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Making a Way Out of No Way

Womanist Theologians on Salvation

I don't know how this works, but it makes me feel whole.—"Maria"

Womanist theologies maintains an unflinching commitment to reflect on the social, cultural, and religious experiences of black women. Womanist theologies are ultimately grounded in and accountable to the religious reality of black women's lives. As a form of liberation theology, womanist theologies aim for the freedom of oppressed peoples and creatures. More specifically, womanist theologies add the goals of survival, quality of life, and wholeness to black theology's goals of liberation and justice. Womanist theologians analyze the oppressive aspects of society that prevent black women from having the quality of life and wholeness that God desires for them and for all of creation.

Theological reflection on oppression and its defeat leads to a conversation about salvation. Oppressive forces are identified as death-dealing for creation and sinful from God's perspective. Efforts to overcome sin constitute various concepts of salvation. While religious concepts of salvation often focus on peace and eternal life in a realm beyond this world, black and womanist theologies maintain a focus on achieving life and liberation here in the land of the living. In this way, they are faithful to the root meaning of the word *salvation*, which literally means health and wholeness. A theological response to Maria's comment—"I don't know how it works, but it makes me feel whole"—will investigate reflections on salvation.

This chapter focuses on five womanist theologians who give sustained attention to the forces that impede black women from experiencing wholeness and quality of life. These same thinkers offer proposals for how these obstacles can be overcome and about God's role in achieving these goals within the lives of black women. Because these womanist theologians emerge

from a Christian context, their reflections on salvation are connected to their understanding of Jesus in general and the relationship between black women and the figure of Jesus Christ in particular. Thus, this examination of womanist views on salvation will also involve some exploration of womanist understandings of Jesus Christ. From these womanist theological approaches to Jesus Christ and salvation, I will gather a womanist theology that describes black women's salvation in terms of a relationship with a God who "makes a way out of no way."

The concept of "making a way out of no way" articulates black women's relationships with God as they navigate the reality of their lives in the pursuit of wholeness and justice. No one womanist theologian directly points to "making a way out of no way" as a theory of salvation. Nevertheless, an examination of "making a way out of no way" reveals that this concept is a construction of salvation that brings together the different emphases of various womanists without denying their particularities. "Making a way out of no way" is a summarizing concept for black women's experiences of struggle and God's assistance in helping them to overcome oppression.

While "making a way out of no way" is a historic expression, it can still speak to the needs of today's society. Critics of black and womanist theologies assert that these theologies have failed to address the religious pluralism within the black community. Indeed, the realities of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries pose a couple of questions to womanist theology: How can we explain deliverance for non-Christian women of African descent? Do our understandings of God's interaction in the world change with what science and technology tell us about how the world works? In order to be relevant to contemporary society, a womanist theology needs to address these challenges within an explicitly postmodern framework.

Womanist Theologians on Salvation

Womanist theologians interpret the concept of salvation within the Christian tradition in light of the experiences of African American women.[1] Womanist theologians connect biblical witnesses of Jesus with the experiences of contemporary African American women to discuss God's transformative role in their lives. As womanist theologians discuss the particularity of black women's lives, they often focus on the suffering of black women and how it is overcome. Collectively, womanists understand salvation as a social activity of teaching and healing that leads toward survival, quality of life, and the holistic transformation of the world. Womanist concepts of Jesus Christ and salvation reveal the powerful images that comprise a postmodern womanist theology.

For womanist theologians, religious proposals must address the oppression and marginalization of African American women. Womanist constructions of salvation discuss the ways in which black women are liberated from various forms of historical and contemporary assaults against the full realization of their personhood. For this reason, womanist concepts of salvation begin with definitions of sin and descriptions of the suffering of black women. Womanists have articulated the experiences of black women in America differently, making their proposed solutions as various as the theologians themselves. Drawing from the lived religious experiences of African American women and the ways that black women have expressed their faith, womanist theologians bring both strong metaphorical language and particularity to the concept of soteriology, theories about how salvation works.

