

**Queering Black Homophobia:
Black Theology as a Sexual Discourse of Transformation**

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Abstract

This article explores black homophobia as a co-constitutive phenomenon which harbors the fear of the loss of a black archetypal identity that can be understood as (hetero)normative. Using a method of queering black homophobia from a hetero non-normative viewpoint, an exploration of the authenticity of a liberation viewpoint that is multivocal, multidimensional, and offering an interpretation that is inclusive of identities that trouble the waters of black hetero-patriarchal hegemony will be in question as it relates to the role of the Hamitic hypothesis and those interpretations that conflate evil, sexual perversion, and human degeneration within blackness.

Introduction

While there will be those who deny the present state of gay oppression in black churches, many heterosexuals will support the validity of this claim and begin the difficult task of challenging black theology and church structure that define homosexuality as immoral.¹

The understanding of 'blackness' expressed as male and female, family and community, straight or gay, *in or out*, is inextricably connected to the Bible and the validation expressed therein. The black biblical hermeneutic is one that reflects the prideful affirmation that we are an equal and precious part of God's creational genius. The hard-fought gains for righteous inclusion in God's plan are precious to who we are as a people and our protection of that understanding is of the utmost importance. For many in the community the efficacy of the Word is bound up within a

1. Horace Griffin, 'Their own Received them Not', in Delroy Constantine-Simms (ed.), *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities* (New York: Alyson Books, 2000), pp. 110-23.

hermeneutical framework that has freed us from the biblical narrative on the one hand and bound us to it on the other. Through biblical interpretation we made what was essentially 'ungiven' within the biblical narrative an existential 'given' within the community; we found ourselves and God where we were told neither existed.² It is for this very reason that the word (as an interpretive strategy) has become the Word (the validating mandate of God). However, our interpretation(s) often harbor the same punitive exclusivity and dogma writ large that was used to define an immoral and unethical pathology of African identity and develop reasons for our subsequent enslavement. Though we have embraced a hermeneutical task with a genius that reveals our ability to survive, liberate, and to elevate, we still suffer from the unspoken effects of oppression in the form of sex, gender, and race upon the black community and the black church. James Evans asserts that there are 'three pillars' of biblical interpretation: (1) the first is based on the experience of the people of Israel as recorded in the book of Exodus (Exod. 1.12), which he also calls the 'Hebrew model of interpretation' and associates with the 'struggle for political emancipation in African-American experience, thereby reversing the patriarchal paradigm espoused by biblical defenders of slavery'; (2) the second is based on biblical references to Ethiopia, Cush and Egypt with key motifs found in Ps. 68.31, which he calls the 'Ethiopic model' and associates with addressing the need for cultural integrity and racial pride, countering the Hamitic argument for the inferiority and invisibility of African-Americans; and (3) the New Testament where the affirmation of Jesus' positive stance toward the downtrodden and oppressed 'gave sustenance to the struggle for survival and freedom in a hostile society'.³ These 'three pillars' are imbedded in a hermeneutical tradition that speaks prophetically against the socially accepted sanctions rooted in a profanized divine edict.

There are three elements that Evans says are key (and very possibly profoundly unique) to understanding the role of the Bible in African-American life: *multivocality*, *multidimensionality* and *interpretation* which constructs meaning 'where it is not readily apparent'.⁴ When a queer lens is applied to Evans' assertion, serious questions can be raised concerning the *multivocality*, *multidimensionality*, and the construction of *interpretation* 'where it is not readily apparent' with regards to black homophobia and the black church. If *multivocality* is present within the

2. See James H. Evans, *We Have Been Believers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), pp. 53-62.

3. Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, pp. 40-45.

4. Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, p. 44.

tradition, why then is the gay voice so silent? If *multidimensionality* is present within the tradition, why is the so-called homosexual not one who exists openly and equally alongside the others? Why does the act of gay appropriation and *interpretation* of the biblical text have no positive meaning or value that is at least 'readily apparent'? What role does sex, gender and race play in the construction of that which is not readily apparent within the black church? My task here is not to take on concepts of immorality as suggested by Horace Griffin, but to *queer* the issue of multivocality, multidimensionality, and interpretation in order to elucidate *what is not readily apparent*, and develop discourse that transforms the debate and troubles the waters of black homophobic oppression found in the black church and community. My interest in this topic will be explored further in a more comprehensive fashion at a later time, but for the purposes of this project, my work will be limited to Evans' Hebrew/Ethiopic model (of biblical interpretation) with particular attention given to the Hamitic myth/hypothesis which, when viewed co-constitutively, reveals how *multivocality* and *multidimensionality* relates to the construction of an *interpretation* of the curse that is not 'readily apparent' and to show how this came to embody the concept of sexual deviancy, which led to the perpetuous condition of slave/outsider of the black race and black homophobia. In order to proceed I will first offer a working definition of queer theory (if that is possible) and black homophobia (a hetero non-normative claim). Secondly, I will talk about how Ham's actions/in-actions, Noah's curse, and black homophobia co-constitute denial: the denial of voice, the denial of otherness, and the denial of greater meaning for the black church, the black community and black identity. Finally, I will propose how we might move toward 'Black Theology as a Sexual Discourse of Transformation' which, at its best, troubles the waters, transforms the debate, and creates change.

