mistreatment from Sarah as her pregnancy continues. Hagar decides to leave the home of Abraham and Sarah, but after finding herself helpless in the desert wilderness, she quickly returns. She eventually gives birth to Ishmael and leaves (through the desert wilderness again), with her son carrying provisions from Abraham and Sarah.

Williams notes that when Hagar first leaves Abraham and Sarah, God sends Hagar back to their home. Hagar is not liberated from her place of oppression, but she is given an opportunity to survive and have quality of life—things that are possible in the home of her oppressors and not in the desert wilderness. Survival and quality of life are now guiding principles for womanist theology. Williams writes, "On the basis of the reconstruction and redemption in this book, an ethical principle emerges as a guide in identifying what is to be revalued. The ethical principle yielded is 'survival and a positive quality of life for black women and their families in the presence and care of God.'"[42] Williams connects her understanding of Jesus' ministry and the Hagar story into a theory of salvation in which God gives individuals the vision to see the resources that promote their survival, quality of life, and right relations with the self, the world, and God. Black women's history reveals that this salvation is often obtained through resistance and survival strategies.

Williams's womanist perspective on salvation focuses on the idea of vision. Jesus' life demonstrates a ministerial vision of teaching, condemning evil, praying, and loving. This vision allows both individuals and groups of people to see the resources that God makes available for salvation. For Williams, salvation is the combination of vision and action that rejects all suffering and leads toward survival and quality of life.

JoAnne Marie Terrell

JoAnne Terrell understands salvation by focusing on the saving power of the cross of Jesus Christ. In *Power in the Blood?* Terrell agrees with Williams that God does not condone the violence of the cross, black women's surrogacy, or the present state of affairs. She also agrees that Christians need to look at the life-affirming images in the ministry of Jesus. Terrell maintains the feminist and womanist critique of *sacrifice* defined as permitting injury or disadvantage to someone or something for the sake of someone or something else. Like Delores Williams, Terrell criticizes any salvation found through surrogacy. Nevertheless, Terrell critiques Williams for ignoring the biblical evidence that God did indeed send Jesus in part for the purpose of dying. Terrell strives to understand how the cross has remained such a strong and important metaphor in African Americans' theories of salvation, and how, through the

experiences of black women, an understanding of the cross can be life-giving and redemptive.

Terrell focuses on the oppression that black people experience at the hands of the government. Like other black male and female theologians, Terrell agrees that there are strong similarities between Jesus and African Americans in their experiences of betrayal, imprisonment, suffering, and torture. Yet she also points out commonalities between African Americans and the martyrs of the early church, since they both struggled to comprehend their oppression within the theological framework of the Christian story: "[T]he Christian and the slave community emerged in an ethos of repression, subjugation, idolatry and death imposed by their state apparatus."[43]

As a result of their oppression and adoption of the Christian story, early Christians and African American slave communities operate with two understandings of the cross—a hermeneutic of sacrifice and a sacramental witness. The hermeneutic of sacrifice interprets Jesus' death on the cross to mean that personal sacrifice imitates Christ and demonstrates Christian character. The way of sacrifice understands the sufferer as one who mediates the presence of God to those who witness their pains.

Terrell acknowledges the negative consequences of adopting the hermeneutic of sacrifice as an interpretation of the cross. The Christian understanding of sacrifice as necessary for salvation has inflicted and continues to inflict violence against groups and individuals around the world. It has led many blacks to "leave white authority unchallenged, or constrained them to veil whatever challenge they did or could pose."[44] More specifically, this interpretation of sacrifice contributes to the justified abuse and suffering of women in situations of domestic and sexual violence. Terrell is quick to denounce this interpretation: "I simply want to indicate the endemicity of violence in the world we know and to point out that this sense of sacrifice—*permitting injury or disadvantage to someone or something for the sake of someone or something else*—does *not* have divine sanction and is precisely a betrayal of Yahweh's insistence on righting relations."[45] For Terrell, this sacrifice can only begin to have validity if the sufferer has agency in the decision to suffer.