Jacquelyn Grant and Kelly Brown Douglas provide constructions of Jesus that emphasize Jesus' humanity and the ability to view Christ as a black woman. In their interpretations of Jesus, they suggest that salvation is social and this-worldly, but they do not provide overt doctrines of salvation. Delores S. Williams and JoAnne Marie Terrell give two very different reconstructions of the doctrine of salvation. Williams emphasizes the life and ministry of Jesus; she finds no redemptive meaning in the death of Christ. Her theology suggests that salvation comes from humanity's embrace of Jesus' activities of teaching, healing, and identifying with the marginalized. Terrell, on the other hand, discusses the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to conclude that there is something sacred and powerful in the blood of both Jesus and black women. Lastly, Karen Baker-Fletcher expands upon the ideas of previous womanist theologies to include consideration of the natural world and the ancestral world in the attainment of healing and liberation.

Jacquelyn Grant

For Jacquelyn Grant, salvation must address the core problems of black women as they experience racism, sexism, and classism. Christian theological language sometimes reflects these forms of oppression. Grant never gives an explicit theory of salvation; it must be extrapolated from her writings on Jesus Christ. An investigation of Grant's writing reveals two components to her view of salvation. First, black women identify with Jesus as sufferer, embracer of the outcast and liberator. This identification is so strong that Grant describes Christ as a black woman. Second, black women can pattern their lives as disciples rather than as servants. Salvation, then, is black women's invitation to full participation in church and society.

Grant frames the discussion of black women's experiences by looking at the particular ways that black women have suffered throughout United States

history. Grant's definition of the particular oppression faced by black women is derived from the work of the black feminists of the 1970s and 1980s. In the early years of the academic study of black women by black women, Frances Beale described the experiences of black women as being in "double jeopardy."[2] With this term, Beale attempted to express the context of black women's experiences as distinct from their black male and white female counterparts. Black women are negatively affected by both racism and sexism. Black feminist Theressa Hoover looked specifically at the treatment of black women in churches and concluded that black women experience "triple jeopardy"—racism, sexism, and classism.[3] Grant's review of black feminism concludes that black women consider three sources of oppression: "Black feminism grows out of Black women's tri-dimensional reality of race/sex/class. It holds that full human liberation cannot be achieved simply by the elimination of any one form of oppression."[4] This "tri-dimensional reality" becomes Grant's category of sin. It is not a sin that black women commit; rather, it is a sin of humanity, the sin committed against black women from which they must be saved.

One place to locate Grant's understanding of salvation is in her work on Jesus Christ. In *White Women's Christ, Black Women's Jesus*, Grant notes the ways that black women have understood and identified with Jesus. She argues that black women draw upon both the teachings of the Bible and God's direct revelation in their lives for their understandings of God. Black people identify with the story of the exodus, in which God delivers the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery. They understand God as a creator, sustainer, and liberator. The role of Jesus as divine co-sufferer is the most salient for Grant. "[Black women] identified with Jesus because they believed that Jesus identified with them."[5] Jesus was persecuted and forced to suffer. Likewise, black women have been persecuted and forced to suffer. During the period of American slavery, black women were systematically and legally raped, sold, and forced to watch their children being sold. Grant calls this a type of crucifixion. Black women identify with Jesus through the shared experiences of persecution and suffering.

Black women understand Jesus as one who cares about the least respected people in society. Jesus identified with the lowest in society during his own day. Examining the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and particularly Luke, Grant concludes that Jesus was one who welcomed the most despised of his own society; he associated with lepers, women, and tax collectors. Grant also looks at the testimonies of nineteenth-century black women—the abolitionist Sojourner Truth and Christian preacher Jarena Lee. Grant concludes that black women have understood Jesus' care for the marginalized as the same quality that welcomes and cares for past and contemporary black women. That is, Jesus is able to identify with black women because they constitute the lowest

social group in contemporary society. Grant boldly states, "Christ among the least must also mean Christ in the community of black women."[6] Jesus' suffering and identification with the outcast are the touch points between Jesus and black women.