Queer Theory: What it Is and What it Is Not

As stated earlier, this project is an attempt to queer *what is not readily apparent* with regards to black homophobia in the black church and the community. What is queer? What is queer theory? Laurel C. Schneider articulates these important characteristics (among many) about queerness and queer theory:

Queer theory is not just for or about so-called homosexuals. It is critical theory concerned principally with cultural deployments of power through social constructions of sexuality and gender... Why queer theory employs 'queer' in its name is important for understanding the basic presuppositions of the discourse. In theoretical terms, 'queer' has come to denote a hermeneutical position similar to other late-twentieth-century theories

such as third-wave feminism and post colonialism, homosexuality, heterosexuality, race, nationality, woman, and man. As a term queer refers to anything outside of the norm.⁵

It becomes immediately apparent that for the task at hand queer theory is more than adequate. Queer theory allows me to do three very powerful things: First, it gives me the authority to speak. I open with an epigraph in which Horace Griffin implores us to *begin the difficult task of challenging black theology and church structure that define homosexuality as immoral*. The most difficult task of speaking out against difficult issues is finding support for what you say and feeling that you have the authority to do so. Griffin's blessing and queer theory's claim that it is 'not just for or about so-called homosexuals' validates my attempt to speak and call to be heard. Secondly, it gives me a method. By using queer theory I can get at my primary concern: how the 'deployments of power through social constructions of sexuality and gender' affect the *multivocality, multidimensionality*, and the construction of *interpretation* 'where it is not readily apparent' with regards to black homophobia, the black community, and especially the black church. Finally, it gives me a location. In the act of my willfully moving outside of my own concept of normal, by intentionally relinquishing my constructed self and bringing my identity into question, I become queer; I seek another 'outsider viewpoint' (outside of myself). As such my location reveals the co-constitutive viewpoint of one who chooses to take on the process of hominization: an altered state (a *hominexus*), which I define as the acceptance of an ever-evolving inter-relational, non-normative, destabilized, de-naturalized, de-essentialized human identity.⁶

Black Homophobia: A Hominized Viewpoint

The assertion can be made that black homophobia is, in itself, a co-constitutive construction that holds the products of black oppression and

5. Laurel C. Schneider, 'Queer Theory', in A.K.M. Adam (ed.), *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (St Louis, MI: Chalice Press, 2000), pp. 206-12.

6. I use these terms as a means by which I might be able to move beyond the constraints or dangers of reinscribing heteronormativity upon my queering processes. I seek to become completely vulnerable by using a term that is neither gender or sexually specific. *Hominization* is that process. The term *hominexus* is a combination of 'hominoid', meaning any of the superfamily of primates including humanity and 'nexus', meaning a connection, tie, link, between individuals and/or groups. *Hominexus* serves as a means of defining me as being a human that is seeking to evolve into one who seeks connectedness based on sameness with other humans rather than disconnectedness based on a set or subset of perceived difference.

the hallmark of colonialism: the negative deployment of race, sexuality, gender, identity, and power.⁷ Colonial thought ensured that the abnormally grotesque essence of blackness would come to validate the normality of whiteness through the racialization of black sexuality (blacks are sexual deviants) and the sexualization of black identity (sexual deviancy is the reason for blacks being oppressed). The conflation of black identity and sexual deviancy has created an 'archetypal Other'.⁸ Black identity as an 'archetypal Other' has created the powerful phenomenon of black binarisms: black as a *condition* that is too flawed, too abnormal to be normal in and of itself; it must have a culturally prescribed normal pole to give it value. Cornel West says 'The Afro-American encounter with the modern world has been shaped first and foremost by the doctrine of white supremacy...'.⁹ The inferences of white supremacy have created the normalcy by which blackness seeks to overcome its otherness. That normal pole, developed as such through the modern discourse of white supremacy becomes the value-added affixture that makes black, black *and* normal or as in the case of black sexuality, black *and* abnormal. As such, the black identity, coupled with sexual deviancy and grotesqueness has caused the need of another more 'normal' pole to help it overcome its lack of a sexual 'correctness': heteronormativity. West says 'This logic [of white supremacy] is manifest in the way in which the controlling metaphors, notions, and categories of modern discourse produce and prohibit, develop and delimit, specific conceptions of truth and knowledge, beauty and character, so that certain ideas are rendered incomprehensible and unintelligible'.¹⁰ When this is applied to the use of black binaries as a means by which the 'archetypal Other' might be overcome, the assertion can be made that white supremacy makes 'incomprehensible and unintelligible' the idea that blackness is some-

7. Stephen R. Haynes, 'Original Dishonor: Noah's Curse and the Southern Defense of Slavery', *Journal of Southern Religion*, 3 (Summer 2000), section 6, online at <http://jsr.fsu.edu/honor.htm>. Haynes notes Lillian Smith, *Killer of the Dream*, when he states, 'the Negro, sex, and the body have long been bound up together in the southern mind'. Haynes says this idea underscores the 'reappearance of sexual themes in twentieth-century invocations of Noah's curse among white [and I would say black] Americans'.

8. Haynes, 'Original Dishonor', section 3. Haynes notes that Benjamin Braude observes the medieval imagination saw Ham as 'archetypal other, the examples of qualities not to be emulated...Ham imagery provided a great variety of themes that, given the appropriate social need, could be bent in any number of directions'.

9. Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), p. 47.

10. West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, p. 47.

thing that can be understood as normal – especially within the binary of black heterosexuality. In claiming the other (normal sexual pole) we in fact buy into the concept of black inadequacy because all normal poles (man, woman, etc.) belong to whiteness, maleness, and the supremacy the two together come to embody. The rationale of ‘twoness’, the binated embodiment of ‘unreconciled strivings’ remains forever susceptible to white supremacy due to the perceived correctness of heteronormative positioning that is inextricable from the perceived deviance and attrited condition of blackness. Because of this, all black *binaries* are judged first by their blackness (not within the concept of the normative gaze).¹¹ Second, all black binaries are judged as deviant (physical and mental inferiority implies cultural primitiveness and sexual looseness).¹² Third, all black binaries are never judged as being ‘normal’ (due to the idea that normal belongs to whiteness).¹³ As such, our claims to be wholly identified still suffer from the delusional concepts offered within the idea of heteronormativity. Black heteronormativity can never be achieved because the ‘archetypal Other’ is needed to maintain white hegemonic discourse and fuel its concepts of supremacy. Black homosexuality suffers the weight of this unresolved ontological argument of normality for it presupposes the accursedness of the ‘archetypal Other’ which blackness seeks to escape. Black homophobic discourse is created in defense of the perceived ability to proclaim any type of prototypical identity that might be considered righteous, normal, and beyond the constructed ‘Other’ of blackness. If we continue to limit our understanding to binaries of male/female, white/black, so-called gay/so-called straight, black/white, saved/sinner, or in/out, we will never destabilize the colonial constructions of our imposed grotesqueness and be truly transformed. Black homophobia reveals a fear of challenging the places that have tradi-

11. West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, p. 54. West says, ‘The recovery of classical antiquity in the modern West produced what I shall call a “normative gaze”, namely an ideal from which to order and compare observations. This ideal was drawn from classical aesthetic values of beauty, proportion, and human form and classical cultural forms of moderation, self-control, and harmony’.

