

Fall 2020

Mutuality

Men and women serving and leading as equals

Womanist Theology

Unraveling
the Double
Bind of
Racism and
Sexism



CONTENTS

- 4 “She Is in Bitter Distress”: A Womanist Ethic of Advocacy**
A womanist reading of the story of Elisha and the Shunammite woman from 2 Kings 4:8–37.
by CL Nash
- 10 What I Wish You Knew about Black Women in Ministry: An Open Letter**
A letter about how to understand the needs of Black women in ministry and support them.
by Deirdre “Jonese” Austin
- 15 Always Say Her Name**
Little Black girls face overwhelming pressure to fit a particular mold, and egalitarians can speak the truth instead.
by Katherine Ladd Smith
- 18 Six Black Female Artists Christians Should Know**
Six profiles of important female artists and examples of their artwork.
by Cara Quinn
- 24 Complicity and Silence: How Lament Could Lead Us to a Better Place**
This article confronts the threefold discrimination women of color face and charts a path for reconciliation.
by Valerie Rane Landfair
- 30 God Is Our Liberator: How Christian Tolerance for Injustice Impacts Our Children**
Powell shares first-person experiences of sexism and racism to show how the church can change the lives of children of color.
by Octavia Powell
- 35 Book Review: *Parable of the Brown Girl: The Sacred Lives of Girls of Color* by Khristi Lauren Adams**
Reviewed by Jeanne Porter King

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 From the Editor**
Let These Women Lead
- 36 Giving Opportunities**
- 37 Ministry News**
- 37 Praise and Prayer**
- 38 President’s Message**
Womanist Liberation for All

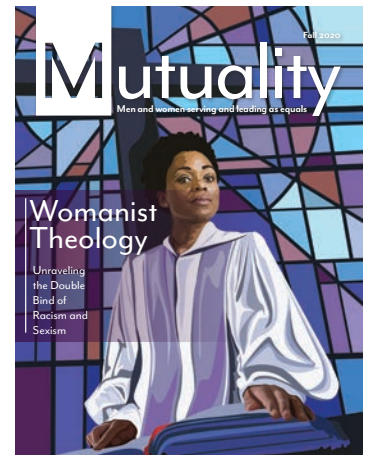
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Mutuality vol. 27, no. 3, Fall 2020

Cover design by Cara Quinn

Mutuality (ISSN: 1533-2470) exists to make egalitarian theology accessible to the non-scholar and to explore its intersection with everyday life.



Mutuality is published quarterly by CBE International, 122 W Franklin Ave, Suite 218; Minneapolis, MN 55404-2451.

We welcome your comments, article submissions, and advertisements. Visit cbe.today/mutuality.

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Let These Women Lead

Mutuality between women and men has been the heart of CBE's mission since its inception in the late 1980s. If you return to the early documents of the egalitarian movement, and the founding papers of CBE, you cannot escape what we believe to be the biblical truth of women's equality with men in the eyes of God, and thus the obligation we have to share leadership and authority as God's people. We feel convicted that God has asked us all to serve the church based on the gifts we've been given by the Spirit, and that those gifts are not given based on the recipient's sex.

What CBE holds to be true about gender we also extend to "all cultures, races, and classes" in our mission statement. God does not show favoritism, so neither do we. But CBE's staff and donor base, statistically speaking, is majority white. We are humans still struggling with sin, so we have not always held to our ideals that culture, race, and class ought not to create a distinction between us.

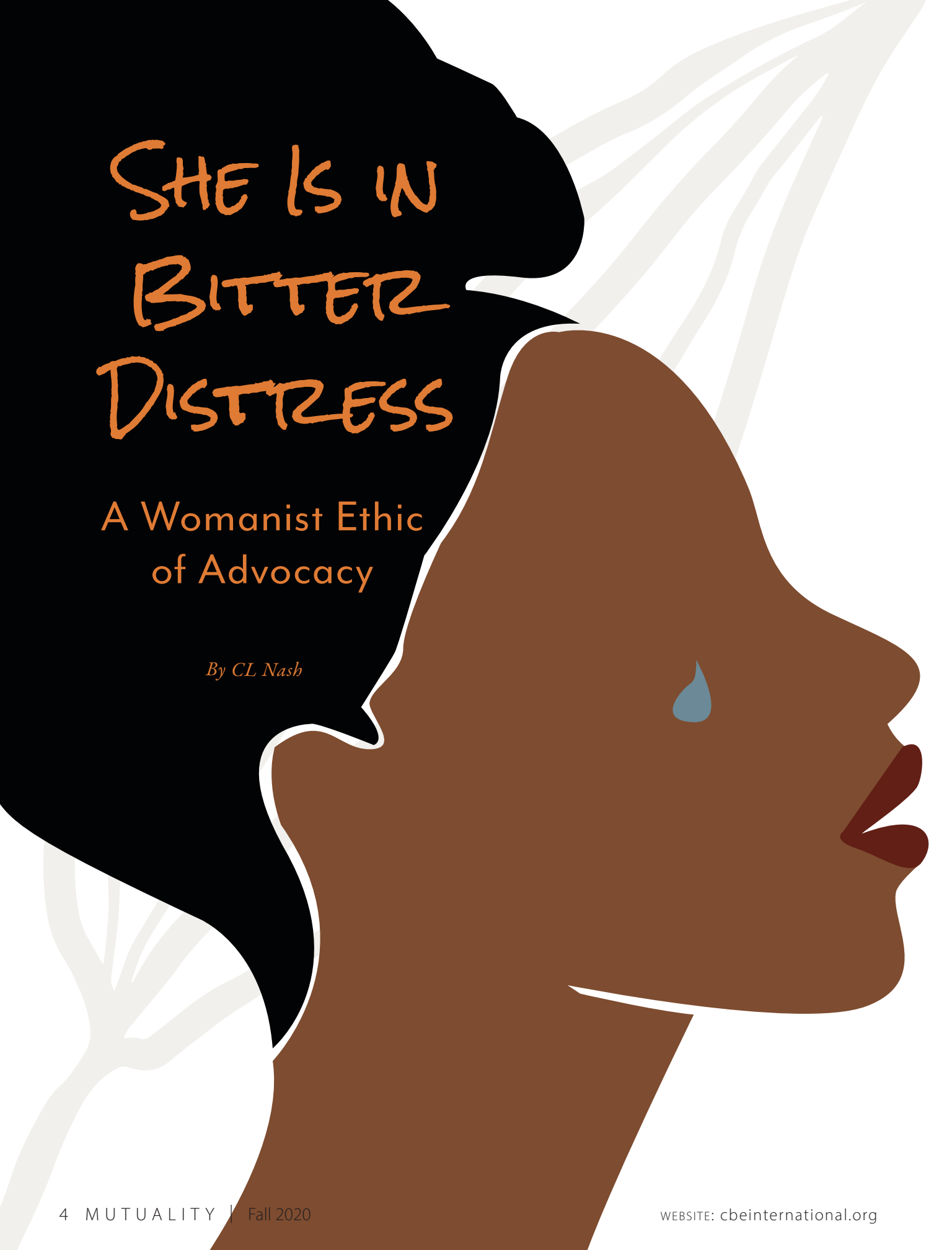
In this issue of *Mutuality*, we hear almost exclusively from and about Black women who speak from a broadly womanist perspective. Alice Walker's now classic definition of womanism dovetails with our mission as egalitarians in that we are "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female." But egalitarians have struggled to carry out some aspects of our mission—we struggle to amplify the voices of egalitarian women and men of color and to recognize that, for many, Black women cannot separate racism and sexism. In this way we have failed to see that the quest for equality for women requires that white women use their privilege to make extra space at the table for the leadership of women of color.

The women featured in this magazine have a strong word for us, especially us white egalitarians. These articles were written over the spring and early summer, which was a moment of global protest. George Floyd, a Black man, was murdered by a white police officer while taking him into custody for allegedly paying with counterfeit currency. This clear injustice sparked protests against police brutality and rallies for Black lives throughout the US and around the world.

I am a white woman. As I learn from these women, I find myself returning to the words of the apostle Paul, which act as an anthem for egalitarians: "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:26–29, emphasis mine). We readily appeal to this verse to establish the radical equality of women in the church. We must also see how Paul is radically including gentile women (race), especially gentile slave women (race and class), as fully equal children of God, one in Christ, and recipients of God's promise.

Talking about race can be uncomfortable, even when we are committed to mutuality for all people. In the US, we as a nation have yet to fully confess our historical sins of slavery and systemic racism, which can hold us back when it's time to reckon with what has happened and how it continues to affect real people's lives. But as egalitarians, we come to the table equipped to have these conversations. As egalitarians, we are not without a framework for listening to and amplifying those who have been treated as second-class citizens. Not only do we believe that we are all one in Christ, but we have let that truth guide the way we live and work together as Christian women and men. And now is the time to let our faith guide how we work together with our Black sisters and brothers in Christ.

As you read these articles, I pray you might "be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (Jas. 1:19). Coming to terms with the ways some of us may have been complicit in the silencing and the pain of others can make us feel defensive. We must ensure that the freedom we have found in Christ, the freedom we proclaim to women and men, is truly extended to all women and men of every race and class. These writers see a way forward for us to achieve true justice and full equality for all women and men. Let them lead us in our shared commitment to mutuality.



SHE IS IN BITTER DISTRESS

A Womanist Ethic
of Advocacy

By CL Nash

For the past thirty years, many African American women as theologians, ethicists, and Bible scholars have consistently used a womanist interpretation, which we call our “hermeneutic” (a method for reading and studying the Bible or theology), to engage the intersection of race and ethnicity, gender, religion, and class. Such engagement is grounded in communal affirmation, or the betterment of the “entire people.”

In this article, we will observe how the Shunammite woman reacts to her situation with an interpretive lens that is similar to womanist thinking; her story can be found in 2 Kings 4:8–37. The story can be summarized this way: A wealthy Shunammite woman tells her husband they should create a room for Elisha (verse 10), a “man of God” who passes by their home regularly and eats with them (verses 8–9). In return, Elisha promises that God will give her a son (verse 16), only for that son to later die (verse 20). Although her son dies, the Shunammite woman’s passionate and focused determination prompts her to advocate for her son. Her ethic of advocacy instructs us; it is grounded in communal survival, works strategically with allies, often carries and bears witness to trauma, and boldly speaks truth to power.