Terrell argues that the cross is redeemed through an understanding of the cross as sacramental witness. Sufferers can understand their suffering at the hands of the state as an act, in part chosen by the sufferer, which will highlight the strength of the sufferer's convictions and inspire future generations to fight against injustice. Terrell gives several examples, including the lives of early Christian martyrs, Sojourner Truth, and Martin Luther King Jr. Terrell asserts that the cross can be understood as a symbol of God's presence with the sufferer. The cross is seen as divine assistance to the sufferer to gain

victory over suffering: "The empty cross is a symbol of God's continuous empowerment."[46]

Terrell's emphasis on the cross pays particular attention to the language of Jesus' blood as one of the vehicles through which humanity is restored to right relationship with God. She begins by evaluating the Hebrew tradition of offering the blood of animals as a vehicle for reconciliation between God and God's people. Referencing the tradition of animal sacrifice among the Israelites, Terrell concludes that the shedding of blood indicates "the seriousness of [the Israelites'] intent to live in right relations with God and neighbor."[47] God's acceptance of the sacrifice implies that God does not simply require blood; rather, God reveres blood. Thus, the Christian idea that Jesus' death and blood sacrifice is offered "once and for all for the sins of the world" asserts that Jesus' blood-loss has eternal efficacy. That God, in Christ, sheds God's own blood signifies that there is something of God in the blood of the cross. It does not affirm the hermeneutics of sacrifice. On the contrary, it means that God loves humanity and can be seen in the blood of those who are suffering. Ultimately, Terrell develops a subjective theory of the atonement when she asserts that Christ's example can teach and save humanity.[48] "I believe that anyone's death has salvific significance if we learn continuously from the life that preceded it."[49] A sacramental witness is defined by the individual's convictions, not victimization.

Terrell believes that the African American community has particular cause to find significance in Christ's blood and blood loss on the cross. Terrell explores the stories of black women and men from slavery and the times of lynching, along with the contemporary blood-related issues of AIDS and black-on-black violence. Terrell also discusses the blood shed by black women murdered by their intimate partners. She believes that their lives, like the example of Jesus on the cross, can be a sacramental witness to the African American community:

> My mother's ultimate sacrifice [of death by the hands of a loved one] and those of countless other black women, who suffer abuse and die at the hands of patriarchal, violence-driven persons, whose deaths go unreported and under-reported, unprosecuted and under-prosecuted—are potentially liberating for women if they learn from their experiences, if we see how they exercised or did not exercise their moral and creative agency. This seems a much more relevant view of the atoning worth of women's blood.[50]

If a sacramental witness is applied to the cross and some of the violence contributed against black women, then black women's blood is not only sacred, but also contains the power of salvation.

Terrell finds salvation in the sacramental witness of Jesus on the cross. Despite the violence of Jesus' suffering on the cross, Terrell affirms that there is something divine in the blood shed in suffering. When we see God's presence in the sufferer and learn from the violence, we can be saved. Salvation comes from the lessons learned after instances of suffering. The very life force, the blood, of sufferers is part of the sacred means of pointing us toward salvation.

Karen Baker-Fletcher

Karen Baker-Fletcher's concept of salvation affirms the proposals of Grant, Douglas, and Terrell, while expounding upon their ideas and extending their views to include the natural world in her understanding of sin and salvation. Baker-Fletcher argues that environmental racism should be added to the list of unique oppressions. She also believes that the ministry and the person of Jesus Christ reveal salvation. She describes Jesus as an ancestor and emphasizes the importance of incorporating one's cultural and religious ancestors into the concept of salvation. Baker-Fletcher's emphasis on honoring Jesus, the cultural and religious past, and the earth leads to a holistic womanist understanding of salvation as a transformation of the human and natural world.

Although Baker-Fletcher does not elevate environmental racism as a sin that is more grievous than the sins that occur among humans, she understands the sins against the earth as critical offenses. In *My Sister, My Brother*, Baker-Fletcher names the oppression of the earth as the result of interlocking systems: "Our present context is not only one of xenophobia that creates isms against one group or another daily, but also one in which we risk losing the planet we depend on for daily physical bread because of abusive habits, negligence, the greed of an economic industrial elite, and the militaristic angst of nuclear-weapon-holding nations and terrorists."[51] Because humans depend on the earth for life, threats against the earth are connected to all other forms of intra-human oppression.

