

WOMANIST THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

Union Theological Seminary

Spring Semester 2010

Course Description:

This seminar is a theoethical analysis of African American women's values and virtues that places the moral agency of African American women at the center of human social relations and ecclesiastical institutions. We will develop a range of tools, conceptual and practical, by which to assess various visions of liberation.

Course Objectives:

The specific objectives of the course are to enable seminarians:

- a) to bring to greater consciousness the complex expressions of religious ideas, incarnated memories, and rituals of annunciation/celebration that govern moral discernment for women in the African American Diaspora;
- b) to demonstrate facility in the skills of argumentation so as to become conversant with the theological language in Christian tradition that helps members of confessing communities to reflect on justice matters;
- c) to demonstrate a degree of familiarity with the essential arguments of formative womanist liberationists who are representative of embodied mediated knowledge and their significance in theological ethics via a proposed feasibility study.

Course Requirements:

Regular class attendance and reading that is complete, careful and on schedule are essential for this seminar. Notice that the required texts vary in length. By planning ahead, you will be able to keep up with the reading and be well prepared each Tuesday to participate in the discussion.

To help promote lively, meaningful exchange, each student is expected to complete the required readings and write a weekly talking paper (**submit in duplicates**) according to the following guidelines:

Guidelines for the Weekly Talking Paper

1. Connect the text with your real-life context by sharing a brief free-write of a place where you resonate with an aspect of this scholar's life **and** a counterpoint of contextual (socio-political-cultural-economic) controversy.
2. Imagine this formative thinker vigorously explaining her contribution to the study of virtues, values, norms and/or taboos with a clear, strong statement, beginning "Considering my scholarship from the past that still bears relevance for today, I ..."
3. In response to this person's contribution to the field of study, imagine yourself as a critical reader questioning the meaning and merit of this work, beginning "But ..."
4. List three significant images, words, and/or concepts in this text that stand out in your mind signaling this person's contribution to a) investigating contestable issues, b) correcting previous data, and/or c) acquiring new knowledge.
5. Summarize an ethical issue, problem, question or controversy in the required reading that genuinely interests you.

6. Restore a religious symbol of conscientization and/or create a new ritual of annunciation and celebration (i.e. a cinquain, painting, drawing, textile art, photography, music, poetry, sculpture, fiction, essay, dance, drama, political cartoon, etc.) that uncovers the lost voice of a woman in your existential context.
7. Draft a comprehensive, one-sentence *metaethical problem* (what/how/why) of a contestable issue emerging from the readings that genuinely interest you. With whom do you cast your lot in writing this *metaethical problem*? What responsibility do you feel to this audience of accountability?
8. Submit weekly installments of designated steps for the *feasibility study* (final draft of feasibility study due: in duplicates **May 2010**).

Procedures:

This seminar will meet weekly on Tuesday mornings for a period of two hours and fifty minutes, 9:00 –11:50 a.m. The basic course format includes dialogical lectures, group discussions, book critiques, and a research feasibility study.

For each class session one or more students will be designated as *Facilitator(s)*. *Facilitators of Discussion* have the following responsibilities: 1) to open with a devotional moment; 2) invite volunteers to share a *ritual of annunciation and celebration* emerging from the homework assignment (i.e. painting, poetry, cinquain, drawing, textile art, photography, music, sculpture, fiction, essay, political cartoon, poster, banner, drama, dance, etc.) that can be included in a justice-making womanist workbook; 3) then, distribute to all participants a photocopy of the *talking paper* in accordance with the talking paper guidelines.

All students (not only *Facilitators of Discussion*) are expected to do the assigned readings, prepare a *talking paper*, and be ready to participate in the seminar discussion, beginning with **February 10, 2010** and each class session thereafter. Everyone should make a copy of each *talking paper* for the professor's files and a second copy for a seminar colleague.

The collegial reader of the *talking paper* should write in the margins her/his responses—such as questions, ideas you liked, disagreements, analogies to other readings, bibliographical suggestions, etc. Include your signature at the end of your comments.

On the following class session, the reader should return the *talking paper* to the original author. The author should read the comments and note any comments that serve as a catalyst for further development of ideas and refinement of thought. Ideally, each student should have responses from each member of the seminar by the end of the semester.

Criteria for Evaluation:

- accuracy and precision of scholarship
- clarity of oral and written presentation
- completion of assignments on the due dates
- contribution to the group process of inquiry and discussion
- creativity, critical judgment, and imagination

Background Texts:

James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, ed. Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume II, 1980-1992 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), pp. 216-244;

Emilie M. Townes, ed. A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994)

Required Texts:

Katie G. Cannon, Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community (NY: Continuum Pub. Co., 1995)

The Womanist Reader edited by Layli Phillips, 2006

Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society edited by Stacey Floyd Thomas, 2006

During the second half of the session, the professor will entertain questions based on the required reading in Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community. Students are asked to submit in writing one question that the reading provoked in your mind and to answer it. Make certain that the question you construct requires you to draw upon the material in the designated chapter when writing your answer.