A Womanist Ethic of Advocacy Is Grounded in Communal Survival

A womanist framework allows us to create space not only for ourselves but for those around us. In this Old Testament story, Elisha was an itinerate preacher. It is often tempting to presume that the leaders among us never need support or advocacy. By advocating first to make space for Elisha, and later advocating for her son, the Shunammite woman teaches us about an ethic of advocacy which both transcends self-interest and solidifies the self. In this way, her ethic of advocacy provides us with a new lens for understanding communal wholeness.

I define an ethic of advocacy as an internal mandate, grounded in practices of advocacy, which sees communal wholeness as intricately linked to the wholeness of oneself. If Elisha is lacking, then something within the Shunammite is also lacking. This notion of connecting beyond one’s self-interest ultimately brings value to us as well as those around us.

The Shunammite woman’s story is particularly relevant today. Many in the US observe the precariousness experienced by African Americans who are disproportionately harmed or killed by police or while in police custody. A womanist ethic of advocacy identifies social organizing and protest as essential to communal wholeness. African American women do not watch husbands, brothers, uncles, or sons encounter danger while sitting silently. We mediate with our minds, bodies, and spirits. Likewise, the Shunammite woman, who is rooted in national solidarity in her ancient culture, provides a commitment to what Alice Walker calls “survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.” When Elisha suggests making life easier for her by speaking to the king on her behalf, she refuses stating, “I have a home among my people” (2 Kgs. 4:13). Like many of us, she is rooted in community.

A Womanist Ethic of Advocacy Works Strategically with Allies

The Shunammite woman shows us we must create communal wholeness. This happens, in part, through consistently building alliances to maintain community. Womanist wisdom identifies the presence of God in and among her people—and she knows when she is somewhere that’s devoid of God’s presence. A womanist ethic of advocacy values true alliances, which put aside self-interest to maintain community or create effective change within community.

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The promise of a son for the Shunammite woman is key. Because her husband was old, the likelihood was that she would lose her property with his death. A son would give her security. Even if we do not advocate for ourselves, true community implores others to speak our pain and speak our names. In this story, Gehazi functions as an advocate for the Shunammite woman when pointing out to Elisha that she needs a son (2 Kgs. 4:14). Despite her vulnerability, she dared not hope, and never made the request, which seemed like a logical extension of her self-preservation. She responded to Elisha's promise: "No, my lord!" she objected. 'Please, man of God, don't mislead your servant!" (2 Kgs. 4:16).

Her fears are relatable. As Black women, we are often unable to articulate our own pain. While we march boldly on behalf of the African American men killed by police, we are strikingly silent when African American women also endure the same fate. In fact, most do not even know the names of African American women killed by police. Women such as Aura Rosser (age 40, 2015), Rekia Boyd (age 22, 2012), Aiyana Jones (age 7, 2010), Shelly Frey (age 27, 2012), Kayla Moore (age 41, 2013), Miriam Carey (age 34, 2013), Natasha McKenna (age 37, 2015), Michelle Cusseaux (age 50, 2014), Tanisha Anderson (age 37, 2014), Sandra Bland (age 28, 2015), and Breonna Taylor (age 26, 2020) are but a few in a long list of names.

A Womanist Ethic of Advocacy Often Carries and Bears Witness to Trauma

Later in the story, the reader is told the son is with his father. When the son complains of his head hurting, he is immediately sent to his mother (2 Kgs. 4:19).

Black women know that boys who appear to be "sick in the head" often appear to be our responsibility. It is our responsibility to train and protect their minds. But sometimes, the trauma is too great. Theories of genetic research tell us that Black people carry the trauma of racism in our very bodies. This theory indicates that extreme stress, such as with racism, can literally impact our DNA—and it can be inherited generationally. We continue to carry the trauma of slavery, Jim Crow laws, redlining, and the daily traumas of insult, both microaggressions and macroaggressions that exist in every instance where people weaponize our skin color against us.

THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN SHOWS US WE MUST CREATE COMMUNAL WHOLENESS. THIS HAPPENS, IN PART, THROUGH CONSISTENTLY BUILDING ALLIANCES TO MAINTAIN COMMUNITY. WOMANIST WISDOM IDENTIFIES THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN AND AMONG HER PEOPLE— AND SHE KNOWS WHEN SHE IS SOMEWHERE THAT'S DEVOID OF GOD'S PRESENCE.

A recent example of the weaponizing of Black skin can be observed in the actions of Amy Cooper, a white woman who was videotaped while calling police with a false report of “an African American man” threatening her in Central Park. Aggressions are evident in the actions of police officers who body slam African Americans, who may die in their care, merely for the accusation of nonviolent crimes. When police officers act as executioners, it is similar to lynching. As a vigilante practice, lynched bodies, often burned or mutilated, hung from trees, and they created bodily and psychic trauma for entire communities.

These traumas are in our bones. And, when we watch, in real time for eight minutes and forty-six seconds, the knee of a police officer take the life of an unarmed Black civilian, that trauma embeds itself within us. We carry that trauma in our very spirits. We pass this on to future generations.

The Shunammite woman's response is to carry that son, a traumatic loss, as we carry traumatic loss today. But her trauma is not lowered into a grave. Rather, she moves up to higher ground and walks up to the room she created for the prophet, Elisha. There, she lays her son on the bed of the prophet and proceeds to confront that lost hope.

When she approaches Elisha, the story says she “took hold of his feet” (2 Kgs. 4:27). Many preachers interpret her as deferential in this verse. I don't think we've interpreted this section properly. There are two hints

typically overlooked. First, her physical presence is such that Gehazi seeks to restrain her, but Elisha says not to restrain her because she's in “bitter distress.” Second, her statement to Elisha is not one of humility or gentleness; it doesn't sound like she was bowing at his feet. So why did Gehazi seek to restrain her? I theorize that she went for Elisha's neck, and as he moved (2 Kgs. 4:27), she fell at his feet. This explains both Gehazi's desire to restrain her and her bold tone.

The Shunammite woman speaks to Elisha, saying, “Did I ask you for a son, my lord?” . . . ‘Didn't I tell you, “Don't raise my hopes?”’” (2 Kgs. 4:28). This statement, full of womanist “sass” and courage, transcends language. She never says her son is dead. Elisha, however, instantly knows a miraculous response is needed. Elisha sends Gehazi to lay his staff on her son. But that does not provide the needed change!

A Womanist Ethic of Advocacy Boldly Speaks Truth to Power

Today's Black Lives Matter protests remind us unjust policing must stop. And following the shooting death of Breonna Taylor, it is apparent that no-knock warrants (where police officers may enter a home, unannounced, and begin shooting) are unjust. In this case, the officers entered Taylor's home while she was sleeping and shot her eight times. Tragically, they were in the wrong house.

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Our current conversations about race need to boldly deal with social parity and equality. We are aware that current practices of redlining keep superior public schools only available to a select few. Those with superior education, inherited wealth, good paying jobs, and access to housing loan programs possess several wealth acquisition strategies often denied people of color—particularly those of African descent.

We are now marching up that mountain like the Shunammite woman. The well-intentioned action of Gehazi laying the staff on her son was ineffective. Today, like her, we are demanding a real change. And, much like the Shunammite woman, we will not leave until we get the stakeholders and the power brokers to the negotiating table.

Elisha knew what it meant to negotiate with allies. Elisha's mentor was the prophet Elijah. When his mentor was about to leave him, Elisha declared, "As surely as the

Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you" (2 Kgs. 2:6). Now, the Shunammite woman says these exact words to Elisha (2 Kgs. 4:30). She speaks truth to power. Elisha, perhaps resonating with the way he felt when he uttered those words, obediently follows her. Elisha goes to her son, stretches his body out on the body of her son, and releases *ruakh* (or "spirit, breath") into him. It is his own release of spirit-filled humanity, his breath, that is released to the boy. This facilitates resurrection.

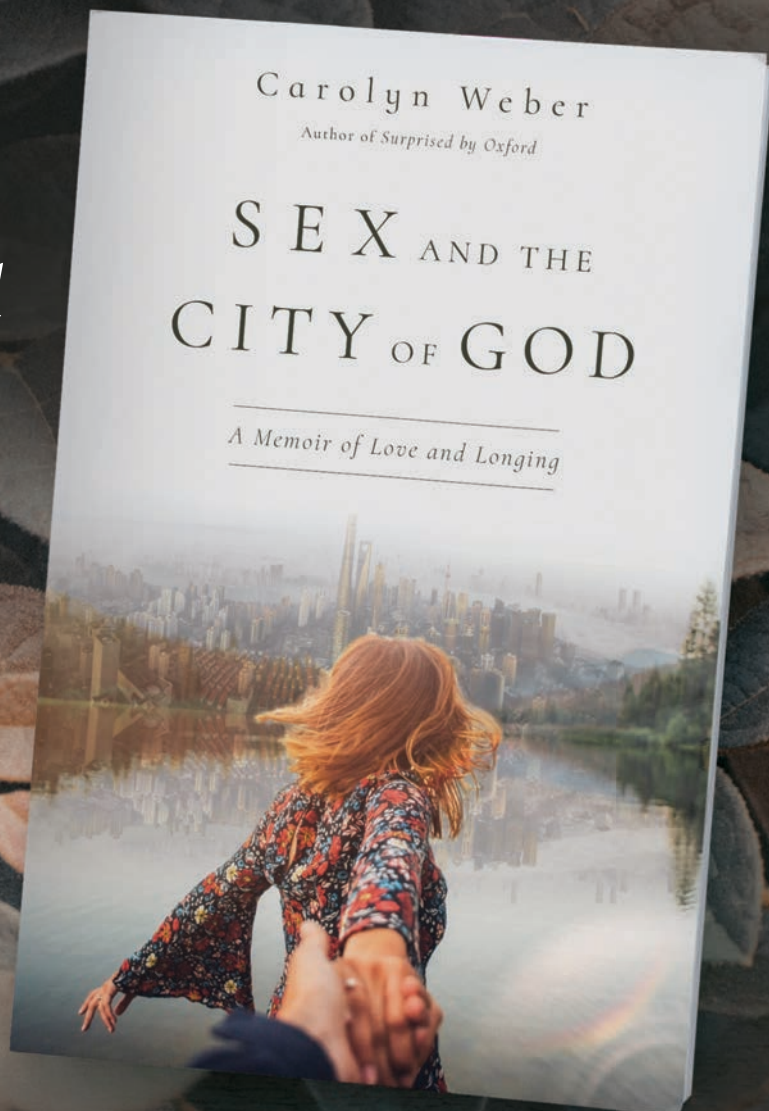
We have that same power. We too can release spirit-filled humanity by speaking up, marching, protesting, and advocating. Inequity for one is a problem for us all. As we looked at the face of George Floyd, under the knee of Officer Derek Chauvin, we saw humanity denied. Today, we are moving toward an ethic of advocacy where we take a stand because it is the only humane option.

