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# Cone and Cannon: Black Theology and Visions of Society

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## Abstract

This essay inspired by the memory of James H. Cone (1938–2018) and Katie G. Cannon (1950–2018), explores the contributions of both scholars to the academy, society, and the public space. Drawing on selected publications, it argues that the recent “passing over” of these two liberationist theologians to other shores of existence warrant significant reflection on their legacies in combating social and other forms of death, reimagining black historical, communal, and eschatological existence, and visions of liberation, justice, and peace for all. They articulated an idea or vision of American society that ran counter to and sought to transcend the dominant construction or ethos of American society.

## Keywords

James H. Cone – Katie G. Cannon – Toni Morrison – Martin Luther King Jr. – Malcolm X – Karl Barth

## 1 Introduction

This essay is inspired by the memory of James H. Cone (1938–2018) and Katie G. Cannon (1950–2018) whom I had the honor to know. Among other things, the idea of inspiration evokes memory, positively speaking, and notions of heroic ancestry. James and Katie were both ancestry and contemporary. C.L.R. James claims in his “Notes on Hamlet” that the greatest tragedies deal with precisely the question of the confrontation of two ideas of society. They deal with it according to the innermost essence of drama—the two societies confront one

another within the mind of a single person.<sup>1</sup> In terms of the life of the mind and that of the Spirit, James' thesis applies to James Cone and Katie Cannon who represented a significant turn in the intervention of black theological consciousness into the religious/theological landscape in the second half of the twentieth-century and in the twenty-first century. Both African-American scholars were modernists in terms of their emphasis on subjectivity, liberation, and visions of society. Ostensibly, their contributions bore witness to a paradigm shift in the academy, society, and the public space: presence, liberationist, womanist, black. The following pages seek to elaborate on the aspects of the contribution of two outstanding African-American religious scholars and human beings in the twentieth-century. The central question revolves around the issue of their theological contributions toward a paradigm shift in the academy, society, and the public space. The recent "passing over" of these two liberationist theologians to other shores of existence warrant significant reflection on their legacies in combating social and other forms of death, reimagining black historical, communal, and eschatological existence, and visions of liberation, justice, and peace for all. They articulated an idea or vision of American society that sought to transcend the dominant construction or ethos of American society.

## 2 Black Liberation Theology: A Black Vision of Society

James Cone's seminal works like *Black Theology of Liberation* and *God of the Oppressed* helped to destabilize the hegemony of Eurocentric theology. Among other things, it was very much in keeping with the Black Power movements, part of the wider Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, and processes of decolonization and independence that were then ongoing in Africa, the Caribbean, and other spaces in the African Diaspora. While, arguably, there were various historical modes of black religious consciousness before the dawn of Cone's work, his line of thought was a manifestation of a conjunctive moment in the post-World War II world. As the world underwent reconfiguration, forms of theological thought and discourse that had legitimated the old theological constructs were undergoing closer critical scrutiny. Consequently, they had to be adapted and/or revised to address and correlate with the central tenets of Christian revelation and the pressing questions of humanization. Such

1 C.L.R. James, "Notes on Hamlet," in *The C.L.R. James Reader*, ed., Anna Grimshaw (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), 243–246, 243.

interrogations, though romantic, pointed toward the recovery of the transformative dimensions of Christianity, and the rehabilitation of black humanity.

While the case has been made that Cone's early work was heavily dependent on that of Karl Barth whose own project seemed to ignore the historical centuries that transpired between the dawn of Christianity in the first century of the common millennium and the twentieth, it is plausible that his theological method ultimately pointed toward a different horizon. It is more accurate to claim that Cone's methodological framework embraced a challenge that Barth, and others, placed to Americans: to consider the theological, religious, cultural, and artistic traditions that were emerging out of their own experience; rather than "mimicking" European or continental modes of theological reflection. The point is significant in terms of understanding the theologies of Cone and Cannon in relationship to C.L.R. James's statement used at the beginning of this section. The problem of two visions of society, to echo W.E.B. DuBois, is rooted in the very matrix of American culture. While addressing the problem might not necessarily fix the American dilemma, it gives the New World experiment a chance for survival, and thus a future that is non-apocalyptic. The work of both scholars reflect the deep systemic problem at the heart of American culture. While Cone addressed the "problem of the color line," Cannon deepened the critique from a "womanist" perspective. Arguably, they laid the foundation for wider and more profound analysis of the American problem or the problem of America. Processes of "othering" tend to be integral to the emergence and development of national projects. How does one do theology without recognition of those who have been expunged from the historical records? How does one reflect on the relationship between the human and the divine in the face of "invisibility?"

