward" (Millwood, New York: Kraus-Thomas Organization Ltd., 1973). Literary studies include Alice Childress, *Like One of the Family . . . Conversations from a Domestic Life* (Brooklyn, New York: Independence Publishers, 1956) and Trudier Harris, *From Mammy to Militant: Domesticity in Black American Literature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982).

White females (especially immigrants) used domestic service as a stepping stone to other more decent women's occupations—office clerks, stenographers, typists, bookkeepers, cashiers, accountants, store clerks and saleswomen, and telephone operators. For Black women, domestic service was permanent. In 1890 and 1920 while White female servants declined significantly, Black women in this field increased to 40%. In 1920 they were 73% of all laundresses. In 1910 and 1920 Black women were 0.5% and 1.4% in non-agricultural occupations while (native born) White women were 32.1 and 37.1 in such occupations. By 1920 only 7% native born and 20% immigrant women were servants. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, pp. 72-73.

Two reasons can be deduced, from the studies, for the high percentage of Blacks in domestic service. (1) Recognizing that race relations and domestic service were intertwined, Katzman quotes Orta Langhorne's report in 1890 that "among the white people of the South, difficulties about servants are generally spoken of as 'trouble with Negroes';—Negroes and servants being synonymous terms in the average White Southerner's vocabulary." (Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, p. 180). See also Orta Langhorne, "Southern Workman" (October 1890) in Charles E. Wines (ed.) *Southern Sketches from Virginia 1881-1901* (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1964), p. 100. (2) Sutherland suggests as another reason for the high percentage of Black domestic servants that negative attitudes

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towards "new immigration" resulting in their seldom employment as

servants. Far worst than the heathen Irish were the culture and

tradition differences of Poles, Bohemians, Hungarians, Italians, and

Jews of all nations. They were seldom employed as servants partially

because Americans disliked and distrusted them. (Sutherland,

Americans, and Their Domestic, p. 59); see also Mary Grove Smith,

"Immigration as a Source of Supply for Domestic Workers,"

Bulletin of Inter-Municipal Committee on Household Research, (May

1906); Rose Cohen, *Out of the Shadows* (New York: Jerome S.

Ozer, 1971), 158-59, 171-72; Elizabeth H. Pleck, "A Mother's Wage:

Income Earning Among Married Italian and Black women, 1896-

1911," In Michael Gordon (ed.), *The American Family in Social-*

Historical Perspective (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 495, 1 (3) A

third factor in the high percentage of Blacks as domestics is that

while native-White women had non-service occupations opened to

them, Blacks were excluded from occupational mobility.

Sutherland, *Ibid.*, see also Mary White Ovington, "The Colored

Woman in Domestic Service in New York City," *Bulletin of Inter-*

Municipal Committee on Household Research, (May 1905), 10-12.

⁷ Comparing the South with the North and West, Katzman notes

that servants were rarely found in lower middle or working class

families. However, in the former slave states, Black servants were

equally common in households headed by wage earners as in those

headed by white collar workers. He further notes that the South has

been called a "house-wife's utopia." Katzman, *Seven Days A Week*,

p. 185. Of course this reflected the fact that Black labor was cheap.

⁸ Because of the strenuousness of housework and the

delicateness of White women's physical make-up, White women

were taught that they needed protection from the dangers of

housework. Katzman recalls:

During the late nineteenth century, medical

authorities cautioned women against demanding and

enduring physical labor. According to medical

guidebooks, adolescent middle-class girls should be

excused from such hard physical labor as strenuous

domestic chores. More mature women were advised

against physical activity during menstruation, and it

was widely thought that regular work schedules were

injurious to a woman's health. (Katzman, p. 149).

⁹ Hooks, *Feminist Theology*, p. 49.

¹⁰ Joel Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. x.

¹¹ C. Eric Lincoln, *Race Religion and the Continuing American*

Dilemma (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), pp. 11-12.

¹² Kovel, *White Racism*, *passim*.

¹³ Brenda Eichelberger, "Voices of Black Feminism," *Quest: A*

Feminist Quarterly III (Spring): pp. 16-23.

¹⁴ Iva Carruthers, "War in African Familyhood," in *Sturdy Black*

Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature, eds. Roseann P.

Bell, Bettye J. Parker and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: Anchor

Books, Doubleday, 1979), p. 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁶ Deborah Hines, "Racism Breeds Stereotypes," *The Witness*,

16 (February 1982), p. 7.

¹⁷ This phrase is used by Anna Cooper in *A Voice From the*

South By A Black Woman of the South (Xenia, Ohio, 1892), quoted

in Hooks *Ain't I A Woman*, p. 193-194. I use it here to characterize

Black women's tri-dimensional experience. To be concerned about

Black Woman's issues is to be *concrete*. Yet because of their

interconnectedness with Black men (racism), White women

(sexism) and the poor (classism), it is also to be, at the same time,

concerned with broad issues.

¹⁸ Cade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1970).

¹⁹ Shange (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1975).

²⁰ Smith (Trumanburg, New York: The Crossing Press, 1977), p. 3.

Originally published in *Conditions: Two* (October 1977). Brenda

Eichelberger's "Voices on Black Feminism" also appeared in 1977,

in *Quest III* (Spring, 1977). In this essay she interviews eight Black

women on Black women's response to the women's movement and

their thoughts on the need for Black feminism.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Smith, "Towards a Black..." p. 3.