According to Grant, black women also understand Jesus as one who leads them to freedom. In particular, the resurrection of Jesus gives hope that there is liberation from oppression. Just as Jesus overcame his persecution and suffering in the resurrection from death, black women will also overcome their situations of oppression. Grant writes of the significance of the resurrection: "For as the Resurrection signified that there is more of life than the cross for Jesus Christ, for Black women it signifies that their tri-dimensional oppressive existence is not the end, but it merely represents the context in which a particular people struggle to experience hope and liberation."[7] Jesus is seen as a liberator.

Grant focuses on Jesus' humanity because black women identify with and are inspired by Jesus. Grant concludes that Jesus' maleness is not an issue, as some feminist theologians believe. Because Jesus is Savior, gender is irrelevant: "If Jesus Christ were a Savior of men then it is true the maleness of Christ would be paramount. But if Christ is Savior of all, then it is the humanity—the wholeness—of Christ which is significant."[8] Grant cares about Christ's humanity, his life and ministry, his suffering and his resurrection. The similarity of the experiences of both Jesus and black women means that Christ is not only found in the experiences of black women, but that Christ can be seen as a black woman.[9] Christ is a black woman.

Grant's understanding of salvation in a womanist context can also be derived from her critique of Christian theological language of servanthood and its feminist theological reconstruction. In her essay "The Sin of Servanthood and the Deliverance of Discipleship," Grant examines the Christian use of the term *servanthood* as a metaphor for the ideal relationship between God and humanity. She notes that both the Bible and generations of theologians have used the concept of servanthood as an appropriate description of Jesus to God and God's people, and therefore of the relationship between humanity and God, and amongst humanity. That is, Jesus has been understood as a servant of God, the fulfillment of the "suffering servant" described in the book of Isaiah, and humans, by proxy, should understand themselves as God's servants on earth. Grant finds the language of servanthood unhelpful and damaging in the context of black women's experiences in the world and in the church. Black women have often functioned as the servants of society—either unpaid in slavery or in menial jobs as domestic laborers after the end of slavery. Grant argues that the servanthood of black women is also servitude since it is accompanied by unjust financial compensation and a belief in the ontological

inferiority of the servant. Not only are black women in service positions often underpaid for their work, but they are also understood as less equal, indeed less human, than those for whom they work. Thus, their servanthood is more properly called *servitude*. Grant writes, "As critical components to Christianity, the notions of 'service' and 'servanthood,' when viewed in light of human iniquities perpetrated against those who have been the 'real servants' of the society, represent contradictions."[10] Servant language, Grant argues, has not necessarily caused the structures of pain and suffering for oppressed peoples, but it has undergirded and supported it within a Christian religious context.

Grant acknowledges that the language of servanthood can have positive value in the African American community. Black women have been able to call themselves "servants of Christ" because it meant that black women were not the servants of whites. Grant notes that Martin Luther King Jr. discusses suffering as redemptive because true redemption "takes place when one experiences the redeemer even as it is in the context of oppression."[11] Black women have experienced redemption in this context and transformed the meaning of servanthood. Grant writes that "being a servant of the redeemer means joining in the struggle of the redeemer against oppression, wherever it is found."[12] Black women have embraced the language of servanthood and inverted it to rebel against their oppression.

Although black women have reinterpreted the language of servanthood, this interpretation is a survival strategy and cannot provide liberation. Grant understands servanthood as sin and rejects the language, because black women have been servants more than others, and servanthood, in this context, is sin. "The sin of servanthood is the sin of humanity that results from the sociopolitical interests of proponents of the status quo and their attempts to undergird their intended goal through psychological conditioning that comes partially with the institutionalization of oppressive language, even theological language."[13] Grant denounces the term *servanthood* completely: "For liberation to happen the psychological, political and social conditions must be created to nurture the processes. Servant language does not do this."[14] For this reason, Grant proposes a moratorium on the use of "servant language" among oppressed people and proposes the language of "discipleship" instead.

