

The Bride of Christ with a hellish existence on earth: Insights from Eboni Turman, the black church and black liberation theology

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This research is based on the reading of Eboni Turman's work that focuses on body politics, especially through a theological paradigm. The study confirms that the body is a theological problem, and the extent of the problem stretches to the annals of Christian theology to the present, especially in light of racism, sexism and capitalism. The study will engage black womanist eschatology to draw from the rich well of seeing how the experience of black women gives new meaning to understanding the presence and coming of God through wrestling and struggle. The study will use the black church, especially in the United States of America (USA), to dialogue with. The researcher has previously done work on the black church in the USA and South Africa, as well as work on the contribution of African womanist theologians. Thus, the study uses the USA purely because of Eboni Turman's discussion on the body as a theological problem.

Contribution: The study seeks to invite men and the black church to remember the black sacred dance from old, which has remained with black women as they continue to dance, thus critiquing those who are out of rhythm and need it now more than ever.

Keywords: dance; black womanist; body; eschatology; black church.

Introduction

Eboni Marshall Turman, in her bedazzling theological contribution, *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, the Black Church, and the Council of Chalcedon*, a text that exhumes metaphysical and concrete theology that underpins body politics in theology and the world, posits that the body is a theological problem.¹ Body and gender, historically, socially, politically and economically, are perennial impediments to be addressed, especially in light of the experience of racism, class and sexism experienced by black women in society and in the black church. To be sure, a black womanist ethic accentuates the variables of black women's oppression within the triangulation of oppression meted out by white men, black men and white women (see Turman 2019b:66). Turman (2013:19–22) reveals politics of the body as played out in theological discourse, stretching from the annals of theological reflection and a somewhat dogmatic authority, as typified by the various models of high Christologies developed during the patristic period. The significance of such an inquiry and meditation into the history of theology, the socio-economic and sexist context is intriguing, especially considering Turman's geopolitical positionality as a black woman, and in particular a black theologian. This demonstrates one who seeks existentially to bend and critique time (time having elapsed in the confines of maleness and the body as a theological problem), while affirming the full humanity of Christ in the body, which confirms women's ontic and physiological significance that has been cast in doubt, invisibility and as an object of continuums of misuse. The significance of her contribution is noticeable as it is a marker for positionality as a black woman in a racist, capitalist and sexist America. However, Turman brings forth the sexist critique and confrontation of the exterior or general (the history of theology, the world etc.) and the interior or particular, namely the black church that is not merely an ecclesiastical institution but an institution uniquely developed behind the antebellum and the black experience. The black church is a significant achievement for black people, in particular the creativity of this church, worthy to be recorded in church history and the current context. Turman (2019b) asserts:

1. This research will not look at the body in Cartesian terms of the dualism of the mind and body problem and, by extension, race. There is a connection between the black female body, which in essence is a common denominator of the black experience for all black people that has resulted in breaking apart of black bodies and souls. To categorise the variables will deter this study from its intended aim.

Note: Special Collection: Women Theologies, sub-edited by Sinenhlanhla S. Chisale (Midlands State University, Zimbabwe) and Tanya van Wyk (University of Pretoria).

What is most peculiar about the prominence of sexual-gender injustice in Black churches is that the Black Church was born in rebellion against body injustice that it reproduces on the gender line. Black women comprise approximately 82 percent of Black church membership and yet they continue to be invisibilized by its moral corruption. (p. 68)

Turman's assertion is valid as it exposes the moral paradox of black liberation and full humanity through black manhood as flawed. She (2015:131) asserts: 'Regrettably, the insistence on Black manhood has too often been dependent on the dehumanization and demoralization of Black women'. The title of this study draws from the apocalyptic eschatological symbolism in the book of Revelation (19:7-8; 21:1-2) to merely accentuate the intended representation of the church in a gender category in the eyes of God, therefore presenting the church as feminine but cursed with the antichrist of racism and sexism. Furthermore, the title is fitting, as the creativity of black womanist eschatology will be demonstrated in this research. The aim of this study, through the lens of black liberation theology, is to dialogue and expose her significant theological treatment of the body problem in the church, which will continue throughout the ages presenting women as appendages of their co-equals, especially through racism and sexism. This point is important as Turman exhumes the patriarchal and racist foundations of theology that obliterates at first bodiliness and black bodiliness specifically. The study seeks to inquire why the black church, with its unique origin, adopts the white social construction of gender mythology (Turman 2015:130, 132).