Following the conversation that followed Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison's plenary address, "Trouble in Paradise" at the 1995 American Academy of Religions/Society of Biblical Literature annual conferences, James Cone posed the following inter-related questions: How is it possible to articulate the liberating experience of faith, a faith that enables people to love their blackness, to endure terrible hardships and to withstand pain without losing their sanity in the struggle to be free? How do we construct a theology that empowers people to survive and to struggle for liberating change?<sup>2</sup>

Cone's interrogations go to the very heart of his entire project of liberation theology. Close reading and engagement reveal that the outlines of his

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2 See, Katie G. Cannon, "Trouble in Paradise: Representing Bliss in Non-Orgiastic Language," in *Toni Morrison Forty Years in the Clearing*, ed. Carmen R. Gillespie (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 26-40, 27.

liberationist theology are embedded in the structure of his questions. The goal of a black theology of liberation is to articulate a liberating experience of faith that enables people to love their blackness, and, by implication, not to hate it. It enables people to endure terrible hardships, and withstand pain rather than becoming insane in the quest for freedom. At stake is the issue of black empowerment. The task is how to construct a theology that empowers people to survive and struggle for liberating change. It is apposite to inquire about the relationship between the people and those who see it as their obligation to construct a theology that empowers people to survive and to struggle for liberating change. In various publications, Cone addressed this, and other critical questions, in a body of work that covered almost a half-century.

Cone's preface to the 1986 edition of his *A Black Theology of Liberation* correlates with the spirit in which he spoke above. Deeply self-reflective, it addressed issues overlooked in his previous work, defined the nature and scope of Black Theology, omissions, and limits of *A Black Theology of Liberation*. It deserves to be unpacked. Ostensibly, Cone needed to bear in mind that, as a pioneer, he was destined to undergo necessary oversights and limitations. To be human is to know and prophecy in part. The opposite tendency leads to absolutism, and the catastrophes that follow in its train. This reality was clear to Cone when, in defining theology, he argued that it is "not universal language about God." "Rather, it is human speech informed by historical and theological traditions, and written for particular times and places." It is contextual language that is defined by the human situation that births it. Appropriately, he wrote that "No one can write a theology for all times, places, and persons." Consequently, "when one reads a theological textbook, it is important to note the year of its publication, the audience for whom it was written, and the issues the author felt compelled to address."<sup>3</sup>

By extension, theology had a de-structuring and re-structuring function. Understood as "rational discourse about ultimate reality" theology "is also a prophetic word about the righteousness of God that must be spoken in clear, strong, and uncompromising language." According to Cone, "Oppressors never like to hear the truth in a socio-political context defined by their lies. That is why *A Black Theology of Liberation* was often rejected as racism in reverse by many whites, particularly theologians."<sup>4</sup>

The foregoing assertions significantly impacted Cone's personal and intellectual style. He confessed that his style of doing theology was influenced

3 James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), xi.

4 Ibid, xii.

more by Malcolm X than by Martin Luther King, Jr. Malcolm expressed what he felt deep within his being.<sup>5</sup> A consummate devotee to the muse of freedom, Cone appropriately confessed the certainty that his “intemperate behavior prevented some whites, whose intentions were more honorable than my responses suggested, from dialoguing with me.”<sup>6</sup>

Cone’s theological development has been marked by continuity and discontinuity. He notes that his critique of white theology is generally the same today as it was in 1970. But there are several significant shifts in his theological perspective since the publication of *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Cone adds that he has given a full account of his theological development in *My Soul Looks Back* (1982) and *For My People* (1984). In this essay, I want to mention four particular areas that have dramatically shifted in Cone: (1) sexism, (2) the exploitation of the Third World, (3) classism, and (4) the methodological dependence upon the neo-orthodox theology of Karl Barth (and other European theologians). According to Cone,