The biblical principle of *mishpat* (a term related to justice-making, which appears over 400 times in the Bible) encourages us to seek out justice for the most vulnerable in our societies. With current dialogue moving us closer to police reforms, community investments, and desegregation, we are moving closer to defunding white supremacy itself. If we do not fear losing our "privilege," we can reach toward what must be had: a release of our bitter distress and an equitable world where we can all breathe.

CL Nash is a graduate of Virginia Union University's Department of Theology and earned her PhD from Edinburgh and Gloucestershire Universities in historical theology. Her research interrogates whether the Christian evangelical church plays a role in the suffering of those most vulnerable among us. Currently a Visiting Research Fellow at Leeds University, she is also a conference speaker and teacher around the world.

WE TOO CAN RELEASE SPIRIT-FILLED
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The Latest from the Author of *Surprised by Oxford*



CAROLYN WEBER is the award-winning author of *Surprised by Oxford* and is an international speaker. Dr. Weber holds her MPhil and DPhil from Oxford University, England. She has served as faculty at Oxford University, Seattle University,

University of San Francisco, and Westmont College, and was the first female dean of St. Peter's College, Oxford.

"[This book] is about all the most important loves we have and how they grow softly and strong and sturdy over time. Weber also provides a rare and honest examination of female desire, sanctified. It is an honest, lyrically and beautifully written memoir from an accomplished writer from whom we expect great things, and Weber does not disappoint."

—KAREN STILLER,
author of *The Minister's Wife*



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WHAT I WISH YOU KNEW ABOUT BLACK WOMEN IN MINISTRY

An Open Letter

By Deirdre "Jonese" Austin

Dear Fellow Ministers and Other Church Folk,

Here are a few things that I wish you knew about being a Black woman in ministry. While I do not speak for all Black women, I am writing from my perspective as a young Black woman in ministry in addressing the unique experiences of Black women within the church. I hope you will hear and listen to me. Black women often face patriarchy and sexism in Black churches, which are predominantly and/or historically Black. We often face racism in addition to patriarchy and sexism in white and multicultural church spaces. Whatever your context, I hope this letter will give you a better understanding of how you can support Black women in ministry.

Black women are valuable and important partners in ministry.

Black women in ministry are more powerful than you realize. We have been fighting and working hard for centuries to do the preaching, ministering, and leading God has called us to do. We have done this within our own churches, and we have created other spaces that allow us to utilize our gifts and talents when our churches do not. We too are called by God.

Furthermore, as marginalized voices within the church, we bring a different perspective. We understand how race, gender, and religion intersect in important ways, and some of us are aware of the ways other identities can intersect with those and their impact. We see the Hagars and the Jaels and the Rahabs—the women that are often overlooked. For those of us who have done the work of unpacking the negative perceptions about our gender that we may have internalized, we know how to talk about women in a healthy way that doesn't further patriarchy, sexism, and abuse.

All in ministry need a good Black woman on their team. I'm not talking about a Black woman to do your work for you behind the scenes, but a Black woman whom you can respect and value and whom you are willing to let exercise her gifts without fearing she's going to try and take your job or your pulpit. For those of us who consider ourselves womanists, all people benefit from our leadership and our work in ministry because we are "committed to survival and wholeness of entire

people, male and female," to quote Alice Walker. Thus, womanists, specifically, in ministry are good for the entire body of Christ, and Black women in ministry more broadly can have a powerful impact on church communities.

Black women don't get to enter a room with an assumed position of respect, authority, and importance.

When I enter a room full of strangers, a new church, or any sort of new environment, I enter as a Black woman first. Additionally, there are other factors at play that can further shape people's perceptions when a Black woman enters a room. As a twenty-two-year-old standing at almost five feet, I have additional physical qualities that would lead one to perceive me as less important. Some have wondered what this "teenage" Black girl could bring and have been pleasantly surprised by the great words that have been spoken from this small package. Thus, Black women in ministry can at times be overlooked, perceived as insignificant, and undervalued.

This occurs because we are *women* in Black church spaces and because we are *both Black and women* in predominantly white spaces. This can occur regardless of how many titles

or degrees we may have, and it happens regardless of whether you recognize and acknowledge it.

As it relates to titles and respect, it is important to address Black women by the titles they have earned. While it should be okay to simply state that we are called by God and seminary trained and educated (or in the process), that is often not enough. Black women in ministry often need titles and credentials to help build our credibility and give us access. Moreover, it is also important that you pay us well. Pay us not what you think we're worth but what you would pay the most privileged person present, often a white man or a Black man in Black church spaces. Don't shortchange us because we're Black women.

Black women are always watching you and listening to you.

I am watching the decisions you make. I am listening closely to your sermons and what you teach. I am listening to Black women who have had previous experiences and

**Amid negative voices,
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encounters with you. I've had some women warn me of the presence of sexism in some churches, and how that sexism can impact my experience serving there. I want you to know that we are always questioning, "Are they treating me this way because I'm a Black woman? Would they treat a Black man or a white woman or a white man or someone older, taller, etc., differently?" I ask that you be aware of this. Don't do things that would make us question whether or not you support us. No matter how much affirmation a Black woman in ministry receives, there will always be voices telling her that she is not capable, that preaching as a woman is unbiblical, or that she does not belong in a position of authority. Amid negative voices, let your voice be a light.

Learn to examine your own privilege.

Most people have at least one privileged identity. When considering your own privilege, examine the following social identities: race or ethnicity, sex or gender, ability, religion or faith tradition, nationality, and socioeconomic status. While privilege in many of these areas can manifest in the church, in my experience, I am most concerned with privilege derived from one's race or ethnicity and sex or gender.

Privilege affords you many opportunities and engagements that can be difficult to notice. There are overly qualified Black women who will not get as many opportunities and engagements simply because they are women in Black church spaces. They may be invited to speak on women's day, but only on women's day. Or maybe they will be invited to speak, but they will have to stand on the floor to give a message while Black men get to give a sermon in the pulpit. These are all stories shared by those who have been in ministry much longer than me.

Limited opportunities and engagements for Black women are not unique to Black church spaces. In a white-led multicultural church, I presented a ministry idea and was ignored, yet a white woman was listened to

when presenting the same idea. I suggested she present it as I knew there was a better chance of it being received from her. Black women may be told that they cannot speak on topics of racism because it can be perceived as too radical, or they will be given the responsibility of always teaching about racism, even if that is not a part of their ministry calling. Like Black church spaces, they may not be permitted to sing, speak, or utilize their gifts in other ways on the altar. In preparation for a service I was participating in once, I was addressed as though I did not belong in the space *as a Black woman*. The presence of Black women is welcome only if they assimilate into the dominant culture and resist the urge to challenge or change anything.

**Accept that you probably have some patriarchal
and/or racist practices, whether intentional or
unintentional.**

It is important at times to reassess one's church and one's ministry. This is especially true if the only leadership positions women serve in are positions with children, women, or Christian education, or the only positions Black people serve in are positions related to "urban" settings, reconciliation, or justice. This is also true if you have had a panel or speaker series that consisted only of men in ministry or only white people in ministry. I often see flyers for church events where the speaker lists are homogenous and wonder where the people who look like me are.

Those of you with privilege wield the keys to the doors that are often locked to Black women in ministry. You keep us out of your boys' clubs and your white spaces. You keep Black women out when you think that Black women just don't have the ability to speak to men or to lead white people, such as in the case of a Black woman serving as a senior pastor. I had a conversation with a peer in which he stated that he would not want to sit under a Black woman senior pastor for a reason similar to that mentioned. As a Black woman Baptist minister, I can count the number of Black women senior pastors in such churches on one hand.

Whether or not you are willing to admit it, many of you participate in and benefit from patriarchal practices in Black churches and participate in and benefit from racist practices in white or multiethnic churches. If you notice it but are silent, you are complicit.



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See her the way Jesus sees
her now and saw the women
of his day: worthy of love
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to everyone.

You can be an ally for Black women in ministry.

Yes, you—whoever you are, wherever you may be. You can be an ally by recognizing the gifted Black woman minister. Speak to her and acknowledge her. Call her by her title, especially when speaking to others about her. Communicate with her in a timely manner and meet her deadlines. Affirm her and support her in her

calling. Begin to evaluate your own actions in relation to patriarchy, sexism, and racism and correct yourself. Pay her well. Recognize your privilege and use it to help her. Refuse to speak on all male and all white panels or in speaking series that are all men or all white people. Refuse to serve in churches where women and/or people of color are not serving in leadership positions. Be willing to work with her as an equal, knowing that God called her, too. See her the way Jesus sees her now and saw the women of his day: worthy of love and respect, an asset to the ministry, and capable and responsible in proclaiming the good news of the gospel to everyone.

Sincerely,

A Black Woman Minister and Seminarian



Deirdre "Jonese" Austin is currently studying for her MDiv at Candler School of Theology. Her research interests include the Black Church and the intersections of faith, race, justice, and healing, and she is committed to employing a radical love ethic in working towards healing and wholeness through good theology, research, direct action, and policy. You can learn more about her at DeirdreJoneseAustin.com.

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Make a statement about your commitment to women
when your church or school joins CBE as a member.
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The fact that [our] seminary is an institutional member of CBE sends a signal to the larger community about how we view women, in particular, in the life of our family.

—Paul Chilcote, Ashland Seminary



ALWAYS

SAY

HER

NAME

By Katherine Ladd Smith

On May 16, 2010, seven-year-old Aiyana Jones was killed in her bed by a Detroit police officer. On March 13, 2020, twenty-six-year-old Breonna Taylor was killed in her bed by a Louisville police officer. There has been no justice for either of them. For so many years, America has been charged for the murder, abuse, and mistreatment of Black bodies. In the list of countless victims, the

names of Black women and girls are often lost and forgotten. Why do we act like Black women and girls are so insignificant? Does this teach other girls that no one truly cares for them? Does this show them how the world views them?

Societal expectations for little girls pressure them into thinking they are not worthy of love unless they meet

certain conditions. Rather than countering this culture and giving little Black girls the true gospel that God created them in his image and liberates them in Jesus, the church tends to double down on the same stereotypes and criticisms. But egalitarian Christians can change this by supporting little Black girls and proclaiming the good news of God's love and freedom for them.