The black church

The struggle against dismantling white supremacy, capitalism, sexism and racism is no stranger to the black church (see Day 2012:18) and black liberation theology (see Motlhabi 2009:170), because the black church is a church born out of struggle and the black experience. This experience is both an ontological and physiological reality occurring in real time, history, present and future, thus accounting in both interiors and exteriors of the physical and ontic reality that culminate in the contours of oppression and exploitation of black people. Biko (1987) asserts:

The whites in this country have placed themselves on a path of no return. So blatantly exploitative in terms of the mind and body is the practice of white racism that one wonders if the interests of blacks and whites in this country have not become so mutually exclusive as to exclude the possibility of there being 'room for all of us at the rendezvous of victory'. (p. 62)

It is significant to note that central to the oppression of black people by white supremacy is a deliberate division of their human essence, namely the body and the soul. To this end, the separation of body and soul is a perverted version of the Christological quest that is meant to reconcile the bodied divinity's full divinity and full humanity; therefore, Cone is correct to posit racism as a modern Christological problem (see Carter 2004:533). Erskine (1981:38) has noted the

idolatrous deity posture of white supremacy, especially the separation of black bodies and souls, which is a tragedy committed by a creature who wants to play God. Thus, this idolatrous play performance of being a God often results in the violation of creatures created in the image and likeness of God. Boesak (2004:10) has linked the theology of dehumanisation through claims of inferior races with the theft of the land and that of the souls of the Natives. The idea of positioning white supremacy – white maleness to be specific – to a God is a fundamental gaze to critique, condemn and resist any human being who seeks to be God at the expense of others. Thus, in the context of the emergence of the black church because of the separation of body and soul, which accounts for namelessness and invisibility in body and soul to the oppressors of the oppressed, demands an intentional clearer vision of reincarnation, but more fundamentally, it is the rejoining of all black bodies in the church and society. The charges against the black church's erasure and invisibility of women by accepting white social construct of gender mythology (Turman 2015:132) is valid and worrying. Turman (2015) argues:

To be sure, Black feminist and womanist scholars have extensively exposed the illegitimacy of sexual-gender mythology and uncovered its primary function as the defense and perseverance of unjust social structures that do not tell the truth. (p. 138)

The black church prides itself in being a pioneer of truth telling, speaking truth to power, but how does such pervasion continue? It is largely because of society and the white man creating specifically the black man in his image and likeness, an inherent trait that accepts an ecclesiastical, historical and theological faulty premise, which inhibits the depths of the life in the flesh. Turman (2018) argues:

White supremacy is a compound form of oppression that centers white heteropatriarchy as the divine ideal around which to build ideal communities. In the academy, white supremacy has been the defining hermeneutic to organize the concept of morality and to press conformity to an abstract, hegemonic idealized figure as the template for both human beings and for the Christian. (p. 23)

She (2018) further asserts:

Consequently, this white sovereign masculine is the template human; he is the one gifted with the image of God and burdened with the task of saving the world. He is a Christ figure; he crafts a God in his white, masculine, pious image and demands that the world worship him. The theoretical task within African American Christian ethics includes the uncoupling of whiteness and God for the sake of a new anthropological principle that endeavors to remove obstacles that prohibit human capacity for community and right relationship. (pp. 23-24)

It is fitting that Turman associates being Christian, white masculinity and the image of God in the same vein, because this explains the genealogical impetus that makes black masculinity loses its humanity, that of women, children and the church, as soon as taking on the 'deity' posture. Biko (1987) argues:

But the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood. Reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the 'inevitable position'. Deep inside his anger mounts at the accumulating insult, but he vents it in the wrong direction – on his fellow man in the township, on the property of black people. (p. 29)

