

Marquette University

e-Publications@Marquette

Dissertations (1934 -)

Dissertations, Theses, and Professional
Projects

The Body as Symbol: Bringing Together Theories of Sex/Gender and Race for Theological Discourse

Patricia Lewis
Marquette University

Follow this and additional works at: https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lewis, Patricia, "The Body as Symbol: Bringing Together Theories of Sex/Gender and Race for Theological Discourse" (2010). *Dissertations (1934 -)*. 31.

https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/31

THE BODY AS SYMBOL: BRINGING TOGETHER
THEORIES OF SEX/GENDER AND RACE
FOR THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

by

Patricia Lewis, B.A., M.A.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

May 2010

ABSTRACT
THE BODY AS SYMBOL: BRINGING TOGETHER
THEORIES OF SEX/GENDER AND RACE
FOR THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

Patricia Lewis, B.A., M.A.

Marquette University, May 2010

This dissertation focuses on race and sex/gender as critical theological topics that are not being adequately addressed in most theological discourse. They are either deemed irrelevant to mainstream theology and addressed in a theoretically unsophisticated manner, if at all, or compartmentalized in theological specializations leaving them outside mainstream theological discourse and separate from each other. Sex/gender and race are important topics for several reasons. First, much suffering has resulted from the meanings human beings have assigned to various articulations of sex/gender and race and the actions taken and institutions established based on these meanings. Second, reflection on race and sex/gender leads to conversation about the reality and meaning of the body, and the body is a crucial theological topic. Third, the most central questions in theology lead us to the body and discussion of the body leads us to the most fundamental questions of theology.

I argue that theology needs to create common approaches for reflection on the body that consider the whole body. My project presents a tool to establish better theological discourse about the body that takes these specificities into consideration and brings them together in theological anthropology. I first explore theological discourses concerning race and sex/gender in order to plot a landscape of and for these conversations. This landscape exposes the complexity of these topics and reveals that within each conversation there is great disparity about how to talk about race and sex/gender. This first step of the project can help theologians articulate and map their own theories of sex/gender and race and promote more sophisticated conversation about the body within the discipline of theology. This part of the dissertation also illustrates the centrality of the questions of sex/gender and race for theology. In the second part of this dissertation, I explore womanist theology to gain insights for bringing race and sex/gender together in theological discourse. Building on these insights, my proposal of the body as symbol argues that a full appreciation of the body in its specificity and complexity must address the body as construction and the body as expression.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Patricia Lewis, B.A., M.A.

This dissertation is my attempt to wrestle with the central questions of my life. There have been many wonderful people who have helped me think about these questions and accompanied me on my journey with them. I want to first thank the Sisters of Mercy who so radically changed my life when I came to know them as a Mercy Volunteer fresh out of college. I am especially grateful to Katherine Nueslein, R.S.M. and Eileen Campbell R.S.M. for teaching me that listening to and being with people in their uniqueness is the foundation of community and any notion of theological anthropology. I will always be thankful to Mary Aquin O'Neill, R.S.M., Ph.D. and Diane Caplin, Ph.D. who first taught me how to think critically about these questions. I remember with much love and gratitude my Baltimore community, both those I clumsily tried to serve and come to know as well as my friends and colleagues who endured my first wrestlings with the complex realities of race and sex/gender. My Milwaukee community has continued to accompany me as I brought the tools of my theological education to bear on these ideas. I thank the members of my board for their careful attention to this project, especially Fr. William J. Kelly, S.J. for all the months of assistance and encouragement and Dr. Shawn Copeland for not letting go of Marquette until I finished this project. I also want to thank my friends Pamela Shellberg, Constance "Susan" Nielsen, Matthew Powell, and Jennifer Henery who listened to these ideas in their nascent and more fully developed forms. I am eternally grateful for the energy and love they have shown in knowing me in all of my complexity and their commitment to community with me. I also want to thank my family, especially my mother Patricia Lewis and my father Charles Lewis, who always supported me in my life journey no matter how strange they thought it was, and my brothers Charles, Paul, and Timothy who made a feminist out of me at an early age. I want to thank my husband Todd Penland who has always challenged me to dig deeper into ideas and who has been my partner in the sharing of our complex identities with each other. Finally, I want to thank my daughter Alexandra Lewis-Penland who always makes me think of who I am and what I believe and insists on patience and attention in the knowing of her. She has shaped this project more than she knows.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	i
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	1
II. METHOD.....	8
III. ARGUMENT.....	12
IV. SOURCES.....	18
V. PROJECT OUTLINE.....	35
VI. USE OF LANGUAGE.....	41
VII. CONCLUSION.....	45
PART I: THEORIES OF SEX/GENDER AND RACE	
CHAPTER 2: SEX/GENDER AND THEOLOGY.....	46
I. INTRODUCTION.....	46
II. THEORIES OF SEX/GENDER.....	50
No Construction.....	50
Gender Constructed.....	57
Sex/Gender System Constructed.....	64
Total Construction.....	74
III. DISCUSSION.....	80
IV. CONCLUSION.....	88
CHAPTER 3: RACE AND THEOLOGY.....	90
I. INTRODUCTION.....	90

II.	THEORIES OF RACE	94
	Race as Essence	94
	Race as Historical Legacy.....	103
	Race as Culture	113
	Race as Class.....	123
	Race as Illusion	131
III.	DISCUSSION	138
IV.	CONCLUSION.....	144
PART II: BRINGING SEX/GENDER AND RACE TOGETHER		
CHAPTER 4: WOMANIST THEOLOGY AND THE BODY		146
I.	INTRODUCTION	146
	Structure of Chapter	151
II.	BODILY IDENTITY IN WOMANIST PERSPECTIVE.....	153
	Surrogacy and Nurturance: Sex/Gender and Race.....	153
	Surrogacy and Physical Labor: Sex/Gender, Race, and Class.....	160
	Surrogacy and Sexuality: Sex/Gender, Race, and Sexuality	168
III.	WOMANIST PARADIGM	176
IV.	CONSTRUCTION AND EXPRESSION.....	179
V.	CONCLUSION.....	185
CHAPTER 5: THE BODY AS SYMBOL		187
I.	INTRODUCTION	187
II.	SYMBOL	191

III.	THE BODY AS SYMBOL.....	197
	The Body as Expression.....	198
	The Body as Construction.....	206
IV.	A PROPOSAL FOR THEOLOGY.....	214
V.	CONCLUSION.....	222
EPILOGUE: AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....		224
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....		227

The fact that theology also considers the body should not astonish or surprise anyone who is aware of the mystery and reality of the Incarnation. Theology is that science whose subject is divinity. Through the fact that the Word of God became flesh, the body entered theology through the main door.

John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*¹

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

James Cone asserts that people enter the liberation struggle, in the broadest sense, from their own specific experience and perspective. This project arises from the questions of my own life. I have been thinking about the body for a long time. I have had life-long questions of how and why *sex/gender* differences affect family, society, and church. My decision to live and work in a low-income community led me to question how *class* differences keep some segregated and award others benefits. My experience in the inner city as well as academia raised my awareness of how *race* differences seep through all class structures. I witness how differences in the *sexual orientation* of my friends keep them isolated and uncelebrated in society. These experiences have taught me the influence the meanings we assign to body categories have on all aspects of life. These observations have challenged me to think more deeply and critically about the body in its specificity. This project brings my theological study to bear on the questions of my life and an important, though often neglected, subject of study. This dissertation focuses on race and sex/gender as critical theological topics that are not being adequately addressed in most theological discourse.²

¹ John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), 88.

² Of course, conversations about race and sex/gender are being had in some specialized fields of theology. I am concerned here with “mainstream” theological discourse and the fact that one can more often than not take a

In my own study of theology, I have found two main reasons for this lack of adequate consideration of race and sex/gender.³ First, sex/gender and race are often deemed irrelevant to mainstream theological discourse. Most theologians whose work does not specialize or focus on race and sex/gender relegate conversations about the concrete realities of the body to those theologians who have *problematic* bodies. These same theologians seem content to brush aside the realities of race and sex/gender and speak about a theoretically unraced and unsexed/ungendered body. This unwillingness to engage in theological discourse about race and sex/gender seems to be accompanied by a general inability to have these conversations. There is much confusion about how body categories like race and sex/gender are used and what is meant when they are invoked. Terms such as gender, sex, woman, man, and race are conflictual and there is widespread disagreement about these terms. I approach the body not simply as matter versus spirit or as that hypothetical material body that all humans have that makes us human. Bodies are always part of the social, political, cultural, and economic matrix in which we find them. Theology must discuss the body in all its concreteness and difference. The body is always raced and sexed/gendered and this reality must be incorporated into mainstream theological anthropology.

graduate level theological anthropology course or read a theological anthropology text and never come across the words race or sex/gender.

³ In this chapter, I explain my reasons for this lack of adequate consideration of race and sex/gender. Other reasons given by both theologians and theorists will be explored in Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation. In Chapter 4, womanist scholars give their reasons why the intersection of race and sex/gender is not adequately addressed even in theological specializations. For more discussion on race and sex/gender and theological education and endeavor, see James H. Cone, "Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 55, no. 3-4 (2001): 1-15; Dwight H. Hopkins, "Black Theology on Theological Education," in *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James Cone's Black Theology and Black Power*, ed. Dwight H. Hopkins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 41-52; Robert J. Deotis, "And We Are Not Saved: A Black Theologian Looks at Theological Education," *Religious Education* 87 (Summer 1992): 353-69; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Religion, Gender, and Society: Shaping the Discipline of Religious/Theological Studies," in *The Relevance of Theology: Nathan Söderblom and the Development of an Academic Discipline*, ed. Carl Reinhold Bråkenhielm and Gunhild Winqvist Hollman (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, 2002), 85-99; and Denise Lardner Carmody, "Integrating Feminist Perspectives with the Religious Studies Curriculum: Setting the Question," *Horizons* 16 (Fall 1989): 292-301.

The second reason sex/gender and race are not adequately addressed in theological discourse is that theologies that do take categories of materiality like race and sex/gender into consideration have been compartmentalized, and often marginalized, into separate and distinct specializations. This is problematic for two reasons. First, they are cordoned off from mainstream theological discourse. This results in an ostracism of discussions of sex/gender and race from mainstream theology and a ghettoization of this important conversation. Second, because of specialization these discourses about race and sex/gender become distinct and separate from each other.⁴ Race and sex/gender become separate subjects in theology because they are based on such specifics as personal and community experience. Both can and have been treated as essential to identity. Within the separate theological conversations about race and sex/gender, one may now be required to note the importance of the other bodily reality but not to explore it at any great depth. Theology needs to explore how discourses about race and sex/gender can come together for theological anthropology.

This dissertation is my response to these frustrations and challenges. My goal in this project is twofold. First, I explore theological discourses concerning race and sex/gender in order to plot a landscape of and for these conversations. This landscape exposes the complexity of these topics and reveals that within each conversation there is great disparity about how to talk about race and sex/gender. This first step of the project can help theologians articulate and map their own theories of sex/gender and race and promote more sophisticated conversation about the body within the discipline of theology. In addition, this part of the dissertation illustrates the centrality of the questions of sex/gender and race for

⁴ This of course is not the case in womanist theology but this specialty, like most liberation theologies, claims to be and is treated as a theology of, by and for a specific community resulting in only that community attending to it, in this case African American women.

theology and demonstrates how theories of the body and theology are intertwined. Although this first step begins to connect sex/gender and race discourses around a central organizing concept, it is in the second part of this dissertation that I propose a theological approach to the body that brings discourses about race and sex/gender together for theological anthropology.

This project is based on the presupposition that race and sex/gender are important topics for theological discourse. They are important for several reasons. First, much suffering has resulted from the meanings human beings have assigned to various articulations of sex/gender and race and the actions taken and institutions established based on these meanings. Definitions of sex/gender have resulted in the second-class citizenship of women in society and church. The black/white racial divide in the United States has resulted in the suffering of the black community. The essentialization of the meanings of woman and black to mean *white* women and black *men* has resulted in a general ignorance of the plight of black women. Meanings of the categories of race and sex/gender include various assumptions about acceptable sexuality. Women, people of color, and people with “alternative” sexual orientations all struggle with the meanings imposed upon their bodies. They struggle because their bodies are read in society as abnormal, inferior, or scripted for specific roles that they may not want. Their freedom in living these bodies is limited by the scripts presumed imprinted on them by genitalia, color, or “perversion” based on the assumed misuse of their bodies.

I understand oppression to include both the unjust limitation of persons, opportunities, and lives as well as outright discrimination and violence.⁵ This unjust

⁵ I find helpful Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s use of Iris Marion Young’s criteria of oppression for social groups, which include exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and systemic

limitation and discrimination is based on theories and theologies of the body. Religious belief systems have undergirded the oppositional way we think about men and women and have contributed to the way we understand different races. Theologians need to recognize the contributions of Christianity to the dehumanization of certain bodies and its justification of the violence and oppression of persons based on physical attributes.⁶ If Christian theologians believe that reflection on sin and redemption is important theological work, then consideration of sex/gender and race must be part of theological discourse. Some may argue that race and sex/gender in themselves are neutral and that racism and sexism are the true problems. I contend that racism and sexism are inherent in the racial categories of black and white and the sex/gender categories of male/female and masculine/feminine because the history and language embedded in these descriptions are racist and sexist. Any real liberation from these impediments and attacks must include a better understanding of the concepts and realities of race and sex/gender.

The second reason discourse about sex/gender and race is important for theological study is that reflection on race and sex/gender leads to conversation about the reality and meaning of the body, and the body is a crucial theological topic. The work of the theologians I explore evidence the body's centrality for theological study. Pope John Paul II understood the body as central to all theology, both our anthropology, which is our understanding of

violence. Schüssler Fiorenza adds two criteria related to theology and religion, namely silencing, and vilification and trivialization. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 29-31. For Young's use of these criteria, see Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression," in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 38-65.

⁶ From its inception, feminist theology has been concerned with uncovering and naming the patriarchy in the Christian tradition. See Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983) as two seminal works in early feminist theology. Likewise, black theology has always called attention to the racism in the Christian tradition, such as the biblical interpretation of white scholars and ministers that claimed that the enslavement of black people was intended by God and recorded in scripture, thereby justifying slavery in this country. See James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), and Gregory Baum and John Coleman, eds., *The Church and Racism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982).

ourselves, and our theology, which is our understanding of God.⁷ James Cone also makes this connection when he asserts that our search for identity is nothing less than our search for God.⁸ Consideration of the body is crucial because human persons live as specific bodies. We immediately notice the race and sex/gender of each person we meet. We use these categories to provide clues to who a person is and we are uncomfortable if we cannot classify the person within the categories we use. Michael Omi and Howard Winant are race theorists who argue that without racial identity one is in danger of having no identity.⁹ I would extend that argument to include sex/gender identity as well. Feminist, womanist, and black theologians challenge the theological community to recognize that not all bodies are the same. With the growth of these liberation theologies, there is a growing awareness of the complexity of the body. Since the specificity of bodies matters so much in the living of life and church, we must think theologically about specific bodies not just the body as flesh opposed to the soul.

Consideration of the body is also crucial for theology because at the center of Christian belief and life is the Body of Christ. This most important body is individual, communal, and eucharistic. The study of this body is concerned with the life and circumstances of a specific person, the community born out of this life, and the sacramental reality that binds them together. Theological reflection on the Body of Christ affects and is affected by how we theologize about our own bodies. To understand Jesus Christ as the Incarnation means that Jesus was a body-person. God took on humanity and shared in its condition. Therefore, we must understand that Jesus Christ lived specifically as all humans

⁷ John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 47.

⁸ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 14.

⁹ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 59.

do. Jesus of Nazareth was a first century, Jewish man who lived in an occupied country. These were the constructions that formed his identity. But he also lived deliberately. His personal expression of his body was to make his place with the oppressed and outcasts of his society and religion and to share in their condition in his very humanity, which included his materiality. This is why liberation theologians see the Incarnation as key to theological body talk. God is present in our very humanity. The body is the instrument for divine presence.

Roman Catholic Christianity still professes Christ's material presence in the Eucharist and in the community formed by its belief in the Incarnation. The liturgy and presence of Christ in it involve specific meanings of bodily categorization as the community decides who represents and reflects Christ. The Body of Christ that is the Church is human and therefore both forms and is formed by the categories of sex/gender and race. The following investigation into race and sex/gender argues that who the Church is and how the Church lives is deeply affected by the meanings assigned to race and sex/gender. Since the Church is a body and bodies do not exist outside of these categories, the Church must reflect on what meanings of race and sex/gender it embraces and which bodies it excludes.

My third reason why discourse about the body is crucial for theology is that the most central questions in theology lead us to the body, and discussion of the body leads us to the most fundamental questions of theology. Discourse about sex/gender and race can serve as entry points to discussions of inequality and injustice, but also elicit and engage biblical hermeneutics, ecclesiological practices and beliefs, as well as ontological considerations. How one interprets biblical revelation informs their understanding of the body. The body is central to reflection on Christian mysteries that occur during liturgical rites in word and

action.¹⁰ Theological reflection on bodies in their specificity explores the significance of history for human identity and the question of how persons come to be at all. The theologians included in this dissertation argue, and I would agree, that the very topic of the subject cannot be considered without addressing the concepts of sex/gender and race. These considerations of personhood are in turn intimately connected to notions of ontology and truth. Therefore, ideas about sex/gender and race and the body in its specificity enter the debate about whether universals exist in human living. The meaning a theologian attributes to the body also goes to the very heart of their method and reflects their goals and concerns. All ideas have bodies. Patricia Hill Collins argues that ideas cannot be divorced from the individuals who create and share them so the identity, and therefore bodily categories, of the owner of any idea matters.¹¹ Liberation theologians argue that how we think, what we think about, and what we think is true is intimately related to our placement within intersecting oppressions based on body differentiation. Our experience and our prejudice influence our research and our scholarly claims.

II. METHOD

My approach to discourse about the body is informed by both my study of liberation theologies and contemporary gender and race theories. Liberation theology anchors this project within the struggle to liberate body-persons from oppression associated with the meanings assigned to bodily categories. The analysis of race and sex/gender found in this

¹⁰ At the heart of any Christian Eucharistic ritual are the words, "This is my body." Other Catholic liturgical observances that involve reflection on the body are Corpus Christi, the Assumption of Mary, and Easter. Karl Rahner's theology of the symbol, which includes his reflections on the body as symbol, originates in his thoughts on devotion to the Sacred Heart. The statement of belief found in the Apostles' Creed includes the words "We believe in the resurrection of the body."

¹¹ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 265.

dissertation is not just an intellectual exercise but a task that is part of the greater project to liberate individuals from that which oppresses and limits them and to create more inclusive communities. I focus on prominent theologians who investigate bodily meaning for theology with emphasis on race and sex/gender and examine how these theologians read the body and explore its specificity within a theological context. In addition to insights from liberation theology, I utilize theological investigations of symbol and its application to bodies, both individual and communal, and the Body of Christ in all its aspects to create a method for discourse of the specific materiality of bodies.

My study of the body also utilizes insights from contemporary theory about race and sex/gender. Contemporary race and gender theories are becoming more and more part of theological discourse about the body.¹² Theology cannot ignore the specificity of bodies, and contemporary theory is a great aid in thinking about this specificity. Theorists explore how meaning is assigned to bodies and how these meanings can be changed. It examines how history and language are at the heart of bodily reality. Theology needs to consider theoretical approaches to the body that critique the very body categories that theologians often assume. I believe that these theoretical critiques can help liberation theologians achieve their goal of freedom from oppression. My own felt need for theoretical help to analyze the body in its specificity led me first to gender theory. Reading Judith Butler and her theoretical approach to the very idea of the materiality of the body opened up to me the space to think about the fluidity of bodily meaning and how it is determined within discourse. Race theory challenged me to see the historical nature of bodily meaning and how the body is always both

¹² Critical race theory began as a development in contemporary legal studies, but now can encompass an intellectual movement in natural and scientific scholarship that critically analyzes and problematizes the concept of race. Gender theory is a field of inquiry that questions any universal beliefs about women and men and attempts to map the cultural, societal, and political roots of gender and sex. See the introductions of Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation for a more in-depth account of the focus of both gender and race theory.

present and past. These contemporary theories recognize that bodies are difficult to capture and define with any one, or once and for all, category. Race and gender theories reveal the diversity of the very categories of race and sex/gender.

My project embraces this pluralism and sits comfortably within a postmodern context.¹³ This context treats pluralism as the way we are, not something to be overcome. Diversity in the meaning and reality of sex/gender and race is the realization that postmodern consciousness opens up to us and for us. This consciousness does not demand a single answer or smooth synthesis. In a postmodern context we need tools that allow us to better live in the pluralism of the world today. It is not my intent to dismiss the theories of any of the theologians and theorists I encounter in this dissertation, but to understand each approach to race and sex/gender and create dialogue among them. The central problem for theology that I am addressing is the lack of sophisticated dialogue about race and sex/gender. I am proposing a tool for discussion. Knowledge about different theories allows us to think better about sex/gender and race. By arranging these theories around a central organizing principle, we can better understand where they are in agreement and where they diverge. By situating these theories within a theological context, we better understand how sex/gender and race are related to the core questions and values of any theological system.

I believe that bodies exist as diverse and complex realities that are not easily defined and never fully captured in language. Every body-person is different and complex. People authentically live sex/gender and race differently. Race and sex/gender exist as multi-

¹³ For more detailed accounts of the meanings of postmodernity as well as its intersection with theology, see Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982-1985* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Walter James Lowe, "Postmodern Theology," in *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, eds. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 617-23; Graham Ward, ed., *Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and A. K. M. Adam, ed., *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000).

faceted, complex realities. Identity can never be captured with any one category or bodily description. There is always difference and diversity. People are more than any category of identity; but they are always these categories as well. Therefore, no one theoretical approach to race or sex/gender is sufficient. Race and sex/gender overlap, intersect, influence each other, and exist with other identifying realities like class and sexuality. Adequate discourse about race and sex/gender must also recognize that the meanings of bodies change over time. This project considers a complex and messy body.

How do we talk about the body then? Can we talk about the body or must we talk about individual or specific bodies? I think there must be a balance. Theologies that intentionally begin with specific experiences are very important for any theology of the body. People do have something authentic to say about themselves and their identity. Theology must leave room in theoretical discourse for life stories, both past and present, and personal experiences. But too much reliance on experience for discourse about the body can be a frustrating endeavor. Some use their own experience to cancel out another's experience or the other's frustration with body categories. A counter argument is often formed around a differing opinion one member of any group in question holds. Therefore, theology must include theoretical approaches to the body in addition to the experiential witness of individual bodies. I contend that all theologies include theories about sex/gender and race, whether articulated or not, because all theological methods lead to certain theories of sex/gender and race. An engagement with various theories of categorizing the body can help theologians better appreciate the significance of these categories for their theological work whether they personally think race and sex/gender are important or not.

III. ARGUMENT

To do this work of liberation of body-persons, theology must reflect on the body itself because racism, white privilege, sexism, androgyny, heterosexism, and homophobia are body issues. Bodies are sites of oppression and the meanings we give to them justifications for this oppression. Theology needs to create common approaches for reflection on the body that consider the whole body, attending to all of its specificities. My project presents a tool to establish better theological discourse about the body that takes these specificities into consideration and brings them together in theological anthropology for the whole body. This tool addresses the two problems outlined above, namely, the reality that discourse about race and sex/gender is often deemed irrelevant for mainstream theology and therefore addressed in a theoretically unsophisticated manner, if at all, and that discourse that does occur about race and sex/gender is ostracized into theological specializations usually ignored by most theologians and often separated from each other.

The first problem is addressed through analyses of theories of sex/gender and race. I use construction as an organizing concept for these analyses. The notion that sex/gender and race are somehow constructed realities is present in both theological and theoretical discourse.¹⁴ The idea that the body and the categories by which it is given meaning are

¹⁴ Even before the term construction was widely used in theology some theologians recognized that the meanings of bodies are ambiguous and shifting. In their early work, theologians such as James Cone, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Delores Williams took quite seriously the idea that the meanings we give to certain bodies are socially, culturally, and religiously constructed by history, language, and power. All three theologians are interested in some way in unmooring bodily categories from “natural” descriptions. The ambiguity and shifting meaning of the body is now expressed in the notion that the meanings of bodies, even bodies themselves, are constructed within and by the context in which they are located. The concept that bodies are constructed is a result of the wider discourse of deconstruction, which is a term used to refer to a contemporary intellectual movement in philosophy, literary theory, and criticism, although not restricted to these, and best understood in terms of its association with the writings of French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction is a strategy to analyze texts and social reality in order to disclose their cultural and social dynamics and unquestioned assumptions as well as unresolved tensions, conflicts and contradictions. Resonating Derrida’s statement that “There is nothing outside the text,” deconstruction recognizes no essential difference between language and the world. The critical analysis of deconstruction is not meant to obliterate or

constructed means that body categories once understood to have ahistorical, scientific, or ontological meanings can be understood to have political, contextual, ever-shifting, and changeable meanings. We are now being challenged to deconstruct these body designations to understand why they have the meanings they do. There is much debate about the very notion of construction; this debate will be part of my examination of theories of sex/gender and race.

Reflecting on the body as construction is a tool to systematize specialized liberation theologies and as a bridge to connect them together in order to better theologize about the body. Using construction as an organizing principle I map theories of race and sex/gender to aid theologians in navigating these discourses. There is no one theory or meaning to sex/gender or race and these maps help clarify the differences. Theologians can then plot their own theories of race and sex/gender. Acknowledging and understanding one's own ideas about each of these categories is an important first step to doing justice to the importance and relevance of body categories for theology. One must be clear about where one stands in these dialogues to have relevant and sophisticated discourse and dialogue about

demolish that which is its object of analysis, but to open up space for rethinking or new thinking about it. Nicholas Royle claims that deconstruction is, above all perhaps, a questioning of the "is," a concern with what remains to be thought, with what cannot be thought within the present. Derrida himself writes, "Destabilization is required for 'progress'...And the 'de-' of *deconstruction* signifies not the demolition of what is constructing itself, but rather what remains to be thought beyond the constructivist or destructionist scheme." Jacques Derrida, "Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion," in *Limited, Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graff, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 147. He has described as "the least bad definition" of "deconstruction," namely "the *experience of the impossible*." Jacques Derrida, "Afterwards: or, at least, less than a letter about a letter less," in *Afterwords*, ed. Nicholas Royle, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Tampere, Finland: Outside Books, 1992). For more on deconstruction and its place within theological discourse, see Thomas J. J. Altizer et al, eds., *Deconstruction and Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982); John D. Caputo and Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997); David W. Odell-Scott, "Deconstruction," in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, 55-61; Nicholas Royle, ed., *Deconstruction: A User's Guide* (New York: Palgrave, 2000); and the work of Mark C. Taylor including *Deconstructing Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), and "The End(s) of Theology," in *Introduction to Christian Theology: Contemporary North American Perspectives*, ed. Roger A. Badham (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

the body in theology today. This dialogue must consider the particularities of any body and these particularities are specific to the context in which bodies are situated. The implications of race for a body in the United States have been shaped by the experience of slavery and legalized discrimination. The meanings of sex/gender for a body in the United States are part of the inheritance of Western culture and religion. Exploring these body categories through the lens of construction highlights the complexity of bodies and how we categorize them. It calls attention to not only different understandings of race and sex/gender as body categories but also various notions about materiality itself and the materialization of bodies. Theories about the constructedness of the materiality of the body can and do include the understanding that these categories are not constructed at all. In this way, theologians who do not adhere to the concept of construction in either discourse of race or sex/gender can still be part of the dialogue. I recognize that the concept of construction is problematic for scholars who equate it with illusion. That is not how I am using the term in this dissertation.

Using construction to think about the concepts of sex/gender and race challenges theologians to go beyond their personal opinion and experience. Everyone must learn the history of these designations and understand how they affect who we are and how we think. Just as we need to expand our understandings of racism and sexism beyond personal prejudice to structural discrimination, so too we need to recognize that the meaning of the body goes beyond the individual person and has meaning according to the discourse of the context in which it lives. Recognizing the contextual meaning of the body is not the equivalent of a structuralist view of personal identity.¹⁵ Persons are able to deconstruct the

¹⁵ Structuralism began as a specialist method of inquiry used first in linguistics and then in anthropology, most notably in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Structuralism focuses on the way that human behavior is determined by various structures and often becomes rigid and ahistorical, losing sight of the individual, their freedom, and their ability to act. For more on structuralism, see Terence Hawkes,

body and can change the realities of sex/gender and race. If bodies are constructed through human action and thought, then they can be reconstructed through these same means whether one believes this entails a new understanding of the body or a return to a true understanding of the body.¹⁶

Exploring various theories of sex/gender and race around the same organizing concept of construction begins to bring these disparate conversations together. While I focus on the level of the construction of the body in theories of sex/gender and the meaning of the construction of the body in theories of race, consideration of both race and sex/gender embrace how and to what extent bodily identities are constructed in time and place. Bringing discourse about race and sex/gender together in and for theological anthropology is the focus of the second part of this dissertation and addresses the problem of ghettoizing these discourses in theological specializations. Liberation theologians challenge all theologians to understand that body designations and the meaning given to them in social and ecclesial life are not only relevant but crucial for theological study and discussion. Womanist theologians in particular call on theologians to recognize that body classifications and the social and ecclesial structures and teachings based on them intersect and influence each other. Only by

Structuralism and Semiotics (New York: Routledge, 2003); and John Sturrock, ed., *Structuralism and Since: From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

¹⁶ This belief that bodies can be reconstructed by first understanding their categorization as constructed is a central notion in white studies, an area of research now being embraced by theologians. The editors of *Disrupting White Supremacy From Within* write that the possibilities raised by constructionist theories have major implications. Once it is recognized that race is not a fixed or static fact of nature, but a contested and changing social-political reality, it becomes possible to interrogate the *meanings* it has been given...Constructionist theories enable more sufficient understanding of how racial oppression actually works. Understanding how race *functions* in processes of white supremacy can lead to pragmatic thinking toward resistance. Recognizing race as constructed makes visible the human agency involved in constructing it, one of the most important insights to leverage in understanding racism as a white problem. Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline, eds., *Disrupting White Supremacy From Within: White People On What We Need To Do* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 100. Conversely, John Paul II in his theology of the body argues that many contemporary approaches to sex/gender have “constructed” it as false and that the proper course of action is to realign our understanding and living of sex/gender with the biblical and true meaning of it.

addressing the whole body in all its particularity can theologians produce theology about and for real life.

Womanist theology addresses both the helpfulness and the limitations of construction as a tool for reflection on the body. Womanists balance the objectification and limitation of bodily identity that can occur through the lens of construction with a consideration of the expression and individuality of bodily reality. Christian theology cannot be concerned only with the historical winners' points of view since Christian faith is centered on a person who was most concerned with the realities of the outcast and oppressed. Therefore, theological consideration of sex/gender and race cannot be satisfied with an analysis of the construction of the body as instituted by power. Theology must also attend to the communal self-definition of those historically oppressed by the meanings assigned to race and sex/gender. Womanists show how reflecting on the identity of black women from the point of view of power is very different from the same reflection from the point of view of black women themselves. In order to understand any body, one must develop a familiarity with their discourse not just discourse about them

Womanist scholarship teaches that careful attention to group identity reveals the diversity in every group. In addition to race and sex/gender, identity markers such as class and sexuality also influence and shape the identity of body-persons. Attending to individual expressions of bodily identity deepens our reflection on human identity and bodies. If Christians believe that God is concerned with each individual person in their uniqueness, then theology must be able to reflect on the individuality of body-persons as well as what creates community among us. Theological reflection on the body must include an ability to read the texts of our materiality as well as an ability to listen to individual life stories. I want

this dissertation to help us learn to face each other as individuals. We must learn how to stand quietly with another and wait to be told and taught who that other is and wants to be. People know something real and important about their experience and history. It is only in the listening and accepting and being with the other that we can recognize we are all unique bodies and at the same time one body. The combination of construction and expression sees our commonality in history and language and our uniqueness as individual creations of God.

Approaching the body as symbol embraces the body as a construction and the body as an expression. The body is given meaning, and therefore constructed, through categories such as race and sex/gender. Each body-person expresses these constructions within their own individuality. Symbol is a concept that brings these ideas together. It has a long history in theological reflection and is a useful tool to think about the body and the much needed consideration of its sex/gender and race. I draw on my study of symbol in sacramental theology and Christology. In both a symbol is understood as a material reality that reveals mystery. Symbols are always contextual as they must have relevant meaning for the current community. The body is materiality that reveals the mystery of humanity and is always situated in its history, language, and context. The body expresses both. The body is individual and communal. Bodies are not static but changing and changeable. Within this fluidity of materiality, new identities are possible. New symbols of humanity will appear and reveal more of its mystery. The more we are open to the diversity of bodies the more diverse they appear. As a multivalent concept, symbol allows room for diverse understandings of sex/gender and race, as well as other identity markers.

I find this approach to race and sex/gender as construction and expression helpful and freeing in my own life as well as my thinking about the body. It allows for conversation

between people with varying views on bodily categories such as race and sex/gender that does not just disintegrate into personal experience but still allows personal experience to be part of the conversation. I believe we must understand how and why people are oppressed by race and sex/gender. We must find ways to create change that alleviates the oppression we discover. My investigation of these theories and theologies of race and sex/gender proposes a way of thinking about the body that allows the unique image of God that is each person to be fully realized and shared. There is no simple fix to the problem of oppression based on body categorization. The change that is needed is always happening and never done.¹⁷ We cannot simply transcend our understandings of race and sex/gender to a completely different reality. We must first understand why we think the way we do about these categories before we can make any changes. It is my hope that in the learning and appreciation of race and sex/gender as constructions and expressions, we will speak and live them in a more liberating way.

IV. SOURCES

The body is not a new theological topic.¹⁸ Throughout the centuries, Christian theologians have struggled with issues concerning the meaning of the body in general, its

¹⁷ The notions of gradual change and the always illusive reality of complete liberation from oppression are specifically noted in the work of many of the scholars I include in this dissertation. James Cone and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza both recognize the important strides taken toward liberation and the always present need for more and relate it to the theological concept of the already and not yet reality of Christian redemption. The kingdom of God broke into the world with Jesus Christ but it is never fully experienced here. Delores Williams argues that because total liberation is a hope and goal, liberation theologies cannot and should not just concentrate on total liberation but also find ways to help people survive in the midst of their oppression that presents hope for new ways of living. Kelly Brown Douglas presents a proposal for change based on the gradual change of discourse. This same idea of gradual shifts in meaning through discourse is also at the heart of Judith Butler's work. Her analysis of bodies as formed in discourse allows room for repetitions in and of this discourse that bring about changes in the meanings of bodies.

¹⁸ See James F. Keenan, "Christian Perspectives on the Human Body," *Theological Studies* 55 (June 1994): 330-46; and Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), for historical surveys of Christian approaches to the human body. See Sarah Coakley, ed.,

value, desires, and needs, as well as with issues concerned with specific bodies, such as the value of women and people of color in society, church, and before God. The body's importance has been recognized in biblical studies, historical theology, Christian ethics, as well as systematic loci such as Christology and ecclesiology. In fact, there is now a theological specialization called body theology.¹⁹ Theology is being challenged to consider the importance of the body and the ramifications of how we categorize people based on the body. This challenge has grown stronger with the emergence of various liberation theologies and questions arising in and from contemporary theory. This dissertation focuses on the categories of race, specifically those defined as black and white, and sex/gender, recognizing that there is work being done on other areas of bodily identity.²⁰ Theories of sexuality also arise in this project since they have been intricately woven into our understandings of race and sex/gender.²¹ This project brings together various voices addressing these topics, with

Religion and the Body (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), for a wider perspective about the body's intersection with religion.

¹⁹ Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart describe body theology as theology through the body not about the body. The starting point of body theology is all the experiences of the body, including but certainly not limited to sexuality and body image issues. Isherwood and Stuart contend that body theology argues for a radical understanding of incarnation that places the divine solidly in the world and challenges any notions of dualism. See Isherwood and Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology*; James Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992); and Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, *Controversies in Body Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2008).

²⁰ For theological reflection on other ethnic identities, see the *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*; Miguel A. De La Torre and Gastón Espinosa, *Rethinking Latino(a) Religion and Identity* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2006); Andrés G. Guerrero, *A Chicano Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987); Alma Rose Alvarez, *Liberation Theology in Chicana/o Literature: Manifestations of Feminist and Gay Identities* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Jonathan Y. Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008); and Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003). For theological reflection on how disability and disease affect identity and theology, see Denise Ackermann, "Engaging Stigma: An Embodied Theological Response to HIV and AIDS," *Scriptura* (2005): 385-95; Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008); and Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Press, 2008).

²¹ For theological reflection on sexuality and identity, see Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Homosexualities* (London: SCM Press, 2008); Jeffrey S. Silker, ed., *Homosexuality and Religion: An Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007); Grace M. Jantzen, "Off the Straight and Narrow: Toward a Lesbian Theology," *Theology & Sexuality* (September 1995): 58-76; and Richard Cleaver, *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Pr, 1995). For specific reflection on how race and sexuality

special emphasis on liberation theologies. I incorporate their work and wisdom into a more general theological approach to the body as symbol.

Liberation theologies in the United States and elsewhere have been especially concerned with the body. Feminist, black, and womanist theologians have critiqued how we think of some bodies as “different,” while white male bodies are gauged normative. These theologians argue that how we value bodily attributes and therefore specific bodies influences all aspects of ecclesial and theological life and thought. The way we have decided to categorize bodies, and therefore people, has determined how we have lived and continue to live as individuals and as community. Historically, some bodies have been valued more than other bodies. Certain physical attributes have been conceived as more valuable and we have created a hierarchy of bodies based on the theories we have imagined concerning embodiment. Some physical attributes have been theorized to reflect reason and leadership while others have come to mean brutishness and weakness. The meaning ascribed to physical aspects of the body has been used to justify the oppression and limitation of certain body types and the unearned privilege of others.

I concentrate closely on the work of liberation theologians because like them I am concerned with bodily categorization because it is used as a tool of oppression. Difference becomes a problem only when people are limited and oppressed by it. Oppression is often defined in terms of “isms” that result from negative body evaluation, namely racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism. I include in the meaning of oppression based on body categorization the limitation of the spirit of individuals by the circumvention of their identity and therefore their lives by the meanings given to their bodies. I focus on liberation

intersect, see Chapter 4 of this dissertation and Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins, eds., *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

theologies because my ultimate goal of this theological discourse about the body is more fulfilled living for individuals and communities. Liberation theologies do not simply engage in theoretical debate about the body, but start with the reality of oppression and work toward its alleviation. Oppression is the key concern of liberation theologians and what unites them under the designation of liberation theology. The alleviation of oppression includes survival while oppressed, a better quality of life while struggling against these oppressions, and the destruction of the systems and prejudices that cause this oppression in the first place. The ultimate goal of liberation theologies is to create new ways of being and thinking that overcome the “isms” that result in oppression. My goal for creating better discourse about the body is to liberate people to be the image of God they are. This includes the destruction of these “isms” as well as encouraging positive self-affirmation. It is the goal of all liberation theology to create space for each human being to be whole and fulfilled. I believe that when we liberate individuals we liberate the Spirit to better dwell among us. This project is a result of my learning from liberation theologies and an attempt to contribute something to the discourse.

Stephanie Mitchem describes liberation theologies as reactions against prevalent Western-focused traditional theology and its universals. She claims that the domination of Christian theology by Western tradition has led to the development and establishment of “correct” theological methods as well as the promotion of cultural domination by Christianity. Liberation theologies present a challenge to the tendencies of traditional theology to (1) make sharp distinctions between body and soul; (2) give preference to the spiritual/mental over the physical; and (3) believe that a universal, one-size-fits-all theology

is possible.²² Liberation theologies argue that there are different perspectives for doing theology because people are different based on their social location, which is often based on their bodily identity. This declaration is a direct questioning of the reality and possibilities of universals for the experience of all people and the theology created for them. Liberation theologians challenge all theologians to recognize and consider their own social location and how it affects their theology. Luis G. Pedraja, a Hispanic theologian, writes that “Marginalized groups and theologies carry qualifiers, such as ‘Hispanic’ theology, while those who are in power simply see their theologies and experiences as universal and thus as the normative or universal expression of theology.”²³ This “normative” expression of theology has been used to subjugate persons and communities. For example, James Cone states that his black theology emerged from his awareness of the weaknesses of white theology. In his study he found white theologians too indifferent to suffering and patient with cruelty, especially concerning blacks. Cone observed a bankruptcy in white American theology because it was and is too tied to oppressive structures and furthers their social, political, and economic interests. White theology led to a wrong ethics that excused and justified slavery and black suffering. This realization led Cone as a black man and black theologian to conclude that the biblical God/Christ cannot be limited to the prejudiced

²² Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 36. She argues that these tendencies are a result of the influence of Greco-Roman philosophical traditions on Western thinking in general and North Atlantic theologies in particular. For other introductions to liberation theology, see Roger A. Badham, *Introduction to Christian Theology: Contemporary North American Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); Miguel A. De La Torre, *Handbook of U.S. Theologies of Liberation* (St Louis: Chalice Pr, 2004); and Alfred T. Hennelly, *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990).

²³ Quoted in Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 38. Originally in Luis Pedraja, *Jesus Is My Uncle: Christology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 25.

interpretations of white scholars. Black theology, Cone contends, must be liberated from white theology for it does not and cannot speak to oppressed blacks.²⁴

Since mainstream theology has been found wanting for oppressed peoples, and thereby for all people, a main focus within liberation theologies is the recovery and restatement of the subjugated strands of human meaning, particularly those of women and people of color.²⁵ Liberation theologies engage people's lives, their histories, and their current political realities. These theologies focus on specific "group" experiences, including both the experience of oppression and the resources and strengths developed to counter this oppression. The history, stories, wisdom, and everyday realities of the community are the basis for the construction of theology. People who were formerly viewed and felt themselves to be outsiders to the closed circles of Western thought began to have a voice and a theology that speaks of and to their particular experience and culture. Theologies of liberation are specific. They are written out of the concrete situations and experiences of particular groups.

Specificity about bodily life and experience is the main subject of this dissertation. I am interested in the meanings ascribed to the specific body categories of race and sex/gender and their affect on how we are and act. I explore feminist and black theologies that argue that how we value bodily attributes, what meaning we give to them, affects not only

²⁴ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 43ff. Cone presents black theology as a more accurate and authentic Christian theology because the black experience witnesses to the same God one finds in the Bible. White scholars are ignorant of this context where God is at work now so they cannot accurately represent Christianity today. Cone contends that the reason white theology misses the mark is because it is not centered on the truth of a liberator God. Early on, Cone was criticized for relying too much on the very system he was criticizing. See Frederick E. Sontag, "Coconut Theology: Is James Cone the 'Uncle Tom' of Black Theology," *Journal of Religious Thought* 36 (Fall-Winter 1979-1980): 5-12, as an example of a criticism of the foundations of Cone's black theology.

²⁵ Feminist theologians have collected the words of Christian women throughout the church's history. An example of this recovery of the past is Amy Oden, ed., *In Her Words: Women's Writings in the History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994). Black theologians have collected the stories and religious thought of enslaved African persons and used them as central sources for their theology. See Dwight N. Hopkins and George C. L. Cummings, eds., *Cut Loose Your Stammering Tongue: Black Theology in the Slave Narratives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

individual identity but the community and its theology. If we value male bodies, feminists argue, we will live in a male-dominated, patriarchal society and church. If we value white skin, black theologians contend, we will live in a white supremacist, racist society and church. Feminist and black theologies have attempted to sharpen our focus on body-persons and experiences that have been historically oppressed and often ignored in theology. They have challenged theologians, mostly white men, to see that these female bodies and black bodies matter; they make a difference in how one experiences life, reads texts, views history, thinks about God; in short, does theology. Because of their focus on the experience of being raced and sexed/gendered, I rely heavily on the work of feminist and black theologians to explore these body categories.

It must be clear from the beginning that there is not one or *a* black or feminist theology or even one way of doing either and I do not approach them as such. In fact, I chose each voice for this dissertation to represent a different approach to race and sex/gender, very consciously exposing the differences within each of these theological discourses. However, all black theologies and likewise all feminist theologies have shared historical roots. Black theology traces its history back to the faith and experiences of enslaved Africans in this country. The major catalysts for the emergence and development of black theology as a twentieth century Christian theology are the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement.²⁶ Likewise, feminist theology has its roots in the movements for

²⁶ The modern Civil Rights Movement began on December 1, 1955, with Rosa Parks's calculated refusal to give up her seat and move to the back of the bus. This Christian nonviolent movement was led by the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. Many young black pastors and ministers were affected by this movement and their theology was formed out in the streets struggling and fighting for justice. Following the example of King, they took the Christian gospel of Jesus Christ and applied it to the black experience. The Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s arose out of the Civil Rights Movement and can be said to have begun with Stokely Carmichael's call for black power during a civil rights march in Greenwood, MS, on June 16, 1966. The cry was for the power blacks deserved, not integration into the white world and white values. There was a recognition that freedom and justice for the black community would have to be wrested from white oppressors.

women's suffrage and later in the fight for Equal Rights for women.²⁷ Both theological movements began in the disenfranchisement of persons based on their bodily identity.

The question of how to approach race and sex/gender and what their meanings should be has always elicited a wide variety of responses from theologians in both discourses. Some feminists have continued to maintain that sex and gender are essentialist categories and that "woman" is indeed a term that can be used without further description. Some of these scholars have declared Christianity irredeemably sexist and have worked to develop

Members of the Black Power Movement were determined this would be achieved by and through whatever means were necessary. Malcolm X preached the right of self-identity and self-determination. He called on all blacks to love themselves and stop equating positive with white. For more on both of these movements and their leaders, see James H. Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991). A third catalyst for the emergence of black theology was the 1964 publication of and subsequent reaction to Joseph Washington, *Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984). In this work, Washington argues that although blacks have a unique culture, their religion and theology are merely folk religion and folk theology because black churches are not genuine Christian churches. Genuine Christianity is found only in white churches since they embody the faith, tradition, and church structure handed down through the centuries in Western Europe. He maintained that a religion of justice, even one based on the justice of Jesus, did not qualify as faith and therefore was not a proper foundation for Christian theology. Since blacks had been excluded from the genuine Christianity of white churches, the goal should be to rejoin them. Black theology arose partly to refute this charge. Black clergy began to create a theology for black people fighting for liberation that stated quite clearly that Christianity and the God it worshipped were centrally interested in justice. For more on the catalysts of black theology, see Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 28-41; and Diana L. Hayes, *And Still We Rise: An Introduction to Black Liberation Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 53-78.

²⁷ Both religious and secular feminism can be divided into three waves. The first wave began in the 1830s and called for the legal and economic equality of women with men in the United States. U.S. women challenged the inferior status of women as part of their participation in the pre-Civil War abolitionist movement. The Female Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1833, connected the oppression of slaves with the subordination of women. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) brought attention to the ways the Bible contributed to the subordination of women and to a biblical commentary by first wave feminists called *The Woman's Bible*. First wave feminism paved the way for the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920, which gave women the right to vote. This achievement, however, virtually ended the feminist movement at that time. In the 1960s and 1970s a second wave of feminism broadened its call for the political and economic equality of women with men. In conjunction with the civil rights struggles of African Americans, feminists sought civil rights for women. This second wave was launched by the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 and was supported by the National Organization of Women, founded in 1966. Second wave feminist theology was initiated by Euro-American women who pursued advanced degrees in theology for the first time and brought attention to the shortcomings of the "maleness" of Christian theology. The third wave of feminism began in the late 1970s and has drawn attention to the differences in race and social class of women. Women of color, such as bell hooks, exposed the whiteness of second wave feminism and called on all women to recognize the importance of social location for all people. This new development in feminism has expanded its goal from the equality of women with men to a recreation of all humanity according to right relations. For more on the historical roots of feminist theology, see Anne M. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: 2001), 9-28.

theologies and language that are woman focused. Others have worked to revalue the place and status of women within the Christian tradition. Some feminist theologians would agree that the categorization of sex and gender is natural but argue not essential. These theologians temporarily focus on this categorization in order to one day focus on our shared humanity rather than bodily divisions. Still other feminist theologians recognize the problem of using the term “woman” unreflectively; but still consider it an important political and theological category. They recognize that those struggling for the end of racism do not agree that patriarchy is the most foundational evil in our country or church.²⁸

There are corresponding trends in black theology concerning the challenge to race as a body category. Some have argued that being physically black has become essential to how one lives in the world and therefore they have called for Black Nationalism and separatism. Others understand the goal of black theology as a work of liberation and reconciliation so that we focus our attention on our shared humanity rather than racial divisions.²⁹ All black

²⁸ Anne Clifford argues that the different types of feminism are the result of different experiences of patriarchy and androcentrism and lead to different ways of analyzing its causes and remedies. She relies on Maria Riley’s mapping of the feminist terrain and applies these to the discipline of feminist theology. These differentiations are most applicable to second wave feminism. Riley identifies four major types of feminism of the second wave. First, liberal feminism emphasizes civil rights and seeks the full equality of women with men in all facets of societal life. Second, cultural feminism, also called “romantic feminism” and “reform feminism,” emphasizes the moral superiority of women and traditional feminine values and seeks the betterment of society by stressing the contributions made by women. Third, radical feminism emphasizes the pervasiveness of male domination and the importance of “women-centered culture” and seeks to eliminate patriarchy in order to liberate women from male control in every facet of life. The fourth and final type is socialist feminism, which emphasizes white male dominance in the economic class struggles of capitalist societies and seeks to end the economic dependence of women on men and to achieve major social reforms that will end class divisions. Clifford connects revolutionary feminist theology with radical feminism. These theologians can be described as post-Christian since they believe Christianity is irredeemably patriarchal, even anti-woman. Carol Christ, Mary Daly, and Christine Downing are revolutionary or radical feminists. Clifford associates reformist feminist theology with cultural feminism. This form of feminist theology does not wish for a totally revolutionized Christianity but rather a more egalitarian one that involves women more. I would classify Elizabeth Johnson as a reformist feminist theologian. Clifford’s third category of feminist theology is reconstructionist. Although it shares with reformist feminist theology a commitment to Christianity, it calls for a deeper transformation and reconstruction of Christianity and its structures. Included in this category are Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether. See Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 32-38.

