

# Womanist Theology: An Introduction

STM Advent/Epiphany Series  
conducted by D. White

# Hermeneutics

- *The study of the general principles of biblical interpretation. The sacred status of the Bible in Judaism and Christianity rests upon the conviction that it is a receptacle of divine revelation.*
- *Four types of hermeneutics have emerged:*
  - a. Literal*
  - b. Moral*
  - c. Allegorical*
  - d. Anagogical (mystical/spiritual interpretation -- eschatological)*

*Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica Website*

# Interpreting Scripture

## **NT Wright:**

*For too long we have read Scripture with nineteenth century eyes and sixteenth century questions. It's time to get back to reading with first century eyes and twenty first century questions.*

**James Cone** developed a theology which sought to make sense out of theology from the black experience in America.

**Katie G. Cannon** lifting up “questions of faith that history might otherwise forget.” *Black womanists search the Scriptures to learn how to dispel the threat of death in order to seize the present life.*

# Interpreting Scripture

**Jacquelyn Grant** developed a theology that sees Jesus as the “divine co-sufferer” who suffered in his time as black women do today.

**Emilie Townes** *a form of reflection that places the religious and moral perspectives of Black women at the center of its method.*

**Delores Williams** *states that womanist theology is a prophetic voice concerned about the well-being of the entire African American community... Womanist theology challenges all oppressive forces and opposes those who discriminate based on race, sex, class, physical ability and caste.*

## Alice Walker's 1983 definition of a Womanist

**1. From womanish. (Opp. of “girlish,” i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk 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. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. Serious.**

# Alice Walker's 1983 definition of a Womanist

**2. "A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually.**

**Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength.**

**Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually.**

**Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.**

**Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist...**

**3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness.**

**Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless."**

**4. "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender"**

# Barriers or Bridges

Methods used for scriptural interpretation can either be barriers or bridges in our Christian journey. Please remember these words:

*The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.*

Audre Lorde

# The Lived Experiences

Are lived experiences valid tools for interpreting sacred texts as well as encounters with God? (In the space below please write your thoughts.)



# Sources

*Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, Katie Geneva Cannon

*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Alice Walker

*Womanist Theology*, Emilie Townes (an article published by the American Theological Library Association Series catalog -- available online)

Womanist Theology (thoughts drawn from wikipedia site)

<https://www.womanistworkingcollective.org/>

# Recommended Reading

1. *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, Katie Geneva Cannon
2. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Alice Walker
3. *Black Womanist Ethics*, Katie G. Cannon
4. *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*, Jacquelyn Grant
5. *Righteous Discontent*, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham
6. *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*, Wilda Gafney

**Recommended Listening:** *Learning How to See* (podcast) with Brian McLaren, Jacqui Lewis, and Richard Rohr

*For the People* with Bishop Rob Wright (podcast, Diocese of Atlanta)

# Next Steps

The Rev. Dr. Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible*, will be our textbook for this series.

Biblical readings for each session: Read each passage slowly -- several times. Note what comes to mind with each reading.

1. Elizabeth and Mary (Luke 1:5-56) Wednesday, December 16th
2. Hagar and Sarah (Genesis 16:1-16, 21:1-21) TBD
3. Jephthah's Daughter (Judges 11:1-40) TBD

Please email me if you have any questions: [priestassociate@stmarksrva.org](mailto:priestassociate@stmarksrva.org)