Baker-Fletcher acknowledges that all people must contend with the failing health of the created world, but argues black women experience the abuse of the land in particularized manners: "What makes Black women's oppression distinctive is that such evils are—*always*—combined with the evils of sexism *and* racism. Classism, environmental racism and heterosexism for Black women, then, take on a particularly *thick* character."[52] She notes that

this "thick character" is evident in black women's lives—disproportionately living in poor urban and rural areas where hazardous waste, incinerators, and industry are placed. "[Black women] are more likely to work in polluted, unhealthy work environments."[53] Baker-Fletcher connects the abuse of the land, "mother earth," to the abuse of black women's bodies.[54] Both black women's bodies and the land have been exploited and raped for the economic gain of their oppressors.

Baker-Fletcher insists that we see the activity of God in the natural world. She describes the positive ways that God acts in nature: "God acts in nature in numerous ways—in the hurricane and in the morning dew, in ways that are awe-inspiring and in ways that are simple, refreshing, comforting."[55] Baker-Fletcher does not just focus on the aesthetic moments of nature. She also considers the times when humanity experiences nature as destructive: "Is God in the hurricane, the tornado, the earthquake? Or is that just nature living its own life, doing what it must to exist, to live, to express the fullness of its life-force? Is God in nature or not? Perhaps God is in nature, but nature is not God. Nature reveals God, because God is present in all that lives, in all that is."[56] Baker-Fletcher knows that God incarnates nature and that the forces of nature cannot be divorced from our understanding of the divine. The destructive effects of nature on humanity occur because humanity lives on shared land and sometimes interferes with nature's system of survival. Other times, humanity experiences (God in) nature as destructive because nature "has its own movement independent of [human] desires."[57] As Baker-Fletcher focuses on the need to save the earth, she also acknowledges that humanity experiences nature as both creative and destructive.

Baker-Fletcher interprets salvation as the transformation of the world. Baker-Fletcher combines Grant's and Douglas's emphasis on salvation as liberation and Williams's emphasis on the telos of survival and quality of life, and includes the natural world. "The task for a womanist theology of survival, liberation and wholeness is to address the brokenness of all of creation in a wholistic manner, ministering to body, mind, spirit, and the material world."[58] Lifting up the African American spiritual based on Psalm 27, Baker-Fletcher describes God as "strength of life." God as strength of life sustains self and the universe. God "provides light for envisioning survival and liberating resources, strength to carry out visions, and salvation through the transformation of life as it is to life as it should be."[59] God grants individuals the vision to see their available resources and use them to work for healing, wholeness, and sustenance. While God provides the vision, salvation also depends upon the freedom of humanity to work for the transformation of society. Baker-Fletcher writes that God can empower humanity: "[R]egardless of the presence of evil in human existence, believers are transformed by the empowering strength

of God so that they no longer live in fear."[60] Salvation includes the personal hope given to people, and people are then equipped to effect salvation in the world.

As a Christian womanist theologian, Baker-Fletcher ties Jesus to her ideas about salvation. She believes that it is Jesus who empowers black women with the vision for resistance and survival resources. Like other womanists, Baker-Fletcher names the acts of Jesus' life and ministry as salvific: "[L]aying on hands to heal, sharing food and wine, empathizing with the woman with the issue of blood, loving widows and orphans, forgiving women condemned by society, passing on wisdom as a teacher, listening to Mary and Martha, weeping over and healing Lazarus, conquering death and evil in his historical life and beyond."[61] Baker-Fletcher summarizes the acts of Jesus' life, and the symbolism of his death and resurrection, as the power to heal, sustain, and liberate.

Yet Baker-Fletcher does not exclude the significance of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection in her Christology. The cross, or tree, is a symbol of life and death for Jesus and contemporary society. Jesus was crucified on a tree; blacks have been lynched on trees. Yet the life of Jesus, like the lives of so many African American freedom fighters, is sacred and gives hope for future generations to struggle for justice. As Jesus is abused and redeemed on a tree, so the natural world (trees, etc.) is abused and can be redeemed. The cross is also a symbol of the risk involved in working for salvation. "Jesus' ministry of resistance against evil and his empowerment of others involved the real risks of political persecution, character assassination, and even death. The cross must not be forgotten because such persecution is a possible consequence of standing up for what is morally right."[62] The resurrection, on the other hand, represents God's ability to constantly create anew.

