

Introduction

This paper is the second of a two-part series that deals with a new missiological concept — *Genderstroika* created as an epistemology proposal to *Womanist Theology*. In part one of the series, though not an in-depth study on my part, I examined “*Womanist Ethics*,” which elucidated from both secular and Christian ethics points of view, how African American women live out a moral wisdom in a ‘real-lived context.’ By this, I mean Womanist Ethics teaches black women not only what is to be endured but also, how to endure the inhumane cruelties that are connected with the demands of life as it is experienced in the Black context. Although the moral wisdom tradition serves as a vehicle which helps to expose institutional social ills, lamentably, such tradition that are handed down to succeeding generations do not rescue young black girls from the pressures and perplexities of those ethical assumptions; a necessary component for women in the ongoing survival of black woman-hood.

Womanist Ethics further discloses how African American women historically have used their “religious experiences” to transcend multiple oppression: racism, economic exploitation, gender crimination and sexual harassment. Accordingly, this present paper will reiterate key philosophical and religious traditions of the “Womanist Theology” milieu and will introduce the tenants of my innovation “*Genderstroika*.” The latter is intended to enable ‘Womanist theologians’ to move beyond what Victor Anderson defines as “ontological blackness,” in dealing with the challenges hitherto, promulgated by the hegemony of white male and female cultural elitism, and black male habitudes, as these affect the black female’s person-hood.

Further, this new missiological concept seeks to awaken in the consciousness of African Americans and ultimately all black people, irrespective of geography, the need to develop liberational structures that will move them beyond “ontological blackness.” Lastly, I am seeking to develop an ideology that

posits constructive practices, which will foster attitudes that will facilitate the ‘consubstantiation’ of all human beings (emphasis mine).

Genderstroika is a missiological concept created by Victoria M. Peagler that proceeds from a Christian socio-political matrix to grapple with the historical and global tri-dimensional aspects of oppression: racism, classism and sexism. Although “Genderstroika” is the consequence of *Missio Dei* (my missiological predilection), it is intended, nonetheless, to work for women and men who operate from other frames of spirituality.

Before I proceed with the discussion in this paper, I would like to define eight key concepts that will appear frequently throughout the paper.

Key Concepts

Afrocentricity. Afrocentricity as is in current use in North America is a concept that was brought to prominence by Molefi Kete Asante. He defines Afrocentricity as “the belief in the centrality of Africans in post-modern history.” Asante posits Afrocentric beliefs as the basis for the way that African Americans negotiate life in a white racist society.¹ He argues that Afrocentricity excavates the African past in an effort to free African Americans from an oppressive Eurocentric consciousness, and creates for them a new African-centered way of thinking and acting. Afrocentricity further demonstrates the vitality of African American culture and history as well as the African heritage²

Consubstantiation. Consubstantiation is a theological term used to connote the same substance but with different aspects. It is a term frequently used in Western Christianity that deals with the element of the Holy Eucharist in an effort to distinguish non-Catholic beliefs from the philosophy of the Roman Catholic Church regarding transubstantiation. Within the context of this paper, however, I will use consubstantiation to emphasize the fact that human life has

¹ Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity Idea* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988), 6.

² Ibid.

its origin in God, though we proceed from different modes of existence.

Glasnost/Perestroika. Are terms attached to Mikhail Gorbachev's tenure between 1985–1991. He embarked upon a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of ***Glasnost*** ("openness") and ***Perestroika*** ("restructuring") new thinking of socialist ideologies in Russia.³ Perestroika took place in two dimensions: internally and externally. Gorbachev explained that externally (*glasnost*), this new way of thinking was to reflect the Soviet's obligation as a world power to do the right thing; confront the truth of Russian history by admitting its past mistakes, and moving forward to a positive future for all Russians). Internally (*perestroika*), his reforms would ultimately bring about "A society of free people, a society of and for the working people, built on the principles of humanism . . . and social justice."⁴ However, by 1990, Gorbachev's *perestroika* program had failed to deliver significant improvement in the economy, and in the elimination of political and social control.⁵

Genderstroika. Broadens and redefine Mikhail Gorbachev and William Strickland's usage of "Perestroika" by re-introducing this old, but new concept. Genderstroika proceeds from a Christian socio-political matrix and uses a radical liberational approach to re-examine the historical, cultural, and religious roles of Black people, in particular Black women, with a view to redefine these roles through synthesis of the Afrocentric way of life.⁶

Ontological Blackness. Religious critic Victor Anderson posits *ontological*

³ a. Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (1996).

⁴ Steven White, *Gorbachev and After* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), 228.

⁵See E. A. Hewett and V. H. Winston, ed., *Milestones in Glasnost and Perestroika* (1991).

⁶ William Strickland referred to Gorbachev's Perestroika in an article he wrote regarding Jesse Jackson and the "African-American Agenda." Strickland stated, "There is a need for "Black Perestroika" regarding the American Intellectual Chaos. Jackson believed that it was constitutional inability to admit error and face reality that was producing a kind of moral and intellectual bankruptcy which more than anything was precipitating America's decline: ideology versus intelligence. Jackson said, "A country so often on the wrong side of history and truth cannot bring itself to admit its sin and, by definition, therefore, resist change." By this, I assume that Strickland means that white Americans must rethink their views regarding intellectualism as it relates to Black people. The intellectual chaos, however, is but a fragment of the ongoing black dilemma in the USA. African Commentary, March 1990. Amherst, Massachusetts.

blackness as a cover term that uses representational language to depict black life and experience. Consequently, from Anderson's viewpoint, ontological blackness, is a philosophy of racial consciousness.⁷

Ontological blackness examines the way that racial discourse operates rhetorically in African American culture and religious thought. Anderson's philosophy asserts that the conscious life of the black experiences is bound by unresolved binary dialectics: slavery and freedom, Negro and citizen, insider and outsider, black and white, struggle and survival. But case histories, whether one accents the positive or negative aspects of racial polarization, reveal that binary polarities admit no possibility of transcendence or mediation.⁸

Symphony. Symphony as used in musicology is the harmonious integration of instruments (wind -, string -, brass -, percussion -, etc.) for producing musical compositions in a unified way. I am using 'symphony' to mean the communal views and interests used to develop liberational structures and plans of action to effect solidarity and to make for harmonious relations between male and female within the African American context – thus, "symphony of being."

Womanist and Womanism. These terms are frequently used interchangeably. Novelist, Alice Walker, coined the term. Walker defines Womanist as a black feminist who is committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people male and female.⁹ Furthermore, she defines womanist as a female "who is responsible, in charge, serious, outrageous, courageous and audacious enough to demand the right to think theologically and to do it independently of both White and Black men and White women."¹⁰ From Walker's point of view, womanism proceeds from an Afrocentric vision, in that it digs right into the core of the historical black experience: one doing what they are willing to do to promote the

⁷ Victor Anderson, African American Religious and Cultural Criticism, (New York: Continuum, 1995), 11.

⁸ 1995, 13-14.

⁹ Alice Walker poet and novelist won the Pulitzer Prize for her work, In Search for Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983).

¹⁰ 1983, xi.

survival and wholeness of the African American family and community.

Womanist Theology. Womanist theology is a discipline that understands its theology as primarily one of liberation. Womanist theology begins with the experiences of black women as its point of departure. This experience includes black women's experiences within the broader context, and addresses such experiences from within the particular — the Black church.

The context for womanist theological writings is pervasive racism with its discriminatory effects resulting in the domination of white over black, and alienation. Conspicuously, Womanist theology is devoted to the construction of a positive self-consciousness that is fundamentally defined by the heroic qualities of black women's strength and creative resistance against racism, classism and sexism.

Now I will foreshadow my discussion on "Genderstroika" by making reference to a personal experience that buttresses my appeal to the "womanist tradition:" the immediacy of finding new ways for dealing with the historical, problems of domination, discrimination and alienation of people of color and in particular, women of color.

Case Study 1

Personal Encounter with Racism and Classism

One Saturday morning in September 1996, while jogging down one of the main boulevards in Pasadena, California, I noticed a "flea market" on the side of the road. When I finished jogging, I decided to go back to the flea market. Antithetically, what I uncovered that morning were items and situations that unequivocally devalued the humanity of specific minority groups, and condescending attitudes by whites, which strengthens my epistemology — the need for "Genderstroika"— a recommendation to womanist theology.

On returning to the flea market scene, immediately, I observed two items that were vitiating and pejorative. The first vendor, a white male, displayed worn-out license plates (numberplates for cars) that read: “No dogs, no Negroes¹¹ and no Mexicans allowed.” A second plate read: “Drinking fountain for coloreds’ only.”¹² Thereafter, I stopped at a table attended by a white female where I stood for several minutes browsing through miscellaneous items with the prospect of purchasing while waiting for her to finish serving another customer. After the other white female left the table, this vendor never bothered to come to the corner of the table where I was browsing.

Disturbed by the repulsive license plates of the first vendor and the snooty treatment of the second vendor, my mind reverted to stories my elderly relatives and friends had shared with me concerning the “Jim Crow” era.¹³ I continued browsing at other tables. Before leaving the flea market, however, I decided to return to the second vendor’s table the second time around to see what her response towards me would be. This time there was no one else present at her table. Can you believe that this woman did not bother to inquire whether or not I might be a potential customer? She totally ignored me! There was no acknowledgement of my person-hood. Unequivocally, what I experienced that morning were the painful darts of racial discrimination.

In a post-modern world we are able to accomplish innovative and phenomenal *tour de forces* such as galactic and subterranean travels. Notwithstanding, in the human sphere, minorities and Black females in particular, still struggle under the hegemony of white discrimination, alienation

¹¹ An earlier 20th century appellation used primarily for those of African descent living in the USA and other areas of the world.

¹² Unlike the meaning that the word Colored holds for South Africans (those of mixed ancestry), in the American context it was an early 20th century appellation used by whites to describe all people whose skin tones were darker than those of whites, namely, Blacks.