12. West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, p. 59. See West’s section on ‘Theoretical Consequences: Restrictive Powers in Modern Discourse’. I make the assertion that the devaluation of the African developed through the ‘normative gaze’ encompassed the sexuality of the African as well.

13. West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, p. 64. Paraphrasing West, I make the assertion that the justification of racial differences ‘grounded in nature, that is ontology and later biology’ preclude the ability of blackness, even in its binated form, from ever becoming a part of what is considered normal within the Western discourse of white supremacy.

tionally been the repository of our validation, pride, self-worth, wholeness, and righteousness: the Bible and the black church. Second, black homophobia expresses the fear of losing the ability to claim a normative identity and the frail stability that comes along with it. It is less a fear of the so-called homosexual and more a fear of questioning the powers that have shaped our identity: the power of white supremacy and the black church. Black homophobia sustains the subconscious belief of black abnormality, our 'archetypal otherness', and ensures that whiteness will remain a powerful hegemonic measure of normativity.

Epistemology of the Tent

Stephen R. Haynes says:

through the centuries the dominant paradigm for interpreting Ham's transgression has been sexual... Thus, for nearly two millennia biblical interpreters have held Ham and his descendants responsible for everything from the existence of slavery and serfdom to the perpetuation of sexual license and sexual perversion (including incest and sodomy), to the introduction of magical arts, astrology, idolatry, witchcraft, and heathen religion.¹⁴

As such, a biblical interpretation infused with sexual deviancy and *blackness* would come to affirm the infamy of Ham and his progeny. Ham and his descendants would become the foils for the creation of their own undoing and for the introduction of sexual evil in the world at large. I want to explain here my reasons for calling this Noah's curse, something which is quite contrary to the concept of it being Ham's curse (which by the way is itself a mis-designation). Queerly stated, as an outsider, as one who is expressing a hetero non-normative viewpoint, the first place to begin destabilizing the reasons for black homophobia and black grotesqueness is in re-naming, re-placing, and reinterpreting the act. These three elements will be used to develop an *epistemology of the tent*.

Re-naming the Act

Gerhard von Rad says that curses are 'proclaimed by specially authorized persons (cult prophets?) and supported by the faith community'.¹⁵ Only Noah has the power and the ability to curse; only Noah has the power and the ability to name. It is quite interesting to me that Ham,

14. Haynes, 'Original Dishonor', section 3.

15. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 137.

though clearly at the center of the act is not the one who is cursed, but his son, *Canaan* (Gen. 9.25). At least on one level we re-name the act when we understand the power dynamics of the event, which clearly shows that Noah has the power to curse and that it is Canaan who becomes the accursed. Why then is this a power Noah chooses to levy against his son's progeny? Walter Brueggemann states, 'Canaan is not to be understood as an ethnic grouping, but as a characterization of all who practice alternatives to obeying the sovereignty and trusting graciousness of Yahweh'.¹⁶ Accordingly, it can be said Canaan becomes synonymous with another way of being that is considered to be outside of the plan of YHWH (God). Canaan must also be understood in the context of estrangement from claims of land. What then is the role of Ham? If Canaan is understood as representing the land then Ham must be understood as the people embodying those who practice the alternative and in doing so, become estranged from the land (of Canaan) and the 'graciousness of YHWH'. What does this have to do with blackness and black homophobia? 'Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers' (Gen. 9.25). Ephraim Isaac tells us that this verse has fallen prey to great misinterpretation by 'medieval Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theologians transferring the curse of Canaan on to Ham'.¹⁷ This interpretation is central to the colonial construction of blackness as the estranged abnormal other that is outside of the graciousness of YHWH. Black homophobia is in part built on the concept of the fear that to accept alternative ways of being is a condemnation of our community and ensures our estrangement from the graciousness of YHWH.

Re-placing the Act

For the purposes of this project we will first deal directly with the actions that took place *inside of the tent* (Gen. 9.20-21). It is obvious, especially in light of the preceding exegetical re-naming I have provided, that the event is fraught with ambiguity and reversal. Randall C. Bailey says the tent is 'generally associated with security'.¹⁸ If this is the case, the ques-

16. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 91.

17. Ephraim Isaac, 'Ham (Person)', *ABD*, IV, pp. 31-32.

18. Bailey calls attention to Gen. 31.33, 'where Rachel is safe from Laban's search for his gods; Josh 7:21, where Achan places the *herem* in his tent for safe keeping; ... 2 Sam 6:17, where the ark is placed within a tent. He also says that trickery is associated with the tent in Judge 4:17ff., where Jael tricks Sisera into her tent, a place he thinks is safe'. Randall C. Bailey, 'They're Nothing but Incestuous Bastards: The Polemical Use of Sex and Sexuality in Hebrew Canon Narratives', in Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (eds.), *Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), pp. 121-38 (134).

tion to be asked is, 'What is Noah trying to keep safe?' One can say the tent is the holder of Noah's knowledge of his secret self. It is, in effect, a secret garden (Edenesque) hidden from the view of the world. It is quite interesting a fruit (grapes in this instance) would again be central to the disclosure of *knowledge*. That it is apparently *fruit* which reveals *sexual knowledge* here in the *new world* after the flood is quite profound. What is also interesting is the fact that the feminine dimension is not readily apparent inside of the tent, but assumed. Yet, it is here as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick says, 'knowledge' and 'sex' become conceptually inseparable and available.¹⁹ The uncovering (knowing) of the father in the new world, re-visits the uncovering (knowing) of the *Creator* in the Beginning (Eden). Like the Creator, Noah is above reproach and therefore found blameless for his indiscretion, beguilement, intoxication and *knowing*.²⁰ There is no Eve (no feminine) to be blamed here (for dishonor, for shame, for sin), *but then there is Ham*.