Baker-Fletcher insists that a womanist Christology includes consideration of the natural world. She initially insists that Jesus and creation are struggling toward a liberating relationship. She takes this point further by comparing the sustaining qualities of the earth with the sustaining quality of Jesus' ministry: "Without the life-sustaining warmth of the sun, the quenching power of rain, the oxygen the air provides, there would be no hope for the physical sustenance of the bodies that enflesh our spirits. The entire cosmos, then, is engaged in God's activity of providing resources for survival and wholeness."[63] She concludes that we see Jesus not only in the faces of black women, but in the face of the earth, waters, wind, and sun. As humans, then, we must consider the earth as neighbor and extend the golden rule to the created world.

Baker-Fletcher considers the constitution of Jesus in her ecological emphasis. Baker-Fletcher's understanding of Jesus as fully human and fully divine translates into a naming of Jesus as fully dust and fully spirit.[64] That is, Jesus

is a full incarnation of God in human form, while also identifying with the earth. Baker-Fletcher describes Jesus as *feeling* with the earth. She cites Jesus' interaction with water, wind, and trees as an example of this. "Jesus [is] one who is in harmony with all aspects of nature."[65] Because the earth is so often disregarded by humanity, Jesus' regard for creation is an extension of his care for "the least of these."

Baker-Fletcher also depicts Jesus as an ancestor. Drawing upon Pan-African theologians and African traditional religious understandings of ancestors, Baker-Fletcher describes Jesus as part of a community of ancestors who have lived, died, and continue to be remembered in the lives of the present. Jesus is, however, the greatest ancestor: "Spiritually and historically, Jesus is a member of an entire community of wise ancestors—similar to saints in the Christian tradition. What makes Jesus distinctive is his perfect wisdom and embodiment of God, who is Spirit."[66] Jesus lives on in the memory of the community, and there is an everyday consciousness of Jesus in the human and earthly community. As Baker-Fletcher describes Jesus as an ancestor, she directly relates this idea to ancestors in traditional African religions: "Moreover Jesus is like African ancestors in his power over death. Death fails to erase the power of his life."[67]

Baker-Fletcher wants to highlight the ways in which death cannot erase the power of anyone's life. She discusses the ways that African traditional religions focus on the role of the ancestors. "According to certain African cosmologies, the ancestors, which contemporary African Americans too often disremember, live on through 'children, relatives, *rituals of remembrance*, and significant deeds.'"[68] She believes that we must remember all of our ancestors—Jesus and "those ancestors whose names no one remembers."[69] According to Baker-Fletcher, ancestors have a memory of the past that is greater than that of the living. Referring to Toni Morrison's fictional character Beloved, Baker-Fletcher writes, "Beloved's memory holds knowledge of the experiences of the ancestors, extending to the slave ships of the Middle Passage. She has a memory of African mothers who died during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Beloved represents not only the ghost of Sethe's [the main character's] dead daughter but also ancestors from Sethe's slave and African history."[70] Beloved has more extensive knowledge than the present generation, and she tells her memories to other characters in the novel. The implication is that this information is important for the survival of these characters. With this interpretation, Baker-Fletcher suggests that the remembering of the ancestors helps the present to incorporate its past into its current becoming.

This remembrance of the past is an important part of Baker-Fletcher's concept of salvation. The memory of Jesus, cultural heritage (especially the Native American and African cultural past of African Americans), and history are critical to effecting salvation. Baker-Fletcher writes about it in this

way: "The wisdom and knowledge required to make decisions that promote survival, healing and liberation are dependent on the power of *memory*. The creative power to make meaning out of the past is necessary to give a sense of direction for present and future generations."[71] As Baker-Fletcher encourages black women to remember the past, she emphasizes the remembrance of the African and Native cultural pasts. *Rememory*, she states, involves "insurrection of subjugated knowledges about the history and ancestry of Africans in the Diaspora."[72]

Baker-Fletcher believes that black women, in particular, need to reconnect with their suppressed memories of their African history, the totality of their cultural heritage, and the techniques they have used to survive thus far in order to move fully into the future. While memory must be complete, only the aspects of the past that assist in the task of salvation should be recreated. Remembering the destructive aspects of the past allows people to avoid repeating them: "The purpose of memory is to build strengths and correct weaknesses in community relations in order to more effectively challenge sociopolitical and economic injustice."[73] Through memory, the past contributes to the present work of salvation.