¹³ Although most historians understand that *de jure* segregation began before the American Civil War (1864/5), and increased massively during Reconstruction, it was recognized as Law right through the Progressive Era (1890-98). Forced segregation — Jim Crow disallowed Blacks privileges afforded whites.

and exploitation. In a democratic society like the United States of America, do we need an ethics and an epistemology that will further the transcendence of ontological blackness? Unequivocally, yes! Absolutely!

A Critique of Feminist and Womanist Struggles: The Historical Dilemma

Much has been written about the white women's liberation movement in the United States. The prevailing and principal question that arises is whether there are parallels between the white feminist movement and the struggles engaged by Black women for total emancipation. Although there are a few parallels that research can draw simply because both white and black women live under the same exploitative system, there remain unparalleled disparities, many of which are quite crucial. In this regard, the feminist movement is far from being monolithic.

The author of this thesis makes this assertion because any white group that does not have an anti-imperialist and an anti-racist-theology has very little in common with Black women's struggle. Many white feminist groups have come to the erroneous conclusion that their oppression is due simply to male chauvinism and accordingly, have written publications, which often reflects extreme anti-male tones. Black people, on the other hand, are engaged in a life-and-death struggle to survive, and consequently the main focus of Black women must be to combat the capitalist, racist, exploitation of the Black community.

In this regard, ethicist Bell Hooks correctly states that one of the major differences between white feminist and womanist is the fact that the white women's liberation movement is essentially middle-class. Very few of these women suffer the extreme economic exploitation that many Black women are subjected to in the routine of daily life. And though it is true that male chauvinism has become institutionalized in the American society, one must always look for the main culprit. In other words, what is the underlying cause of

the female condition?

During the past few decades, several womanist theologians have articulated many of the probable causes for the ongoing oppression of Black people, followed by possible solutions for the historical dilemma. Therefore, I have included in this paper an engaging summary, which highlights dialogue between Alice Walker's womanist views and seven primary womanist ethicists and theologians to further my appeal to womanist theologians to seek new alternatives to move African American women forward in the new millennium.

Alice Walker's Womanism and Womanist Theologians in Dialogue

Alice Walker's Womanist, as stated under definition of key terms, is clearly, Afrocentric. I say this because she digs right into the core of the historical black experience. Walker challenges stereotypical ideas that devalue Black women. According to Walker, a black feminist is one who possesses qualities of being that are challenging and bold, inquisitive and creative, and one who possesses a disposition that causes her to push and strain towards a special kind of maturity survival of the black community.¹⁴ Walker asserts that womanist ideology involves love, being relational, being committed to the health and survival of the black community.¹⁵ She further identifies a womanist as Black or one of a dark hue, and goes on to define womanist as universal in terms of an array of skin colors: Brown, pink and yellow as well as white, beige and Black. The author believes that the latter statement is meant to provide intrinsic value to all skin colors.

To buttress Walker's views regarding womanism and color, well known theologian and author, James Cone has well documented how Black people's color has been the basis upon which whites in general, and white Americans in

¹⁴ Walker, 1983, xii.

¹⁵ Ibid.

particular, previously judged Black people to be subhuman.¹⁶ Finally, Walker asserts that womanist loves men and women, sexually and or, non-sexually. She concludes by stating, “To devalue their humanity is to be guilty of sin — the sin that denies that Black women’s humanity is in the image of God — as is all humanity.”¹⁷ This assertion, of course, challenges those that covertly or openly devalues “lesbianism.” For one to consider Walker’s views straightforwardly, it seems quite clear to the author that she is persuaded that to devalue any of her preceding assertions is to devalue the Black woman’s womanhood.

1. Delores Williams. Williams embraces mediatorial possibilities as constitutive of what Alice Walker means by womanism. Williams is worth quoting:

. . . The relationship between mother and child in a single-parent household is not valued as the proper circumstance out of which “normal” and psychologically healthy children can come... Walker describes a womanist as “responsible . . . in charge . . . serious.” This challenges the stigma of “childlike,” “girlish,” and “frivolous,” which patriarchal and demonarchal social attitudes assign to Black women. She describes Black women’s love in terms of dance, the moon, the spirit, love, food, roundness, struggle, and love of themselves as women. This affirms the cultural elements through which black women express their humanity. To devalue any of this understanding of a womanist is to devalue Black women’s womanhood . . .¹⁸

Observably, Williams supports the promise of ‘womanist prose,’ racial and cultural mediation as a part of her definition of womanist. At the contextual level, Williams as well as other womanist theologians appear to accent themes of cultural domination and alienation as vitiating cultural fulfillment. From Williams point of view, it seems clear that “*Womanist*” signals an appreciation for the richness, complexity, uniqueness, and struggles involved in being black and

¹⁶ James Cone, A Black Liberation Theology (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991).

¹⁷ Walker, 1983, xii.

¹⁸ Delores Williams, Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 145-46.

female in a society that is hostile to both “blackness and woman-hood.” I concur with Williams’ assertion, that womanist theologians will add challenge to the hegemony of black, male clergy over legitimacy claims in African American religion and theology. The real question remains whether these gender challenges, contextual and hermeneutical, will be able to transcend ontological blackness which structures the black theology project, without at the same time vitiating womanist real interests? Clearly, womanist theology from a contextual point of view remains bound by ontological blackness, since the defining category is black oppression.

2. Katie Cannon. Cannon advocates **religious and ethical** values as a significant means to the cultural ethos of womanism. Cannon states that her religious quest was one of trying to relate the Christian doctrines preached in the Black Church on Sunday mornings to the suffering, oppression and exploitation of Black people in society. Clearly, she has thought long and hard about these issues based upon the following questions:

How could Christians, who were white, flatly and openly, refuse to treat as fellow human beings Christians who had African ancestry? Was not the essence of the Gospel mandate a call to eradicate affliction, despair and systems of injustice? . . . How long would the white church continue to be the Ominous symbol of white dominance—sanctioning and assimilating the propagation of racism in the mundane interests of the ruling group?¹⁹

Cannon seems swayed that as long as the white-male experience continue to be established as the ethical norm, the Black community and other minorities will suffer incontestable oppression. Cannon states “racism, gender discrimination and economic exploitation as inherited aged-long complexes, require that the Black community create and cultivate a set of ethical values that allow them to prevail against the odds with moral integrity, in their ongoing

¹⁹ Katie G. Cannon, Black Womanist Ethics, (Atlanta: Scholars Press 1988), 1.

participation in the white-male-capitalist value system.”²⁰

Forced to the lowest rungs of the social, political and economic hierarchy, one can conclude that Black existence, then as well as today, are to a great extent deliberately and openly controlled. Accordingly, Cannon argues that the ethical values that the Black community has established are not identical with the obligations and duties that the Anglo-Protestant American society requires of its members. Neither can the ethical assumptions be the same for both races as long as powerful whites that control the wealth, the systems and the institutions, continue to publish materials that foster criminal acts against Blacks. The author is fully persuaded that when discussing the Black community and its desirable ethical values, and sound morality, one must take into account the paradoxes and the dilemmas that constrict Blacks to the lowest range of self-determination.

3. Jacquelyn Grant. Grant draws on **triple oppression and racial reductionism** of black women as a fundamental differentiating precedent for constructive womanist theology. Grant seems very adamant about feminist theology being inadequate and vigorously argues, feminist theology is inadequate for two reasons: first, “it is White and second, it is Racist.”²¹

The logic of her argument is that racism is a function of the systemic behavior of dominant racial groups — namely, whites. Grant argues that because white women are entailed in the privileges of white classism, white feminist theology must be by definition—racist. The taxonomy of whiteness and racism for Grant is categorical. Hence, the author asserts that Grant’s ontological mindset has resulted in a categorical racial reductionism that morally diminishes her capacity to distinguish between friend and, foe. Further, by making racism categorical and identifiable with whiteness, she has in effect posited a type of

²⁰ Katie G. Cannon, “Resources for a Constructive Ethic for Women with Special Attention to the Life and Work of Zora Neale Hurston.” (Ph. D., Dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1983), 75.

racial reductionism that would suggest *reductio ad absurdum* — every black woman is also a womanist. Unquestionably, there are African American scholars (the author included), that challenge the logic of Grant's racial reductionism.

Grant, also asserts that historic disparities between white and black women relative to sex under the economy of slavery and segregation, have created a gulf between the two, a gulf that seemingly cannot be bridged. Grant argues . . . 'White feminists' common assumptions that all women are in the same situation with respect to sexism is difficult to understand when history so clearly discloses a different story, that is, Black existence, whether male or female, is bound by peerless suffering and survival."²²

Lastly, on a contextual level, Grant infers that the black experience with respect to triple oppression: race, class and gender, will provide womanist theologians with an angle of vision that anticipates promise of transcendence over the burdens of ontological blackness. Yet it seems to me that from parts of her argument that womanist demands and claims for exceptionalism requires, the stability of ontological blackness for the legitimacy of their project. (Isn't this the same as trying to define a word while using part of the word in the definition)? Therefore, Grant, I ask you, is it likely that womanism can transcend the problems associated with an ontology that is dependent on that mindset to provide legitimacy for its project?

4. Clarice Martin. Martin approaches womanism with a key theological tool, namely, **reiterative hermeneutics**, a strategy that is intricately expressive of black women's spiritual autobiography. Reiterative hermeneutics, says Martin is a strategy that involves "a declarative rehearsal, a reiteration of the ways in which God has delivered, rescued, transformed, and re-empowered the self or the

²¹ Jacquelyn, White Woman's Christ and Black Women's Jesus, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 195.

²² 1989, 196.

community in the face of suffering and calamity.”²³

Martin asserts Black women’s autobiographies are representational of “radical uses of traditional forms of spirituality,” and that such radicalism led black women to question courageously what they perceived to be illegitimate authority to wage war against an intemperate, sexist, and slave holding societies. Further, reiterative hermeneutics appear to disclose an authentic consciousness of black womanhood that speaks to black women’s narratives of pain and anguish of both their individual and collective struggle to grasp and manage, rather than to be managed by their suffering.