Discipleship language comes from both Jesus' inclusion of the outcast among his own disciples and the black church tradition of issuing a call for discipleship at the end of a worship service. At its best, discipleship is a call to be invited into power and participation in relationship to God and in the community of faith. The traditional model of discipleship focuses on Jesus as the leader of a select group of men. This model has supported the exclusive power of men within the black church. Yet Grant's model of discipleship is empowering

because it allows black women to undermine traditional exclusive understandings of discipleship that only include men and white people. The language of discipleship fulfills Grant's requirements of "challeng[ing] the servant mentality of oppressed peoples and the oppressive mentality of oppressors."[15]

Grant's theology of Jesus and her examination of servant language have implications for a womanist concept of salvation. Salvation is the deliverance of black women in this world. It is political, economic, and social freedom from the oppressive forces of racism, sexism, and classism. Salvation is about a positive transformation of the current society. Salvation is about improving the quality of black women's lives. For Grant, Jesus models salvation. Jesus models the ways in which a savior must identify with the oppressed and downtrodden of any particular context and not let oppression have the last word. Grant is also the first theologian to state that the savior can be seen as a black woman.

Grant's concept of discipleship can be seen as a way of achieving this salvation. Grant does not articulate this forthrightly, but she does see the language and model of discipleship as a way to combat the sin of servanthood. Understanding discipleship as salvation implies that salvation is an ongoing process. It is a model for life. To be a disciple, to be saved, one must follow the teachings and lessons of Jesus. Salvation is the way we relate to each other and to God. It is a sharing of power. Salvation is the insurrectionary and revolutionary process of challenging the status quo and demanding equality and inclusion.

Kelly Brown Douglas

Kelly Brown Douglas also investigates Jesus Christ in light of the experiences of black women. Like Grant, Douglas does not overtly discuss salvation. Douglas's theory of salvation lies in the lives of those who, imitating Christ, are working for the betterment of the community. Douglas defines sin as the multidimensional oppression of black women. This oppression is overcome in the struggle for black women's wholeness. From Douglas's writings, one can identify salvation in all those who strive for this wholeness.

In *The Black Christ*, Douglas identifies the sources of black women's oppression in terms similar to those used by Grant. She discusses historical understandings of the Black Christ—the religious and political assertion that the historical Jesus was a black man. Yet Douglas states that racism is not the only challenge for theologians to consider; they must also consider sexism, classism, and heterosexism. Douglas is particularly adamant about the need to examine issues of heterosexism: "[Womanist scholars] must make clear

that homophobia in any form is unacceptable, and that heterosexism must be eradicated as it is a part of the same interlocking system of race, gender, and class oppression."[16] Black women's experiences of multidimensional oppression are overcome through the pursuit and achievement of wholeness.

The goal of Douglas's theology is a vision of wholeness for black women and the black community. Douglas derives this goal from part of Alice Walker's definition of womanist: one who is "committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people."[17] Being committed to wholeness means that womanist theology addresses heterosexism both outside and inside the black community. This goal of wholeness is also achieved as womanists explore the connection between African American women and other women in the two-thirds world, and address the individual needs of black women. While Douglas wants to keep the focus of her womanist theology on the wholeness of the community, she is sure to balance this with concern for individual black women: "This [sociopolitical] analysis urges Black people, especially Black women, to confront the ways in which societal oppression has left them less than whole human beings—spiritually, emotionally, psychologically and so forth."[18] On individual and sociopolitical levels, the goal of wholeness is crucial for Douglas.