There are distinct ethical implications in Baker-Fletcher's doctrine of salvation. Understanding the problem, empowered by God, and using the appropriate resources, she urges all people to challenge the status quo and assist in the work of salvation: "We are required to discern the truth of our participation in systemic societal injustice, to name systemic societal injustice, and to challenge the powers that be to transform dehumanizing, necrophilic (death-loving) socioeconomic practices into systems that value the worth of all humanity and creation."[74] The work of salvation includes being a good steward of the earth and helping to transform the earth with the rest of society. These goals are not attained in one instance, but in everyday ordinary acts: salvation has to do with the "daily moment by moment business of living."[75]

For Baker-Fletcher, salvation is a holistic way of living. Using Jesus as an example, Baker-Fletcher identifies saving activity as the work of healing, sustaining, and liberating. Human salvation, however, cannot be exclusive of salvation for the created world. Salvation comes from transforming this world and allowing the best of the past—the nameless ancestors, the ancestors who are known, and Jesus, the greatest ancestor—to inform the present and future ways of living.

Summary of Womanist Views of Salvation

From the work of the aforementioned womanist theologians, one can make some conclusions about womanist concepts of salvation. Womanist theologians who discuss salvation address the suffering and desperate situations of

black women. The offenses against black women are variously identified as the tridimensional oppression of racism, classism, and sexism, as well as multidimensional oppression that includes heterosexism, environmental racism, domestic violence, and surrogacy. These offenses are part of the particular experiences of black women in U.S. history. God cares about the lives of black women and helps them to deal with and overcome these circumstances.

For womanist theologians, salvation flows from their understandings of Jesus Christ. Black women identify with the experiences of Jesus. Black women see similarities between their suffering and Jesus' suffering. Black women believe Jesus cares for them as marginalized individuals, because Jesus had a ministry to the outcasts of his society. Black women believe that Jesus' resurrection gives hope for their own liberation from oppression. Salvation comes by embracing the vision that Jesus provides throughout his life. With differing emphases on the life or death of Jesus, these womanist theologians assert that Jesus changed the world and that salvation occurs when people work for the transformation of the world by imitating Christ. For womanist theologians, salvation is always social.

These womanist theologies understand that salvation is not always liberation or freedom from all pain and suffering. Salvation is not a divine imposition or gift to creation. Salvation is also survival and quality of life, and it requires the cooperation of the world in which we live. While God offers salvific resources, humanity must take advantage of these resources to effect salvation. Womanist perspectives on salvation draw from black women's past cultural experiences and the creative ways by which they have survived and incorporated their experiences to make it this far. In vastly different ways, Terrell and Baker-Fletcher suggest that salvation involves learning from the lives of those who have died. This allows individuals to move past determinism and learn from the experiences of the past to create something good.

Most important, womanist discussions of salvation bring strong metaphorical language to a constructive womanist theology. Womanist theologians discuss salvation in concrete images: survival, quality of life, and discipleship. Womanist theologians use the ministry of Jesus to provide action verbs to the process of salvation: teaching, healing, praying, welcoming, suffering-with. In this way, they give pictures of what salvation looks like and how it is achieved. They expand understandings of salvation such that we can see salvation in black women, poor people, those marginalized because of their sexual orientations, and even blood and other natural elements. Womanist theologians use familiar and indigenous expressions of black women and black religion to add particularity and power to their analysis of what it is that makes us whole.

Making a Way Out of No Way

The concept of "making a way out of no way" best describes the ways that womanist theologians articulate salvation. Delores Williams best describes this concept as a theme to which many womanists feel connected. In *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Williams states that black people in general, and black women in particular, express their relationship with God as the one who "makes a way out of no way." She writes: "Many times, as a little girl, I sat in the church pew with my mother or grandmother and heard the black believers, mostly women, testify about 'how far they had come by faith.' They expressed their belief that God was involved in their history, that God helped them make a way out of no way."[76] It is a central theme in black women's experiences of struggle and of God's assistance in helping them to overcome struggle.

"Making a way out of no way" is more than Williams's naming of the relationship between black women and God.[77] Karen Baker-Fletcher acknowledges this:

> [Survival as a creative quality] has been metaphorically referred to as the power of "making a way out of nothing" in the work of [womanist ethicist] Katie Cannon and "making a way out of no way" in the work of Delores Williams. In [my first book] *A Singing Something,* I refer to this particular quality of God and Black women in my grandmother's words as "making do." All three metaphors refer to what Williams calls an ethic of survival and quality of life among Black women. The activity of the God who enables them with vision for such survival traditionally has been described as God's *sustaining activity*.[78]

"Making a way out of no way" is an expression that acknowledges God's presence in providing options that do not appear to exist in the experiences of the past. It is a weaving of the past, future, and possibilities offered by God; a weaving that leads to survival, quality of life, and liberating activity on the part of black women.