Though the author acknowledges Martin’s analysis of reiterative hermeneutics, once again, one must ask womanist ethicists and theologians, if suffering and resistance continues to have a totaling function in womanist theological discourse as in classical black theology and other Afrocentric theologies, on what, then does transcendence depend? Though the author concur that we must not, neither should we forget the historicism of the black experience in America and elsewhere, at what point do we stop focusing on the struggle and began to emphasize the need to create a positive future?

6. Kelly Brown Douglas. Kelly Douglas casts the womanist debate in its intensity when she suggests that what was missed in a roundtable debate was an opportunity for womanist theologians to make clear their unmistakable no to **heterosexism and homophobia** in womanist theology.²⁴ Douglas argues that womanist theologies must be careful not to embrace or affirm language, models, movements, or ways of thinking that predisposes people to certain roles based on gender or sexual preference. Douglas correctly points out that sizeable segments of the black community are caught in a spiral of death and brokenness. “They, too often succumb to the crime, drugs, disease, lack of life- and freedom-

²³ Clarice Martin, “Black Women’s Spiritual Autobiography.” *A Troubling in My Soul: Perspectives on Evil and Suffering* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 28.

producing values, that an ‘interlocking system’²⁵ of multiple oppression — that is racism, sexism, poverty, and heterosexism — breeds.”²⁶ Douglas states emphatically and the author concurs that womanist theologians must be held accountable to black women in struggle. “What we say about God, Christ, and the church must make sense, must ring true to these women in the context of their daily struggles,” states Douglas.²⁷

Moreover, Douglas asserts, that what is crucial to the ongoing struggle for Black women’s person-hood and the survival of the black community is meaningful dialogue on two levels: (1) between genders and, (2) secondly between church and the academy. Men must talk to men and women need to talk unapologetically to other women. Douglas insists that because of the immense crisis in the black community, black male theologians must commence the discussion. The author agrees that the interaction must be more than a simple discussion on the sin of sexism. The challenge for involvement calls for more than a one-dimensional focus if African Americans are to obtain integrity and decorum for both males and females.

Lastly, Douglas says that the challenge for womanist theologians is to develop appropriate pedagogues for teaching church and community women. It is the author’s view that the church, particularly, Evangelicals, Pentecostals and the Charismatic wing of Christianity continue to approach life from an eschatology bias, thus neglecting the social and moral decay that continues to confront black life in the present. Unequivocally, Womanism must move beyond the walls of the academy to make itself available to the church and community.

²⁴ Douglas, Kelly B. The Black Christ. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 100-101.

²⁵ The phrase interlocking system of oppression comes from sociologist Patricia Hill Collin’s depiction of African American women’s oppression. See Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (New York: Routledge, 1991), 44.

²⁶ Douglas, “Teaching Womanist Theology” Living The Intersection ed. Cheryl Sanders. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 155.

²⁷ Ibid.

7. Bell Hooks. Bell Hooks a cultural critic elucidates the interrelationship of the tri-dimensional oppressive reality of Black women by pointing out a few of the inherent weaknesses of white feminist theory:

Racism abounds in the writings of white feminists, reinforcing white supremacy and negating the possibility that women will bond politically across ethnic and racial boundaries. Past feminist refusal to draw attention to and attack racial hierarchy suppressed the link between race and class. Yet, class structure in the American society has been shaped by the racial politics of White supremacy.²⁸

Hooks states it correctly that the oppression of Black women, determined by race and the hierarchical structure (class), makes possible further subjugation of black women and a disproportionately high percentage of the poor and working classes.²⁹ The fact that African American women are a subjugated group within the white hierarchy as well as within their own community does not mean that they are alone in this oppression.

Within the women's community of the poor, one can effortlessly recognize that lower class, white women, Hispanics, Native Americans. Asians and other minority women are also marginalized. Added to the class of economic poor are African American males who are also the victims of discrimination and alienation.

Classism impacts women of color in a profound and paradoxical way. Repeatedly, African American and other minority women are forced into positions that inevitably place them on the bottom of the social and economic ladder. Women theologians, who also engage in womanist theology but ignore classism, would mean that their exercise in theology is no different from any other bourgeois theology. Classism, similar to racism and sexism has a corrupting life of its own. Consequently, the author must concur with Hooks in her assessment that middle class theology would be pointless to the majority of

²⁸ Bell Hooks, "Black Women Shaping Feminist Theory." Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 3.

African American women who are themselves, poor. Hence, any theology that simply addresses racism and sexism only, is an inadequate approach to affect total liberation for the African American female in the specific and the African American community in the broader context.

8. Cheryl Sanders. African American Christian ethicist, Cheryl Sanders casts the Womanist theological debate in terms of an ontological dilemma and makes problematic the womanist theologian's ability to transcend the offing of ontological blackness.

Sanders charge her womanist theology colleagues as having bought into a highly loaded definition of *womanism*. Sanders, posits Walker's womanism as a theology that is at its core anti-Christian and anti-black. From Sanders point of view, clearly, womanism is an extension of the modernist moral impulses that are driven by individualism and moral autonomy. Accordingly, this religious antinomian renders womanism anti-Christian. Similarly, Sanders suggests that womanism is anti-black in that it allows an openness, to homosexual love that devalues the real interests of black life, which in her view is the sustaining of black families and the wholeness of the community.³⁰ These assertions, seems to suggest that Sanders is propagating homophobia.

If the author understand Sander's essay correctly she charges her womanist colleagues with making a categorical error. From her point of view, the error lay in their identifying the freedoms and transcendence Walker anticipates in her womanist connotation, with ontological blackness. Sanders asserts, and on this point the author concurs, "I suspect that it is Christianity and not womanism that forms the primary ground of theological and ethical identity with our audacious, serious foremothers."³¹

Sanders understands womanism as a secular category and as such black

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Roundtable Discussion: Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. (1989, 90).

³¹ 1989, 91.

women theologians have good warrants for rejecting Walker's definition of womanism:

Walker's definition comprises an implicit ethics of moral autonomy, liberation, sexuality and love that is not contingent upon the idea of God or revelation. In any case, to be authentically "womanist" a theological or ethical statement should embrace the full complement of womanist criteria without omissions or additions intended to sanctify, defeminize or otherwise alter the perspective Walker intends...³²

Conspicuously, Sanders advises that the inclusion of womanism into the construction of black women's theology creates a defect because black women's experience in the main, is based on theistic principles, biblical faith, and a moral tradition that eschews the radical claims to sexual autonomy that Walker suggests. Clearly, Sanders believes that if womanist theologians affirm the privilege of self-definition and the racial and cultural transcendence promised by Walker's womanist connotations, then they risk alienating themselves from the real interests of black life. If on the other hand they mitigate their claims for womanism, then they risk self-referential inconsistency as Womanist.³³

Sanders internal critiques of womanist theology is provocative, however, some of her colleagues (here the author includes herself), point out that her theory is flawed on several points. Sanders, in fact, mistakes connotative pronouncements (the meanings of which are extrinsic and unwarranted) for denotative ones (the meanings of which are intrinsic and essential).

Firstly, Sanders seems to wonder in what sense womanist theology can be womanist, if the theologian does not conform too or agree to all connotative remarks that Walker commends? Is it not possible to have a mitigated 'womanism?' Womanist theologian, Jacquelyn Grant's categorical rejection of whiteness, may well be an instance of a mitigated womanist.

Personally, the author disagrees with Walker's connotation that by

³² 1989, 87

³³ 1989, 90.

affirming lesbian love, one is able to transcend ontological blackness. The author's question to this affirmation is how does affirming any lifestyle, particularly, those that appear contrary to the biblical canon aid one to achieve transcendence from ontological blackness? Furthermore, what does one have to do with the other? However, the various connotations characterized by Walker's womanism are not themselves logically dependent.

We have a saying in the United States amongst some religious circles: "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water." The author is fully persuaded that not only is a mitigated womanist possible, but is placing her innovation—*Genderstroika* on the theological table as a proffer to Womanist theology.

Secondly, Sanders misconstrues the womanist theological debate when she casts it in terms of secularism versus Christianity. From the author's perspective, the conflict seems to be more accurately cast as internal among black women who hold incompatible Christian perceptions and theologies. What this suggests is that the conflict may well be between women whose moral and religious sensibilities are commensurate with secular theology, rather than sensibilities that are commensurate with biblical or evangelical theologies. Several of Sanders womanist colleagues emphasized this point in their roundtable responses to her.³⁴

Notwithstanding, her arguments crystallize many of the problems facing the womanist theological project. Again, the author asks, can womanist theology transcend the apiaries of ontological blackness and simultaneously hold to the transcending openings that Walker's womanist connotations recommend? This is not a question posed peculiarly to womanist theology, but rather is a question that the author pose to other Black theologies where blackness determines the existential meanings connected with black life and experience. When black life is essentially determined by the totality of "binary racial dialectic" which admits no

³⁴ Round Table Discussion - 1989, 83-91. Present were Cannon, Townsend, Gilkes Copeland and Hooks.

possibility of cultural transcendence, then African American theologians hold few prospects for effectively ameliorating the social and existential crises that bind black life.

Womanist Theology and the Literary Heritage

Womanist theology begins with the experiences of Black women as its point of departure. These experiences include not only Black women's activities within the broader context of society but in the narrower sense — experiences within the Black church. From a hermeneutical viewpoint, womanist theology tends to privilege not only traditional biblical/theological archival sources, but also, narratives, autobiographies, and black women's writings, as primary sources for doing theology. The materials from black women's literature and slave narratives serve to disclose ancestry wisdom. For womanist theologians these sources function as Black women's wisdom literature.

The turn to Black women's literature tends to serve the apologetic notion that buttresses the "womanist" exceptional claim — the capacity for survival under unprecedented sufferings. Although there are many available sources from which womanist theologians draw for their project, their historical retrievals are governed by survivalist intentions. From these various sources womanist theologians engage in a selective retrieval of materials that in turn reinforce a crystallization of values that identify them with the womanist undertaking. Some of the following women form a significant part of the visible crystallization whose stories of suffering, survival and resistance are representational of womanist consciousness: Maria Stewart, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Zora Hurston, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison just to name a few. However, the literary resources need not to be identified strictly with black women's novels or poetry.