²⁹ Dwight Hopkins divides black theology into first and second generations. The first generation is further delineated into political and cultural theologians. He defines political theologians as those claiming a

theologians continue to maintain race as a legitimate and currently important theme for Christian theology and its work of liberation. Other voices have challenged black scholars to move away from understanding race as central to identity. They argue that racial categories are themselves becoming limiting and non-liberating for people who find they fit less and less comfortably within the boxes of “black” and “white.”³⁰

Both black theology and feminist theology came under criticism for their exclusive focus on one aspect of bodily identity. Since black theology was done mostly by black men, they were concerned with the problems race presented them since their sex was not problematic. Feminist theology was done mostly by white women who did not have problems with their race but focused on the problems their sex/gender caused them. What neither saw was their own exclusive approach to theology. Black women challenged both white women and black men to see that black female bodies experience a different womanhood and blackness. Womanists have challenged the sexism and racism found in the

theological mandate for political activism for the full empowerment of black people. Included in this group is James Cone who understands race as basic to how we live and think in this country and calls for a general liberation from whiteness. Another political theologian is J. Deotis Roberts who understands blackness as a symbolic reality in our society and believes there must be room for both a black and white Christ in Christianity. However, he hopes Christians can go beyond color to worship a colorless Christ and achieve true reconciliation between whites and blacks as equals. Hopkins also includes Albert Cleage in this division of black theology. Cleage was the leader of the Black Christian Nationalism Movement who advocated black separation from the white world and a development of an independent church. Hopkins’ second category of first generation theology includes cultural theologians Gayraud Wilmore and Charles Long who called on black theology to be in touch with the African American cultural context. Open to both secular and non-Christian sources, cultural theologians uncover and create black religious thought and language based in the American black community and its cultural ties with Africa. Blackness in the U.S. is a cultural construct that does not exhaust African American identity but also cannot be ignored. Second generation black theologians extended black theology’s scope to include the place of women and the role of class in the creation of black theology. See Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*, 49-124. For a classification and criticism of methodological perspectives in the academic study, interpretation, and construction of black theology in the United States, see Frederick L. Ware, *Methodologies of Black Theology* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002). Ware classifies black theologies as belonging to a hermeneutical school, philosophical school, or human sciences school. All avenues of black theology are involved in the on-going task of identity formation and the challenge of defining blackness amid its positive and negative realities.

³⁰ See Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1995); and Alistair Kee, *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), which question the usefulness of the category of race for theology. These texts are part of my analysis of race in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

black and feminist political movements. They argue that black male theologians do not adequately interrogate the patriarchal moorings of traditional Christian language about God and humanity. Womanist writers have also exposed the racism of both secular and theological white feminism. Womanists criticize feminists for being too focused on sexism as the sole oppression in society and church. Womanists argue that the experience of black women is different from that of white women. They cannot stand exclusively with white women against sexism because they must stand with black men against racism. They argue that neither white women nor black men can speak for black women; they stand at the intersection of racism and sexism. Womanist theologians are concerned with the unique position of black women's bodies. From this unique position, they challenge liberation theologians to fight against oppression in all its forms. Their critique of both black and feminist theologies has led to a more complex conversation about the body and theological reflection that brings race and sex/gender together. The inclusion of all three of these theological specializations in this project brings attention to the complexity and importance of the body in life and religion.

My investigation of and attention to black, feminist, and womanist theologies helps create better overall theological discourse about race and sex/gender, but there are limitations to the use of these sources. First, race is not just about being black or white. Black theology does not concern itself with race *per se* but with a specific race, namely African American people. This focus on race as black and white may seem to be a limitation for my bigger project of thinking about the body as symbol. I recognize that not all people identify as being white or black, but in the United States racial categories began and have been deeply affected

by the black/white divide.³¹ In addition, dealing with race in a theological context means addressing a genre of theology that reflects on the experience of a particular community of people for whom their particular race is a consciously important aspect of life. Each genre of theology begins with this community's experience of race not race in general. To talk about race in theology in general terms would be to address multiple genres of theology, which would make this project unwieldy. However, the ideas and conclusions from this project translate to such a wider analysis of race, at least in theology. My method of addressing the materiality of the body as symbol calls for inclusion of all the specifics of the body into theological conversation, including the particularities of each person's racial identity and struggles. In this way theological analysis of race broadens to include those beyond the black-white paradigm.

The specific focus of each liberation theology is both its strength and one of its limitations. All of these theologies are based on the experience of those people who fit within the bodily parameters of the theology's focus: black theology was for and by black people, supposedly both men and women; feminist theology was by and for women, supposedly white women and women of color; and womanist theology was by and for black women. Because these theologies begin and focus on the experiences of specifically defined

³¹ Michael Omi contends that how we think about, engage, and politically mobilize around racial issues have been fundamentally shaped by a prevailing "black-white" paradigm of race relations and that such biracial theorizing misses the complex nature of race relations in post-Civil Rights Movement America. One of the main challenges to this paradigm of race relations is that demographically the nation is becoming less white. The massive influx of new immigrant groups has destabilized specific concepts of race, led to a proliferation of identity positions, and challenged prevailing modes of political and cultural organization. Omi recognizes the consequences of trying to get beyond the black-white paradigm. On the one hand, he does not wish to displace or decenter the black experience, which continues to define the fundamental contours of race and racism in our society. On the other hand, he suggests that the prevailing black-white model tends to marginalize, if not ignore, the experiences, needs, and political claims of other racialized groups. He proposes that the challenge is to frame an appropriate language and analysis to help us understand the shifting dynamic of race that all groups are implicated in. See Michael A. Omi, "The Changing Meaning of Race," in *America Becoming: Racist Trends and Their Consequences*, vol. 1, eds. Neil J. Smelser, William Julius Wilson, and Faith Mitchell (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2001), 245, 250.

groups, there is not much room for overlap. Even though womanists have critiqued both black and feminist theologians for too narrowly defining identity under the categories of race and sex/gender, their primary concern is also on a specific and delineated group of persons, namely black/African American women. There was and is the challenge among the theologies to respect and respond to the reality of those whose bodily identities and lived realities were and are different. But thinking about race and gender as problematic and/or oppressive realities one must experience to understand creates a problem for men wanting to talk about gender and whites wanting to deal with race. Discussion and debate has arisen on how one talks about an oppression one has not experienced.³² Using experience as central has become divisive even in attempts to unite people with the same body categories, such as women or blacks.³³ Narrowly focusing on these realities has also led to an isolation of these discourses from mainstream theology. It is argued for example that black theology is strictly for blacks and feminist theology is strictly for women even though both are advocating a change in how theology is done in general. Not everyone thinks about the(ir) body as

³² For more on appropriation and reciprocity in theology, see Katie Cannon, "Appropriation and Reciprocity in the Doing of Womanist Ethics," in *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 129-35; and "Appropriation and Reciprocity," pt. 5 of *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Judith Plaskow, eds., "Appropriation and Reciprocity in Womanist/Mujerista/Feminist Work," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 8 (Fall 1992): 91-122; and Deanna A. Thompson, "Teaching What I'm Not: Embodiment, Race, and Theological Conversation in the Classroom," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 3 (October 2000): 164-69.

³³ This division is at the heart of third wave feminism and feminist theology. For an exploration of the use of women's experience in feminist theological discourse, see Sheila Greeve Davaney, "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience," in *Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture*, eds. Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan, and Margaret R. Miles (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1987), 31-49; Ann Elizabeth O'Hara Graff, "The Struggle to Name Women's Experience: Assessment and Implications for Theological Construction," *Horizons* 20 (Fall 1993): 215-33; Loraine MacKenzie Shepherd, "The Deceptive Monolith of Women's Experience: Struggling for Common Feminist Visions Amidst Diversity," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 11 (Fall 1995): 151-64; Linda Hogan, *From Women's Experience to Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Serene Jones, "Women's Experience Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Theologies in North America," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms*, eds. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 33-54; and Jennifer Beste, "Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experiences Reconsidered," *Horizons* 33 (Spring 2006): 54-77.

problematic. Pauli Murray has also argued that the particularization of these liberation theologies can stifle self-criticism, lead to isolation and frustration, and can develop into myopia.³⁴

Another critique of these liberation theologies is that they also essentialize bodies. Feminist and black theologians have been criticized for their own exclusionary, limited, and limiting categorization of bodies. Womanist theologians have critiqued feminist theologies that do not consider race as a divisive aspect within the feminist movement. These same theologians have also critiqued black theologies for not recognizing the sexist aspects of black theology and the black church. Some womanists in turn have been criticized by black lesbian women who do not find sexual orientation to be a prominent part of womanist discourse about oppressed bodies. All of these theologies are being challenged to find room in their discussion of bodies for social location and class structures. Challenged to face their own exclusionary beliefs and practices, these theologies are beginning to address new questions and different approaches to bodily identity. Groups based on bodily categorization are being challenged to face their own diverse reality. No one is ever just raced or sexed/gendered but always both. In addition, our individual identity is defined by many other identity markers as well. Focus on community can neglect the individual but an exclusive focus on the individual can lose sight of how people are community.

Contemporary theory challenges liberation theologies to recognize that the very categories of race and sex/gender, such as black and white and woman and man, continuously fragment. The postmodern subject is a complex entity not easily defined with simple categories. However, we cannot simply discard such categories for they do have

³⁴ Pauli Murray, "Black Theology and Feminist Theology: A Comparative View," *Anglican Theological Review* 60 (January 1978): 22.

meaning both historically and in the present struggle of people for liberation. Liberation theologies must recognize that liberation today may mean not only liberation of the group from oppression and discrimination in general but also the liberation of the individual from the group. I contend that any theological approach to the body must address it in its constructed group reality as well as in its individuality. I utilize additional sources to focus on these two aspects of the body.

Contemporary social theory is reevaluating the very categories at the heart of liberation theologies. Theorists outside of theology contend with how to categorize and ascribe meaning to the body. These theorists challenge essentialist theories about the body and use the tools of philosophy, sociology, law, and language to examine the complexity of body categorization. Critical race theorists wrestle with the questions of what race is, how it came to be meaningful for our identity, and what the current meanings of race are. As North Americans, we must be attentive to how the experience of colonialism, the African slave trade, as well as centuries of slavery and segregation have affected our notions of race. Race theory in general challenged me to see the changing meaning of the body.³⁵ Gender theory in general challenged me to see the level to which the body can be thought of as a social construction. Gender theorists struggle with the meaning and naturalness of gender and sexual differences for identity and the organization of society.³⁶

Some theologians hesitate to dialogue and/or incorporate these contemporary theories into their theological discourse. Some theologians fear that many “postmodern” theories lead

³⁵ David Theo Goldberg is one theorist who explores the historical development of the meaning of race. He argues that race is not a natural category but a development of modernity and the experience of colonialism. Race, according to Goldberg, is written into the fabric of life in this country and far from being irrational racisms are highly developed theoretical notions. David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993); and *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

³⁶ For a discussion about approaches to gender theory among the top thinkers in the field, see Seyla Benhabib et al., *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

to relativism and provide no basis for community or individual agency to exact change. They also fear that the loss of categorizations such as “woman” or “black” will undermine their progress toward the liberation of people who self-identify with these categories. Therefore, they continue to use language about the body that maintains dualistic overtones such as “man” and “woman” and “black” and “white.” It is a question whether this dualist language will in the end prove more harmful to their causes of liberation than what contemporary theories have to offer. I believe that critical liberation theologians are increasingly aware of the complexity of categorizing the body for analysis or political action in society and church. While studying the theologies of select liberation theologians, I recognized a shift occurring in their thought from reflection on body categories as natural/ontological/ahistorical to a greater appreciation of race, sex/gender, and sexuality as culturally, including religiously, constructed realities. There is an increasing number of theologians who do address contemporary theory about the body in their work.³⁷ Many, like me, are recognizing that contemporary theory has something important to offer theology and is not contradictory to its goals of love and unity.

I incorporate contemporary theory to help me think more deeply about the constructedness of the body; but this is not all there is to the body. In order to reflect on the individuality of body-persons, I incorporate sources that reflect both on how various social constructions come together to create unique identity within any group as well as how individuals express uniqueness in their own person. I turn to the work of Karl Rahner to

³⁷ For investigations of the concerns and themes of contemporary theory and reflections on its potential for theological explorations in various liberation theologies, see C.W. Maggie Kim, Susan M. St. Valle, and Susan M. Simonaitis, eds., *Transfigurations: Theology & French Feminists* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Lisa Isherwood and Kathleen McPhillips, eds., *Post-Christian Feminisms: A Critical Approach* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub., 2008); David B. Batstone et al., eds., *Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity, and the Americas* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Floyd-Thomas, ed., *Deeper Shades of Purple*.

reflect on the individuality of each body-person from a theological perspective. Rahner's work began my own thinking about the body as symbol and I use his theological reflection to flesh out this aspect of the body as expression. Starting with his theological reflections on the Trinity to his Christological considerations, Rahner's work explores how symbols express uniqueness and individuality of being.³⁸ His application of the concept of symbol to the human body is illuminating but not the definitive way of theologizing about the body. No one source is *the* key to a theological approach to the body that is concerned with the complexity of bodily identity in terms of race and sex/gender. Discourses must be brought together. Dialogue is beginning to happen with the growing awareness that all oppression is interrelated and that the body categorizations it produces are intersecting and multilayered. I bring the conversations about race and sex/gender together with theoretical and theological approaches to the body to propose a theology of the body that incorporates many voices.

I approach each source as an approach to the body that flows from the thinker's method and corresponds to their goals for body-persons. I explore how they challenge or defend traditional notions about the body in terms of race, sex/gender, and sexuality and what tools they offer to expand how we have conversation about the body in theology. I propose how these discourses can be brought together to create a Christian approach to the body that respects individuality and communal connectedness. Specific voices are not being used to represent all black, feminist and womanist theologies. Nor are they being explored in their entirety. Each source is used as an example of a different approach to and theory about sex/gender, race, and the body in general. I bring theory and theology together in an approach to physical and personal identity that respects individuality, acknowledges

³⁸ See Chapter 5 of this dissertation for bibliographic references to Rahner's work.

constructs, calls for community, and invites all theology to know the wisdom of liberation theology.

I consider this project a contribution to the conversation of liberation theologies as well as theological anthropology in general. My basic premise is that an analysis of the categories of sex/gender and race is crucial for both liberation theology and theological anthropology. Bodily categorization is intimately connected to racism and sexism so we must analyze race to combat racism and sex/gender to combat sexism. These conversations in turn must be brought into mainstream, traditional theology since everyone is working with a theory of race and sex/gender whether they know it or not and it affects their theology. Only by exposing these theories can theologians have better discourse about human materiality, identity, and community. My investigation of liberation theologies and their theories of sex/gender and race leads to my proposal of the body as symbol, which respects the specificity of the body in liberation theology and a more general Catholic appreciation of human materiality.

V. PROJECT OUTLINE

This chapter has laid out the problems that are addressed in this dissertation and how I address them. Theology needs better tools in order to engage in more in-depth conversations about sex/gender and race. These conversations cannot be isolated from each other or mainstream theological thinking about anthropology. My goals are to map theories of sex/gender and race for better discourse about these body categories using the concept of construction to organize the theories and to bring these separate discourses together for theological anthropology. It is my argument that thinking about the body as symbol creates

more sophisticated discourse about race and sex/gender in theology and brings them together for and in theological anthropology. Part I of this dissertation will analyze various theories of sex/gender and race in theology. Part II will explain my proposal to bring them together for theological anthropology.

Part I introduces the reader to gender and race theory before outlining various theories of sex/gender and race found in theology. Using construction as an organizing principle, I map various theories about race and sex/gender, analyzing key differences, emphases, and how these theories intersect with other important theological concepts such as ontology, truth, methodology, philosophy, historical perspective, rhetorical and political goals, understandings of language, subjectivity, personhood, and community, as well as theological themes such as Christology, ecclesiology, biblical interpretation, sin, and redemption. The maps of sex/gender and race theories serve as tools for clarification of these theories and a template on which theologians can plot their own theories. In mapping various theories of the materiality of the body, they are shown to exist in multiple ways. These theories are explored within an overall concern for the liberation of bodies from oppression based on bodily categories and as building blocks for a theology of the body that keeps sex/gender and race as central concerns.

Chapter 2 explores theories of sex/gender according to how each theory explains the level of construction of bodily materiality in terms of sex and gender. Theologians and theorists disagree about the level of constructedness of the body in terms of sex and gender with opinions ranging from no construction to total construction. Theories are explored that explain sex and gender as ontological and transcendent categories of identity, that understand the dual sex of humanity as natural but how sex is gendered as constructed, that view

sex/gender as constructed for rhetorical and political reasons, and that understand all aspects of bodily identity as constructed in time and space. Sex and gender are exposed as multivalent concepts with differing relationships between the two depending on the theory in question. This chapter is an exploration of how theology can bring together very different ideas about the meaning of sex and gender into one conversation. Central to this conversation about sex/gender and resulting sexualities is the notion that the meaning of bodies is based on language and power and a deeper understanding of one's notions of language and power explains much about one's notions of bodily identity. How each theologian and theorist understands the very idea of construction expounds their theory of sex/gender more deeply. Each theory of sex/gender is also dependent on the theologian's methodological starting point as well as their theological goals. This chapter explores how theories of sex/gender are central to theological discourse.

Chapter 3 continues to use construction as an organizing principle to explore theories about bodily materiality, but shifts its focus from the level of bodily constructedness to the meaning of materiality once it is accepted as a construction. Outside of white supremacist writing, race is rarely thought to be a biological or "natural" category of human persons. It is understood to be a social construction invented in time and place. The meaning assigned to this construction varies from an essential aspect of identity that needs to constantly be taken into consideration to an illusion that must be jettisoned from descriptions of human identity. I explore five different meanings of race. Race as essence presents race as central to our sense of self and for our living. Approaching race as historical legacy considers the history of the concept; how race has been thought of in the past and how these past interpretations influence how we think about it today. Understanding race as culture or community

considers race as the worldview we receive from the community that has shaped us. The fourth consideration of race reflects on how economic systems influence the meanings we assign to race. The approach to race as illusion contends that race is losing its meaning. This approach shifts focus from the community to the individual and asserts that to beat racism we must transcend race. This chapter highlights the fact that race does not mean one thing to everyone even if we limit our conversation of race to black/African American and white/Caucasian. Race is an amorphous concept. The body reveals itself as historical; its meaning shifting over time. Its meaning reflects its time and context as well as the ideas applied to it by its interpreter. The same body means different things to different people.

Part II of this project explores the problem of bringing the study of sex/gender and race together in theological anthropology. It presents some of the challenges of bringing them together in theology and a tool that addresses these challenges. Chapter 4 investigates womanist theology as a discourse that brings together race and sex/gender. Womanist scholarship calls attention to the fact all body-persons are both and always raced and sexed/gendered, and the reality that these identities interact and change each other. The specifics of these interactions and their outcomes are unique to different communities and to different individuals. Any community's identity fragments and diversifies with the influence of additional factors such as class and sexuality, highlighting the uniqueness of individuals within the community. Womanist theologians explore the body in terms of identity being a complex phenomenon. They investigate African American female identity in terms of the interaction of sex/gender, race, class, and sexuality, recognizing that identity is formed within matrices of oppression. Because of the uniqueness of identity for both communities and individuals, womanist scholars challenge theologians to attend to both communal and

individual discourses that contribute to determining identity for body-persons. Communities construct counter-discourses that self-define their members, usually in a positive way. The literature and culture of the community are the loci in which these discourses are found. Individual discourses include the unique manner in which body-persons express the concepts of race and sex/gender as well as the uniqueness of each subject. These discourses are only learned through attention to specific life stories. Womanist discourse has much to teach theologians about bodily identity and the interaction of race and sex/gender; but its focus remains on the experience of specific identity constructions, namely African American women. Womanist discourse is concerned with particular bodies.

Chapter 5 presents my proposal for a theological approach to the body that keeps sex/gender and race central. This tool is based on what I have learned from my investigation of race and sex/gender in theology and theory. My approach to the body as symbol incorporates both an analysis of bodily identity through the lens of construction and a consideration of bodily identity as the expression of both communal and individual discourses. The body as construction is a useful tool since it can organize and map theories of sex/gender and race and disclose how and why they differ, but it is limited in that it loses sight of the individual aspect of the body. The body as expression is a useful tool since it recognizes there are always counter-discourses in the construction of the body and an individuality to each body, but it is limited in that it loses sight of the social aspect of the body. Any theological approach to the body must balance construction and expression. With the theological concept of symbol, theology has a tool that enables such an approach to the body-person.

Chapter 5 begins with an investigation of the notion of symbol in general and how it has been and can be applied to the body in order for theological anthropology to better address the identity concepts of race and sex/gender. Symbol is a theological concept that brings together ideas teased out in the previous chapters. Symbols are multivalent, allowing for different understandings of what is being symbolized and how, and are contextual and shifting. There is precedent for thinking about the body as symbol in theology and theory. Karl Rahner's theology of the symbol focuses on the uniqueness of each person and how the body expresses this. His work is important for how it illustrates the importance of the body as symbol for all of theology. His approach to the body is limited, however, as it does not spend ample attention on the body as social. This aspect of the body is more fully explored in philosophical, anthropological, and sociological approaches to the body as symbol. These disciplines investigate how the body is a construction and central to how life is lived and understood, but are limited in their lack of attention to the individuality of each body-person. My tool of the body as symbol incorporates both aspects of the body as construction and as expression. I argue that this tool can allow for better discourse about sex/gender and race in mainstream theological anthropology. It highlights the varied realities and theories of race and sex/gender and brings them together as central to discourse about the body. Although my purpose in this project is to focus on the concepts of race and sex/gender for bodily identity, the body as symbol is a tool that invites theologians to explore other identity concepts as well.

VI. USE OF LANGUAGE

There are many ideas and concepts about bodily identity explored in this dissertation. It is customary to give an explanation of how one is using terms at the beginning of such a project. However, a major theme of this dissertation is that categories about the body cannot be contained in one definition. They exist as varied realities and therefore have multiple meanings. In general, when I use the term body I mean the materiality of human persons.³⁹ The body includes and encompasses ideas about biology as well as group and individual identity that forms its experience and reality. I use the term body-person to reflect the reality that we are not, nor are we ever, able to refer to mere materiality when the body is invoked. The body is always a person.⁴⁰ Body-persons are categorized according to supposedly physical attributes that are easy to recognize such as skin color and “biological” sexual differences. Body categorization is the way we group people according to physical attributes or categories of materiality. I use the group identity markers black and African American interchangeably to reflect that race has more than one meaning.⁴¹

Since this dissertation takes up the topics of race and sex/gender because of discriminatory practices based on them and the resulting suffering of some based on body categorization, let me say a few words about the “isms” that follow from bodily identity. I will not address racism and sexism directly but work toward their elimination with closer

³⁹ For further explorations of the concept of the body, see William R. Lafleur, “Body,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 36-54; Jörg Splett, “Body,” in *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. 1, ed. Karl Rahner et al (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971), 233-35; Richard H. Roberts, “Body,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 213-28; Donn Welton, ed., *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

⁴⁰ The meaning of person is contested. See Charles E. Winquist, “Person,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, 225-38. When I invoke the term here I mean an individual instance of the *imago Dei* that inhabits both a social context and encompasses a deep mystery.

⁴¹ Some authors make a distinction between black and African American depending on the heritage of the person or group in question.

attention to the concepts of race and sex/gender. I enlist sociologist Graham Kinloch's definition of racism and expand it to cover sexism as well. He writes that racism is "uncritical acceptance (through socialization) of a negative social definition of a group identified as a race [or sex/gender] on perceived physical grounds along with the legitimacy of the discriminatory treatment accompanying that definition."⁴² This discriminatory treatment includes both individual and structural practices. It is my project to help us avoid such "uncritical acceptance" of these identifications through a more attentive approach to the categories that create group identities.

Being attentive to the history and language of body categorizations means recognizing that the concepts of race and sex/gender shift and change over time. For example, sex has meant the anatomical difference [in reproductive systems] between females and males and gender the set of social roles, symbolic functions, and so on, that are assigned to this difference.⁴³ This distinction is very much contested now. The ambiguity is evident in scholarly discourse as well as everyday use. Gender and sex are often used interchangeably, for example, when one asks the gender of a newly born child. Although I use the terms masculine and feminine to refer to traditional notions of gender as the tendencies of persons within specific sexes, some of the authors I use do not make such a distinction and use masculine and feminine, man and woman, and male and female interchangeably. I employ the term sex/gender to reflect that there is debate about the meanings of sex and gender and their relationship to each other and the fact that they are

⁴² Graham C. Kinloch, *The Dynamics of Race Relations: A Sociological Analysis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1974), 54.

⁴³ Daniel Boyarin, "Gender," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, 117. See also Mary Ann Tolbert, "Gender," in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 99-105.

always in relationship to each other so both must be considered in our analysis of body categories. Sexuality is intimately related to both of these categories. I do not mean sexuality when I use the term sex. Sexuality is how and with whom one has intimate/sexual relationships and involves the concepts of heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and so on. This is not a central focus of this dissertation but because it is very much connected to race and sex/gender it will arise throughout the project.

I introduce the reader to not only theories of sex/gender and race in theology but also gender theory and race theory. These introductions are meant to be just that. I have chosen theorists who present main ideas and central questions for gender and race theory recognizing that they are just one voice in these larger disciplines. I also present black feminist theory as a basis for womanist theology, recognizing the debate between black feminists and womanists concerning the best self-naming for black female scholars.⁴⁴ Some of these theorists embrace a more modern approach to the body while others self-identify as

⁴⁴ Black women in some disciplines are more likely to designate themselves black feminists rather than womanists because of a longer development in these disciplines. Black women scholars in ethics and theology, however, are more likely to identify themselves as womanists. These lines of demarcation are not set and black feminists and womanists share in the commitment to analyze and deconstruct at least race, gender, and class constructions from the perspective of African American women. The term womanist originates in the work of Alice Walker, most notably in *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden*. Walker locates the term within the black female community; uses it to describe such a black woman's relationships with other women, men, her community, and the world; describes a womanist's loves; and situates womanism in relationship to feminism. Those scholars who advocate for the term black feminism contend that black women's thought and activism is better connected to the global feminist agenda. It both broadens this agenda and disrupts feminism's racism. African American women scholars who embrace the term womanist contend that the feminist movement has been a white movement and argue that the term womanist better respects their connection to the whole African American community. Perhaps most importantly, womanists claim that this way of self-naming makes clear that at the forefront of their thought is the concrete experience of black women. This distinguishes them from both white feminists and black male scholars. Many womanist scholars adopt the name because it feels right to them; it fits. See Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi-xii, for Walker's definition of womanism; Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 63-68, for an exploration of the debates between black feminists and womanists; "Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5 (Fall 1989): 83-112, for a roundtable discussion about the adoption of the term womanist for theology; and Joy James, *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), for a mapping of a range of black feminisms.

postmodern scholars. Postmodernism is another ambiguous term. As Colin Campbell writes,

Postmodernism is an exceptionally difficult phenomenon to pin down...As Alex Callinicos has suggested, the term is certainly something of a “floating signifier” and consequently, in Tom Docherty’s words, “hovers uncertainly in most current writings between a difficult philosophical concept and simplistic notion of a certain nihilistic tendency in contemporary culture.” When first used, the term did have a largely accepted and determinate meaning, but it has since become “an irredeemably contested concept.”⁴⁵

A definitive definition of postmodernism is not necessary for this project, but my work attends to what Campbell calls North American postmodernism, which includes movements that aim to change some aspect of culture because the orthodoxy of “modernity” oppresses their members in some way. These movements are usually named “identity politics” and critique the universalism of human identity embraced by modern discourse.⁴⁶

I need to address two final notes about language in this dissertation. I use the pronoun “their” rather than “he or she” to refer back to “person” or “one.” This seeming lack of agreement is my intention. It reflects the fact that the duality of sex has become problematic and I do not want to use language that simply enforces this duality. I want the reader to take note of the tension inherent in discourse about sex/gender. Finally, I will use women’s full last names reflecting before and after marriage with before first whether hyphenated or not. This use reflects the dissertation’s concern with self-naming within such constructs as heterosexual marriage.

⁴⁵ Colin Campbell, “Modernity and Postmodernity,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 311.

⁴⁶ Campbell, “Modernity and Postmodernity,” 315.

VII. CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an introduction to my project, its presuppositions, argument, method, and sources. Given the obvious relevance and importance of the body in its specificity of sex/gender and race for theological study, theologians need tools to help those outside of specialized sex/gender and race discourses to incorporate an adequate analysis of the body into their theology. I am proposing a tool that helps theologians think about sex/gender and race in a way that embraces the complexity of these concepts and realities and brings them together for theological anthropology. There are great thinkers out there creating new ways of thinking about the body and I welcome and celebrate their work. I try to embody some of that theory for I find it challenging and exciting, and I believe it could be freeing to many others in their own struggles with identity. This project gives me the opportunity to bring my theological learning to bear on the questions of my life and contribute to a larger conversation intended to alleviate oppressions that body-persons experience. This liberation allows all persons to more fully embody and experience the Spirit of God within and among us.

To claim that the materiality of sex is constructed through a ritualized repetition of norms is hardly a self-evident claim. Indeed, our customary notions of “construction” seem to get in the way of understanding such a claim. For surely bodies live and die; eat and sleep; feel pain, pleasure; endure illness and violence; and these “facts,” one might skeptically proclaim, cannot be dismissed as mere constructions. Surely there must be some kind of necessity that accompanies these primary and irrefutable experiences. And surely there is. But their irrefutability in no way implies what it might mean to affirm them and through what discursive means. Moreover, why is it that what is constructed is understood as an artificial and dispensable character?

Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*¹

CHAPTER 2: SEX/GENDER AND THEOLOGY

I. INTRODUCTION

The first step in my proposal of considering the body as symbol explores how the body is constructed in and by its temporal and spatial location. The concept of construction invites reflection on the degree to which the materiality of the body is established within and by means of social discourse as well as the meaning and significance attributed to identity markers such as sex/gender and race that categorize this materiality. This chapter specifically focuses on the degree of bodily construction by exploring the extent to which the identity categories sex and gender are constructed in different theories of sex/gender. Using construction as an organizing principle illuminates the differences in the theories as well as how each theory flows from and informs the theologian’s or theorist’s method and goals. This investigation into different theories of sex/gender can help theologians better understand their own, perhaps until now unacknowledged, theory of sex/gender and the relevance and significance of a consideration of sex/gender for all theological investigation.

The starting point for any gender theory is the identity categories described as sex and gender. Sex refers here to the materiality of the body usually defined in terms of biology,

¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), x-xi.

which classifies persons as either female or male. Gender indicates how female and male bodies do or should live this dyadic sexual differentiation. Descriptors such as feminine and masculine fall under the domain of gender. Sex/gender written together invites consideration of the relationship of the two and recognizes that both must be considered in any approach to body-persons. A gender theory is an explanation of the meaning and significance of these categories of identity. The work of philosopher Judith Butler is a helpful guide in approaching theories of sex/gender.² Butler maintains that although different discourses set limits to the analysis of gender based on their presuppositions and basic tenets, there are some basic questions that all theories of sex/gender should address.

Gender theories must attend to the very notion of the person and the relationship of the person and their materiality. How does the subject come to be and what is the role of the concepts of sex/gender in this process? Is the person someone embodied, creating a division between the substance of the person and their material reality or is there no such distinction? Is the subject a person who is the bearer of essential and nonessential attributes or do these attributes constitute a subject? These initial questions about the relationship of the person and their materiality lead to more specific questions regarding the relationship between the identity categories of sex and gender. The central issue is whether there is or should be a distinction between sex and gender.³ Is sex to nature as gender is to culture? Is there a precultural, prediscursive “nature” to identity or is “nature” produced? Questions like this disclose varied understandings of ontology underlying different gender theories.

² I rely especially on Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

³ Butler herself makes no distinction between the two but discusses how Lévi-Strauss’ structuralist anthropology with its nature/culture distinction was appropriated by some feminists to create a sex/gender distinction. See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 36-37.

Gender theories begin in the reality that all people are assigned to one of two sexes, and intend to explain whether and why this binary is problematic. This discussion includes reflection on the normativity of heterosexuality, which the binary approach to human living establishes and reinforces. Discussion of sexuality goes hand in hand with discussions of sex and gender since any gender theory will critique sexual practices.⁴ Reflections on heterosexuality and the binary categorization of sex force attention to the very meanings of “female,” “woman,” “male,” and “man.” There is disagreement in gender theory about what does and should constitute these categories. Do they establish an individual’s primary identity or establish cross-cultural constituencies? Butler challenges gender theorists to decide whether “unity” of subject or constituency is a presupposition, a goal, a provisional status around action, or an impossibility. Gender theorists should contend with how other identity markers, such as race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality, intersect with sex/gender. Such an investigation is especially important for feminist liberation theologians because various identity categories have been used to oppress groups of people throughout history. Theories of sex/gender should explore if and how people have been limited by the meaning assigned to their materiality, and if and how our understandings of the categories of sex and gender can and should be changed in order to bring about a fuller life for all body-persons.

The theologians and theorist I include in this chapter have different answers to the questions involved in proposing a gender theory. These differences emerge from their various interpretations of the degree to which the identity categories of sex and gender are socially constructed. The first theory claims that neither sex nor gender are socially

⁴ Butler cites Michel Foucault’s argument that the mode of sexuality in fact constructs the very category of sex. See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 23. Foucault makes this assertion in the closing chapter of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); and in the introduction to *Herculine Barbin, Being the Recently Discovered Journals of a Nineteenth-Century Hermaphrodite*, trans. Richard McDougall (New York: Colophon, 1980).

constructed but have ontological and transcendent meaning outside of any specific social discourse. This first approach to sex/gender is articulated in Pope John Paul II's theology of the body.⁵ The second answer treats sex as an unconstructed biological fact but defines gender as the socially constructed way of living our sexed reality. The second theory finds voice in the ethical approach of Lisa Sowle Cahill. The third approach argues that both sex and gender have been constructed to support a system of oppression; but that some form of these constructions must be maintained in order to overcome this oppression. Biblical theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza explores this third theory. The final consideration of sex/gender in this chapter defines the very materialization of sex and its corresponding articulations of gender as socially constructed phenomena. Philosopher Judith Butler presents this final approach. These authors have been chosen because their work articulates examples of four general theories of sex/gender. The theories themselves are the focus of this chapter, not the specific theologians or theorist chosen to articulate it. My presentation of their work is not meant to be exhaustive nor intended to define their approach to sex/gender once and for all.

⁵ John Paul II is the only theologian included in this chapter that is not a feminist scholar. There is much debate about whether John Paul II's pontificate took a pro- or anti-woman stance, and opinions differ depending on whether one agrees with John Paul that there is some kind of fundamental difference between men and women that does and should affect the living of life. Feminist theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether view John Paul II's pontificate as a time of reactionary backlash in matters having to do with the status of women in the church. See "John Paul II and the Growing Alienation of Women from the Church," in *Church in Anguish: Has the Vatican Betrayed Vatican II?*, eds. Hans Küng and Leonard Swidler (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 279-83. Lisa Sowle Cahill, however, points out that John Paul II has defended the equality and rights of women in the family and in society to an extent far exceeding the teaching of previous pontiffs. See "The Feminist Pope," in *Does Christianity Teach Male Headship?: The Equal-Regard Marriage and Its Critics*, eds. David Blankenhorn, Don Browning, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 40-48. Other women scholars who also understand John Paul to be pro-women have taken up his challenge to build a "new feminism" in Michele Schumacher, ed., *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

II. THEORIES OF SEX/GENDER

No Construction

This first theory of sex/gender claims that neither sex nor gender is constructed in or by their social context. An example of this theory is found in *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* by Pope John Paul II. The body is central in John Paul II's theology.⁶ His exploration of the body does not simply discuss the body in general but addresses its specificity in terms of sex/gender. In *The Theology of the Body*, John Paul II argues that both sex and gender have transcendent and ontological meaning fashioned and intended by God in the original creation for all times. Therefore, John Paul II's method for explaining the body in its sexed/gendered reality is exegesis and commentary on the stories of Genesis.⁷ John Paul II argues that in these stories is revealed the absolute originality and truth of what the male and female human being is. These primordial experiences are treated as the root of every human experience. John Paul II's method for reflection on the body

⁶ In a commentary on John Paul II's theology of the body, Christopher West writes, "The length of this catechesis [*The Theology of the Body*] and its place as the inaugural teaching project of John Paul II's pontificate points to its fundamental significance. In fact, the theological vision detailed in these addresses informs all his subsequent papal teachings. We have not fully penetrated the teachings of John Paul II if we have not penetrated his theology of the body." See Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained: A Commentary on John Paul II's "Gospel of the Body"* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2003), 5.

⁷ The Genesis commentary begins with reference to Matthew 19 and Mark 10 where Jesus is answering questions about the indissolubility of marriage. In his answers, Jesus references "the beginning." John Paul II picks up on this reference and explains how that conversation about marriage has its roots in the creation stories of Genesis. He further explores Genesis with reference to the Gospel story of Mt 5:27-28 and the topic of lust and adultery. John Paul's method is not considered critical biblical scholarship. Although he is in favor of historical critical method, John Paul does not usually employ it because he is more interested in the divine meaning of the text rather than the human meaning. It is widely agreed that John Paul's method of interpreting scripture is meditative and homiletic reflection. His use of the Bible treats it as a unified whole. His biblical reflection on Genesis is not based on a literal reading of these stories. He categorizes the accounts as mythical, not in its meaning of fabulous, but rather as an archaic way of expressing a deeper content. For more on John Paul II's use of scripture, see Charles E. Curran, "John Paul II's Use of Scripture in His Moral Teaching," *Horizon* 31 (Spring 2004): 118-34; Michael Waldstein, trans., *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, by John Paul II (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 18-23; and William S. Kurz, "The Scriptural Foundations of The Theology of the Body," in *Pope John Paul II on the Body: Human, Eucharistic, Ecclesial: Festschrift Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J.*, ed. John M. McDermott and John Gavin (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2007), 27-46.

represents his overall belief that there is something to be known about the body beyond specific historical experiences of it.

John Paul II considers both creation accounts in his development of a theology of the body and what I am calling his gender theory. He understands there to be no contradiction between these accounts but explains them as two ways of exploring the reality and meaning of humanity. The first account, Gn 1:1-2, 4, simply gives the objective facts about the creation of humanity: created male and female; created in the image of God; created to be fruitful and multiply (and fill, subdue, and have dominion over the earth); and seen by God as good. The second account, Gn 2:5-25, has a subjective character and is concerned with humanity's self-knowledge. John Paul II maintains that the subjectivity of this second account corresponds to the objective reality of the first account. Both are significant for his theology of the body and his gender theory but he focuses much more on the second account.

As leader of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II's approach to the body was intended to support and defend the Church's teaching on sexuality, marriage, and family life.⁸ John Paul II's gender theory, explicated from his overall theology of the body, includes the teaching that heterosexuality within monogamous marriage with an openness to reproduction is the only acceptable form of sexuality. According to John Paul II, these are the divine intentions for human bodies found in the scriptures and revealed by the body

⁸ John Paul II addresses the complementarity of women and men in terms of marriage and the family in his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* and his Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*. In addition, his approach to the body supports the teachings of *Humanae Vitae*, which restrict the use of contraception for Catholics and supports the Church's ban on homosexual relationships. For more on John Paul's teaching on sexuality, marriage, and the family, see Janet E. Smith, "Pope John Paul II and Humane Vitae," and John F. Crosby, "The Personalism of John Paul II as the Basis of His Approach to the Teaching of *Humanae Vitae*," in *Why Humanae Vitae was Right: A Reader*, ed. Janet E. Smith (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 229-50, 195-225; Ronald E. Modras, "Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body," in *The Vatican and Homosexuality: Reactions to the "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons,"* ed. Jeannine Gramick and Pat Furey (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 119-25; Richard M. Hogan and John M. LeVoir, *Covenant of Love: Pope John Paul II on Sexuality, Marriage, and Family in the Modern World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992); and Michael J. Wrenn, *Pope John Paul II and the Family* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983).

itself.⁹ The goal of his theology of the body and its gender theory is to explain the true understanding of human life intended by God from the beginning so people can take steps to live this meaning authentically in their lives according to church teachings.

John Paul II's gender theory argues that a fundamental fact of human existence is that at every stage of its history God "created them male and female." He contends that God always creates humanity in this way and that they are always such. For John Paul II, the fact that humanity is divinely intended to be male and female is revealed in the Genesis account of both humanity's original solitude, 'adam alone, and its original unity, the creation of male and female. Humanity's original solitude includes the events from the creation of the first person to the creation of the woman as such (Gn 2:7-2:20). John Paul II starts his theology of the body from a consideration of the human person alone before considering sex as a human marker. He argues that the first human being, 'adam, is not yet specifically sexed/gendered but embodies both male and female humanity.¹⁰ Both male and female participate in the original solitude so that all that is said about the person before the duality of sex is affirmed in both the male and the female after the duality is established.

John Paul II assigns two meanings to original solitude, one about the general meaning of personhood and the other about the necessity of male-female sexual differentiation for this

⁹ John Paul II's exegesis of Genesis, especially Gn 2:24, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh," leads him to conclude that the finality of man's masculinity and femininity is in the life of the spouses-parents, that man and woman are created for marriage. Later in *The Theology of the Body*, John Paul II does address the choice of celibacy in light of these reflections on Genesis. John Paul II describes the choice of celibacy as a "charismatic orientation" toward that eschatological state in which men "Neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Mk 12:25). The same anthropology remains. The person remains "dual" by nature (directed as man toward woman and as woman toward man), but is capable of discovering in their solitude a form of communion. The reciprocal "for" of man and woman can also be at the basis of continence "for" the kingdom of heaven. The person fully rediscovers self through a sincere gift of self totally to Christ. See John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 262-303.

¹⁰ John Paul II notes that it is significant that the first man ('adam), created from "dust from the ground," is defined as a "male" ('is) only after the creation of the first woman. The bible calls the first human being "man" ('adam), but from the moment of the creation of the first woman, it begins to call him "man" (ish), in relation to ishshah ("woman," because she was taken from the man – ish). John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, 30, 35.

personhood. By means of the body ‘*adam* moves out into the world in a search for identity. In original solitude, the human being realizes through the body that they are different from the other creatures and alone. The human being discovers their own superiority to the other creatures in that the human is capable of “tilling” the earth and transforming it according to their own needs. The human way of participating in the visible world, through their body, leads them to the conclusion that they alone are created in the image of God. The experience of the body teaches the human being that they are both beyond the visible world as the image of God, but still of this world as a corporal being. In original solitude, the human being searches for an identity that reflects both of these realities and finds it in the realization of themselves as a person.

As a person, the original human being yearns for communion with another person. John Paul II contends that right from the beginning the human person is moving toward relationship and the overcoming of the frontier of solitude. As the image and likeness of God, the original person represents all humanity and embodies the unity of the male and female. The person recognizes their humanity as male and female and longs for communion between the two with another person. John Paul II argues that humanity requires the dualism of sex, which is fully achieved in the creation of the second person and the sexing and gendering of the first, in order for humanity to overcome its original solitude.

John Paul II maintains that the sleep of the first person which precedes the creation of humanity as male and female is a return to the moment preceding the creation, a return to non-being.¹¹ It is the creation of humanity as male and female which represents the “definitive” creation of humanity as it gives life to that *communio personarum* that man and

¹¹ John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 44.

woman form.¹² He makes special note that in the biblical text, upon awakening, the human person expresses joy in the other person, in the second “self,” and the person recognizes their shared humanity not their difference. This is the “helper fit for him.” John Paul II translates this notion of help to have the meaning of exact correspondence in a way that supports his definition of gender relation(ship)s as complementarity.¹³ In this original unity there is absolute trust and recognition of completeness between the male and female. This original unity affirms everything that constitutes the person in solitude; the communion can only be formed on the basis of double solitude. The Fall interrupts the total trust that is represented by original nakedness in the original unity. The male and female are then divided and opposed to one another rather than united. They become estranged from the body, both their own and the other’s. It is then that the male becomes “husband” and rules over the woman.

John Paul II explains that Genesis reveals that human beings are not meant for the antagonism between the sexes that the Fall brings. Rather, persons are meant for communion and intimacy. He argues that the body calls out for unity in original solitude and in original unity because human beings realize their essence by existing with and for someone. This is the nuptial meaning of the body, which is John Paul II’s central understanding of materiality and the basis of his gender theory. He explains the relationship between man and woman as the quintessential example of this. The original person had to reawaken as two, male and female, to attain this relationship because no *animalia* offered man the possibility to exist in a

¹² John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 45-46. John Paul II maintains the equality of the two sexes. In John Paul II’s theology of the body, these equal but different incarnations of the human as male and female form a *communio personarum*. He explains that *communio* is a better descriptor than community since it underlines the notion of the person “beside” or “for” the other person.

¹³ John Paul II writes that it is difficult to translate the Hebrew expression *cezer kenegdô*. The English is “a helper fit for him.” He maintains the term suggests “complementarity,” or better, of “exact correspondence,” and expresses the reciprocity in existence (because of double solitude), which no other living being could have ensured. John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 96.

relationship of mutual giving.¹⁴ The man and woman gift their masculinity and femininity to each other and in this way come to know their essence. The woman was given by the creator to the man and accepted by the man as a gift the way the Creator wished her to be “for her own sake.” In her continued giving of herself woman rediscovers herself. In receiving the woman as a gift in the full truth of her person and femininity, the man enriches her. Man gives himself in response to woman and is thereby also enriched through the gift of self in his masculinity, which the woman also receives and welcomes, and the mutual relationship is now established.¹⁵ John Paul II writes that this giving and this accepting of the gift interpenetrate, so that the giving itself becomes accepting and the acceptance is transformed into giving. One finds oneself in giving oneself and this “possession of self” becomes the source of a new giving of oneself. It is only in and through the body that this giving and receiving can occur because it is through the body that the human person expresses themselves.

In both original solitude and original unity, human beings are the duality of male and female. In original solitude the person embodies both the male and female as the full image and likeness of God and as the basis for the communion of persons for which the person longs. In original unity the male and female live out their mutuality for each other and reflect the complementary duality at the heart of human being. John Paul II’s analysis of Genesis argues that the two creation stories do not contradict each other but rather give both the objective and subjective meaning of creation. Physical sex, that humanity was created male and female in the beginning, is understood by John Paul II to be both objective and subjective and includes within itself both sex and gender. He reads the creation accounts as

¹⁴ John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

revealing that it is the Creator's decision that the human being should always and only exist as a woman or a man. The reality of two sexes is an objective fact of creation as evidenced in the first creation account. He contends that sex is a constituent part of a person and not merely an attribute as evidenced in the second account. The person is deeply constituted by the body as "he" or "she."¹⁶

The nuptial meaning of the body includes not just sex but also what some would call gender. John Paul II does not separate sex from gender since each biological sex has a corresponding and appropriate gender. He writes that sex decides not only the somatic individuality of man, but defines at the same time his personal identity and concreteness.¹⁷ We live our unique and unrepeatable self within the specificity of our sex/gender. In addition, we are for and with each other in this same specificity. John Paul II contends that femininity finds itself in the presence of masculinity and masculinity is confirmed through femininity.¹⁸ Human life is dependent on what she will be for him and he for her.