The most glaring limitation of *A Black Theology of Liberation* was my failure to be receptive to the problem of sexism in the black community as a whole.” (2) “Another serious limitation was my failure to incorporate a global analysis of oppression into *A Black Theology of Liberation*.” (3) “The third weakness of *A Black Theology of Liberation* was the absence of a clearly focused economic, class analysis of oppression” (4) “The fourth and last weakness that I wish to comment on was my inordinate methodological dependence upon the neo-orthodox theology of Karl Barth. Many of my critics (black and white) have emphasized this point. It is a legitimate criticism, and I can offer no explanation except to say that neo-orthodoxy was to me what liberal theology was to Martin Luther King, Jr. the only theological system with which I am intellectually comfortable [with] and which seemed compatible with the centrality of Jesus Christ in the black church community. I knew then as I know now that neo-orthodoxy was inadequate for my purposes, and that most American theologians who claimed that theological identity would vehemently reject my use of Karl Barth to interpret black theology.”<sup>7</sup>

In 1995, Cone stated that if he were then writing *A Black Theology of Liberation*, he would not have followed the theological structure that begins with a

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, xii–xviii.

methodology based on divine revelation, and then proceeds to explicate the doctrines of God, humanity, Christ, church, world, and eschatology. His thesis was that there is no “abstract” revelation, independent of human experiences. He continued: “God meets us in the human situation, not as an idea or concept that is self-evidently true. God encounters us in the human condition as the liberator of the poor and the weak, empowering them to fight for freedom because they were made for it.”<sup>8</sup>

In the same year, 1995, but this time in the context of Toni Morrison’s plenary address to the joint annual conferences of the American Academy of Religion/ Society of Biblical Literature, Cone reiterated this basic stance when he asked how is it possible to articulate the liberating experience of faith that enables people to love their blackness, endure terrible hardships, withstand pain without losing their sanity in the struggle to be free? In other words, “How do we construct a theology that empowers people to survive and struggle for liberating change?”<sup>9</sup> The intersections between theology, people’s empowerment, struggle and survival, and liberating change, that is, integral liberation, are enduring dimensions in Cone’s theological grammar.

Among other things, to remember James Cone is to recall his notion of God as Black, and concomitantly, the coming out of Black Liberation Theology in the academy, church, and American society. This was nothing but an epistemological revolution, some might define it as a scandal, that found echoes throughout Africa and the African Diaspora, including the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia, and beyond. Cone’s coming out represented part of a wider process of exit from the clutches of colonialism to which blacks had been historically subjected in the modern world. While the claim that his expression of liberation theology is modern, the notion reduces the radical significance of his theology in a world that hitherto had been constructed on patterns of domination and subordination. From this perspective, Cone’s thinking conjured a sense of fear and dread by the traditional custodians of power that the “invisible” subaltern was speaking back. Cone’s theological language has significant capacity to unmask the violence that underwrote most relationships and discursive frameworks in America. Thus said, Cone’s theology has significant potential to unmask the relationship between power, violence, and constructions of the sacred in America. In 1986 he declared a revised schema if he were to re-write *A Black Theology of Liberation*. He would not follow the theological structure that begins with a methodology based on divine revelation, and then proceeds to explicate the doctrines of God, humanity, Christ, church, world,

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8 Ibid, xix.

9 Cannon, “Trouble in Paradise,” 27.

and eschatology. That is, a theology that begins with first principles. His rationale was that “There is no ‘abstract’ revelation, independent of human experiences, to which theologians can appeal for evidence of what they say about the gospel.” On the contrary, “God meets us in the human situation, not as an idea or concept that is self-evidently true. God encounters us in the human condition as the liberator of the poor and the weak, empowering them to fight for freedom because they were made for it.” The question of the God and the human were inextricably connected, according to Cone. Ultimately, the correlation between God and human freedom, particularly black freedom, is at stake.