In addition to the literary coterie, political, religious and feminist

theologians are representational of those who also engaged in liberational undertakings to support the womanist survivalist tradition. Here the author has added a few representational excerpts rather than detailed readings.

Ethicists, Katie Cannon states “Black women have created and cultivated ethical values that allow them to prevail against the odds, with moral integrity, in their ongoing participation in the white-male-capitalist values system.”³⁵ The late Pauli Murray makes use of the “inclusionary principle”³⁶ of White feminist theology in that she challenged proponents of Black theology to adopt a spirit of co-operation towards liberation and reconciliation. She rigorously encouraged Black theologians to take women’s roles more seriously.

Black feminist theologian, Jacquelyn Grant challenged Black theology and the Black church to realize its own proclamation of liberation as the central message of the gospel by extending the same principle to Black women. Grant defines the task of Black feminist liberation theology to be one that exposes the various forms of oppression: racism, classism, sexism and imperialism. She argues, and the author agrees that the varied forms of oppression are all interconnected and that challenging them separately will not eliminate any.³⁷

Women in Pentecostal and holiness movements also contributed significantly to the philosophical and literary heritage. Theologian, Cheryl Townsend-Gilkes’ enumerates the activities of women in the Black holiness traditions and describes how their contributions are irreplaceable and further elucidates how the strength and power they exhibited went beyond the spheres customary for women, especially, in light of how patriarchy and racism impinged upon their participation.³⁸

³⁵ Cannon, 1988, 75ff.

³⁶ The late Pauli Murray was a former priest in the Episcopal Church and Professor at Law and Politics at the Brandeis University. “Black Theology and Feminist Theology: A Comparative View (1979, 398-417).

³⁷ See “Black Theology and the Black Woman,” (1979, 418-483); “Task of a Prophetic Church,” (1982, 136-42).

³⁸ “The Role of Women in the Sanctified Church,” Journal of Religious Thought 43 (Spring Summer 1986): 24.

Delores Williams' graduate thesis explores Black women's image through the ante-bellum and post-bellum literary materials. Williams suggests that given the peculiar reality of Black Women, perhaps the Jewish and Christian biblical story that focuses on Sarah—Abraham's wife, is an inadequate model for Black women.³⁹ In conclusion, it is this author's opinion that Williams is correct when she proposes that Hagar, the slave woman should be the correlative for Black women's experience. Moreover, sister theologians need increased participation from black male theologians to challenge fellow-theologians and black male ministers to advance Black women's liberation in the church, work force and in the community.

Womanist Religious Heritage: The Bible and the Church

Briefly summarizing the Black religious heritage, we find that the Black Church is the crucible through which systematic faith affirmations have been revealed. The Black Church came into being as an invisible institution during the seventeenth century. Concealed from the eyes of the slavemasters, Black men and women developed an extensive religious life. By blending West African religious concepts in a new and totally different context with colonial Christianity the slaves made Christianity truly their own.⁴⁰

During the Reconstruction Era, the Black Church continued to assume its responsibility for shaping the expository and critical thought that would help the adherents of the faith understand the interplay of historical events and societal structures. The teachings of the Church developed out of the socio-economic and political context in which Black people found themselves. The theology after the

³⁹ "The Black Woman Portrayed in Selected Black Literature and Some Questions For Black Theology." (MA Thesis, Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary), 1975.

⁴⁰ "The Black Woman Portrayed in Selected Black Literature and Some Questions For Black Theology." (MA Thesis, Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary), 1975.

“Emancipation” focused on Christians working to help the social order come into harmony with the Divine plan. In every sphere where Blacks were circumscribed and their legal rights denied, the Black Church called its members to a commitment of perfecting social change and exacting righteousness.

As Black people moved from the South, northward and from rural to urban settings seeking relief from restricted circumstances, the Black church became the citadel of hope. Women, largely, were great champions of that hope. When one examines the writings of Black women it is clear that these women make the unity and liberation of Black people their starting point in an analysis of Black feminism.

The source for Black women’s perception of God, conspicuously, proceeds from two dimensions: firstly, Black women’s understanding of God’s revelation directly to them, and secondly, God’s disclosure as witnessed in the Biblical canon and as read and heard in the context of their experience. The understanding of God as creator, sustainer, comforter, and liberator took on new life as they agonized over their pain. They celebrated with the belief that as God delivered the Israelites, they too, would be delivered (Exodus 19: 1-4). Thus, the God of the Old and New Testaments was realized in the consciousness of oppressed Black women.

Case Study II

Jerena Lee's Call to the Gospel Ministry

The life and ministry of 19th century Black female preacher, Jarena Lee illustrates how she grappled with racism, classism and sexism. Lee states that two days after she received the call “ . . . Go preach the gospel,” she went to see

the preacher in charge of the African Society, the Reverend Richard Allen.⁴¹

Sexism: Upon sharing with Richard Allen that the Lord had called her to preach the gospel, he asked her in what sphere did she wish to move? When she answered that she wanted to preach among the Methodist, he replied, “As to women preaching, our Discipline knows nothing at all about it and that it did not call for women preachers.” Assertively and unashamedly, Jarena Lee responds as follows:

O how careful ought we to be, lest through our bylaws of church government and discipline, we bring into disrepute even the word of life. For as unseemly as it may appear nowadays for a woman to preach, it should be remembered that nothing is impossible with God. And why should it be thought impossible, heterodox, or improper for a woman to preach, seeing the Savior died for the woman as well as the man? If the man may preach, because the Savior died for him, why not the woman, seeing he died for her also. . .⁴²

She continued her appeal by referring to Mary as the first woman to preach about the risen Saviour. She asks, “is not the doctrine of the resurrection the very climax of Christianity — hangs not all our hope on this, as argued by St. Paul? Then did not Mary, a woman, preach the gospel? For she preached the resurrection of the crucified Son of God.” Apologetically, Allen defended the conventional argument that Mary did not expound the Scriptures, therefore, she did not preach. To this Lee responded:

. . . It may be that the term preach in those primitive times did not mean exactly what it is now made to mean; perhaps it was a great deal more simple then, than it is now. If it were not, the unlearned fishermen could not have preached the gospel at all, as they had no learning. . .⁴³

⁴¹ The African Society later broke away from its white counterpart and became what is known today as the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The Reverend Richard Allen became the first bishop of the denomination. This separation was necessary because of the hegemonious white male hierarchical infrastructure that seldom licenses and ordains black male clergy. Once the separation was finalized, they in turn placed the same restrictions upon females who felt called to the ministry.

⁴² See “Religious Experience and Journal,” in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *Spiritual Narratives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. First published by Jarena Lee, 1849), 503-505.

Thereafter, Jarena Lee held worship services in various homes, in churches, public buildings, and traveled to many cities preaching the gospel and praying for the sick. Although she was never officially ordained by the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), eight years after she first announced her call to ministry and the desire to be confirmed by the AME church, Richard Allen, publicly validated her call to ministry.⁴⁴

Racism: Lee tells the story of a slaveholder who was very cruel, one who, visibly, thought nothing about knocking down a slave with a fence stake or whatever might be in his hands. When this slaveholder heard that Lee was coming to her uncle's house to preach the gospel, out of curiosity, he came to hear her "speak." She writes:

At the first meeting that I held at my uncle's house, an old man, who was a deist, and who said he did not believe that 'colored' people had any souls -- he was sure they had none. He took a seat very near where I was standing, and boldly tried to look me out of countenance. But I labored on in the best manner I was able, looking to God . . . there went an arrow from the bow of the gospel, and fastened in his obdurate heart . . . After the meeting, his language was different from what it was a little time before, as he now seemed to admit that colored people had souls. He came to me in the friendliest manner, shook hands with me, saying he hoped God had spared him to some good purpose. From that time it was said of him that he became greatly altered in his ways for the better.⁴⁵

Jarena Lee was an excellent pioneer of liberationist and womanist ways of thinking. The above narratives suggest that perhaps more than a mere rejection of a White and Black male preacher's interpretations of the Bible occurred. Jarena Lee and other women, too numerous to mention, exercised an internal critique of the Bible and its messengers. Our Black mothers did not hesitate to read and interpret the Bible in the light of their own experiences of oppression

⁴³ 1988, 512.

⁴⁴ 1988, 513.

⁴⁵ 1988, 514.

and God's revelation to them, within that context. Surely, as enlightened women of the twentieth-first century we will do no less than to interpret the Bible within the context of our own experiences.

Today, women comprise more than 50 percent of church membership, yet they are not involved at the higher levels of the decision-making process within the church. Women know, all too well, about the continued debates that go on in the American religious institutions about their roles in the priestly hierarchy and the lack of representation in decision-making policies. Women, who are vitally involved with religious institutions in America, and here, the author refers mainly, to the Black Church, often take on responsibilities previously refused by black males.

Straightforwardly, the Black woman has given the most, but in return has received far less. She has shown tremendous faithfulness to the spirit of her church. Her foresight, ingenuity, and "stick-tuitiveness" have kept many black church doors open, many black preachers fed, and many parsonages livable. If the truth was fully voiced, many black pastors in their present-day churches owe their commitment to the early influences of such black women.