Sex/gender in John Paul II's gender theory is the foundation on which human life is built and understood. Sex/gender has been given its meaning by God not human beings. We express ourselves in and through our sex/gender but we do not create or construct the meaning of sex/gender as such. John Paul II's theology of the body is not concerned with specific historical articulations of sex/gender but with their true meaning revealed in the mystery of creation. This true meaning is ontological and transcendent of time and place. The true meaning of the body is beyond any specific articulation of it yet this meaning is present in all articulations. John Paul II recognizes that the sinfulness of historical humanity

¹⁶ John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 49. He writes that the constitution of the woman is different as compared to the man and that we know today that it is different even in the deepest bio-physiological determinants. John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 81.

¹⁷ Ibid., 79.

¹⁸ Ibid., 49.

can distort our understandings of sex/gender but that does not negate that they have true meanings, which is understood in light of scripture and the Church's interpretation of it.¹⁹ The body expresses the divine intention for humanity. The body reveals the unique being willed for their own sake and enables this being to participate in the *communio personarum* willed by the Creator for them, and to live out the nuptial meaning of the body.

Gender Constructed

A second theory of sex/gender states that sex is not a social construction but gender is. Lisa Sowle Cahill's work, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, represents this approach to sex/gender.²⁰ Like John Paul II, Sowle Cahill approaches the body in its specificity of sex/gender as a crucial theological topic. Sex and gender are treated as foundational questions for Sowle Cahill's Christian ethics and considered central to any ethical discourse and a base on which to build this discourse. Sowle Cahill presents the materiality of the body as a cross-cultural point of contact because she understands the differentiation of the human body into the male and female sexes which cooperate for reproduction as a cross-cultural phenomenon that is invariant over time. The sexual differentiation of men and women is given form by cultural institutions such as family and marriage. Gender is this cultural translation of sex, and as such, a socially constructed phenomenon. This approach to sex/gender argues that although people cannot change the reality of sex, they can debate and judge different interpretations of gender and the institutions that give form to them.

¹⁹ John Paul II writes that systematic theology discerns two antithetical situations or two different states of human nature before and after the transgression of Genesis. The former is the state of integral nature and the latter the state of sin in which historical humanity always finds itself. He contends, however, that the reality of historical humanity has its roots in and always references the state of original innocence. There remains continuity between the two because although we are closed to original innocence we are open to the mystery of redemption. John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 31.

²⁰ Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Sowle Cahill employs a theological method she calls critical realism. She presents it as a response to postmodern critique, which she argues cannot make objective moral assessments because it gives equal validity to a plurality of moral foundations and agendas.²¹ Sowle Cahill maintains that ethicists must rediscover or reinvent some account of knowledge, truth, and the “universals” of human experience that is reasonably objective in order to make moral judgments. Her method proposes a modified objectivity that recognizes that culturally relative assumptions are not timeless absolutes and all judgments are potentially revisable. However, normative proposals for human living can be made based on reasonable reflection on human experience within historical existence. She traces her approach to the ethical tradition found in Aquinas’ interpretation of Aristotle. Such a method requires generalizations about human life in order to condemn some moral and cultural practices and promote others. Sowle Cahill proposes the sexed and gendered body as a foundation for these generalizations. Because she describes the human body as such and in its physiology as relatively invariant over time, she can use it as a common point of contact for all people. Two examples of this invariance according to Sowle Cahill are the differentiation of the human race into two sexes and the male-female sexual union to produce children.²²

The goal of Sowle Cahill’s ethical project is to promote human flourishing across cultures. Human flourishing, according to Sowle Cahill, requires equality and compassion, including equality between the sexes. She argues that how sex is socialized into gender can create impediments or possibilities for human flourishing. Therefore, Christian theology

²¹ Sowle Cahill describes the postmodern sensibility as marked by randomness, fragmentation, distrust of all “meta-narratives,” self-irony and irreverence, and countercultural politics. She argues that postmodern thought defines the “foundations” it rejects too narrowly, and therefore can rebut only some understandings of moral objectivity and universality. Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 14, 18.

²² Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 79.

must give careful attention to these socializations. While she acknowledges that modernity played a large part in teaching people to recognize and prize freedom and the equality of persons, she proposes that Christianity can help people mold these values with compassion and solidarity. She admits that the Christian tradition has not gone far enough in implementing and supporting the range of ecclesial, familial, and social changes that women's equality requires. However, she still maintains that Christianity has much to add to the discussion and realization of this equality. What it has to add is the kingdom preaching of Jesus that invites people to transform their personal relationships into relationships based on compassion and inclusiveness. Sowle Cahill reads New Testament instructions about sex and gender as a challenge to hierarchy within and outside the family. Early Christians were resocialized from the patriarchal family of society and the state to the new family of brothers and sisters in Christ.²³

Sowle Cahill proposes that the equality between the sexes that human flourishing requires does not call for disregarding or contesting differences between men and women. She understands these differences as not only an opportunity to bring about equality and mutuality between the sexes but their recognition a necessity for this equality. Therefore, her project is not to deconstruct sex but to critique the institutionalization of sexual differentiation. She proposes a feminist ethical critique of social institutions that construct gender in ways that create unequal relations between men and women, including marriage and family forms. The question becomes how to socialize the body in order to promote equality and compassion.

²³ Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 150. She reads the gospel stories and actions as responding to and challenging the highly stratified social relationships of their time, including that of the Greco-Roman family.

Sowle Cahill posits that in order for widespread ethical dialogue about human flourishing to exist, people must recognize their commonality. She fears that the current focus on diversity is becoming so extreme that there is not ample attention to connections and shared reality between people, even that of bodily reality. Her project uses the body not as something that isolates us through radical individualization, but what unites us in our humanity. She writes that it is in and through the most basic and widespread forms of our materiality that human beings have “common sense” access to the experience of other human individuals.²⁴ Sowle Cahill proposes that human commonality can be found in the fact that each human person experiences a naturally occurring sex that is then gendered by common social institutions. This is the foundation of her gender theory.

For Sowle Cahill sex originates in and comes back to the reproductive organs. The sexual differentiation of the body is naturally occurring and shared by all people. Although she does not dismiss individuality, she does not view the body as infinitely malleable or in some way unique to each individual. She recognizes that to speak of sex, or the basic materiality of the body, as a fundamental reality is considered an interpretation of it; so part of her project is to re-establish the body’s stability. Although she would allow that sexuality may extend itself in pluriform and diffuse ways, she maintains that to suggest that “there is no such thing as ‘sex,’ or that sex in humans has no intrinsic connection to reproductive physiology, is more rhetorical than factual. Such a claim could only be maintained on the basis of an abrupt break between humanity and other mammalian species.”²⁵ For Sowle

²⁴ Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 76.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 111. Sowle Cahill is writing in response to what she defines as the radical claims of such thinkers as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler who would contest the foundationalism of a shared, two-sexed material reality. She notes that Foucault “even suggests in a few more extravagant passages that the human body itself is not a cultural constant.” *Ibid.*, 22.

Cahill, sex is a basic experience of embodied individuals. Sex is not socially constructed but something on which culture operates.

Sowle Cahill contends that there are innate differences between the sexes that always and everywhere inform identity. She holds that a feminist ethics should recognize that women's sexual and reproductive experience sets them apart from men as well as binds women together historically. The question then focuses on the consequences of the different embodiment of men and women. Sowle Cahill contends that although bodily difference does affect our sense of self and how we live, it does not necessarily establish social roles or imply a hierarchy of the sexes.²⁶ She does not want to be labeled as a biological determinist. She recognizes that an ethics that considers "natural" tendencies must integrate the reality of biological urges with the equally human capacity for love, commitment, fidelity, and compassion.

Sowle Cahill acknowledges that selfhood includes not only sex but the socialization of sex that all humans experience. The sexed body is always socialized in cultural institutions which channel its expression. On the one hand, this socialization is culturally various leading to a diversity in how bodily realities are experienced. On the other hand, the process of this socialization itself produces parallel institutions among cultures, such as the family and clan, which, though distinct, are familiar to all. The experience of these common institutions presents another junction for cross-cultural discourse. Although Sowle Cahill here differentiates gender from sex, she maintains that they are always related. Gender is

²⁶ Sowle Cahill grants that sexual dimorphism need not provide the basic category for organizing human persons into social relations. She admits that focusing on sex and sexual reproduction may, as Foucault warned, endow sex with a disproportionate centrality among human experiences and goods. However, she maintains that since sex is used as a social marker, ethics must address it as such. Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 5.

based on the biological tendencies, capacities, and differences of sex and the social ties that sex creates.²⁷

Lisa Sowle Cahill's gender theory incorporates the idea of construction. Although sexual differentiation is not socially constructed, gender is. This construction is not *ex nihilo*, as she reads postmodern critique, but based on the differences between the sexes. For Sowle Cahill basic facts of biology must be central to discourse about sex *and* gender. Her work approaches the body as a symbol of both naturally occurring sexual differentiation and of the social order in which it is found.²⁸ This makes the body both invariant and changing. Sexual differentiation is a constant of bodily reality. It expresses the commonality all people share with each other. But the body also expresses its local context and its historical placement because customs of gender are many and varied. How cultural communities socialize sexual differentiation will constantly shift because no historical understanding of gender encompasses the final way men and women should live their bodies. However, on Sowle Cahill's account the process of socialization is also a point of contact between people of

²⁷ Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 89. Sowle Cahill builds her sexual ethics around the claim that heterosexuality within committed marriage that nurtures children is the sexual ideal for individual persons and society in general. She contends that it is not her intent to use an ideal of committed, parental sex to condemn, exclude, or cast into the shadows "nonconformists," but to reflect on how and when to justify exceptions. Her views on homosexual relationships are also based on the belief in some kind of innate differences between the sexes. In addition, the innateness or social construction of homosexuality has bearing on its moral evaluation. As personally "natural" and a "given" to those who experience it, a sexual drive towards persons of the same sex should be channeled by the moral values which humanize heterosexual relationships, that is, respect, reciprocity, love, and commitment. If it is the case that sexual orientation is in fact pliable, then the question returns of the moral warrants which would make sexual object choice commendable, condemnable, tolerable, or neutral. The importance of male-female reciprocity and reproductive potential as enriching or completing sexual relations would return as contentious questions. *Ibid.*, 97-119. For more on her analysis of homosexuality, see Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Homosexuality: A Case Study in Moral Argument," in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, ed. Jeffrey S. Siker (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Pr, 1994), 61-75.

²⁸ Sowle Cahill appropriates this idea from the work of Mary Douglas who maintains that, since "the human body is always treated as an image of society," there thus "can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension." See Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 130-31; and Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, rev. ed. (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1973), 98. See more on Douglas' work in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

different cultures. The body, then, serves as an anchor for cross-cultural ethical dialogue in both its sex and gender.

Sowle Cahill's Christian ethical project critiques how we gender sexually differentiated bodies in order to promote equality between men and women. If a process of gendering does not produce bodies that express equality and compassion, it must be challenged and changed. Although she recognizes that for women the institutions of family and marriage can be limiting and sometimes dangerous arenas, she does not believe that bodies need to be liberated from all social control.²⁹ What people need to do is live social institutions differently. Sowle Cahill calls on contemporary Christians to emulate the witness to social challenge of their early biblical counterparts. These initial Christian communities recognized that how they lived family life could transform larger social patterns and expectations. They embraced a communal vision of the body as well as alternatives to hierarchy and domination in the family and society. Christians in today's world must find ways to bring about social transformation based on fundamental Christian values of compassion and solidarity. This transformation does not require the denial or deconstruction of sexual differentiation, but it does require the rejection of patriarchy that survives in and through the social mediation of biological reproduction. According to Sowle Cahill, Christians can upset exploitative, oppressive, and dehumanizing relationships in any culture and the institutions that support them by living the institutions of family and marriage which gender sexed bodies in a more reciprocal and compassionate way.³⁰ The question for Sowle

²⁹ Sowle Cahill writes, "In relation to sex and gender, an insistence on pragmatic self-determination which is individualist and asocial can also permit exploitation by tacit yet tenacious sexist attitudes which survive under a veneer of women's rights, masking a deeper lack of public investment in the positive welfare of women, children, and families." Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*, 140.

³⁰ Sowle Cahill expands her reflections on the Christian family, its inheritance from Christian history, its diverse articulations today, and its challenges in contemporary society in *Family: A Christian Social Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

Cahill is not whether the body is gendered in different ways, therefore representing different social systems, but rather what sort of society the body represents and what value judgment we can bring to bear concerning ways of being bodies. This second theory of sex/gender calls for engagement with the variety of gender socialization, but for acceptance of the constancy of dyadic sexual differentiation.

Sex/Gender System Constructed

The next theory of sex/gender posits that the meaning and significance of both biological sex and its cultural articulation as gender are social constructions. Advocates of this approach to sex/gender retain the term and reality of women as a political rallying point against the oppression that the constructed sex/gender system creates and supports. This recognition of a reality of woman is meant to appreciate the continuing influence of the sex/gender system on our lives and identity even though the hope is to shift our intellectual focus away from sex/gender identity to frameworks that focus on alleviating oppression in all its forms. Such an approach to sex/gender is outlined in the theology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.³¹ Schüssler Fiorenza argues that theologians must address the construction of sex/gender because it contributes and supports systems of oppression. In the name of liberation from this oppression, she advocates for the deconstruction of the Western

³¹ Works used for this analysis are Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesiā-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1993); and *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

sex/gender system in order to understand how it oppresses as well as the discovery of avenues for changing how we think about body-persons.³²

Schüssler Fiorenza defends the importance of thinking about body categorization for biblical studies and theology. She argues that the meaning and significance given to different bodies is an integral aspect of the meaning of ancient texts and their past and current interpretations. The rhetorical and political goals of authors and interpreters are to construct bodies to fit the social and ecclesial structures these agents support. The history bequeathed to us by these texts and their interpretations encode certain ideas onto bodies and create commonsense and “natural” understandings about which bodies rule and which bodies are oppressed. She advocates an approach to reading ancient texts as well as the bodies they construct that undermines interpretations that lead to oppression and supports liberation from this oppression. She claims that this can be done because all texts, including bodies, are ambiguous and allow for reading against the grain.

Schüssler Fiorenza names her theological method a Critical Feminist Liberation Theology.³³ This method challenges any reading of biblical texts and the theology based on it that oppresses women or other traditional “nonpersons.” Schüssler Fiorenza has a critical approach to history, biblical texts, and bodies. She defines all three as sites of struggle for

³² Schüssler Fiorenza recognizes that any sex/gender system is localized and formed in a specific history, language, and culture. In the West, the sex/gender system or the way that sex and gender differentiation is defined and culturally constructed has been influenced by Western philosophy that originated in ancient Greece as well as Christianity. For the elaboration of the notion of sex/gender and discussion of the literature on this concept, see Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 105-14.

³³ Schüssler Fiorenza uses the term critical to not only signal an indebtedness to the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas, but also because she critically reflects upon experiences of oppression through the problematization of preconstructed religious and cultural gender lenses of interpretation. She does not believe there is intellectual neutrality, nor should there be, and so she uses the term feminist to overtly express her political goals. The term liberation signals this as the ultimate concern of her theology and declares her allegiance to and partnership with emancipatory women’s movements in church and society. For an analysis of Schüssler Fiorenza’s method, see Marsha A. Hewitt, “Dialectic of Hope: The Feminist Liberation Theology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as a Feminist Critical Theory,” in *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 443-58.

authority and meaning. History for Schüssler Fiorenza is never the objective reporting of “facts.” The texts that are our history are consciously constructed narratives that reflect the interests and social location of the author as well as the historians and exegetes who interpret them. They are stories about power relations, with “winners” ensuring how the “facts” are reported and remembered. The language of those in power becomes commonsense and forms our reality. In her theology, even biblical texts are treated as rhetorical structures with philosophical and political objectives. Thus, Schüssler Fiorenza applies the same method of investigation to bodies as she does to texts. She maintains that bodies, like texts, are historical and political realities that have been constructed and reconstructed throughout history.

Schüssler Fiorenza argues that because texts are sites of struggle, they evidence both oppressive and liberating movements and feminist theologians must recognize both.³⁴ She contends that we have inherited a kyriarchal reality from ancient texts and their traditional interpretations, but also models that oppose kyriarchy. Schüssler Fiorenza defines kyriarchy as a multifaceted matrix of relationships between masters and oppressed people.³⁵ It reflects a more complex understanding of oppression than patriarchy, but patriarchy is part of the matrix of kyriarchy. Our historical texts are androcentric because they were written within patriarchal contexts. Their authors often wrote them for the purpose of maintaining this balance of power. Exegetes throughout history continued to interpret them for this same purpose. As a biblical scholar, Schüssler Fiorenza analyzes not only ancient texts themselves but the linguistic theories by which they are translated. She contends that the historical

³⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza challenges feminist theologians who focus exclusively on the liberating aspects of the early Christian movement or just on oppressive aspects of it. She issues this challenge in the introduction to *In Memory of Her*, and evaluates different feminist approaches to history and texts in Chapter 1.

³⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 14. Kyriarchy is derived from the Greek term *kyrios*, meaning lord.

development of masculine-exclusive language within the English language has led to the fact that although the masculine gendered pronouns are supposed to be understood as standing for all humanity they are not often read this way. Therefore our reading of ancient texts can ignore or exclude the presence of women in the ancient world. Schüssler Fiorenza assumes their presence.³⁶ This assumption shifts the possible interpretation of many texts. Her approach perceives ambiguity in texts rather than just one meaning. By extension, she recognizes the ambiguity in the construction and meaning of bodies, which are based on these texts.

Schüssler Fiorenza understands her approach to texts and bodies as a shift in feminist theology away from identity questions *per se* to well-being questions. She contends that feminist theology must focus on those suffering from oppression and uncover what keeps kyriarchy and its language alive. A focus on kyriarchy keeps her theology attentive to the experience of those who struggle against oppression especially the poorest of the poor who remain women and children dependent on women. With this focus, she maintains her feminist concern for women's experience but expands her reflection to include more complex and differentiated ways people are oppressed.³⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza contends that a first step

³⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza cites empirical studies that have documented that men and women read so-called generic masculine language differently. *But She Said*, 36. Letty Mandeville Russell, in her reflections on the issues of inclusive language for interpretation and the life of faith, writes that "the generic 'he/man' was a result of the politics of grammarians who convinced English parliament to make it a law in 1850 because men should 'naturally' take precedence. Now feminists are seeking a return to the earlier usage of generic 'they' with the singular noun." "Inclusive Language and Power," *Religious Education* 80 (Fall 1985): 584.

³⁷ Although Schüssler Fiorenza has shifted her attention from patriarchy to the wider scope of kyriarchy, she continues to center her theological focus on women because the poorest and most oppressed persons in the world continue to be women. Although she admits that not only women suffer from kyriarchal structures, Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that deconstructing the reasons for women's oppression can provide key insights into the antidemocratic and kyriarchal structures that oppress people of all body categorization. Her early work was criticized by women and men of color for concentrating too narrowly on the experience and oppression they claim is that of white women only. She addresses some of these concerns in *But She Said*, 114ff. For more on Schüssler Fiorenza's work on how the concept and reality of empire has shaped and affected Christian scriptures and our self-understandings, see Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

in this process of alleviating the distress and denigration of oppressed women is the deconstruction and eventual destruction of the Western sex/gender system.

Any true elimination of oppression must present a way to include the former outcast into decision-making structures. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that although Christianity was and is not always and everywhere liberating for women and other nonpersons, reflection on the Jesus movement and the house *ekklēsia* does offer liberating models for community. She interprets the model of *ekklēsia* based on her understanding of the Greek word as the assembly of full citizens that promotes the well-being of all.³⁸ As the model of the Jesus movement and the early Christian Church, she reads the ancient texts as advocating that everyone can and should be part of the deciding of their own spiritual-political affairs as well as being part of the determination of what well-being means. Schüssler Fiorenza reads the Jesus movement and the early Christian Church as advocating radical democracy, which is a way of living inclusive of the nonpersons and outcasts of *kyriarchal* structures, as the best way to realize God's *basileia* on earth. This approach to living includes both individual liberation for self-actualization and the establishment of community that includes all in responsible decision-making.³⁹

³⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 128; *In Memory of Her*, 344; *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 14-15; *Sharing Her Word*, 112; and *The Discipleship of Equals*, 112, 199. Schüssler Fiorenza qualifies the term with the phrase "of women," in order to indicate that *ekklēsia* will become historical reality only when women are fully included. See *The Discipleship of Equals*, 196.

³⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the Jesus movement advocated a radical Jewish democratic vision most evident in a table fellowship initiated by Jesus which included those alienated from societal roles. She posits that some of these persons may have found themselves alienated in the larger social and religious context because they refused patriarchal definition. These outcasts found a place within this Jesus movement, which did not advocate patriarchal submission but participation in *ekklēsia*. Such participation sometimes led to the breaking of household relationships rather than the justification of them as evidenced in Jesus' claim that the community is his family not his biological or patriarchal one. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that even after the death and ascension of Jesus, many Christian communities still formed themselves around the notion of *ekklēsia*. She contends that the house community broke down the public/private split and the hierarchies between men and women based on it evidenced in the fact that women were not only part of the church but its leadership as well. Communities differed in their interpretation of the gospel and lived it in varying ways. She contends that although the Jesus movement and house *ekklēsia* offered liberatory models, there were also other

Schüssler Fiorenza argues that although the Jesus movement provided the model of *ekklēsia* to guide Christian efforts to live God's *basileia* of liberation for each person and inclusion of all into God's community, Christian communities have not always lived *ekklēsia* and often find themselves accepting and creating kyriarchal patterns of oppression and exclusion. The Christian acceptance of the Western sex/gender system into its exegesis, historical interpretation and ecclesial structures reflects such kyriarchal living. Therefore, deconstructing and recreating the meaning of bodies is a crucial step to move Christian communities away from kyriarchal living to a way of being together that better reflects the *ekklēsia* of the Christian gospel. Interpretation of the body forms a critical tool in evaluating whether Christian communities are living up to the call of Jesus and the example he set for them.

This tension between the models of liberation and the reality of kyriarchy is central to Schüssler Fiorenza's work and her gender theory. This tension is inherent in the theological notion that Jesus Christ's presence in the world announced the inbreaking of God's *basileia* into human living, but because it is an eschatological concept and reality it is never completely realized in earthly life. The "already" and "not yet" aspect of the *basileia* of God brought into the world through Jesus Christ means that the total liberation it promises is always a goal but never fully realized. Schüssler Fiorenza uses this central Christian belief about God's *basileia* as a guiding principle for her feminist theology. Since her socio-political and theological goals are based on the eschatological concept of God's *basileia*,

forces within the Christian community that wished to bring Christian life into conformity with patriarchal and kyriarchal norms. Schüssler Fiorenza has come to understand the struggle for radical democracy to be intricately related to women's religious-theological authority. In her studies of Christian beginnings, Schüssler Fiorenza draws a connection between religious antidemocratic arguments (lack of freedom for all) and the debate concerning women's place (lack of freedom based on body categorization). See Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 115-18; and *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 8-9.

which she understands as reflected in *ekklēsia*, this change will be gradual and incomplete. For this reason, her gender theory seeks to balance the hope of changing intellectual frameworks, such as the Western sex/gender system, that perpetuate kyriarchal structures with the realization that this sex/gender system still informs and constructs our lives.

Schüssler Fiorenza's approach to the sex/gender of bodies is the same as her strategy for reading texts.⁴⁰ Her analysis has two main steps. First, she seeks to understand how the sex/gender system oppresses by deconstructing how bodies are formed in and by this system. Second, she proposes ways this oppressive system can be changed and bodies reconstructed through the creation of more liberating practices and relations. Deconstructing the Western sex/gender system means deconstructing the body since it is the manifestation of this system. The first step in this deconstruction is locating any body within their socio-political and religious context and the social networks of power that exist within these contexts. This first step differentiates the social experiences of masters from that of the oppressed. Her second move is to uncover the forces that create ways of thinking and therefore being that lead to the suffering of oppressed persons, including ideas that support sexism, racism, classism, colonialism, and Eurocentrism. These ways of thinking and being are created and continually influenced by the biases of the texts we read, the interpretations we have been taught, and the privileges of the system in which we live. Schüssler Fiorenza's approach to bodies recognizes that our past and current philosophical, political, economic, and religious

⁴⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza names seven hermeneutical strategies, the first four of which are deconstructive and the last three constructive. They are a hermeneutics of experience that socially locates experience, domination, suspicion, assessment and evaluation, reimagination, critical evaluation or reconstruction, and change and transformation. She writes that these strategies are not simply successive and progressive but corrective, repetitive, and interactive. See Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 51-76; *Bread Not Stone*, 1-21; and *Sharing Her Word*, 76-77.

systems produce and assign identity to us.⁴¹ Kyriarchal arguments and theories for inequality have become encoded in the body, and affect how we live and think about bodies. We must, therefore, interrogate the philosophical, political and religious subtexts of even our most commonsense understandings of the body.

After these strategies for deconstructing bodies, Schüssler Fiorenza turns her attention to the task of reconstruction for she believes that bodies can be changed through a change in how we read them. She contends that if we approach language as not deterministic, then texts and the reality they produce in our bodies are ambiguous and open to different interpretations. In addition, inviting the voices of people of varying socio-political experiences to join the interpretation of texts disrupts traditional readings. Different perspectives reveal the ambiguity and complexity of texts and bodies and allow for a proliferation of interpretations.⁴² Schüssler Fiorenza admits that her translation of texts and bodies serves her political goals, but maintains that all interpretations are motivated by rhetorical aims. She argues that kyriocentric interpretations merely try to hide this “constructedness” of reality in order to naturalize the structures and prejudices of kyriarchal

⁴¹ Schüssler Fiorenza points out that we in the West are heirs to the thought and understanding of bodies of Aristotle and Plato, which have been detrimental to the freedom of some bodies. Plato believed in a hierarchy of bodies that created the notion of a great chain of being and Aristotle argued that relationships in society are based on nature and reason and that different bodies embodied differences in nature and reason. These ideas together have undergirded many kyriarchal approaches to the domination and subordination of some bodies to others. Schüssler Fiorenza also notes that the revival of Aristotelian philosophy in the first century CE was a weapon against emancipatory movements of the time and against democratic notions in general. Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 94.

⁴² Schüssler Fiorenza defines her approach to texts as relative objectivity because although she proposes a proliferation and amplification of interpretation she does not advocate absolute relativity. She contends that there can be truer, more adequate accounts of the “real” world and history. These accounts would appreciate the levels of meaning uncovered by her first four hermeneutical strategies and the complexity of identity and oppression. In the end, they would also move us toward liberation rather than oppression; they would help all persons achieve self-actualization as an individual and provide means to include all in communal decision-making. Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 33, 90. Schüssler Fiorenza engages postmodern themes in “The Ethos of Interpretation: Biblical Studies in a Postmodern and Postcolonial Context,” in *Theological Literacy for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Rodney L. Petersen with Nancy M. Rourke (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 211-28; and *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), although she claims that the concepts of postmodernism are never her inspiration, but rather she is compelled by marginalized discourses and minority theories.

systems. She claims she is simply more upfront and honest about her own rhetorical aims of creating a counter-discourse for liberation.

Schüssler Fiorenza argues that since texts are inherently ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations they contain contradictions and fissures that allow us to read against the grain. Reading against the grain allows us to open up historical memory to what has been suppressed by those in power. For example, Schüssler Fiorenza assumes that history involved and involves both women and men and that both were historical actors who shaped Christianity so both should be subjects of intellectual inquiry. She reads grammatical gender as inclusive rather than an instrument of language to keep people marginalized and oppressed by making them invisible in biblical translation and interpretation and therefore insignificant for contemporary life as well. Having established that texts and bodies can and do have ambiguous and plural readings, Schüssler Fiorenza encourages Christians to choose readings that move the community toward the goal of liberation as articulated in the radical democracy of *ekklēsia* inaugurated by the inbreaking of God's *basileia* in Jesus Christ. Our readings of texts and bodies should move us to personal transformation and liberating action. Creative rereading should fashion subjects dedicated to radical democratic praxis and the construction of a different reality that no longer supports kyriarchal structures, including the Western sex/gender system.

Schüssler Fiorenza advocates changing the ways people are differentiated away from the current emphasis on the sex/gender system to an approach to persons that recognizes if they are being included or excluded from democratic agency. This approach to identity still recognizes the important influence of the Western sex/gender system in how we understand ourselves and others. Schüssler Fiorenza advocates the use of the term *wo/men* to reflect the

tension of working toward liberation from kyriarchal oppression while still living within it. Wo/men includes both oppressed women and men and those who stand with them. It is a challenge to how we think about sex/gender categories since it recognizes that identity is about our place in kyriarchal structures not any kind of neutral biological designation. It is also an invitation to change the frameworks that create these designations in the first place. Her use of the category of wo/men shifts focus from men and women to oppressors and oppressed, suggesting a means of differentiating persons otherwise than the phallus.⁴³ This shift in the meaning of the body is a move from materiality as biological specimen to the body as a text that is written for political purposes.

Schüssler Fiorenza's gender theory understands bodies as constructed for rhetorical and political purposes in just the way texts are. By thinking of the body as text, she shows how bodies are expressions of philosophical and religious arguments that support specific political goals. These arguments become encoded in the body and become the guidelines for how we understand our materiality. Bodies are constructed by the "winners" of history, those with power interested in keeping it. The very language of and about bodies reinforces power relations, which includes how we live our sexed/gendered bodies. This language includes not only contemporary ideas about the body but our history as well. The context of the authors of our history, the interpreters of this history, as well as our own context construct the meaning of our bodies.

On the other hand, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that texts and bodies are ambiguous because they extend beyond their specific moment. People are not completely programmed by their history or the context in which they find themselves. Our bodies do express the

⁴³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 206. See also Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "G*d at Work in Our Midst: From a Politics of Identity to a Politics of Struggle," *Feminist Theology* (September 1996): 47-72.

kyriarchy we have inherited, including our ideas of sex/gender, but they can be reread in a more democratic way. Just like texts, bodies can be deconstructed to understand why we understand them the way we do and reconstructed to express something else. Schüssler Fiorenza's goal is for bodies to express *ekklēsia* so that all people are freed from oppression and all people participate in the decision-making for the well-being of themselves and others. Although we may never attain this reality, it should be the goal of Christian feminist theology. As theological justification for this type of reading, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the gospel stories invite us to engage in a rereading and rewriting of history in light of Jesus Christ that leads to a rereading and rewriting of ourselves as his followers.

Total Construction

For this final approach to sex/gender, I return to the work of Judith Butler. Although Butler is not a theologian, her work is engaged and used in theological reflection on the body.⁴⁴ Like John Paul II, Butler establishes no distinction between sex and gender and describes both as foundational to our way of being in the world. She does not, however, understand this to mean they are absolute, transcendent, or ahistorical. Her approach to sex/gender differs fundamentally from that of Lisa Sowle Cahill, which argues for an *a priori* sex on which is stamped the cultural construction of gender. Butler posits that both sex and gender are constructions of power through which a subject comes to be at all, a position she shares with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. She has a different understanding of power, however, and so her theory takes exception to Schüssler Fiorenza's argument that some idea of women *must* be maintained for political purposes. Butler calls on feminist politics to shift

⁴⁴ For more on theological engagement with Butler's work, see Ellen T. Armour, and Susan M. St. Ville, eds., *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

its focus from the so-called interests of the set of ready-made subjects under the heading of “women,” to a questioning of the very terms through which identity is articulated.⁴⁵ In this section I consider two of Butler’s works—*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.”* In the first, she outlines a genealogy of gender and concludes that gender is performative of regulatory norms; in the second, she furthers her investigation of how bodies are constructed and concludes that power relations also work in the very formation of “sex” and its “materiality.”

Butler applies Michel Foucault’s notions of power and Jacques Derrida’s theory of iterability to theorize how bodies become sexed/gendered and how the materialization of bodies can be shifted to positively include more articulations of the subject beyond the heterosexual binary of male/masculine and female/feminine. When Butler claims that the materiality of the body is the effect of power, she is employing Foucault’s understanding of power. Power here is not something someone has or yields nor an external force or subject operating on bodies. Rather, Foucault defines power as a web of relations that interpenetrates society and produces its subjects. Power is the regulatory norms that form identity and the very process by which anyone is.⁴⁶ This process of identity formation produces intelligible subjects that fit the contextual norms as well as those entities that do not fit the criteria of a subject. Butler names those that do not fit power’s discourse the abject.

⁴⁵ Butler challenges feminists to address what law and norms of identity categories they are repeating so as not to reinscribe the power matrix they are trying to oppose. In its frustrated attempts to define “women,” feminism should understand that identity formation always includes an “etc.” because it is a process that always produces and forecloses. For Butler, the idea that there is a community of “women” based on some shared nature is a phantasm and often an impediment to real change. See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 143-47. For more on the problematic denotation of “women,” see Denise Riley, *Am I That Name?: Feminism and the Category of “Women” in History* (New York: Macmillan, 1988).

⁴⁶ See Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 22. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 177.

Butler's gender theory and her strategy for changing the regulatory norms that produce the materiality of the body rely on Derrida's theory of language.⁴⁷ Derrida claims that at the heart of all language, that which makes language possible, is the notion of iterability. In order for language to be possible it must be able to be repeated and used in different contexts. Its iteration in a different context than its original citation creates a rupture in the language that can result in a breakdown of meaning or the occurrence of new meanings. For Butler, the language and discourses that produce the materiality of bodies are phallogocentrism, which is identity based on male-ness, and compulsory heterosexuality. These discourses provide the regulatory norms that determine what is meaningful about the body and therefore how the body should be lived. Butler concludes that sex/gender is an effect of these discourses not their cause, and posits that we experience the body as gendered masculine and feminine because we live the body as dyadic.⁴⁸ Her goal is to decenter these discourses so that more and different bodies can materialize as acceptable and meaningful subjects. Thus, Butler's methodology yields a theory of sex/gender that claims that power forms bodies in and as discourse, which in its necessary repetition can be rearticulated.

Butler argues against theories of sex/gender that separate the two and establish sex as prediscursive on which gender operates. Such a theory of materiality is inadequate for Butler because it cannot contest the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality which cast some bodies as meaningful and others as not mattering at all. She claims that reference to a pure body or a prediscursive sexed body is actually part of the discourses of phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality, which establish sex/gender as timeless structures. Butler argues

⁴⁷ See Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," in *Limited, Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graff, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

⁴⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 148.

that any reference to the body is at the same time a formation of the body.⁴⁹ For her, there is no subject who stands before the construction of sex in any spatial or temporal sense. All subjects emerge within and as the matrix of gender relations. Butler gives as an example the process through which an embryo becomes a person or a subject. She writes that through the interpellation of sex/gender an “it” shifts to “she” and is “girled” and brought into the domain of language and kinship. Declaring the embryo or child “she” demarcates the body as female rather than male and as acceptable rather than unlivable.⁵⁰ The body of the child becomes culturally intelligible only by being sexed/gendered. Butler argues that the power of “sex” at its most effective is that it constitutes a field of intelligibility, a taken-for-granted ontology.

Butler’s gender theory maintains that the regulatory norms of phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality materialize the body’s sex and produce male and female subjects. Thus, the production of materiality does not mean that power creates materiality but rather that it marks and delineates what portion of the materiality of the body is relevant and foundational for the living of our lives. Butler contends that within our context being male/masculine and female/feminine matters and so we are materialized and live as such. In other words, power operates in the production of the binary frame of thinking about sex/gender. Butler wants to recast the matter of bodies not as a site of surface but as a process of materialization that is the effect of the dynamic of power. Regulatory norms govern the materialization of any body.⁵¹

⁴⁹ This is just as true for Butler even if one is referencing a pure body. She writes that if one is claiming the undeniability of “sex” or its “materiality,” the discourse that refers to a prediscursive sex is itself formative of this reference. See Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 10.

⁵⁰ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 7. Butler contends that the construction of gender operates through *exclusionary* means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation. Butler theorizes that the ideal is a series of normativizing injunctions that secure the borders of sex through the threat of psychosis, abjection, and psychic unlivability. *Ibid.*, 8, 14-15.

⁵¹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 9.

According to Butler's theory, the construction of bodies is not a singular act, but a process of repetition. Subjects are materialized through the reiteration of the regulatory norms that govern them. To name a person a female or male is the repeated inculcation of a norm, and the power of regulatory norms stems from the persistence of their repetition. Therefore, the phenomenon of sex is formed within and by discourse. The regulatory norms of the controlling discourses produce by marking and constraining bodies to fit the ideals of their discourse. Butler argues, however, that bodies can never fully comply with these ideals because they are constructions themselves. "True" gender identity and the "law of sex" are such because we mirror gender ideals in our living and cite sex as a law of nature. She contends that norms only exist and have power to the extent that they are repeated or cited as a norm. This repetition or citation occurs in our process of approximating or "identifying with" such norms.⁵² Although the norms of sex/gender compel citations and approximations, which we call female/feminine and male/masculine, there is no true or perfect sex/gender identity.

After establishing her theory that bodily materiality is the repetition of the norms of governing discourses and therefore have no "true" reality, Butler lays out how change in our very materiality is possible. First, she claims that the concepts of sex and gender have complex histories, which reveal them as historically revisable regulatory schemes. This revision happens, and can only happen, within the discursive practices one wishes to contest. Within and as part of the construction of sex/gender is the possibility for and agency to change them.⁵³ Butler argues that the materiality of the body is the effect of social discourse, which maintains its status as foundational through the continual repetition of its regulatory

⁵² Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 13.

⁵³ Some theologians argue that thinking of sex/gender as construction opposes the possibility of agency, but for Butler it is the necessary scene of agency.

norms. By applying Derrida's insights about language and iterability to the discourses that produce sex/gender, Butler treats identity as unstable and incorporating the possibility and necessity of its own rearticulation and disruption. If sex/gender are regulatory norms that require repetition then they have the same quality as language that needs to be repeated in different contexts than the one for which it was originally intended. The regulatory norms' ability to be repeated in different contexts means that their meaning is divided past and future. There always exists the possibility for different articulations or reiterations of the body by individuals. Gaps and fissures to the current construction of sex/gender open up and allow shifts in the norms of sex/gender. Change happens when one lives sex/gender as something different in a world that presupposes and requires that sex remain dyadic. Butler argues that moral agency is in the gap of who I find myself to be and who I can be. Persons can repeat these norms in other ways that allow for alternative identity formations. The task is then not whether to repeat, but how to repeat the regulatory norms of sex/gender.

The first step in this change is to recognize that there are already bodies that exist in what Butler calls "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life. She claims that these bodies fail to materialize as subjects within the discourses of phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality; but if we have the eyes to see them they represent the possibility for change through the contestation of the regulatory norms of sex/gender. By including their articulation of materiality, we can rearticulate "the symbolic horizon in which bodies come to matter at all."⁵⁴ These alternative articulations of materiality question the fundamental naturalness of sex/gender, contest its very binarism, and present new possibilities for its articulation. Butler contends that a proliferation of sex/gender configurations can become a reality if we redescribe what is currently defined as culturally

⁵⁴ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 23.

unintelligible as acceptable articulations of materialization. This proliferation then has the potential to deprive sex/gender configurations based on compulsory heterosexuality of their natural status. Butler asks, “What would it mean to ‘cite’ the law to produce it differently, to ‘cite’ the law in order to reiterate and co-opt its power, to expose the heterosexual matrix and to displace the effect of its necessity.”⁵⁵ Her answer is that it would change the regulatory norms that bring about the sexed/gendered subject. We would have the space and means to rethink and rearticulate what it means to be sexed/gendered. In this process exist the possibilities of rematerialization. For Butler, shifts in materialization are not change simply for change’s sake. They are an attempt to include more persons in the realm of who matters in social discourse. She wants to expand the meaning of what counts as a valued and valuable body in the world, of what qualifies as bodies that matter, of what ways of living count as “life,” and of what lives are worth protecting, saving, and grieving.⁵⁶

III. DISCUSSION

This chapter demonstrates how using construction as an organizing principle can serve as a tool for theology to explore different theories of sex/gender through reflection on the degree to which bodily materiality is constructed. Analysis of each theory centers on how it answers the question to what degree are the sex and/or gender of the body constructed in and by its social discourse. The varied responses to this question reveal that sex/gender as concepts and realities exist broadly and diversely in theological discourse and life.

Sex/gender cannot be approached as one thing in and for theology; it must be handled as a

⁵⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 15. She claims that we can politicize personal life, but she argues that cultural innovation is key and not myths of transcendence. For a more expanded exposition of Butler’s views on social transformation, see her essay “The Question of Social Transformation,” in *Women and Social Transformation*, by Elizabeth Bek-Gernsheim, Judith Butler, and Lúcia Puigvert (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 1-28.

⁵⁶ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 16.

discussion. Theologians must clarify their own theory of sex/gender, and equally important know where it fits within the spectrum of views on sex/gender. This clarification invites theologians to delve deeply into the relevance and place of the body in theology by considering how reflection on the sex/gender of bodies calls attention to theological method, truth claims, views on subjectivity and personhood, judgment of binary sexuality, and the body's relationship with language.

Conversation organized around construction begins with discussion about the very meaning of the idea of construction, the process by which sex and gender are established, who or what is responsible for this process, and if there is any opportunity for the sexed/gendered person to change the meaning of sex and/or gender. For some theologians such as John Paul II, construction of bodily reality would negate the belief that there is a divine plan to and for our bodies and their living. If sex/gender are ontological realities that reflect the divine plan, then sex/gender are not constructed but rather created. God is the creating agent and humanity cannot change the ultimate meaning of sex/gender; it is revealed to them. Any change in a person's understanding and living of these categories should reflect an acceptance of their original and ultimate meaning. Other theologians such as Lisa Sowle Cahill understand construction to mean *ex nihilo* so using it to describe sex would ignore the biology of humans as a mammalian species. If sex is a given in human reality, then only gender can be addressed as constructed. Any meanings and institutionalizations of gender that do not create equality and promote compassion in partnership should be changed. Most who do use the idea of construction in their explanation of sex/gender do not mean it "creates" materiality. Rather, the construction of sex/gender is understood as the assignment of meaning to it, the demarcation of the importance of it, and therefore the production of it.

Judith Butler adamantly argues that to state that sex/gender is constructed does not mean it is illusory or artificial, or that it is constructed once and for all.⁵⁷ Even theories that accept the construction of sex/gender for rhetorical and political purposes might disagree on who or what constructs them. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza describes the constructing agent as other human beings, the winners of history who have control and want to maintain it. Judith Butler has different notions of power and understands it as a web of relations rather than something someone yields. Both, however, maintain that change is possible and in the hands of constructed individuals either as a rebellion against the constructing agent or a decentering of the constructing power from within.

The answers to the central question of this chapter must be read as crucial to and flowing from the overall method and goals of the author's theology or philosophy. A theological method that demands the possibility of timeless realities to support unchanging teaching describes the meaning of sex/gender as ahistorical and transcendent of time and place. If a theological method is searching for universal foundations or generalizations to anchor cross-cultural ethical dialogue, then sex and the process of being gendered is described as invariant. Bodies will look different according to methods and goals that aim for the alleviation of oppression that is based on the very categorization of bodies as sexed and gendered. Both the meaning and reality of sex and gender are considered in terms of how they move toward the goal of equality or hinder its achievement. When sex and gender are understood as the result of power relations, they must be able to be changed if new

⁵⁷ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 9. The concept of construction is central to Butler's work, although she recognizes the difficulty of using the term because there are many understandings of the notion that can be problematic. She realizes that many regard anything defined as "constructed" as artificial and dispensable. Butler believes that the term "construction" is neither a subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration. Because she wants to focus on the process by which materiality is produced, she drops the term construction and adopts the term materialization.

political realities are to be achieved. This change happens through the deconstruction of the history of sex/gender and a shift in how we think about sex/gender identity and live it.

These different approaches to sex/gender reveal different understandings of truth. John Paul II professes a belief in ahistorical, transcendent truth we can know through revelation. Soble Cahill proposes a modified objectivity, which considers truth as something we come to together. There are, however, foundations to human being that can be considered universals. Schüssler Fiorenza maintains that we usually define truth according to the commonsense established by the winners of history and the masters in the kyriarchal structure. She claims it is better to think about truth as that which brings us closer to living God's basileia, which on earth is approximated in radical democracy. Butler approaches truth as something constructed as such within and according to the discourses of any social context.

These considerations of ontology and truth within the discourse about sex/gender disclose each theorist's notion of personhood and subjectivity, another central theological question. Gender theories must address the relationship of selfhood and the sex/gender of the body. Is there a subject beyond their sex/gender or does the subject come to be and exist only as sexed/gendered? Is true selfhood a goal that can only be achieved once the person is liberated from oppressive sex/gender articulations or are they what define the person as a self or subject? Inherent to these beliefs about the human subject is each theory's idea of the purpose of human life. Should sex/gender be understood as complementary, based on equality and mutuality, undermined altogether, or expanded in order for persons to most fully live human subjectivity? Each view of subjectivity comes to a different conclusion about the unity of each sex as a group.

John Paul argues for the necessity of male-female differentiation for personhood. Each human being knows their essence and the self in and through their own sex/gender. In the giving and receiving of the sexed/gendered self, each person realizes themselves as a person created by God for this purpose. It is only in and through the body that a human being knows themselves as a person created uniquely from other creatures and for communion with other persons. The ultimate communion is the union of the male and female. Because he understands sex/gender as our primary identity, the unity of males and females as individual groups is a presupposition to John Paul II's thought. Sowle Cahill concurs with John Paul II that being a sexed and gendered person informs our sense of self and through this reality we are able to connect with others. The body as sexed and gendered is what makes us human. Sex and gender are essential aspects of being a human person, although the hierarchy based on them is not. Sowle Cahill considers the unity of women a goal to be maintained for it recognizes the uniqueness of women's sexuality and reproductive capacities and allows cross-cultural dialogue. For Schüssler Fiorenza, the person is formed according to the sex/gender system of their history and context, but it does not and should not be the essential way we think about human beings. She advocates other ways of categorizing identity that would define people differently. Schüssler Fiorenza shifts identity designation to wo/men in recognition that the unity of this group is a provisional status around action for alleviation of oppression. Judith Butler describes the sex/gender matrix as a power discourse that materializes bodies and causes subjects to be. These attributes of the body are both essential and nonessential for personhood. Butler treats the unity of women as a phantasm and an impossibility.

Delving into the relationship of the subject to their materiality in terms of sex/gender brings to light different understandings of the relationship of sex to gender as well as how each relate to social life. While Lisa Sowle Cahill separates sex and gender in her analysis, John Paul II, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Judith Butler treat them as inseparable aspects of bodily reality. These three differ, however, on the relationship of sex/gender to social life. John Paul II understands sex/gender as the foundational principle for social life; its cause not its effect. Schüssler Fiorenza regards the sex/gender system as a foundational principle of kyriarchy and established for its purposes. Butler argues that sex/gender is the foundation of being in our social context and is produced and restrained by the normalizing institutions of phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality. Sowle Cahill tries to balance the idea that the sex of the body is prior to social life, but the gender of it formed only within and by social institutions.

Various approaches to the relationship of sex and gender reveal diverse opinions about whether the binary of sex and gender is problematic. The more problematic this binary, the more sex and gender are viewed as constructed in social discourse and changeable. Because John Paul II argues that God always creates human beings as male and female, dyadic sexual differentiation is not problematic and heterosexuality is the only acceptable form of sexuality. Sex/gender is not oppressive; the estrangement of the sexes caused by the Fall is what creates tension between men and women. Lisa Sowle Cahill also does not understand binary sexual difference as problematic, but rather as the foundation for childbearing and rearing. It is the basis for necessary social order, although its gendering can be established in oppressive ways. Schüssler Fiorenza and Butler both find the binary problematic and oppressive. Schüssler Fiorenza contests it because it is part of the

oppression of kyriarchy, creating relationships based on masters and oppressed. Butler argues that the binary is unacceptable because it does not allow some bodies to materialize and therefore matter in society.