Revealing the Act

Ham becomes the foil for Noah's sexual secrets and as such is cursed for 'outing' Noah to his brothers.²¹ When viewed queerly, something more befalls Ham which is just as prominent and powerful. One must also understand in the tent, Ham *becomes Eve* and with his feminization befalls the same fate as Eve. In becoming feminized Ham feels pain and estrangement in association with his children just as Eve did. In the epistemology of the tent, where knowledge means sexual knowledge and secrets mean sexual secrets, we are also shown that the feminine, characterized as Ham (as the sexual deviant), is a key component of Noah's ability to curse Canaan. The heteronormative patriarchal positioning of Noah, Shem, and Japheth is righteously opposed to the accursed homoerotic non-normative feminization of Ham. How does secrecy become '*this secret*' (homoerotic and feminized) and how does '*this secret*' become raced? The re-covering of Noah by Shem and Japheth can be said to represent the closeting of the homoerotic and the blessing

19. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Epistemology of the Closet', in Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (eds.), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, (New York: Routledge Press, 1993), pp. 45-61 (49).

20. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989) concerning Noah's drunkenness interprets there is no blame attached to Noah since he was 'oblivious to the intoxicating effects of his discovery' (p. 65).

21. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, p. 65, points out the fact that Noah's actions take place inside his tent and this makes Ham's behavior 'all the more contemptible'.

of heteronormativity.²² The feminization of Ham and the cursing of Canaan becomes the damning of openness, of sexual difference, of the feminine, of homonormativity. The abnormally grotesque sex/gender construction of Ham-femme has to be created in order to maintain Noah's honor and hide his own *homoerotic* identity. The secret becomes raced when the curse is transferred from (the land of) Canaan on to (the people) Ham where subsequently, he is blackened and comes to embody sexual deviancy expressed as the masculine effeminate. Black homophobia is a fear of the tent (or the closet). It is a fear of becoming feminized, it is a fear of losing patriarchal positioning, it is a fear of access to normalcy, and it is a fear of embracing our own uniquely queer non-normativity. This is an interpretation which reveals something not 'readily apparent', but significant to our understanding of black homophobia.

Troubling the Waters

The refutations that have been offered in response to the prevailing heteronormative interpretations of Noah's curse have done much in the way of building a black ontology that allows for 'being black' to encompass archetypes that are nearer to heteronormativity and whiteness than those which were central to the propagation of a hermeneutic which formed the colonial understanding of black as less than equal. Through the religion of the African in America a hermeneutic was born that has always proclaimed the normativity of the black identity. The efforts to liberate the African in America from the shadow of the gospel of black grotesqueness and deviancy encompassed the whole community. It was as Evans posits a multivocal and multidimensional effort that developed a new and powerful hermeneutic of liberation which restored blackness into the family of God. We see ourselves no longer as the disinherited, but in moving forward as a community we have failed to maintain a religious coherence that is multivocal and multidimensional. The black hermeneutic that re-formed the center has now itself become the center, leaving a multitude of its people on the margins of the gospel message. *Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me* (Mt. 25.45). Who and what does black homophobia hide? Who and what are we attempting to keep inside of the tent (closet)? In our push for normalization have we allowed our spirit to become co-opted

22. Interestingly, Randall C. Bailey points out that it is the act of re-covering Noah by Shem and Japheth which draws suspicion, especially since the tent is generally associated with security. Bailey says, 'This causes the reader to think that maybe the suspicion of sexual innuendo is misdirected. It must have been only voyeurism on Ham's part' (Bailey, 'They're Nothing but Incestuous Bastards', p. 134).

by the dominant culture? Do we help maintain the very structures that we once fought to overcome? Does black homophobia reveal to us what we 'do not do for the least of these'? I am not implying that the so-called homosexual is the sole representative of the least of the black community or the black church. This line of questioning is meant to reveal the absence of certain dimensions and certain voices at the table. The presence of the poor, the under-educated, the young, the old, the so-called homosexual are the 'least' evident in the place that has long been central to the formation and maintenance of our identity: the black church. The relationship between the multivocality of the biblical narrative and the multidimensionality of African-American experience of which James H. Evans speaks has developed a black ontology which includes everything short of gay/lesbian identities as well as those who do not fit neatly into definitions of black normality. There is a denial of the external reality of the other, a sort of sexual/cultural autism which directs those who do have a voice to favor the hetero-normative interpretations that conserve the presuppositions of the Hamitic hypothesis and ensures black homophobia will remain intact. Interpretation as an act of human appropriation has done little to construct new meaning where it is not readily apparent; rather it has buttressed the old. We must begin to 'trouble the waters' that have lain placid for far too long and develop a sexual discourse of transformation which gives voice, presence and understanding to 'the least of these'.

Multivocality

Concerning the issue of multivocality, I feel it is appropriate to begin with the question of 'What voices are present?' as a means of understanding what voices are not present with regards to my queer understanding of Ham and its relation to black homophobia. '...Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers'. He also said, 'Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. May God make space for Japheth, and let him live in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave'. The voice of Noah is one that is *supravocal*. His voice is heard above all others and represents the voice of patriarchy, the masculine, righteousness (heteronormativity), inclusivity, exclusivity, and even God (covenant making). Noah's supravocality creates a chasm into which the feminine, the homoerotic, Ham, Canaan, even Shem and Japheth fall deathly silent. Even the animals of the ark are not heard. The tent becomes a place where the story is *de-vocalized* and in its place the supra-imposition of Noah's perspective becomes the witness of what was 'uncovered' and expressed by Ham. The loudness of Noah is more a concern for his shame/fear than it is a concern for Ham's actions/

inactions (sexual/asexual): Is a curse levied against Canaan for what Ham did (engage in a homoerotic act with his father or find his brothers engaged in a homoerotic act with their father and each other) or for what he did not do (respond to his father's drunken advances or those of his brothers or both)?