Lamentably, current research and the author's personal experiences with male clerics corroborate the fact that the plight of women in historically Black denominations, seemingly, is to make them invisible. Unequivocally, however, women of strength and faith remain the backbone and moral integrity of the universal church. It is this author's opinion that Black women, specifically those in leadership positions must continue to work within the walls of the church challenging theological pacesetters and church bureaucracy.⁴⁶ Theresa Hoover states it correctly; "To confront the inequities of Black women and the inequities

⁴⁶ I personally know of a "classical Pentecostal female who went unnoticed in her denomination for three years. A lack of appointment by her denomination prompted her to initiate her own work. She had charisma and was innovative. Her genuine love for people caused her church to flourish. Lamentably, after her church gained prominence within the local community and subsequently in the region, the denomination seized the property, removed her from the church and appointed a male to pastor the church.

of the Black community, and to have the responsibilities of a dedication to the church is 'triple jeopardy' for a Black woman.⁴⁷

Author's Critique of Womanist Theology

Much is commendable about Womanist theology in its struggles against the hegemonic structures of the American society, and against black as well as white chauvinistic attitudes, globally. Firstly, 'womanist theology reminds the Black populace that Black women experiences are complex and are often neglected in the interest of racial criticism. Conspicuously, black male theologians have remained reticent where feminist theology is concerned and remains tacit with regards to *Womanism*. Black males speak of the Black Diaspora and accompanying experiences as if they consisted only of male experiences with no distinctive contributions from their black sisters. The emergence of womanist theology, which proceeds from a black and feminist consciousness, has helped to put an end to the previous silence.

Secondly, the womanist tradition has been useful in that it discloses the various forms of consciousness that subjugate black women's subjectivity and personality under concealment of race and black masculinity. Womanist theologians have exposed a truth concerning Black males. Black men from within and from outside the church are insensitive to women's experiences of classism and sexism. In fact, the author's first-hand experiences with Black men's reaction to sexism, particularly, within the framework of the church causes her to wonder how men can freely apply Galatians 3:26, "There is neither Jew or Greek, there is neither slave nor free? Yet, many of the same men fail to appropriate the same freedom for its female community through the acknowledgement of the latter clause, "There is neither male nor female for we are all one in Jesus Christ."

Sister Anna Cooper stated it correctly, "while our Black men seem

⁴⁷ Theresa Hoover is retired Associate General Secretary of the Women's Division, Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church.

thoroughly abreast of the times on every subject, when they strike the woman's question they drop back into sixteenth century logic."⁴⁸ Although, contemporary black women are deeply disappointed with a lack of responsiveness from Black men towards gender discrimination, black men must understand that their lack of response and conservative attitudes will not be dismissed as a superficial inconvenience that is expected to soon, disappear.

Thirdly, it is providential for the black church and culture that many African American womanist scholars are simultaneously women of the cloth and are profoundly sensitive to the cultural concerns of black people and accordingly, are engaged in a twofold interpretative task: (1) To interpret the significance of Afrocentric and womanist ideas in ways that people in the church and community can understand. (2) To give expression to the distinctive ideas emerging from African American life by using language, structure, and the vehicle of the academy to assist in changing dyed-in-the-wool, ideology.

On the other hand, inexplicably, womanist theology in the main, suffers from contradictions of ontological blackness. Womanism proposes the privilege of self-definition, but its course of thought appears, to limit the discussion almost, exclusively and exceptionally, to suffering and resistance. Currently, Womanist theology seems to be more "existential" rather than a realized status. The black community collectively has experienced cultural, socio-political and economic sanctions since the ante-bellum era of slavery. Having cross the threshold into the new millennium, Africans and African American's are demonstrably, speaking out to say "enough is enough" and the author agrees.

It is the author's belief that within the Black community, especially, where black sisters are concerned, there is an urgent need for collective and communal introspection and re-examination of both historical documents and the biblical canon, as they endeavor to eliminate historical oppression. An existence that is

⁴⁸ Cited in Robert Staples, *The Black Woman in America: Sex, Marriage and the Family* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1973), 69.

bound existentially by the dimensions of struggle, resistance or survival, it would seem constitutes a far less than fulfilling human existence. Jesus came and preached a Gospel, which promised good news to the poor by letting the oppressed go free (Luke 4: 18). Also, Jesus said, “ . . . I am come that they may have life and that more abundantly” (John 10: 10). African Americans absolutely desires more than to merely survive, as this is the minimal requirement of life.

In conclusion, the author turns to ‘womanist theology’ to ask the following questions with the view that such exchange will give rise to meaningful dialogue regarding new attempts in grappling with historical oppression. (1) If suffering and resistance continue to have a tallying function in womanist theological discourse, on what, then, does transcendence depend? (2) What socio-political and economic structures are required to enable black people to be freed from the ongoing dilemma? In a word, what kind of a society do we anticipate, and furthermore, what steps are we willing to employ to prepare for future generations of African Americans?

As the above narrative relates specifically to genderism and to religion in the broader context, the following questions also seem to be appropriate. (1) What new missiological, theological, Christological and ecclesiological exchanges are needed to deconstruct present sexist realities? (2) What liberational structures are needed to enable black women to be recognized as fully human, hence, capable of significantly, contributing, in meaningful roles within the dominant society as well as within black culture and the church? Of necessity, these roles must extend beyond the sphere of domesticity and other subservient roles! And finally, womanist and other Black theologies are at some stage obliged to ask and answer “What has all the above got to do with God?”

Should the fact that that religion has played a vital role in the African American experience, presuppose that every new ideology will bear a relationship with the sacred worldview manifested in Black religious thought? To be sure, the religion of enslaved women affirmed the presence of God in their

efforts to promote life back. Shouldn't the same hold true for 21st century women? Jesus for most enslaved women was the unwavering force that enabled them not only to survive "de troubles of de world," but also, was the force to move them beyond. To buttress the author's point, Sojourner Truth shares a remarkable testimony regarding the power of religion after having lost nearly all of her thirteen children to the slave system: "I cried out my mother's grief and none but Jesus heard me!" ⁴⁹

"Genderstroika" — A Twenty-first Century Paradigm Shift (part of summary)

Admittedly, circumstances pertaining to the historical dilemma of racism, classism and sexism of Blacks on the North American continent have been argued from divergent and sometimes opposing viewpoints. Over the last several decades, a wide-range of symposiums, religious and political round-tables have convened to grapple with unrelenting oppression, but too date, there have been no lasting resolutions. In the face of these alarming facts, the author is fully persuaded that as a new undertaking, *Genderstroika* will prove to be the missiological catalyst that will enhance and broaden the African American community's quality of life and experience in the American context and ultimately, black life around the globe!

Genderstroika (taking its lead from Mikhail Gorbachev's "Perestroika") recognizes the urgent need for a radical shift in Black people's thinking and lifestyle if they are to achieve success in their ongoing struggles against oppression by white hegemony. Initially, Gorbachev was of the opinion that it would be sufficient to simply eliminate various shortcomings in Soviet life to achieve his objectives for Russia. Subsequently, however, Gorbachev realized that nothing less than a radical reconstruction of the whole Russian mindset was

⁴⁹ Excerpt, see Miriam Schneir Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 93.

necessary to bring about new ways of doing to achieve his political agenda.⁵⁰

Likewise, *Genderstroika* recognizes the need for guarded critique of existing internal structures (cultural, socio-political, economical, education and religion), in order to effect workable reforms that will enable the Black community to transcend its present mind-set of ontological blackness. Germane to the overall success of *Genderstroika* is the involvement of black scholars from several disciplines engage in dialogue with community leaders and religious authorities. In a word, there is need to foster “symphony of being”⁵¹ within the black community first, and only then, can they collectively and effectively deal with issues encountered from the external pressures of white hegemony.

What is *Genderstroika*?

Firstly, *Genderstroika* is a missiological concept that proceeds from a Christian socio-political and religious matrix that utilizes an interdisciplinary approach as it seeks to reach attainable and lasting solutions to the ongoing historical tri-dimensional oppression: racism, classism and sexism. The interdisciplinary approach is essential in that this old, but new concept requires the establishment of a new methodology as well as to preserve existing, relevant moral and ethical values. To provide stability to this new epistemology, the following disciplines have been employed to facilitate *Genderstroika* towards its ultimate mission, equality and the con-substantiation of all human beings: anthropology, history, literature, theology, ethics, and contextualization. Additionally, the author uses the Bible, church dogma and quotations from sermon notes, where appropriate.

Secondly, *Genderstroika* is not an anti-male, sexist, approach to solving the historical dilemma of genderism. Rather, this epistemology seeks camaraderie in communal views and interests with the hopes that these new impulses will lead

⁵⁰See E. A. Hewett and V. H. Winston, ed., Milestones in Glasnost and Perestroika (1991).

⁵¹ Seekey concepts.

to liberational structures and action that will effect internal solidarity amongst Africans and African Americans in their ongoing struggles to combat the historical dilemma.

Thirdly, although the agenda of *Genderstroika* is the consequence of personal *Missio Dei*, it is intended, nevertheless, to work for women and men who operate from other frames of spirituality. The author asserts that this vital undertaking will provide the moral, ethical and religious ethos necessary to catapult the African American community beyond ontological blackness. Furthermore, the internal structures that develop from this epistemology will positively affect the external structures as all races, ethnicity's and religions' work together to build the "beloved society."

Moreover, the author is further convinced that with both internal and external structures in place, this will enable black females to overcome the additional burdens of gender discrimination, marginalisation and economic exploitation while facing a multiplicity of uncertainties advocated by white hegemony, feminism, and black as well as white chauvinistic habitudes.

With the acknowledged aspirations in clear view, the objectives of *Genderstroika* can be stated as threefold:

(1) To evoke new and innovative ways of thinking within the Black community, to bring about new ways of doing, that will effect communal and religious solidarity within the African American context. The establishment of communal views and interests will be used to develop these structures, followed by strategic planning. (2) With new internal structures in place, the black community can collectively seek new ways to externally resist racism, classism and sexism advocated by the hegemony of white male cultural elitism, which to a great extent, is shared by white females in an alleged democratic society.

(3) Since the goal of every society should be to live in harmony with all its citizens, another purpose of *Genderstroika* is to encourage all Black people, regardless of geography, to move beyond ontological blackness and develop

liberational structures that will challenge the oppression of people that are discriminated against simply because of race, class and sex, on a global level.