Course Schedule and Assignments

Week 1 Introduction to the Course

Week 2 Womanist Work of **Delores S. Williams**

Facilitator(s) _____

Required Reading:

Delores S. Williams, Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993) and Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community, pp. 144-170

Supplementary Reading:

The Womanist Reader edited by Layli Phillips, 2006

Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society edited by Stacey Floyd Thomas, 2006

Due: Feasibility Study Update: Based on today's reading, define a research topic as specifically as possible by writing a basic question that identifies the problem, puzzle, or conflict you would like to resolve or a case you want to prove, share the reason(s) you want to research this topic, and identify who is your audience.

Due: Steps 1, 2 and 3

Week 3 Womanist Work of **Emilie M. Townes**

Facilitator(s) _____

Required Reading:

Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil by Emilie M. Townes, 2006 and Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community, pp

Supplementary Reading:

The Womanist Reader edited by Layli Phillips, 2006

Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society edited by Stacey Floyd Thomas, 2006

Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume II, 1980-1992, pp. Emilie M. Townes, In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality as Social Witness (Nashville: Abingdon pr., 1994).

Feasibility Study Update: Based on the supplementary reading list, complete a scholarly book review form for at least three established authorities who have published possible answers to your basic feasibility question.

Due: Steps 1, 2, and 3

Week 4 Womanist Work of **M. Shawn Copeland**

Facilitator(s) _____

Required Reading:

Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race and Being by M. Shawn Copeland, 2008 and Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community, pp

Supplementary Reading:

The Womanist Reader edited by Layli Phillips, 2006

Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society edited by Stacey Floyd Thomas, 2006

Feasibility Study Update: Express the main point of your proposed research by writing a one-sentence thesis statement that promises to reveal something new about your topic. In other words, return to your basic research question and write an answer in terms of what/how/why. Make it as precise and specific as possible.

* Due: Steps 1, 2, 3, and 4

Week 5 Womanist Work of **Renita J. Weems**

Facilitator(s) _____

Required Reading: Renita J. Weems, Battered Love: Marriage, Sex and Violence in Hebrew Prophets (Minn: Fortress Pr., 1995) and Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community, pp. 91 – 121.

Supplementary Reading:

The Womanist Reader edited by Layli Phillips, 2006

Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society edited by Stacey Floyd Thomas, 2006

Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible by Renita J. Weems, 1988

Black Theology, Volume II, pp. 99-155; 257-272;

A Troubling in My Soul, pp. 109-149;

Feasibility Study Update: Introduce your feasibility study by sharing the origin-of-the-idea. For 5 to 7 minutes, write your reaction to the research data, whatever that may be without critical constraint. Share in free-style your feelings, opinions, observations and/or beliefs about your gathered resources.

Due: Steps 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5

Week 6 Womanist Work of **Raquel A. St. Claire**

Facilitator(s) _____

Required Reading:

Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark by Raquel A. St. Clair, 2008 and Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community, pp

Supplementary Reading:

The Womanist Reader edited by Layli Phillips, 2006

Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society edited by Stacey Floyd Thomas, 2006.

Feasibility Study Update: Continue reading materials related to your basic research question. Then make a list of the significant points you have accumulated for your study-in-progress. Name and define (what/how/why) your three major body points.

* Due: Steps 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6

Week 7

Womanist Work of **Gay L. Byron**

Facilitator(s) _____

Required Reading:

Gay L. Byron, Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature (NY: Routledge, 2002) and Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community, pp. 144-170

Supplementary Reading:

The Womanist Reader edited by Layli Phillips, 2006

Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society edited by Stacey Floyd Thomas, 2006

Black Theology, Volume II, pp. 309-320;

A Troubling in My Soul, pp. 78-91;

Feasibility Study Update: Make an outline by clustering certain minor points under each of your three defined major body points. If a new question comes to mind while you are writing, feel free to revise your outline or create a new one from scratch.

* Due: Steps 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7

Week 8

Womanist Work of **Kelly Brown Douglas**

Facilitator(s) _____

Required Reading:

Douglas, Kelly Brown. What's Faith Got to Do with It? Black Bodies/Christian Souls.
Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.

Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community, pp

Supplementary Reading:

The Womanist Reader edited by Layli Phillips, 2006

Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society edited by Stacey Floyd
Thomas, 2006

Kelly Brown Douglas, Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective
(Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

- I. Feasibility Study Update: The fact you have continued to read materials related to your basic research question, make a list of the significant points you have accumulated for your study-in-progress.