Why is the voice of the accursed so silent? One of the most striking observations concerning Noah's curse is the silence of Ham. We are told Ham does say something, but never is that utterance identified with any degree of certainty. Randall C. Bailey says, 'The story is fraught with ambiguity as to what exactly happens... Rather our concern is that the ambiguity leads the reader to resolve that something sexual has transpired, and regardless of the act, it was enough to justify a curse of slavery upon at least one of the descendants of Ham'.²³ It seems Ham's silence brings in other voices (most notably Noah's supravocality) which prevent him from ever being heard. His actions are colored by those who have the power to speak and to be heard. This act of 'calling out' by Ham has the effect of silencing him and once this is done, other acts of oppression or devaluation of Ham and his descendants are readily sanctioned, condoned, and accepted in both ancient and modern times.²⁴ The silence surrounding black homophobia reveals the silence imposed upon Ham and appropriated by the supravocality of colonialism. Our own silencing of the so-called homosexual is in essence a silent acceptance of white supravocality: we allow them to speak for us. In creating black homophobia as a means of silencing what we fear (either the loss of identity, feminization, the threat to black patriarchy, or the admittance of it [black identity] being a product of whiteness), we have in fact re-enacted the silence of Ham and placed the yoke of grotesqueness firmly upon our own necks. We have come to sustain our own oppression by *becoming oppressive* as evidenced by our abandonment of multivocality (representing the many) for supravocality (representing the righteous few or the righteous one). There is no multivocality here just a lone (supra) voice making unilateral decisions. Ham's discovery becomes Noah's shame, his silencing, Noah's curse. Black homophobia is the black church's shame; the surrounding silence, its curse.

Multidimensionality

What is multidimensional about the African-American experience? What helps us recognize there are many sides to life? Of course one can point directly to our history of being both slave and free as the most evident

23. Bailey, 'They're Nothing but Incestuous Bastards', p. 133.

24. Bailey, 'They're Nothing but Incestuous Bastards', p. 137.

example of that multi-dimensionality. DuBois says it best when he states, 'One ever feels twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder'.²⁵ DuBois' 'twoness' does not include straight or gay, yet does not our community 'wrestle' with this dimension also? If not, what do we really wrestle with? Is black sexuality not impinged upon these unreconciled strivings? Does the so-called homosexual trouble the process of reconciliation? Is this the basis of black homophobia? Can we truly say we are multi-dimensional if we purposely exclude the homosexual dimension of our community? That Ham is left without the ability to be reconciled to his father or his brothers, his progeny estranged from the land, and relegated to slavery pose for us the dilemma of reconciling ourselves to those in the church and community who are different yet of the same body? It is quite obvious Noah creates two dimensions: one encompassing the land of the blessed and one encompassing the land of those who shall be displaced and enslaved. One might take this a step further and view the land of the blessed as the land of heteronormativity (Shem and Japheth) and the land of the accursed as the land of the homoerotic (Ham/Canaan). Since blackness has been long associated with the land of the accursed one can begin to understand the reasons for the rejection of Canaan (and abnormality) for the right to dwell 'in the tents of Shem' (normalcy). If one is to inherit the land then one must accept the reality of Noah. In view of this we disavow multidimensionality in the rejection of Canaan, for the supradimensionalism of the tents of Shem where our homophobia reinforces heteronormativity and the promotion of one way of being. If we are to become truly multidimensional we must embrace the so-called homosexual in order to dismantle black homophobia and be reconciled before we are torn asunder.

Interpretation

Horace Griffin says:

Two primary reasons account for African American's negative view of homosexuality: 1) Slaves were mainly converted to Christianity by conservative white Christians who were sex-negative and opposed to homosexuality; 2) African Americans have recognized that conspiring with mainstream society in targeting homosexuals as the 'despised other' frees them from the deviant label of being sexually immoral and provides a degree of social acceptance.²⁶

25. See W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Random House, 1996), p. 5.

26. See Griffin, 'Their own Received them Not', p. 114.

Kelly Brown Douglas attributes black homophobia to black oppression saying, 'While the Black church and community share the logic of others who denounce homosexuality, their particular history of White racist oppression and sexual exploitation makes Black homophobia appear even more passionate, trenchant, and unyielding'.²⁷ The interpretive paradigms that support the less evident issues of sex, gender, race, and colonialism which drive black homophobic discourse can be easily identified if both the assertion of Griffin and Douglas are correct. What then, must be understood and challenged for us to truly begin to trouble the waters and reveal the truth concerning black homophobia? Cornell West says black sexuality is a 'form of black power over which whites have little control – yet its visible manifestations evoke the most visceral responses, be it one of seductive obsession or downright disgust'.²⁸ The obsession with homoerotic seduction is centered on the threat to the Christian claim to so-called heterosexual stability. The disgust directed at same-sex desires in the black church is the visceral response to a type of reasoning that views such love as a threat to masculinity, family and community. With regards to black homophobia being viewed as a threat to black masculinity Douglas says:

Even as homosexuality is seen as a threat to Black families, Black families have been held responsible for causing homosexuality, especially among males. Following the logic of the Moynihan Report,²⁹ many Black homophobic arguments stress the importance of a male-dominated family model. They suggest that the absence of such a model leaves young Black males woefully susceptible to the 'disease' of homosexuality. This is based on the false assumption that male homosexuality is equated with effeminate behavior. In the minds of various Black thinkers, homosexuality indicates a defect in the development of Black masculinity and is a perversion to manhood.³⁰

This sense of perversion rooted in the masculine effeminate (Ham) becomes the biblical accursedness bestowed on blackness. One must add

27. See Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), p. 89.

28. Cornell West, *Race Matters* (New York: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 125.

29. Kelly Brown Douglas is referring to a report written by then Assistant Secretary of Labor and Director of the Office of Policy Planning and Research, Daniel P. Moynihan in 1965 on the 'Negro Family'. Douglas says the 'report opens by presenting the "deterioration of the Negro family" as the "fundamental weakness of the Negro community"'. According to Douglas, Moynihan 'clearly named the black woman as the culprit'. Black femininity, especially black matriarchy, was the core problem imposing a 'crushing burden on the Negro male' (*Sexuality and the Black Church*, pp. 50-52).

30. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, p. 103.

to this the concept of the 'lesbian threat'.³¹ Such a perversion is seen as a direct threat to the community's concept of strength, independence, and dominance. Secondly, it is seen as a direct threat to black male patriarchy. Lastly, it reinforces the concept of the accursed nature of black femininity and black sexuality, especially black homosexuality. When the issue of black masculinity and black homophobia are viewed co-constitutively it can be said that the loss of the former is a fear of the loss of black patriarchal dominance and the control of black female bodies and femininity; the perpetuation of the latter the means by which those things are accomplished while still refusing to address the larger issues of sex, gender, race and power. The community still suffers because black masculinity and heteronormativity continue to validate themselves at the expense of the 'archetypal other' embodied by black homosexuality. Our protection of black masculinity perpetuates racism, sexism, gender bias and white power rather than develop solutions to our sexual silence and the multiple forms of oppression it belies. Kelly Brown Douglas says 'White culture has created an image of Black people as sexually deviant has been through its attacks on the Black family'.³² As such one of the responses of the black community and black church has been to 'advocate White family norms – that is to espouse a family model more acceptable within a White patriarchal and heterosexist society'.³³ Because the concept of the model of the Western family, with its stability and heterosexual patriarchal formation highly prized, 'all other forms – for example, the extended family, the female headed family, the lesbian family – are devalued'.³⁴ Accordingly, the assertion can be made that the black family embodies the normalization of black roles and identities; black homophobia embodies a fear of the loss of the efforts to 'clean up images of black sexuality' as well as negate the threat of what is seen as 'nonproductive and genocidal'³⁵ with regards to the maintenance of the

31. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, p. 104. Douglas points out that 'no individual is perhaps seen as more challenging to male prerogatives than a lesbian'. She quotes Cheryl Clark who says 'The black man may view the lesbian – who cannot be manipulated or seduced sexually by him – in much the same way the white slave master once viewed the black male, viz. as some perverse caricature of manhood threatening his position of dominance over the female body' (from 'Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance', *This Bridge Called my Back*, pp. 131-32).

32. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, p. 99.

33. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, p. 100.

34. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, p. 100. See Douglas's use of Cheryl Clark regarding the black community's response to the perceived threat of homosexuality to the black family.

35. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, p. 100.

black family. Black homophobia reveals a fear of the perceived fragility of the black family in light of homosexual relationships. But as more and more children are left without even one person to assist in their development the real fragility lies in our inability to relinquish our phobia and come to understand that the black family cannot afford to view itself according to the Western 'heterosexual dyad'. This attitude (of homophobia) is a direct threat to the community. The community's dogmatic approach to Scripture coupled with its zealous desire to emulate and, therefore, perpetuate the dominance of white cultural mores ensures that we will continue to support ideologies that do not engender the hope and freedom for all within the community. Black homophobia plays into the hands of white cultural power because it not only disallows the exposure of the relationship between itself and issues of race, sex, gender and power, it also creates discord among a community of people that cannot afford to expend energy on infighting while the 'structures of oppression that truly threaten Black life' remain intact.

Douglas says, 'The fact that homosexuality can be considered harmful to Black well-being is inextricably related to the sexual exploitation and denigration of Black people by White culture'.³⁶ As such, it can be said black homophobia is a direct response to white cultural hegemony and white cultural power which directs and denies the impact/role of white culture in the construction of black identity. Black homophobia becomes problematic in the maintenance of black identity for it (black homophobia) reveals to us that blackness is a performance of whiteness. We carry forward the fears of white folk as our own; it is their conceptualization of black identity that we maintain and not our own. White fear of black sexuality is a fear of black identity and black power; black fear of homosexuality is a fear of white power's ability to deny us the crumbs that are found on the floor of their 'tents'. We have closeted our power for the tents of whiteness. Claiming homophobia is claiming rightness according to white cultural hegemony and denies our ability to define ourselves on our terms, reinforcing the colonial notions of Ham and our own fear of losing access to claims of normativity and an identity that is valid according to the biblical text. White cultural hegemony has created and relies on the willingness of the black church and black community to maintain sexual suppression in the form of homophobia in order to deny black agency and closet issues concerning sex, gender, race and power. The homophobic utterances of the church defeat its own prophetic edge and liberative zeal.

36. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, p. 97.

*Black Theology as a Sexual Discourse of Transformation
for 'The Least of These'*

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me'. Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me (Mt. 25.37-40).

What has come to my attention of late is a sense of the feeling that the spirit of God has left the construct of liberation. Liberation was once the home of a great movement that heralded the call of God to 'let my people go'. Over the years the liberation movement has come to seem less relevant to a church and community which has gained access to popular culture and its offering of success. Today, the church speaks of liberation in economic terms. Righteousness is often measured by what one drives, where one lives, and by what one can 'tithe'. It is my assertion, based on the magnitude of the continued mis-education of our children (and adults); the overwhelming dross of persistent generational poverty; urban renewal shrouded in asset based community development gentrifying, fracturing, and disenfranchising whole neighborhoods; and the threat to future generations to various health-related issues from diabetes, heart disease, obesity and HIV/AIDS, that the spirit of liberation has lost its power. Somewhere along the way, the leadership of the church and community made a Faustian deal that ensures the future for some at the expense of the other. Yet when I look at the biblical narrative and the history of the movement of the Spirit of God, I see the power always rests with 'the least of these'. This queer analysis has revealed black homophobia is a fear of power—power which cannot be controlled. It is the power that rests with 'the least of these': the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the misunderstood, gays and lesbians. As it was with Ham, as it was with Jesus, as it was with the slave, as it is at present in the gay and lesbian community, the Spirit of freedom and Transformation is in the place where it would be least expected and not 'readily apparent'.