As a final point, Unquestionably, “Genderstroika” (new thinking) will occupy a lengthy stage in the historical development of gender equality. Notwithstanding, when properly interpreted, it should serve as a window of opportunity for the resuscitation and the restructuring of those noble aspects within the African American culture that can promote solidarity, rather than cultural apathy.

Historical Review of Socio-political and Economical Issues

As the author examines the socio-political and economic issues, she asserts, that in order for the African American community to rise above its present ideology. 'Womanist,' Afrocentric and other Black theologies will need a communal theology that is informed by the enlightening and emancipatory aspects of post-colonial African American cultural criticism. Also, further dialogue should include the iconoclastic rigors and utopian dimensions of post-colonial African American religious criticism. I say this because black religious criticism is a viable aspect of cultural critique.

Detailed examination of the spectrum of cultural activity within the African American community and its link with religion and spirituality is not possible in one general paper, nor is it wholly necessary. Therefore, review of these indispensable components (socio-politics, economics, and religion) as they interconnect to *Genderstroika*, will be limited in my analysis to within the African American context.

During the seventeenth and eighteen centuries in the United States, colonial powers did not allow their acquisition of wealth to interfere with the distinctions made between economic realities facing black women and those facing poor white women. Sanctioned discriminatory laws used to create distinctions between black and white women, were mainly contrived by (white) males who were accustomed to thinking that fieldwork was ordinarily the work of men rather than women. This distinction, of course, exacerbated tensions between poor black and white women.

For example, in 1643, the State of Virginia passed a new tax law, which declared that "all adult men were tithable. This law also included "Negro" women.⁵² The state of Maryland followed this policy in 1654. "Negro" women

⁵² Donald G. Matthews, Religion in the Old South (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) 136f.

had to pay taxes as did men, but were left in the fields to work.

John Hammond (1565) of Maryland, published a tract, which confirmed white hegemony consensus of his day, which was that poor white women not be put to work in the fields, but rather placed in domestic employment. Hammond's tracts also revealed his sense of value regarding the worth of black women. Appallingly and inexcusably one tract read: "Some wenches that are nasty, and beastly and not fit to be so employed are put into the ground (put into the fields to work)." ⁵³ In other words, being regarded as "nasty and beastly," black women would be required to do any kind of work the slavocracy demanded and that work more frequently, than not, included sexual favors. Hence, most Black women continued in their distinctive roles from white women and suffered economic injustices in ways that white women would not. Simply because of the color of their skin, black women would, in the larger society's definition, lose gender distinction made by the dominant society between men and women. ⁵⁴ These ways of thinking about Black people supported the major economic reality in the American colonies during the mid- and late-eighteenth century.

Unfortunately, the twentieth did not produce significant change to the plight of African Americans. The "sustenance" that kept white racial narcissism alive (such as theories of Black intellectual and moral inferiority), also sustained every social system affecting black and white life: the educational, the political, the economic, the welfare, the legal systems and the Christian religious system. For example, during the 1930s Americans were severely affected by the 'Great Depression.' And although President Franklin D. Roosevelt set up the Federal

⁵³ Winthrop Jordan, White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550 - 1812. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), 7

⁵⁴ Aesthetic values, interpretations of biblical texts and stories, and the analogies Englishmen made between the African natives and the animals on the continent of Africa helped them arrive at the conclusion that the "Negro" was less than human and was more akin to animals — like the apes inhabiting Africa. In this way, chattel slavery could happen and continue in the American colonies because "black people were viewed as beast, as cattle, as 'articles' for sale." See Charles Nichols, Many Thousands Gone. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), p. 12

Emergency Relief Agency to assist families during the depression there was a tendency to limit work subsidies to Black people primarily, because many white welfare administrators had a low opinion regarding black people's intellect and high regards for white people's whiteness.⁵⁵

Consequently, a significant part of the South's philosophy gave preferential treatment to whites and suggested that Blacks should always remain poor with or without an economic depression.

Regarding the socio-economic plight of women of color, particularly, African American women, current research corroborates the fact that black women make up the larger percent of women who remain at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. The economic disparity, in part, is the result of black women not receiving commensurable salaries for the same work performed by white males and females in the United States. And yes, black women are still among the last to be hired and among some of the first to be fired.

Concerning the legitimacy of Western culture and its affect upon slavocracy and women during that era was the fact that Greco-Roman humanist traditions and Christian theological traditions sustained the West. Ancient perspectives regarding the role of men and women varied depending on the context. As Martin Weeks' notes, the Greco-Roman household (*Oikos*) was hierarchical and according to the political moral thought of this epoch the paterfamilias family unit represented the appropriate social order.⁵⁶ It was universally expected that wives, children and slaves should submit fully to the rule of the "husband-father-master" and further, to practice the master's religion. The male's denial of household responsibilities resulted in convenient, theoretical divisions of authority between male and female. These views which were dichotomous and socio-political in preference, brought about unnecessary

⁵⁵ Winthrop Jordan, White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550 - 1812. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), 10.

cultural divisions.

From these theoretical divisions came epithets which referred to women, for example, as “queen-bees?” Ancient writers and Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Xenophon made statements that publicized and promoted the division of gender roles.⁵⁷

Also, Aristotle argued that patriarchal domination: male over wives, slaves and children was natural and enhanced the proper functioning of the household and ultimately the functioning of the state.⁵⁸

Parenthetically, a close examination of the Greco-Roman community reveals that the Christian community was greatly influenced by the same ideals of antiquity and are echoed in the words of Philo, a first-century historian and Alexandrine Jew:

For the nature of communities is twofold, the greater and the smaller, the greater we call cities and the smaller household. As to the management of both forms, men have obtained that of the greater, which bears the name of statesmanship, whereas women have obtained that of the smaller, which goes under the name of household management.⁵⁹

Eventually, tension generated disparity between the socially established fact of women’s leadership and the strict Greco-Roman delineation of gender roles. Conspicuously, these social infringements are the antecedents of cultural ideologies, stereotypes, and assumptions that in due course distorted gender roles. The social and political ambiguities concerning household distinctions and gender roles would subsequently, negatively, impact the Christian community.

⁵⁶ Wayne A. Meeks, The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 76. In addition, E. A. Judge, The Social pattern of Christian Groups (London: Tyndale, 1960), 60, 71.

⁵⁷ John Chrysostom: The Kind of Women Who Ought To Be Taken as Wives 4, trans. Elizabeth A. Clark, Women in the Early Church (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 37.

⁵⁸ For fuller discussion of Aristotelian politics see “The Basic Works of Aristotle” in Aristotle Politics,

1.12. 1259a-b trans., Richard McKeon, (New York: Random House, 1941), 1143.

⁵⁹ Philo The Special Laws 3.170, trans. David Wilson, Philo of Alexandria (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 280.

Many of the ancient beliefs and social ills became edicts within the infrastructure of the New Testament Church. Out of these cultural beliefs and practices have emerged views that continue to adversely affect the way people in the twenty-first century think about gender roles and household distinctions. Notwithstanding, these cultural divisions and distinctions do not necessarily express God's viewpoint concerning the roles of women in society and the Church.

What all these apparent contradictory claims have in common is that such pronouncements are about how things ought to be in the Church, culture, and the work place and the Church. Accordingly, one of the first challenges for *Genderstroika* is to sort out social pragmatism from ideological distortions concerning gender roles. The prevailing question then becomes can such social ills and distortions truly be settled without further consideration of race, class, gender and religion?

Black scholars know all too well that with in the African American context, the religious views maintained by the "church" play an indispensable role in how the above constraints will be resolved. Thus, the daily struggles of the black community and the additional struggles of sexism that Black women face, form the bases to implement an epistemology, which embraces and promotes the author's new missiological innovation — *Genderstroika* (rethinking the socio-political order and gender roles). This inclusive paradigm shift is not only indispensable, but also, obligatory for the person-hood of African and African American women.

The Christian Religion: Racism and the Church

Lamentably, the "Church" has not escaped the sinful realities of racism. Paradoxically, the contemporary Church continues to be a bastion for racism.

Racism is reflected not only in the practice of many that attend church, but also in the church's structure and theology. Overt prejudices and inequalities are nowhere more apparent than in the negative color symbolism institutionalized in Christian theology and Christology.

Theological expressions in racism are recognizable in church dogma, ritual practices and in images of Jesus. The absurdity used for racism in the church is similar to the line of reasoning used for the sin of sexism (to be discussed later in the paper). Case in point, Christian theology insists that God is Spirit and that Jesus died for all humanity, nevertheless patriarchy persists in deifying the maleness of both God and Jesus. Maleness, unequivocally, provides men with a social, political and theological edge over women. And though Christianity claims that God is 'Spirit' and further Jesus as being for all, Christian leadership has consistently and historically presented God and Jesus as white. Because of present color imagery, 'whiteness' has been and continues to be deified, while blackness is "anathemazied." Both races have been visible conscience-stricken to the notion of a white Christ to the extent that most Christians would think it sacrilege to consider that another color could possible represent Christ. This proposal becomes manifestly strained when that possibility bespeaks blackness.⁶⁰

Historically, Christology was created and controlled in the context of white supremacist ideology and domination. The author assert, "the name of Christ and the 'Word of God' have been used in ways, which makes Christology

⁶⁰ See: Gene Rice, "The Curse That Never Was (Genesis 9: 18-27)," *Journal of Religious Thought* 29 (1972): 13.; Frank Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983; Nicholas F. Gier, "The Color of Sin/The Color of Skin: Ancient Color Blindness add the Philosophical Origins of Modern Racism," *Journal of Religious Thought* 46, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 1989): 42-52. People of other races are allowed to portray Christ as white, but the desire by blacks to portray Jesus as such is held in derision. I remember that in one of my graduate courses, in view of Mat. 2: 13-21 ("... the angel of the Lord led Joseph to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt to hide until the death of Herod. . ."), I provided an anthropological argument: it would be extremely difficult to hide a white, blond hair, blue eyed Jesus amongst the Egyptians, and proposed a change in events, which suggested that perhaps Jesus was another skin colour,

appear that Christ in effect, legitimized past and current social and political ills. In a society where dichotomous views have been allowed to dominate: “if you’re white you’re all right and if you’re black stay back;” white is good and black is evil; white is pure and black is sin, an evolution (evilution) of natural progression in polity and biases have emerged with respect to Jesus. Christian unanimity concerning color and symbolism enables those who want to be viewed as “respectable Christians” accept white hegemony ideologies without questioning, the destructive nature of color symbolism in Christian theology.