While Biko might be speaking on the ontological status of black people in general in relation to power, there is a strong underlining inclination to connecting it to the particularity of man or maleness, who extends his anger not only in barring women but also in physically violating them. Today, when reading newspaper articles in South Africa concerning what is happening in the black church in Reformed, Catholic, African Independent Churches (AICs) and Pentecostal or charismatic churches, respectively, there is a need of a revolt by women against the corruption in the church but more specifically to the use and abuse of their bodies. This is important for lay-women to understand that despite reading the Bible, the values in terms of ethics are to a large degree linked to ethical or moral abstraction to the reality of being a woman, a black woman to be specific. Turman (2018:1) argues that democracy is in cahoots with white erogeneity atonement, the stimulus in the phallic symbolism of the cross, pornotropic visuals of black women suffering. She (2018:1) further argues that it is a problem to have a God who sees women but will not liberate them from demoncrachal realities emanating from the collusion of white women and men across racial lines. Turman (2018:1) argues against the pathologising of wilderness cries and suffering rather than pathologising the demon that oppresses women. For her, women's womanist creativity or creative wrestling gives profound and corporeal meaning to the Pauline call to fight against powers and principalities. Of course, this exorcism entails the problem of white women who oppress black women and women of colour because of the invisibilisation of black women; the result of such instances would lead to the conclusion that God is a racist, sexist and classist (see Turman 2018:2). Turman (2018:3–4) holds that despite the oppression of women, women must wrestle with these powers and principalities because black women's anger has the potential to creatively emerge or perform in ways that lead to social transformation. However, that transformation needs women's wrestling that requires engaging the demonic, she (2018) asserts, concerning what this fighting implies:

But it always demands the 'casting out of demons' and the assumption of 'God in us', en sarki dei, 'for reasons of health'. The processual trajectory of black women's survival and flourishing further entails 'a making' – sometimes making a way, sometimes making do, sometimes making it through, sometimes making it over, sometimes making something out of nothing, and sometimes making it up as we go, as fundament of self-liberating womanist creativity – but a deontological 'making' that, as noted on the final page of the text, always 'trusts the [telos] to [an all-seeing] God' (239). This work of casting out demons by the power of God in us, who sees us creatively making on the way, while still trusting the end to God, is black womanist liberation. (p. 4)

The black church has transcended definitions from others, for example, black invisibility and namelessness for its own meaning, and has used that black namelessness and invisibility as cardinal poles to pitch its tent as an ecclesial institution (see West 1999:113). Stewart (1999) asserts:

The Black church has taught perseverance; incited the establishment of a black Christian ethic; fuelled the fight for freedom, and provided people with a text, context, pretext, and subject for the confirmation of human dignity among the people of God. (p. 100)

Therefore, there has been within the church an ethic for justice in its totality, firstly, against the oppressors who dehumanise others through the Gospel. Secondly, the drive towards justice provides the new vitality of the church with the church being a source of empowerment, protest, resistance and a place one can call home. However, a third way has emerged in the church, rearing it away from the proclivities of justice; it is a 'custom' that has always been inherent in the church, however, with a hope that the theology of the black church would not suffer from it. This third way is a perverted logic that tramples on the former positives; this perversion of the *plerosis* of justice is sexist and patriarchal structures that have remained because of the symbol of a black male preacher – a consequence from the formalisation of the black church. The perverted logic can be seen in the fact that the separation of body and soul has extended the problem of race and sexism, at least within the black church, which is the fact that women remain with bodies and souls unreconciled to completeness and therefore not seen as complete humanity. What is worst is the fact that the church is actually a woman, the bride of Christ, whose sons both black and white have been insidious through behaviour and treatment to their sisters and mother. Perhaps the black historian Dr Hendrik Clark's statement about the role Africa played in the civilisation of the world, specifically Europe, is fitting here, when he asserts that 'Europe has done a terrible thing in that it has become a child who has given birth to its own mother'. We can accentuate that when considering the fact that how can a bride become a patriarch and sexist despite compelling evidence of the church's existential and eschatological symbolism being a woman? Turman (2014:129) asserts: 'Sexism in the black church is the antichrist'. In this article, the work of black womanist ethicist and theologian Eboni Marshall Turman will be considered as a guiding force or episteme, fundamentally because her work addresses black body politics and the black church. In this study, we will consider the deeply creative theological lenses she employs in addressing these issues. At the same time, the study is an urge to the black church to radically self-correct.