These theories of sex/gender approach narratives and language as central to any understanding of the body. Scripture is approached as both revealing a true and proper understanding of our bodily reality and as rhetorical and political narratives that encode bodies for inequality. Even so, all Christian theologians argue that the Christian narratives can still expand our understandings of sex/gender to make them more about equality than oppression. Theorists in other disciplines challenge theologians to recognize the importance of social discourses in the creation and understanding of sex/gender that may extend beyond and exist distinctly from Christian narratives but still affect how we know ourselves. These narratives include our social and cultural history. There are and have been different historical articulations of sex/gender. Theories define some of these articulations as the result of sinful humanity or the interests of the powerful to keep some ruled while they rule. Either way, one's knowledge and interpretation of the history of sex and gender are important aspects of any gender theory. This includes contending with past and current scientific explanations of sex/gender. The science of the body changes in different contexts. Sowle Cahill is the only theologian to base her argument for sex on science, although John Paul II briefly employs science to support some of his claims. Judith Butler uses science to support her opposing claim, contending that whether science argues for or against a dual sex system is not obvious. Butler challenges theorists to delve more deeply into the supposed

naturalness of sex by critiquing scientific discourses which establish its facticity, enquiring into its history, and questioning its very meaning.⁵⁸

The debate and discussion extracted through dialogue about sex/gender based on the concept of construction leads to questions about bodily expression. Different theories about sex/gender articulate different understandings of what the body expresses in its materiality. The body can be understood as revealing God's plan for creation or its social context that may or may not be based on oppressive discourses. John Paul's theory claims that each person expresses the self in and through their body. Sowle Cahill treats the body as a cross-cultural connection that creates discourse with others. Schüssler Fiorenza approaches bodies as texts expressing the rhetorical and political goals of their authors. Butler contends that they are the materialization of the norms of controlling discourses. One must determine if the body's expression as sex/gender is an appropriate and live-giving expression or one that should be changed. These reflections also challenge theologians to think about how the body expresses not only its constructing discourses but also the individual who the body is. To what degree are individuals determined by the discourses that form them? If Christianity believes that each person is a unique being willed for their own sake by God, then gender theories must explore individual identity as opposed to and in relationship with communal

⁵⁸ In *Gender Trouble*, Butler cites the following sources for feminist research conducted within the fields of biology and the history of science that assess the political interests inherent in the various discriminatory procedures that establish the scientific basis for sex: Ruth Hubbard and Marian Lowe, eds., *Genes and Gender*, vols. 1 and 2 (New York: Gordian Press, 1978, 1979); Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); Evelyn Fox-Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Sandra Harding and Jean F. O'Barr, *Sex and Scientific Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); and Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories About Women and Men* (New York: Norton, 1979).

identity.⁵⁹ Reflecting on bodily construction and how it leads to questions about bodily expression starts the process of thinking about the body as symbol.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the significance of the body has been investigated through the lens of sex/gender. The importance of the body in its specificity of sex/gender for theology has been demonstrated in each approach to sex/gender outlined in this chapter. Sex/gender was shown to be relevant and significant to theological anthropology and what it means to be and live as the image and likeness of God. It was argued that the body is the foundation of ethical dialogue and our understandings of sex/gender the difference between human flourishing and oppression. The meaning and significance we assign to sex/gender is also an integral aspect of our scriptural texts and their exegesis. Although not a theologian, Judith Butler challenges theology to investigate how sex/gender is part of our very understanding of the subject and its possibility.

Theorists concerned with sex/gender have often been criticized for too narrow a view of identity. Just as John Paul II establishes sex/gender as primary identity, feminist theorists have been criticized for not recognizing that race is also a fundamental aspect of identity in this country as well as around the world. There is now a general recognition that other social divisions affect how sex/gender is lived in different communities and that race is a crucial tool of oppressive structures and institutions. Theology must recognize, however, that race is not just another aspect of identity, but that race and sex/gender together interpenetrate and influence the meaning of each other. Sexual difference is not prior to racial difference.

⁵⁹ This approach to the person as a unique being is not limited to Christian theology. Judith Butler understands the individual as a unique utterance of the norms that form them. Therefore, each individual has the capacity to shift the constructions of sex/gender through a different iteration of their materialization.

Judith Butler honestly addresses race when she writes, “There are other regimes of regulatory production that contour the materiality of bodies. Race emerges not simply as another, fully separable, domain of power from sexual difference or sexuality, but that its ‘addition’ subverts the monolithic workings of the heterosexual imperative as I have described it so far.”⁶⁰ I agree with Butler’s assessment of the relationship of sex/gender and race in human identity and the meaning of materiality and I will explore the intersection of sex/gender and race in Part II of this dissertation. For now, I will move on to a specific consideration of theories that give meaning to the construction of the materiality of the body commonly known as race.

⁶⁰ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 18.

A person without a past is a person without an identity. And the absence of an identity is very serious, because without self-knowledge others can make you become what they desire.
James Cone, *My Soul Looks Back*¹

CHAPTER 3: RACE IN THEOLOGY

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter shifts focus from theories of sex/gender to theories of race but continues to use construction as its organizing principle. The concept of construction is again employed to invite reflection on how the materiality of the body is established within and by means of social discourse as well as the meaning and significance attributed to identity markers such as race and sex/gender that categorize this materiality. The previous chapter outlined theories that debated the level of construction of sex and gender. In discussions about race there is general agreement that race is socially constructed, meaning it has no biological basis nor is it an ontological category with transcendent or ahistorical meaning. However, agreement about race as a social construction does not mean agreement about what race is. There remains debate about the meaning and significance of the construction of race for human living. This chapter focuses on this discussion.

Declaring race a social construction does not relegate it to the status of illusion, which is just one theory of race. Treating race as a social construction calls attention to the fact that race as an identity category has been invented in time and space and so racial meaning depends on its context and the history of its context. Race is an ever-changing, continuously shifting concept.² We must always ask the question of what is meant when the term “race” is

¹ James H. Cone, *My Soul Looks Back* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 28.

² For a deeper investigation of the history of the term and concept of race, see E. Nathaniel Gates, ed., *The Concept of “Race” in Natural and Social Science* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997); Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965); and Winthrop D.

invoked. Race, like sex/gender, never exists as one thing but is subject to various interpretations. Theories overlap and influence each other as well as contradict and oppose one another. Exploring various theories of race helps theologians have better discussion about race and how it intersects with theological discourse.

In order to frame my presentation of race in theology, I turn to the work of sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant.³ Omi and Winant argue that the primary task of racial theory is not to problematize a seemingly “natural” concept of race but to focus attention on the *continuing significance and changing meaning of race*.⁴ They emphasize three main points that are at the heart of race theory in general and this chapter in particular. First, the importance and centrality of race in shaping identities and institutions in the United States cannot and should not be understated. Omi and Winant argue that the United States is a “color-conscious” not color-blind society; one marked by *racism*, not equality.⁵ Race has been and continues to be an important organizing concept at both the individual and institutional level. Our socialization involves learning some version of racial categories and

Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968).

³ I rely on the following texts: Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*; “Racial Formation,” in *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study*, ed. Paula S. Rothenberg (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998); “On the Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race,” in *Asian American Studies: A Reader*, ed. Jean Yu-wen Shen Wu and Min Song (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000); and Michael A. Omi, “The Changing Meaning of Race.”

⁴ Omi and Winant, “On the Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race,” 200. Emphasis theirs. They write that although most theorists reject race as a “natural” or biological concept there are still attempts to discern the *scientific meaning* of race today in such areas as genetics and educational psychology. These attempts seek to remove the concept of race from fundamental social, political, or economic determination and see the truth of race to lie in the terrain of innate characteristics. Omi and Winant, “Racial Formation,” 14.

⁵ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 10. Emphasis theirs. Omi and Winant describe the U.S. social structure as a racial state, meaning a state that is inherently racial. They write that the state intervenes in the racial order and is intervened by it; structures it and is structured by it. From its very inception the state has been concerned with politics of race whether that concerns repression, exclusion, the categorization of groups for situation in the racial order by such means as the census, or the political action and demands of groups to the state. See their model of the racial state in Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 83-84. For more on the racial state, see David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002). For Omi and Winant’s discussion of racism, see Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 69-76.

meaning systems and our common sense knowledge includes racial thinking. Our concepts of race are infused with and supported by social, economic, political and religious forces and beliefs. To ignore race means to ignore central issues of our society.

Omi and Winant's second main point is that although race is central to life in the United States, there is a general unwillingness to discuss it. Underlying this unwillingness is the fact that race is a difficult concept even if it is often treated as a common sense, simple reality. It is difficult to define race since it is fluid and subject to multiple determinations. As one delves deeper into the study of race, one must contend with many areas of human thinking. It is a topic that brings us back to the difficult and painful racial legacies of the past, especially slavery, legalized discrimination, and violence against racial minorities, which continue to haunt and shape American society. In addition, the important investigation of whiteness that must be part of race theory is made problematic by the fact that most whites do not see or recognize their whiteness most of the time.⁶ Because of these difficulties the discussion of race is usually avoided, often by means of treating it as a mere manifestation of some other supposedly more important social relationship or by advocating color-blindness and the transcendence of race.

A third contention of Omi and Winant is that because of the importance we place on race, we as a society, and just as importantly as individual scholars, cannot ignore these realities or simply jettison our widely held racial beliefs. They advocate that we must notice, not ignore, the concept of race in all its subtlety to effectively analyze issues that involve race

⁶ See Martha R. Mahoney, "The Social Construction of Whiteness," in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 330-33. She writes that whites usually discuss whiteness only when they perceive their well-being threatened by race-based initiatives or their privilege undermined by attacks on whiteness. These perceptions are often discussed in terms of racism against whites. Making whites feel white is usually thought of as racism.

and to make strides to oppose racism.⁷ Omi and Winant treat race as an element of social structure not an irregularity in it and as a dimension of human representation not an illusion.⁸ In addition, race must be situated within its historical and social context. Races do not emerge full-blown but are the results of historical practices as well as the contestation of these practices and the beliefs behind them. Racial meanings vary over time and between different societies.⁹ Race has a dynamic reality.

The five approaches to race that follow begin with the assumption that race is a social construction. I name these theories race as essence, race as historical legacy, race as culture, race as class, and race as illusion. Each section explores how race can be discussed in theology. Theologians debate and investigate if and how race can be used to think about our ultimate concern, to discern the significance of history for identity, to reflect on different cultures and worldviews, to serve as an entry point to a discussion of economic inequality and injustice, and to distract theologians from truly understanding contemporary living. Included in all of these discussions is an assessment of racism and suggestions for liberation from it. Each section is titled “race as...” not “race is...” because race is being treated as a construction and therefore open to multiple interpretations. Theologians and theorists were chosen to illustrate these positions although I recognize that no neat categorization can

⁷ Omi argues that it is crucial to relate racial categories and meanings to concepts of racism. See Omi, “The Changing Meaning of Race,” 254.

⁸ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 55.

⁹ Omi and Winant’s approach to race is explicitly historicist. They propose the emergence of racial time, which is the interpretation of history itself through the lens of race. For example, instead of understanding modernity in terms of the rise of capitalism and the bourgeoisie like enlightenment-based social theory, they point to the immense historical rupture represented by the rise of Europe, the onset of African enslavement, the *conquista*, and the subjugation of much of Asia, all of which were influenced by and further influenced ideas of race. They argue, “that modern (and post-modern) history can be thought of as the process by which the slow inscription of phenotypical signification took place upon the human body, in and through conquest and enslavement to be sure, but also as an enormous act of expression, of narration.” “Western” or colonial time can be explained as a huge project of demarcating “difference.” Omi and Winant, “On the Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race,” 206. Since race and by extension race theory is contextual, race is understood differently in different countries and societies. See Omi and Winant, “Racial Formation,” 15-16, 21.

capture any one thinker's understanding of race. Theories of race often overlap and intersect in theology, theory, and life.

II. THEORIES OF RACE

Race as Essence

This first approach to race treats race as essential to human identity. Such an explanation of race is found in the work of James Cone, who reflects on Christian faith in light of the black experience in the United States.¹⁰ Cone's theory of race is based on the claim that U.S. society essentializes race; we are "raced" first and everything else after that.¹¹ Race is the meaning and significance we give to skin color; and its essentialization attempts to explain who we are and how we should live based on the color of our skin. Theologizing within this context, Cone asks who we should be as Christians and how we might live this identity in a society that essentializes race. This reflection leads to a new way of thinking about race as essence. Race for Cone is still about who we are and how we should live, but it is now understood from a Christian perspective about identity. Cone concludes that Christians are meant to live as the image of God, which today means we must be black. His theological proposal challenges how we think about ourselves as well as God by reflecting on theological anthropology through the lens of race, which Cone argues is necessary if theology is to be relevant for Christians living in the United States.

¹⁰ James Cone is known as the father of black theology. His first book, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), was the first book on liberation theology. It was published two years before Gustavo Gutiérrez's *Teología de la liberación*. I rely on James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989); *A Black Theology of Liberation; God of the Oppressed; My Soul Looks Back*; and *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984). For an overview of Cone's work, including continuities and changes in his thought, see Rufus Burrow, Jr., *James H. Cone and Black Liberation Theology* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 1994).

¹¹ See Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, xi; and *For My People*, 46.

Cone's discussion about identity begins with the Christian belief that all persons are created as the image of God and we are called to live this identity in our specific context. In order to be the image of God we must know who and how God is. This knowledge of God comes from revelation, which Cone defines as God's self-disclosure in personal relationship with humankind. He claims that this revelation is found in the biblical witness as well as the black experience since God's relationship with humankind continues today.¹² There is continuity between the biblical stories of God, especially those of Jesus Christ as the Incarnation of God in the first century, and the experience of the risen Christ today. According to Cone, both means of God's self-disclosure reveal a liberator God who is in solidarity with victims of injustice. For Cone, the Bible speaks of how God is not just interested in spiritual liberation but also bodily freedom as evidenced in the many stories about cure from disease, escape from abuse, and the destruction of structures and realities that oppress the poor and marginalized.¹³ The gospels specifically reveal how Jesus Christ as God incarnate was with the oppressed and took on their condition as his own in his own humanity.

The image of God was perfectly lived by Jesus Christ. If human beings are to be the image of God as revealed and lived by Jesus Christ, each person must live as one with the oppressed and take on their condition as their own. What this specifically means for a person's identity depends on their context. God will always be with the oppressed but to meet God in one's living one must look at concrete reality and where the factual inequalities

¹² For Cone's discussion on revelation, see "The Meaning of Revelation," chap. 3 in *A Black Theology of Liberation*.

¹³ Like much of black theology Cone bases his understanding of God as a liberator on the Exodus story and Jesus' proclamation in Lk 4:18-19. He interprets Jesus' healing of the sick, feeding the hungry, and giving sight to the blind to mean that Jesus did not regard salvation as an abstract, spiritual idea or a feeling in the heart. Instead, salvation is the granting of physical wholeness in the concreteness of pain and suffering. See Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 140.

exist in one's specific time. Cone posits that in contemporary U.S. society living as the image of God is only properly understood in racial terms. He argues that in a racist society such as the United States no one can be, or should be, colorless, least of all God/Christ.¹⁴ Black theology teaches that in the black experience we find oppressed persons and therefore we find God/Christ. For Cone, God/Christ is not just a theological concept but a liberating presence he has experienced and to which the black experience testifies.

Cone understands God's presence with oppressed black people as a continuation of the work of God in the Bible. He argues that this continuity between God's liberating work of the past and God's presence in the struggle for black liberation is based on the Christian belief in the resurrected Christ. As the risen one, Jesus Christ continues to be as he was in his humanly existence. Who Christ is today is who Christ was in the first century. In the first century he was a Jew in an occupied country, one of the oppressed himself. But more than just a situation into which he was born, he chose to make his place with the oppressed and outcasts of his society and religion. As the Incarnate One, the one who took on humanity and shared its condition, his human, bodily existence was and is inextricably tied to others. Jesus Christ shared in the condition of the outcast and oppressed in his very humanity, which included his materiality. As the resurrected one, Christ continues to be as he was in his humanly existence, that is, one with the oppressed sharing in their condition. Cone argues that Christ is alive in our midst continuing his work of liberation. Therefore, we find Jesus today with the suffering and outcasts of our society and religious communities.

¹⁴ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 63. The image of God/Christ as black has deep roots in black theology in general and Cone's theology in particular. For an analysis of the black God/Christ in black theology, see Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994). For more on God/Christ and blackness, see James H. Cone, "God is the Color of Suffering," in *Changing Face of God*, ed. Frederick W. Schmidt (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub., 2000), 51-63; and Warren McWilliams, "Theodicy According to James Cone," *Journal of Religious Thought* 36, no. 2 (1980): 45-54.

Cone posits that we know and make sense of God/Christ in our present context only in relation to the human condition as we know it. He argues that in the contemporary U.S. God/Christ is found with the black community because they are the outcasts of our society. Because black people are oppressed because of their blackness, God has taken on this oppression as God's own, and therefore God is black. Christ must also be understood as black because he takes on the suffering of the oppressed as his own, in his very body. Only in being black can Christ be today who Christ was. If a person finds their being in God and wishes to live as the image of God, they must also completely identify with the oppressed and become black with them. Christians must be black because God/Christ is black. By describing God/Christ as black, Cone outlines racial identity as both literal and symbolic. In a literal sense, Jesus was not a white man in the first century and because of who he was cannot be one today. Since his presence and oneness with the oppressed and suffering cannot be docetic, in a racist society Christ must be black to share in the bodily suffering of the oppressed.¹⁵ But this racial identity is also symbolic for it is not just about skin color. Christ's blackness represents most importantly God's solidarity with the poor, sharing in their suffering today as he did in the first century on the cross, and giving hope for new life, as he did in the resurrection.

As a Christian theologian, Cone professes that each person is created as and called to live as the image of the liberator God. As a black man who has experienced and observed racism in this country, Cone argues with confidence that we are not living as God's image. Cone contends that a proper understanding of who God/Christ was in the biblical stories and therefore who God/Christ is today is crucial for our self-understanding since our search for

¹⁵ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 124. Docetism is the belief that Jesus only seemed to have a physical body but in reality was incorporeal, a pure spirit. Since Jesus' physical body was only an illusion, he only appeared to physically die as a result of his crucifixion. This belief is regarded as heretical by Christian churches.

identity is indeed our search for God.¹⁶ Professing Jesus Christ as the final and definitive word for Christians regarding their humanity, including the meaning and significance of bodily existence, means that Christians must convert to a new form of existence that radically identifies with the poor and oppressed.¹⁷ This new way of being, enabled by the inbreaking of the divine into social existence in the Incarnation, should transform our perceptions of identity. For Cone, the meaning of Jesus Christ is an existential question; we must choose where we will stand and what we stand for. A person is for or against oppression. Because of Christ, people are now gifted with the freedom of self-determination about their being and are no longer dependent on oppressive systems by which a person's existence was formerly defined.¹⁸ It is a freedom that allows the individual to choose God's will, which calls us to be for others and to recognize that one's individual freedom cannot be achieved or have meaning without the freedom of the other. According to Cone, this new form of existence means that Christians today must be black by being fully present with the oppressed. Race here is essential because it describes who we are and how we live based on the identity we choose within the racialized context in which we find ourselves.

This theory of race as essence changes our current meanings of race in terms of whiteness and blackness as well as challenges the significance we attribute to skin color. Cone's descriptions of white and black must be understood within the context of racism, which in this country is the context of and for our "racial" identities. Cone writes that of

¹⁶ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 14.

¹⁷ Cone, *My Soul Looks Back*, 97.

¹⁸ Cone writes that the new value system of black theology brings to bear the spirit of self-determination upon the consciousness of black people. They are no longer dependent on the white oppressor for their understanding of truth, reality, or what ought to be done about the place of black sufferers in America. To be free means to be free to create new possibilities for existence. See Cone *Black Theology and Black Power*, 129-30. Friday M. Mbon argues that the image of freedom is the central image in Cone's analysis of what it is to be really human. For his analysis of all the aspects of Cone's view of humanity, see his article, "James Cone and the Question of What it Means to be Really Human," *Journal of Religious Studies* 18 (1992): 34-49.

course whiteness as such, meaning skin color, is no problem. However, in the black experience whiteness almost always means racism and this is a very big problem. Therefore, for Cone, whiteness in soul and mind, meaning in our way of being, is not identifying with the oppressed. He argues that we cannot be white, culturally speaking, and think and act biblically. In fact, he argues that the gospel denies whiteness as an acceptable form of human existence. He further defines it as the symbol of humanity's depravity and the expression of what is wrong with humanity, which is not living as if Christ is at the center of our lives. If our racial identity expresses who we are and is the determinate of how we live, then whites must destroy their white identity, which represents racism and oppression, and forfeit privilege based on whiteness.¹⁹ They are free only when they become new persons by radically reorienting themselves to be on the side of the oppressed. When they do this their white being passes away and they are created anew in black being. Black identity means standing with that which society oppresses and denigrates, namely blackness, and taking a stand for liberation.

Black persons must also embrace blackness. Blackness in Cone's theology represents the tension between oppression and the certainty of liberation. It is both the visible reality of oppression in the U.S. and an ontological symbol of the ultimate liberation of the kingdom of

¹⁹ This same theme is at the heart of a movement called race traitors. In an interview, Noel Ignatiev of *Race Traitor* magazine defines a race traitor as someone who is nominally classified as white, but who defies the rules of whiteness so flagrantly as to jeopardize his or her ability to draw upon the privileges of the white skin. Race traitors advocate the abolition of the white race. They contend that as long as the white race exists, all movements against what is called "racism" will fail. They promote models of amalgamation. They argue that although white supremacy seeks to repress the cultures of Afro-Americans and other peoples of color, American culture is incontestably mulatto. Without race prejudice, Americans might discover that culturally they are all Afro-American, as well as Native American, and so forth. See "Treason to Whiteness Is Loyalty to Humanity: An Interview with Noel Ignatiev of *Race Traitor* Magazine," in *Critical White Studies*, 607-12.

God.²⁰ Cone recognizes the suffering and humiliation of black people who are oppressed because of their blackness but appreciates that this suffering and oppression is not the definition of their humanity. He recognizes that people of color are often symbols of oppression, but they are also signs of hope for the creation of a new humanity when they reject racist living and make the black God/Christ the center of their being. U.S. society describes black as bad and rejects it as a way of being.²¹ Cone argues that God has made this blackness, this nonbeing in the world, God's own condition. No one can know God without knowing blackness. To be in relationship with and meet God, one must embrace what the world hates; take it on as one's own being. This is why Cone writes that blackness is holy, because it is a symbol of God's work and a mode of God's presence.²² It is a special creation of God offered to us as a gift by which each person can reorient their existence to be on the side of the oppressed. Blackness is a symbol of liberation from whiteness. Cone writes that blacks have been searching for an identity beyond the boundaries of black being set for them by whites and white society. This is evidenced in the shifts in self-naming and identification of this community from colored to Negro to black to African American.²³ This search has also been an experience of an identity crisis because of the destruction of their past by whites and the attempt at assimilation as well as their own attempts to uncover their history and a new meaning to blackness within the reality of white social and political power. Cone argues that black persons must also accept blackness as a gift of the creator, as a special creation of God.

²⁰ Cone recognizes that not all those who are oppressed are black. If we understand with Cone that the kingdom of God is ultimate liberation, any humiliation caused by oppression is inconsistent with this promised future and our contemporary living of our faith based on it. See Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 6 and 137.

²¹ This rejection is not mere individual or collective prejudice but backed by social sanctions in the form of economic exploitation and political marginalization to those who embody and embrace blackness. See Cone, *For My People*, 5.

²² Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 69.

²³ See Cone, *My Soul Looks Back*, 95; and *For My People*, 14.

In Cone's theology, in order for anyone to adopt this new way of being and living one must be liberated from our white past and its ideology of racism. In opposition to a Christ-centered way of being, racism is an outright denial of the Incarnation and Christianity. It does not recognize that Jesus is with the oppressed in their blackness so it cannot recognize that that is where Christians must be as well. Cone argues that the ultimate reality and meaning of humanity is thwarted by the existence of racism and the exaltation of whiteness, which sadly is the social ethos of the U.S. The liberation Cone believes we all need is different for different people. Non-freedom is a sin in his theology but we all sin differently depending on our social location. White sin is the folly of playing God. Whites are enslaved and dehumanized by their own will to power. Therefore, they must be freed from their racism. Black sin, on the other hand, is their loss of identity in a desire to be white. Blacks must be freed from their self-hatred. Their freedom will involve new ways of looking at and living reality. Cone argues that by repudiating the other's status as master, the oppressed are no longer slaves and can reorient their existence and achieve freedom even while still being poor or oppressed. This new vision enables them to fight their oppression. Both versions of liberation, white and black, are for Cone "not doing what I will but becoming what I should" and this becoming is to realize in ourselves the image of God.²⁴

For Cone race goes beyond mere skin color but is always connected to the meaning and significance given to skin color since race is a social construct based on skin color in U.S. society. Just as Christ's blackness is both literal and symbolic so is our racial identity. Humans obviously only live within the confines of their historical and cultural context, even though these are not the final determinants of humanity. In this contemporary context, people live with color as a defining characteristic and from its beginnings have ordered U.S.

²⁴ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 39.

society based on it. For Cone, however, racial identity is not just these constructions but also one's answer to the question of where is one's being and on what do you ground it. Identity, including racial identity, is not set once and for all but is defined by what one believes about God/Christ and how one acts on this belief. If people understand their purpose as Christians to be about the kingdom of God and their obligation to act as if Christ was at the center of their lives, then they will renounce "whiteness" and follow the "black" Christ. If one grounds their being in God then they must become black, no matter what their skin color, because blackness is obedience to the gospel message to be in solidarity with the oppressed.

As a theologian aware and reflective of his context, Cone recognizes the significance of race based on skin color in the United States. He challenges this significance when he writes that race has little to do with skin color. For Cone, black is the color of the heart, soul and mind when one is fully with the dispossessed. Blacks are those who say they are and act as though they are black regardless of their skin color. The blackness of one's skin color is not enough to be living the image of God and does not exempt one from criticism.²⁵ Only with the destruction of whiteness, for racially defined whites and blacks alike, can the wholeness of humanity, evidenced in the life of Jesus Christ, be realized. Because it represents this wholeness, Cone can describe being black as our ultimate reality and identity.²⁶ He admits that although blackness now describes materially the condition of the oppressed, it may not always be an appropriate symbol to describe the complete solidarity between God/Christ and the suffering. But for now Cone uses racial identity to reflect on our being as human persons.

²⁵ Cone has often voiced disappointment and criticism of the black church. As an example, see "Black Theology and the Black Church," chap. 3 in *My Soul Looks Back*.

²⁶ See Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 32-33.

Cone challenges Christians to expand the concept of material identity to consider how it reflects beliefs and being based on these beliefs. Cone's challenge of reversal, understanding black as holy and white as evil, and his insistence on the need for all Christians to become black, disrupts commonsense and accepted notions of the meaning of skin color and race. One is black or white, with the oppressed or the oppressors, with God or not. By challenging current concepts of race, new possibilities for being are created. The goal for Cone is not to reify race but to embrace individuality. This individuality is not a laissez faire individuality but part of a new humanity in which the special uniqueness of every person is given and received, regardless of physical characteristics.²⁷ It is an individuality that expresses one's core beliefs through the construct of race.

Race as Historical Legacy

A second approach to race is race as historical legacy, which claims that race still exists as the identities established to justify slavery and its aftermath of legalized discrimination, namely, race constructed as black and white. This racial ideology created stereotypes that led to a mythology deeming blacks inferior in nature and whites naturally superior. This racial ideology was so strong and so widely accepted that it was then and still

²⁷ Cone recognizes that identity is a complex concept. He has come to recognize that there are interlocking structures of oppression that shape our society and world and has therefore broadened the scope of his analysis to realize the sins of sexism, imperialism, and classism. See "Black Theology, Feminism, and Marxism," chap. 5 in Cone, *My Soul Looks Back*. For more on Cone's engagement with women's experience, see James H. Cone, "Women's Experience of the Sacred: An African American Male Theological Response," *Voices from the Third World* 19, no. 1 (June 1996): 162-69. For more on his engagement with other liberation theologies, see James H. Cone, "From Geneva to Sao Paulo: A Dialogue Between Black Theology and Latin American Liberation Theology," in *Black Theology: A Documentary History 1966-1979*, eds. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 371-87; "Theologies of Liberation Among U.S. Racial-Ethnic Minorities," in *Convergences and Differences*, eds. Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 54-64; and "Black Theology and the Imperative and Dilemma of Solidarity," in *Struggles for Solidarity: Liberation Theologies in Tension*, eds. Lorine M. Getz and Ruy O. Costa (Minneapolis: Fortress Pr, 1992), 37-48. Cone has also begun to engage with the ecological movement. See "Whose Earth Is It Anyway?" *Cross Currents* 50 (Spring-Summer 2000): 36-46.

is at the heart of American culture. Those who investigate race from this angle claim that by exploring and coming to grips with this racial legacy, we not only better understand our own identities as black and white, but we make conscious how this racial ideology influences our thoughts and actions. This approach views race as relational and dynamic and recognizes that we continue to construct race in how we live together today. The goal of this approach to race is to educate people about racial legacies so as to change the constructions of white and black to a new way of living together that does not continue the injustices of the past. Although all black theologians base their theology on the black experience, which in the United States began and continues to be influenced by slavery and legalized discrimination, I use the work of womanist theologians Delores Williams and Kelly Brown Douglas to outline this theory of race.²⁸

Both Williams and Brown Douglas argue that in order to understand race in this country one must begin with an investigation of the American institution of slavery that gave birth to it. Williams uses the term slavocracy to connote that slavery in the U.S. involved not just the act of enslaving black people but a whole ideology—a way of being and thinking. At the heart of this slavocracy was the construction of race in terms of white and black, which assigned essential importance to skin color. Williams contends that although colonists also deemed Native Americans as different and inferior, they based this assessment on English national and religious biases; the same evaluation applied to Negro slaves had to do with

²⁸ I rely on Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); and Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999). I more fully investigate their work in Chapter 4, which explores how womanist theologians and thinkers bring together race and sex/gender.

English values regarding color, especially blackness.²⁹ She argues that skin color or blackness became “an independent rationale for enslavement.”³⁰

Historian Winthrop Jordan in his book *White Over Black* gives a different answer to the question of the relationship of slavery and the creation of race based on skin color.³¹ Jordan concludes that difference of color, which became the “mark” of race and really “race” itself, was not the reason for enslaving Africans; it was the rationale for it, after the fact. At first, the English believed the Africans had no religion or civilization and they thought the African ways were lewd and libidinous. These impressions made the Africans heathen, savage, and almost bestial in their eyes, but Jordan contends that even all of this did not add up to a vision of innate, ineradicable inferiority rooted in the body. The need for such a vision of race based on skin color arose with the spread of slavery, which became the better means of meeting the material and economic interests of the English colonizers than indentured servitude.³² As Luther Wright writes in “Who’s Black, Who’s White, and Who Cares,” “One problem with the existence of indentured servants and slaves in a free society was the ease with which slaves or servants could escape if they were not distinguishable from free citizens. By linking slavery to race, slave escape became much more difficult, particularly once all blacks were presumed to be slaves.”³³ This focus on skin color also resulted from the slaveowners’ or slave supporters’ wrestling with the questions that arose

²⁹ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 90.

³⁰ Ibid., 92.

³¹ I rely on James Campbell and James Oakes’ analysis of Jordan’s book in their article “The Invention of Race: Rereading *White Over Black*” in *Critical White Studies*, 145-51. I am not here interested in whether their analysis is the “correct” one but am focusing on an alternative argument about the relationship of slavery and race than that proposed by Williams. Jordan argues that skin color was only one of the ways the English described the difference between themselves and Africans in their first face-to-face encounters. Although they described them as *black*, an exaggerated term full of negative connotations, more impressive to the English at the outset was that the African appeared to have no religion or civilization.

³² Campbell and Oakes, “The Invention of Race,” 146-47. A great labor shortage existed in a place where the availability of land resulted in few people voluntarily selling their labor for wages.

³³ Luther Wright, Jr., “Who’s Black, Who’s White, and Who Cares,” in *Critical White Studies*, 164.

concerning the place of free blacks or the status of children of “mixed” couples.³⁴ These questions demanded a more systematic approach to blacks and race. This approach drew on two secular traditions of the time, the Great Chain of Being and the Linnaean system of biological classifications, which led to “the naturalization of man” that used the human body as a basis for distinguishing between different groups of people.³⁵ The process of building the American nation where equality was a national ideal involved “imagining” a community in which some would be included while others excluded. Jordan argues that in the post-Revolutionary period, based on the premise of black inherent inferiority, American intellectuals, in effect, claimed America as a white man’s country.

Both Delores Williams and Kelly Brown Douglas recognize that any ideas and theories about blackness also suggest ideas and theories about its opposite, namely whiteness. These bodily distinctions were constructed in relation to each other. Both authors contend that the debasement of blackness is always related to the overvaluation of whiteness. The white and black “races” became polar opposites connoting, respectively, “purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and beneficence and evil, God and the devil.”³⁶ Williams argues that by regarding blacks as “nasty and beastly” they could be required to do any kind of work the slavocracy demanded.³⁷ Whiteness according to the

³⁴ Jordan argues that widespread fear and loathing of free blacks was a crucial component in the development of racist ideology. It was the existence of free blacks that constituted an invitation to develop a new rationale which would tell white men who they were and where they stood in the community—the rationale of racial superiority. Campbell and Oakes, “The Invention of Race,” 148, 150. By the turn of the century, the free status of blacks and the growing difficulty in distinguishing them from whites sharpened the nation’s need to define race. The legal categories of griffe, octoroon, quadroon, and mulatto betray a society so concerned with racial purity that it began to define distinct categories by which to delineate the degree of “taint.” See Wright, “Who’s Black, Who’s White, and Who Cares,” 166.

³⁵ The Great Chain of Being is a Western medieval concept of the hierarchical structure of the universe, which extends from God down to the lowest forms of life. The Linnaean system is a biological taxonomy that classifies organisms according to their similarities. It was developed by the Swedish scientist Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778). In it organisms are sorted according to kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species.

³⁶ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 90.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

slavocracy meant you were not a slave and did not have to prove this status. Very concretely, a person's race based on the color of their skin determined their freedom. In addition to indicating one's place in society, a person's skin color was also assumed to indicate their innate value. Slavery demanded that black inferiority be grounded in nature. This construction of race was supported by all manner of thought including that of science, religion, and law.³⁸

Williams and Brown Douglas argue that although most racist caricatures were developed in order to justify the institution of slavery, their influence continues to prevail in society today. Brown Douglas writes that growing up black in America means discovering early in life the various stereotypes that surround blackness. Both Williams and Brown Douglas examine these stereotypes and caricatures that were part of the mythology of slavery and analyze how they have been translated into modern parlance. Brown Douglas writes that the image of Jezebel defined the black female as "a person governed almost entirely by her libido," a temptress, and thereby justified white men's sexual exploitation of black women.³⁹

³⁸ Theories in religion and science were employed to justify the enslavement and oppression of blacks and to assuage any feelings of guilt by providing "evidence" of its historical and scientific inevitability. White interpretations of the bible reasoned that the enslavement of black people was intended by God and recorded in scripture, especially the story of the curse of Ham and Paul's defense of slavery. The work of some physical anthropologists claimed that blacks had always been servants to the "more intelligent" races, read Caucasian, even in the most distant past. "Scientific" studies of sociobiology and the eugenics movement perpetuated the idea of black people's inherent intellectual and moral inferiority and white people's inherently superior intelligence and moral character. Sexual stereotypes of black people were also supported by "science" and were presented as "evidence" that black people were biologically predisposed to being lascivious and sexually perverse, which according to dominant Christian tradition signaled their inferiority and need to be dominated by those governed by reason, namely, white men. See Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 96, 105-6; and Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 34. Legal rhetoric throughout the centuries has also often "explained" the deprivation of blacks, and often the naturalness of it, and smoothed over the apparent inconsistency between U.S. realities and U.S. principles, all the while avoiding white responsibility for this degradation. For specific cases and examples, see Thomas Ross, "The Rhetorical Tapestry of Race," in *Critical White Studies*, 89-97; and Ian F. Haney López, "The Social Construction of Race," in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, 2d ed., ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 163-75. For more on how public policies are shaped by white privilege, see Linda Faye Williams, *The Constraint of Race: The Legacies of White Skin Privilege in America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

³⁹ Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 36.

Brown Douglas argues that the Jezebel image remains virtually intact in our culture and has been carried forth in the image of black women as welfare mothers/queens who are portrayed as promiscuous unmarried women.⁴⁰ Connected to the Jezebel image is the caricature of the black man as beastly and violent, the sexually perverse reprobate. This image justified treating the enslaved black man as a powerful animal, a buck, who could produce work and breed offspring. Through the years the supposed superpotency and virility of the black male has meant he is a sexual predator whose common prey was and is white women.⁴¹ These descriptions of slave mythology were used to justify the ill treatment of enslaved blacks, but they did not meet all the needs of the slavocracy. White slaveholders could not entrust the care of their children and their households to Jezebels and bucks. Therefore, the role and stereotype of the Mammy emerged.⁴² Mammy was the strong asexual nurturer of the white family. Mammy has become the strong, single mother with no needs, the domineering matriarch. Connecting current racial stereotypes with those of the past is one way that these authors support the claim that the racial system that justified slavery did not cease with emancipation.⁴³

⁴⁰ This Jezebel image is not limited to just impoverished black women, however. Brown Douglas contends that the Thomas/Hill hearings witnessed to the continuing power of the Jezebel image for all black women. A Jezebel asks for whatever sexual treatment she receives, from harassment to rape. Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 50, 53-55.

⁴¹ Brown Douglas contends that the O.J. Simpson case continued the image of the violent black man. She argues that white culture used all of its tools to show that black men *will not* get away with challenging white male superiority, especially when that challenge involves the defilement of white female purity. Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 46, 58.

⁴² Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 11. See more in Chapter 4 of this dissertation about Mammy and the intersection of race and sex/gender.

⁴³ The race created by slavery continued to define life and living after slavery's abolition. The fact that passing was so common during the "separate but equal" era highlights the fact that there were great societal benefits, even after slavery, to being classified as a white person. See Luther Wright, Jr., "Who's Black, Who's White, and Who Cares," 166. See also Linda L. Ammons, "Mules, Madonnas, Babies, Bathwater: Racial Imagery and Stereotypes," in *Critical Whites Studies*, 276-79. She defines stereotypes as "the language of prejudice;" as such, they are a part of the social heritage of a society. They appear in a range of materials from academic sources to rock-and-roll lyrics. She adds that the subtlest and most pervasive of all influences are those which create and maintain the repertory of stereotypes, for these preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, can govern deeply the whole process of perception.

Williams and Brown Douglas maintain that the racial ideology that was developed within the history of slavery and oppression and that has always valued whiteness over blackness is still at the heart of American culture. Williams argues that skin color consciousness and the value put upon color have birthed a pathological pattern in American culture that continues to this day. She names this pattern “white racial narcissism” and defines it as the overvaluation of one group’s skin color to the pathological point of using the group’s power and authority to persecute others who are not of that skin color.⁴⁴ She contends that in this country and its society whiteness is valued as good and its opposite blackness has been assigned a permanent negative value. The view that blackness is bad, frightening, and dangerous, especially when it is the color of human bodies, has saturated the American national consciousness and conscience. Brown Douglas also views American society as one that is fixated on whiteness and has embraced and lives a white culture.⁴⁵ White culture is the very culture that harbors and nurtures white racism.

This racial ideology in the U.S. serves several purposes. One is economic. Williams writes that the debasement of blackness and therefore black people was from the beginning economically important to this country. The slave trade was the primary source of wealth during the colonial period. Brown Douglas concurs that black people have been absolutely critical to white economic power, initially as free labor and later as cheap labor. The ability to freely exploit black bodies with relative impunity has been critical to the labor market. She adds that another reason these stereotypes have been employed by white culture is that

⁴⁴ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 88.

⁴⁵ Brown Douglas defines culture as “the totality of any given society’s way of life and comprises a people’s total social heritage, including language, ideas, habits, beliefs, customs, social organization and traditions, arts and symbolism, crafts and artifacts.” All of these in the U.S. have various marks of and usher forth from whiteness. She recognizes that some white people, though recognizing white hegemony, refute the existence of white culture. To do this, she argues, is to fail to see the deep imprints of whiteness on our society. Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 17-18, 23.

the very color and physiognomy of black persons has inspired both fear and fascination from whites. Both reactions have served to heighten the sense that black people need to be controlled.⁴⁶

The mythology of whiteness and blackness serves not only the function of denigrating and subsequently oppressing blacks but also of uniting whites. Williams writes that even though after slavery, poor whites would have had more in common with the plight of blacks, they nevertheless got their feelings of self-worth from membership in the white race since society invested such great value in white skin. American culture employed whiteness as a variable to unite various European immigrants together in a white group identity. Brown Douglas maintains that European immigrants arrived as Irish, Italian, English, German, and various other ethnic and cultural groups, yet somewhere on the shores of America they became white. They subordinated their ethnic and cultural particularities in order to adopt a common national identity as *white* Americans.⁴⁷ This white group identity was the harbinger of white culture, which exists primarily as it is contrasted with that which is non-white.

The theory of race as historical legacy respects the fact that our current attitudes toward race and our own racist selves did not spring out of a vacuum, but have long cultural antecedents. It approaches race as something formed by social distinctions, invented in time and place, not nature. Race was not created by one person or even a group but by the needs of a way of life, in this case the slavocracy of the United States. We cannot properly address our bodily reality without recognizing the inheritance of race born in the system of

⁴⁶ Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 24.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 13. Emphasis hers. James Barrett and David Roediger argue in their article "How White People Became White" that although most immigrants did not arrive in this country with conventional U.S. attitudes regarding "racial" difference, they soon got caught up in them when they arrived on the shores of a country obsessed with race. They contend that "becoming white" and "becoming American" were connected at every turn. Native born and older immigrants often placed new immigrants in an in-between racial category, above African- and Asian-Americans, but below "white" people. These same older immigrants, particularly the Irish, had themselves been perceived as "nonwhite" just a generation earlier. In *Critical White Studies*, 402-3.

oppression and privilege. We are heirs to notions of race based on skin color. People were members of different races because they were assigned to them based on skin color. It was important for this racial ideology, however, to connect skin color not only to supposedly different biological groupings but to connect the color of race to innate characteristics that were then classified hierarchically. Whites possessed a superior nature; blacks were closer to animals. This theory of race lays out what our racial legacy works to keep unnoticed; namely, that race is constructed for specific purposes. It is in no way natural or innate. This approach to race challenges people to understand the progression, content and purpose of the construction of race in the U.S. in order to better understand black and white identity. Black theologians and theorists understand the importance of and have undertaken the task of investigating the history of being one's race in this country. They have also repeatedly called upon white theologians and theorists to do their own work on the meaning of whiteness and of white privilege or white supremacy. James Baldwin counseled white people to "do your first works over." He called them "to reexamine everything. Go back to where you started, or as far back as you can, examine all of it, travel your road again and tell the truth about it. Sing or shout or testify or keep it to yourself: but know whence you came."⁴⁸ White theorists

⁴⁸ James Baldwin, "Introduction," *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1985), xix. The editors of *Disrupting White Supremacy From Within* claim that Baldwin's challenge to white U.S.-Americans informs the work they take up in this volume. In addition, the collection of essays was inspired by James H. Cone's 2001 plenary address at the American Academy of Religion annual meeting when he charged that more than thirty years after the emergence of black liberation theology, white theologians have failed, overwhelmingly, to make racism a starting point of their theological reflection. The lecture at the AAR can be found in James H. Cone, "Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 55, no. 3-4 (2001): 1-15. See Harvey et al., *Disrupting White Supremacy From Within*, 7. Rev. Bryan Massingale has called on Catholic ethicists to name explicitly the reality of white privilege by engaging "the social sciences in a serious analysis of 'whiteness' as a social location of structured advantage and dominance, [without which] their understanding of racism will continue to be superficial and result in ineffective pastoral practices." Bryan N. Massingale, "James Cone and Recent Catholic Episcopal Teaching on Racism," *Theological Studies* 61 (December 2000): 727. Alex Mikulich responds to Massingale in "Mapping 'Whiteness': The Complexity of Racial Formation and the Subversive Moral Imagination of the 'Motley Crowd,'" *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 25 (2005): 99-122. Catholic theologians are also taking up the task of analyzing white privilege in Laune M. Cassidy and

and white theologians are beginning to answer this call. Thinkers in various fields are beginning to interrogate whiteness and a field of critical studies of whiteness has emerged. The purpose of these studies is to investigate the meaning of whiteness in a white supremacist society. Racism is understood as a white problem and the goal is to dismantle the structures that support and encourage it.⁴⁹

This theory of race contends that the origin and staying power of white supremacy are confronted only when we delve into the history of race and its ongoing legacy. White supremacy should be understood as a system of individual, institutional, and societal practices in which whiteness, meaning “white” bodies, and the cultural and societal practices associated with those deemed “white,” are seen as normative and superior, and through which white people are granted advantaged status of various kinds and their political, social, and economic dominance is maintained as is the subjugation of peoples of color.⁵⁰ Once we recognize that human interaction is a source and continued basis for racial categorization, we now put ourselves in a position to change the continuing racial ideology based on white supremacy by expressing, embodying, and living race differently. This legacy results in some bodies being more valued, which is contradictory to both the Christian revelation that all are created in God’s image and the American proclamation that all are created equal. With knowledge and understanding we can recreate race for the purpose of equality.

Alexander Mikulich, eds., *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007).

⁴⁹ Some examples of this work can be found in Delgado and Stefancic, eds., *Critical White Studies*; Harvey et al, *Disrupting White Supremacy*; Mikulich, “Mapping ‘Whiteness’”; and Ruth Frankenberg, ed., *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁵⁰ Based on definitions of white supremacy in *Disrupting White Supremacy From Within*, 4, 23, 36. White supremacy is saturating. Thinkers such as bell hooks argue that white supremacy is a better expression of the exploitation of peoples of color, than racism, as it overtly names the link between discrimination of racism and the privileges held by whites, *Disrupting White Supremacy*, 22.

Race as Culture

The approach to race as culture claims that defining race in terms of skin color is insufficient and inaccurate. This theory shifts the focus from race as skin color to race as communities with shared histories that provide their members with a common worldview and culture. Black identity becomes African American identity which better reflects the self-understanding and culture of a specific community. This approach to race recognizes that black bodies not only symbolize oppression in American society, but embody African American culture that stretches back before this oppression and sustained people in the midst of it. Theologians who posit this approach to race believe it provides new challenges and insights to the Church in terms of individual and communal embodiment as well as breaking down barriers between people while maintaining diversity and difference. This approach to race is well represented in black Catholic theology. I use the work of Diana Hayes, Jamie Phelps, M. Shawn Copeland, and Joseph Brown to explore it.

Race as culture recognizes that traditional racial classifications such as black and white are too vague and do not reflect the diversity that exists within the very groups they are trying to define. These racial classifications define racial groups as monochromatic and monolithic in order to easily define who are to rule and who should be ruled. Diana Hayes argues that these classifications mostly serve to maintain the “hegemonic dominance of persons of European descent,” those deemed “white.”⁵¹ They were never meant to address the diversity that exists in all racial groups. In fact, such nuance immediately breaks down the categories of black and white. For example, the black community is extremely diverse encompassing different languages, cultures, and skin colors. The either/or approach to race

⁵¹ Diana L. Hayes, “To Be the Bridge: Voices from the Margins,” in *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins*, eds. Eleazar S. Fernandez and Fernando F. Segovia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, Books, 2001), 65.

divides people into neat and specific boxes and alienates one from the other even if they share interests and concerns. The approach to race as culture addresses both the problem of unnecessary distinction of persons into absolute others and the problem of not recognizing true diversity between persons. By shifting focus to culture, and therefore community, this approach to race encourages true diversity in the richness of different cultures, yet allows room to unite for common goals of justice.

The approach to race as culture shifts emphasis from race as skin color and the history of racial categorization based on it to a focus on community. Proponents of this race theory argue that how people define and name themselves depends more on the particular communities and cultures into which they are born than any specific physical attributes.⁵² Therefore, they focus on the shared story of the community not simply the physical attributes the community has in common. Personal identity is understood as coming from being part of a community with a shared history that produces a shared culture. Communities nurture and teach their members. They provide a worldview, a context for self-understanding, traditions, heritages, art, music, and language. These communities with their specific cultures provide a way to understand self and the world. These cultures are part of their members forever because they form a person's identity. Community identity is not just a historical legacy but on ongoing and changing reality. To be authentically part of a community is to trace one's roots throughout the history of that community and also to be part of the ongoing reality of the community. The community's story is always unfolding. Therefore, racial identity is not set once and for all because the story of it is still being told in the day-to-day existence of the

⁵² Hayes, "To Be the Bridge," 67.

community that produces it. It evolves as culture changes with the times and circumstances.⁵³

The theory of race as culture in its shift of focus from skin color to community treats black heritage more specifically as African American heritage. Hayes contends that although most black theologians use the terms African American and Black American interchangeably, African American is the appropriate term for those who trace their ancestry back to the time of slavery in the United States, while black American is a more inclusive term covering not only African Americans but any person of African descent living within the United States today regardless of intermediate places of origin.⁵⁴ She argues that African Americans' ancestors may have been free or enslaved, but either way they were marked by the experience of slavery and usually have a worldview somewhat different from that of other persons of African descent. This kind of specificity in talking about "racial" groups is at the heart of a race as culture approach.