In many African American churches we still have black Christians singing and praying “Lord, wash me whiter than snow,” despite the unswerving nature of related Scriptures. One significant proof text is found in Isa. 1: 18, “Come now, . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Conspicuously, no reference is made to black as the color of sin or transgression. .⁶¹

In recent years to counteract such historical and theological propensity, black theologians have called not only for a new departure in theology, and more specifically, for a new Christology hermeneutics to interpret biblical narratives. I concur with many scholars-- the insistence that the white Christ must be eliminated from the black experience and the belief that a black Christ must be established. To assist in the establishment of a “Black Christ,” noted theologians such as James Cone, Wilmore, Cleage, and black feminist theologians such as —

meaning dark or blacked skinned. My white classmates verbally censured me and even a few blacks joined in with them.

⁶¹ The Rabbis of the early Talmudic periods and the church fathers, at times used O. T. Texts (Genesis 9: 18-27) to demean black people. Later Europeans adopted the so-called curse of Ham as a justification for slavery and stereotypical aspersions about blacks. In contemporary times, many whites that are professedly Christian and racists often cite some of the same biblical passages as a means to continue their justification of stereotypical aspersions of blacks. For an in-depth discussion on the curse of Ham and related text see Charles B. Copher, “3000 Years of Biblical Interpretation with Reference to Black Peoples,” *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 30, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 225 - 46; Cain Hope Felder, *Racial Motifs in the Biblical Narratives*, *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class, and Family* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 42; Gene Rice, “The Curse That Never Was (Genesis 9: 18-27, “ *Journal of Religious Thought* 29 (1972): 13; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1 - 11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 459.

Jacqueline Grant and Delores Williams, just to name a few, have argued this point from various and sometimes divergent views. Several black scholars argue for a literal blackness while others argue for symbolic blackness.⁶² Regardless of the literal or figurative aspects, the crucial factor is the recognition of the oppressive ways in which the negative images have functioned for black and white Christians. All races, at some point in history have experienced the rigors of Christian catechism and the notion that Africans and African Americans do not have souls and accordingly were not made in the image of God. For this reason, many people still harbor beliefs and habitudes about the inferiority of blacks even when their intellects tell them differently. However, oppression does not stop with racism. Additionally and unjustly, the image of Jesus as servant has been used to reinforce servant-bondage amongst minorities, particularly, black-skin people.

Classism and the Church

A brief exploration regarding domestic servant-hood will buttress my argument that Christian and socio-political servant-hood (classism) was taught simultaneously in the church. Indisputably, blacks have been disproportionately relegated to servant positions. Following the United States “Emancipation” of Africans in America, the majority of whites continued to uphold their subservient attitudes towards those of African ancestry. Blacks were led to believe that not only was it their civic duty, but in fact, it was their heavenly duty to obey and serve white hegemony.⁶³

⁶² For in-depth discussions on Black Christian theology see Joseph Johnson, “The Need for a Black Christian Theology,” *Journal of Interdenominational Theological Center* 2 (Fall, 1974): 25. Albert Cleage Jr., *The Black Messiah* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968). *Black Theology: a Documented History Volume 1: 1966-1979* ed., James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979); *White Women’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

⁶³ Such ideological thought was based on faulty hermeneutics around the following texts: Eph. 6: 5-6; Col. 3: 22-24; 1 Tim. 6: 1; Titus 2: 9; 1 Pet. 2: 18-20.

Before long, however, black people began to identify the contradictions between their subservient roles to whites as opposed to the servant role of Jesus towards humanity. Black Americans begin to sing lyrics, which quietly protested their oppression. Cultural groups not familiar with the Afrocentric mindset, misinterpreted the lyrics of certain songs to be messages of eschatology trivia or, some form of spiritual bliss that comes with varied brands of spirituality. In reality, however, such lyrics disapproved of how white America treated blacks. The refrain to one particular tune, validates that understanding and subsequent protests.

Heaven, heaven
Everybody talkin 'bout heaven ain't goin there
Heaven, heaven
I'm gonna walk all o'er God's heaven.⁶⁴

The implication of this and similar songs were messages that avowed retribution. In a word, though white Christians had the power to define the politically oppressed servants, they should not assume that their social and earthly political powers controlled the heavens. Although black peoples were dehumanized in slavery, it was their hope that whites in America would ultimately realize that divine retribution would surely come.

More appalling than the violence of servant-hood itself, is the fact that though Christendom uses servant-hood language with respect to Jesus' earthly life and ministry, white ethicists and theologians have in effect made Jesus a member of the bourgeoisie. The "Jesus" of white hegemony escaped the real tragedy of servant-hood while the oppressed peoples did not. In contemporary times, Black Americans are still viewed as members of the servant-hood class and consequently, continue to be the economically deprived, socially ill, politically impotent, and spiritually irrelevant.

⁶⁴ The author is a musician and as a young adult, many of the older choir members frequently requested this and similar types of songs, particularly, during certain seasons of the year. For a variation on the same theme, see Thomas R. Frazier, ed., Afro-American History: Primary Sources (Atlanta: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1970), 93.

The prevailing images of Jesus in servant-hood (classism), existentially, function as deceptive tactics to keep non-European whites indifferent and complacent. Current imagery, symbolism, and language buttress the oppressive conceptions about God and Jesus. Consequently, there is a need to challenge Christian theology on its points of racism and classism. Both dimensions are contrary to the true message of Jesus Christ. Regrettably, however, for African and African American women the problem goes much deeper than racism and classism. There has always been a problem of sexism within culture and the Church. In this regard, I must agree with African feminist scholar, Madipoane Masenya (1997: 59) who asserts, “Women are denied the right to exercise their God-given potential because of their God-given sex.”

Sexism and the Church

Historically, the credo and practices of Christianity have always been overwhelmingly patriarchal, yet, an exploration of primitive Christianity discloses didactic patterns which gave witness to overturning the established hierarchies. Such patterns included women as the first believers, first eyewitnesses, and the first prophetic heralds of the Risen Lord. The extent of influence these patterns had on early Christian social practices are not clear. We get only glimpses of women in ministries that were quickly suppressed by an unambiguous patriarchal mind-set in Jewish culture and history. The new freedom of women to travel as itinerant preachers, freed by Christ, was abruptly repressed in favor of a Christianity that declared women second in creation, first in sin, silent in church, and saved by childbearing (1 Tim. 2: 11-15).

The determined patriarchal Christianity of the deuterio-Pauline tradition repressed both the apocalypticism and the incipient egalitarianism of the earlier eschatological interpretations of the church. The conflict between egalitarian, eschatological Christianity and patriarchal, historical Christianity continued well into the second and third centuries during the Gnostic and Montanist struggles.

The conflict between egalitarianism and patriarchy was finally resolved in the late fourth to sixth centuries and resulted in a new synthesis of the two.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, during the Reformation, women would once again experience historical patriarchy.

From the author's comprehensive examination regarding christological concerns, historically, men have always defined Jesus solely as male to undergird their own privileged positions in the church and in society. This fact is evidenced by male clergy and community leaders who used Jesus to justify the subordination of women in the church and in culture. Repeatedly women have been denied person-hood, equality and leadership roles because of negative Christology and symbolism. Such negativism results largely from an over-emphasis on the maleness of Jesus.

In actual fact, the maleness of Jesus has been so central to our understanding of him that even the personality of Jesus and his work on earth has been consistently misinterpreted. Jesus, in effect, has been imprisoned by patriarchy's obsession with the supremacy of maleness. This overt obsession from the author's point of view suggests, that obsession with male supremacy is nothing more than a cognate of idolatry. Consequently, living within the parameter of maleness bespeaks living within a dualism that effectively keeps men in superior roles and women in inferior roles. When role reversals do occur, these occasions are generally regarded as 'atypical' in order to maintain the status quo of patriarchy. An understanding of the context from which male hermeneutics emanates indubitably helps to explain the dilemma of sexism.

Briefly stated the overall problem of sexism is conspicuously couched in the unsatisfactory responses of liberal and conservative approaches to the phenomenon of women inherent in the male gender of the Incarnate God. The

⁶⁵ Both the Montanist and the Gnostics supported women in ministry. For a detailed account see Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, "Word, Spirit and Power: Women in Early Christian Communities," in Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions, ed. R. Ruether (New

liberal approach, which asserts that Jesus' maleness is secondary to his humanity, is of no theological or soteriological significance. On the other hand, the conservative's approach where 'mankind' is employed as representational of all humankind is of no consequence, either. From the author's viewpoint, such forged representation is dishonest and therefore, unacceptable. The cultural symbols of maleness and "generic humanity" have never included women without qualification, and certainly do not do so in contemporary American culture. Unequivocally, the problem is the continued acceptance and promotion of "biased" white male Christology within Christendom.

The Bible, Culture and the Church

The Bible, indeed, has played a pivotal role in influencing and shaping the ethical, moral, social and political values of our Western culture and in particular, American values. Furthermore, church history from its earliest documentation has used the sacred Scriptures to argue divergent points of view regarding those values. Hence, one can hardly argue against the fundamental element that interconnects the tri-dimensional dilemma of racism, classism and sexism—the Bible.

It is the author's assertion that hermeneutical application and relevancy provide the answers to the following questions; what and where is the place of those born of African ancestry in our present society, and what is the role of women in religion, culture and the home. Past methods used to interpret Scripture and culture placed great emphasis on social, historical, and political hermeneutics. Therefore the author also asks, "is all of what the Bible records relevant to all people for all times?" Are cultural norms of the past, relevant in a contemporary society?