Douglas's model of achieving wholeness is informed by the life and ministry of Jesus. She focuses on the actions of Jesus: "[A womanist understanding of Jesus] starts in history with Jesus' ministry as that is recorded in the Gospels. What Jesus did becomes the basis for what it means for him to be Christ. This makes Christ more accessible to ordinary Christians."[19] Highlighting Jesus' inclusion of the least respected in society, Douglas sees Jesus as the Savior who can be seen working for the wholeness of his community. Douglas's Jesus is not just the sustainer and liberator of black theology. Jesus is also a prophet "challenging the black community to rid itself of anything that divides it against itself and to renounce any way in which it oppresses others."[20] Ultimately, Douglas affirms the blackness of Christ. Douglas's Christ is phenotypically black, as argued in the historical concept of "the Black Christ."[21] Yet Douglas is less concerned with the physical blackness of Christ: "Essentially, Christ's biological characteristics have little significance to discerning Christ's sustaining, liberating and prophetic presence."[22] Douglas's emphasis is on finding Christ in the struggle for wholeness.

Douglas's interpretation of Jesus' significance for black women, while similar to Grant's, differs in its understanding of the problem and its solution. Douglas expands Grant's tri-dimensional analysis of black women's oppression to a multidimensional analysis that is both sociopolitical and religio-cultural. Douglas also understands the blackness of Christ differently than Grant. Although Christ can be seen in the faces of the poorest black women,

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Douglas's Christology does not center on the experience of oppression, but rather on the struggle against oppression. When Douglas identifies the Black Christ, she states that Christ is "found where Black people, men as well as women, are struggling to bring the entire Black community to wholeness."[23] Working for wholeness is the standard by which Douglas evaluates Christ. "Christ is a Black woman whenever Black women act to establish life and wholeness for the Black community."[24] Unfortunately, Douglas does not provide an image of her vision of wholeness. The reader is left to assume that wholeness is the opposite of the racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist activities she decries.

Douglas's interpretation of the Black Christ also suggests a womanist construction of salvation. Douglas is forthright in acknowledging that womanist theology must aim for the wholeness of the black community. Black people need to be saved to social, political, cultural, and religious well-being. Salvation is not just the goal of that wholeness, but is found in *the struggle to attain* that wholeness. Douglas connects her perspectives on Christ with salvation by asserting that salvation comes from imitating Christ: "For Blacks, it is precisely by imitating Christ that we bring salvation to our community."[25] Blacks must not only identify with Jesus, but they must imitate Jesus' prophetic role of challenging even an oppressed community to rid itself of its own forms of oppression. Thus, Douglas's focus on the life and ministry of Jesus indicates that the way of salvation comes from doing as Jesus did. To be saved, one must imitate the Savior; one must be willing to challenge oppression wherever it is found. Salvation is about achieving wholeness, and it is found in the continual actions of those who are working for that wholeness.

Delores S. Williams

Delores S. Williams believes that salvation must address black women's experiences of suffering and evil. There are two key elements in Williams's doctrine of sin and salvation. First, both sin and salvation are social. Second, sins are committed against the very personhood of black women, particularly against black women's bodies. Salvation, then, must deny any sacrifice or suffering in the body and be located in a vision of right relationship between black women and their bodies, black men, white women, and the world at large.

In the essay "A Womanist Perspective on Sin," Williams constructs a womanist doctrine of social sin from the ideas about sin found in spiritual songs, the autobiographies of ex-slaves, and the autobiographies of nineteenth-century African American women. From these sources, she concludes that the black community describes its experience of sin as being troubled or burdened. While the black community demonstrates a notion of individual sin in

particular wrongdoings, there is a much larger idea of sin as social. Social sin occurs when one group commits wrongdoing against another group. According to spiritual songs and the testimonies of ex-slaves, "white" is not devalued, nor is it synonymous with evil. Sin is found in the negative behavior and unhealthy structure of relationships between blacks and whites: "Rather, certain patterns of human relations that yield cruelty and enslavements are thought to be evil and sinful."[26] Sin is social because it involves the evil and suffering inflicted upon groups of people by other groups of people. Sin is found in the behaviors of groups of people and in the systems that perpetuate this behavior.[27]