This specificity also reflects the importance of self-naming for communities and individuals. In the last section race was treated as a historical legacy and being raced was the experience of being named rather than self-naming. This current approach to race holds up culture as identity because it claims that culture is who and what we say we are.⁵⁵ An approach to race as culture understands that self-naming is not only important but liberating, especially if people lift up a name formerly used to denigrate and dehumanize as is the case

⁵³ Diana L. Hayes, "Emerging Voices, Emerging Challenges: An American Contextual Theology," in *Theology Toward the Third Millennium: Theological Issues for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. David G. Schultenover (Omaha: Creighton University, 1991), 51. For example, Hayes writes that the complexity of culture and identity must now consider the challenges of contemporary life including how issues of gender, social and economic concerns impact understandings of race.

⁵⁴ Diana L. Hayes, "James Cone's Hermeneutic of Language and Black Theology," *Theological Studies* 61 (December 2000): 610.

⁵⁵ See Jamie T. Phelps, "African American Culture: Source and Context of Black Catholic Theology and Church Mission," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 3:3 (1996): 58.

for African Americans. Of course, African American culture includes the reality of racial classification and racial injustice, but it also embodies the agency of the community in self-definition. Self-naming as African and American better represents an identity informed by the new community born in the United States as a result of the institution of slavery and by the ancient people from whom they came and inherited ways of being in the world.

The African American community provides its members with an identity that recognizes both its African roots and its American reality. It is a specific identity that reflects a particular community's experience. The roots of this experience stretch back to Africa and help the community understand itself as heirs of African cultures. But the African American identity also reflects their long and proud history in the United States where they formed themselves into a new people.⁵⁶ This African reality and American experience collided in the African slave trade, which affected identity throughout the world.

Joseph Brown writes,

No mistake should ever be made regarding an assessment of the culpability and the consequences of the transatlantic trade in human beings. Millions and millions of lives were lost; millions more would wish for death, once they found out what the life of enslavement would bring them. Centuries of systematic torture, manipulation, abuse, and domination of human beings by other human beings have brought into the world a pattern of psychosis and destructive behaviors that has infected cultures and peoples everywhere.⁵⁷

The impact of the slave trade is central to the previous theory of race as historical legacy; it is here explored as part of the creation of African American culture and identity.

⁵⁶ Jamie Phelps employs W.E.B. DuBois' classical idea of "double consciousness" as a descriptive metaphor for this racial-cultural experience. Many historically conscious black Americans perceive themselves as bi-cultural. They are culturally both sons and daughters of Africa and sons and daughters of America. See Phelps, "African American Culture," 43.

⁵⁷ Joseph A. Brown, *To Stand on the Rock: Meditations on Black Catholic Identity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 71.

The American part of the African American reality and identity began with the story of African persons stolen from their communities and their land by slave traders. This was just the beginning of a process by slavers to strip these people of all that made them who they were, including their language, traditions, and culture. The goal was to make them a blank slate upon which to draw a new and derogatory image of the enslaved person.⁵⁸ The enslaved resisted these efforts in whatever ways they could and countered with their own efforts to create a new self-image for themselves. Enslaved Africans transformed themselves into a new people by embracing each other as brothers and sisters no matter the differences between them, and becoming an African American community. The members of this community shared a history of oppression and suffered from the stigma associated with black skin color in American society. Jamie Phelps writes that all the attempts to dehumanize African Americans did impact their culture-making process, but did not dominate it.⁵⁹ African Americans replaced slavery's negative depictions of them with more positive self-images. Their self-understanding comes from the stories of the community that have formed and sustained it, especially those stories that tell and retell their history. In addition to stories, Joseph Brown writes that enslaved Africans became a community through their song. He contends that they sang themselves from small groups of individuals into a people. Their singing brought them from the brink of collective psychic collapse to a place where systems of psychological health could be generated and sustained.⁶⁰

Theologians who investigate African American identity from a cultural perspective recognize that this new people born in America through their stories and songs were in fact

⁵⁸ Hayes, "To Be The Bridge," 55. See Race as Historical Legacy section of this dissertation for more information about the mythology of slavery.

⁵⁹ Phelps, "African American Culture," 44.

⁶⁰ Brown, *To Stand on the Rock*, 66.

not new people. The approach to race as culture leads theologians back to Africa in an attempt to trace African American heritage backward and find lines of influence forward. When theologians advocate for a black theology that is truly black, they mean one that reflects African American culture embracing American experience and African heritage. The connection they seek is not so much an innate biological sense of being African but a way of understanding the influences of African cultures on the culture and community that became African American. Of course, the task of African Americans tracing their roots back to Africa is not simple. Unlike immigrants from other countries, enslaved Africans were systematically stripped of their history and heritage by the slavocracy of America. Finding one's specific heritage in Africa is difficult because it is a continent of many different cultures and traditions. Even if the search is narrowed to the Western part of Africa where most enslaved Africans were captured, one still finds there peoples of different cultures and religions. Some scholars, therefore, try to map out and make connections among the different cultures and religions of those Africans most likely enslaved in order to find similarities and patterns. There are efforts to distinguish a distinctive African culture at the base of all African cultures, whether on the continent or in the diaspora, and to describe an Afrocentric worldview. Theologians have begun to outline a traditionally African religious perspective that would have influenced African American Christianity.⁶¹

⁶¹ Drawing from the blended identity of African and American, M. Shawn Copeland describes what she considers the most essential characteristics of an African American Christian worldview: creative and tensive holding of the sacred and secular, without separation or dilution; profound respect for all human life and interpersonal relationships; individual identity formation from and in relation to community, along with regard for the wisdom of elders; empathetic, symbolic, diunital, and associative understanding; unity of being and doing; commitment to freedom and liberation due to centuries of oppression and communal and personal anxiety; ambiguous toleration and transcendence of a notion of limited reward in the context of slavery and stigmatized social history; indirection and discretion in speech and behavior; affirmation of styling; intentional or unintentional improvisation in language, gestural, or symbolic mannerisms to favorably affect the receipt of a message. See M. Shawn Copeland, "Body, Representation, and Black Religious Discourse," in *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*, eds. Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan (New York:

Employing an approach to race as culture, black theology teases out the black experience, which is its main source for doing theology. It is the African American community and its culture that black theology is referencing not racial classification in terms of biology. Even though the African and American elements of this culture are always wedded to the meaning given to certain aspects of physicality, it is the entire story of the African American community to which black theology refers. It reflects the particular experience of the divine this community has had within their culture.

M. Shawn Copeland writes that there is a synergy between identity and theology, between black identity and black theology.⁶² Black theologians that embrace a race as culture approach reflect on the African American community and its culture as a main source for doing theology. They learn the cultures of West Africa in order to truly understand what the slave trade meant to and did to captured Africans as well as what culture they brought with them and how that was molded into African American life and culture. They attend to the stories of these enslaved people to get a sense of how they were able to embrace a forced and often hostile Christianity. They learn from slave theology that slaves understood God speaking to them in their own medium. Diana Hayes explains this to mean that African American slaves could not worship God truthfully unless they “talked” with God through

Routledge, 2002), 189. Joseph Brown claims that central to African culture and therefore religion are the drum-and-dance-based religious expression, mystical forms of prayer, and the sense that all of creation contains the power of the divine and that this power is to be used for healing that which has been wounded and for the restoration of balance to that which has been perverted and distorted. Brown, *To Stand on the Rock*, 87. See also Phelps, “African American Culture,” 49-52, for how African American philosophical psychologists, sociologists, and political scientists studying the African American world have identified a distinct African American cultural world of behavior, ideas, values and meaning which, while not unique, evidence themselves with some consistency in the African American community and connect it with African and other African diaspora cultures.

⁶² M. Shawn Copeland, “Guest Editorial,” *Theological Studies* 61 (December 2000): 605.

their black culture.⁶³ This culture continues to mediate God's presence according to black theology.

This approach to race as culture is central to the conversation about being black and Catholic. The question has been raised to black Catholics whether it is possible to be *both* authentically black and truly Catholic.⁶⁴ Obviously this question is addressing more than skin color. Here the question is whether one can be wholly part of the black community and a full member of the Catholic Church at the same time. The question reflects the fact that the Catholic Church has been beset by racism in the past and present. The Church, with its Eurocentric identity, has encouraged African Americans to forsake their unique identities and cultural practices in order to be seen as truly Catholic. Other members of the black community understand this as a denial of black Catholics' blackness. The question here is whether these cultures, black and Catholic, are compatible and whether one can participate in both without betraying the other.⁶⁵

Diana Hayes proclaims the belief of Catholic theologians when she writes that to be black and Catholic is not a paradox; it is not a conflict; it is not a contradiction. To be black and Catholic is correct, it is authentic, it is who black Catholics are and have always been.⁶⁶ Jamie Phelps argues that to address this identity question one must have a thorough knowledge of the black and Catholic cultures in all their complexities. Most black Catholic

⁶³ Hayes, *And Still We Rise*, 98.

⁶⁴ Black Catholic theologians take on this challenge in a special issue of *Theological Studies* 61 (December 2000); Hayes and Davis, eds., *Taking Down Our Harps*; and Jamie T. Phelps, ed., *Black and Catholic: The Challenge and Gift of Black Folk: Contributions of African American Experience and Thought to Catholic Theology* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1997).

⁶⁵ Here I talk about a Catholic culture rather than church of faith because the challenge concerns how the Catholic community functions. At issue is the hierarchy and priesthood and who holds positions of authority as well as religious practices. See Diana L. Hayes, "We've Come This Far by Faith: Black Catholics and Their Church," in *Taking Down Our Harps: Black Catholics in the United States*, eds. Diana L. Hayes and Cyprian Davis (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 9. Hayes writes that questions about the faithfulness of black Catholics come from both the Catholic family and the greater black community.

⁶⁶ Hayes, "We've Come This Far by Faith," 9.

theologians begin with tracing the black presence in the Catholic Church. This stems from a conviction that to be authentically Catholic is to trace one's or one's people's roots in the Church, just as to be authentically black means to trace one's roots throughout that history as well. Sharing authentically in the history of these groups makes one part of them. Black Catholic theologians attend to their historical presence in the Catholic Church and rightly conclude that there have been African peoples in the Catholic Church as long as the Church has existed.⁶⁷ The Church needs to embody this reality at the altar, in the chancery, in the seminaries, and other educational institutions in black bodies, which are black culture. The Catholic Church has too long negated this culture, which hampers its ability to immerse itself in the lives, traditions, and cultures of a people historically seen as "less than" human, without cultures or traditions worthy of notice.⁶⁸ Its ability to join with these cultures is a critical contemporary challenge of the Catholic Church. These black Catholic theologians are challenging the Church to recognize the cultures and heritages of the many peoples who make up the Church and create true inculturation with respect to these life-giving and life-sustaining cultures. They also hope it will foster a new theology, open to the contributions of

⁶⁷ Black Catholic theologians have studied the history and presence of Africans and African Americans in the Catholic Church. They call attention to the African heritage of Augustine and Monica, Cyprian and Cyril, Perpetua and Felicity, point out that the first American "settlers" were black Catholics in Florida, and study the participation of African Americans in the life of the Church in the U.S. such as the Black Catholic Congresses and the establishment of religious orders. See Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad, 1996); M. Shawn Copeland, "Tradition and Traditions of African American Catholicism," *Theological Studies* 61 (December 2000): 632-55, *The Subversive Power of Love: The Vision of Henriette Delille* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), and ed. with LaReine-Marie Mosely and Albert J. Raboteau, *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009); and Hayes, "The Development of a Black Catholic Theology," chap. 8 in *And Still We Rise*.

⁶⁸ Jamie Phelps contends that the notion of the cultural inferiority of African Americans is a pervasive feature of the dominant U.S. culture. Based on social anthropological concepts of culture, she argues that there exist four etic perspectives regarding the cultures of black people, which have been internalized both by blacks and non-blacks. The first three attitudes are based on a notion of culture which adopts a single static cultural norm, in this case a Eurocentric one, and measures all other cultures as comparatively inferior. From the perspective of the dominant U.S. culture, African Americans appear to have: no culture (through the Civil War); a pathological culture; and a deprived culture (from Reconstruction until the Civil Rights era (1865-1968)). The fourth perspective would view African American culture as a different or distinct culture (early 20th C Pan African movement and re-emerged in Black Nationalist period (1968-1975) and in current Afrocentric Pan African Period (from 1975 to the present)). See Phelps, "African American Culture," 47-48.

every race and ethnicity, expanding our understanding not only of each other but also of God and Jesus Christ.

The goal of this approach to race is to shift focus and emphasis from race as physical, meaning skin color, to race as community or culture. It argues that our racial identity is constructed by the history of our communities as well as their ongoing stories. It emphasizes the self-definition of the community and not just how it has been traditionally defined by those in power for the purpose of oppression. This approach to race challenges people to self-define in a more nuanced way than the usual black and white categories. It points out that these groupings do not do justice to the diversity of those that make them up. Once we define ourselves and allow others their own self-definition we can appreciate our differences and meet on common ground.

This approach to race with its emphasis on culture treats black and white as quite different categories. The black community, or more specifically the African American community, developed a common culture based on the historical experiences of slavery and oppression and resistance to this but also things like food, art, music, language, styles, because they were robbed of their heritage and family and clan lineages. White is not a culture in the same way. Whites may have become a new group of people in America, but those that became “white” maintained the cultures of their immigrant forebears. Their whiteness was opposed to being “colored,” it only had meaning based on the oppression of blackness. There may be a worldview based on white supremacy, but this is not the same kind of worldview as that created in the African American community. This approach to race encourages whites to reclaim their cultural heritages and once again find and appreciate the diversity of the “white” race. Changing our approach to race can change how we interact

based on hierarchy and oppression to ways based on respect of differences. Diana Hayes articulates the goal as the recognition that we are all people of mixed races, mestizaje people, when it comes to culture, and still all of the same race, human persons.⁶⁹

Race as Class

The next theory of race contends that the construction of race can never be addressed as an independent variable. A full appreciation of the meaning and significance of race must include an economic analysis as well. This approach to race connects racial discrimination and economic exploitation as two sides of the same coin. I use the work of Dwight Hopkins to give voice to this approach to race.⁷⁰ Hopkins does not negate the continuing significance of race and racism in American society. He maintains that race matters in the United States, regardless of denomination, gender, class, sexual orientation, occupation, professional level, and political orientation, and racial discrimination still permeates North American culture.⁷¹ But Hopkins understands racial discrimination as just one aspect of the disenfranchisement suffered by African Americans. Another aspect is the restrictions they experience in controlling wealth, resources, and indeed the space surrounding them. These attacks on African American self-identity and self-determination have been an integral part of African American life and history.⁷² Therefore, Hopkins argues that the liberation of the black poor requires more than just a critique of race and an analysis of racism. A too narrow focus on race is inadequate because the forces that keep the black poor poor are more complex. Black

⁶⁹ Hayes, "To Be the Bridge," 67.

⁷⁰ I especially rely on Dwight N. Hopkins, *Heart and Head: Black Theology—Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

⁷¹ Dwight N. Hopkins and Linda E. Thomas, "Womanist Theology and Black Theology: Conversational Envisioning of an Unfinished Dream," in *A Dream Unfinished*, 73.

⁷² Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 17.

theology must understand the black poor's place in our economic system as well as in our national racial order. This complexity demands a more sophisticated theoretical framework that addresses both our postmodern situation and our economic reality.⁷³ Hopkins presents a theological analysis of monopoly capitalism and its underlying racism and proposes an alternative vision of a new common wealth. He advocates an understanding of the forces of global monopoly capitalism in order to create a more equitable world.

Hopkins argues that black theology must focus on the situation of the black poor if it is truly a Christian liberation theology. Black theology as Christian theology teaches us that God is a liberator God who co-labors with the poor and oppressed for justice. If the liberation of the least is God/Christ's purpose then it must be our purpose as Christians. Hopkins writes that the biblical stories call on humanity to oppose poverty, which is the result of human sin. He further asserts that the stories and lessons of Jesus teach us to judge life by the well-being of the most broken and vulnerable among our citizenry. Hopkins argues that black theology has always attended to the experience of the poor in its community. It arose from real life situations of African Americans struggling against racial oppression and economic exploitation. Hopkins calls on black theologians to continue to produce a theology concerned with the liberation of the poor, which involves dismantling the dehumanizing structures that make and keep African Americans poor. To do this, black theology must understand why the poor are and remain poor. This requires a class analysis. He writes,

⁷³ Hopkins lists some of the claims of postmodernity as the following: relativity means there is no right and wrong; social strata replace class consciousness; the lack of a long-term human purpose substitutes for an ultimate goal of liberation; particularity trumps universality; the appearance of many voices overcomes an overarching master story; and individualism cuts against the grain of obligation to a specific community. See *Heart and Head*, 62. See also Dwight N. Hopkins, "Postmodernity, Black Theology of Liberation, and the U.S.A.: Michel Foucault and James H. Cone," in *Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity, and the Americas*, 205-21.

The question of economically poor blacks living in the primary monopoly finance capitalist country in human history is the decisive question for both womanist and black male theologians. All else in God-talk and God-walk stands or falls on how Jesus Christ calls us to measure our everyday living by whether or not poor black people are getting better or worse. If black and womanist theologians are concerned with liberation and not only with band-aid reforms, then class, poverty, ownership of wealth, finance, and the means of production in the United States—indeed, in the world—need to be top priorities.⁷⁴

Hopkins advocates a wealth-class hermeneutic for black and womanist theologies in order to understand the system of global capitalism and how its unjust power dynamics on the national and international levels relate to and create the reality of the poor. It is wealth that is crucial for economic analysis not simply income because it is wealth that determines one's power and privilege in American society and throughout the world. Class differentiations in the U.S. are based on the control of wealth. Those with wealth own the means and distribution of production, including land, the natural minerals in the land, the commercial real estate on the land, the air over the land, communications networks, industries, technologies, companies and corporations.⁷⁵ Hopkins believes that monopolized wealth is one of the primary targets of the gospel for social justice because it is a major condition for the vast poverty and economic inequalities in North America and around the globe.

⁷⁴ Hopkins and Thomas, "Womanist Theology and Black Theology," 84. Hopkins cites Martin Luther King, Jr. as precedent of how concern for black liberation from a faith perspective pushes a person to a class analysis. King said, "As we talk about 'Where do we go from here,' ... we must honestly face the fact that the Movement must address itself to the question of restructuring the whole of American society. There are forty million poor people here. And one day we must ask the question, 'Why are there forty million poor people in America?'" King was raising serious questions about the overall political economy in the U.S. from the perspective of the least in society. Quoted in Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 60. Originally, Martin Luther King, Jr., "The President's Address to the Tenth Anniversary Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, August 16, 1967," in *The Rhetoric of Black Power*, ed. Robert L. Scott and Wayne Brockriede (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 161.

⁷⁵ Hopkins and Thomas, "Womanist Theology and Black Theology," 85. See also Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 24.

Hopkins contends that an economic analysis must be integral to black theology because the monopolized ownership of wealth in the United States is directly related to skin color. He argues that powerful white families, under the leadership of white men, crafted a sinister racist asymmetry, known as white supremacy, in order to monopolize resources.⁷⁶ Defining black as evil, powerful whites forced African Americans into servant and manual labor roles while also denying them human and civil rights that the majority of the population regularly expects as its God-given entitlement. Black human beings became just another resource to be used and dominated for profit and the accumulation of more wealth. Hopkins further contends that the state apparatus, also predominantly white, functions in collusion with, if not at the behest of, the small minority of white families who monopolize the majority of the wealth in the United States.⁷⁷ The racism of U.S. capitalism also means that the neighborhoods of poor black people can be the dumping grounds for deadly chemicals and other lethal toxins that shorten lives.⁷⁸

Hopkins' own analysis of the finance and means of production of global capitalism is uniquely theological, analyzing it as he would a religion, replete with a god, clergy, institutions, a theology, revelation, a theological anthropology and core values. According to Hopkins, the god or ultimate concern of the religion of globalization is the concentration of monopoly finance capitalist wealth. It is a transcendent god beyond allegiances or

⁷⁶ Hopkins argues that black and womanist theologians must also attend to the gender as well as racial hierarchy inherent in our capitalist system. He contends that every foundation of the U.S. has been based on male superiority. See Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 93.

⁷⁷ Hopkins maintains that one could argue persuasively that the inordinate amount of virile black men in prison in the twenty-first century results from a deliberate collaboration between monopoly capitalist-related prison industries and local, state, and federal governments. Someone is making billions of dollars from the incarcerated labor of black male bodies. See Dwight N. Hopkins, "The Construction of the Black Male Body: Eroticism and Religion," in *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, 186.

⁷⁸ For more on environmental racism, see Bryan N. Massingale, "An Ethical Reflection Upon 'Environmental Racism' in the Light of Catholic Social Teaching," in *Challenge of Global Stewardship: Roman Catholic Responses*, eds. Maura A. Ryan and Todd David Whitmore (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 234-50.

boundaries reflected in the fact that wealth circulates wherever in the world the owner can find the highest return. The religious leadership consists of a small group of U.S. families who privately own, control, and distribute wealth and the means of production. Like priests, they know the laws of the god and the requirements of its followers.

The institutions of the religion facilitate the flow of finance capital and aid the wealth of the priests. These entities, he argues, maintain dependent financial relationships, an unequal balance of trade, and unfair access to resources and wealth that allows the religion of globalization to have free access to the developed world and the Third World.⁷⁹ Hopkins argues that these institutions are enabled and justified by the theology of neoliberalism whose three prominent doctrines are an emphasis on free markets, privatization and deregulation. The goal is to open up global markets for the god of globalization. Transnational corporations enter developing countries, create unfavorable terms for the countries' efforts of exporting, and disrupt their economic planning for domestic prosperity. The governments of these countries stop regulating the harmful effects of business practices on their people and ecology. They are also forced to refocus resources to repaying debts on loans by monopoly capitalists and away from health, education, welfare, jobs, and other safety nets for their citizens. Devotees of the religion of globalization view the integration of all markets throughout the world, the weakening of the sovereignty and decision-making powers of local states and their shift of focus from their own people to the service of transnational corporations, and the movement to a worldwide culture as revelation of the truth and rightness of their god.

⁷⁹ Hopkins names the three most important of these as the World Trade Organization, international banks (including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank), and monopoly capitalist corporations. Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 132-33.

Hopkins writes that like all religions, the religion of globalization advances a theological anthropology, which defines what it means to be a human being in a religious system. In this system a person's worth is based on what they consume. A true human being is one who actually possesses commodities or one whose goal in life is to do so. The ideal person has the most concentrated financial wealth accumulation on a global scale, which they use for their own individual benefit. Global capitalism rejects communalism and embraces a utilitarian way of being. Only a few can become ideal persons for inequality and exclusion are requisites of the religion.⁸⁰ These values, Hopkins argues, are at the heart of U.S. society and other developed capitalist countries. These Western countries want to establish their way of life as the model for developing countries. The religion of globalization intends to create one transcendent world culture that prescribes the tastes and sensibilities of the true human being.⁸¹

Hopkins argues that the theological anthropology of global capitalism constructs the wealthy white person as the ideal model of human personhood. Monopoly capitalism is entwined with white supremacy. Hopkins writes that although its advocates present it as intended and supported by God, true Christians should know that God did not originate or advocate these oppressive systems. They are authored by humans and so can be dismantled by human efforts as well. Hopkins claims that the goal of liberation theology must be to liberate us all from an economic system that preys on the most vulnerable and rewards only the wealthy few. Economic analysis should lead us to a concerted effort to bring about systemic social justice and healing. These efforts should empower individuals and attack

⁸⁰ Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 135. For more on the need of the capitalist system for inequality and exclusion, see Israel Batista, "Social Movements: A Personal Testimony," in *Social Movements, Globalization, Exclusion. Social Movements: Challenges and Perspectives*, ed. Israel Batista (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967).

⁸¹ Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 148-49.

unjust systems created by the small group of monopoly owners of the world's wealth. He argues that black theology must unite its liberation theology with all the world's oppressed who struggle for God's purpose of justice on earth.⁸² Monopoly capitalism has stolen resources from blacks as well as other people of color and Third World nations and left them poor and oppressed all over the world. The poor must unite against the global dynamics of monopoly capitalism that destroys indigenous cultures, discriminates against darker-skinned peoples, oppresses women, and attacks the earth's ecology. Global monopoly capitalism strangles the poor regardless of religion or nationality.

According to Hopkins, these dialogues and actions should work toward what he calls a new common wealth. This new social order will include a new democracy and a new economic reality. The new democracy will focus its energy on the vulnerable and marginalized and will include true and equal representation of and from these populations. The new economic reality will be based on humanity sharing equally in all available resources and opportunities on earth. The equality established in both systems will be based on all citizens having similar material possessions and possibilities. The new common wealth will embrace communalism, not individualism. Members will recognize that no one can be fully human if another has access blocked or is less than someone else in the

⁸² Hopkins contends that this attack on monopoly capitalism must happen at both the grassroots level as well as on the national and international scenes. He suggests that the black church's economic resources and other forms of wealth (buildings, publishing centers, transportation vehicles, auditoriums, dining facilities, credit unions) on a national scale could offer an independent financial base for an alternative way of witnessing in a society that continually makes black life and labor expendable. He also advocates interfaith dialogues and interactions among theologians and churches concerned with the poor and their well-being. See Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*, 201; and *Heart and Head*, 73-74. Hopkins outlines an example of how to connect with Third World Theologians in "A Black American Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue in the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians," chap. 5 of *Heart and Head*.

community. Hopkins' vision of the new social order is based on creative individuality where the particularity of each person's cultural identity is respected and affirmed.⁸³

Hopkins maintains that for Christians this means adopting a preferential option for the poor. Christians serve the poor by putting love of neighbor above the private accumulation of things. Hopkins admits this is not easy for people in the U.S. as it goes against the grain of the "American way of life" and its commodified, consumer economy, which purports a me-firstism and instantaneous gratification. He contends that our economic and political structures actually reward those who oppose the poor's liberation. The commitment to embody a preferential option for the poor and embrace the love of neighbor demands a transformation of ourselves and our society. It means personally taking concrete action to help people get out of poverty. It also means restructuring society so that the poor become equal in all respects with those who currently hold privileges and wealth over them. Dwight Hopkins contends that Christian theology can and must provide an alternative vision of people and relating than that of the religion of globalization based on a preferential option for the poor rather than support of the wealthy few.⁸⁴

Hopkins theologizes that this vision of humanity is God's vision for humanity. God calls us to be healthy human beings as equal partners with each other and as equal and responsible stewards of the earth's resources. With concerted efforts we can dismantle

⁸³ Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 50. Hopkins distinguishes individuality from individualism. Individuality calls for accountability and obligation to the community, but with individualism a person makes skewed decisions and opts for narrow actions just for the self or even just for his or her family. An individual harms the self when left to live, think, and be alone separate from the group. Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 72

⁸⁴ Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 58-59. Hopkins recognizes, however unfortunate, that most churches, and theologians for that matter, do not embody or embrace such a vision. Some do take a stand with the poor but only in giving charity, not in working for systemic change. Others support the system of capitalism in various ways. There are those that blame the poor explaining that they are victims due to their own effort or lack of efforts. Others recognize the unfair and inequitable power of wealthy families and institutions but accept it for fear of losing money, members and privilege. Still others fully support the economic and political system of the United States and believe God blesses America as it is.

monopoly capitalism and white supremacy and for the first time in U.S. history experience a racial democracy. Hopkins maintains that no one in the new society would have private ownership of wealth, for no one can own personally what does not belong to them. This new communalism would foster a positive sense of self for each person since all would be involved in the process of building common wealth for all. In fact, this way of being would end all barriers to full humanity including not only class exploitation and racial oppression, but also gender discrimination and sexual identity exclusion. The new common wealth would embrace all.⁸⁵

Race as Illusion

The main claim of understanding race as illusion is that race is not a biological or “natural” category of human existence and should not be treated like one. This approach does not negate the historical significance or impact of race on our society and its members; but it does argue that times have changed and race is not what it was, nor should it be. Proponents of this theory of race contend that race has been reified in black theology and has indeed become an ontological category for black theologians. They claim that the black identity discussed in black theology continues to be determined by whiteness and modern white racial ideology. Advocates of understanding race as illusion propose a move away from thinking about race as the central issue of a person’s being to a more complex approach

⁸⁵ Hopkins’ new common wealth sounds a lot like socialism but he does not employ Marxist analysis. There are those, however, that advocate a Marxist approach to economic analysis for black theology. Alistair Kee, a European religious scholar, critiques Hopkins’ approach to race and class as inadequate and ineffectual since he is unwilling to really move from a race analysis to a class analysis, which he believes is a Marxist concept. See Kee, *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology*, 24-26. Cornel West also encourages black theology to dialogue with the progressive Marxist tradition. See Cornel West, “Black Theology and Marxist Thought,” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History 1966-1979*, vol. 2, 552-67; “Black Theology and Socialist Thought,” *The Witness* 63 (April 1980): 16-19; and “Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Capitalist Civilization,” *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 10.102 (2006): 67-83.

to human identity. They contend that only in this way can black theology address the real problems black people face and bring about true liberation. The work of Victor Anderson and Alistair Kee to illustrate this approach to race.⁸⁶ Both authors argue that black thinkers must transcend racial discourse with its racial apologetics and present a new way for black people to think about identity that allows for true fulfillment of the individual in community.

Both Alistair Kee and Victor Anderson agree that black is not an ontological category, but Anderson contends that it has become one in black theology. Anderson uses the term ontological blackness to describe this tendency in black theology to reify race. Racial reification, according to Anderson, is to treat race as if it objectively exists independent of historically contingent factors and the subjective intentions in the writings of historical and contemporary writers.⁸⁷ Treating race in this way makes membership in a racial group the totality of a person's existence. All other identifying characteristics become secondary to race. Anderson argues that in black theology blackness has been reified into the totality or unity of black experience.

Anderson contends that black theologians are heirs to a black intellectual tradition that has led to the reification of blackness. He argues that the African American approach to race he calls ontological blackness was determined by and reflective of white racial ideology, the racial discourse of modernity and European imperialism. This racial ideology was justified and supported by species logic applied to race as an organizing category. Species logic contends that every individual member of a species shares essential traits that identify the member within the species. White and black became species. Europeans articulated "white" traits as the unity of experience and taste with history and culture. The racialized

⁸⁶ Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*; and Alistair Kee, *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology*.

⁸⁷ Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness*, 11.

other of the “black” African was the opposite of the European and naturally inferior. This inferiority was inherent in their race and therefore their very being and so justified the contemporary politics of democratic exclusion that they experienced. Anderson writes that white racial ideology has had at least three functions, all of which had the goal of justifying inequality. It justified the supremacy of European consciousness on a comparative and hence a scientific basis; it provided historical and moral rationalizations for the spread of European imperialism throughout the world; and it justified the exclusion of blacks and other colonized peoples from civic republican citizenship.⁸⁸

Black thinkers responded to white racial ideology and defended black people by extrapolating what they understood blackness to be. Anderson argues that African American cultural philosophy became preoccupied with racial apologetics. It rejected categorical racism and white racial ideology’s negative projections of blacks and worked to expound the black cultural genius and civilization. The goal of black subjectivity became the disclosure of this genius and the representation of the civilization of African Americans. Anderson argues that this counter-discourse in African American cultural philosophy, including black theology, has produced a cult of black heroic genius. It, like the white racial ideology it repudiates, emphasizes racial categories and essentialized principles that determine identity. Anderson contends that just as in categorical racism all persons who are classified as members of the black race are included in qualities that distinguish this group from others. He argues that African Americans continue to represent themselves as the mirror of European genius.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness*, 52.

⁸⁹ Anderson notes that the cult of European genius espouses essentially heroic, epochal, and culture-advancing qualities and these are also at the heart of black heroic genius. He further charges that this blackness has also

Both Kee and Anderson argue that even the new self proposed and presented by black theology is not really new but still determined by their oppositional stance to those who previously defined them. They each contend that African American scholars are still presenting themselves within the confines of the blackness that whiteness created. The new black being continues to be defined within the binary dialectics of slavery and freedom, Negro and citizen, insider and outsider, black and white, and struggle and survival. Black consciousness is a revolutionary consciousness that requires oppression for its self-disclosure. Black being is always in relationship with white racism. Anderson argues that if black experience is defined as the experience of suffering and rebellion against whiteness, which are ontologically created and provoked by whiteness as the necessary condition of blackness, then whiteness appears to be the ground of black experience. This approach to black identity is problematic for two reasons. First, it does not adequately address contemporary black experience and identity; and second, it does not leave room for real liberation of black persons today.

Both Anderson and Kee contend that black theology's approach to racial identity is modern discourse that does not adequately relate to contemporary postmodern life. Both suggest that black theology needs to transcend modernity's racial consciousness and develop a real radical race critique. The first step in this move is to recognize that the culture that created categorical black identity is not ultimate but a human artifact and therefore changed and changeable. Another important tenet of this approach to race is the argument that black persons are not bound by black culture but in fact inhabit widely differentiated social spaces and communities. Anderson argues that African American life and experience are structured

taken on the patriarchal base of whiteness, with *moral manliness* being architectonic to African American cultural philosophy. See *Beyond Ontological Blackness*, 13, 50.

by dispersed and not always commensurable interests of class, gender, sexual differentials, and race. Therefore identity formation is conditioned by all of these factors as well as race. Black theologians must embrace the fact that raced identity is always present and effective, but it is not total. Anderson calls for a new politics of identity that balances an emphasis on community, unity, racial pride, and black interests, which mitigate claims for difference, with an emphasis on personality which privileges self-realization at the levels of labor, family, gender, sexual interests, and personal lifestyle choices, which can make it difficult to justify claims for community.

Anderson argues in favor of new literary critiques of African American cultural philosophy that address “race” as a dying category. Anderson proposes the grotesque aesthetic, which focuses on ambiguity and difference, as an adequate foundation for a contemporary rationality of difference. Anderson attributes his understanding of the grotesque to Friedrich Nietzsche who he claims best crystallized a reversal of the heroic epic. The grotesque contends with the seemingly diametrically opposed sensibilities in binary dialectics, but seeks neither negation nor mediation between them. It leaves them in tension and unresolved. It is a challenge to the mind’s instinctive endeavor to synthesize. It renders objects we perceive and our apperception of them confused or ambiguous. The grotesque aesthetic leaves open possibilities for creative ways for considering an object or subject, because the object is other than how it appears when one contour or another is attenuated.⁹⁰ Anderson argues that the grotesque in African American cultural analysis is able to see the morally ambiguous African American presence in American life. The cultural critic is freed up to play in the unresolved ambiguities of black life.

⁹⁰ For Anderson’s understanding and use of the grotesque, see *Beyond Ontological Blackness*, 120-38. Anderson relies on the following works by Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956); *The Gay Science* (Vintage Books, 1974); and *Twilight of the Idols* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990).

Anderson argues that this new approach to black identity and experience addresses the problems created by a focus on the heroic genius of black people in their struggles against oppression. He claims that when black scholars make suffering, rebellion, and survival essential marks of black experience, it leads to the absurd claim that anyone who is black is also oppressed. He believes that such a claim trivializes the nature of oppression many blacks genuinely experience. This oppression, of course, must be faced; but it must also be accurately named and described. Anderson maintains that defining race in terms of ontological blackness leads to another kind of limitation for black persons. He contends that defining black consciousness within the binary polarities of white racial ideology and black racial apologetics admits no possibility of transcendence or mediation from their dialectical boundaries of being, or the blackness that depends on whiteness for its meaning.⁹¹ Liberation then becomes the assumption of a revolutionary consciousness not real release from or change of the categories that define and create the suffering and oppression in the first place. Anderson is concerned for the individual seeking true personal thriving and fulfillment and he wonders whether individual fulfillment is possible within the confines of ontological blackness. Because of the over-emphasis on community and what it means to be really part of the black community, ontological blackness represses individuality and does not allow space for black persons to pursue goods outside of its dialectics even if they contribute to the person's fulfillment as an individual. Those who wander too far from authentic black consciousness often find themselves ostracized.

Anderson maintains that ontological blackness does not and cannot recognize that real black interests go beyond mere surviving to thriving and flourishing. He argues that human flourishing involves cultural fulfillment, which he defines as the integration of human

⁹¹ Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness*, 92.

social activity with the satisfaction of categorical and reflexive human goods.⁹² Anderson believes that a prerequisite for the cultural fulfillment of black people is cultural transcendence from the binary determinants of racial apologetics. This does not mean ignoring or neglecting the negative and difficult aspects of black life, but it calls on black theologians to define the black experience as more than this. According to Anderson, black theology must stop focusing on suffering as well as admit the internal differences among blacks. Black theology must come to recognize the conditions of postmodern North American life and develop “a new cultural politics of black identity” that meaningfully relates to it.⁹³ Anderson argues that “pressing beyond ontological blackness requires African American religious critics to subvert every racial discourse, including their own that would bind black subjectivity to the totality of racial identity.”⁹⁴

Both Alistair Kee and Victor Anderson argue that black identity has become synonymous with the blackness that whiteness created during modernity for the justification of European imperialism and subsequent enslavement of captured Africans. At the heart of this white racial ideology is race as a classifying category that discloses the qualities of each individual in a specific race. Kee contends that black is a social and political construct defined by the political interests of the powerful and as such should be dropped from black discourse all together. He writes, “[B]lack’ does indeed seem a perverted category and the use of the term by blacks would seem to be a form of perversion or self-abuse. It is difficult to imagine how the interests of white oppressors could be better served than by blacks

⁹² Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness*, 26.

⁹³ Ibid., 15.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 85. For Anderson’s proposal for a way around racial essentialism, see Victor Anderson, *Creative Exchange: A Constructive Theology of African American Religious Experience* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008). For constructive responses to Anderson’s critique, see Anthony B. Pinn, “‘Black Is, Black Ain’t’: Victor Anderson, African American Theological Thought, and Identity,” *Dialog* 43 (March 2004): 54-62; and Trevor Eppehimer, “Victor Anderson’s *Beyond Ontological Blackness* and James Cone’s Black Theology: A Discussion,” *Black Theology* 4 (January 2006): 87-106.

accepting this politically motivated and socially constructed term.”⁹⁵ Anderson also questions the usefulness of the modern disclosure of blackness, whether from the side of white racial ideology or black racial apologetics. He argues that neither allows for an adequate appreciation of the complexity of individual identity and neither allows for real liberation from white racism. Both Kee and Anderson argue for an altogether new expression of black identity.

III. DISCUSSION

This chapter begins in the assumption that we must seriously engage race in order to combat racism. It recognizes that in theory and theology race is treated as a social construction, invented in time and place. It demonstrates how using construction as an organizing principle can serve as a tool for theology to explore different theories of race through reflection on the various meanings given to this construction. Differences exist about what this construction is and how it should be approached. There are different answers to the questions of who constructs, what meaning of race do they construct, why do they construct, and how and should constructions be changed. An exploration of these answers allows for a better appreciation of the complexity of race. This exploration of race helps theologians navigate the diverse reality of race as well as their own theory of race. Since race influences how we think and how we act, theologians must become conscious of their own racial beliefs.

Thinking of race as a construction invites theologians to reflect on who constructs race, how this is done, and for what purpose. Most agree that, historically, powerful whites constructed race in terms of black and white to meet the needs of slavery. However,

⁹⁵ Kee, *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology*, 172.

theologians must reflect on how this relates to current understandings and uses of race since race is never constructed once and for all. Some argue that powerful whites are still constructing race and that our state and economic structures support this construction. Theology must also attend to how the black community and other communities have and do construct race as well as how each person constructs race in their own life. These constructions can be positive or negative depictions of human beings and result in racist and nonracist ways of life. Race is constructed for specific purposes that include the oppression and exploitation of people of color for the advantage and continued dominance of those deemed white. Race has been used to meet the needs of our national economic system. It has been used as a tool to support European imperialism and democratic exclusion. It has been employed to make and counter claims of white racist ideology. Race also serves the purpose of uniting people in shared worldviews and perspectives, which create group identity. In the U.S., race has been a social construct based on skin color, which makes sweeping generalizations about what it means to have this skin color. Race theorists and black theologians claim that any racial construction is a conscious choice based on the core beliefs of the constructing agent. This construction is accomplished through the establishment of a narrative that situates specific traits within specific bodies and animates and influences human interactions. Human relations both create and are created by narratives of race.

In the U.S., race has been and continues to be an essential aspect of identity. The theologians and theorists included in this chapter disagree about whether this is a positive or negative aspect of our contemporary culture. James Cone contends that race has been a negative aspect of American culture but because it is a choice based on our beliefs about

human living we can change our racial identity to be a positive force. Those advocating an approach to race as historical legacy also recognize the relational and dynamic character of identity and challenge us to reconstruct our inherited racial understandings into relations of equality. Black Catholic theologians underscore the idea that identity is about one's community and culture and that our ongoing participation in its story continues to form our racial identities. Dwight Hopkins argues that we need to shift our understandings of identity from where we fit into the current capitalist system to how we can all uniquely fit into a new common wealth. Victor Anderson most notably argues that human identity is more complex than just race and that identity shifts if we attend to different aspects of it. Because race has always been a negative aspect of identity and continues to limit the individual, he advocates a shift away from it in African American discourse.

Treating race as a construction attends to the fact that it has been invented in time and space; it depends on its context and the history of its context. What race means in the U.S. is not what it means in other societies, but this does not negate the importance of race for theology done in the U.S. nor its influence on how the U.S. acts in the international arena. James Cone focuses on the struggles of the black community throughout its history in the U.S. with a special focus on the meaning and importance of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements for Christian theology. Those who understand race as historical legacy call attention to the racial stereotypes that pervade U.S. culture. Dwight Hopkins challenges theologians to understand how the U.S. participates in global monopoly capitalism and what its views on race mean for people of color around the world. Alistair Kee and Victor Anderson recognize that our racial discourse is changing in and for our postmodern context. They argue that black life, like all life, is ambiguous and diverse. Advocates of approaching

race as culture also call attention to the diversity of persons who live within the groups defined as black and white.

Any understanding of the context in which theology is being done must appreciate and understand the history of this context. Our past forms our bodies, our worldviews, which are intimately connected to our bodies, and our ideas about each other. Race in terms of black and white is the historical legacy of the United States. Theologians must appreciate the American institution of slavery, the continued discrimination based on race that followed it, and the efforts to combat both institutions. Our bodies have been marked by these experiences. Our bodies also carry with them the history immigrants and enslaved Africans brought with them. Racist ideology has been integral to America's past and undermines American claims to equality; it has also greatly affected American Christianity.

U.S. racist ideology, the stereotypes and caricatures it created, as well as the stories, songs, and discourses formed to combat it all construct race. Theologians must investigate the narratives that created and sustain racism as well as those that contest it. As Omi and Winant warn, discussion of race reveals it to be much more complex than usually thought and in it one must contend with many areas of human thinking. Not only do theologians need to explore Christian narratives and theology that have been employed to support racist constructions and institutions, but also those of science and law. The approach to race as culture invites sociological and cultural investigations of the stories, songs, and life of communities that construct race. Dwight Hopkins calls on theologians to examine the beliefs and practices of capitalism and the discourse of neoliberalism. Remembering that race continues to be constructed, contemporary as well as historical texts must be included in discourse about race.

Of course, Christian theologians are most concerned with the importance of race for Christian theology. Theological anthropology is concerned with who we are and are called to be in relation to our ideas about God. Christian theological anthropology addresses the question of how the inbreaking of God into the world as a human being affects body-persons as well as the community of bodies that is the Church. The work of theologians in this chapter investigated how race is related to Christian identity and how we are and live it. Theologians cannot ignore such an important bodily reality as race in a religion whose central belief concerns the human body of God. All human bodies embrace categories of physicality. James Cone argues that how we think about and live these categories should reflect our central beliefs about God/Christ and how we are to live based on these beliefs. Dwight Hopkins also contends that our purpose must be God's purpose. This means we must embody a preferential option for the poor and oppressed and stand with them with our whole being, including our physical body. In terms of race, theologians suggest we become black, change the meaning of whiteness, embrace the diversity of God's people, and shift all of our understandings of race for the purpose of combating racism.

Reflection on race is especially important for the Christian Church, which is called to live as the body of Christ. The reality is that the Church has both embraced and fought against racism; it has both included and excluded people based on race. The Church must face its own culpability in the construction of race for racist purposes and live race as if Christ was the center of its life. For Cone this means the Church will be a black Church which stands with the poor and oppressed. Hopkins contends that the Church must begin the formation of a new common wealth that equally shares the earth's resources. Those who understand race as historical legacy contend that all the Church's priests and ministers must

investigate how white supremacy has influenced their own identity and how they minister. Race as culture advocates argue that the worship of the Church should embody the culturally diverse bodies that are the Church. The Church can only be a moral voice in the world if it recognizes its own racism and works to eradicate it. Black theologians call the Church to see the sin of racism and liberation from it as integral to redemption. The purpose of changing our attitudes about race is to work toward the establishment of God's kingdom, which cannot allow injustice or dominance between persons. Race is a major barrier to peaceful living and the concern of those who wish God's peace to be with us. To be the Body of Christ on earth, Christians need a theology that addresses how categories of the body impinge upon this goal.

Liberation theologies are concerned to construct race in a positive way that allows for all to live fully. James Cone advocates a new way of thinking about race, the renunciation of whiteness and the blackness that whiteness created, and a commitment to becoming black in imitation of Jesus Christ. Those who study race as historical legacy call for a cultural transformation that reconstructs whiteness and blackness in order that all can live the equality called for by Christianity and the United States' founding documents. Advocates of the approach to race as culture posit that people can come together for common goals of justice while maintaining cultural diversity if we respect and appreciate our differences. Dwight Hopkins argues that we can only overcome racism if we embrace people as more important than the accumulation of things. This mindset will help establish racial democracy and instill in all a positive sense of self. Victor Anderson and Alistair Kee contend that we need a new racial discourse so that our identities can be different. This discourse must change the culture that created blackness and embrace individual diversity. Specific expressions of race may alter dominant theories of race. Understanding race as a construction implies that race

changes and is changeable. Race is authored by humans and can be changed by human efforts. We continue to construct race in how we live today. We can choose to continue to live race as the historical legacy of slavery and racism or we can change these constructions based on white supremacy. Challenging race involves new ways of looking at and living reality and creates new possibilities for being. These may include dismantling our very notions of race.

IV. CONCLUSION

Just as in the previous chapter, reflecting on bodily construction leads to questions about bodily expression. Racial identity expresses many things. The theologians in this chapter argued that race expresses our beliefs about God and what it means to be a Christian, our history, our culture and heritage, our beliefs about justice, our diversity as human beings, oppression, dominance, exclusion, as well as our inability to get beyond race. White and black are not obvious terms but have varying meanings depending on the interpreter. Theology cannot assume any common understanding but must investigate their diverse interpretations as well as their interrelationships. This interpretation must not only include what history has said these identities mean but also how persons with these identities describe them. This investigation is crucial to balance group identity with self-expression. Black and white will mean different things to different people. Individuals express their race differently. This expression may follow from group self-expression or challenge their assumed communal identity.

Bringing together the ideas of the body as construction and the body as expression starts the process of thinking about the body as symbol, a constructed and expressive reality,

which can bring together theories of sex/gender and race for a more complete theological anthropology. Investigating theories of sex/gender and race is an important first step to appreciating how the human body in its specificity is an important theological theme. But sex/gender and race are not independent variables. A fuller appreciation of the meaning and significance of the body for human living must involve discourse that brings them together. In the next chapter I will begin to explore how race and sex/gender interpenetrate and influence the meaning of each other.

And we know that what our minds forget our bodies remember. The body is central to our being. The history of the African American ordeal of pain and pleasure is inscribed in our bodies.

Linda E. Thomas, "Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm"¹

CHAPTER 4: WOMANIST THEOLOGY AND THE BODY

I. INTRODUCTION

Part I of this dissertation addressed sex/gender and race separately in order to engage different theories about these categorizations of bodily materiality. Part II brings race and sex/gender together in its consideration of the materiality of the body. This shift brings to light important considerations for theological reflection on the body in its specificity. By shifting attention to the whole person rather than one variable of bodied identity, this chapter recognizes that many intersections of identity make up human living. These combinations of bodily categorizations create unique identities for those who are and live them. Construction as a conceptual concept continues to be helpful to understand and trace the historical events and language that create and affect unique identities. However, consideration must also be given to the discourses of the groups that are these identities, often unnoticed outside of the group. These group discourses may paint a very different picture of the self-understanding of the group despite the affect of social constructions that wish to define them. Deliberation of group discourses includes attention to individual voices within the group. These voices reveal the various realities existing within the group itself, which again depend on ever more specific identity or body markers. Womanist theology is a discourse that brings together sex/gender and race and illustrates what attention to multiple bodily categorizations means

¹ Linda E. Thomas, "Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm," in *Living Stones in the Household of God: The Legacy and Future of Black Theology*, ed. Linda E. Thomas (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 41.

for theological anthropology. Womanist theology continues to use construction as a helpful conceptual tool to think about identity, but it also stresses the importance of attending to group and individual expressions of identity. This balance of construction and expression is the heart of my proposal of the body as symbol, which I will flesh out in the next chapter.