"Making a way out of no way" acknowledges both the role of God and of human agency as new ways break forth into the future. There are four characteristics of "making a way out of no way": (1) God's presentation of unforeseen possibilities; (2) human agency; (3) the goal of justice, survival, and quality of life; and (4) a challenge to the existing order.[79]

Taken literally, "making a way out of no way" suggests that a path forward appears out of nowhere, out of nothing. We should not understand it this way. Instead, "making a way out of no way" means that the way forward was not contained in the past alone, the only way that was known. A way forward, a way toward life, comes from another source. It comes from unforeseen possibilities. These possibilities come from God. Using the example of Hagar, Williams writes, "God opened Hagar's eyes and she saw a well of water that she had not seen before. In the context of the survival struggle of poor African-American women this translates into God providing Hagar (read also African-American women) with *new vision* to see survival resources where she saw none before."[80] God is the one who presents the way. A way is made more properly out of God than out of nowhere. Womanist ethicist Emilie M. Townes also acknowledges the grasping of possibilities as a part of womanist spirituality in general: "Living out womanist spirituality means integrating faith and life. . . . We are called to a new and renewed awareness of our humanness and our infinite possibilities. . . . God makes demands on us to live into our faith in a radical way. . . . out of the possibilities we have before us and not out of our well-acknowledged and believed shortcomings."[81] God's offering of possibilities is felt as a call into the future.

Williams is careful to note that the possibilities offered by God are not always *felt* as good. As mentioned earlier, Williams concludes that God is not liberating Hagar, but God is ensuring Hagar's survival. God has knowledge of a wider context than Hagar could have and offers this to Hagar. Although returning to the place of her oppression is not what Hagar wants, it is the best option for her in her given context. For Hagar, salvation can look like a safe place with food and shelter for the delivery of a baby. Baker-Fletcher describes salvation as a group of teenagers in Los Angeles who grow their own food in a community garden and sell it at a local farmers' market.[82] Survival is often inadequate in terms of full liberation, but it is one of the ways in which God saves.

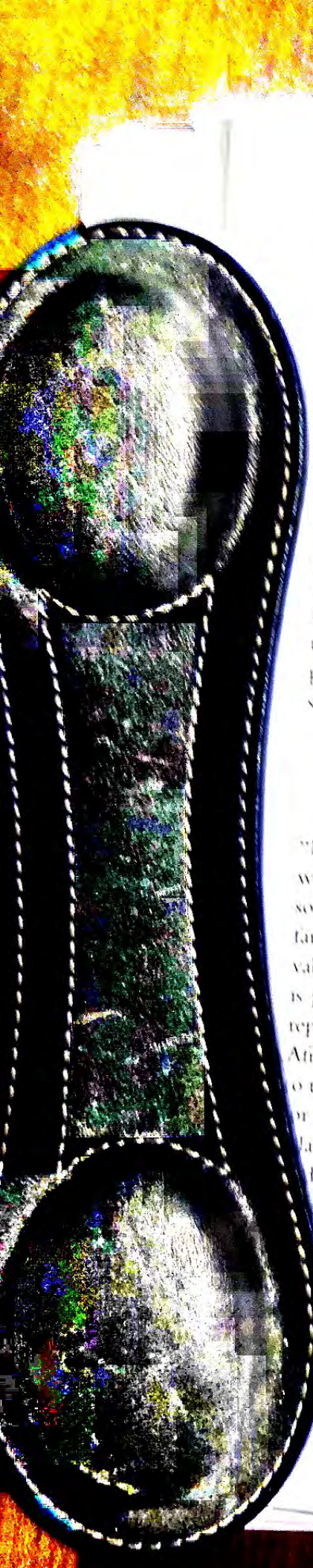
God does not force possibilities onto Hagar, or any human, when "making a way out of no way." There is always human agency involved. "God gave [Hagar] new vision to see survival resources where she had seen none before. Liberation in the Hagar stories is not given by God; it finds its source in human initiative."[83] Williams is so careful to emphasize the role of human freedom that she speaks about "making a way" as something that the human being does *with God's help*. This is why she uses the stories of Hagar: "The Hagar stories are those which suggest that an *ex-slave* mother could, with God's help, be in complete charge of furnishing her son with survival strategies. There are no other stories like this in the Bible."[84] "Making a way out of

no way" is, therefore, a combination of God's presentation of possibilities and human decision.