Williams's doctrine of sin also involves individual participation. The writings of nineteenth-century black women reveal an identification of sin and their own "unworthiness." Williams links this sense of unworthiness to the elevation of white womanhood, the consequent devaluation of black womanhood, and to the fact that the exploitation of black women's bodies (through lynching, overwork, and rape) was ignored by the American legal system. Therefore, Williams concludes that the devaluation of black women's sense of self is also sinful. For this type of sin, Williams charges society at large, the African American community, and even black heterosexual women who devalue the full humanity of black lesbians. So, sin is also participatory: "Individual sin has to do with participating in society's systems that devalue Black women's womanhood (humanity) through a process of invisibilization—that is, invisibilizing the womanist character of Black women's experience and emphasizing the stereotypical images of Black women that prevail and are perpetuated in the larger society."[28] The devaluation of the body, sexuality, humanity, and self-esteem are the womanist sins that can be seen as social and individual through participation.

Williams addresses sin with a concept of salvation that is both social and participatory. She hints at the need for salvation to address the needs of black women at micro and macro levels. Salvation needs to address the individual needs of black women, "thus elevating and healing Black women's self-esteem figures into womanist notions of what constitutes salvation for the oppressed African-American community."[29] Yet Williams also asserts that salvation is concerned with more than the individual acts of sin. Salvation occurs in the process of addressing sin. Referring to African American spiritual songs, Williams writes, "[S]laves seem more concerned about a process of moving toward positive transformation and destination than with identifying individual acts as sinful."[30] This is the first place where Williams suggests that salvation, like sin, is not found in one act, but in the process of alleviating collective behaviors that are sinful.

Williams's assertion that salvation addresses the social nature of sin means that salvation also alleviates sins and evils in the temporal world. In her essay

"Straight Talk, Plain Talk," Williams insists that salvation is this-worldly, and that churches should work for the social salvation of the black community. Williams has no need for salvation that focuses on heaven or any place outside of this world: "I contend that the need for social salvation then and now presents a necessary and serious challenge to all black Christians. It prods them to leave heaven and 'otherworldly' pursuits to the business and judgment of God. There is only the material world in which to work out a place of salvation for Black people and the Black community."[31] She believes that many young black people have given up on the promise of heaven and life after death. Salvation, therefore, is not about making it to heaven or defeating death. Salvation is about surviving, finding meaning and quality of life.[32]

Williams suggests three "in-house strategies" that black churches can use to effect this social salvation. Black churches should renew the memory of black heroes and heroines whose actions show how racism has historically oppressed black people. Williams cites Malcolm X and Angela Davis as two such examples. Second, churches should develop community consciousness and actions that assist black people in getting beyond oppressive systems. This strategy might entail starting educational institutions and making social, political, religious, and economic alliances with non-black groups and organizations that support black advancement. Lastly, black churches should encourage constructive critical thinking and planning. She concludes that if the church does not participate in the work of bringing social salvation to the suffering and violated ones, it has no mission. When black churches support the "quest for salvation on earth," they also support the historical beliefs of the black community and the theologies of black male and womanist theologians. Salvation is social, this-worldly, and, with the active participation of black churches, institutional.

Williams's second discussion of sin focuses on the devaluation of black women's bodies. Unlike Grant and Douglas, Williams does not define black women's experiences of sin as the multidimensional oppression of racism, sexism, and classism. In "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption," Williams argues that an interlocking system of classism, racism, and sexism is not the exclusive experience of black women. "Jewish, Hispanic, Asian and other women of color in America can also experience this reality."[33] Williams seeks to particularize the experience of African American women in their historical and contemporary roles as surrogates.

Williams identifies two kinds of surrogacy—coerced and voluntary surrogacy. During slavery, black women's surrogacy was coerced. White men and women forced black women to provide labor and children. Whites exploited the biological functions of black women in order to generate a steady supply of slaves for the developing capitalist economy, gratify sexual desires, and supply wet-nurse services for suckling white babies. Black women not only

managed white people's homes, cooking, cleaning, and caring for their children, but they also labored in the fields. Their labor substituted for that of white women, white men, and black men. Black women's labor in the postbellum period constitutes voluntary surrogacy. Black women were relegated to subservient positions; moreover, many black women continue to be circumscribed to these social roles and constitute a class of servants to white people.[34] As more and more black men are criminalized and incarcerated, black women are taking on the roles of mother and father to their children. Black women have taken on the roles of white men, white women, and black men. Their roles as surrogates are still perpetuated.