²² Harley and Terburg-Penn (New York: Kennikat Press, 1978).

²³ Wallace (New York: Dial Press, 1978).

²⁴ Davis (New York: Vintage Book, 1981).

²⁵ Hooks (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

²⁶ Hull, et al. (Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press,

1982).

²⁷ Walker (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich,

Publishers, 1982).

28 Walker (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, Publishers, 1983).

29 Giddings (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984). Other collections of historical documents include Gerda Lerner, *Black Woman in White America*, and Bert Lowenberg and Ruth Bogin, eds. of *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century America: Their Words, Their Thoughts, Their Feelings* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976). In *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*, Sterling (ed.) brings together a primary source of Black women's letters, interviews, diaries, autobiographies organizational records and newspaper accounts. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1984).

30 Wade-Gayles (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984).

31 Hooks (Boston: South End Press, 1984).

32 Walker, *In Search...*, p. xi.

33 Theresa Hoover, "Black Women and the Churches: Triple Jeopardy" in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, eds. Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), pp. 377-388. This article was originally published in *Sexist Religion and Women in the Church: No More Silence!* ed. Alice Hageman (New York: Association Press 1974).

34 Pauli Murray, "Black Theology and Feminist Theology: A Comparative View," in *Black Theology*, eds. Wilmore and Cone, pp. 398-417.

35 Jacquelyn Grant, "Black Theology and The Black Woman," in *Black Theology*, eds. Wilmore and Cone, pp. 418-433.

36 Idem, "Tasks of a Prophetic Church," in *Theology in the Americas*, Cornell West (New York: Orbis Books, 1982), pp. 136-142.

37 James Cone, "New Roles of Women in the Ministry: A Theological Appraisal," in *Black Theology*, eds. Wilmore and Cone, pp. 380-397.

38 Idem, *My Soul Looks Back* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), and James Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984).

39 James Evans, "Black Theology and Black Feminism," *Journal of Religious Thought* 38 (Spring/Summer, 1981), pp. 43-53.

40 Pearl Williams Jones, "A Minority Report: Black Pentecostal Women," *Spirit: A Journal of Incident to Black Pentecostalism* 1 (No. 1, 1977), pp. 31-44.

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41 An unpublished paper.

42 Cheryl Gilkes, "Togetherness and in Harness: Women's

Traditions in the Sanctified Church" (publication forthcoming in *Sig's Quarterly*).

43 Delores Williams, *The Black Woman Portrayed in Selected*

Black Literature and Some Questions for Black Theology (M.A.

Thesis, Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary,

1975).

44 LaTaunya Marie Bynum, *Black Feminist Theology: A New*

Word About God (D. Min.thesis, School of Theology at Claremont,

1980).

45 Katie G. Cannon, *Resources for a Constructive Ethic for*

Women with Special Attention to the Life and Work of Zora Neale

Hurston (Ph.D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1983).

46 Jualynne Dodson, *Women's Collective Power in the African*

Methodist Episcopal Church (Ph.D. dissertation, University of

California at Berkeley, 1983).

47 Evelyn Brooks, *The Women's Movement on the Black Baptist*

Church, 1880-1920 (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester,

1984).

48 Hooks, *Feminist Theology*, p. 3.

49 This is reflected in the fact that the Black movement (Civil

Rights/Black Power) has resulted in advancement of only some

Blacks, primarily men, creating an emergent Black middle class.

Likewise, the women's movement has meant progress for some

women, primarily White, resulting in the increased class

stratification in the women's community.

50 Cecil Wayne Cone, *Identity Crisis in Black Theology*

(Nashville, Tennessee: African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1975),

passim, especially Chapter II.

51 Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Nashville:

Abingdon Press, 1949), pp. 30-31.

52 Olive Gilbert, *Sojourner Truth: Narrative and Book of Life*,

(1850 and 1875; reprint ed., Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., Inc.,

1970), p. 83.

53 Harold A. Carter, *The Prayer Tradition of Black People* (Valley

Forge: Judson Press, 1976). Carter, in referring to traditional Black

prayer in general, states that Jesus was revealed as one who "was all

one needs!" p. 50.

54 *Ibid.*

- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- 56 *Ibid.*
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 Gilbert, *Book of Life*, p. 118.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- 62 J. D. Roberts, *A Black Political Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 138. See especially Chapter 5. The Noel Erskine, *Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 1980), p. 125.
- 63 Roberts, *A Black Political Theology*, p. 133.
- 64 Albert Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), p. 92.
- 65 Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, p. 134.
- 66 *Ibid.*, p. 135.
- 67 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- 68 William Eichelberger, "Reflections on the Person and Personality of the Black Messiah," *The Black Church*, p. 54.
- 69 Jarena Lee, *Religious Experiences and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee* (Philadelphia, 1849), pp. 15-16.
- 70 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 71 There is no evidence to suggest that Black women debated the significance of the maleness of Jesus. The fact is that Jesus Christ was a real crucial figure in their lives. Recent feminist scholarship, important in the discussion of Chapters III, IV and V, has been and the oppression of women.
- 72 Truth, "Ain't I A Woman," in *Feminism*, ed. Schneir, p. 94.
- 73 *Ibid.*, pp. 96-98.

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