The balance of community and individuality, of the social construction and personal expression of identity, is continually found in black feminist and womanist theory. I turn here to the work of Patricia Hill Collins to give a brief introduction to this theory.²

Womanist scholars attend to black women as whole persons that navigate life within an American society built on their exploitation and within the black female community that provides a more positive self-image to help them face this challenge. The womanist project starts with the exploration of the juncture of sex/gender and race, but recognizes the fact that living the combination of black race and female sex/gender has historically intersected with economic instability and sexual abuse. Womanist scholarship illustrates that any marker of materiality that seeks to define group identity is a dependent variable because all aspects of identity intersect and influence each other.³ Any combination of identity markers creates a unique experience and perspective.

² I rely mostly on Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. I use the term womanist in this chapter even though Hill Collins uses the term black feminist, since what I present would be accepted as foundational in womanist work as well, and womanist theology is the focus of this chapter. See my discussion of the demarcations of black feminist and womanist in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Hill Collins is aware that she presents black feminist thought as overly coherent. She does this purposefully in response to the challenges on political and intellectual fronts that question black feminist theory's right to exist. Recognizing that she has focused on the pieces of the mosaic, she writes that she hopes to see other volumes emerge which will be more willing to present black feminist thought as a shifting mosaic of competing ideas and interests, emphasizing the disjunctures distinguishing the pieces of the mosaic from one another. Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, viii-ix. One such example of work that focuses on the diversity of womanist thought is Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, ed., *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*.

³ Womanists are not the only scholars that recognize that sex/gender and race intersect with other identity markers. The work of Judith Butler and John Paul II, included in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, analyze the role of sexuality in the formation of bodies. In Chapter 3 I explored how Dwight Hopkins' work considers economic realities as intimately tied to questions of race. Womanists have begun to add to this list age and

Womanists argue that African American women did not and do not simply share in the experiences of black men and white women, the simple addition of troublesome race and sex/gender. Race and sex/gender intersect in the experience of black women and create a unique identity. Collectively, African American women represent a unique perspective from which to view life in the United States and theorize about it. Patricia Hill Collins points out two aspects of this unique location. First, African American women have and often continue to live in all-black communities, which carry on the traditions of African American culture that traces its roots to African cosmologies and epistemology rather than those of Western Europe. Second, African American women have often found themselves working within white spaces and forced to learn and sometimes adopt the rules of the dominant society in order to survive, but simultaneously marginalized in and by this society. Hill Collins describes this as the black woman's "outsider-within" position.⁴ Whether as domestic workers or academics or any of a number of employment situations, the marginality black women experience provides a distinct angle of vision on civil, political, and intellectual situations.

Womanist scholarship focuses on the unique experiences of black women, both individual stories and traditions within the group as a whole. Both analyses of identity lead to a consideration of the power dynamics that affect these experiences and the social constructions that want to define black women as a group. Womanists' attention to the intersecting oppressions black women experience moves them to a further examination of the

religious difference. See Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Audre Lorde (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1984); Debra Mubashshir Majeed, "Womanism Encounters Islam: A Muslim Scholar Considers the Efficacy of a Method Rooted in the Academy and the Church," in *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 38-53; and Melanie L. Harris, "Womanist Humanism: A New Hermeneutic," in *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 211-25.

⁴ See Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," in *Just Methods: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Reader*, ed. Alison M. Jaggar (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 308-19.

matrix of domination within which these intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained. A central theme and critical aspect of womanist scholarship is engagement with the images of black women society has created to control them. Womanists recognize that controlling images such as Mammy, matriarch, welfare mother, and Jezebel reflect power relations and justify the very existence of intersecting oppressions. To address these controlling images, womanists must analyze the history and narratives of the social context that have shaped black women's identity.

Womanists point out that black female identity means one thing to society at large, but quite another thing to black women themselves. Womanist theology and theory do not stop by analyzing how intersecting oppressions construct black female identity in this country. They also attend to the testimonies of African American women who are making a "way out of no way." This attention to African American women themselves witnesses to the different reality and identity that these women create for themselves within the context of oppression and negative constructions. This counter-discourse expresses something beyond and in spite of these constructions. Attention to the counter-discourses of black women themselves reveals that most black women do not define themselves with these controlling images since they do not reflect how they know themselves or each other. Hill Collins writes that black women must "jump outside the frames and systems authorities provide and create their own frame" for stimulating positive self-definition.⁵ These new frames and systems are created in the discourse between and among black women themselves. The tradition of

⁵ Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 100. This work is often done in the safe spaces black women create for themselves and each other. The safe spaces in which black women examine the issues of their lives and foster the conditions of independent self-definition are now under attack as "separatist," "essentialist," and anti-democratic. Hill Collins posits that one reason these safe spaces are so threatening to those who feel excluded, and so routinely castigated by them, is that safe spaces are free of surveillance by more powerful groups. Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 111.

sharing experiences and collecting and passing on wisdom about these experiences and acts of resistance in response to them constitutes the long-standing African American women's intellectual tradition.⁶

The specifics of this tradition are not uniformly shared by all African American women. Although African American women face common challenges, they do not all respond to these challenges in the same way. Hill Collins writes, "There is no essential or archetypal black woman whose experiences stand as normal, normative, and thereby authentic."⁷ Individual black women find their voices in their own unique way. They connect to the larger black women's community for support and to collectively work for change, but they remain an individual within it. This individuality is based on how intersecting oppressions have affected the individual. Attending to the various intersections of identity categories reveals diverse and individual body-persons and recognizes the diversity present in any group. By addressing many aspects of human identity, including race, sex/gender, class, sexuality, and religious pluralism, womanism recognizes that individual persons face different realities as these categories intersect specifically in their lives. Womanists point out that just as white men, white women, black men and black women all differ from each other, so too is there diversity within each group, including the collectivity of black women. Contending with poverty or a denigrated sexuality creates differences and fissures among those who identify as African American women. Investigating African American women's identity points to the reality that every person's identity is always more complex and unique the closer you attend to them as individuals.

⁶ Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 3. She writes that the invisibility of this tradition in the larger social and academic society is neither academic nor benign. Its suppression is part of the maintenance of current social inequalities. It also presents black women as willing collaborators in their own victimization since they apparently say and do nothing about it.

⁷ Ibid., 28.

Black feminist and womanist work embraces the importance of individuality within community and emphasizes self-expression in its treatment of identity and the body. Womanist scholars contend that change happens in this self-expression that contests traditional constructions of black female identity. This self-definition validates black women's power as human subjects. In their rearticulation of themselves is the power to rearticulate their social realities. By resisting and challenging controlling images, black women protest the power relations that underlie these images. Hill Collins writes that, "when black women define ourselves, we clearly reject the assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to interpret our reality are entitled to do so."⁸ She contends that this empowerment is the first step in resisting oppressive institutions. Black feminist thought recognizes that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type and that oppressions such as race and gender or sexuality and nation work together in producing injustice. Womanist scholarship includes a thorough investigation of the social construction of black female identity for the purpose of oppression and domination *and* a witness to the real black women who know another image of self that is revealed in their individual life stories.

Structure of Chapter

This chapter explores bodily identity from womanist perspective. Womanist work encourages an approach to the body that addresses the construction of bodily reality and attends to the life stories and individual first-person expressions of identity. Womanists hold in tension communal identity, which is often based in historical constructions, and individual identity, which is the unique reality of the self. Womanists employ the idea of construction in their investigation of the lives of African American women to tease out the various aspects

⁸ Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 114.

of black female identity. Thinking of identity as a construction addresses how various historical events and narratives have and continue to shape African American women's lives. Womanists give equal attention to the specific group's expression of identity as well as individual expressions within the group.

I use Delores Williams' text *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* to provide the structure for this chapter.⁹ Williams' work explores how black female identity has been constructed through the forced and coerced use of their labor and reproduction. Williams uses the theme of surrogacy to organize her analysis of African American women's historical experience. Surrogacy can be defined as functioning in the place of someone else. In the history of African American women in this country, Williams identifies two kinds of surrogacy experience. The first was the coerced surrogacy of antebellum America when people and systems more powerful than black people forced black women to function in roles that ordinarily would have been filled by someone else.¹⁰ These surrogacy roles could not be refused. After the Civil War that brought freedom to enslaved African Americans, black people tried to determine for whom or what black women would *not* stand in place. However, even though black women could exercise choice in refusing surrogate roles, social pressures and realities often influenced and limited their power to choose full emancipation from all surrogacy roles. For this reason, Williams describes this

⁹ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Williams' text is used because it is a signal text for womanist theology. Williams describes her work in the following manner, "This book is representative of the first step in the method of womanist theology: to provide pieces of fact and of vision subjected to the critical reflection of the particular theologian," Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 12. I use it to provide "pieces of fact and of vision" on which other womanist theologians have built arguments concerning the identity and life experiences of African American women. I believe Williams' text can be used as a tool for this work on bodily identity without having to employ her entire theology. For example, one can use it as a tool without having to accept her critique of atonement. For an analysis of Williams' work, see Diane M. Stewart, "Womanist God-Talk on the Cutting Edge of Theology and Black Religious Studies: Assessing the Contribution of Delores Williams," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 58, no.3-4 (2004): 65-83.

¹⁰ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 60.

surrogacy experience as voluntary though pressured. Her theology presents black female identity as forged within intersecting systems of oppression. Her work outlines how black women's nurturance, physical labor, and sexuality have been exploited. Her initial investigation of the intersection of sex/gender and race in black women's lives leads to the necessary consideration of class and sexuality. I follow Williams' lead to consider how approaching the many identity markers of human living lead to a consideration of the body that incorporates the social construction of identity as well as unique communal and individual expressions of identity.

II. BODILY IDENTITY IN WOMANIST PERSPECTIVE

Surrogacy and Nurturance: Sex/Gender and Race

Womanist scholarship challenges any approach to the body that focuses exclusively on race and/or sex/gender since the body is a complex combination of identity categories. A focus on how race and sex/gender intersect is just a first step in appreciating the complexity of bodily identity and the experiences that follow from this identity. The way that race and sex/gender come together in the lives and experiences of African American women cannot be understood as just being the experience of being female added to the experience of being black. It is something different and unique and produces a unique perspective for African American women that is sometimes in tension with white women and black men. African American women and white women share both the challenge of facing sexism in their lives and the belief in the full humanity of women, which makes them equal to men. However, womanists would not affirm an historical solidarity or common experience among women in this country. Womanists challenge white women to explore how they have benefitted from

the subjugation of African American women and the social structures and standards by which this was done and justified. White privilege creates a deep division between white feminists and women of color.¹¹

African American women share with African American men a common slave cultural heritage and the ongoing experience of racism. They share the painful reality that in the United States skin color makes a difference and has had a lot to do with their enslavement and with the continuation of their oppression. Sharing this common heritage of the past and experience in the present does not mean that all African-American people must or do think alike. Black women challenge black men to see how sexism pervades the black world and to recognize how they themselves add to the oppressive forces pressing on black women.¹²

Delores Williams argues that throughout the history of African American women in the United States there have been forces bent on conquering black women's power to resist and rise above obstacles and trouble. She contends that both men and women of the ruling class as well as some black men have worked to keep black women in the service of other people's needs and goals. These efforts included the production of negative and controlling images of black women and a narrative that justified their exploitation. Williams points to the mythology that surrounded the figure of Mammy both before and after emancipation.

Much of the antebellum stereotypes presented Mammy as the positive result of slavery; the

¹¹ Williams admits that most Anglo-American women live only with the illusion of authority and power, which is mostly derived from powerful males. She nevertheless argues that white males and white females together often administer the mainline social systems in America that oppress black women and the black family. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 185.

¹² African American women scholars point out that in the black community the fight against racism has often taken precedence over the fight against sexism. Williams writes, "Many black women in the African-American denominational churches have been duped to believe that first black people must expend all their effort getting rid of racial oppression. They have been told that later the community can work on the oppression of women. Nineteenth century black women like Sojourner Truth warned black women that 'if the men get their rights and women don't, things will be no better for black women than they were during slavery.'" Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 219.

conversion of some “heathen” black women into “civilized” models of womanhood. In fact, Mammy was seen as an example of how black women could model the prevalent, Victorian ideals of womanhood, by being maternal, virtuous, asexual, pious, tender, and understanding. Mammies were thought to embrace and embody white cultural ideals and values.

In antebellum America, many African American women slaves were forced to perform the role of Mammy. The job of these enslaved black women was to nurture white families. Mammy was responsible for the care of the white slaveowners’ home and the nurturance of their children. She managed the household, cared for the children, and often advised about business matters. Even after freedom from bondage, many African American women, forced by financial necessity, needed to continue performing the duties of Mammy in the role of domestic worker. In both roles, Mammy and domestic worker, African American women were thought of as subservient because of their sex/gender and subservient because of their race. Patriarchy kept them locked to the proper work of women, which included taking care of the owner’s or employer’s children and keeping his household running smoothly. Williams argues that this role according to patriarchal norms belonged to the white woman/mistress of the household and that the African American woman was forced and coerced to be the white woman’s surrogate and do the work that she wished to avoid. Whether as abused slaves or exploited domestic workers, African American women have often been forced to put white women’s needs before their own and do the work white women didn’t want to do or thought was beneath them. Williams contends that in white women’s fight to get out of the house and be freed of domestic drudgery, the experience of African American women, who have often been handed these tasks by white women to do for them, has been ignored and disrespected. Mammies and later domestic workers were

forced to support white male dominance with their work and to appear to agree and imitate the ideals and values of white culture. The authority of Mammy or the domestic worker in no way challenged that of the master and mistress; her race kept her subservient to both.

Williams argues that the surrogacy roles and images of Mammy and domestic worker created a strain and tension for African American women in their own communities. She contends that although Mammy's forced surrogacy in the white household did not lessen her dedication to her own family, it muddled her relationship with the black community.

Williams writes that Mammy's tragedy was not that she abandoned her own people, but that she was powerless to offer her gifts to black people "on terms they could accept without, themselves, sliding farther into a system of paternalistic dependence."¹³ Despite this tension in the slave community, the nurturing skills of black women were valued by black men after emancipation as long as her standing changed to support his male authority instead of that of the white slaveowner.¹⁴ Williams writes that apparently the freedmen did not want to perpetuate a model of authority subordinating black men to black women. It was the goal of the black man to bring notions of black manhood into agreement with the manhood notions of mainline American culture. Therefore, the black father must be seen as protector and authority of the black family not the black woman. In adopting sexist role definitions, black men have also been part of conquering black women's power through violence as well as

¹³ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 63. Despite this, many mammies were involved in liberation efforts on and beyond the plantation.

¹⁴ Even after emancipation, there were efforts to continue to force African American women into the mold of mammy. Williams writes that the Black Mammy Memorial Association advocated that the skills of the mammy, including exerting authority without usurping power of main authority figures, skill in every form of women's work, diplomat and peacemaker in relationships, and a person who understood upper-class white values, were needed by the black community after emancipation, especially if they were to engage in the process of acculturation in which they became "more white," meaning more mainline American. Williams also suggests that the black community itself apparently retained their respect for the kind of dedication to the family that mammies demonstrated. The institution of mothers of the church that developed in some black churches after emancipation perhaps has some kinship with the antebellum mammy tradition. These women had power and authority but none that challenged the preacher. For Williams' treatment of the post-emancipation image of mammy, see Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 74-81.

emotional and psychological pressure. Womanists argue that the inordinate demands men make upon the nurturing capacities of black mothers are destructive for women.¹⁵

Williams argues that this forced and coerced form of surrogacy has contributed to the formation of negative images of black women that prevail in America to this day. Mammy is the image of black women as perpetual mother figures—religious, fat, a-sexual, loving children better than themselves, self-sacrificing, and giving up self-concern for group advancement. The mythology and stereotypes of Mammy and wage earner has morphed into the negative depiction of African American women as matriarchs. These black women are not respected and criticized for supporting their families and being heads of households. She contends that in black religious institutions, black literature, and black culture, African American mothers are often portrayed as an impediment to the black male's struggle for manhood in America. These women are seen as emasculating to black men and are often blamed for many of the problems that plague the black community. Womanists counter by calling attention to the fact that the continuous devaluation of black fatherhood and the plight of black men is part of the cultural matrix of American society.¹⁶

¹⁵ This conclusion is part of Williams' analysis of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Williams contends that Walker's work suggests that the exertion of male power to make sure women meet these demands constitutes sexism in the black community. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 53.

¹⁶ In her work *Sexuality and the Black Church*, Kelly Brown Douglas cites "The Moynihan Report," a 1965 report on the "Negro family" by Daniel P. Moynihan, who at the time was assistant secretary of labor and director of the Office of Policy Planning and Research in the Johnson administration. The report implies that black women are responsible for the failure of black children to achieve, especially black boys. The report perpetuates the myth that "the crisis of black politics and social life [is] a crisis solely of black masculinity....It is to be repaired by instituting appropriate forms of masculinity and male authority, intervening in the family to rebuild the race." It also identifies "Black women's failure to conform to the cult of true womanhood...as one fundamental source of Black cultural deficiency." This report directed attention away from the social, economic, and political structures – all of them racist and patriarchal – that actually deprived black men of work and relegated black women to domestic labor. See *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 50-52. Williams' work concurs with this assessment. She writes that the Ku Klux Klan came to life to stamp out any manifestation of black male power. This attack on black men trying to take their place in American society continues today. For example, black working fathers cannot reside with their destitute families if the mother is to receive public assistance for the children. Womanists insist that black women must not be blamed for the racism of American society and that in fact suffer from it just as much as black men. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 80.

Womanists turn to their own tradition to explore how sexism and racism have intersected in their history and its effect on their lives. They attend to the words of black mothers to black daughters. For example, in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she articulates a black woman's analysis of the historical intersection of sex/gender and race in the lives of black women. She writes of a grandmother telling her granddaughter about her perspective of the world. "Honey de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out...So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it tuh be different wid you. Lawd, Lawd, Lawd!"¹⁷ Through such expressions, black women explain their experience in their own words. Womanists charge both black and white theologians to attend to these expressions if they are to have an adequate understanding of black female identity created in the intersection of sex/gender and race.

Womanist analysis of the construction of black female identity challenges the adequacy of the notion of patriarchy that many white feminists espouse to describe the cause of female oppression. Williams contends that as a term to describe black women's relation to the white (male and female) dominated social and economic systems governing their lives, it is lacking. It is silent about class-privileged women oppressing women without it. It is also silent about white men and women working to maintain this white supremacy and privilege. White feminist analysis is often silent about the positive boons that patriarchy has bestowed upon many white women.¹⁸ Williams contends that overcoming the racist divide between

¹⁷ Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 14.

¹⁸ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 185.

womanist theologians and white feminist theologians will require an analysis of the racist leanings of the secular and religious notions of womanhood in the country and in Christian tradition. Williams argues that black women and other women of color have been oppressed by the standards of white womanhood; and that often for women to be assumed to have humanity at all, it must be white-woman humanity.¹⁹ African American women express different notions of womanhood within the context of their lives.

Williams argues that just as a directed analysis of patriarchy is not enough, neither is an exclusive analysis of racism enough. Such analyses are usually silent about black sexism in all its forms. Williams suggests that African Americans need to continue to attend to how they describe blackness. She contends that much of the language used to discuss the struggle between blacks and whites assumes an androcentric black history so that blackness comes to mean black maleness.²⁰ As a theologian she challenges the black Church to reflect on its use of the bible and to spurn patriarchal theology that prohibits women from asking questions and keeps them in a secondary role to men in church and society. Womanists urge the black Church and community to understand the unique suffering and struggle of African American women and to not join the larger society in blaming her for what she had and has to do.

Womanist theologians recognize the unique identity of black women is situated within the intersection of sex/gender and race. Their attention to the specific experiences of African American women leads them to understand that black female identity is more than just sex/gender and race. Black women know that their history includes struggles with not only racism and sexism but also economic marginalization and sexual exploitation. These experiences both unite and differentiate black women with and from each other. In the

¹⁹ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 183.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

complex intersections of identity categories there are ever more unique experiences of being a black woman.

Surrogacy and Physical Labor: Sex/Gender, Race, and Class

The persistent reality of poverty continues to be a common experience for African American women. Therefore, to be true to the real-life situation of many African American women, womanist analysis cannot stop with a critique of sexism and racism, but must also make the connections between these and the structures that keep the majority of African American women poor and/or economically disadvantaged. Womanists recognize that class status is a crucial identity marker in U.S. society. Understanding class is not an independent study in womanist discourse, but is understood through its interaction with sex/gender and race. From the very beginning of black life in this country, race dictated one's economic status. Blackness made one a slave; it continues to make many poor. From their very first moment on American soil, African American women found themselves exploited within the U.S. economic system. The daily struggles of poor black women today witness to the continued interaction of sexism, racism, and classism, so womanism employs a tri-dimensional analysis of this triple oppression. Womanist theologian M. Shawn Copeland writes that the experiences of African American women are a pivot for focusing, defining, and coding the interaction of sexism, racism and classism.²¹ She argues that theologians interested in liberation cannot rank or order oppression but must see all its expressions and their interaction both in the individual and societal realms.

²¹ M. Shawn Copeland, "The Interaction of Racism, Sexism, and Classism in Women's Exploitation," in *Women, Work and Poverty*, eds. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Anne E Carr (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987), 22.

Through their experience of economic hardship, African American women know that economic systems also construct how we are known and how we know ourselves. Delores Williams argues that investigating the history of African American physical labor reveals various ways that sex/gender, race, and class intersect. She begins with how the institution of slavery originated this tri-dimensional oppression. The debasement of black women has always been economically important for the U.S. Williams points out that the slave trade was the primary source of wealth during the colonial period and the work of the slaves helped build the economic foundation of this country. The debasement of all black people was important for the success of the U.S. slavocracy. It was believed that the enslaved could not be overworked and were “comparatively insensitive to sufferings that would be unbearable to whites.”²² For enslaved black women, this justified the practice of forcing them to do the same work as men in roles usually associated with men.

Not all female slaves were Mammies and forced to nurture white families. Most female slaves were field hands and sex/gender and race intersected differently for them. Williams describes the substitution of black female energy for black male energy as another example of the forced surrogacy they experienced during slavery. The substitution of enslaved women for enslaved men led to the “masculinization” of these slaves in their work, meaning they lost the gender distinction society made between men and women. Williams writes that in the consciousness of many slaves, the masculinization of the roles of female slaves erased gender boundaries in relation to work. This is reflected most clearly in some slaves’ lack of gender distinction in their use of pronouns. They would refer to both female

²² Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 70. Williams writes that the aesthetic values, interpretations of biblical texts or stories, and the analogies Englishmen made between 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. See Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 92.

and males slaves as “he.”²³ The masculinization of their labor bred the idea that black women were not feminine and did not desire to be so. When compared to white women, black female slaves were considered to have not only far more physical strength but also more capacity for pain than white women. But these women were not completely equated with men. Williams writes that female field hands could not fill the highest role of field slaves and become the slave driver. In addition, these masculinized female field hands were thought to be of a lower social class than the female house slaves who usually did “women’s work.” Williams argues that these female slaves were forced into the roles they had to perform and then their suffering in them was justified based on the view of them the performance of these roles created.

Even after emancipation, African American women often still filled the roles usually associated with men at that time, including breadwinner and head of household. She entered into these roles because of her economic circumstances. Poverty necessitated that black women work either in the fields or as domestic workers. In the fields, they would continue to do the same work as men. As domestic workers, they would do the work that white women wished to avoid and had the resources to pass off to black women. Poverty and the search for work often separated families and left black women to support their children without the help of men.

Racism has historically undermined the efforts of black people to gain financial security. Delores Williams gives an example from postbellum U.S. society. She writes that even though white men and women had serious labor struggles with each other in Southern factories after the Civil War, white women and white men together mobilized to keep manufacturers from hiring black women and black men. Whites joined together, regardless

²³ See Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 65-67.

of sex/gender or class, to keep African Americans economically and racially inferior. Some of these tactics were violent. Employers came up with plans to “utilize black and white labor in a reasonably efficient manner while still preserving white supremacy, especially for disadvantaged whites.”²⁴

Focusing on the experience of black women, womanist scholars have always made connections between racism, sexism, and economic exploitation. Frances Beale, in her early black feminist article “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” argues that the “system of capitalism and its afterbirth racism” have always existed contemporaneously in the U.S.²⁵ She contends that both narratives are imbued with sexism. Beale challenges capitalism’s definitions of women and family. She contends that its sexist and racist model of family has wreaked havoc in the black community because black people do not fit. The capitalist model of woman is a bourgeois white model of womanhood and the model of man is the head of household. Beale argues that the economic system of capitalism seeks to reduce women to a state of enslavement and defines their labor as surplus and exploitable.²⁶ For most of its history, capitalist America has defined woman as full-time caregiver to the family who is then a mere satellite of her mate. Beale argues that such an existence for women is sterile and parasitic and offers her little opportunity to develop herself as an individual. In addition, black men, even after slavery, have and continue to find it difficult to secure meaningful or

²⁴ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 98. Williams is quoting Gerald David Jaynes, *Branches Without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the American South, 1862-1882* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 256. Williams writes that as black people organized and began to find jobs after the Civil War, they were thrown into fierce competition with poor white people. Economic destitution did not inspire white Americans to relinquish notions of the inherent inferiority of blacks and their own inherent superiority. In this belief, the white North and the white South came together. Many poor southern whites had a pathological fascination with whiteness. This caused many ex-slaves to conclude that “it was the poor white man who was freed by the war, not the Negroes.” The white northerner was also infected with this same white racial narcissism, though it did not always express itself in massive violence—except for occasional race riots.

²⁵ Frances Beale, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, vol. 1, 284.

²⁶ Beale, “Double Jeopardy,” 287. Beale originally wrote this article in 1970 and indeed things have changed, but women are still paid less than men for the same work and still face many more obstacles to advancement.

productive employment. This reality attacks their sense of self given that the capitalist evaluation of men depends on their status as breadwinner. Black women historically have had to work and in fact are sometimes the breadwinner for the family. They are then accused of emasculating black men. Beale contends that too often black men may have accepted the sexist guidelines about women, but racism prevents them from taking their place beside white men. She argues that the black community must renounce these ideas of manhood and womanhood as counter-revolutionary.

Beale argues that capitalism and its class structure give birth to and perpetuate racism and sexism, and calls on black female scholars to address this underlying problem. Womanists have taken up Beale's challenge. Womanist scholars recognize that fighting classism is a different battle than taking on racism or sexism. First of all, it includes a critique of capitalism, which is whole-heartedly embraced by most of the U.S. Second, in a country that prides itself on equal rights and equal opportunity for all, it is difficult to even make the argument for the existence of class structures. However, Katie Cannon, in her articles, "Unearthing Ethical Treasures: The Intrusive Markers of Social Class" and "Racism and Economics: The Perspective of Oliver C. Cox," does both.²⁷ In true womanist fashion, she writes about both the realities of class and how to assess our place within it by balancing "theoretical" approaches with personal reflection on individual history and the sense of self that issues forth from that history.

Cannon's analysis of class posits that before understanding our own personal place within U.S. class structures, one must first recognize the reality of class itself. Cannon

²⁷ Katie G. Cannon, "Unearthing Ethical Treasures: The Intrusive Markers of Social Class," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 53, no. 3-4 (1999): 53-64; and "Racism and Economics: The Perspective of Oliver C. Cox," in *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, Katie G. Cannon (New York: Continuum, 1995): 144-61.

argues that knowledge of class is habitually suppressed in this country and the false idea of classlessness is promoted. This illusion of classlessness promotes the idea that one's social standing is determined by individual merit and hard work, even though the class position of one's family is probably the single most significant determinant of future success.²⁸ Success according to capitalism is defined in terms of affluence and possessions. The way of life of the privileged and affluent is established as the norm in U.S. capitalist ideology.²⁹ For capitalism and its resulting class structure to work and survive, it is important that the majority of people buy into these values and ideology. Even those exploited by the system are expected to embrace it and the justifications for their exploitation. Cannon writes that most people opt to live this parcel of lies and either pose and pass as so-called members of the muddled middle-class or exist in a state of we-are-all-the-same classlessness.

Cannon argues that this we-are-all-the-same attitude is dangerous for those who possess little resources and limited opportunities, because class is not just about money but our being and sense of self. When a person's real life does not reflect the prosperity and affluence of the ruling class, one can develop a sense of nobodiness. Those with higher economic standing blame the poor for the problems in the U.S., an attack on the very being of the poor.³⁰ Cannon advocates honesty in assessing our place within the U.S. capitalist order. She argues that each person must apply a fundamental inquiry of class indicators to all

²⁸ Cannon, "Unearthing Ethical Treasures," 59.

²⁹ Like Dwight Hopkins in the last chapter, Katie Cannon argues that the influence and control of the ruling class goes beyond just the economy and manifests itself as well in all areas of government. The pressure the ruling class brings to bear on local and national government results in their interests being national policy. Since the domestic and international arenas are interdependent, international relations also serve the interests of the ruling class. Cannon argues that ambassadors and consuls abroad function to bring other nations under the exploitative hammer of national corporations and that the diplomatic service is regularly overhauled and reorganized to support business more efficiently. See Cannon, "Racism and Economics," 150-51.

³⁰ Cannon, "Unearthing Ethical Treasures," 63. Cannon calls attention to John Raines' idea that far too many of us spend a vast amount of life's energy "looking up and blaming down." John Raines, "Class, Classroom, and Complicity: An Argument for Radical Teaching," unpublished essay. Temple University, 1998.

areas of their biotext in order to recognize class in one's own individual life and how this connects to the class structures of the U.S. capitalist political economy. This process invites each person to claim who they are and where they come from as well as what roles they adopt to survive and succeed in our society. It asks each person to assess their beliefs about the internal worth of humanity and on what they base it.

This process of self-reflection in terms of class will highlight how each person relates to capitalism. Some will be the powerbrokers who benefit from the system while others may recognize that they are embracing a system that exploits them. Cannon argues that this self-reflection is especially important for the black community because racism is inherent in our capitalist economic reality. She uses the work of Oliver C. Cox to uncover the interconnections of racism and capitalism. Cox contends that the exploitation of black people and people of color is an inherent dynamic of capitalism. Racism is about labor relations. Black people and other people of color have and are intended to continue to occupy the lowest rungs of the labor hierarchy both domestically and internationally. Cannon writes that chattel slavery was an extreme institutional expression of capitalist exploitation but demonstrates the frightful principle of capitalism that the greater the need for black labor, the greater would be black subjugation.³¹ The suppression and mistreatment of black people is maintained because it serves the needs of the system.

Cannon concludes from Cox's analysis that since white supremacy has been interstructured with our capitalist political economy only the elimination of a capitalist mode

³¹ Cox argues that racism provided the moral rationale for the subjugation and exploitation of blacks as "inferior" people, but it was their labor power that had made chattel slavery an irreplaceable necessity to whites. Racism must be viewed as an inherent part of the basic political economy that is our capitalist system. Domestically, employers will work to depress black wages, to restrict blacks to poor working conditions, and to limit job opportunities. Globally, African populations will remain the poorest of the poor. Cannon, "Racism and Economics," 146, 148, 157.

of production can open the way to making racism dysfunctional. She recognizes that this fight against capitalism must be undertaken in the Church and theology as well. Cannon writes that the form of Christianity shaped by obeisance to the economic interests of a capitalist system is a new form of Christianity, one that legitimates exploitation. It is a form of capitalist Christianity which combines defense of the sanctity of the economic system with racial and theological conformity. Such Christianity, Cannon argues, separates the spiritual person from the bodily person and calls on people to be spiritual and avoid politics. Such a Christianity has no place in womanist theology.

The racism inherent in capitalism does not always preclude some African Americans from achieving middle-class status. As African American life in this country diversifies in this manner, womanists have become aware of the classism developing within the black community. Bridgette Hector, in her article “Womanist Model: Crossing Class Barriers: Middle-Class Black Women Relating with Inner-City Black Female Youth,” observes a tension growing between black women of different economic class status.³² She contends that class divisions are dividing the black community and leaving it diminished as a result. Hector argues that African Americans of different classes do not know each other anymore, and an important first step to unifying against oppression is to tell each other their stories so they can learn about and from each other.³³ In knowing each other outside of the dictates of

³² Bridgette Hector, “Womanist Model: Crossing Class Barriers: Middle-Class Black Women Relating with Inner-City Black Female Youth,” *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 30 (Fall-Spring 2002-2003): 129-45.

³³ Building on Katie Cannon’s observation that the real-lived texture of black life requires moral agency that may run contrary to the ethical boundaries of mainline Protestantism, Hector argues that young urban black women’s lives must be understood in their “particular” life dilemmas. Hector argues that although many middle-class black women believe that intelligence and moral uprightness are developed in institutions of higher learning, there is much to be learned from inner-city black youth. She first challenges middle-class black women to understand the moral standards of their poorer sisters and respect their plight. She contends that in fact the moral standard of the “hood” is communalism, which can stand as a powerful counterforce to the

capitalism, women of different classes can become “empowered cojourners” who dismantle stereotypes and establish opportunities for ministry between each other.³⁴ Womanist analysis recognizes that economics both unites black women in their historical battle with poverty and divides them in their present economically diverse realities. It is an important social marker that groups and distinguishes bodies.

Surrogacy and Sexuality: Sex/Gender, Race, and Sexuality

In order to give a wholistic account of black female identity, womanist scholarship attends to the sexuality of African American women. Kelly Brown Douglas addresses sexuality and the black community and Church in her book *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*, and concludes that the violation of black sexuality by white culture is about nothing less than preserving white power in an interlocking system of racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist oppression. Brown Douglas approaches sexuality not as a term synonymous with sex but rather implying a person’s very humanity. She contends that sexuality is basic to personhood. It compels emotional, affective, sensual, and spiritual relationships and involves self-understanding and ways of relating in the world as women and men.³⁵ Brown Douglas contends that the exploitation of black sexuality is part of the overall effort to control black bodies in the support of white patriarchal hegemony. This is especially true for black women who are held in lowest regard by white patriarchal culture because they are black *and* female. In contrast to the myth of white womanhood, which “leads men and children to God,” black women are blamed for the depravity of the entire

middle-class individualistic mentality that some middle-class black women have bought into. Hector, “Womanist Model: Crossing Class Barriers,” 130-31, 134-35.

³⁴ Hector, “Womanist Model: Crossing Class Barriers,” 144.

³⁵ Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 6.

black community. They are also held responsible for their past and present abuse at the hands of white men. She claims that black sexuality and its attack and humiliation serve an essential function in white culture's myths, stereotypes, laws, and customs.

The attack on black sexuality began during and as part of the enslavement of African people. Although according to the racist ideology of the time white men should have limited their sexual relations to white women, they continually forced black women to endure their advances and to provide for their sexual "pleasure."³⁶ This experience of surrogacy, which entailed the continued rape of enslaved women, was a constant attack on their self-esteem and self-worth. Delores Williams contends that the sexual surrogacy of enslaved women contributed to a negative image of black women as "loose, over-sexed, erotic, and readily responsive to the sexual advances of men, especially white men."³⁷ She argues that by describing the black woman in this way, white society could put the responsibility for the sexual liaisons of slavery upon the "immoral" slave woman, whose "passionate" nature was supposed to have stemmed from her African heritage. These ideas laid the foundation for a mythology of black sexuality that helped justify the institution and practices of slavery and which continue to justify white patriarchal hegemony.

The racist caricatures and stereotypes surrounding blackness portray the belief in the intrinsic depravity of black persons. The image of the wild and savage Jezebel was used to justify the sexual exploitation of black women by white men. Brown Douglas argues that the stereotypes and false images surrounding black womanhood provided a gateway and

³⁶ The white sexual ideology read, however, that white men should have sexual relations with white women for procreation not pleasure—according to the myth of white womanhood, white women were pious and sexual only for the purpose of achieving motherhood. Delores Williams writes that this reality was most devastating for those female slaves sold for the exclusive purpose of being a slaveowner's mistress. These female-slave/slave-master sexual liaisons were institutionalized through the "fancy trade," a special kind of slave trading involving the sale of beautiful black women for this exclusive purpose. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 69.

³⁷ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 70.

foundation for the dehumanization of black men. The stereotypes about the lasciviousness of the black female required a matching mythology for the black male. Black people were portrayed as governed by passion and therefore naturally violent. Black women were described as seductresses of white men and black men as sexual predators of white women.³⁸ The mythology created about black sexuality has and does support and justify white control of black bodies. Brown Douglas contends that the myths employed to justify this control painted black persons as potential threats to the peace and sanctity of the white world. For the sake of the white world, these people needed to be controlled.³⁹

Brown Douglas argues that Christian teaching has supported white culture's control of black bodies by giving sexuality authoritative prominence in the denigration of particular human beings. Brown Douglas maintains that Western Christian tradition opened wide the door for the possibility of utilizing sexual practices, or alleged sexual practices, as a means for devaluing and demonizing human beings by associating sexual activity with passionate, irrational, and even satanic behavior.⁴⁰ White Christian society embraced and used this tradition to place a sacred canopy over their acts of domination and oppression.

³⁸ Ironically, both portraits implied that white men and women were erotically attracted to black persons. Brown Douglas writes that especially the portrait of the black male challenged what it was contrived to protect—the notion of white male superiority. Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 46.

³⁹ Their weapons of control, including rape, castration, and lynching, were also part of the overarching narrative of black and white sexuality. This narrative claimed that the black woman deserved and wanted rape at the hands of white men. Black men were castrated as an exercise of control as well as to eliminate their contact with black women desired by white men. The reasons and justifications for lynching were often the perceived or invented sexual advances of a black man toward a white woman. Brown Douglas contends that the phenomenon of lynching exemplifies Michel Foucault's understanding of the relationship between sexual discourse and the exercise of power. Clearly a sexually directed and motivated attack against black male bodies, it was a primary weapon employed to control black men and women socially, economically, and politically. Almost 3000 black people were reportedly lynched between 1889-1918. It was a reaction to a perceived threat to white supremacy. See Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 47-49. For more on this relationship between discourse and power and its violent effects on black bodies, see Kelly Brown Douglas, *What's Faith Got To Do With It? Black Bodies/Christian Souls* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005).

⁴⁰ Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 29. She maintains that Christianity has been influenced by aspects of Greek thought that embraced a profound split between the body and the spirit. This "spiritualistic dualism" alienated persons from their sexuality as it demanded the denial of their body-selves. For more on how Brown Douglas understands the influence of *Platonized* Christianity in the sexualized condemnation of

Brown Douglas utilizes Michel Foucault's theory of power with insights from black female and male social critics in order to address both the reality of the denigration of black sexuality and reasons behind it.⁴¹ She reads Foucault's relational view of power as originating in and controlled by the hands of people not impersonal or elusive structures of domination. Through the production of certain forms of knowledge and their deployment through public discourse, power produces constraints over the bodies and consciences of people and thereby compels them to behave in certain ways. Foucault argues that sexuality is integral to power because it is central to the regulation of bodies. By questioning and impugning another's sexuality, one bolsters their own claim to superiority and suggests the other group's inferiority. Such distinctions establish justification for the control of one over the other.⁴² By attacking black sexuality, white culture attacks black people's being for the purpose of controlling them. By painting black people as deviant and uncivilized, white culture produces and deploys knowledge meant to define black people as inferior, intrinsically depraved, and in need of control. Brown Douglas argues that the main purpose of this mythology is to make white supremacy seem natural, normal, necessary, and inevitable, and thereby deflect attention from the sinister nature of white power. White culture has benefitted from the control of black bodies, both their reproductive and productive capacities.

black humanity, see Kelly Brown Douglas, "The Black Church and Homosexuality: The Black and White of It," *Union Seminary Quarterly* 57, no. 1-2 (2003): 32-45; and Brown Douglas, *What's Faith Got To Do With It? Black Bodies/Christian Souls*.

⁴¹ Brown Douglas writes that since Foucault's theory virtually ignores matters of race it must be complemented by the work of black scholars. She contends that although Foucault's analyses sometimes reflect a self-serving androcentric perspective, they do provide an "insider's" view of white patriarchal culture. Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 12.

⁴² Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 22. She refers to Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1.

Brown Douglas argues that the assault on black sexuality by white culture has impeded black people's ability to love themselves, to love each other in all their diversity, and to know God. The result of centuries of attack on all aspects of their person, including their sexuality, is a lowered self-esteem of individual black persons. An inability to love self is an obstacle to loving others. Brown Douglas writes that "the consequences of sexual humiliation have left black men and women vulnerable to adopting perceptions of masculinity and femininity that place them in dysfunctional relationships with each other and oblige them to negate the humanity and worth of gay and lesbian persons whose ways of being challenge their distorted views of sexuality."⁴³ Brown Douglas argues that black people must face the degree to which their perceptions of femininity, masculinity, and family have been shaped by and in fact support the ideology of a white, patriarchal, heterosexist culture. She quotes Patricia Hill Collins who writes, "Much of the antagonism African-American women and men feel may stem from an unstated resentment toward Eurocentric gender ideology and against one another as enforcers of the dichotomous sex role inherent in the ideology."⁴⁴

Brown Douglas argues that divesting themselves of this gender ideology will help the black community better define black freedom as freedom for all black people. Like many womanists, she contends that too often black freedom has meant gaining a certain standard of "manhood" for black men. This manhood is too often reflective of patriarchal and sexist norms that equate it with physical strength, independence, and dominance.⁴⁵ This manhood meant the subjugation of black women and the derision of homosexual persons. Male homosexuality becomes equated with effeminate behavior and black mothers are blamed for

⁴³ Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 129.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 103.

causing it in their sons. Lesbians are often thought of as a betrayal of manhood by simple virtue of who they are outside of sexual relationship with black men. In spite of this, these notions of manhood and womanhood are often embraced by the black community. Brown Douglas posits that one reason may be that in a society where privilege is accorded on the basis of race (namely, whiteness), gender (maleness), and sexual preference (heterosexuality), heterosexual privilege is virtually the only privilege that black people – especially black women – can claim in order to move to the center.⁴⁶

Brown Douglas contends that the worst response to the white cultural attack on black sexuality is the silence in the black community concerning their sexuality. Brown Douglas challenges the black Church to engage in a sexual discourse of resistance, which is a counter discourse to the one white culture has created to describe and construct black sexuality. She embraces the theory that discourse constructs us and it is through a disruptive discourse that we can change.⁴⁷ This counter discourse can change interpersonal interactions and undermine oppressive institutions. Because Brown Douglas proposes this counter discourse from a womanist perspective, she advocates dealing with sexuality within its intersections with sex/gender, race, and class. She finds precedence for this counter-discourse in the history of African Americans in this country. She points to the example of the enslaved African people whose sexuality and persons were continually under assault, but who forged

⁴⁶ Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 104.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 105. Building on the work of Foucault, she contends that such a discourse would undermine and expose the power of white culture, render it fragile, and make it possible to thwart. Strategies to change and eliminate structures of domination can then be inaugurated. Foucault proposes that if the way persons relate to one another on the microlevels of society is altered, then the way power is institutionalized will also be changed. See Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 68, 20. For more on the development of a black sexual discourse of resistance, see Abraham Smith, “The Bible, the Body and a Black Sexual Discourse of Resistance,” in *Loving the Body*, 73-90.

their own notions of their sexuality that affirmed their personhood and fostered well-being in the community.⁴⁸

Brown Douglas proposes that this sexual discourse of resistance should have two main steps that could lead to many positive outcomes. First, it must deconstruct the sexual politics of the black community in order to uncover and understand what forces have shaped black sexuality. Most importantly, according to Brown Douglas, this discourse must name and expose the impact of white culture on black sexuality. Second, the sexual discourse of resistance must be constructive in that it should cultivate more life-enhancing approaches and attitudes concerning black sexuality. Brown Douglas posits that by discussing sexuality the black community could divest itself of its sexism and its homophobia. Both sexism and homophobia destroy black life. Black feminists and womanists have long proposed to end the silence about sexism in the black community because sexism is destructive to both black men and women. Brown Douglas proposes that homophobia is similarly destructive to both those who perpetuate it and those who suffer from its perpetuation.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 64. Brown Douglas refers to the work of Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom: 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976); John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); and Robert Staples, *Introduction to Black Sociology* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976).

⁴⁹ Brown Douglas posits that homophobia leads homosexual persons to engage in self-destructive behaviors. She quotes Keith Boykin who writes, "With all the efforts being made to divide minorities, it is important to remember that the real enemy is injustice, not each other. Homophobia, not homosexuality, leads some lesbians and gays to engage in risky and self-destructive behaviors. Homophobia, not homosexuality, leads many of them away from their families, their communities and their places of worship. And when closeted black lesbians and gays continue to deceive themselves with unsuccessful marriages and families, it is homophobia, not homosexuality, that threatens the survival of the African-American family. The enemy within us is often more threatening than the enemies surrounding us. But that internal enemy is not homosexuality but, rather, the hurtful way we treat one another. Physically, spiritually, and intellectually, blacks are warring against each other instead of supporting each other." Keith Boykin, *One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America* (New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1996), 270-71. In addition, Brown Douglas argues that silence about sexuality and the presence of homophobia in particular impair the black community's ability to respond to the HIV/AIDS crisis. Black persons comprise 12/13% of the population but represent 57% of HIV/AIDS cases in the U.S. See Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 106-7.

Brown Douglas urges the black community to fully understand how the tools of power have been used against black people, and recognize how they in turn are using them to oppress gay and lesbian persons. Like white culture, the black Church invokes biblical authority for its denouncement of homosexuality and thereby places a sacred canopy and divine sanction over their views and thereby justifies its oppression of homosexuals. Brown Douglas maintains that with such a history of the bible being used against them, it seems abhorrent for black people to be so steadfast in their use of the bible against other black persons. She challenges the black Church to remember how Christianity was used to support their own oppression and therefore develop a hermeneutic that reflects the struggle for freedom it says it embraces. She contends that the black Church needs to reexamine the biblical texts it uses to denounce homosexuality and determine if homophobia is driving its reading of these texts.⁵⁰ She calls attention to the first chapter of Genesis that all of God's creation was good, including the human body. God is present through our very humanity and the body is the instrument for divine presence, the means through which God is actualized in our lives. The Incarnation reaffirms another Genesis claim that every human body-person is created in the image of God. Brown Douglas emphasizes that God loves our bodies, all our bodies. She urges the black community to remember that black bodies are not an affront to God but the means by which black persons enter into loving relationship with each other and

⁵⁰ Brown Douglas contends that the irony is that the Bible does not present as clear a position on homosexuality as is often self-righteously asserted. She maintains that the NT shows Jesus to be virtually indifferent about matters of sexuality. When discussing sexual issues, he was typically making a wider point. She claims that black biblical scholars need to: (1) identify for black people what has been a "biblical tradition of terror" by making clear that participation in a biblical tradition of terror and allegiance to a biblical tradition that supports freedom are absolutely incompatible and hypocritical; (2) urge black people to adopt a consistent "hermeneutic of suspicion" in relation to the way they use and interpret the biblical witness by asking does the text support the life and freedom of all black people?; and (3) find ways to communicate the complex and rich message of the scriptural witness on issues surrounding sexuality to black people in a language and manner that maintains the integrity of the black biblical oral/aural tradition. See Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 90, 96.

with God. She looks to the ministry of Jesus, which was partial to justice and the victims of all oppressions, to justify her goals of tolerance and inclusion. Brown Douglas contends that if the black Church really chooses Jesus as the center of its life and faith then it must also choose a way of being in the world that includes an appreciation for the sanctity of human sexuality and an acknowledgement and acceptance of the rich sexual diversity in the black community.

III. WOMANIST PARADIGM

This chapter has teased out examples of how womanist theologians analyze black female identity from the perspective of black women themselves. This analysis recognizes a unique identity for black women formed within the multilayered oppressions they have collectively experienced. This identity is not monolithic as black women experience and respond to these challenges differently. Markers of class and sexuality as well as others create diversity within the African American female community. However, womanist method embraces the claim that a unique theological perspective follows from the unique experiences that result from black female identity. Womanists identify and learn the stories of oppressed black women and witness to both their abuse and degradation as well as their power and hope. Womanist theology explores the exploitation of black women in this country, but sees how this difficult history has taught them to defy identity categories that aim to define what a person can and cannot do. Black women are more than what our society defines them as. Their own stories reveal a counter-discourse about their identity and the power structures that affect this identity.