Although black women are not the only group to suffer and experience violence toward their bodies, black women experience this in particular forms. Theologian A. Elaine Crawford affirms Williams's discussion of black women as historical and contemporary surrogates:

> To be sure, suffering is a part of the human condition and all peoples have experienced suffering. Abuse and violence pervade the lives of women of every ethnicity. Yet, African American women have had a legacy of abuse and violence perpetrated against their bodies that has been justified through sexualized stereotypes and mythologies that denied the presence of God in them. It denied that they were created in the image of God.[35]

Crawford explicitly connects the unique context of the physical abuse of black women in America with interpretations of their relationship to God. Whereas Crawford feels that this abuse stands in direct opposition to the concept of *imago Dei*, Williams likens the abuse of black women with traditional concepts about salvation through Jesus Christ.

Williams matches the theme of black women's surrogacy with views of the atonement that cite Jesus' death as a vicarious sacrifice for the sake of sinful humanity.[36] If Jesus died for humanity, he was the ultimate sacrifice and should not be emulated by black women:

> In this sense Jesus represents the ultimate surrogate figure standing in the place of someone else: sinful humankind. Surrogacy, attached to this divine personage, thus takes on an aura of the sacred. It is therefore altogether fitting and proper for black women to ask whether the image of a surrogate-God has salvific power for black women, or whether this image of redemption supports and reinforces the exploitation that has accompanied their experience with surrogacy. If black women

> accept this image of redemption, can they not also passively accept the exploitation surrogacy brings?[37]

Williams's womanist doctrine of salvation will not affirm any idea of Jesus as a substitution of the sins of humanity: "There is nothing divine in the blood of the cross."[38] In spite of her rejection of the cross, Williams understands Jesus as crucial to a theory of salvation. She states: "The fish and loaves, the candles we are to light, that our light will so shine before people so that we can remember that this message that Jesus brought, I think, is about life, and it's about the only two commandments that Jesus gave; they were about love."[39] Williams believes that Jesus' life constitutes a vision that is salvific.

Williams focuses on the vision offered in the ministry of Jesus as represented in the Synoptic Gospels. She focuses on the way Jesus models "right relationships." She describes Jesus in this way:

> Jesus showed humanity a vision of righting relations between body, mind and spirit through an ethical ministry of words (such as the beatitudes, the parables, the moral directions and reprimands); through a healing ministry of touch and being touched (for example, healing the leper through touch; being touched by the woman with an issue of blood); through a militant ministry of expelling evil forces (such as exorcising the demoniacs, whipping the moneychangers out of the temple); through a ministry of prayer (he often withdrew from the crowd to pray); through a ministry of compassion and love.[40]

Jesus saves because of what he does. Jesus teaches, heals, condemns evil, prays, and loves. Williams believes that God is acting through Jesus to invite humans to participate in this ministerial vision. Salvation comes from this *vision* we see in the life of Jesus. Williams states this directly: "Redemption had to do with God, through Jesus, giving humankind new vision to see resources of positive, abundant, relational life—a vision humankind did not have before."[41] This is a vision for black women.

The ministerial vision of Jesus is a vision, not only for liberation, but for survival and quality of life. In *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Williams uses the Abraham-Sarah-Hagar stories from the book of Genesis to assert that the God of womanist theology is not just a God of liberation, but also a God who is interested in the survival and quality of life of black women. In this biblical narrative, God promises a child to Sarah and Abraham when Sarah is beyond child-bearing age. Sarah gives Abraham permission to impregnate her Egyptian maidservant, Hagar. Hagar soon becomes pregnant but experiences