Due: Steps 1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8

Week 9 Womanist Work of **Marcia Y Riggs**

Facilitator(s) _____

Required Reading: Plenty Good Room: Women Versus Male Power in the Black Church
by Marcia Y. Riggs, 2003

Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community, pp

Supplementary Reading:

The Womanist Reader edited by Layli Phillips, 2006

Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society edited by Stacey Floyd
Thomas, 2006 Marcia Y. Riggs, Awake, Arise and Act! A Womanist Call for Black
Liberation (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Pr., 1994)

Black Theology, Volume II, pp. 321-324;

A Troubling in My Soul, pp. 67-77; and 232-249

Feasibility Study Update: Give your Feasibility Study a **title** (thinking/ being/ or doing).

* Due: Steps 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9

Week 10 Womanist Work of **Karen Baker Fletcher**

Facilitator(s) _____

Required Reading:

Dancing with God: A Womanist Perspective on the Trinity (Chalice Pr., 2006)

Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community, pp

Supplementary Reading:

The Womanist Reader edited by Layli Phillips, 2006

Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society edited by Stacey Floyd Thomas, 2006

Karen Baker Fletcher, A Singing Something: Womanist Reflections on Anna Julia Cooper (NY: Crossroads Pub. Co., 1994).

Black Theology, Volume II, pp. 290-299; and 399-404;

A Troubling in My Soul, pp. 37-47;

Feasibility Study Update: Name and define (what/how/why) your three major body points.

Due: Steps 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10

Week 11 Womanist Work of **Cheryl Townsend Gilkes**

Facilitator(s) _____

Required Reading:

Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "If It Wasn't for the Women" Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000).

Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community, pp

Supplementary Reading:

The Womanist Reader edited by Layli Phillips, 2006

Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society edited by Stacey Floyd Thomas, 2006

Black Theology, Volume II, pp. 336-344;

A Troubling in My Soul, pp. 92-106

Katie's Canon, pp. 129-135.

Feasibility Study Update: In the final re-drafting process, add a specific, concrete example so that each of the three body points reveals something new in answering your basic, overarching research question.

Cheryl J. Sanders, Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture (NY: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1995).

Week 12 Womanist Work of **Cheryl Kirk-Duggan,**
Diana L. Hayes and **Patricia L. Hunter**
Jacquelyn Grant
and **Jamie T. Phelps**

Feasibility Study

1. Define a research topic as specifically as possible by writing a basic question that identifies the problem, puzzle, or conflict you would like to resolve or a hypothesis you want to prove (what/how/why).
2. Share the reason(s) you want to research this topic. In other words, why is this topic worthy of study?
3. Who is your audience?
4. Complete a scholarly book review form for at least three established authorities who have published possible answers to your basic feasibility question.
5. Express the main point of your proposed research by writing a brief paragraph that promises to reveal something new about your topic.
6. Return to your basic research question and write an answer in terms of a comprehensive thesis statement of what/how/why. Make it as precise and specific as possible.
7. Introduce your feasibility study by sharing the origin-of-the-idea. In other words, for 5 to 7 minutes, write your reaction to the research data, whatever that may be without critical constraint. Share in free-style your feelings, opinions, observations and/or beliefs about your gathered resources.
8. The fact you have continued to read materials related to your basic research question, make a list of the significant points you have accumulated for your study-in-progress.
9. Give your Feasibility Study a *title* (thinking/ being/ or doing).
10. Name and define (what/how/why) your three major body points.

11. In the final re-drafting process, add a specific, concrete example so that each of the three body points reveals something new in answering your basic, overarching research question.

KGCannon 2010

Guidelines for a Scholarly Book Review

1. Author of the Book _____
2. Include one fact about the Author that might be relevant to her/his contribution to the subject matter.
3. Title of the Book _____
4. Publisher _____ Date of Publication _____
5. Author of the Review _____
6. Include one fact about the Reviewer that might be relevant to the Reviewer's approach to the subject.
7. Review Publication _____
8. Volume _____ Month _____ Date _____ Page # _____
9. According to this scholarly review
 - a. In what ways does the author take advantage of the most recent developments in scholarship on the topic?
 - b. What new issues does this text raise?
 - c. For whom was the book written?
 - d. What are the book's major weaknesses?
 - e. What are its primary strengths?

10. Summarize your findings in relations to your Feasibility Study.

Black Theology, Volume II, pp. 273-289;
Jacquelyn Grant, White Women's Christ, Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response (Atlanta: Scholars Pr., 1989)

A Troubling in My Soul, pp. 48-64; and 199-218;
Katie's Canon, pp.27-46.