Many womanists claim that what they offer is not just a unique perspective but a new epistemology that creates a new paradigm for doing theology. Ideas have bodies and these bodies affect ideas. Womanists claim that truth has been reified within ideological formulations that keep white supremacist heteropatriarchy intact and continue the marginalization of black women.⁵¹ Womanist theologians such as Delores Williams challenge all theologians to consider how their bodily identity affects their theology. Williams contends that a theology's focus is often the result of whom the theologian identifies with in biblical texts. She suggests that all theologians engage in a womanist hermeneutic of *identification-ascertainment* in order to discover with whom and with what events they personally identify.⁵² This will be the result of the theologian's individual faith journey and communal influences. She maintains that mainstream white male theologians too often just identify with the patriarchs, that white feminist theologians are too often just concerned with patriarchy, and that black male theologians identify too thoroughly with Israel's election. She suggests that because of their historical experience in this country, African American women see the oppressed of the oppressed in the biblical stories and identify with them.

Williams posits that the unique identity and therefore perspective of the theologian creates different ways of addressing theological themes. She challenges liberation theology to expand its theological focus from a too narrow concentration on liberation themes to include survival themes. Womanist theology's identification with the oppressed of the oppressed brings to light the reality that the oppressed do not always experience bodily

⁵¹ Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 2-3.

⁵² Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 149.

liberation in the biblical stories or real life.⁵³ It is still important theological work to reflect on survival issues since oppressed communities must have tools to survive within the oppression they fight to eliminate. Womanists consider what it means for the oppressed to believe in a God that not only liberates but leaves some in bondage. The gift of revelation is sometimes hope and survival tools. Williams claims that this recognition is a challenge to black theology and its exclusive focus on liberation.⁵⁴

Williams argues that the womanist method of identifying with the oppressed of the oppressed in real life, in the form of black women and their experiences of surrogacy, also raises serious questions about how Christians are taught to think about redemption through the image of Jesus on the cross. As a surrogate for sinful humanity, Jesus on the cross seems to redeem humans by enduring torture and death at the hands of cruel, imperialistic, patriarchal power.⁵⁵ God's "love" is therefore manifested in the death of God's innocent child. Williams finds this problematic for two reasons. First, it bestows on surrogacy an aura of the sacred and may encourage black women to also view their suffering as sacred, as part of God's divine plan. Williams contends that as Christians, black women cannot forget

⁵³ Williams' work in *Sisters in the Wilderness* focuses on the survival story of Hagar with which many African American women have historically identified. Although God does not initiate her liberation, God does give Hagar a new vision to find the survival resources she needs where she saw none before. In Hagar's story liberation is self-initiated when she runs away and oppressor-initiated when she is turned out. Like Hagar, African American women's experience does not end in oppression and hopelessness; they survive even if they are never fully liberated from the forces that aim to keep them down. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 198.

⁵⁴ Williams questions the exclusive emphasis on liberation and the use of the Bible to support the claim that God is a God of liberation. She argues that the non-liberative strands in the Bible make it difficult to understand how it can function today in the way James Cone suggests as a weapon against oppressors. She maintains that the equivocal messages and/or silence about God's liberating power on behalf of non-Hebrew, female slaves of African descent (i.e., Hagar) do not make effective weapons. She further points out that there is no clear opposition expressed in the Christian testament to the institution of slavery. Williams maintains that the question for black theology is about its use of the Bible as a source validating its normative claim of God's liberating activity on behalf of *all* the oppressed. She maintains that building a systematic theology only on the Exodus and Luke paradigm is to ignore generations of black history subsequent to slavery. It is to consign the community and the black theological imagination to a kind of historical stalemate that denies the possibility of change with regard to the people's experience of God and with regard to the possibility of God changing in relation to the community. See Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 144-47, 151.

⁵⁵ For Williams' discussion on the doctrine of redemption, see *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 161-70.

the cross, but neither can they glorify it for to do so is to glorify suffering, and to render their exploitation sacred and to glorify the sin of defilement. For Williams, the image of Jesus on the cross is the image of human sin in its most desecrated form. It should remind us of the ongoing reality of oppressive systems that continue to attack, mock, and destroy human bodies. The existence of this sin and its manifestation in systems of oppression such as sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism cannot bring about redemption.

Not all womanists agree with Williams' theology of redemption, but many would agree with her claim that redemption and the ushering in of the kingdom of God comes about through the righting of relationships. William contends that if we focus on Jesus' life we see that righting relationships was core to his person and ministry. In this theology, the cross becomes a reminder of how humans have tried throughout history to destroy visions of righting relationships. Womanists claim that the wholeness that Jesus preached includes a new vision for both individual identity and interpersonal relationships. This process often involves the transformation of tradition and social relations sanctioned by the status quo and its power dynamics. Williams interprets Jesus' work as helping people exchange their old identities based on inherited cultural meanings for new identities shaped by his gospel ethics and worldview. Womanists call on Christians to embark on a similar personal and communal transformation from identities based on patriarchal, racist, and heterosexist meanings to those that embrace equality and inclusion.

IV. CONSTRUCTION AND EXPRESSION

Womanist theology contributes important insights to theologizing about the body in its sexed/gendered and raced reality. Womanists call attention to the fact that all bodies are

always sexed/gendered and raced at the same time so both identity markers must be considered in theological discourse. The intersection of these identity categories creates different and unique identities and realities. Womanist theology also recognizes that identity markers beyond sex/gender and race affect the lives of body-persons. It advocates movement away from narrow or essentialized definitions of black and/or female subjectivity, including black female subjectivity. Womanist consideration of black women's historical experience recognizes the influence of class and sexuality on black female identity that sets them apart as a group as well as creates diversity within the group. These insights advocate an approach to the body that recognizes that the identity of body-persons is greatly affected by how sex/gender and race intersect in their lives as well as how these two intersect with a plethora of other identity markers that create unique individual identities. Womanist theology urges theological discourse about the body to balance consideration of the social construction of identity with the unique expression of identity at both the communal and individual levels.

Womanist approaches to the body balance the fact that historical and societal experiences and language construct our identity and the equally important fact that we are always capable of both embracing and contesting these constructions. Our bodies include both the construction of group identity as well as counter-discourses to this construction and the life stories that individualize identity. Womanists recognize that white supremacy has authored language that has defined black female identity for general consumption. But female black bodies have a language of their own.⁵⁶ Womanist theologians regard this attention to the discourses of specific communities and individuals as integral to the

⁵⁶ Diana L. Hayes, "Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made: The Making of a Catholic Womanist Theologian," in *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 68; Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words*, xxi; and Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, "Quilting Relations with Creation: Overcoming, Going Through, and Not Being Stuck," in *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 177.

theological enterprise. Rosemarie Harding writes, “Religion is not simply a doctrine of faith or the methods and practices of church, rather it is all the ways we remind ourselves of who we really are, in spite of who the temporal powers may say we are. Religion is how we situate ourselves, how we understand ourselves, in a particular place and time vis-à-vis ultimate reality, vis-à-vis God.”⁵⁷

Just as in the previous explorations of sex/gender and race, womanist theologians use construction as a useful though limited conceptual tool for exploring and understanding the unique identity and reality of African American women by teasing out the various aspects of identity that black women experience. Construction can be a limited tool because it often does not attend to the counter-discourses of historically oppressed communities since these discourses are rarely known outside of the community.⁵⁸ Emilie Towns contends that the images of black life from beyond black life usually keep black people as objects not as subjects with complex identities and realities.⁵⁹ Womanist consideration of history includes both what those outside of the black female community have said about black female identity *and* what they have said about themselves to each other. Central to the womanist approach to black female identity is the fact that black women are and always have been more than the constructs of white supremacy have portrayed them to be. Womanist discourse brings to light the forces against black women and their own counter-discourse based on their culture, language, and self-knowledge. Women of African descent have unique experiences and a narrative about it that is uniquely their own. It is “a narrative of their persistent effort to rise

⁵⁷ Rosemarie Freney Harding with Rachel Elizabeth Harding, “Hospitality, Haints, and Healing: A Southern African American Meaning of Religion,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 100.

⁵⁸ Katie Cannon writes that these discourses have been “unheard but not unvoiced.” See “Structured Academic Amnesia: As If This True Womanist Story Never Happened,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 21.

⁵⁹ Emilie M. Townes, “The Womanist Dancing Mind: Speaking to the Expansiveness of Womanist Discourse,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 239.

above and beyond those persons and situations, which attempt to hold them down.”⁶⁰ It is a narrative that helps black women know themselves and how they came to be. It is a narrative that is crafted within African American female culture. Womanists utilize this narrative with the assumption that these women have intimate knowledge of the matrixes of power that structure their lives.⁶¹

Womanists look to anecdotal evidence to speak the truth of the private lives of black women and liberate and utilize the power of this knowledge. They look to ordinary people’s reflection on their experiences of gender, race, class, and sexual oppression.⁶² Womanism is based on the right of self-naming and a central tenet of its methodology. Black female scholars of religion claimed the power of naming and called themselves womanists, knowing that changing names can change minds. The power of self-naming reflects that each person is a moral agent and a potential agent of change. Through the stories of the oppressed we learn of their power and agency and our worldview changes. These stories are not just communal stories but individual stories. By approaching the body in its totality, womanism recognizes that each body-person is unique. They seek out and call forth the whole self-expression of individual persons.⁶³

Womanist scholarship claims a respect for individuality and the space each individual needs to know the self. As individual creations with the stamp of the *imago Dei*, each person

⁶⁰ Hayes, “Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made,” 57.

⁶¹ Carol B. Duncan, “From ‘Force-Ripe’ to ‘Womanish/ist’: Black Girlhood and African Diasporan Feminist Consciousness,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 33.

⁶² M. Shawn Copeland claims that subjugated knowledge emerges from ordinary people’s reflection on their experiences of gender, race, and class oppression. The position she advocates locates womanist foundations not in propositions but in persons, in critically inquiring, thinking, probing, reflecting, judging, deciding, acting black women. See Copeland, “A Thinking Margin: The Womanist Movement as Critical Cognitive Praxis,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 229.

⁶³ Shani Settles in her article, “The Sweet Fire of Honey: Womanist Visions of Osun as a Methodology of Emancipation,” describes this whole self as a hybrid composite. She claims that there must emerge a mutual respect of an individual’s multiplicity in order for real liberation from the confines of those markers that limit and oppress. In *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 198.

has their own expression of self and revelations of the divine to bring forth into the world. Katie Cannon argues that womanists, and all theologians really, must bring the specificities of their autobiographical context into play because our contextual lens affects our theology. In other words, we must all tell our stories. These stories include our familiar narratives and our communal practices. This self-reflection must include who we are and who we are becoming. Life can only be accessed through individual persons. Womanists maintain that only in knowing the person's story can you know their understanding of black female identity and therefore their rendering of womanist scholarship.

The community self-named as womanist is not a homogeneous group and its narratives are not monolithic. Womanism recognizes that individuals make up communities and they do not lose this individuality by being part of a group. Womanist scholarship endeavors to negotiate and balance communal identity, which is both historical constructions and their contestation, with individual identity, which is the unique reality of each black woman. Although all black women live in the intersection of black race and female sex/gender, the influences of class, sexuality, age, and religion on identity result in diverse experiences and form unique persons. Womanism needs this diversity and expansiveness to address the many challenges black women face both in the wider world and within the community of womanists themselves. Womanists challenge each other to value the multiple voices, cultures, and experiences of black women. It is not an easy challenge to embrace diversity within community, but womanists believe it is true to their heritage and necessary for their future to do so.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Womanist thought as an identity politics must be inclusive of black women's religious pluralism. In Debra Mubashshir Majeed's essay, "Womanism Encounters Islam," she challenges womanists to recognize the religious diversity of African American women. She praises Katie Cannon and other first-generation womanists who understood the need to reject an essentialist womanism which privileged religion or any single

This attention to individuality does not lead womanists to embrace relativity and the ultimate isolation of persons from each other. Womanist discourse reveals that attending to individuality does not preclude community. Although different aspects of human identity fragment communal identity into different experiences and realities, womanist scholarship teaches that persons are always connected in their sharing of certain intersections of identity categories. We are connected to others through the very uniqueness of our identity and the aspects of it we share with them. Jacquelyn Grant argues that in all dynamics of oppression, black women share in the reality of a broader community. They share race suffering with black men; with white women and other Third World women they are victims of sexism; and with poor blacks and whites, and other Third World peoples, especially women, they are disproportionately poor. Therefore, in doing their theology, womanists in their concern for the concrete lives of black women are also concerned with broader issues. Grant presents the experience of a black woman as both unique and connected with others. She claims that “it is in the context of black women’s experience where the particular connects up with the universal.”⁶⁵ Grant continues that this belief that the particular can and does connect up with the universal is central to Christian belief. She writes that with Jesus Christ there was an implied universality which made him identify with others—the poor, the woman, the stranger. Emilie Townes echoes these sentiments when she writes, “It is in exploring these

spiritually based experience and to allow space for the problematizing of womanist theories so as to acknowledge, differentiate, and reclaim the diverse faith journeys and spiritual influences in the lives of African American women. In *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 43. In “Hospitality, Haints, and Healing,” Rosemarie Freeney Harding writes that an openness to and acceptance of the diversity of God’s witness in the world is a legacy of the wisdom brought from Africa. She writes, “Indigenous African religions are known for the inclusivity of their worldview—most tend to find ways to absorb and adapt new traditions (even those of conquered and conquering peoples) into a fundamentally accepting and essentially flexible whole.” In *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 113.

⁶⁵ Grant writes, “The theology is potentially wholistic because the experience out of which it emerges is totally interconnected with other experiences. It is potentially liberating because it rests not on one single issue which could be considered only a middle-class issue relevant to one group of people, but it is multi-faceted. Thus, the possibility for wholistic theology is more likely.” Jacquelyn Grant, “Womanist Theology: Black Women’s Experience as a Source for Doing Theology, With Special Reference to Christology,” in *Black Theology*, 287.

depths, in taking seriously my particularity—not as a form of essentialism, but as epistemology—that I can meet and greet others because we are intricately and intimately interwoven in our postmodern culture.”⁶⁶ Womanism celebrates community that finds common ground not sameness, and builds solidarity within diversity.

V. CONCLUSION

Womanism attends to a “specific” community, namely black women, but offers its work as a platform and starting point for the liberation of all to wholeness and right relationships. Diana Hayes hopes that, in time, womanist would be adopted by all women as, unlike feminism, from its beginnings it has been a theology that attempts to deal holistically with issues of race, class, and gender (including sexual orientation).⁶⁷ The womanist tenet of critical engagement proclaims the inclusiveness of womanism for black women of different religions and life situations. In addition, it proposes that womanist discourse is a thought process “from which other critical discourses might glean directives for doing thoroughgoing research and analysis ‘that seeks to discover and tell what is true.’”⁶⁸ It is in this spirit that I have explored womanist theology. Womanism advocates a method based on the belief that to bring about a future inclusive and representative of all, theologians must attend to the actual experiences of diverse persons. These experiences will help us redefine what it means to be male and female or black and white or any other combination of identity markers because they are the stories of how people live these identities. The following chapter on the

⁶⁶ Townes, “The Womanist Dancing Mind,” 242.

⁶⁷ See Hayes, “Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made,” 57, 74.

⁶⁸ Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, “Introduction,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple*, 11. She is quoting M. Shawn Copeland, “A Thinking Margin,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple*.

body as symbol embraces an approach to the body that balances the social construction of identity with the discourses of the oppressed and individual expressions of self.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us...full of grace and truth.
Jn 1:14

CHAPTER 5: THE BODY AS SYMBOL

I. INTRODUCTION

At the heart of this dissertation is the belief that the human person cannot be or be known apart from their body. We are body-persons. Our coming to be is a materialization. Theology needs to consider not only the process of materialization but our materiality as well, including its sexed/gendered and raced aspects. What the previous investigations into sex/gender and race and their interconnection in womanism reveal is that theology must balance two aspects of materiality in any consideration of the body. Theologians must explore what bodies mean in their specific context as well as investigate bodies as the reality of specific body-persons. The purpose of this chapter is to propose a theological approach to the body as symbol that builds on the discourses concerning sex/gender and race from the previous chapters as well as applications of symbol to the body in theological and other intellectual disciplines.

The first aspect of materiality that is important for theological analysis of the body-person is the impact of its context on the meaning of the body. I use construction as an organizing concept to present different approaches to contemporary meanings of sex/gender and race. Using construction as an organizing principle reveals how both discourses explore the extent to which language and narratives establish norms and regulations by which we know and are our bodies, how history defines and influences bodily identity, and how changing times change bodies. Investigations of sex/gender and race that use construction as an organizing principle are helpful for several reasons. They reveal the range of descriptions

of sex/gender and race that exist simultaneously in theological and theoretical discourses as well as their application to life and living. They present the diversity of opinion that exists about these identity categories without deeming one correct and the others wrong. By reviewing the multivalent reality of sex/gender and race, these investigations into sex/gender and race invite theologians to chart their own theories of these identity categories.¹

Specific investigations of theories of sex/gender and race are important for theologians but they are not enough. Isolating sex/gender and race is a good first step to seriously addressing them but theology must recognize and contend with the fact that all people live both at the same time. Womanist theology is a theological discourse that specifically explores this aspect of human living. Womanist theology utilizes the concept of construction in its investigations of the experience of black women. Womanist theologians explore how historical events and the narratives and mythology that followed from these events construct black womanhood in this country. They explore how the intersection of different bodily constructions influences each construction. In addition, womanist theologians offer two other important insights for any theological analysis of bodily identity. First, womanists point out that the constructions explored in most academic discourses are those developed and known by those with power in our society. Womanists call upon theologians to also attend to the counter-discourses developed by those who traditionally have had no power in society or academia. Black womanhood means different things to those who have traditionally oppressed black women as opposed to black women themselves. Second, womanist theologians recognize that black womanhood is not a monolithic

¹ I recognize that it is difficult for some theologians to embrace the idea of construction as a reality. For them, a constructed sex/gender or race is an illusion. It is my intention to propose construction not as *the* answer for thinking about sex/gender or race but as an organizing concept around which to have discussion about these identity categories.

categorization. Womanist discourse addresses issues of class and sexuality that have affected black female identity as well as differentiated black women from each other. Because it begins with the complexity of human identity for any group as well as person, womanist analysis moves out from race and sex/gender to consider other important identity markers. As a result, womanist scholarship teaches theologians to attend to the individual as well as the constructed group.

Womanist theology highlights a second aspect of materiality that is important for theological analysis of the body-person, namely, that each body is the specific reality of a unique individual body-person. Theology must recognize that persons choose how to understand the constructs of sex/gender and race and their intersection, and speak and live from this perspective. There are many different frameworks, discourses, and iterations of identity, some of which have never been brought into mainstream discussion because of the social location of those who embrace the standpoint. Theology must invite and explore various communal narratives about identity, but it must also recognize that individuals may be more diverse than the community identity by which they are known.² The unique individual at the heart of Christian theology must be included and recognized in theological discourse about the body.

Approaching the body as symbol achieves the balance of the body as construction and the body as individual expression that is needed for better consideration of sex/gender and race in theological discourse. The body as symbol embraces both the body as a symbol of its context, including the language and history of this context, and as a symbol of the individual who is the body, including the person's expression of their context and of their uniqueness.

² These community identities would include the definition of a person as "woman," "man," "African American," "black woman," "Caucasian," etc.

The body as symbol learns from and builds on ideas running through the previous chapters on sex/gender, race, and womanism. First, it includes the idea that socio-cultural and socio-historical contexts and their discourses are articulated and made visible in the materiality we call race and sex/gender. Second, it allows for the reality that the meanings of bodies are always shifting and changing. The constructions of bodies are not static. Because bodies include individual articulations of identity constructions as well as the unique utterance of the individuality of the body-person, race and sex/gender as such are continually being reconstituted. Sex/gender and race have ambiguous meanings since there are so many people articulating the materiality that is these identity categories. Third, the body as symbol incorporates the tension and interconnection between individual identity and communal life, which is central to human identity and theology, especially liberation discourses.

The concept of symbol embraces the insights revealed in the previous investigations of theories of sex/gender and race, namely that material symbols reflect their context and express mystery. The concept of symbol has a long history in theological discourse and has been used by theologians to describe the body. There is also precedent in other intellectual disciplines for thinking of the body in this way. An investigation of Karl Rahner's presentation of the body as symbol explores the body as expression, while analyses of the body as symbol in philosophy, anthropology, and sociology promote understanding of the construction of the body in and by social discourse. Each provides a corrective to the other and in their balance is a good approach to the body as symbol. Balancing insights from theology and other disciplines produces a good tool for a theological consideration of human materiality that properly addresses sex/gender and race. This approach investigates the body

as construction, reflecting its social location, and the body as expression, reflecting its unique expression of its context and its self.

II. SYMBOL

With the concept of symbol, theology already has a tool to reflect on the two aspects of materiality highlighted by the previous investigations of sex/gender and race.³ The concept of symbol applied to the body invites reflection on how its context impacts the meaning of any body and how the body reveals the unique individual it is. The concept of symbol addresses how materiality makes immaterial concepts and realities present. Although the concept of symbol is prevalent in theological discourse, any attempt to give one universal definition of symbol is almost impossible because of the many understandings of what symbols are and how they function. This ambiguity is what makes symbol such a good tool, because it invites *discussion* about bodily materiality and how and what it symbolizes. My argument that human beings embody and live as symbols relies on certain aspects of the word and concept of symbol, which are specifically helpful for thinking about the body in its sexed/gendered and raced reality.

The word “symbol” itself can be traced to the Greek συμβάλλειν (*symbollein*), which means to throw together or place together. In its basic etymology, the word indicates one

³ I rely on the following articles for overviews of the concept of symbol from a theological perspective: Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, “Symbols,” in *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. John Bowden (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1160-71; David Brown, “Symbolism,” in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, eds. Adrian Hastings et al. (New York : Oxford University Press, 2000), 690-92; William L. Hendricks, “Symbol,” in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, eds. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 467-68; Stephen Happel, “Symbol,” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, Dermot A. Lane (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), 997-1002; Jörg Splett, “Symbol,” in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, eds. Karl Rahner et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 199-201; and Stuart Chambers, “Symbolism, Ecclesiastical,” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1964), 203-12.

thing, usually material and visible, bringing to mind or representing something else, usually immaterial and unseen. This idea of symbol has been used throughout Christian history to think about the mystery that materiality makes accessible to us. The materiality of the body makes present and accessible the very concepts of sex/gender and race and the person who is the body. The body is the symbol of these identity concepts and the individual person. In its visibility, the body triggers a huge vocabulary and diverse language about the meanings we give to sex/gender and race. The body simultaneously symbolizes linguistically by evoking historical meanings of sex/gender and race and nonlinguistically by its color, shape, movement, gestures, clothing, and so on. The Greek root of symbol can also mean to compare. Any body we encounter is compared with our preconceived ideas about sex/gender and race. We want to determine if that body complies with or diverges from these assumptive interpretations of sex/gender or race.

In its original Greek form (*symbollein*), symbols were understood to indicate more than one meaning, “thrown together” in such a way that one meaning implies or entails others.⁴ Because of their open nature, symbols can be explained in many and sometimes contradictory ways. A proper appreciation of symbols must embrace their overload in meaning. They invite exploration and speculation. This multivalent character of symbol can attend to both the complexity and diversity of persons and the complexity and diversity of the very notions of sex/gender and race. Human persons are each unique, diverse, social, oppressed and/or oppressing, agents of change, as well as a combination of many identity markers. In addition, race and sex/gender also exist in multiple ways and are variously interpreted in theology, theory, and specific societies. These explanations sometimes overlap

⁴ Happel, “Symbol,” 997.

and sometimes contradict each other but all are present in the broad concepts of sex/gender and race and the bodies that symbolize them.

Symbols are contextual; in other words, the meaning and very existence of symbols depend on their context.⁵ Symbols communicate to the members of particular cultural or religious groups who have been taught their proper interpretation through the process of socialization to the group. Symbols function as part of larger social systems and cannot be fully understood in isolation. When it comes to the body, we are all socialized into certain understandings of what particular bodies are and mean and what they can do. The identity of any body-person is initially established by bringing together the individual body in question with the concepts of sex/gender and race that are relevant to the context in which we encounter them. To have a fuller appreciation of the body as a symbol of its social context, interpreters must pay attention to and know the language and history of this context, including its notions of sex/gender and race and how these have shifted over time. The body as symbol is also communicating its own *self*-understanding. This meaning may align with accepted rules of sex/gender and race or may be a counter-discourse to dominant theories. In addition, an interpreter's own perspective about sex/gender and race will influence the meaning assigned to any body they encounter or investigate.

Catholic theology embraces the idea that materiality can and does reveal mystery within the context of its time and space. The Incarnation and the Eucharist bring believers into direct contact with God in specific places and times and do so through the thought and language of these contexts. Just as theologians and Church leaders must reflect on how different cultures embrace alternative liturgical and theological symbols, theological

⁵ Some suggest that the similarities of certain symbols around the world have their origin in a common psychological unconscious shared by all human beings.

anthropology must also wrestle with various notions of sex/gender and race, as well as other concepts of human identity. Christian revelation is historical and interpersonal as are the symbols that make it present, including the body.

Another use of the original Greek term for symbol, *symbolon*, refers to the comparing or setting together of two things for the purpose of identification. This harkens back to the custom of bringing together the two halves of a broken object, called “symbols,” in order to establish the identity of one or both of the persons possessing the matching halves.⁶ More generally, the term *symbolon* could be applied to whatever signified a means of recognition or identification. The Christian Church has employed this idea of symbol. In the Patristic era, the liturgical creeds pronounced by candidates at the time of baptism were called symbols.⁷ By professing their belief in formulas that began with “I believe” and inferred “we believe,” the candidate was recognized as acceptable for baptism and incorporation into the community. By uttering the Church’s profession of faith, the person was set aside once and for all as a Christian and accepted into the community of faith. This personal expression of the words that formed the community changed the identity of the individual.

The use of the idea of symbol as a token of identity is an important aspect of my application of it to bodies. Bodies establish individual and communal identity. Each body symbolizes the unique individual who it is as well as the meaning(s) assigned to bodily

⁶ The purpose of the symbols could be for identifying two contracting parties, or legitimate guests, messengers and partners. It originally referred to a coin, ring, staff, or tablet, which was cut in half and then carried by two separate parties. Each party kept a piece (a *symbolon* or *symbol*) as proof of identity when one or the other presented their piece. The value of the object lay in its being united with its other part. With this token a guest or ally could reclaim the rights of friendship or hospitality when the two participants next met.

⁷ The term symbol has been applied to early creedal formulas at least from the third century (e.g., by St. Cyprian, d. 259) and the Apostles’ Creed was called a symbol from the fourth century onward. These common professions of faith were collections or summary formulas of dogmatic statements “brought together” as succinct expressions of basic Christian truths. These creedal statements, which compress the whole belief of the church into succinct statements, reflect the overflow of meaning that is inherent in symbols. The study of the distinctive doctrinal characteristics of church bodies is called symbolics.

categories such as sex/gender and race, which group bodies into distinct identity subsets. Being able to identify persons, discerning how to feel about them, and thereby knowing how to act toward them is an important part of everyday living. Recognition and identification are crucial purposes of the body. Race and sex/gender serve important roles in this process of identification and reaction. They can trigger feelings of belonging and acceptability or rejection. These identifying categories may connect people cross-culturally as well as allow people to live more specific cultural lives. In this way the body allows us to be open to others while still forming communal loyalties.⁸

The concept of symbol itself allows for different opinions about how symbols symbolize. The question is to what degree is a symbol the thing it is symbolizing and to what degree is it not. This question also entails discussion about what it means that one thing is or represents something else. The history of Christianity's use of symbols has witnessed periods of belief in a real affinity or correspondence between the visible sign and the invisible truth and periods of iconoclasm when there was the need to distinguish reverence for symbols and their worship.⁹ This "is" vs. "is not" debate can be translated as nature vs. convention when it comes to bodies. Questions about nature and convention invite

⁸ The reluctance of some black theologians as well as feminist theologians to stop using traditionally oppressive categories like black and woman is because they are also concepts that rally people for political action and social change. Symbols are significant for the establishment of communal experience.

⁹ For example, the early and medieval Church and theologians took a symbolic view of scripture and the universe as a whole. The time of the Reformation was a period when rationalism and the development of science were valued and the use of symbols was suppressed. The twentieth century saw a renewed interest and attention to symbols. The question for theologians considering symbol is whether the symbol represents by participating in that which it symbolizes or does it manifest Being Itself only in negation, revealing the discontinuity between symbol and what it manifests. Two leading scholars who represent these different approaches to symbol are Karl Rahner and Paul Tillich. Roger Haight, a theologian who tries to bring together their theologies, describes their approaches as reflecting the "is" vs. "is not" dialectical structure of religious symbols. Emphasizing the "is," as Rahner does, assumes a continuity between our world and a transcendent one. Emphasizing the "is not" of symbol focuses more on the disjunction between humans and God. This theology would use symbol as a way to talk about something we do not know how to think or talk about. For an example of this approach to symbol, see Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957). For more on Haight's analysis of the "is" and "is not" aspects of symbol, see Roger Haight, *Dynamics of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 129-45.

speculation about how materiality symbolizes and what it symbolizes. The body as symbol asks the question of whether the body is uttering ahistorical and ontological realities and materializing something natural and innate about human identity, or merely pointing to and making present identity constructions based on how certain characteristics of the body have been historically or conventionally associated with particular personality and capability traits by specific social contexts.¹⁰ Today the “natural” status of sex/gender and race is being challenged or has been eradicated. Theological discussion of the body must address what happens if we change the register of a description from natural, ontological, or ahistorical to one that is established by convention or power dynamics. The usefulness of the idea of symbol in theological discourse about the body includes its invitation to conversation about understandings of ontology, how being materializes, what it embodies, and the role of human agency in changing any of these.

Thinking of the body as symbol invites critiques of the meanings assigned to the body because all symbols must be investigated and questioned. While we are aware that symbols shape our lives, at the same time, we question the meaning and intent of social, political, and economic symbols, all of which are expressed by the body. We must investigate symbols not only to more fully understand them, but also to judge whether those symbols lead us toward the transformation of society for good or toward ill. Human history has witnessed the expansive use and abuse of symbolic images. Within this conversation about the body as symbol, interlocutors must remember that symbols elicit not only intellectual responses but

¹⁰ Some argue that characteristics of specific sexes/genders and races have been tied to “natural” modes of being and therefore explained as ontological descriptions. For example, there have been and are many theories and explanations of women’s reproductive capacities. The female sex and its corresponding feminine gender have been described as more nurturing and the roles assigned to them often in the capacity of caregiver because some women can birth and nurse children. Africans were thought to be less human because they enacted different modes of religion and living than the Europeans who described them in this way.

emotional reactions as well, because symbols are deeply embedded in human living and the meaning we attach to it. Debate about the materiality of the body is often difficult because of the emotional connection people have to the meaning they gain from and give to bodies.

The fit of symbol for my approach to the body is evident in the fact that human beings are body-persons; they are both at the same time physical matter and mysteriously more than that. Bodies are powerful symbols because they can bear more than one meaning and evoke a gamut of ideas and responses. Christian theology maintains that human persons are the *imago Dei* and therefore the body symbolizes both human and divine mystery. Neither is exhaustibly expressed in the body, yet neither can be revealed without the body. It is through the body as symbol that we attain knowledge of the mystery of the human and the divine that expresses itself in it. Yet at the same time that the body as symbol plunges us into the mystery of being, it also reveals aspects of human history and determines everyday actions and policy. The body-person achieves meaning in their context and expresses the mystery of the individual who is more than just this context. The immaterial something that is made material in the body is both the constructs of sex/gender and race and the expression of the individuality of the body-person. The body is construction and expression at all times.

III. THE BODY AS SYMBOL

The concept of symbol has been used in theology to reflect on the body. Karl Rahner's ideas about the body in particular are helpful for theological discourse about sex/gender and race. Rahner demonstrates how discourse about the body flows from the central questions of theology and is inherent in them. His theology of symbol argues that expression is essential to being and the body as symbol is first and foremost the self-

expression of the individual. Rahner's emphasis on expression serves as a needed corrective to discourse about the body that focuses almost exclusively on the group identity of the person and loses sight of the unique individual that the body-person is. However, Rahner's theology also needs the corrective of discourses that understand the body as a symbol of its context since his approach does not address the specificity of the body to which the categories of sex/gender and race point. The juxtaposition of Rahner's theology of symbol with other theories of the body as symbol creates the balance of the body as expression and the body as construction that is needed to have better theological discourse about sex/gender and race as identity concepts and about the whole body in all its specificities. The body as symbol expresses the mystery of the body-person that it reveals as well as the construction of materiality that informs and is informed by this mystery.

The Body as Expression

Symbol is central to the theology of Karl Rahner. He wrote that "the concept of symbol is an essential key concept in all theological treatises, without which it is impossible to have a correct understanding of the subject-matter of the various treatises in themselves and in relation to other treatises."¹¹ Rahner explains that a real theology of the symbol is based on the fundamental truth of Christianity, namely that God enunciates God's self to the world through the incarnate Logos. He uses symbol to explain his theology of the Trinity and the Incarnation as well as his theological anthropology that claims that the body is the symbolic reality of the human person.

¹¹ Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, ed. Kevin Smith (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 245.

Rahner admits that the word “symbol” has no clear and definite meaning in every instance and that the very concept of symbol is much more obscure, difficult and ambiguous than is usually thought. Symbol for Rahner is the highest and most primordial manner in which one reality renders another present. Rahner argues that the symbol is not something separate from the symbolized. The symbol contains the reality it represents and allows the other to really be there. He writes, “the symbol is the reality, constituted by the thing symbolized as an inner moment of itself, which reveals and proclaims the thing symbolized, and is itself full of the thing symbolized, being its concrete form of existence.”¹² For Rahner, the symbol represents primarily for the thing symbolized itself and only secondarily for others.

Rahner’s basic principle in his ontology of symbolism is that all beings are by their nature symbolic, because they necessarily “express” themselves in order to attain their own nature. He posits that all being must express itself. Being achieves its expression through forming something distinct from itself yet one with itself. This expression is a symbol of the being. Beings cannot fully express themselves all at one time so they are multiple in their expression. These plural moments have an inner agreement among themselves on account of the unity of the being.¹³ In its multiplicity, being sees “the other,” a derivative of its unity, which expresses its unity. In the recognition of the whole in each part or expression, the being is made present to itself and finds itself in knowledge and love. Therefore, Rahner explains the expression or symbol of the being as its self-realization. The being needs this “other,” this expression, to be present and to be known by itself and by others. Without the symbol the being cannot be known at all.

¹² Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 251.

¹³ Ibid., 227.

The Trinity is the constant background of Rahner's ontological considerations of symbol.¹⁴ Rahner argues that communication is intrinsic to God as God is in God's self and symbol is central to his explanation of this communication. God the Father, in order to attain [his] proper nature, expresses self and possesses self in the other. The other is the Father's self-expression and therefore shares the Father's be-ing. This other is the Logos, the second person of the Trinity. The Logos is the perfect symbol of the Father. What is communicated within the Godhead is the essence of God. This divine essence is communicated in three manners, since expression of being is multiple. The Father as the unoriginate mediates self to self. The Son is the one who is in truth uttered for self, and the Spirit is the one who is received and accepted in love for self. This communication is the divine act of self-possession in knowledge and love. Here is the perfection of unity in multiplicity that Rahner understands as the ground of all being. This is Rahner's first proposition about symbol; that through symbols we express self and therefore possess self. We communicate first of all for ourselves.

Secondarily, symbols allow beings to be known by others. This idea is also rooted in Rahner's Trinitarian theology. He argues that because God must express God's self inwardly in order to possess self in the other and therefore attain God's own nature, there is potential and capacity for God to be known outwardly and by others. God is known outwardly by the same "other" by which God possesses God's self, namely the Word. The content of God's communication is God's self. God is the giver and gift of the communication itself. Rahner maintains that how God is with us in and through this self-communication is how God is in

¹⁴ For a full exposition of Rahner's trinitarian theology, see Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998).

God's self because it is God's *self*-communication.¹⁵ For Rahner, this self-communication of God is a real ontological communication which gives real knowledge and therefore implies real relation to what is known. That is why his basic Trinitarian axiom is that the "economic" Trinity is the "immanent" Trinity and the "immanent" Trinity is the "economic" Trinity.¹⁶ The relationship that Jesus Christ revealed to us through the historic event of the Incarnation reveals the real relation of the Father and Son as they are in God. Rahner contends that God has made God's self known as triune, a unity and multiplicity that is at the heart of his understanding of symbol.

Rahner contends that in the same way as Trinitarian belief is best understood through a theology of symbol so are Christological tenets. Because being expresses itself, the Word must also express self in "the other." This other is the humanity of Jesus Christ, which shares the be-ing of the Logos. Jesus' humanity is the symbol of the Logos, the second person of the Trinity, and as the symbolic reality of the Logos, the self-disclosure of the Logos. Rahner maintains that each person of the Trinity communicates self according to their personal peculiarity, that is, according to and in virtue of their mutual relations.¹⁷ Since only the Logos became human, we must believe that only the Son, in [his] peculiarity as Son, could become incarnate.¹⁸ Only then could the mission of the Son tell us anything about the Logos. In this human symbol, the concrete symbol of the Logos, God is expressed and is known by the world. The fact that the second person of the Trinity expresses self in created reality has consequences for all created reality. Rahner argues that we know human being in

¹⁵ Rahner, *The Trinity*, 101.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁸ Rahner, "The Theology of Symbol," 238.

reference to divine self-communication because there is continuity between God and humanity through grace.

Rahner's theological reflection on being, both divine and human, is based on the notion of the fundamental knowability of being because being is expressive. The central symbol by which human beings are known is the body. The human being expresses self as the body and through the body. Only through its self-expression in the body can the person acquire self-knowledge and achieve self-fulfillment. In addition, it is only through the body that the person can make themselves known to others. Therefore, Rahner defines the body as the symbolic reality of the human being. In Rahner's theology, to say that the body is the symbol of the soul means that the soul renders itself present in the body. The soul determines the body by expressing itself in it. The body becomes the actuality and reality of the soul, its concrete form of existence. Therefore we can talk about corporeality as the symbol of the unity of the person, which is self-communicated in the body. The person speaks of self as one self-knowing whole which evokes the unity of one's being. One only knows the self in the body.

Rahner's claim that "the body is the symbol of the soul, in as much as it is formed as the self-realization of the soul,"¹⁹ reflects several important considerations for my own project. First, the body *is* the person in that there is no separation between the soul and body. Rahner writes that reality and its appearance in the flesh are for ever one in Christianity, unconfused and inseparable.²⁰ Therefore, Rahner argues that Christian theologians cannot separate the reality of the person from their materiality in the body for the highest knowledge of the spirit is corporeal. According to his theology, people come to be and know themselves

¹⁹ Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," 247.

²⁰ Ibid., 252.

only in their corporeality. This recognition of the importance of corporeality for human living and being is at the heart of my project. There is no person without the body and sex/gender and race are important aspects of the body and so must be seriously considered in theological discourse.

Second, I agree with Rahner's ontological assumption that being is expressive. By understanding communication as intrinsic to being, we are able to think about the body as self-expression. In fact, it is only through the body that persons can express themselves, remembering always that this body is contextualized in time and space as well as through the categories of sex/gender and race. These categories reflect the fact that human identity is not simple. Like Rahner, I would argue that human self-expression is multiple even though the human being is the unity of all these intersecting identity markers. Because human beings cannot express themselves all at one time, theologians must attend to the many expressions of the one person, including how sex/gender and race are part of these expressions.

Rahner is again helpful when he states that the body expresses the unity of the person in different ways in its different parts. He contends that the person is known in each part of the body, although some are more important than others.²¹ We certainly see this in how critical identity aspects are based on specific body parts. For example, sex/gender is based on genitalia and race is based on skin color. Other body parts do not matter as much, i.e., eye color, hand size, or belly-button configuration. Rahner contends that differences clearly exist in the various "parts" of the body with regard to their power of expression, their degree of

²¹ In each part of the body is comprised the whole of the person, Rahner writes, "This prior ontological unity of the whole man also appears in each part of the body; as the unity unfolds, it projects its proper manifestation, its symbol, into the part in question and thus possesses itself there as a whole, though not totally." Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," 248.

belonging to the soul, their openness of the soul.²² For my purposes this can translate to the whole person expressing self in their sex/gender or race at one time and then the other at another time or a unique combination of the two at still other instances. This helps understand the critique of womanists that feminists are not always in solidarity with other women of color but sometimes more in community with white men based on their race. In each case, the woman in question is expressing herself. Each aspect of the body contributes its part to the whole of the symbol and all must be considered in theological reflection on body-persons.²³

Another important contribution Rahner makes to thinking about the body as symbol is his reflection on the uniqueness of the body-person. Each body is unique and particular because it reflects and expresses the uniqueness of the person in and through it. The body is not merely flesh that all humans share but the real symbol of the unique person. The relationship of the person with their body is not arbitrary but true to them. Rahner writes, “one cannot give another body to a spiritual soul; not only would it express itself differently, but it would itself become other or else transform the body into which it was forced into *its* body.”²⁴ *This* body is symbolic of *this* soul. It is the person’s self-proclamation. What they are saying in and through the symbol of their body is something real and true about themselves.

Finally, I agree with Rahner that the body as symbol is the means by which the person is known by self and by others. His theology of symbol posits that the being posses

²² Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 249.

²³ Rahner writes that “It has always been more or less clearly known that the axiom: the part is only understandable in the whole, and the whole is in each part, was true above all of the human body. The axiom is represented even in Scripture, 1 Cor 12:12-26,” in “Theology of the Symbol,” 248.

²⁴ Rahner, “Priest and Poet,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 295.

self in knowledge and love in the plurality they create in their symbol. For my project, this means that how one expresses one's body in terms of sex/gender and race is how one knows one's self. A person's race and/or sex/gender may be a real symbol for them, the means by which they realize themselves. This may be different for another person who may not know or express self through the same particular categories. One must be attentive to how each person is expressing their body in terms of their race and sex/gender to themselves in order to know and understand how the body is communicating this individual to the outside world. Rahner concludes that persons do not *have* a symbolic quality; they *are* symbols.

Rahner's importance for theologizing about the body is his emphasis on the body as an expressive symbol of the unique human person. The person known and knowing self through the symbol of the body is a singular creation of God. Rahner's ideas about symbol allows for a pluralism of identity since each body as symbol reflects the unique individual it is. This approach to the body as expression needs to be balanced with a strong historical consciousness and social understanding of human existence in terms of the body. Rahner is somewhat aware of determinants that affect the body and therefore the person known by it as their self-expression. He posits that although the body does not have any positive content prior to the reality of the soul, it may be influenced by prior determinations of matter. These prior determinations of the body affect how the body-person can and does know themselves and therefore how they are known by others through the symbol of their bodies. For my proposal, the determinations of what certain aspects of the body such as race or sex/gender mean would influence the body of the individual person and therefore the reality of the person known in the sexed/gendered and raced body. These prior determinations may shift but at this time in our society certain aspects of the body matter more than others and two of

which matter most are one's classification as male or female and white or person of color. Rahner's insight that the soul determines the body by expressing itself in it must be balanced with the idea that the body also determines the soul by being the medium through which it expresses itself. I posit that this balance can be achieved by incorporating into theological reflection on the body an appreciation and consideration of social context and its construction of bodies.

The Body as Construction

A corrective for the previous theological approach to the body as symbol in the work of Karl Rahner and in much of traditional theology is to balance its insight that the body in general as human materiality expresses the individual soul with an approach to the body as symbol in other disciplines that considers the body specifically as a product and reflection of its particular context. This section explores how other disciplines speak about the body as symbol with an emphasis on its constructedness within its particular societal context. In this section, I focus on how the body-person is a symbol of the society that forms it. I use Fiona Bowie's work *The Anthropology of Religion* as a guide to ideas about the body as symbol in philosophy, sociology, and anthropology.²⁵ As with theology, symbol in other social sciences is a varied concept with diverse meanings. Bowie describes what she understands as two poles of interpretation in the study of symbols. One pole maintains that there are intrinsic genetic or psychological mechanisms that generate appropriate symbols. At the other pole is the doctrine of conventionalism, which contends that symbols and what they symbolize are arbitrary and based on social agreement. One can borrow from theology the

²⁵ Fiona Bowie, "The Body as Symbol," chap. 2 in *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 38-69.

insight that there are different emphases in the study of symbols on the “is” and “is not” aspects of them.

Bowie maintains that when considering the body one must always remember that we are not talking about biology *per se*, but rather we are speaking of symbolic classification. Bodies are classified and regulated according to the markers, such as sex/gender and race, that are deemed significant by the surrounding culture. The body is a symbol of its context embodying and reflecting the beliefs of the culture in which one finds it. I focus here on three ideas about the body as a construct of its social location. First, the body symbolizes its society; the body and its surrounding culture reflect each other. Second, the body comes to be and have meaning according to the regulations and control of a particular social context. Third, the body’s personal expression is related to, influenced by, and an influence on societal constructions of bodily reality. Throughout this section, I connect these theories of bodily construction with my previous investigations of sex/gender and race in theology and theory. I read liberation theologies concerned with sex/gender and race as part of this corrective to traditional theological anthropology.

To suggest that the body is a symbol of its society in that the body and its surrounding culture reflect each other has two aspects. First, societies, including religions, take cues from the body and its functions and create meaning systems based on these. Second, the body symbolizes society by reflecting its structure and beliefs. These two considerations of the body create a constant back and forth between materiality and society. The conflation of cultural rules with the body makes these rules and values appear natural. To explain this aspect of the body as symbol, Bowie turns to the work of Robert Hertz and Mary Douglas.²⁶

²⁶ Robert Hertz (1881-1915) was a French sociologist, a pupil of Émile Durkheim, and some consider his work a precursor to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism. He interpreted the human body as a vehicle for expressing

Hertz's work on the concepts of right and left demonstrates how societies have taken the fact that right-handedness is more dominant and married it to beliefs about religion and gender role differentiation so that the right has meant good, sacred, creative, life, and male, while the left has symbolized uncleanness, profanity, death, weakness, and female.²⁷ The defamation of the left has limited the capacities of left-handed individuals who were forced to use their right hand and has thereby been a loss to humanity collectively.

The continual interaction between the embodied individual and the social and natural world of which the individual is a part is also prevalent in the work of Mary Douglas.²⁸ Douglas contends that even the most lowly and intimate of bodily processes can be given the most elaborate and metaphysical of interpretations. Douglas' work stresses the importance of the body as a symbol system in which social meanings are encoded and in this way how body-persons are classified in any system. The body exists as a cipher for understanding social structures because it symbolizes these structures. Douglas' work on purity reflects how religious/cultural beliefs are crucial for understanding bodies, classifying them, and living them. She understands dirt not as a thing-in-itself but as a symbolic category that

social values. Bowie concentrates on his essay, "The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand: A Study in Religious Polarity," which was originally published in 1909 and translated by Rodney Needham in *Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973). For more on Hertz, see Robert Parkin, *The Dark Side of Humanity: The Work of Robert Hertz and Its Legacy* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996). Mary Douglas (1921-2007) was a British anthropologist, who is also considered a follower of Durkheim and a strong proponent of structuralist analysis. Douglas wrote on how human cultures employ symbols to express their reality. Bowie focuses on Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Routledge Classics Ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002). Another important work by Douglas in this area is *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, rev. ed. (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1973). For more on Douglas and her work, see Richard Fardon, *Mary Douglas: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

²⁷ Bowie, "The Body as Symbol," 42. Many religions orient bodies and sacred spaces toward the East or the "right" as an orientation toward the sun, the light, and God. Bowie notes that the decrease in the emphasis on right-handedness coincides with an increase in secularization as well as the lessening of gender role differentiation, "The Body as Symbol," 43.

²⁸ Bowie, "The Body as Symbol," 44. Bowie notes that while these interrelationships may seem obvious to many people today, they represented a radical move away from a Cartesian view of the universe as a mechanical object, observed by the rational mind of the conscious individual.

reveals the dualities of order/disorder, being/nonbeing, form/formlessness, and life/death.

Body-persons must be attentive to the purity of their bodies so as not to be classified on the wrong side of these dualities, which has grave consequences for one's place and potential in society.²⁹ These examples expound on the idea that the body-person is a symbol of the society/culture in which it lives not only as a source of symbolic ideas for the meaning making of society, but a reflection of this meaning making.

The links between the individual body and cultural forms that define this first aspect of the body as a symbol of its context are found throughout the previous investigations of sex/gender and race. Some theologians extrapolate from bodily realities such as heterosexuality, birth, and infant nursing by the mother and present a "natural" and ahistorical understanding of sex and/or gender. However, one could also argue that the body is in fact constructed by these "ahistorical" meanings given to them by theology.

Theologians who treat race as a theological theme call attention to the fact that U.S. society was built on beliefs that marry skin color to a mythology of color that understands black as bad and white as good. Skin color is encoded by and reveals the social beliefs of our time as well as our reactions to them. Our life and living is marked by skin color in black/white relief.