Making Black Girls Forgettable

In 2005, Black American filmmaker Kiri Davis released a seven-minute documentary called *A Girl Like Me*. In this documentary, she interviews several Black girls of varying complexions about the difficulties they have faced being Black, such as criticisms of their hair and skin. She also recreates the famous doll experiment originally performed by Mamie and Kenneth Clark for the 1954 US Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*. In Davis's test, fifteen out of twenty-one children chose the white doll over the Black doll. Like the Clarks' test, these children saw the darker doll as "bad" while the white doll was "good." What is even more heartbreaking is that these children recognized that the darker doll resembled themselves.

This doll experiment shows the effects of society's standards placed on Black girls and how they lead to an inner battle between self-love and self-hatred. This battle is not only against stereotypes and negative assumptions formed by white people and other non-Black people of color but also within the Black community. The lighter-skinned girl is always preferred over the darker-skinned girl.

Harmful and unrealistic beauty standards are not only a matter

of skin color either, and these standards are forced upon girls long before they understand what's happening. Mothers of little Black girls decide if their daughter's hair is too unmanageable and whether they should straighten it or not. This decision will not come without a price. That little Black girl will be told in many ways that her hair is not beautiful enough—her hair will either be too kinky or too straight. If she has a perm, her blackness might be questioned, but if her hair is natural, she will be compared to an animal. It's a no-win situation.

Black girls are taught that their beauty is tied to their worth, and they are also never given the option to be sensitive or emotional. The world decides whether they are desirable or not. Black girls are labeled "ghetto" when they are creative, "loud" when they are passionate, and "difficult" when they stand up for themselves and others. They are ridiculed for the way they speak and use African American vernacular, but if they don't use it, they risk being judged by the Black community for sounding "too white." People do not take the time to learn Black girls' names or how to pronounce them correctly. No matter the style, their hair is petted as if they are animals. Black girls are treated as a spectacle at every turn.

While the church ought to be an accepting place for all people, especially for those who are marginalized by the world, I have faced discrimination within my own church community based on the same stereotypes Black girls learn as they grow up.

Good News for Little Black Girls

The church is not exempt from being affected by the same detrimental stereotypes about Black girls. While the church ought to be an accepting place for all people, especially for those who are marginalized by the world, I have faced discrimination

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within my own church community based on the same stereotypes Black girls learn as they grow up. The microaggressions I have experienced have left me feeling hurt and abandoned by the church. I have been criticized for the natural state of my hair, and told it is more preferred pulled back or straightened. I have been asked to be silent and challenged to forgive before the aggressor is challenged to confront their prejudices. In my passion for change, I have been labeled angry and told to avoid making my own agenda. I could tell countless stories of Black voices being silenced.

This is not the gospel. The gospel does not require us to fit the expectations of humans but to look like Christ. This is good news for little Black girls, that the God of

all creation made no mistake in creating their different shades of brown or the texture of their hair. Christians should remember that the world is cruel enough, so the church should be loving. The church should be aware of everything that God's children face, especially non-white children.

The gospel should not be used to enslave the minds of little girls. It should not teach little girls that they deserve to be forgotten or expected to meet these unrealistic and conflicting standards. The gospel shows us that the church ought to be a safe place for them. The gospel should liberate them to live in the fullness of God's love. We are commanded by Christ to love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34–35). The church has a responsibility to care for the minds and bodies of little Black and brown girls. The church should not be silent against the atrocities that kill and abuse them. It should be clear that they are protected and loved. If we claim to love God, we must also love others (1 John 4:20–21).

Remember Little Black Girls

As we pray for future generations, remember the little Black girl. She needs you to see her struggles and to support her and to advocate for her. She has dreams and a calling from God too. Remember her when

you are fighting for women's place in the church. That mission includes her and the girls and women that look like her. Remember her when you read the story of the children coming to Christ (Matt. 19:14). Pray for her as she grows and faces all that the world will throw at her. Remember that she is watching what you do, listening to what you say.

Remember that little Black girl is a child of God. She will learn quickly that the white, blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus is not for her; however, the church must teach her that the brown Palestinian Jesus is. He will free her from the standards of the world. She will need to know that her identity is in Christ, but her ethnicity is no mistake. Her culture should be embraced, not criticized. She will need more than sympathy; she will need allies and advocates. She will need to know that our God is one of justice. When God calls her into ministry, she will need a platform or pulpit. She should never be silenced; she should be heard and believed. This will teach her that God hears her. She should never be judged for her upbringing or education. She should be loved and cared for as a child of God.

And lastly, say her name. Always say her name.

**As we pray for future generations,
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Katherine Ladd Smith is a graduate of Beeson Divinity School with a master's degree in Theological Studies. She lives in Birmingham, Alabama, with her husband and their many plants.

SIX BLACK FEMALE ARTISTS CHRISTIANS SHOULD KNOW

By Cara Quinn

For too long, Black women's contributions in art have been overlooked and unacknowledged. Art has always functioned as an important avenue for those who wish to express their inspired ideas with visual impact. For Black Christian female artists, their talents and voices have historically been suppressed as dominant cultural voices gained more recognition. Fortunately, it doesn't take much digging to uncover a variety of visual artistic contributions by Black Christian women in the United States. The six women featured below have

used art as a medium to express their faith, to call attention to injustice, and to recognize and preserve their heritage. Their work is a treasured piece of American history, evoking important voices rooted in Black women's experiences. Although many Black female artists remain unknown, we have the opportunity to celebrate the stories and talents of those we do know. These women's contributions to the field of art and their impact on US history deserve our attention and recognition today.



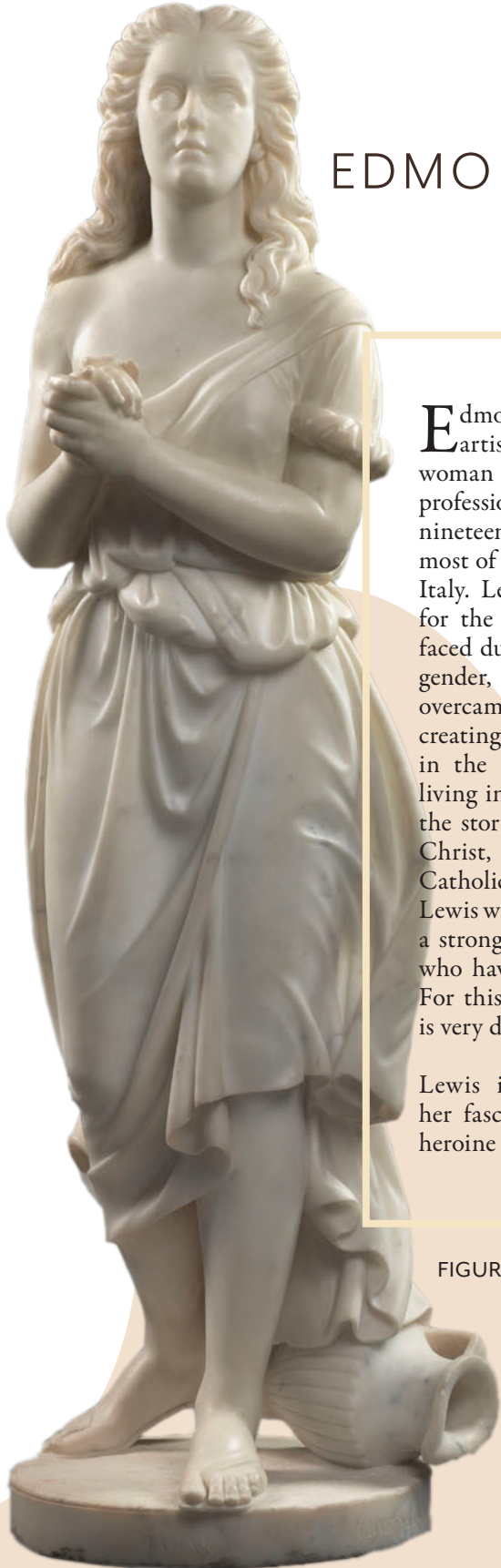
FIGURE 1

HARRIET POWERS

Harriet Powers was born a slave in Georgia in the late 1800s. When she later gained her freedom, she created a series of quilts that reflected her interest in biblical heroes who overcame great obstacles, such as Noah, Moses, Jonah, and Job. This appliqué textile design technique was imported from West Africa as a storytelling device and was an important medium for narrative storytelling among African Americans. In *Pictorial Quilt* (Figure 1, above), Powers used cut and sewn-on fabric shapes created from dyed fabric to illustrate biblical scenes intermixed with traditional folklore legends. Powers was rediscovered in the 1970s, and her work can now be found hanging in the Smithsonian and in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

By the late nineteenth century, religious art was in great demand, and patrons of the arts regularly commissioned pieces that captured beloved Bible stories and heroes. Art historians have concluded that over 40 percent of art created in America in the nineteenth century was thematically religious. It was around this same time that Black artists began to gain professional recognition. To escape the racism that prevented acceptance by the American art community, Black artists had to move abroad to Europe, which was the epicenter of professional artists at the time, to study and gain the skills needed to make a living.

EDMONIA LEWIS

A full-length marble statue of Hagar, the biblical heroine, by Edmonia Lewis. The figure stands in a neoclassical style, wearing a long, flowing robe with a draped sash. Her hands are clasped in front of her chest, and she has a pained or distressed expression on her face. She is barefoot, and a broken water jar lies at her feet. The statue is set against a plain white background.

Edmonia Lewis was one of these artists. Lewis is the only Black woman to be widely accepted as a professional American artist in the nineteenth century, and she spent most of her career living in Rome, Italy. Lewis's story is remarkable for the unmatched obstacles she faced due to prejudice against her gender, race, and poverty. Lewis overcame all odds, studying and creating many marble sculptures in the neoclassical style. While living in Rome, she felt drawn to the story of Mary, the mother of Christ, and converted to Roman Catholicism. After her conversion, Lewis was quoted as saying, "I have a strong sympathy for all women who have struggled and suffered. For this reason, the Virgin Mary is very dear to me."

Lewis is also well known for her fascination with the biblical heroine Hagar, and she worked

for years to create a sculpture of Hagar that pleased her. Lewis identified with Hagar as a woman who had been used, abused, and cast out from all society, and like many African American women, she saw Hagar's Egyptian heritage as representative of Black people. Although Lewis created many sculptures, her Hagar statue is the only religiously themed piece of her art that remains. This life-sized Hagar statue, exhibiting elaborate drapery and a poised posture representative of the neoclassical style (Figure 2, left), represents the moment when God asked Hagar, "What aileth thee, Hagar?" (Gen. 21:17, KJV). Although not given the recognition she deserved at the time, Lewis was rediscovered as a professional artist in the 1960s, one hundred years after her career ended.