Eboni Marshall Turman: Black womanist ethic

To assert that the body is a theological problem surely raises eyebrows, because the Jesus that we know fits into our plethora of normativity, for we know the saviour who died and rose – now seated at the right hand of God the Father.

However, little attention is paid to our preferred metaphysics that keeps us content not to probe what it means now and then for God to have a body. Perhaps, it is this sensitivity that euthanises many to a deep death whose rot and odour is beginning to strangulate the church for its silence. The transcendent metaphysics of a bodied God is challenged from history to the existential concerning bodies who must contend for their divinity and full humanity. Eboni Turman problematises the treatment of women by tracing the rejection and misuse of women, specifically their bodiliness, through the history of Christian theology and its encounter with the divinity and bodiliness of the saviour. Christian theology begins with understanding the identity of Jesus (Turman 2013:19–20, 2019a:33). What is of importance is her treatment of the various forms of Christologies that often reflect a faith wrestling with the body, especially an enfleshed deity. The early Christological discussion between the Antiochian and Alexandrian schools of thought is typical in its formulation of placing emphasis on a high Christology, bolted by pre-existence and an indelible ontological status of Jesus that transcends his body (Turman 2013:20–26). One thing that is for certain is that the body of Jesus is as real as his resurrection and cannot be explained away; however, various explanations were conceived to explain an embodied God, such as assertions of enfleshment playing a restorative role to the original human condition or Jesus being believed to have divine flesh, the ‘Logos wearing humanity like a garment’ (see Turman 2013:27, 29). Often these discussions entailed serious identity politics, such as the view of either one or two hypostases or two natures that were operatively working in the physical body of Jesus Christ (see Turman 2013:30). Turman (2013:31–33) noted that the high Christology of Alexandria held the view that the humanity of Jesus never existed independently of the Logos, and this enfleshment bound Jesus and the Logos into one substantial reality. However, it must be noted that these discussions often threatened the unity of the church, thus requiring inroads to be made to make a consensus between the Antiochian and Alexandrian churches, resulting in the development of the Formula of Reunion; Turman (2013:34) asserts: ‘Taken together, the Formula of Reunion held that Jesus Christ was one person with two natures, born incarnate by the “Mother of God”’. Turman (2013) asserts:

The limits of Chalcedon notwithstanding, its almost compulsory assertion (given the political and theological zeitgeist) of a constant negotiation and crucial ‘coming-togetherness’ of opposing identities in Jesus Christ, clearly reveals how unfamiliar bodies, rather, bodies that transgress the boundaries of normativity as conceived by the arbiters of power, function as highly charged sites of contention. (p. 37)

She (2013) argues:

In other words, Jesus’s body was a problem which means that the problems of body and identity that contemporary Christian communication grapple with are not novel. Patristic theology specifically and early church history, more generally, elucidate how Christian identity and witness have largely emerged from and been shaped by the problem that the body poses. (p. 37)

Indeed, it is perhaps critical to see the body problem in theology as having deep roots in the history of the church and its dogmatics, although one can argue that perhaps what makes this more difficult is the preoccupation of the early church fathers with the loftiness of Greek philosophical constructs. It is puzzling how in the Apocalypse written by the Apostle John, temple symbolism is used extensively and seemingly can be understood by the early church. Of course, this does not mean there is no patriarchy in the early church; however, the point here is the initial language of the church and biblical Hebrews rooted in concrete symbolism, such as beliefs that human bodies are the temple of the Most High. Furthermore, there is also this duality between that which is holy and flesh despite the fact that the writer of Genesis 2 reveals God labouring with his hands to create the human being, but this discussion should be explored further because I doubt the biblical Hebrews saw things from a philosophical lens that dematerialise physicality. Turman (2013) asserts:

Christian communities often find themselves unable to escape the circularity of human oppression because they are rooted in a narrative that *seemingly* suggests that the body that defies normative wholeness must be *dehumanized* and choreographed to adhere to a specific narrative, one that ascribes to a binary hierarchy of sorts that too often divinizes certain kinds of flesh, while demonizing others. (p. 38)