A second supposition about the construction of bodily materiality is that the body-person comes to be and have meaning only according to the norms and regulations of its social context. Control of how bodies can and should be is the means of regulating society as

²⁹ Douglas contends that this attentiveness to purity and pollution contests distinctions between the sacred and profane. According to her, they are not separate types of experience concerned on the one hand with the metaphysical realm of religion, and on the other hand with the mundanity of everyday life, but part of the same ordering system. Bowie, "The Body as Symbol," 52. See Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 40.

a whole. If bodies are and do what they should, then society will be as it should.³⁰ The regulation of bodies is the result of socialization and its process of imitation and the exercise of power through the regulatory norms that define bodies as acceptable or unacceptable. Michel Foucault's work explores how societal power creates bodies and continually regulates them by authoritative monitoring and the restriction of physical movement.³¹ This approach to the construction of the body argues that in many ways the formation of the body-person according to social norms is prior to any act, even imitation. The argument is that we can only come to be as the embodiment of the regulatory norms of our society. Those not adhering to this obligatory social conformity are left out of, removed from, or some would argue do not materialize in the social order.³²

This process of bodily construction is not a once and for all event but must continue throughout life. Bowie investigates the work of anthropologist Judith Okely on boarding schools to provide an example of this idea of the construction of the body-person by societal norms and regulations enforced through the constant surveillance of power.³³ Bowie categorizes Okely's description of her private girls' boarding school as a "total institution," a notion of Erving Goffman for "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together

³⁰ This is an ancient notion. Ancient Rome tried to regulate how households functioned based on specific role differentiation, arguing that a well-run household meant a well-run *polis*. Hence the household codes of the ancient world. One could also argue that the household codes found in New Testament texts reflect this notion that the proper control and living of each body meant a well-ordered church community acceptable to the larger social context.

³¹ Foucault's work examines how control via the gaze, the constant surveillance of people by those in authority, affects bodies and their living. See especially Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

³² This is a core aspect of Judith Butler's work on sex/gender and the formation of the subject. See Chapter 2 of this dissertation for Butler's appropriation of Foucault's notions of power to the formation of the sexed/gendered subject.

³³ Judith Okely, "Privileged, Schooled and Finished: Boarding Education for Girls," in *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society*, ed. Shirley Ardener (New York: Wiley, 1978), 109-39.

lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life.”³⁴ The goal of the boarding school is to sculpt the minds and bodies of the students to reflect the understanding of the world according to the custodians of the institutions. This understanding embraced the wider social messages of class and gender. Okely describes the achievement of the school as the defeat of the individual student. The comportment of the body was crucial in this process since bodies reflect our inner attitudes. Its control was understood as integral to the control of the person’s thoughts and emotions.³⁵

The interconnection of the social, psychological, and biological is intrinsic to any understanding of the construction of the body-person and is part of many of the liberation discourses discussed in previous chapters. Many argue that history and the texts that tell its tale are told by those with power and for the purpose of perpetuating the social structure that keeps them in power. Bodies are understood as both a reflection of and the materialization of society’s controlling discourses concerning sex/gender and race. These discourses are argued to determine the meaning of bodies, the proper living of life based on these meanings, and even the production and control of wealth. Victor Anderson addresses this notion of the regulation of bodies from a different perspective altogether. He questions whether cultural and racial communities themselves are guilty of regulating and defining bodies in a way that limits their full potential for personal fulfillment. His argument contends that bodies must be allowed to express themselves personally and not always collectively.

³⁴ Bowie notes that Goffman caused some controversy by his comparison of boarding schools, monasteries, and hospitals with military, mental, and penal establishments. See Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Penguin, 1984), 11.

³⁵ Bowie agrees with Marcel Mauss (1872-1950), the French sociologist who claimed that the nature/nurture debate misses the point. He claimed even “purely biological or psychological” skills have to be learnt. Social meanings are inscribed on the physical body and may limit or enable individual and collective actions. Regulations, by means of their inscription on and through the body, are ordained natural and inevitable and imbued with emotional force. See Bowie, “The Body as Symbol,” 55, 57, and 62.

This insight about the reality and need of personal expression is also explored in Bowie's article when she investigates the idea of personal symbols and the body. This approach to the body as symbol contends that the body reflects not only the wider society but also the individual within this society. In the body is located the back and forth between the personal and the social. Bowie writes that we continually create patterns of meaning out of both our individual and collective experience; even though individual classifications are less powerful than those with the weight of collective authority, which in turn are more rigid than private ones.³⁶ Bowie includes the work of Gananath Obeyesekere as a consideration of the personal symbolism of the body.³⁷ He argues that personal bodily symbols are optional for the individual and may fill a psychological need rather than reflect obligatory social conformity. These symbols are nevertheless recognized by the culture in which the person lives. Obeyesekere maintains that personal symbols may be missed or misunderstood if one does not attend to the individual life history of the person who is expressing the symbol and the meaning they attribute to the symbol. He concludes that the public meaning of a symbol relates to, but may not be the same as, the genesis and personal meaning of the same symbol. Here is what I call the personal expression of the social construction of the body.

Any approach to the body as a construction of society and therefore a symbol of it needs to be balanced by not only the body as an expression of the unique individuality of the person but also the body as a personal expression of the constructions of society. Expression must include the idea that the body expresses the constructions that form it, sometimes uniquely. The body's personal expression of sex/gender and race is related to, influenced by,

³⁶ Bowie, "The Body as Symbol," 48.

³⁷ Gananath Obeyesekere is an anthropologist most interested in psychoanalysis and anthropology and the ways in which personal symbolism is related to religious experience. Bowie utilizes his work, *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

and an influence on the societal constructions of bodily reality. Therefore, personal symbols constitute part of the symbolic language of the wider society. Obeyesekere claims that the need to express personal symbols, or personal variations of culturally acceptable symbols, may represent a psychological need so deep that the person would suffer if it were not expressed. He claims that the personal expression is received by society as meaningful and rational. We must also consider that personal expressions are often not accepted by society as such. Some expressions are dismissed as silly, false, irrelevant, over reactive, or unnecessary. The need to express the personal in the body may make the body-person an anomaly or an outcast.³⁸

This third point that there is always also a personal aspect to the constructedness of bodies is quite evident in the work of womanist scholars. Womanism focuses on the unique reality of black women with special attention to their expression of black womanhood. Womanists emphasize the strong psychological need to express identity in one's own words and ways. They recognize that this expression does not erase the social construction of black womanhood that has defined them and often limited their opportunities in their historical context in the United States. But their expression of black womanhood serves as a counter-discourse to this construction. Womanists recognize that black women must study the history of the construction of black female identity in the United States as well as how that same identity has been expressed by black women themselves. There is a constant relationship between public and personal symbols. It is the hope of black women as well as

³⁸ Bowie contends that there is usually a strong emotional reaction to anomalies at the individual and societal level. An anomaly is an entity that defies the rules of the operating taxonomy, which determines what is normative. In terms of body-persons, an anomalous person could be classified as virtually outside the limits of the "human" category. Anomalies or ambiguities challenge the foundations of social living. Anomalies are powerful for they may reorder reality by forcing it to shift itself to accommodate them. For more on anomalies, see Bowie, "The Body as Symbol," 38, 49-52.

other traditionally oppressed groups that as their members are more able to publically voice their personal or communal expression of public constructions, their counter-discourses will become part of the language of the wider society and the meaning assigned to their identity by the wider community will shift.³⁹ Womanists, much like Obeyesekere in his work, recognize the need to attend to the individual who is making an expression of identity. Their life story is important in order to properly understand how their body is symbolizing their identity. This attention to the individual within community must allow for diversity of expression and perhaps even contradictions of what it means to be a black woman.

IV. A PROPOSAL FOR THEOLOGY

My proposal of the body as symbol as a tool for theological anthropology emerges from my investigations of theories of sex/gender and race in theology, of their intersection in womanist work, and of relevant reflection on the body as symbol in theology and other intellectual disciplines. It is a platform for deeper, more critical theological discussion of sex/gender and race and through these of the overall complexity of identity for body-persons. The body as symbol does not define race or sex/gender once and for all, but rather acknowledges their diversity and multiple realities in our society. It also embraces the fact that no identity markers are separate from the others that an individual embodies and is.

³⁹ Womanists argue that thinking about the body in terms of construction only tells part of the story. The identity of black woman in this country has been constructed to be an oppressed body, an overused and abused body. This is the construction that has made it into the history books and the construction that still makes it into the newspaper. But black women speak a different tale. They talk about the counter-discourse they learned from their black mothers to speak back to these constructions and realize a different way of being for themselves and their children. But their lack of power keeps this discourse insular to the experiences of these black women who know it and pass it on to other black women. This discourse, this construction if you will, of black womanhood is just now coming into theoretical analysis as womanist scholars make their way into venues to speak it. In the same vein, we learn from white feminists and black male scholars a new way of talking about the body that is not focused on the universal white male body. It is a way of thinking about the body that is outwardly political with the goal of changing all manner of academic and public discourse. It is a way of thinking about identity that is determined to liberate bodies to tell their own tale and their own interpretation of their history and their selves.

Theology must attend to these identity markers without losing sight of the individual, unique person.

The constructions of bodily identity may determine many aspects of one's life but one's own narrative and individual expression in relation to them is just as important and must be included in any theology that wants to be relevant for real people. Attending to identity constructions guards against getting lost in the specificities of individual expression and losing sight of the social constructions that always inform personal life. Attending to individual circumstances and identities guards against a structuralist view of human identity that leaves little room for uniqueness of expression and agency. The body as symbol reflects on the person who lives and navigates social constructs and expresses individuality. This approach to the body balances knowledge of various theories of sex/gender and race as well as sensitivity to personal life stories. The concept of the body as symbol posits that the person expresses and forms their body *and* that their body expresses and forms the person. The body is both an expression and a construction.

The body as symbol invites theologians to consider the relationship between the concept of construction and the body, including the idea of construction itself, the level of bodily construction, and the agent(s) of construction. Fiona Bowie's exploration of philosophical, anthropological, and sociological work that treat the body as symbol provides examples of how the body is a reflection and creation of its specific cultural context. These approaches to the body as symbol argue that the body symbolizes, represents, and, some argue, is the societal constructs of materiality in which it finds itself and comes to know itself. There is much debate in theology and other disciplines about the "reality" of constructions and some hesitation to think of bodies as construction since materiality is

commonly considered the most real of realities.⁴⁰ However, the term construction invites reflection on how sex/gender and race influence and are our identities without depriving them of their force in life. For example, most theorists and theologians understand race as a social construction not a “real” biological distinction; yet saying it is a social construction is not the same as relegating it to the status of illusion, which is just one theory of race.

Using construction as an organizing principle for discussion about sex/gender and race invites dialogue about whether these bodily categories are transcendent, ontological, ahistorical realities that tell us something ultimately true and timeless about ourselves or are somehow constructed in time and place. One can understand the level of bodily construction as total, as partial, or as none. If one accepts some level of construction in bodily life, questions follow concerning who is doing the constructing and what kind of agency individuals have within the matrix of construction. These initial questions about the construction of material identity in terms of sex/gender and race disclose the existence of various theories about sex/gender and race in both theology and theory. The meaning of sex/gender and race varies according to the interpreter and even then no neat categorization can capture any one thinker’s understanding of these identity markers. In a postmodern context, theology must find methods to discuss race and sex/gender that recognize their varied interpretation and simultaneously varied reality. Individuals understand and live sex/gender and race differently and authentically.⁴¹ This variety includes multiple explanations that may overlap and influence each other as well as exclude and contradict each other. Approaching the body as symbol encourages and supports discourse about

⁴⁰ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, x.

⁴¹ I do not mean here to include women haters or white supremacists who do violence to women or people of color. I would argue that the need to enforce one’s will through violence would not be an authentic way to live any identity.

sex/gender and race that embraces the multiple realities and understandings of sex/gender and race because the concept of symbol itself is open and allows for more than one meaning. In addition, theology must be prepared to explore how race and sex/gender intersect and influence each other. There is never just one construction of identity at work but several at the same time.

The body as construction invites consideration of the language, history, and context of the identity concepts by which it materializes and according to which it has meaning. My investigation into theories of race and sex/gender includes three main ideas about the relationship of the body and language. First, theologians must ask what language we use to define bodies in their raced and sexed/gendered realities. Which language or narratives does a theologian think important in furthering our understanding of bodies? Second, theologians must interrogate how language forms bodies. Third, theologians must consider how the body itself is language. Treating the body as symbol in theological discourse also invites theologians to consider the history of bodily categories such as sex/gender and race. There are many theories about how the body symbolizes the history of the context in which it finds itself. The categories of the body may or may not be explained as historical and political realities which have been constructed and reconstructed throughout history. Regardless of whether one views the body's meaning as historical or ahistorical, all must recognize the influence of the body's context on our understanding of it. Our understanding and description of bodily categories such as race and sex/gender change in different historical contexts and so the material identity markers that are important today, or were important yesterday, may lose their importance in the future or may have already lost some of their relevance for contemporary society. Thinking of the body as symbol embraces this

changeability, whether it is explained in terms of the symbol's birth, growth, change and death, or in terms of our changing interpretation or growing understanding of the symbol. Regardless of one's approach to symbols, thinking of the body as symbol forces some level of engagement with the historical shifts in the concepts of identity, such as sex/gender and race.

Consideration of the body as construction, which includes reflection on the concept of construction itself as well as the language, history, and context of the body's identity markers, is just one part of my proposal of the body as symbol. Bodies express more than constructions and understanding constructions cannot tell us all we need to know about body-persons. The other aspect of my proposal investigates the body as expression. If the body as construction considers how the body informs the person, then the body as expression addresses how the person informs the body. There are two important aspects of the expression of the body. First, bodies express individual and communal interpretations of the constructions of sex/gender and race. Second, the body is the expression of the unique individual.

Personal interpretations of the constructions that give meaning to race and sex/gender are expressed in the body. The same construct can take on different meanings for individuals and groups. The philosophy, narratives, perspective, goals, and personal ambitions one brings to this interpretation determine bodily expression. Differences in methodologies and ontologies result in a multiplicity of meaning of sex/gender and race for bodily reality. The expression of the body as symbol is each person's expression of their self-knowledge, which is their personal reality in relation to the constructions of race and sex/gender. This reality might reflect an acceptance of the meaning of race and/or sex/gender received from their

community or may involve contestations of these meanings. The body as expression includes a person's informed and lived sense of self which attends to the interconnection of identity categories in one's life that makes them aware that their identity fragments away from sole categories of identity. Sex/gender and race may not only mean different things for different people but have various levels of importance for their self-identity. Sex/gender and race are interpreted differently because there are various experiences of them. As a result of personal expressions of sex/gender and race, they exist as diverse realities. Communities bring together persons with shared experience but even communities must recognize the unique individuality of each of its members.

The body as symbol as a method for addressing materiality in theological anthropology embraces the unique individuality of each body-person. The body expresses this unique individuality and is always uniquely individual. Each body-person is a unique utterance of the constructions that mark its identity as well as a unique occurrence of the mystery of humanity. The unique expression that is the body-person may be shifting the very constructions it is uttering in order for these to include the one time only utterance of any individual person. Christians especially believe that the person is willed for their own sake and represents a unique utterance of humanity by God. Therefore, there are and have been untold numbers of expressions of the uniqueness of human living.⁴² The body as symbol invites consideration of the individuality of the person in all the vastly different philosophical and ontological approaches to sex/gender and race.

My investigation of the theology of Karl Rahner especially addresses the individuality of each person and how this is reflected and expressed in their body. Starting

⁴² In addition, Christians cannot forget or dismiss in their consideration of the body as symbol that the body always expresses the mystery of humanity as *imago Dei*, and as such utters the mystery of God as well. The complexity of human bodily life leads us to new considerations of divine life.

with the belief that Christian revelation says something truthful about God and us, Rahner concludes that beings, both human and divine, must be expressing something truthful in the symbols they use to reveal themselves. God expresses self using the symbol of the Incarnation and humans express their being using the symbol of the body. The materiality of humanity becomes expressive of both human and divine life. It expresses uniqueness in both ways. Human materiality expresses the unique being of the second person of the trinity that has become incarnate and it expresses the unique being of each person who is a body. The idea of being as expressive is important for thinking about human beings and what they may be revealing through their body-selves.

In narrowing the analysis of human being from the general concepts of race and sex/gender to individual persons, one becomes more and more aware of the varied and complex instances of human identity. Womanist work especially teaches us this lesson. For example, considering a black woman is different than just thinking about a black person or a female person; and to be a black lesbian woman is different again. If class is added to the analysis, one must recognize that a white middle class woman has a different identity and reality than a poor white woman or still more different than a poor black woman whose experience is different again from a middle class black woman. Black feminist and womanist thought recognize that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type and that different oppressive forces work together to produce various instances of injustice. This lack of attention to more than one identity factor that leads to oppression was and is a critique womanist scholars level against both feminist scholars and black liberation theologians. Their challenges charge theology to recognize that bodies are complex and unique if it hopes

to address human reality. Neither sex/gender nor race can be approached as an independent variable in the final analysis.

The very concept of symbol means that the body as materiality points to something immaterial beyond it in which it participates and which it makes present. The body participates in the societal constructs of its time and place and materializes them. The body also participates in the individual identity of the human person and makes the person present and known. The idea of symbol presents symbols as expressions which make something intangible present, but which only can be understood in the context in which we find them. The unique individuality of each body-person is always situated within the language, context, and history in which they come to be. Addressing the body as construct and as individual helps theologians better appreciate that identity markers both create community and fragment it. The language, context, and history that form the constructs of identity will connect a person to others that share some or all of these identity markers and form community for this person based on shared language, belief, history, context, ability, religion, and so on. But even within these seemingly bounded communities there will always be fragmentation because they are made up of unique individuals. The boundaries of these communities and the constructs which create them are always porous. This reality should not be problematic for a Christian theology that confesses the uniqueness of each person as a never before creation called into being individually by God and bound together in community through the mystery of the Incarnation.

V. CONCLUSION

This balance of construction and expression in the idea of the body as symbol brings together the goals of this dissertation. Thinking of the body-person as construct allows for more adequate discourse about the specific identity markers of sex/gender and race. The concept of construction is a good organizing tool and an instrument of education about theories of sex/gender and race and how they are used in theology and theory. By deploying this concept from contemporary theory, theologians can consider how the body is a reflection and reality of its context. We come to learn that sex/gender and race are not concepts that are outside of theological purview but intimately connected to its central themes. Understanding the body as construct invites theologians to wrestle with the reality and complexity of identity markers of the body such as race and sex/gender and our collective and individual understandings of and relationships with them. But the concept of construction is not enough for a full theological presentation of the body-person. Construction alone can focus on the object of the body and lose sight of the subjective understanding and living of the body. It also keeps race and sex/gender as separate concepts for consideration; but real human living always knows their interrelationship. Theology must approach the individual and communities not in terms of one category but a complex interaction of various discourses. Therefore, theology needs to consider the body as expression in order to attend to individual discourses about the body as well as communal counter-discourses that bring accepted and commonsense understandings of sex/gender and race into question. This project is based on the belief that race and sex/gender are important theological topics that are not being adequately addressed in theological discourse. Approaching the body as symbol is a tool to better develop theological conversation about these topics and address any oppressing and

limiting aspects of them. More adequate and critical discourse about race and sex/gender forms a crucial strategy in the overall battle against racism and sexism. The ultimate goal is for each person to live to the fullest their unique instance of the *imago Dei* so that the Spirit of God can more fully dwell among us all.

EPILOGUE: AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

At the end of any project, one must ask oneself, “Where do I go from here?” This dissertation has endeavored to develop a tool to better think about bodies in their specificity. I narrowed my approach to a consideration of sex/gender and race in terms of white and black, recognizing that any body and all bodies are more than these identities. This tool should be expanded to include other identity markers. Any consideration of race in theology must expand to include racial identities not included in the black-white paradigm, even if influenced by it. In the United States Hispanic, Latino/a, and a variety of Asian American identities represent other important racial distinctions. Considering the body as symbol requires that any consideration of these identity markers must include how these categorizations have been constructed in this country as well as the understanding of self-identity that arises in each community. Recognizing that every racial group is diverse, it would be necessary to map different understandings of each body categorization. In turn, any consideration of sex/gender in theology must expand to include sexual identities that do not fall neatly into the sexual dimorphism of male-female. Explorations of scholarly theories and personal discourses about homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexual identity, and transgendered identity must be considered in themselves as well as representing challenges to our current understandings of sexual differentiation and gender. These further investigations in the general topics of race and sex/gender are still just some of the identity categories that mark bodies. Age, disability, and disease also affect how bodies are understood and treated in our society and church as well as the body-persons who know these ways of being. The endless expansion of a tool, however, is not the main purpose of creating it. Its implementation is the reason for its creation. It is my intention to present the work of this

dissertation as a tool for students, colleagues, church communities, and religious communities to better consider the complexity of bodily identity. In its use and the conversations that I hope it encourages, the tool will be refined.

Thinking of the body as symbol, as both a construction and an expression, has implications for all areas of theological inquiry. It calls all theologians to be in dialogue with theorists concerned with bodily identity. It also invites theologians to reflect on the literature and stories of communities marked by different body categories. Both of these engagements expose the theologian to the constructed and expressive aspects of bodily identity. No theologian can be an expert on all identity formations, so theology must invite and welcome diverse voices within its discipline. The presence of such diversity will not only present a more nuanced theological study of the body, but diverse body-persons will bring new questions, challenges, and propositions to central theological themes. This is already beginning to happen, but mainstream theology and theological study must better incorporate and appreciate the work of diverse body-persons. There is a reciprocal and interdependent relationship between one's theory and living of the body and one's approach to the theological enterprise. One only has to look to the Christology of James Cone, the theory of atonement of Delores Williams, or the exegesis of Genesis of John Paul II to understand how central one's approach to the body is to theological study.

Let me present some ideas for the application of thinking of the body as symbol for specific theological projects. Considering the body as symbol in biblical studies and historical theology can lead to new insights on historical figures in the Christian tradition. For example, the stories of Jesus with Martha and Mary in Lk 10:38-42 and Jn 11:1-44; 12:1-7 can be reread in light of this tool. An historical critical method helps us understand the

constructions of sex/gender of the time. A narrative method helps us understand how the expressions in word and deed of each of the characters is embracing or contesting these constructions. In the stories from Luke and John, the characters sometimes acting according to the sex/gender constructions of their time, and sometimes contesting them. It is interesting to note that Jesus appears to be inviting the contestation. The balance of thinking of the body as construction and expression continually reminds us that bodies did not all and always mean one thing at any time in history. The unique individuals that are bodies express their context and their individuality at all times. Approaching the stories in Luke and John by keeping in mind the body as symbol presents the possibility for new understandings of early Christian witness to bodies defined as male and female. In the same way, all historical figures should be approached as both reflecting and embodying their context and expressing their individuality through an acceptance or contestation of all or some of the aspects of this context. In addition to biblical scholars and historical theologians, systematic theologians must also be challenged to embrace a better appreciation of the body in its specificity. Systematic theologians must be challenged to be systematic. Theologians should address how their methods, theories of Christology, Trinitarian themes, and ecclesiologies influence their theological anthropology and their understanding of body-persons who are specific in time and in themselves. The study of any theologian's work ought to question the ramifications for our understanding of the body, including how we think about its race and sex/gender. Studies of the theories of sex/gender and race of specific theologians can further map the variety of approaches to the body in its specificity in theological discourse.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ackermann, Denise. "Engaging Stigma: An Embodied Theological Response to HIV and AIDS." *Scriptura* (2005): 385-95.
- Adam, A. K. M., ed. *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000.
- Althaus-Reid, Marcella. *Homosexualities*. London: SCM Press, 2008.
- Althaus-Reid, Marcella, and Lisa Isherwood. *Controversies in Body Theology*. London: SCM Press, 2008.
- Alvarez, Alma Rose. *Liberation Theology in Chicana/o Literature: Manifestations of Feminist and Gay Identities*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Ammons, Linda L. "Mules, Madonnas, Babies, Bathwater: Racial Imagery and Stereotypes." In *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, 276-79. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.
- Anderson, Victor. *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*. New York: Continuum, 1995.
- . "A Relational Concept of Race in African American Religious Thought." *Nova Religio* 7 (July 2003): 28-43.
- . *Creative Exchange: A Constructive Theology of African American Religious Experience*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.
- Apostolos-Cappadona, Diane. "Symbols." In *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, edited by John Bowden, 1160-71. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Armour, Ellen T., and Susan M. St. Ville, eds. *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Badham, Roger A. *Introduction to Christian Theology: Contemporary North American Perspectives*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.
- Baldwin, James. *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985*. New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1985.
- Barrett, James R., and David Roediger. "How White People Became White." In *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, 402-6. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.

- Batista, Israel. "Social Movements: A Personal Testimony." In *Social Movements, Globalization, Exclusion. Social Movements: Challenges and Perspectives*, edited by Israel Batista. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967.
- Batstone, David B., Eduardo Mendieta, Lois Ann Lorentzen, and Dwight N. Hopkins, eds. *Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity, and the Americas*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Baum, Gregory, and John Coleman, eds. *The Church and Racism*. New York: Seabury Press, 1982.
- Beale, Frances. "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female." In *Black Theology: A Documentary History: 1966-1979*, edited by James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, 284-92. 2d ed. rev. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979.
- Benhabib, Seyla, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser. *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Beste, Jennifer. "Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experiences Reconsidered." *Horizons* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 54-77.
- Bowie, Fiona. *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.
- Boyarin, Daniel. "Gender." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark C. Taylor, 117-35. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Boykin, Keith. *One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America*. New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1996.
- Brown, David. "Symbolism." In *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, edited by Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason and Hugh Pyper; with Ingrid Lawrie and Cecily Bennett, 690-92. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Brown, Joseph A. *To Stand on the Rock: Meditations on Black Catholic Identity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998.
- Brown Douglas, Kelly. *The Black Christ*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994.
- . *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.
- . "The Black Church and Homosexuality: The Black and White of It." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 57, no. 1-2 (2003): 32-45.
- . *What's Faith Got To Do With It? Black Bodies/Christian Souls*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.

- Burrow, Rufus, Jr. *James H Cone and Black Liberation Theology*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 1994.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- . *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 1993.
- . "The Question of Social Transformation." In *Women and Social Transformation*, by Elizabeth Bek-Gernsheim, Judith Butler, and Lidia Puigvert, 1-28. New York: Peter Lang, 2003.
- Cady Stanton, Elizabeth. *The Woman's Bible*. New York: European Pub. Co., 1895-1898.
- Campbell, Colin. "Modernity and Postmodernity." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, edited by Robert A. Segal, 309-20. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Campbell, James, and James Oakes. "The Invention of Race: Rereading *White Over Black*." In *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, 145-51. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.
- Cannon, Katie G. *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*. New York: Continuum, 1995.
- . "Unearthing Ethical Treasures: The Intrusive Markers of Social Class." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 53, no. 3-4 (1999): 53-64.
- . "Structured Academic Amnesia: As If This True Womanist Story Never Happened." In *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, edited by Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, 19-28. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- Cassidy, Laune M., and Alexander Mikulich, eds. *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007.
- Chambers, Stuart. "Symbolism, Ecclesiastical." In *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson, 203-12. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1964.
- "Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5 (Fall 1989): 83-112.
- Cleaver, Richard. *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Pr., 1995.

- Clifford, Anne M. *Introducing Feminist Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: 2001.
- Coakley, Sarah ed. *Religion and the Body*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Cone, James H. *My Soul Looks Back*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1982.
- . *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984.
- . *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986.
- . "Theologies of Liberation Among U.S. Racial-Ethnic Minorities." In *Convergences and Differences*, edited by Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, 54-64. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988.
- . *Black Theology and Black Power*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989.
- . *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.
- . "Black Theology and the Imperative and Dilemma of Solidarity." In *Struggles for Solidarity: Liberation Theologies in Tension*, edited by Lorine M. Getz and Ruy O. Costa, 37-48. Minneapolis: Fortress Pr., 1992.
- . "From Geneva to Sao Pãulo: A Dialogue Between Black Theology and Latin American Liberation Theology." In *Black Theology: A Documentary History: 1980-1992*, edited by James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, 371-87. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993.
- . "Women's Experience of the Sacred: An African American Male Theological Response." *Voices from the Third World* 19, no. 1 (June 1996): 162-69.
- . *God of the Oppressed*. Rev. ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.
- . "God is the Color of Suffering." In *Changing Face of God*, edited by Frederick W. Schmidt, 51-63. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub., 2000.
- . "Whose Earth Is It Anyway?" *Cross Currents* 50 (Spring-Summer 2000): 36-46.
- . "Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 55, no. 3-4 (2001): 1-15.
- Copeland, M. Shawn. "The Interaction of Racism, Sexism, and Classism in Women's Exploitation." In *Women, Work and Poverty*, edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Anne E. Carr, 19-27. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987.

- . “Guest Editorial.” *Theological Studies* 61 (December 2000): 603-8.
- . “Tradition and Traditions of African American Catholicism.” *Theological Studies* 61 (December 2000): 632-55.
- . “Body, Representation, and Black Religious Discourse.” In *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*, edited by Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan, 180-98. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- . “A Thinking Margin: The Womanist Movement as Critical Cognitive Praxis.” In *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, edited by Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, 226-35. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- . *The Subversive Power of Love: The Vision of Henriette Delille*. New York: Paulist Press, 2009.
- . *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010.
- Copeland, M. Shawn, LaReine-Marie Mosely and Albert J. Raboteau, eds. *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas, eds. *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*. New York: The New Press, 1995.
- Crosby, John F. “The Personalism of John Paul II as the Basis of His Approach to the Teaching of *Humanae Vitae*.” In *Why Humanae Vitae was Right: A Reader*, edited by Janet E. Smith, 195-225. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993.
- Curran, Charles E. “John Paul II’s Use of Scripture in His Moral Teaching.” *Horizon* 31 (Spring 2004): 118-34.
- Daly, Mary. *The Church and the Second Sex*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.
- Davis, Cyprian. *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*. New York: Crossroad, 1996.
- De La Torre, Miguel A. *Handbook of U.S. Theologies of Liberation*. St Louis: Chalice Pr., 2004.
- De La Torre, Miguel A., and Gastón Espinosa. *Rethinking Latino(a) Religion and Identity*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2006.
- D’Emilio, John, and Estelle B. Freedman. *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. New York: Harper and Row, 1988.

- Deotis, Robert J. "And We Are Not Saved: A Black Theologian Looks at Theological Education." *Religious Education* 87 (Summer 1992): 353-69
- Derrida, Jacques. "Afterword : Toward an Ethic of Discussion." In *Limited, Inc.*, edited by Gerald Graff, translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988.
- . "Signature, Event, Context." In *Limited, Inc.*, edited by Gerald Graff, translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988.
- . "Afterw.rds : or, at least, less than a letter about a letter less." In *Afterwords*, edited by Nicholas Royle, translated by Geoffrey Bennington. Tampere, Finland: Outside Books, 1992.
- Douglas, Mary. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. Rev. ed. London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1973.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Routledge Classics Ed. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Duncan, Carol B. "From 'Force-Ripe' to 'Womanish/ist': Black Girlhood and African Diasporan Feminist Consciousness." In *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, edited by Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, 29-37. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- Eppehimer, Trevor. "Victor Anderson's Beyond Ontological Blackness and James Cone's Black Theology: A Discussion." *Black Theology* 4 (January 2006): 87-106.
- Fardon, Richard. *Mary Douglas: An Intellectual Biography*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne. *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories About Women and Men*. New York: Norton, 1979.
- Floyd-Thomas, Stacy M., ed. *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- . *Herculine Barbin, Being the Recently Discovered Journals of a Nineteenth-Century Hermaphrodite*, translated by Richard McDougall. New York: Colophon, 1980.
- . *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

- Fox-Keller, Evelyn. *Reflections on Gender and Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- Frankenberg, Ruth, ed. *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Freeneay Harding, Rosemarie, with Rachel Elizabeth Harding. "Hospitality, Haints, and Healing: A Southern African American Meaning of Religion." In *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, edited by Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, 98-114. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell, 1977.
- Gates, E. Nathaniel, ed. *The Concept of "Race" in Natural and Social Science*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.
- Gates, H. L., ed. *"Race," Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Goffman, Erving. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin, 1984.
- Goldberg, David Theo. *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993.
- . *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- . *The Racial State*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- Gossett, Thomas F. *Race: The History of an Idea in America*. New York: Schocken Books, 1965.
- Grant, Jacquelyn. "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Experience as a Source for Doing Theology, With Special Reference to Christology." In *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Vol. 2, 1980-1992*, edited by James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, 273-89. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.
- Greeve Davaney, Sheila. "The Limits of the Appeal to Women's Experience." In *Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture*, edited by Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan, and Margaret R. Miles, 31-49. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1987.
- Guerrero, Andrés G. *A Chicano Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987.
- Gutman, Herbert. *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom: 1750-1925*. New York: Vintage Books, 1976.

Haight, Roger. *Dynamics of Theology*. New York: Paulist Press, 1990.

Haney López, Ian F. "The Social Construction of Race." In *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*. 2d ed. Edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, 163-75. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000.

Happel, Stephen. "Symbol." In *The New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane, 997-1002. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987.

Harding, Sandra. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.

Harding, Sandra, and Jean F. O'Barr. *Sex and Scientific Inquiry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Harris, Melanie L. "Womanist Humanism: A New Hermeneutic." In *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, edited by Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, 211-25. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

Harvey, Jennifer, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline, eds. *Disrupting White Supremacy From Within: White People On What We Need To Do*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004.

Hawkes, Terence. *Structuralism and Semiotics*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Hayes, Diana L. "Emerging Voices, Emerging Challenges: An American Contextual Theology." In *Theology Toward the Third Millennium: Theological Issues for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by David G. Schultenover. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen; Omaha: Creighton University, 1991.

———. *And Still We Rise: An Introduction to Black Liberation Theology*. New York: Paulist Press, 1996.

———. "We've Come This Far by Faith: Black Catholics and Their Church." In *Taking Down Our Harps: Black Catholics in the United States*, edited by Diana L. Hayes and Cyprian Davis, 1-14. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998.

———. "James Cone's Hermeneutic of Language and Black Theology." *Theological Studies* 61 (December 2000): 609-31.

———. "To Be the Bridge: Voices from the Margins." In *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins*, edited by Eleazar S. Fernandez and Fernando F. Segovia, 52-71. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.

- . “Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made: The Making of a Catholic Womanist Theologian.” In *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, edited by Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, 54-79. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- Hector, Bridgette. “Womanist Model: Crossing Class Barriers: Middle-Class Black Women Relating with Inner-City Black Female Youth.” *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 30 (Fall-Spring 2002-2003): 129-45.
- Hendricks, William L. “Symbol.” In *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, edited by Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price, 467-68. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992.
- Hennelly, Alfred T. *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990.
- Hertz, Robert. “The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand: A Study in Religious Polarity.” In *Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification*, translated by Rodney Needham. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.
- Hewitt, Marsha A. “Dialectic of Hope: The Feminist Liberation Theology of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as a Feminist Critical Theory.” In *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, edited by Fernando F. Segovia, 443-58. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.
- Hill, J., ed. *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- . *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2d ed. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- . “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought.” In *Just Methods: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Reader*, edited by Alison M. Jaggar, 308-19. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008.
- Hogan, Linda. *From Women’s Experience to Feminist Theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.
- Hogan, Richard M., and John M. LeVoir. *Covenant of Love: Pope John Paul II on Sexuality, Marriage, and Family in the Modern World*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992.
- Hood, Robert E. *Begrimed and Black: Christian Traditions on Blacks and Blackness*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.
- Hopkins, Dwight N. “Postmodernity, Black Theology of Liberation, and the U.S.A.: Michel Foucault and James H. Cone.” In *Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity, and the*

- Americas*, edited by David B. Batstone, Eduardo Mendieta, Lois Ann Lorentzen, and Dwight N. Hopkins, 205-21. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- . “Black Theology on Theological Education.” In *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James Cone’s Black Theology and Black Power*, edited by Dwight H. Hopkins, 41-52. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.
- . *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.
- . *Heart and Head: Black Theology—Past, Present, and Future*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- . “The Construction of the Black Male Body: Eroticism and Religion.” In *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, edited by Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Hopkins, Dwight N., and George C. L. Cummings, eds. *Cut Loose Your Stammering Tongue: Black Theology in the Slave Narratives*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.
- Hopkins, Dwight N., and Linda E. Thomas. “Womanist Theology and Black Theology: Conversational Envisioning of an Unfinished Dream.” In *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins*, edited by Eleazar S. Fernandez and Fernando F. Segovia. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.
- Hubbard, Ruth, and Marian Lowe, eds. *Genes and Gender*, vols. 1 and 2. New York: Gordian Press, 1978, 1979.
- Ignatiev, Noel. “Treason to Whiteness Is Loyalty to Humanity: An Interview with Noel Ignatiev of *Race Traitor* Magazine.” In *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, 607-12. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.
- Isherwood, Lisa, and Elizabeth Stuart. *Introducing Body Theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.
- Isherwood, Lisa, and Kathleen McPhillips, eds. *Post-Christian Feminisms: A Critical Approach*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub., 2008.
- James, Joy. *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999.
- Jantzen, Grace M. “Off the Straight and Narrow: Toward a Lesbian Theology.” *Theology & Sexuality* (September 1995): 58-76.

- Jaynes, Gerald David. *Branches Without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the American South, 1862-1882*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- John Paul II. *Familiaris Consortio*. Washington, DC: Office of Pub. Services, United States Catholic Conference, 1982.
- . *Mulieris Dignitatem*. Washington, DC: Office of Pub. and Promotion Services, U.S. Catholic Conference, 1988.
- . *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*. Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997.
- . *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, translated by Michael Waldstein. Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006.
- Jones, Serene. "Women's Experience Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Feminist, Womanist, and *Mujerista* Theologies in North America." In *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms*, edited by Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney, 33-54. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997.
- Jordan, Winthrop D. *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968.
- Kee, Alistair. *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006.
- Keenan, James F. "Christian Perspectives on the Human Body." *Theological Studies* 55 (June 1994): 330-46.
- Kim, C.W. Maggie, Susan M. St. Valle, and Susan M. Simonaitis, eds. *Transfigurations: Theology & French Feminists*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- King, Jr., Martin Luther. "The President's Address to the Tenth Anniversary Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, August 16, 1967." In *The Rhetoric of Black Power*, edited by Robert L. Scott and Wayne Brockriede. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.
- Kinloch, Graham C. *The Dynamics of Race Relations: A Sociological Analysis*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1974.
- Kirk-Duggan, Cheryl. "Quilting Relations with Creation: Overcoming, Going Through, and Not Being Stuck." In *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, edited by Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, 176-90. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- Kurz, William S. "The Scriptural Foundations of The Theology of the Body." In *Pope John Paul II on the Body: Human, Eucharistic, Ecclesial: Festschrift Avery Cardinal Dulles*,

- S.J., edited by John M. McDermott and John Gavin, 27-46. Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2007.
- Lafleur, William R. "Body." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark C. Taylor, 36-54. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Lardner Carmody, Denise. "Integrating Feminist Perspectives with the Religious Studies Curriculum: Setting the Question." *Horizons* 16 (Fall 1989): 292-301.
- Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1984.
- Lowe, Walter James. "Postmodern Theology." In *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, edited by John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance, 617-23. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982-1985*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- MacKenzie Shepherd, Loraine. "The Deceptive Monolith of Women's Experience: Struggling for Common Feminist Visions Amidst Diversity." *Toronto Journal of Theology* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 151-64.
- Mahoney, Martha R. "The Social Construction of Whiteness." In *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, 330-33. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.
- Mandeville Russell, Letty. "Inclusive Language and Power." *Religious Education* 80 (Fall 1985): 582-602.
- Massingale, Bryan N. *The Social Dimensions of Sin and Reconciliation in the Theologies of James H. Cone and Gustavo Gutiérrez: A Critical Comparative Examination*. Dissertatio Ad Doctoratum in Theologia Morali Consequendum. Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis Academia Alfonsiana Institutum Superius Theologiae Moralis. Romae, 1991.
- . "An Ethical Reflection Upon 'Environmental Racism' in the Light of Catholic Social Teaching." In *Challenge of Global Stewardship: Roman Catholic Responses*, edited by Maura A. Ryan and Todd David Whitmore, 234-50. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.
- . "James Cone and Recent Catholic Episcopal Teaching on Racism." *Theological Studies* 61 (December 2000): 700-30.
- Mbon, Friday M. "James Cone and the Question of What it Means to be Really Human." *Journal of Religious Studies* 18 (1992): 34-49.

- McWilliams, Warren. "Theodicy According to James Cone." *Journal of Religious Thought* 36, no. 2 (1980): 45-54.
- Mikulich, Alex. "Mapping 'Whiteness': The Complexity of Racial Formation and the Subversive Moral Imagination of the 'Motley Crowd.'" *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 25 (2005): 99-122.
- Mitchem, Stephanie Y. *Introducing Womanist Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.
- Modras, Ronald E. "Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body." In *The Vatican and Homosexuality: Reactions to the "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons,"* edited by Jeannine Gramick and Pat Furey, 119-25. New York: Crossroad, 1988.
- Mubashshir Majeed, Debra. "Womanism Encounters Islam." In *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, edited by Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, 38-53. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- Murray, Pauli. "Black Theology and Feminist Theology: A Comparative View." *Anglican Theological Review* 60 (January 1978): 3-24.
- Neale Hurston, Zora. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: Harper & Row, 1990.
- Nelson, James. *Body Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1956.
- . *The Gay Science*. Vintage Books, 1974.
- . *Twilight of the Idols*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Obeyesekere, Gananath. *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Oden, Amy, ed. *In Her Words: Women's Writings in the History of Christian Thought*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.
- O'Hara Graff, Ann Elizabeth. "The Struggle to Name Women's Experience: Assessment and Implications for Theological Construction." *Horizons* 20, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 215-33.
- Okely, Judith. "Privileged, Schooled and Finished: Boarding Education for Girls." In *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society*, edited by Shirley Ardener, 109-39. New York: Wiley, 1978.

- Omi, Michael A. "The Changing Meaning of Race." In *America Becoming: Racist Trends and Their Consequences*, vol. 1, edited by Neil J. Smelser, William Julius Wilson, and Faith Mitchell, 243-63. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2001.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- . "Racial Formation." In *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study*, edited by Paula S. Rothenberg. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.
- . "On the Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race." In *Asian American Studies: A Reader*, edited by Jean Yu-wen Shen Wu and Min Song, 199-208. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000.
- Parkin, Robert. *The Dark Side of Humanity: The Work of Robert Hertz and Its Legacy*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996.
- Pedraja, Luis. *Jesus Is My Uncle: Christology from a Hispanic Perspective*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999.
- Phan, Peter C. *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.
- Phelps, Jamie T. "African American Culture: Source and Context of Black Catholic Theology and Church Mission." *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 3:3 (1996): 43-58
- , ed. *Black and Catholic: The Challenge and Gift of Black Folk: Contributions of African American Experience and Thought to Catholic Theology*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002.
- Pinn, Anthony B. "'Black Is, Black Ain't': Victor Anderson, African American Theological Thought, and Identity." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 43 (Spring 2004): 54-62.
- Pinn, Anthony B. and Dwight N. Hopkins, eds. *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Pontifical Commission, "Iustitia et Pax." *The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society*. Vatican City: The Commission, 1988.
- Radford Ruether, Rosemary. *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1983.

- . “John Paul II and the Growing Alienation of Women from the Church.” In *Church in Anguish: Has the Vatican Betrayed Vatican II?*, edited by Hans Küng and Leonard Swidler, 279-83. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987.
- Rahner, Karl. “The Theology of the Symbol.” In *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, edited by Kevin Smith. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966.
- . “Priest and Poet.” In *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, translated by Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger. New York: Crossroad, 1982.
- . *The Trinity*, translated by Joseph Donceel. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998.
- Reinders, Hans S. *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Press, 2008.
- Reynolds, Thomas E. *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008.
- Roberts, Richard H. “Body.” In *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, edited by Robert A. Segal, 213-28. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Ross, Thomas. “The Rhetorical Tapestry of Race.” In *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, 89-97. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.
- Schumacher, Michele, ed. *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York: Crossroad, 1983.
- . *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.
- . *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.
- . *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesiā-logy of Liberation*. New York: Crossroad, 1993.
- . *Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology*. New York: Continuum, 1995.
- . “G*d at Work in Our Midst: From a Politics of Identity to a Politics of Struggle.” *Feminist Theology* (September 1996): 47-72.

- . *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998.
- . *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.
- . "Religion, Gender, and Society: Shaping the Discipline of Religious/Theological Studies." In *The Relevance of Theology: Nathan Söderblom and the Development of an Academic Discipline*, edited by Carl Reinhold Bråkenhielm and Gunhild Winqvist Hollman, 85-99. Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, 2002.
- . "The Ethos of Interpretation: Biblical Studies in a Postmodern and Postcolonial Context." In *Theological Literacy for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Rodney L. Petersen with Nancy M. Rourke, 211-28. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.
- . *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, and Judith Plaskow, eds. "Appropriation and Reciprocity in Womanist/Mujerista/Feminist Work." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 8 (Fall 1992): 91-122.
- Settles, Shani. "The Sweet Fire of Honey: Womanist Visions of Osun as a Methodology of Emancipation." In *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, edited by Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, 191-208. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- Silker, Jeffrey S., ed. *Homosexuality and Religion: An Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007.
- Smith, Abraham. "The Bible, the Body and a Black Sexual Discourse of Resistance." In *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, edited by Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins, 73-90. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Smith, Janet E. "Pope John Paul II and Humane Vitae." In *Why Humanae Vitae was Right: A Reader*, edited by Janet E. Smith, 229-50. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993.
- Sontag, Frederick E. "Coconut Theology: Is James Cone the 'Uncle Tom' of Black Theology." *Journal of Religious Thought* 36 (Fall-Winter 1979-1980): 5-12.
- Sowle Cahill, Lisa. "Homosexuality: A Case Study in Moral Argument." In *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, edited by Jeffrey S. Siker, 61-75. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Pr., 1994.

- . *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- . *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.
- . “The Feminist Pope.” In *Does Christianity Teach Male Headship?: The Equal-Regard Marriage and Its Critics*, edited by David Blankenhorn, Don Browning, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, 40-48. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004.
- Splett, Jörg. “Symbol.” In *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, edited by Karl Rahner et al, 199-201. New York: Herder and Herder, 1967.
- . “Body.” In *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. 1, edited by Karl Rahner et al, 233-35. New York: Herder & Herder, 1971.
- Staples, Robert. *Introduction to Black Sociology*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976.
- Stewart, Dianne M. “Womanist God-talk on the Cutting Edge of Theology and Black Religious Studies: Assessing the Contribution of Delores Williams.” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 58, no. 3-4 (2004): 65-83.
- Sturrock, John, ed. *Structuralism and Since: From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Tan, Jonathan Y. *Introducing Asian American Theologies*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008.
- Thomas, Linda E. “Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm.” In *Living Stones in the Household of God: The Legacy and Future of Black Theology*, edited by Linda E. Thomas. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.
- Thompson, Deanna A. “Teaching What I’m Not: Embodiment, Race, and Theological Conversation in the Classroom.” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 3 (October 2000): 164-69.
- Tillich, Paul. *Dynamics of Faith*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957.
- Tolbert, Mary Ann. “Gender.” In *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, edited by A. K. M. Adam, 99-105. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000.
- Townes, Emilie M. “The Womanist Dancing Mind: Speaking to the Expansiveness of Womanist Discourse.” In *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, edited by Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, 236-50. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

- Vanhoozer, Kevin J., ed. *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Walker, Alice, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.
- Ward, Graham, ed. *Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.
- Ware, Frederick L. *Methodologies of Black Theology*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002.
- Washington, Joseph. *Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, c1984; orig. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.
- Welton, Donn, ed. *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999.
- West, Christopher. *Theology of the Body Explained: A Commentary on John Paul II's "Gospel of the Body."* Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2003.
- West, Cornel. "Black Theology and Marxist Thought." In *Black Theology: A Documentary History 1966-1979*, edited by Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone, 552-67. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979.
- . "Black Theology and Socialist Thought." *The Witness* 63 (April 1980): 16-19.
- . "Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Capitalist Civilization." *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 10.102 (2006): 67-83.
- Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.
- Williams, Linda Faye. *The Constraint of Race: The Legacies of White Skin Privilege in America*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003.
- Wink, Charles E. "Person." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark C. Taylor, 225-38. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Wrenn, Michael J. *Pope John Paul II and the Family*. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983.
- Wright, Jr., Luther. "Who's Black, Who's White, and Who Cares." In *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, 164-69. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.

Young, Iris Marion. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.