FIGURE 2

SISTER GERTRUDE MORGAN AND MINNIE EVANS

Many Black folk artists emerged in the 1900s, including Minnie Evans and Gertrude Morgan. These artists, although formally untrained, created art to communicate their faith and emphasize their personal encounters with the divine. Many of these artists' works are now displayed in prominent museums throughout the US.

Sister Gertrude Morgan answered her spiritual calling as a street preacher and gospel singer. Later she started painting because she believed God called her to spread the gospel message through her artwork. The majority of her paintings revolve around Revelation 21, and her work was regularly inspired by her personal visions and conversations with God. In her painting, *Jesus is my air Plane* (Figure 3, below), Morgan illustrates a vision of her and God flying together over the New Jerusalem in a sky full of angels.

Minnie Evans grew up in North Carolina and worked as a gatekeeper of the public Airlie-on-Sound gardens. Evans was fascinated by the book of Revelation and created many paintings in the 1960s and 1970s that combined her interest in the garden's beauty with her visions of the Garden of Eden restored in the New Jerusalem. In particular, she was inspired by the feminine divine and felt compelled to paint visions she received directly from God. She is known for combining goddess-like faces and figures with floral motifs and patterns in her brightly colored art. She has been quoted as saying, "Something has my hand," about the process of creating her art, attributing her talent, ideas, and inspiration to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

FIGURE 3



Design Made at Airlie Gardens (1967)

Courtesy of the Smithsonian American Art Museum,
accessed at americanart.si.edu.

KARA WALKER

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, popular African American religious art experienced a shift in focus and began emphasizing political activism over direct communication about religion. Although the themes of oppression and redemption have always been present, overtly religious themes became significantly less common. Art that highlighted the evils of oppression and wrestled with issues of continued injustice experienced by Black Americans gained greater importance.

Kara Walker's artwork deals with issues of oppression, racism, gender, sexuality, and the impact slavery has had on the Black American experience of faith in her work. In her ink

piece entitled *Christ's Entry into Journalism* (see this piece at www.moma.org/collection/works/274903), Walker employs a play on words and merges together images of Jesus's entry into Jerusalem with American historical figures such as Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King Jr., riot police, Ku Klux Klan members, a lynching flanked by trapeze artists, and several other seemingly irreverent characters. Walker's complex, nonlinear image merges together various influences and moments in history that have played a part in the Black Christian American experience and calls attention to the continuous struggle of racism in America.

MARY L. PROCTOR

In a vibrant and unique style, Mary Proctor picks up on the long tradition of folk art to tell stories from her own experience as a Black woman in America. She often employs Christian themes in her art, refers to herself as "Missionary Mary," and is a self-taught visionary who is inspired by God to create and promote the truth. She reports hearing directly from God to begin painting when God told her "the door is the way," and she started by painting an old door she found in her yard.

Proctor's work can be found all around the country in many galleries and several museums. Proctor's conviction that God inspired and asked her to continue to paint the truth of her experience has led her to continuously seek him, and she feels her mission is to get into the hearts and the minds of the American people.



The Rocky Road of Jesus Christ (n.d.)

Photo: William Arnett, Courtesy Souls Grown Deep Foundation

THE INVITATION

By taking a quick look back at the contributions of these artists, we are able to gain a greater appreciation of the unique voices being expressed, how they call our attention to injustice, current and historical, and their invitation for us to engage in the tension of their realities, embracing faith while living through oppression. These female artists invite us to see the truth of their experiences through their artistic talents inspired by God. By recognizing and appreciating these women's contributions to the field of art and to US history, we can further understand how to

become informed allies that can promote more voices and stories of Black women through the unique lens and power of art.



Cara Quinn runs Know Your Mothers, a project that seeks to empower women in the church with the buried stories of women from the past. She is a designer, illustrator, and former advertising creative. She lives in Southern California with her four kids and husband and recently received her MA in Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary. Find her on Instagram @Knowyourmothers.

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COMPLICITY AND SILENCE

How Lament Could
Lead Us Toward a
Better Place

By Valerie Rancee Landfair

Our lived experiences will always tint the lenses through which we each see and name injustice. Womanist scholars examine the lived experiences of Black women as the starting place for theology. Black women experience the injustices of today's world on multiple structural levels, including communal and personal. Therefore, her focus is family-oriented because she's concerned about Black men, Black children, and the Black community. Thus, womanist scholars have developed methodologies for addressing Black women's ongoing daily oppressions due to the systems and structures of discrimination because of gender, race, and class.

In 1989 Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality as a way to describe threefold discrimination from gender, race, and class. While acknowledging the ongoing oppression of white women and the double discrimination of poor white women, the threefold oppressions of gender, race, and class are the everyday experiences of women of color. Crenshaw states, "all inequality is not created equal."¹ The silence of white

women who primarily focus on gender and equality leaves them shaking their heads regarding white privilege and white supremacy. Why can't we focus on gender inequality within the sacred and secular?

All inequalities are not created equal. For instance, white women are right to protest being paid 79 cents for every dollar paid to white men. The angry protest is met with silence when Black women are upset that they are paid 62 cents for every dollar paid to white men and 17 cents less than white women. Native American women make 57 cents for every dollar paid to white men and 22 cents less than white women, and Latinas make 54 cents and 25 cents, respectively.² The COVID-19 pandemic also has revealed racial, gender, and class disparities in our society once again. The higher mortality rates for African Americans have yet to be fully explained, but data confirms the reality of medical and environmental racism.³

These historical and contemporary inequalities have me, a womanist theologian, lamenting to God, seeking an answer as to why it seems that God has forsaken Black people. Why has the white evangelical church abstained from a communal lament regarding the devastations from the compounding effects of sexism, poverty, and racism for Black people? And when some white Christians finally did speak out, why did it take so long? Why is it that some white feminists feel the luxury to select which aspect of Black women's crises they will trumpet and which grave structural realities they will pretend do not exist in the Black community? Why must Black women fight against gender discrimination from white and Black men and racial discrimination from white women and white men?

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Silence is the weaponized tool of preference for ignoring the three-part plights of sexism, racism, and classism within the majority of white Christian communities. In this essay, I want to explore how white evangelical women continue to be complicit with white supremacy. I believe that the failure of many white evangelical women in denouncing the sin of racism perpetuates the ongoing oppression of women of color. While you call out white men for their gender discrimination, you are using their systems of oppression in silent support of racialized discrimination of Black women, Native Americans, and Latinas. I argue that silence was one way by which many white evangelical women dealt with and deal with their longstanding racial fears. Finally, I want to assert that communal lament is the right first step toward working together.

COMPLICIT SILENCE

Womanist theologies seek to address both the historical and everyday experiences of women of color, especially Black women, and to interrogate the historical and contemporary engagements of white

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women in Black communities. The protection of white womanhood by white men from 1619 through the Civil War was aroused due to the racist belief that enslaved Africans might do the very same sexually perverted acts to white women as their Christian white slave owners did to enslaved African girls and women. Therefore, the fear of the possibility of being raped by enslaved African and African American men allowed a historical embrace of silence regarding the rape of enslaved African and African American women, men, girls, and boys. White womanhood afforded her comfort, and her silence affirmed the ongoing terrorization and trauma of Black people.

White womanhood has also allowed for historical silence regarding the fact that many Christian white women were just as cruel as their white Christian husbands during the 250 years of slavery in the United States.⁴ A contemporary understanding of the ongoing effect and tension from the gulf of silence embedded within the cult of white womanhood affirms, “While it is true that white women were similarly circumscribed on the basis of their sex, they do not share in the exponentially charged experience of interstructured oppression with black women, and in fact, are signal contributories, along with white children and men, in the oppression of black children, women, and men.”⁵

White women, even those who are ready to protest and speak against sexual abuse and discrimination, tend to be slower to speak against injustices related to race. This disconnect causes me to question the authenticity of the white feminists’ stated agenda. As a recent example, the Women’s March was a worldwide protest in 2017 against anti-women sentiments.

This anger did not fully erupt until a white woman became the object of derogatory comments.⁶ White supremacy seems to thrive because of white feminists’ silence in the face of dehumanizing and demeaning comments targeting those with disabilities and those in Hispanic and Black communities. Filomina Chioma Steady states, “The issues of racism can become threatening, for it identifies white feminists as possible participants in the oppression of blacks.”⁷ The privilege of white womanhood allows white evangelical women to oppress Black women and feel justified in being the oppressors because whiteness affords comfort and privilege.

Silence can easily be interpreted as a mode of conscious and unconscious support of white supremacy and, by extension, Black women’s oppression and, subsequently, the oppression of Black communities. Several recent and egregious examples of white women remaining generally silent about

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overt racist violence comes to mind, even when clear and detailed video is widely available. There was an odd initial (and sometimes prolonged) silence when twenty-five-year-old Ahmaud Arbery was chased and shot down like a dog; when Elijah Tufono, a fourteen-year-old Black boy, was abused by a white cop because he asked a stranger to purchase a cigar; when Marvia Gray, a sixty-eight-year-old lady, was beaten down by officers who wrongly accused Gray and her forty-three-year-old son of stealing a television; when George Floyd was killed by an officer who was unrelentingly kneeling on his neck. All of these incidents had detailed, clear, and concise videos, and yet, Black communities had to march, file petitions, and garner support from white Evangelicals, and we still await justice.

Historically, Black people have been accused of being angry through the arrogance and ignorance of white privilege that fails to demonstrate remorse, repentance, and atonement for the sins of enslavement, murder, rape, and oppression of people of color, simply for the color of their skin. And yet in my musings on this subject, I realized that I am an Angry Black Woman. I am angry because we are still fighting the same fights of our great-grandmothers and grandfathers. I am angry because of the silence, and thus complicity, of many white evangelical women in the historical and contemporary exploitation and oppression of Black women.

LEARNING TO LAMENT WITH BLACK WOMEN

How can we have fruitful discussions on becoming allies if one side is focused on centering themselves and securing power from white men,

while not securing the full liberation of women of color? Can Black women continue to hope for the dismantling of racism and classism in addition to sexism?