In ‘Moving Heaven and Earth: A Womanist Dogmatics of Black Dance as Basileia’, Eboni Marshall Turman makes serious inroads to a conception of the black woman, body politics and the black church. She (2014:123–124) critiques sexism as the ecclesiastical reality and affirms the importance of heaven in a black womanist eschatology by using this body, unchoreographed but liturgically performed movement (the black dance), as an expression of the now-ness, immediacy and significance of heaven to black church women. Through this lens, through black art and the use of black dance, Turman locates the body of black women as a sight for a *plerosis*, she (2014:124–125) asserts: ‘Black women’s plerotic act in the black church insists upon putting heaven on their bodies, in spite of the ecclesial circumstances that would oppose it’. Turman’s metaphysical, existential and ecclesiastical insight locates the conception of heaven as heaven in relation to the existential reality. However, this approach is insightful, as again, heaven is not seen as at odds with axial motion of reality, the existential reality, but rather heaven is near. Thus, we should categorise black church speech that uses the eschatological motif to describe the present or God-talk as rooted in black history, the nearness of heaven and more fundamentally the nexus between what is now and what is to come. Turman (2014:126) notes that heaven in the black spirituals represents transcendent coded language, therefore affirming that the transcendent in black theology locates heaven within reach, which then informs a grasp of a transcendent God within creation while transcending all of history and materiality. This form of God-talk, according to Turman, is explicit in seeing the hereafter as here and now; the hereafter is a nexus existence of past, present and future. Turman (2014:126–127) notes that the black womanist eschatology criterion interconnection of

past, present and future is distinct and never mutually exclusive in God's not yet future. Therefore, for Turman, God as our help is revealed in black eschatology. Turman (2014:128) also problematises sexism in the black church by making distinctions between *kata sarka* [according to flesh] and *en sarka* [in the flesh]. The *kata sarka* is precisely rooted to the condition of women in the past and present; at the same time, this 'according to the flesh' is linked to the faulty tokenism given to women as they occupy positions that were previously reserved for men. For Turman, while these changes are overdue, they carry the propensity of getting approval from the same patriarchal 'male arbiters of ecclesial power'. Turman (2014) asserts:

In other words, the *kata sarka* historicity which constitutes the injustices of the 'real world' in which we live, and move, and have our being, which oppose heaven on every side, do not constrain the 'glory about to be revealed' to what is visibly apparent; rather, the *en sarki*, or that which is coming, is real and really stronger than the inequities that threaten our bodies and our souls. (p. 128)

The eschatology of black womanist theology is remarkable because it leaves no black women outside of God's interaction with the world. In fact, it suggests a blending of history, the existential and the eschatological reinterpreting of God's timely presence in all ages. Whereas men have forgotten about women despite the example set by Christ, God is indeed faithful. Turman (2014:128) notes that the history of sexism is a long history of exclusion of black women in the church, despite the history of black women ministers as critical in the black Christian experience. Drawing from other theologians and ethicists, Turman (2014:129) notes that the likes of Keri Day see the black church as a community of transcendence that is linked to agency and a place where women have found meaning for their bruised lives. To see the black church as community of transcendence is not a philosophical point but definitive of the ambience of the church influenced by God's contagious presence. Such a realisation prompts the question: how did we lose this? Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis on the link of soteriology with the body and soul, a practice that is no longer found in the church, thus signalling for the black church the same need of preaching used to control the bodies of women (2014:130). This behaviour is linked to the meniality of women in the church (Turman 2014:131). Turman (2014) asserts:

There is no doubt that sexism in the black church is a psychic and behavioral doppelganger of sorts. To echo Emilie m. Townes' consideration of the cultural production of evil, gender discrimination in the black church not only reveals that African American churches participate in the reproduction of white supremacy in black face, but eschatologically speaking, the sexist black church is a counterfeit reality that privileges past *kata sarka* racial-gender mythologies to oppose the *en sarki* authority and advent of heaven. Nowhere else is this more apparent than in the lie that is typically fashioned along the lines of, 'God does not call women to preach' or more generously, 'God does not call women to be pastors', both of which are claims that continue to be asserted in the new millennium, and many black women,

young, old, and in-between actually believe and endorse this defective assessment. (p. 131)

Turman (2014:132–133) makes a credible insight concerning the meniality of women by considering the capitalist traits of the role of sexism in the church through the ethic of submission, which exploits the labour of women for the benefit of men as women produce the capital and goods, which is the money and ministry. The exclusion of women is to promote castigation and prejudice of women because of their own bodiliness. Turman (2014) argues:

As such, sexism in the black church is irrevocably linked to the past and present, or as I have contended elsewhere, to *kata sarka* social historical realities that oppose God while exercising 'a pseudo-agency that is distinctly other from ... God's good creation in the biblical drama of creation and redemption'. Sexism in the black church is Barthian *das Nichtige* insofar as it seeks to impose hell with deadly resistance on black women and thus nullify heaven's coming to black women's real world. (p. 133)

She (2014) further asserts:

Sexism in the black church as Barthian *das Nichtige* demands eschatological vision; a vision of a 'coming' future that stimulates an 'at hand' pro-clitoral/pro-woman revolt that functions as the epistemological and ontological threat to afro-ecclesial gender discrimination. This eschatological vision cannot be fully determined by present realities that merely beget a reversal of the present order as it rides the slippery slope of solipsism that refuses to believe that there really can be a new way – a way that defies the contours of what has hitherto fore been done. Instead, eschatological vision that is accountable to black women's experience of gender discrimination in the black church, that is, the experience of Barthian *das Nichtige*, must nullify all that opposes heaven's coming by demanding that the church as it is presently constituted, pass away. (p. 133)

Turman (2014:134–135) advocates for seeing and hearing the Gospel again; the black womanist eschatology holds that God is coming and makes a way even in the hellish no way. Furthermore, the black women, interestingly, see the coming God in the patriarchal black church. Therefore, rehearing the Gospel is refusal to comply with oppression, because real heaven does not actually correspond to the form of this world, despite the parabolic language used to define heaven. For Turman (2014), it seems black women in the church have knowledge of heaven; she asserts:

Black womanist eschatology contends that something of heaven is known to black women that escapes the gaze of male normative eschatological vision as it manifests in the black church. The experience of sexism and the subjugation of black women in African American churches as it relates to male power compels a hearing of heaven 'at hand' that is accountable to black women's experience of heaven's opposition in church and society 'this day'. Heaven cannot be confined by sexist realities precisely because the coming *basileia* as gospels disrupts its 'would be nullifying opponents', *das Nichtige*, and transforms what is in order to establish what ought to be. For black women what was and what is sexism in the black church opposes but does not impede what is coming, that is, heaven's inbreaking. (p. 136)

The black church in need of the black dance: Concluding the dialogue

Turman's (2013, 2014, 2019b:66) focus on black womanist theology reveals not just the choreographed and unchoreographed roles of women, with their bodies, their liberation struggle against racism and sexism. But the emphasis on the black dance is critical not only to be observed and known of, given the fact that women are often those who keep that which is sacred, but for black men and the black church to return to its roots of dance as a way of bodily union geared towards worship, liberation and dismantling of oppressive structures. It is a move away from the black church's policing of women (see Day 2018:207; Lomax 2018:191) and recreating of Western constructs. Turman (2014:38) has argued that in the midst of this dance, known, preserved and performed by black women in silence, it is revealed that this silence is the actuality of the unspeakable speech expressing the beyond, consisting of a phonological creativity of the oppressed that is found in the silence that is present between words. Therefore, black dance is embodied by an in-body lexicon that functions as the primary source of womanist theology, and this dance itself cannot be said. Turman and Williams (2018:23) argue that African-American Christian ethics are embodied ethics because a neglect in embodiment accounts for domination and oppression that characterise white supremacy. Furthermore, for African-American ethicist, the Gospel is good news for the liberation of the oppressed; it is an embodied encounter (see Turman & Williams 2018:24). The idea of dance and embodiment is perhaps precisely what the black church has lost in the marginalisation and oppression of women, because true embodiment shatters abstraction for a concrete hermeneutic rooted in everyday-ness (Turman & Williams 2018:24). The insights from Turman and Williams point to the fact that sexism is not a church problem but an everyday problem which the church continues to perpetuate. Unless a real solution is addressed, which I contend is situated in a conjoint bodily dance of bodies, women will continue being reviled and their bodies will account as that which is not sacred. Lomax (2018:191) has proposed a move away from mere woundedness, which prioritises pain as above pleasure. Lomax (2018:190) calls for a rereading of the text for pleasure, because black womanhood is located in pleasure, which disrupts previous grammars. This approach also leads to loving the body, women's bodies specifically, thus making the body a critical theological project (see Lomax 2018:192).

