

The Catholic and Protestant Roots of Anglicanism

Saint Barnabas's Church, Falmouth MA

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Class #16: Liberation Theology: Black, Feminist, Womanist & Queer Perspectives

1. Black, Feminist and Womanist Theologies provide distinctive biblical interpretations and postmodern witnesses to Jesus
 1. Liberation theologies—Latin American, American Black, Queer and Feminist—embrace common yet distinctive methods that privilege social analysis over metaphysics
 2. Liberation theologies critique Enlightenment notion of disinterested biblical reader
 3. No disinterested or innocent interpretation of scripture: we must know our biblical bias and reader's bias as the prisms through which we encounter the gospel
 4. Word of God can be commandeered by dominant powers with worldly agenda
 5. Feminist biblical interpretation critiques persistent patriarchal frame of reference
 6. There is no innocent reading of scripture: all interpretation must be ideological
 7. Reject missionary desire for one-way history from privileged to less fortunate
 8. Relying heavily upon the O.T. Exodus narrative, God takes sides and actively roots for the disadvantaged, the prisoner, the rejected, oppressed or minority actor
 9. Critique univocal authority and meaning of biblical interpretation to unmask its bias
 10. Embrace hermeneutical suspicion of prevailing norms and governing standards
 11. Connect the violence of Jesus' saving death and bloodshed with brokenness of world
 12. God bestows infinite dignity on society's non-persons, and Christian ethical demands, as followers of Jesus, demands the same—justice trumps charity
 13. Jesus' identity with the marginalized—women, criminals, Samaritans—serves as model of ethical action and Christian discipleship
 14. Ethical action demands that we challenge/change underlying structures of social sin

15. Focus on Jesus' central role as martyr, liberator, paradoxical agent of God
16. Christological reflection is not abstract metaphysics but socio-political engagement
17. God's Kingdom—or reign—breaks into temporal principalities and powers of world

2. Black liberation theology, modern atonement, and Jesus: James Cone (1938-2018)

1. Broken people identify Jesus' suffering and transformation with their own
2. Jesus' violent death adds meaning to the chaos of worldly violence
3. Historic African cosmologies and religious traditions inform American slave religion
4. Jesus and the power of the blood on the Cross—liberation or opiate of masses?
5. Jesus as God's agent of change/liberation to transform the status quo
6. God actively takes sides and sends Jesus to redeem the world in temporal way
7. Black hermeneutics (interpretation, meaning) connects ancient stories of freedom to the particular (cf. universal) struggles of today as witness to God's breaking in
8. Black liberation theologians critique doctrines of Jesus that have been used suppress, marginalize or exclude Black voices and otherwise justify subservience
9. James Cone interview at Trinity Institute:

<https://www.trinitywallstreet.org/video/religion-violence-james-cone-interview>
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1. Feminist liberation theology critiques the ways in which Jesus has been interpreted via patriarchal lenses and power structures, resulting in violence or degradation of women
 1. Christological reflection can be used as sacred justification for sin of patriarchy
 2. Jesus' unique identity is his human vocation and abiding with God, not his gender
 3. Reclaim first-century title of Jesus as Wisdom/Sophia

1. Sophia is complex female figure who personifies God's creative action
 4. Focus on new patterns of relationship beyond domination-subordination
 5. Feminist theology repudiates ransom theories of Jesus' death; rather, view crucifixion as Jesus' love and identification with those who suffer and are outcast
 6. Cross evokes pain-to-life realities that women know in childbirth and life contingency
 7. Women serve as final witnesses to Jesus death and first witnesses to resurrection
2. Liberation christology and hermeneutical suspicion
 1. Liberation theology unmasks spiritual heritage tainted by hegemonic, dominant ideology
 2. Must separate Jesus the Christ from "master narratives" of Western discourse
 3. Reject strong metaphysical notions of Jesus and replace with incarnation's reality amid real life struggles and domination
 4. Deconstruct ways in which Jesus has been co-opted by forces of worldly domination
3. Selected quotations from Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza's *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Profit—Critical Issues in Feminist Christology*:
 1. "[Feminist theology's systemic analysis] must be critical rather than apologetic and start with a hermeneutics of suspicion rather than a hermeneutics of indiscriminating acceptance of Scripture and tradition." (p. 12)
 2. "Classic christological dogma expresses the imperial desire for the unification and control of a church created by the diverse understandings of Jesus developed in the beginnings of Christianity.... Liberal Enlightenment christologies of Jesus, the greatest man who ever lived, the exceptional individual hero, or the true religious genius to be imitated in turn have resurrected the 'divine man' of ancient Greece is who always male, autonomous, and defiant, and stands above and beyond all human limitations." (p. 18)
 3. "Jesus' liberating practice and not his maleness is significant. Jesus' action became the symbol and model of the full but not yet realized way of

being human. What matters is not Jesus' masculinity but his option for the poor and his solidarity with those who are marginalized." (p. 49)