The Limits of Liberation

One of the most powerful elements found within the biblical message is its concern for the other. It is the concern for the other that needs to resonate within the black church and its appeal to the world to always do what is right with regards to the least of these. As stated earlier, Evans reveals it was the gospel message of the New Testament that

affirmed for the black church Jesus' positive stance toward the down-trodden and oppressed and 'gave sustenance to the struggle for survival and freedom in a hostile society'. We understood the black church and community was considered 'the least of these'. Black theology embodied the claim to a valid and valued identity viewed as God's own. With regards to this James Cone says this:

Black people affirm their being. This affirmation is made in the whole experience of being black in the hostile American society. Black theology is not a gift of the Christian gospel dispensed to slaves, rather it is an appropriation which black slaves made of the gospel given by their white oppressors. Black theology has been nurtured, sustained, and passed on in the black churches in their various ways of expression. Black theology has dealt with all the ultimate and violent issues of life and death for a people despised and degraded.³⁷

Black theology has been and remains to this day the primary catalyst of liberation thought and action. It is a source of nurturance the black church has used to deal with issues regarding degradation and oppression. This is the reason black theology has long been seen as a theology of liberation. A black theology of liberation

seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity... The message of liberation is the revelation of God as revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Freedom is the gospel. Jesus is the Liberator.³⁸

How then is black liberation relevant to the conversation surrounding a queer re-construction of Noah's curse and black homophobia? Interestingly, James H. Evans says that liberation is 'multidimensional' and is expressed as follows:

physical liberation: refers to the innate desire of all human beings to enjoy freedom of movement and association and the rights of self-determination, spiritual empowerment: where African-Americans come to understand and reclaim their intrinsic worth as human beings, and cultural liberation: refers to the freedom from negative self images, symbols, and stereotypes.³⁹

In keeping with a queer perspective of revealing meaning which is not readily apparent, it becomes obvious that black liberation has not been

37. James H. Cone, 'Black Theology: A Statement of the National Committee of Black Churchmen', in James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (eds.), *Black Theology: A Documentary History*. I. 1996-1979 (2nd rev. edn; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 37.

38. Cone, 'Black Theology', p. 38.

39. Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, p. 16.

concerned with *sexual liberation*. Evans says a common distortion of liberation is that it is 'unidimensional'. On whose distortion is this based? The claim of liberation as 'unidimensional' is a valid one for it is a heteronormative univocal construct concerned with the 'unreconciled strivings' for coherence (of the black identity) in terms of man/woman, rich/poor, black/white. The abnormal 'other' is the antitype that liberation wishes to silence and distance. It is a case of supradimensionality where the subsumption and silencing of homosexuality occurs and the multidimensionality which our community expresses as an inherent characteristic is not to be found. The freedom of Jesus upon which black liberation is founded is replaced with the estrangement of Ham and the cursing of Canaan. With black liberation the point of righteousness begins to take on the moralistic pietism of popular notions of salvation. This being the case, black homophobia can never be properly addressed by the apologetics of liberation talk. Cornel West says there are five stages in the development of black liberation theology: (1) 'Black Theology of Liberation as a Critique of Slavery'; (2) 'Black Theology of Liberation as a Critique of Institutional Racism'; (3) 'Black Theology of Liberation as a Critique of White North American Theology'; (4) 'Black Theology of Liberation as a Critique of U.S. Capitalism'; (5) 'Black Theology of Liberation as a Critique of Capitalist Civilization'.⁴⁰ Of the final point of evolution West notes:

The present challenge to black theologians is to put forward an understanding of the Christian gospel in the light of present circumstances that takes into account the complex ways in which racism (especially white racism) and sexism (especially male sexism) are integral to the class exploitative capitalist system of production as well as its repressive imperialist tentacles abroad; and to keep in view the crucial existential issues of death, disease, despair, dread, and disappointment that each and every individual must face within the context of these present circumstances. This theological perspective requires a move into a fifth stage: 'Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Capitalist Civilization'.

West's quintessential development of black liberation, though co-constitutive in nature, is primarily concerned with the underlying existential issues of capitalist wherewithal. West says that black liberation, while concerned with the amelioration of the 'socioeconomic conditions of black people', it does not have a clear-cut understanding of what that 'amelioration amounts to'. There is a failure to be specific and as such issues that do not fit within the context of the normalized discursive structure of black exploitation and oppression are silenced. It is not my

40. See West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, pp. 103-108.

intention to critique West (noting that his body of work and critique of liberation has evolved since 1982), but to highlight the limits of black liberation theology as something that even in its most refined form does not speak directly to the issue of black homophobia (in 2003). It is obvious we cannot get to the issues of sex, gender and race with the present understanding of black liberation, for it has difficulty in looking back (or in the mirror) for fear of losing the fleeting manna of the capitalistic influences of the present. Liberation buys into the binary of in/out and is limited by its inability to move beyond the self-interest of those who vocalize its claims. When it comes to black homophobia, liberation has run its course and has failed to dismantle the homophobic impulses of the church and the community. Irene Monroe says that black liberation promotes 'black male heterosexuality as the icon of racial suffering and for black liberation at the expense of those who suffer from multiple forms of oppression—that is women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people'.⁴¹ James Cone says, 'Like our failure to deal with classism, sexism blinded us to the depth of the problem of oppression in the black community, and it stifled the development of the human resources for fighting against it'.⁴² If we are to maintain a queer perspective, we must reinterpret this and say sexuality and our fear of the homoerotic has blinded us to the depth of the problem of oppression and the development of all human resources; it is the flaw that is not readily apparent to the black church. Cone makes this statement:

Black theologians and ministers, men and women, have major problems to face in the church and the society. Will we be able to face them adequately and thereby create structures in our churches and the community that are liberating? Do we have the courage to 'tell it like it is', not only in relation to white racism but also in regard to sexism and classicism in our churches. Telling the truth can be a risky venture in a church that defines its life on the basis of the professional self-interest of its leaders. It is always much easier to tell the truth about others, and black theologians and preachers have done this task well. But the critical task of the gospel is whether we can tell the truth about ourselves.⁴³

41. Irene Monroe, 'When and Where I Enter, then the Whole Race Enters with Me', in Robert E. Goss and Mona West (eds.), *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), pp. 82-91 (85).