For white women (and men), I offer that a first step is to intentionally reflect on the various ways you have been socially shaped to support white supremacy. What are the contemporary implications of white womanhood? Yes, the racist tendencies that some white evangelical women exhibit are different from those of your foremothers and forefathers during slavery; however, they are still racist tendencies. Please, hear my heart! Being a racist does not mean that you are a terrible person. Racism has nothing to do with your feelings and emotions toward Black people. The Cambridge Dictionary defines racism as the “policies, behaviors, rules, etc. that result in a continued unfair advantage” to Black women based on race.⁸ Racism encompasses policies, laws, rules and behaviors—including silence. Racism is a sin because Scripture reminds us that God loves all humans and we are not to show partiality based on race (Jas. 2:9). How can you fight against prejudice and bias based on gender and remain silent when you see policies and laws that differ based on race?

Black women take their trauma, anger, fear, and grief to God in laments. Lament creates a sacred space where they can freely allow their sorrow to find expressions in tears, groans, words, and silence. Human masks of all pretenses are removed, urgency is employed, and the state of desperation causes her to seek God in a manner and language native to marginalized communities that are often invisible and powerless within the dominant society. Black women’s lived

Black women take their trauma, anger, fear, and grief to God in laments. Lament creates a sacred space where they can freely allow their sorrow to find expressions in tears, groans, words, and silence. Human masks of all pretenses are removed, urgency is employed, and the state of desperation causes her to seek God in a manner and language native to marginalized communities that are often invisible and powerless within the dominant society.

How are you complicit
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experiences have taught them that God hears their laments concerning policies, laws, rules, and behaviors of discrimination. Scripture states that “if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law” (Jas. 2:9, NLT). “God does not show favoritism” (Rom. 2:11, NLT). God made one nation—humanity. Prayers of lament allow the expressions of pain to fill the gaps between the promises embedded within Scripture for both genders and every race and the lived realities of Black women. Black women have inherited a rich prayer legacy that allows them to face their pain in the form of prayers of lament. Lament to God and hope in God serve to make sense of that which continues to baffle the Black community—our desire to eradicate gender inequality and racial inequality.

I offer that before white evangelical women write that next article, sermon, Facebook post, or tweet about some outrageous white patriarchal

comment (which should be addressed), they should have the courage to ask themselves these questions: How have you contributed to eradicating the policies, laws, rules, and behaviors that result in the ongoing oppression of women of color, and pertaining to this article, specifically Black women? How are you complicit in the oppression of Black women? How might prayers of lament enable us to change policies, behaviors, rules, etc., that result in the continued generational trauma of Black women? How might our communal laments transform the power inequality between white women and women of color?



Valerie Rane Landfair

is the founder of Firstfruit Ministries Inc. She received her MDiv from North Park Theological Seminary and

her PhD in theology from Regent University. She is excited about her upcoming winter three cohort “Invitation to Lament: Reimagining Sisterly Power” (find out more by emailing Firstfruit1@sbcglobal.net).

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*"This teaching is
so clear!"
— Mimi Haddad, Ph.D.*

Fact or Theory?

***The Truth About Women in
Church History and the Bible***

**INTRODUCTION AND
HISTORY OF WOMEN IN
CHRISTIANITY**



1

**HOW THE BIBLE
AFFIRMS WOMEN IN
MINISTRY**



2

**DOES THE BIBLE LIMIT
WOMEN IN MINISTRY?**



3

**JESUS'
REVOLUTIONARY
TREATMENT OF
WOMEN**



4

**RECONCILIATION
BETWEEN MEN AND
WOMEN**



5

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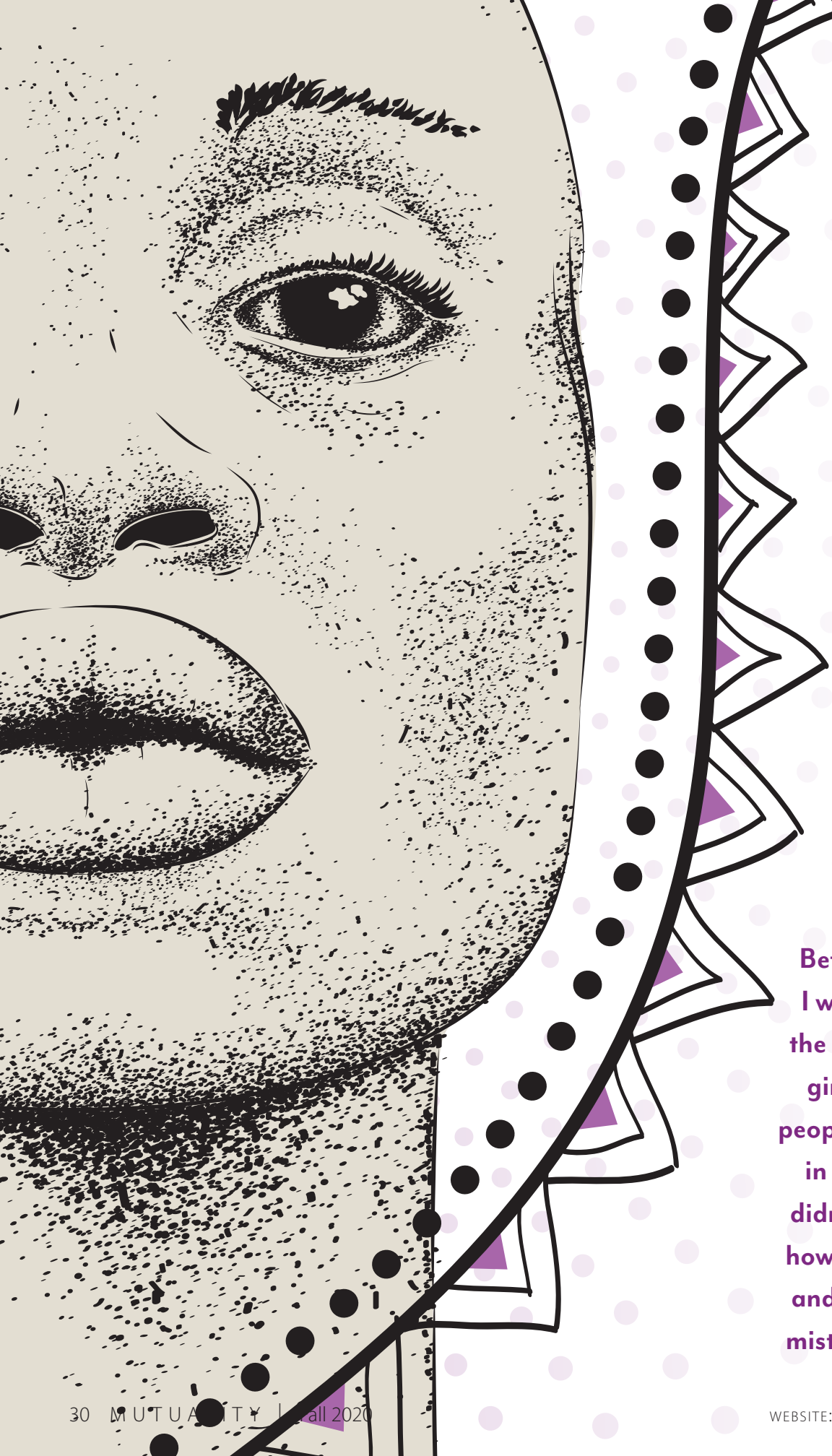
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Jane L. Crane is a gifted leader and speaker who has taught this material on five continents. She was the Lausanne Movement's first Senior Associate for the Partnership of Men and Women and holds a Masters in Peace and Justice.



Before that day,
I wasn't blind to
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girls and Black
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God Is Our Liberator

How Christian Tolerance for Injustice Impacts Our Children

By Octavia Powell

Once you lose a loved one, their words echo in your soul long after they leave. With the third anniversary of my mom's death this past August, I have been methodically reflecting over the many things my mom taught me. I think it is natural for parents to want to shield their children from some of the harsher realities of the world. Not to explicitly hide the truth but to soften it. Even with my mom's gentlest approach, I clearly remember the first time she tried to prepare me for what was outside of our safe family structure.

We were on one of our routine after-dinner walks around our neighborhood. We were lightheartedly talking about nothing of particular importance, but the tone quickly became more serious as she switched the conversation to my physical identity. Calmly but firmly she captured my attention with a simple warning: "There will always be two things going against you in this life, Octavia: your race and your gender." My mom's cautious words have replayed in my mind as I have grown up in the racially divided society of the US. Before that day, I wasn't blind to the different ways girls and Black people were treated in society. But I didn't understand how long standing and systemic that mistreatment was. From a young age my gender already seemed to be a stumbling block to what I was allowed to do by societal standards. I was accustomed

to hearing snide remarks about Black people that I only later was able to understand as microaggressions. These themes only became more apparent as I grew older.

Christians and Racism

A few years after that conversation with my mom, police and civilian brutality against Black men and women rose in publicity in the US. The killing of Trayvon Martin on his way home from the convenience store in 2012 was the first time I remember seeing nationwide coverage of an unarmed Black person killed by someone who seemed to be attempting to uphold the law. It was also the first time I remember hearing people argue about whether or not a teenager deserved to die. Since I lived about two hours from where this particular incident occurred, Trayvon Martin's death was at the top of our local media coverage for weeks. After the initial shock subsided, I began to hear a lot of people, predominately white Christians, attempt to rationalize why the actions of Trayvon's killer were justified.

Seeing people villainize a dead teenage boy scared me. I was thirteen when he was killed at seventeen. He was criticized for wearing a hoodie, carrying Skittles, looking "menacing," and being in the wrong place at the wrong time. As someone who always wore hoodies,

could easily be found with candy, and had the same skin tone as Trayvon, I wondered if one day I would be the one caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. I used to go to convenience stores and wonder if this was the moment that something like what happened to Trayvon would happen to me. And I wondered what people would say about me if I died, how they might use my character and my actions to justify my death.

After that year it seemed like Black deaths were commonplace in the media, and a debate over the necessity of their deaths would subsequently follow each report. While not all of these deaths were a result of police brutality, they contributed to the narrative that Black lives were dispensable and their deaths could be rationalized. The death of Philando Castile by the hands of the police on July 6, 2016, was the incident that really broke me.

One night, I sat on the floor in the dark in my room and cried out to God, asking him why this was happening. Eventually, I ventured out to the living room where my parents were and asked them, through tearful choked sobs, why they hated us. The “they” in question were the people haphazardly killing innocent Black people and the justice system that barely investigated these murder cases. But, “they” also included the white evangelical Christians who came up with reason after reason for why the actions of the predominately white perpetrators were right.