"Making a way out of no way" includes an ethical goal of justice. Womanist theologians have long understood justice as part of God's vision for the world and the goal of salvation. By looking specifically at the experiences of black women in America, they discuss the ways in which the vision of God is manifest in a particular situation. The goal of justice is a logical component of a constructive womanist theology because of the ways in which the problematic is described. The sufferings of black women are a result of the unjust social, legal, political, and economic systems that give greater value and preference to the ideals of wealth, whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, and anthropocentrism. Grant writes about this in terms of humanity: "In general, womanist principles accent the move toward full humanity for all. To this end, the eradication of all forms of oppression is primary."[85] Townes specifically references the need for justice: "God's love moves out to grow in compassion, understanding, and acceptance of one another. It helps begin the formation of a divine-human community based on love that is pointed toward justice."[86] Seeking justice challenges the societal structures we currently experience. Justice for the African American community will necessitate an eradication of the existing structures that oppress people on the basis of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and ecological injustice.

"Making a way out of no way" challenges the wider society and our own personal comfort. As in the case of Hagar, it moves us into the wilderness. While the wilderness is a difficult place to be, Williams asserts that it is a meeting place for God and humanity. There, God teaches and guides humans into a sense of identity and strength in order to continue the struggle.[87] Womanist theologian Renee Hill pushes all black theologians (womanists included) to question where we currently are and what we currently believe. A norm of love and justice will necessarily lead to this questioning: "It is this love and justice that ultimately disrupts all that we take for granted, whether theological reflection or our understanding of who and what we are. It is this love and justice that disrupts cycles of oppression and calls us to new and powerful ways to live in all of the intersections of our lives."[88] "Making a way out of no way" is sometimes experienced as release and joy; other times it is experienced as resources in the midst of oppression without release. Either way, it disrupts the past from continuing on as it would without the possibilities offered by God.

"Making a way out of no way" is the way of life that appears in situations that threaten death. Williams reminds readers that African American women have not been passive "in the face of the threat of destruction and death."[89] Again, the story of Hagar is illustrative: "One of the constituent



ideas in the Hagar in the wilderness symbolism is Hagar's, black women's and black people's encounter with the threat—and often actuality—of death dealing circumstances. Alone in the wilderness, pregnant on one occasion and alone with her son in the wilderness on the other occasion, Hagar and child surely would have died had not God intervened."[90] When black women rebel against death dealing situations and God offers possibilities that were previously unforeseen, a way is made out of no way.

Womanist views on salvation can be articulated in the expression, "making a way out of no way." It is an expression that acknowledges God's role in providing possibilities that are not apparent in the experiences of the past alone. It weaves the past, future, and possibilities offered by God into decisions that lead to survival, quality of life, and liberation for black women. This concept acknowledges both the influence of God and of human agency as black women live into their futures. "Making a way out of no way" expresses black women's experiences of struggle and of God's assistance in helping them to overcome tribulations. This womanist concept of salvation involves God's presentation of unforeseen possibilities, human agency, the goals of justice, survival, and quality of life, and a challenge to the existing social order.

Postmodern Challenges

"Making a way out of no way" must be able to speak to the realities of today's world. Religious pluralism is one of the biggest challenges that contemporary society poses to any theological construction. While a plurality of religious faiths and experiences is not new, postmodernism reflects openness to the validity of multiple religious perspectives. The reality of religious pluralism is particularly important for black religions in the United States because it represents the ways in which the slaves and their descendents interacted with African traditional religions and other religious traditions. In order to speak o today's realities, a womanist theology cannot require a belief in Jesus Christ r salvation, and it must uphold a religious framework that can discuss the lationship between God and the world for more than one single religious lition. All the while, this womanist theology cannot contradict the ways we act with science, technology, and economics in today's world.

an Traditional Religions

orementioned womanist concepts of salvation are intertwined with eologian's understanding of Jesus Christ. Jacquelyn Grant and Kelly Douglas affirm that for black women, the historical Jesus is primary.[91]