African American Women Tapping Power and Spiritual Wellness by Stephanie Y. Mitchem, 2004

Black Theology, Volume II, pp. 325-335;
A Troubling in My Soul, pp. 150-171; and 189-198;

Katie's Canon, pp. 136-143

Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, Exorcising Evil: Theodicy and African American Spirituals - A Womanist Perspective (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993

and

Diana L. Hayes, Hagar's Daughter: Womanist Ways of Being in the World (NY: Paulist Pr., 1995)

Pauli Murray and Caroline Ware: Forty Years of Letters in Black and White edited by Anne Firor Scott, 2006.

Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church by Barbara A. Holmes, 2006

Native Americans and the Christian Right by Andrea Smith, 2008

Disruptive Christianity: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter by Traci C. West, 2006

The Dina Project: A Handbook for Congregational Responses to Sexual Violence by Monica A. Coleman, 2004

Reading In Black and White: A Memoir by Karla F. C. Holloway, 2006

The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, 2007

Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace by Serene Jones, 2000

Introducing Asian Feminist Theology by Kwok Pui-lan, 2000

A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology edited by Maria Pilar Aquino, Daisy Machado, and Jeanette Rodriguez, 2002

A New Climate for Theology: God, the World and Global Warming by Sallie McFague, 2008

Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide by Andrea Smith, 2005

Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work by Rachel Salazar Parrenas, 2001

Introducing Womanist Theology by Stephanie Y. Mitchem, 2002

Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist and Buddhist: One Woman's Spiritual Journey by Jan Willis, (2001), rpt 2008

Not Without Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry by Vashti M. McKenzie, 1996

Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology edited by Rita Nakashima Brock, Jung Ha Kim, Kwok Pui-lan, and Seungh Ai Yang, 2007

Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity by Mercy Amba Oduyoye, 2004

Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology by Wonhee Anne Joh, 2006

Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion by Sara Miles, 2007

Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S. by Amira Jarmakani, 2008

Setting the Table: Women in Theological Conversation edited by Rita Nakashima Brock, Claudia Camp, and Serene Jones, 1995.

Post Colonial Imagination and Feminist Theology by Kwok Pui lan, 2005

Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics edited by Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serene Jones, 2006

Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System by Raj Patel, 2008

The Truth that Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender and Freedom by Barbara Smith, 1998

Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique edited by Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn, 1989

My Name Is Child of God...Not "Those People": A First Person Look at Poverty by Julia K. Dinsmore, 2007

Awakening Youth Discipleship: Christian Resistance in a Consumer Culture by Brian J. Mahan, Michael Warren, and David F. White, 2008

Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab Feminists edited by Joanna Kadi, 1994

Hope in the Holler: A Womanist Theology by A. Elaine Crawford, 2002

The Miter Fits Just Fine: A Story about the Rt. Rev. Barbara Clementine Harris by Mark Francisco Bozzuti-Jones, 2003

Spirit and Politics of Disablement by Sharon V. Betcher, 2008

Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century by Ada Maria Isasi Diaz, 1996.

Equal Value: An Ethical Approach to Economics and Sex by Carol S. Robb, 1995

This Is My Story: Testimonies and Sermons of Black Women in Ministry by Cleophus LaRue, 2005

An End to the Strife: The Politics of Gender in African American Churches by Demetrius Williams, 2004

Coming Home: Asian American Women Doing Theology by Unzu Lee, 2006.

Poor Banish Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible by Gale A. Yee, 2003

Wives, Widows, and Concubines: The Conjugal Family Ideal in Colonial India by Mytheli Sreenivas, 2008

Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology by Mary McClintock Fulkerson, 1994

Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education by Rebecca Chopp, 1995

Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics by Beverly W. Harrison, 1986

Moving Up: Ten Steps to Turning Your Life Around and Getting to the Top by Suzan D. Johnson Cook, 2008

Shaking the Gates of Hell: Faith-Led Resistance to Corporate Globalization by Sharon Delgado, 2007

Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education by Diane L. Moore, 2007

Liberating Eschatology: Essays in Honor of Letty M. Russell edited by Serene Jones and Margaret Farley, 1999

A Priest Forever: One Woman's Controversial Ordination in the Episcopal Church by Carter Heyward, (1976) rpt. 1999

En La Lucha/In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology (10th anniversary edition) by Ada Maria Isasi Diaz, 2004.

God's Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological Education by The Mudflower Collective, 1985

Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion and Civil Rights by Rosetta E. Ross,

Womankind: Faces of Change Around the World by Donna Nebenzahl, Nance Ackerman, photographer, 2003