42. Cone acknowledges the weakness of black theology to be its lack of sexual analysis. He states that, 'If we blacks are not self-critical in regard to our historical failings, we will not be able to correct ourselves in the present so that we can create a meaningful future'. James H. Cone, *For my People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), pp. 96-97.

43. Cone, *For my People*, pp. 97-98.

As I have stated earlier, 'White cultural hegemony has created and relies on the willingness of the black church and black community to maintain sexual suppression in the form of homophobia in order to deny black agency and closet issues concerning sex, gender, race, and power.' Kelly Brown Douglas says,

When Black churchgoers approach human sexuality as a vessel of sin and evil – as they perceive it to be only about genitals and sexual activity and as they refuse to promote frank public discourse concerning sexuality – they betray their enslaved religious heritage in that they have adopted the dominant Western European and Euro-American tradition of spiritualistic dualism and pietism.⁴⁴

Liberation has been co-opted by popular culture (e.g. Black Theology of Liberation as a Critique of Capitalist Civilization) and what we have been liberated 'from' (black abnormality and estrangement from the land) is subverted by that which we have been liberated 'to' (the 'tents' of Shem: the American dream). Liberation exposes the paradoxical nature of the black church – its 'twoness'; it is both the most 'radical of black institutions' and most imbued with the 'mythology and values of white America...'⁴⁵ and it stands to be torn asunder by its inability to reconcile itself to 'the least of these'.

Conclusion: Transformation as the Next Step

In my queer abandonment of liberation the question arises of 'what now?' Speaking as a queer theorist, I would have to say a clear-cut answer defeats the purpose of this paper. This paper is to 'trouble the waters' and give us new angles to old situations, which gives rise to new meanings, not give a definitive answer. Yet, I am compelled to at least offer a step in the direction of a new and queer way of thinking of responses to the question 'what now?' We must build upon the horizon of Cone, the prophetic methodology of West, and the radical boldness of Douglas. We must build a response that engages tradition by developing transformative discourse that *refers to the innate desire of all human beings to enjoy freedom of movement and association and the rights of self-determination, while claiming our intrinsic worth as humans beings in a culture that is free of negative self images, symbols, and stereotypes.* It must be a discourse that is a reclamation of black body-identities and their myriad expressions. The transformative next step that must be taken is

44. See Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, p. 121.

45. See Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (2nd edn; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), p. x.

imbedded in black anti-homophobic discourse that struggles with dismantling the heteronormative forces of oppression that keep our ability to unify locked in a conservative struggle for the maintenance of black identity. We must have a sixth stage—a new horizon: Black Theology as a Sexual Discourse of Transformation.

How do we begin to form a black theology as a sexual discourse of transformation? Kelly Brown Douglas says, 'Anything less than a positive acceptance of human sexuality heralds a faulty conception of what it means to be created in the image of God revealed in Jesus Christ'.⁴⁶ Black theology as a sexual discourse of transformation is one that liberates black bodies from becoming conformed to this world. It is a theology of perpetual renewal where the will of God reveals our own image as the image of 'the least of these': a mirror image of God's self in each and every one of us. How might it be done? We must take a methodology that effectively unmasks falsehoods. West proposes a 'dialectical methodology' consisting of a 'three-step' procedure of negation, preservation and transformation.

Negation: First, we must adopt an approach that is 'highly critical of dogmatic viewpoints of the gospel, questioning whether unjustifiable prejudgments are operative'.⁴⁷ The black church must be transformed from a 'place' that holds onto orthodoxy and liberation dogma to a 'space' where the ideas of sexual deviancy can be dismantled and where reconciliation can begin.⁴⁸ As such we are then able to negate 'past understandings of the gospel' and transform them 'into new ones'. We must acknowledge and affirm the gay and lesbian voices of our church and community and begin to celebrate the *multivocality* that is our heritage. It is in effect the restoration of 'sacred space', a liminal experience in which a new all-inclusive understanding can be attained and maintained. This is a movement 'into a new situation, not a return to the old' where the destruction of the old ways of being and understanding usher in transformation.⁴⁹

46. See Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, p. 121.

47. West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, p. 109.

48. E. Patrick Johnson in speaking about the 'communion between spirituality and sexuality' speaks of transforming the 'sacred space' of the church into the secular 'space' of the club so as to liberate the body. I am taking this understanding and applying this transformative step to the church. E. Patrick Johnson, 'Feeling the Spirit in the Dark', in Constantine-Simms (ed.), *The Greatest Taboo*, pp. 88-109 (105).

49. Dow Edgerton, 'Worship and Transformation', *The Chicago Theological Register*, LXXV (Fall 1985), pp. 11-19. Edgerton talks about Victor Turner's 'Liminality' and the process of transformation of space into 'sacred space' (pp. 13-14).

Preservation: Second, by attempting to expand our understanding of black people, black sexuality, homoeroticism, and homosexuality, we might come to 'preserve the truth God sides with the oppressed and acts on their behalf'.⁵⁰ We must acknowledge our *multidimensionality* and embrace the gay and lesbian members of our church and community, revel in their stories, welcome their talents, and rejoice in their living as a gift of God's creational genius.

Transformation: Finally, in believing 'in the living presence of God and the work of the Holy Spirit' we must 'acknowledge the constant and unfolding process of the gospel'.⁵¹ West says, 'Paradoxically, the gospel is unchanging, yet it is deepened by embracing and encompassing new human experiences'.⁵² For West, the gospel 'must speak to every age'. For a Black Theology as a Sexual Discourse of Transformation it must speak to everyone without respect of person. We must begin to practice black theology as a sexual discourse of transformation that expresses an *interpretation* of that which is not readily apparent and begin to dismantle the fear of our own non-normativity and embrace difference – we have those who can show us the way. It all begins with 'the least of these'.

50. West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, p. 109.

51. West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, p. 109.

52. West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, p. 110.