After that conversation with my parents, and seeing that they were just as confused as I was, I spent the next few years of my life continuing to be hardened by the news accounts of police brutality cases against Black women and men. What could be done? Every ounce of pain I felt about these cases felt mitigated by many white outspoken Christian communities who advocated for injustice. Being a follower of Christ seemed to be at odds with speaking out against Black people being killed just because they were Black. But that didn’t make sense to me. I was taught that God

cares about his Black children; their lives matter to him. My lived experiences and desires for justice seemed to be at war with the outspoken Christian majority in the United States.

Bonnie Kristian in her *Christianity Today* article, “White, Black, and Blue: Christians Disagree over Policing,” surveys research which reveals that there are a high percentage of white evangelicals that don’t believe there are racial discrepancies when police interact with civilians. Growing up hearing this majority vocally express their indignation over calls for fairer treatment against Black people was distressing. The church needs to speak up against hate motivated by racism because there are more Black children that feel like I did: sad, afraid, and scared that the church doesn’t see the trauma in their lives as real.

Christians and Sexism

My experiences with sexism in the church evolved alongside this unrest over racial injustice. The strongest influences on my walk with the Lord growing up were the women in my family. My mom, aunts, and grandma

were very outspoken, Spirit-led, Black Caribbean women. They taught me how to pray by laying my life down at the feet of God and earnestly seeking intimacy with him. It was in my Black, immigrant, Christian community where I was first taught by women that God seeks to rectify justice even before the end times.

When something unjust occurred in one of our lives, my mom, aunts, and grandma’s first advice would be to turn to the Lord in prayer. Then their second step would be to use the position where God had placed them to help enact justice. My family’s personal experiences and testimonies gave proof to us that our God actively seeks justice for the marginalized and oppressed. God is not waiting until heaven to start the process of reconciliation and ending injustice. My Black female mentors proclaimed this truth, but I observed that this was rarely talked about in the larger evangelical church regarding racial injustice, and women definitely were not given the platform to be leaders in these conversations.

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I believe that by excluding the complete experience of Black people in general, and Black women in particular, the evangelical church in the US loses out on embracing the totality of the work God is doing in and through all his people. This creates an evangelical context that doesn't acknowledge the Black female experience in its entirety and does not teach young Black Christians that they are a part of the bigger body of Christ.

Moving toward Racial and Gender Justice

In light of the #MeToo movement, issues of sexism and gender equality have become more acceptable topics of discussion in evangelical circles. Because more space has been created for women to be in positions of leadership and speak out against sexual harassment, the church has been able to do a lot more healing collectively as the body of Christ. While there is still more work to be done in this area, especially regarding racially inclusive feminism in the church, the basic framework of beginning to talk about these once taboo topics can also be applied to institutional racism.

There was an onslaught of police brutality cases against Black individuals during the summer of 2020. This is nothing new. However, the death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, seemed to be the spark that finally illuminated the big elephant in the room for many non-Black people in the US: racism is real and systemic.

I have appreciated the love and support that I have felt from many white Christians during this time, but acknowledging the problem is only the first step toward justice. To be a Black person in the US is to constantly know that there are systems and ways of doing things that are discriminatory against people who look like

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you. To be a Black Christian in the US is to have the Black experience scrutinized and questioned regularly by the wider evangelical church. The good news is that Jesus has already shown us how to reject the superiority of one group over another. From Christ's time on earth (Mark 12:31) to the ministries of Jesus' disciples after he ascended to heaven (Rom. 2:11), we have been given clear instructions regarding how we are to value one another's lives. No matter how new this focus on racial justice might be to the white majority of Christians in the US, Christians of color have been preaching this for centuries. God is our Liberator, and he doesn't permit the Christian walk to be one devoid of action.

In Proverbs 31:8–9 there is a call to action against injustice given to King Lemuel. The advice given to him by his mother is to “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.” While this advice was originally

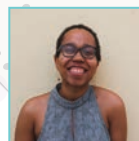
It took my own understanding, formed by my Black female mentors, of the nature of God and the life of Christ to understand that my identity in Christ isn't swayed by the stance of outspoken Christian leaders unwilling to make racial injustice something their church addresses.

for King Lemuel in his context, these verses exemplify the nature of God to be one of justice and action. God may not have given you command over a nation. You may not have a leadership position in your work, church, or volunteer organizations. But as Christians, we are called to be in the world and out with the people others have cast aside. When God calls his people to do his justice work, he properly equips us. That call does not discriminate on race, gender, or any other characteristic that we have used to restrict leadership opportunities in the past.

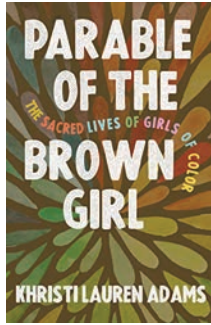
All things are reconciled through Christ. As the hands and feet of Jesus, we are invited into dismantling injustice alongside Christ. Women and men alike are called to engage in this work. We are all called to uplift the broken and the fallen. When racial injustice plagues our world, it is not merely enough to stick to only speaking up about topics that aren't "divisive." Regardless of the racial demographics present in your church, as Christians, the life that Christ lives in us should be so fully evident that all can walk into our homes, churches, and places of recreation and feel like they belong.

The failures of the white evangelical church at large, not just individual Christians, regarding racial justice made me feel like I didn't belong in some pockets of the body of Christ as a child. It took my own understanding, formed by my Black female mentors, of the nature of God and the life of Christ to understand that my identity in Christ isn't swayed by the stance of outspoken Christian leaders unwilling to make racial injustice something their church addresses.

Our understanding of Christ expands as we embrace and love his people. The experiences of Christians of color are often not given the platform to be shared publicly for large Christian audiences. This unfortunate reality is further expounded upon women of color in particular. As the events from summer 2020 grow more and more distant from your present circumstance this fall, I urge you not to forget that the road to healing our church, marred by racial injustice, is not to alienate the voices and experiences of any member of the body of Christ. Only then can our Black girls and boys grow up in a complete Christian community where all parts of their lives and experiences are valued and shared.



Octavia Powell is a recent graduate of Wheaton College where she majored in International Relations and Spanish. Octavia hopes to engage in the pursuit for justice and equity for all by working in the world of public policy.



Review of **Parable of the Brown Girl:** The Sacred Lives of Girls of Color

By **Khristi Lauren Adams**

By *Jeanne Porter King*

In *Parable of the Brown Girl: The Sacred Lives of Girls of Color*, ordained minister, speaker, and author, Khristi Lauren Adams shares the stories of girls of color to spotlight their dreams, struggles, and worlds. By centering the lives of Black girls, she raises the reader's awareness of the forces that girls of color face, as well as the resilience of these girls and their communities.

By employing the narrative form of the parable, also used by Jesus to bring truth and spiritual insight to his hearers, Adams "explores the everyday lives of black girls" (xi). She writes, "racially classified they are black; aesthetically the girls are shades of brown" (xi). Adams aims to disrupt the traditional, often stereotypic views people hold of Black girls.

In seven insightful and accessible chapters, Adams shares the heart of Black girls to help dispel stereotypes, to grant voice to their experiences, and to provide a multidimensional lens to see girls whom the dominant culture often deems invisible, tries to render silent, or dismisses as angry.

Black girls face the harmful expectations of stereotypes early in their lives. For instance, the trope of the Strong Black Woman emerged in response to white patriarchal images meant to demean Black women. Today, this stereotype casts Black women as superhumanly strong inside and out and is a burden foisted upon Black girls at a young age. This stereotype denies the humanity of these young girls.

Adams's parables also shed light on the "adultification" of young Black girls. *Adultification* is the tendency to see Black girls as older than they are and thus to treat them like adults instead of the children and teens that they are. Adams exposes how Black girls are hypersexualized, which causes them to be preyed upon and labeled as promiscuous. So many of the hypersexualized misperceptions of Black girls' bodies emerged from the Jezebel stereotype constructed during slavery to justify the rape of young Black women. This historical perspective helps readers see how the tentacles of patriarchy still attempt to hold Black girls in their grip.

Adams addresses colorism, identity, and so much more. The issues and challenges described by Adams play out in everyday situations for these young girls at school, at

home, and in their neighborhoods, increasing their levels of insecurity and diminishing their mental health. And if that weren't bad enough, these girls also must strive against white beauty standards that attempt to mar the image of God within them.

Yet, Adams shows the resilience and beauty of these young girls of color, especially when given consistent support and understanding. Adams works as an advocate for these girls of color, and her book provides space for their voices to be heard. These Black girls have so much to teach us, and their stories are sacred texts that we must honor.

I highly recommend that any person working in ministries or agencies that provide services to girls of color read *Parable of the Brown Girl*. This book is also a must-read for anyone advocating for gender equality because it provides insight into the complexity of the struggles many women and girls face, specifically those of color. It will remind every person who aims to dismantle gender-based hierarchies that patriarchy affects girls and women of color differently than it affects white women and girls. Our work against patriarchy is one dimensional unless we truly aim to represent all women and girls and not only white women and girls.

The book will challenge you to ask, "how can we have a movement to advance the equality of women and girls if we don't know the stories or understand the plight of the very girls who constitute the group on whose behalf we say we advocate?" Indeed, we can never fully advocate for women's equality if we don't know the diverse stories of women and girls who are hampered by the threats of sexism, racism, classism, colorism, and more.

Like the parables of Jesus, these stories will open your eyes to see and your ears to hear the truths that are needed in our work for gender equality for all girls.



Jeanne Porter King is the President of TransPorter Group Inc, a consulting practice that specializes in leadership development and diversity, equity and inclusion strategies. Jeanne is the author of numerous books addressing women's leadership, serves as the Executive Pastor at Christ Community Church in South Holland, IL, and is a member of the CBE's board of directors.