A call back to the basics of black Christianity will return the black church to its slave religious roots defined by 'music', 'frenzy' and the 'preacher' (see Billingsely 1999:7). The music and the frenzy must remain only to transform the preacher from heteropatriarchy normativity. The spirituals produced by the African-American religious consciousness were music from the black experience, a worship in a strange and lonely land (see Hopkins & Antonia 2012:21). It is

interesting that some of the music produced by the spirituals was shaped between the father (God), mother and child motifs. Grown men and women saw in their dehumanisation, exploitation, slavery and oppression a need to find assured comfort and embrace, as a child seeks his or her mother. Dixon (1976:35) asserts songs such as 'Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child' were songs expressing uprootedness felt by everybody. Frazier (1964:16) has also argued that spirituals are communal songs; he asserts: 'More often, however, the religion of the Negro was expressed in the Spirituals showing faith in fellowship with his fellow slaves'. Therefore, a black womanist perspective is not out of bounds with the black church but reflective of the church, as she remains its main essence bodily, socially and spiritually. Turman (2019a:30) argued that womanist theology is an organic enterprise rooted in black women's love for nature, culture, Spirit, joy and laughter – womanism loves both male and female. The organic element of black womanism is the fact that it is born around black women's kitchen tables, on front porches, beauty salons, clubs, prayer closets and women's spaces in the black church (see Turman 2019a:30). The organic element of black womanist theology shares the same history as black theology, which is born from the womb of the black church, which is a surrogate world (see Day 2012:23) for black people in the world. Although womanist theology has often been critical of black theology's emphasis on the cross and suffering, which is seen through the Hagar symbolism as surrogacy (see Turman 2019a:31), the communal bonds of the slave religion are significant as it functions to work in the church and outside in the world. Turman (2019a:33) has noted that the black church is important to womanist theology; however, black womanist theology has decentred the black church, as there are other spiritual experiences occurring outside of it as not all black women are Christian. However, the call for performance of the black dance has never been internal, despite the fact that sexism in the black church is a mirror image of accepting being created in the image of white supremacy and not using the resource in the church as the black womanist hermeneutic does. Furthermore, this silent dance has occurred in both the church and the world, because even in the worship and prayers of black people, their prayers have never shared the same status as white prayers because of the radical differences of social and political realities (see Cone 1986).

Mdingi (2014:62, 84, 112) argues that the black church needs a soteriological syllogism which entails a salvific process operating dialectically on the bodies and the souls of black people – salvation and liberation proper. Perhaps there is then another category, or the accentuation of the initial category, to this soteriological syllogism that accounts for all black bodies and souls, a unity for the dehumanised and previously unbodied bodies. Malcolm X (1990) was correct in saying:

There can be no workers' solidarity until there is first some racial solidarity. We cannot think of uniting with others, until after we have first united among ourselves. We cannot think of being acceptable to others until we have first proven acceptable to

ourselves. One can't unite bananas with scattered leaves. (pp. 21–22)

The acceptability of black bodies and aesthetics, especially pertaining to women in the black church, must move beyond the mythologising of mere women's dress, covering of bodies and women's bodies often used as tests of holiness (see Day 2018:208; Lomax 2018:192). Instead, the physiology and ontology are necessary without sexism, being a category of possessing full humanity and holiness even among the previously oppressed who live in the surrogate world of the black church. Day (in Turman 2014:129) is correct in seeing the black church as a community of transcendence, although today this transcendence requires introspection and action from the male counterparts. The church has taken part in the struggle for integration; however, real integration is needed in the church for its sexism and amplification of dehumanising bodies of similar shade, strength, origin and survivors of the black experience because of adopting the sexism inherent in white supremacy and capitalism. The South African Students' Organisation (SASO) Manifesto (1969:2) argues that integration must not be worked for or forced upon people because 'integration follows automatically when the doors of prejudice are closed through the attainment of a just and free society'. Therefore, no lip service or postures of solidarity should be given to women and their plight; remove the prejudice against black bodies; campaigns are useful to spread awareness, but sexism is political. The church, which is often portrayed as the bride of Christ, the black womanist theology, hermeneutics, methodology and embodied ethics have revealed to us that heaven is now, despite the hell visited upon women (see Turman 2014:24, 134–135). Furthermore, the triad of experience of the past, present and future in black womanist eschatology (see Turman 2014:126–127) has revealed the immanence of God outside philosophical theological treatments but actually bears testimony of how women survive this long against racism, sexism and class and how they have inhabited the egalitarian theocracy of God, which many are still awaiting. At the same time, the paradigm of black womanist theology has accentuated the presence of hell in the church, which has been bought by blood. Turman (2014) argues:

Black women's sacred dance employs socially subjugated bodies – black women – as parabolic signifiers that use the potency of the present to signal the supremacy of the transcendent, which is *to come* this day for the glory forevermore. Beyond the hegemony of the text, black sacred dance reveals a future that is 'not yet' through the bodies of black women who en flesh the reversal of the present moment. (p. 39)

Frazier (1964) argues:

On the see Islands of the coast of South Carolina and Georgia where the slaves were most isolated from white, some of the Spirituals reveal some continuity with their African background. This continuity is to be found especially in what has been called the Afro-American shouts songs. These shout songs are so named because they were sung and are still sung while the Negro worshippers are engaged in what might be called a holy dance. This may be regarded as an example of the most primitive and elemental expression of religion among American Negroes.

Moreover, it provides an excellent illustration of Maret's contention that primitive man 'does not preach his religion, but dances it instead. (p. 13)

Conclusion

In Turman (2014:39) and Frazier (1964:13), sacred or holy dances are two flip sides of the same coin as the sacred dance of black women is empowered as a force or agency against exterior and interior sexism and racism, which ought to be destroyed here and now and even in the world to come – the methodology of a black womanist theology project's creative proclivities of a nexus of existential and eschatological leanings encountering hegemonic structures. Whereas Frazier's holy dance and shout songs provide the ambience of black spirituality, dancing a sermon demystifies the ecclesiastical 'normative' quality of a preacher, and all who join in holy dance are engaged in preaching; thus, indeed, in that moment 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gl 3:28 KJV). The sacred dance has survived, perhaps as a sign of God indwelling the black church, but more importantly for women who would now use the dance as instrumental in the existential, spiritual, political and theological demands of agency. In the context of South Africa, there is a need for this endeavour of addressing the body problem in the black churches, as women fall victim to subjugation, rape and direct dehumanisation. In newspaper articles, stories are told of pastors taking advantage of female congregants, such as the pastor who raped five² congregants in the name of giving them a blessing. There are stories of sexual grooming of young boys,³ and this treatment of women makes it easy to extend such demonic practices to children as well. South Africa was shocked last year when a young black girl at university was cut into pieces and her body parts were put in a suitcase and plastic bags by her boyfriend.⁴ The question of body politics and the body being a theological problem is a serious pandemic often at odds with the full humanity and divinity of black women, and all women as well, emanating from the initial creation and salvation. While black women through the black womanist eschatology paradigm have experienced both hell and heaven in the black church, hell must not be made comfortable in the church. The significance of black womanist theology is undoubtably significant and needed in the quest for total and tangible liberation. Black theologians are invited to behold the mystery of the transcendent God in heaven and hell; certainly, the work of Eboni Marshall Turman's prism is instructive and serves as hope for those committed to freedom fighting.

2. News24 published a story about the sentencing of the pastor who raped congregants; the article is entitled 'Pastor who raped congregants as a "blessing" gets 37 years behind bars'. Viewed from <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/pastor-who-raped-congregants-as-a-blessing-gets-37-years-behind-bars-20210927>.

3. 'Pastor accused of sexual grooming of boys misses court date'. Viewed from <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2022-01-27-pastor-accused-of-sexual-grooming-of-boys-misses-court-date/>.

4. A story was published by News24 with the title 'Law student's boyfriend arrested in East London after police find her body parts in suitcase, bags'. Viewed from <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/law-students-boyfriend-arrested-in-east-london-after-police-find-her-body-parts-in-suitcase-bags-20210819>.

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