York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 39-44. Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels. (New York: Random House, 1979), 48-69.

Because of distorted theology and Christology, the author argues that the global social order must move away from polarized ideology. The dichotomous margin-centered worldview fostered during the Industrial and Post-industrial revolution has added unmerited hardship to the daily struggles of women, particularly, to the struggles of black women who are pioneering in a man's world. The aggregates of human behavior and the belief systems that lie behind specific ideas, actions, and symbols, unquestionably must move towards an integrated whole. Moreover, she asserts, it is because of theological and christological ambiguities (which has aided in the creation of flawed hermeneutics), and also, because of polarized ideologies that such variables are largely responsible for the moral and ethical dilemma of past and present conditions under which the African and African American communities continues to labor.

If opprobrious and narcissistic behaviors of white hegemony are going to change, an egalitarian hermeneutical shift must be realized. Without an egalitarian hermeneutical frame in place, the moral and ethical dilemma of our present civilization may never be completely resolved. Therefore, the broader Christian community, specifically its religious leaders, should dialogue with other community leaders and make it their moral responsibility to conscientiously, facilitate resolving the historical black oppressive dilemma. Notwithstanding, that this undertaking cannot be accomplished without confronting the historical problem in its tri-dimensional components: racism, classism and sexism.

During Mikhail Gorbachev's administration, he aptly documented the need for a total restructuring of the Russian society.⁶⁶ Likewise, it is only when African American males and females collectively evoke new thinking that leads to new impulses and liberational structures, can the global black community move forward to deal with the external oppressive institutions: social, political,

economic, education and religion. So, where must the new missiological epistemology begin?

The new innovation—*Genderstroika*, wrought through personal *Missio Dei*, the author recognizes that nothing positive will be ascertained without the essential building blocks of prevailing prayer, positive communication and action. Hence, this epistemology calls for responsive dialogue amongst bishops, pastors, educators and community leaders, which will provide a synthesis to the historical situation within the “universal Church,” and more specifically, within the Black church and community first: “A house divided against itself cannot stand” (Matt. 12: 25).

Clearly and unequivocally, a new, egalitarian hermeneutical frame must be created one that will lead to new impulses and structures in theology, Christology, eschatology and Church doctrine. Because until these textual, theological, Christological and ecclesiological problems have been sorted out, the “Church” will continue to negatively impact upon other social institutions in the United States and around the world.

⁶⁶ See Key Concepts.

Conclusion

In the United States it has been long established that the color of one's skin as well as one's gender can be a hindrance to high achievement; not because of inherent inferiority, but rather, because societal conditions predetermine the lower achievement.⁶⁷ Whereas, it can be said that most women in America face socio-economic and political discrimination, however, women whose skin pigmentation's are of a darker hue than European whites have the added hurdle of racism.

The resistance of white hegemony to change their views where socio-economics are concerned is conspicuous in that the African American community continues to suffer from economic exploitation. The exploitation becomes well defined, as one examines the salaries of black men and women as compared to the salaries of white males and females doing the same job.

The effect that religion continues to occupy in American culture and the contemporary church is extensive. And although neither black Americans nor women are as systematically, denigrated and excluded by religious thought today as they were throughout Christian history, nevertheless, contemporary Christianity continue to resist change. The unrelenting reluctance to change within present-day Churchianity, is clearly corroborated, in that Sunday morning, yet remains the most segregated hour of 'worship' in the United States.

Furthermore, current views in religion and culture strongly suggest that patriarchal anthropology with its false biological underpinnings, which regard women, as less complete expressions of human nature than men, absolutely, require re-enacting an egalitarian anthropology. Given the existing patriarchal system grounded in its present christological paradigm, what is urgently needed is a new Christology hermeneutics.

The author resolutely, but circumspectly, recommend that *Genderstroika*

⁶⁷ James Cone, A Black Liberation Theology (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), ??

and all gender related theologies insist on a Jesus who does not exclude over one half of the human race from an immediate experience of the “Holy,” and subsequently, as bearers of those experiences.

Eleanor McLaughlin states it correctly, “We need a Jesus as God/man and stranger who is also God/woman, friend, sister and mother; . . . “like unto us in all things, excepting sin.”⁶⁸ In a word, there is an urgent need for contemporary theologians to re-enact a Christology, which allows a God/Jesus in the cosmic process to be both divine and human, Jew and Gentile, white and black, and both male and female.⁶⁹ Christianity warrants a Jesus in whom all humanity can be found in God. Genesis 1: 26 – 28 states, “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to Our likeness; let him have dominion over . . . So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female created He them... Then God blessed them, and God said unto them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over.”

Patricia Grundy (1986: 20) and Gretchen Hull (1986: 24) have gone to the core of the matter regarding women’s subordination by asking the following questions respectively: “Are women fully human?” “Are women fully redeemed?” How the “Church” and culture has responded to these questions, historically, is in defiance of the biblical canon. The last word’s of Jesus’ redemptive act was, “It is finished!” Yet, conventional views upholds a theology, which insists that women, indeed, were redeemed — but!

The author contends that either Christ’s redemptive work on the cross was complete or, it was not. If the work was complete (Jesus said, “It is finished”), then we must exercise faith and have confidence in the God word of God juxtapose man-made dogma and illusive interpretations.

⁶⁸ For a detail exploration of developing christologies see Reconstructing The Christ Symbol: Essays in Feminist Christology. (New York: Paulist Press, 1993). For the development of *Logos* Christology in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of John, see C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (New York: Cambridge U. P., 1963), 263-285. For its development in the second century see, Erwin Goodenough, The Theology of Justin Martyr (Amsterdam: Phil Press, 1968), 139-175

So then, if women are fully human, fully created in the image of God and fully redeemed (implicit in the biblical texts), then women should be allowed to share in the custodial and restorative processes of creation, which was lost in the fall of humanity. There is an urgent need to find inspired, resourceful and practical ways to deal with the established religious paradigm — the mores of a patriarchy/kyriarchy religious system.⁷⁰ In order to recover the integration of Christ and creation — an essential route to a coherent theology — Christology, soteriology, eschatology and ecclesiology must be re-examined. As the author, I do recognize the enormous difficulty involved in creating a new Christology, in particular, if the framework needed must be created from scratch. Nevertheless, *Genderstroika* is dedicated and prepared to facilitate this process because I am fully persuaded that women should be allowed to share equally in the images of God and Christ.

Whereas, the author further agrees with McLaughlin, when she says, “Without the God-Ness of God (not to be confused with goddess theology) there is no way to deconstruct or uncover the male-ness of God so that the woman-ness of God/Jesus can be seen and shared.”⁷¹ Thus, in the final analysis, in order for female Christology to be realized, white male hegemony Christology must be reconstructed so that such images of God made “Flesh” can be seen and experienced, as female, too.⁷²

Regarding the historical, tri-dimensional standing on racism, classism and

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Word used to mean that there is a societal pyramid with the lord(s) derived from the Greek word *kyrios* (*kyrioi*) at the top. Women depending on their contexts and experiences use patriarchy/kyriarchy in different ways: white women vs. black women; poor vs. rich; American women vs. women from developing nations. For details see Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza publication *But She said: Feminist Substitute Biblical Interpretation*.

⁷¹ For a detail exploration of developing christologies see *Reconstructing The Christ Symbol: Essays in Feminist Christology*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1993). For the development of *Logos* Christology in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of John, see C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Cambridge U. P., 1963), 263-285. For its development in the second century see, Erwin Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr* (Amsterdam: Phil Press, 1968), 139-175

⁷² See Jon Sabrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1978).

sexism, *Genderstroika*, in its mission to grapple with such forces are enormously advantaged in that black theologians have been notably helpful as they give witness to the power of the historical Jesus. Black male and womanist theologians have been able to contend for a Jesus who though portrayed consistently as male, can be experienced as black. Black theology from a hermeneutical framework has successfully developed an Afrocentric theology that allows the historical Jesus to be the liberator of all oppressed people, regardless of color (Lk. 4: 18), who in his individuality, is black, and stands alongside of and redeems the uniqueness of black suffering.

Having systematically explored the historical dilemma of racism and classism, and more specifically, the struggles that women of African ancestry in the United States have had to defend against, the author asserts, black women in the new millennium, still remain triply removed from the image of God.

Many of the ancient interpretations regarding patriarchy from a historical, biblical and theological point of view, have been previously challenged by feminist theologians who worked diligently to overcome the indiscretions of patriarchy. Past and present endeavors by feminist and womanist theologians have succeeded in helping to break women free from this conceptual trap by taking seriously women's experiences as a source for biblical interpretation. Such analyses have provided considerably in breaking the grip of patriarchy by pointing women in a positive direction for eliminating the inequalities of sexism.

However, the author avows that if black men refuse to take up the challenge and help to liberate their black sisters, then black women, without reservation should enable themselves and resist further alienation, marginalization, exploitation and gender discrimination.

The question of racism, classism and sexism, in its historic function to oppress minority people, must be adequately addressed from within black culture and the church first. Then with newly generated impetus that will have developed a collective communal view, proceed cautiously but firmly, to take the

position to externally deal with white hegemony in America.

Clearly, the preceding narration demonstrates that the far-reaching issues are not only political and social in the broader context, but is the dilemma of religion, Christology and theology in the particular. Considering every perspective, it is time to find new and pragmatic ways to deal with the historical problem — the mores of a hegemonic, white male structured society and to deal with its inequalities and sometimes-inhumane dealings with minorities, and more specifically, with Black women.

As the author and brainchild of *Genderstroika*, it is my hope that a global look at this 'old but new' concept (Mikhail Gorbachev's *Perestroika*) will lead to new impulses and liberational structures. Such structures are indispensable elements for black women to move beyond Victor Anderson's "ontological blackness" and the challenges, hitherto maintained by white hegemony, feminism and white as well as black male chauvinistic habitudes, in the new millennium. Howbeit, if Jesus is not something more than a first century Jewish rabbi, then my undertaking — "Genderestroika" — is more trouble than it is worth.