



Reflections of a Womanist

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I mourn the loss of Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon. She departed August 8, 2018.

Dr. Cannon was the first African-American woman ordained in the United Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 1974 and in 1983 became the first African-American to earn the Doctor of Philosophy degree from Union Theological Seminary (NYC). She is known for her scholarship in the areas of Christian ethics, Womanist theology, and women in religion and society. Her life's work and legacy as professor, scholar, and author speaks to her brilliant mind.

I was first introduced to Dr. Cannon's scholarly research and writing while in seminary. My master's research topic, "Reclaiming the Spirit of God in Womanist Theology" was a declaration to theological educators that seminary education was not complete until Womanists theologians were included as primary sources.

Those unfamiliar with the term may ask, what is Womanist theology and what roll did Dr. Cannon play in advancing this area of study? Dr. Linda Thomas, a Professor of Theology and Anthropology at Lutheran School of Theology-Chicago, shares her insights and goals of Womanists theologians, saying "Womanist theology is an emergent voice of African American Christian women in the United States. Employing Alice Walker's definition of womanism in her text *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden*. Womanist theology's goals are to interrogate the social construction of black womanhood in relation to the African American community. Womanist theology seeks to decolonize the African mind and to affirm our African heritage."

"A key feature of womanist theology is its evolving character," wrote Rev. Dr. Emilie M. Townes, Dean of Vanderbilt Divinity School. "From its formal beginning in 1985 with the publication of Katie Geneva Cannon's article, 'The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness,' (Katie's Canon, 47-56)... womanist theology evolved from the life and witness of Black women." Womanist theology remains an important approach to faith—to adore, love, and worship God. It is important to include Womanist theology resources because black women's experiences are valid.

And it remains necessary in a time when we still regularly see black women dehumanized, and their experiences invalidated, in our public discourse. Recently, the Commander and Chief of the United States tweeted an attack against Omarosa Manigault Newman, a black woman and former White House Communications Director for the Office of Public Liasion. He wrote, “When you give a crazed, crying lowlife a break, and give her a job at the White House, I guess it just didn’t work out. Good work by General Kelly for quickly firing that dog!”

Mrs. Manigault Newman, does not deserve to be dehumanized with language that equates her to a “lowlife” and an animal. Where is the respect for black women? Where is the Christian church when we are being dehumanized? Where is the demand for an apology from white Christians to our nation’s political leader?

This is not the time to be silent. This is the time when the Christian church should speak loudly, prophetically, boldly, and proudly because black women reflect the image of God, the Creator, and the imago Dei.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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