4. "Women who read the Jesus story of have a 'personal' relationship to Christ take up the position that romance novels or films offer to women in relationship to men....The tendency to conceptualize as intimate love relationship the relation between believing women and the exceptional man and singular hero, the beautiful Lord Jesus, has a long theological tradition in the classical prophets, early Christian writings, and the spousal relationship of the mystics." (p. 55)
 5. "Feminist theologies have underscored the pernicious impact of a theological and christological symbolic system that stresses that God sacrificed his son for our sins. If one extols the silent and freely chosen suffering of Christ...as an example to be imitated by all those victimized by patriarchal oppression, particularly by those suffering from domestic and sexual abuse, one not only legitimizes but also enables acts of violence against women and children." (p. 106)
4. To understand Womanist theology, read Delores Williams' *Sisters in the Wilderness: the Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Quote from Amazon website: "Williams draws on biblical figure of Hagar mother of Ishmael, cast into the desert by Abraham and Sarah, but protected by God. Williams finds a prototype for the struggle of African-American women. African slave, homeless exile, surrogate mother, Hagar's story provides an image of survival and defiance appropriate to black women today. Exploring the themes implicit in Hagar's story poverty and slavery, ethnicity and sexual exploitation, exile and encounter with God. Williams traces parallels in the history of African-American women from slavery to the present day. A new womanist theology emerges from this shared experience, from the interplay of oppressions on account of race, sex and class. *Sisters in the Wilderness* offers a telling critique of theologies that promote liberation but ignore women of color. This is a book that defined a new theological project and charted a path that others continue to explore."

From AI Overview: **Queer Theology**

Postmodernism and queer theology intersect by deconstructing traditional, binary understandings of gender, sexuality, and scripture, influenced heavily by theorists like Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. Queer theology utilizes postmodern tools to challenge heterosexual norms as the "norm" within religious texts, viewing identity as fluid and socially constructed rather than fixed.

Key Aspects of Queer Theology in a Postmodern Framework:

- **Deconstruction of Binaries:** Queer theology critiques the male/female and heterosexual/homosexual binaries, arguing these structures are unstable and reflect power dynamics rather than natural truths.
- **Performativity and Fluidity:** Gender and sexual identities are viewed as performances ("performativity") rather than innate essences, allowing for fluid identities that change over time.
- **Critique of Power and Marginalization:** Influenced by poststructuralism, this approach seeks to empower marginalized sexualities by deconstructing the "metanarratives" of traditional moral theology.
- **Intersectionality:** Postmodern queer theology emphasizes that individuals possess multiple, overlapping identities (race, class, gender) that contribute to varying experiences of power and oppression.
- **Scriptural Re-interpretation:** Proponents re-examine scripture to focus on themes of love, commitment, and inclusion, arguing that traditional interpretations have been used as tools of exclusion.

Significance in Modern Context:

- **Theology as Construct:** Many queer theologians argue that all meaning, including biblical interpretation, is constructed out of relationships of difference, rejecting a single, objective truth.
- **Shift from "Nature" to "Culture":** Queer theory argues that human behavior is not dictated solely by biology but is shaped by cultural constructs.
- **Impact on Church Structure:** Queer theology challenges traditional views on marriage, gender roles, and community, advocating for a more inclusive, "queer" understanding of the church.

Major queer theologians apply queer theory and liberation theology to scripture and tradition, challenging cis-heteronormative, binary, and dogmatic structures in faith. Key figures include Marcella Althaus-Reid, Patrick S. Cheng, Elizabeth Alvilda Johnson, and Kittredge Cherry, who explore themes of embodied theology, sexual justice, and the "queer" or subversive nature of God.

- Marcella Althaus-Reid: A trailblazing Argentine theologian known for *Indecent Theology* and *The Queer God*, she used liberation theology to challenge conservative theology and advocate for a radical, "un-disciplined" queer approach to God.
- Patrick S. Cheng: A prominent author (*Radical Love, From Sin to Amazing Grace*) who provides a foundational framework for queer theology, focusing on themes of divine love, inclusivity, and challenging the queer "sin" of heterosexism.
- Kittredge Cherry: An author and theologian who specializes in LGBTQ+ spiritual liberation, documenting queer saints and interpreting biblical stories through an affirming queer lens.
- Fr. Luís Corrêa Lima: A Brazilian Jesuit whose work focuses on healing the wounds of exclusion within the Catholic Church, promoting pastoral care and dialogue with LGBTQ+ Catholics.
- Elizabeth Alvilda Johnson: A theologian specializing in queer theological aesthetics and ecology.
- Theodore Jennings: Known for his work on homoerotic themes in scripture, such as interpreting the relationship between YHWH and David through a queer lens.

These thinkers often lean on the philosophical work of queer theorists like Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, adapting their concepts of gender performativity and subversion into the religious sphere.