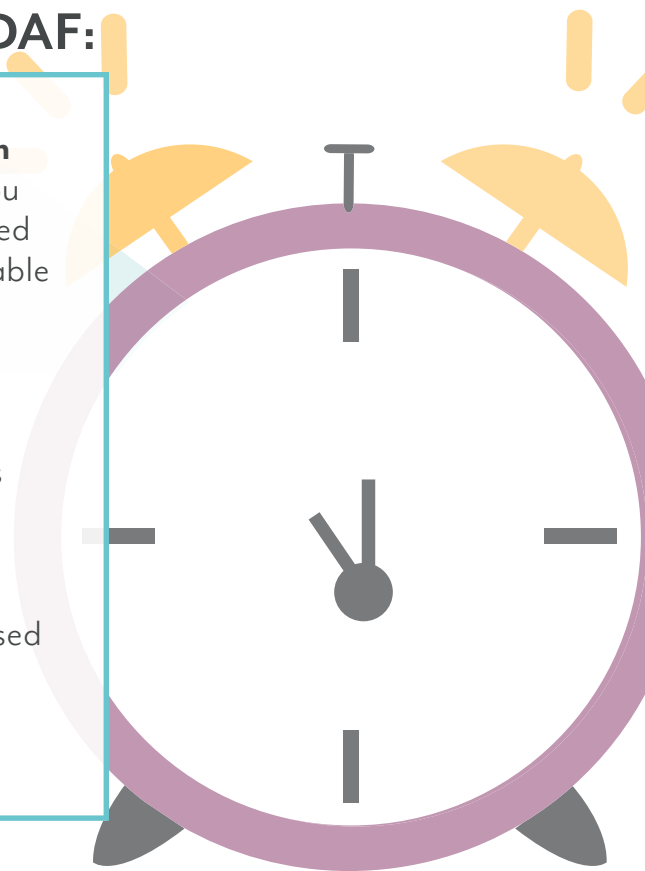
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“Men, Women, and God: Theology and Its Impact” 2021 Conference Virtual Preview Panel

CBE’s international conference at the London School of Theology may have been rescheduled for August 11–14, 2021, but that doesn’t mean you have to wait to hear from our keynote speakers!

Mimi sat down (via Zoom) with Andrew Bartlett, Steve Holmes, and Lucy Peppiatt and asked them to consider the spiritual and social consequences of theological patriarchy. What is at stake, globally, when we talk about the power differential between men and women? How is this conversation woven into what God is doing in the world? Hear their insights at cbe.today/previewpanel.



Andrew Bartlett QC
Barrister, international
arbitrator, lay leader



Lucy Peppiatt
Principal of Westminster
Theological Centre



Steve Holmes
Principal of St. Mary’s College and
Head of the School of Divinity,
University of St. Andrews

Watch for another virtual preview panel with CBE keynote speakers this fall!
Learn more about CBE’s 2021 conference at cbe.today/2021conf

Praise and Prayer

Praise

- Thank you to the generous donors who made it possible for CBE to award \$6,000 Alvera Mickelsen Memorial Scholarships to Christy Chia, Fatu Kanu, and Jessica Prieto.
- CBE’s wise and responsive conference team, hosts, and speakers worked together to reschedule CBE’s “Men Women, and God” conference for August 11–14, 2021, in London.
- We thank Jesus for the skills, passion, and hard work of our summer interns who have made significant contributions to advancing CBE’s mission.
- We praise God for how he has lent physical, mental, and spiritual stamina to CBE staff, board, and volunteers as they “keep their hands to the plow” during these challenging days.

Prayer

- Please pray for new wisdom, courage, and strategies as we grow CBE’s intercultural competencies ministry wide.
- May God encourage more CBE friends to volunteer to assess new books and write reviews.
- Pray that God grows and strengthens CBE chapters by bringing new leadership, vision, and programs where needed.
- May God safeguard the health and well-being of our 2021 conference speakers, sponsors, and registrants as we prepare for a powerful event next summer. Pray that upcoming video conversations with key speakers inspire the CBE community with the conference theme, “Men Women, and God: Theology and Its Impact.”



Womanist Liberation for All

Arising from Black and feminist liberation theologies in the 1980s, womanist theology brings a needed focus on the experiences of Black women to Christian theology. Attending to the abuses of slavery, the injustices that brought about the Civil Rights movement, and the present fight for full emancipation for Black people in the United States, womanist theology identifies with the oppressed to empower and liberate. Acting on love and an audacious courage to challenge assumptions, womanists take charge and battle the powers and principalities. Ultimately, their indomitable self-respect fuels a life-saving activism for “family and community.”¹

Embedded in the biblical text is a womanist ethos that pulsates throughout the stories of biblical women—the outliers and outsiders who prove themselves to be great leaders of God’s people. For the love of God and the marginalized, they challenge oppression boldly. They are the strong rescue evoked over the woman in Genesis 2:18.

At the forefront of God’s liberating work are women like Esther, Ruth, and Rahab. Upending the racial and sexual exploitation by her king and husband, Esther strategized the survival of the Jews. The Moabite Ruth also risked destitution by initiating marital overtures with her kinsman redeemer, Boaz, and upended ethnic stereotypes along the way. Named as faithful for her courage in Hebrews 11:31, Rahab the Canaanite fearlessly negotiated with Israel’s spies to save her family. The womanist spirit of empathy and self-respect characterize take-charge leaders—a sisterhood that shines in the Gospels, too.

Consider the Samaritan woman who holds the longest conversation with Jesus in Scripture (John 4:7–30, 39–42). Though demeaned by multiple marriages, a woman from a hated tribe disrupts social power to engage a man of privilege publicly. In response, Jesus reveals himself as Messiah. These events disturb the disciples, yet she dashes to bring her community Christ’s liberation.

In Mark 7:24–30 we encounter a Syrophenician woman who demands equality beside the privileged. Love for her

demon-possessed daughter drives her courage. In what seems a cruel conversation, Jesus honors her with an opportunity to demonstrate her dignity. He tells her that he must first feed the children of Israel and not the dogs. The Jews viewed her people as dogs, as undeserving of God’s gifts. Her womanist spirit leaps as she declares, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Her response makes clear that the bread of heaven, Christ’s body, is food for the entire world, especially for the so-called dogs—the marginalized. The Jewish, male disciples lack faith that Jesus can feed 5,000, but a non-Jewish woman knows that even a few crumbs from Jesus will satisfy her for eternity. Her faith eclipses the privileged.

In Luke 7:36–50 we meet a woman who, despite her reputation as a prostitute, courageously crashes the party hosted by a Pharisee. Unafraid, like the woman with an issue of blood (Luke 8:43–48), she reaches for Jesus. Washing his feet with her tears and drying them with her hair, she then anoints his head with oil. Outraged, the host, a Pharisee, demeans her character. But her initiative evokes the truth. This woman did what was expected of a religious leader. She humbly washed Christ’s feet. She honored him with a kiss and anointed Jesus just as priests anointed Israel’s kings. Her faith and self-respect exposed the religious pretense of the Pharisee.

These women, and others like them, embody the truth that it is character not tribe or social position that constitutes identity and leadership as God’s people. Though demeaned and exploited as outliers, their suffering is known by the God who sees, who vindicates their demands for equality, and who endures their abuses on the road to Calvary. Their love, self-respect, and commitment to save lives reflects their truest identity as created in God’s image as a strong rescue. Womanists “make a way out of no way,” like their Creator and Redeemer who bore our weaknesses to liberate rather than exploit. Christ alone willingly assumed all human suffering and injustices we perpetrate in order to extinguish that which dehumanizes us all. In Christ, the womanist love of liberation is indeed for family, community, and the world.

1. Kelsi Watters, “Solidarity and Suffering: Liberation Christology from Black and Womanist Perspectives,” *Obsculta* 12, no. 1 (May 2019): 81.

CBE INTERNATIONAL (Christians for Biblical Equality)

MISSION STATEMENT

CBE exists to promote the biblical message that God calls women and men of all cultures, races, and classes to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world. CBE's mission is to eliminate the power imbalance between men and women resulting from theological patriarchy.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

- We believe in one God, creator and sustainer of the universe, eternally existing as three persons equal in power and glory.
- We believe in the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.
- We believe that eternal salvation and restored relationships are only possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.
- We believe the Holy Spirit equips us for service and sanctifies us from sin.
- We believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.
- We believe that women and men are equally created in God's image and given equal authority and stewardship of God's creation.
- We believe that men and women are equally responsible for and distorted by sin, resulting in shattered relationships with God, self, and others.

CORE VALUES

- Scripture is our authoritative guide for faith, life, and practice.
- Patriarchy (male dominance) is not a biblical ideal but a result of sin.
- Patriarchy is an abuse of power, taking from females what God has given them: their dignity, and freedom, their leadership, and often their very lives.
- While the Bible reflects patriarchal culture, the Bible does not teach patriarchy in human relationships.
- Christ's redemptive work frees all people from patriarchy, calling women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership.
- God's design for relationships includes faithful marriage between a man and a woman, celibate singleness, and mutual submission in Christian community.
- The unrestricted use of women's gifts is integral to the work of the Holy Spirit and essential for the advancement of the gospel in the world.
- Followers of Christ are to oppose injustice and patriarchal teachings and practices that marginalize and abuse females and males.

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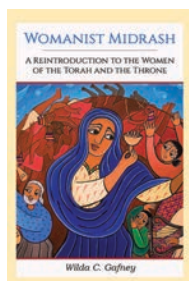
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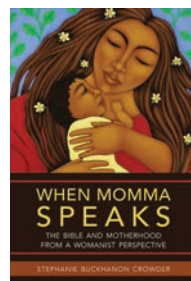
Parable of the Brown Girl: The Sacred Lives of Girls of Color
Khristi Lauren Adams

The stories of girls of color are often overlooked, unseen, and ignored rather than valued and heard. Instead of relegating these young women of color to the margins, Adams brings their stories front and center where they belong. Thought-provoking and inspirational, *Parable of the Brown Girl* is a powerful example of how God uses the narratives we most often ignore to teach us the most important lessons in life.



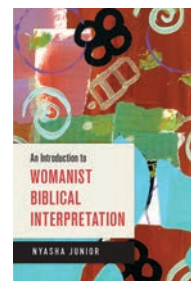
Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne
Wilda C. Gafney

Offering a Midrashic interpretation of the biblical text that is rooted in the African American preaching tradition, Gafney tells the stories of a variety of female characters. Employing a solid understanding of womanist and feminist approaches to biblical interpretation and the sociohistorical culture of the ancient Near East, this unique and imaginative work will expand conversations about feminist and womanist biblical interpretation.



When Momma Speaks: The Bible and Motherhood from a Womanist Perspective
Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder

After providing a brief history of womanist biblical interpretation, Crowder provides an engaging womanist reading of mother characters in the Old and New Testaments and shows how the stories of several biblical mothers can be powerful sources for critical reflection, identification, and empowerment.



An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation
Nyasha Junior

Written in an accessible style, this volume provides a much-needed introduction to womanist approaches to biblical interpretation. Although some African American women identify themselves as "womanists," the term, its usage, its features, and its connection to feminism remain widely misunderstood. This excellent textbook is perfect for introducing readers to the development and applications of womanist biblical interpretations.

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