Reflection and critical engagement with these foundational dimensions of James Cone’s theology contain significant potential to illuminate, further the cause, and extend the work of Black Liberation Theology in the contemporary world. Recalling C.L.R. James’s insight on the confrontation between two ideas of society at the beginning of this essay, the enduring potential of Cone’s liberation theology lies in its capacity to unmask the relationship between constructions of the sacred, power, and violence in America. This idea is important for the integrity and vitality of the academy, especially now when the Humanities are under threat in the American academic landscape. Cone’s theological discourse of liberation warrant a reconfiguration of sources. The epistemological revolution it effected through its definition of God as black contributed to the globalization of black consciousness in the twentieth century, and the creation of the experience of inclusivity in the academy and elsewhere. On this, he was preceded by Marcus Garvey who had articulated the notion of the blackness of God in his philosophy. Cone’s theological development and notions of God had direct bearing on his interpretation of society. He was thus able to see how the fundamental principle of colonialism, divide and rule, functioned in American society through portrayal of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. as oppositional figures. In *Malcolm & Martin & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (1998) expressed Cone’s appeal to “freedom-loving Americans to turn to Martin and Malcolm for resources in the struggle for justice.”<sup>10</sup> The words, “Justice and Peace,” signified his commitment to these virtues, and their centrality in his theological reflections and writings. His elaboration was significant in terms of his re-imagining of the American public space. “This book,” he wrote, “is an examination of the meaning of justice and blackness in America in the context of the lives and thought of Martin King and Malcolm X.” Prophetically,

10 James Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), xi.

Cone declared that “Unless America recognizes the rights of human beings, its future is doomed.”<sup>11</sup>

Cone saw Martin and Malcolm as necessary ingredients in the African-American struggle for justice in the United States whom we should never be pitted against each other. Consequently, anyone who claimed to be for one and not the other did not understand their significance for the black community, America, or the world. He wrote emphatically, “We need both of them and we need them *together*.” Then, as someone who had wrestled deeply with Malcolm, Martin, and America, Cone spoke from the abyss/inferno: “Malcolm keeps Martin from being turned into a harmless American hero. Martin keeps Malcolm from being an ostracized black hero.”<sup>12</sup> The trumpet of conscience sounded when Cone declared that “We must declare where we stand on the great issues of our time” such as racism, sexism, class exploitation, and imperialism. Cone’s litany of exhortations included the imperative to break the cycle of violence in America and around the world. Since humans are meant for life, not death; freedom, not slavery; created for each other; not against each other; “We must, therefore, break down the barriers that separate people from one another.” Cone’s final exhortation or charge to direct our fight toward the goal of the beloved community of humankind on behalf of Malcolm, Martin, America, the world, and all who have given their lives in the struggle for justice.<sup>13</sup>

Since many rituals and projects of inclusion and community ironically involve exclusion, where were Martin and Malcolm’s mothers, Coretta King, Betty Shabazz, and Katie Cannon in Cone’s vision of the beloved community? This fundamentally heuristic question seeks to embrace and recognize the role of women in the African-American struggle for justice in America.

### 3 Remembering Katie Cannon: A Womanist Vision of Society

While it can be claimed that James Cone represented a more male-centered voice in the theological narrative, Katie Geneva Cannon’s was, of necessity, female; more specifically, “womanist.” They represented a more plural and global understanding of theologies. They made it possible to talk of theologies, rather than theology as a primarily Eurocentric Christian enterprise. “Womanist,” Katie Cannon’s signature term signified, among other things, the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 316.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 318.

meaning-making, interpretive function of theological and religious discourse. In 1990, James Cone noted Katie Cannon's voice as a member of the choir that supported Delores Williams in the development of womanist theology, was the most creative and challenging development that occurred since he published *A Black Theology of Liberation*.<sup>14</sup> Cannon's voice comes through in a definitive way in her essay "Trouble in Paradise: Representing Bliss in Non-Orgiastic Language," written in response to the Nobel Laureate, Toni Morrison's 1995 plenary address, "Trouble in Paradise," delivered to the American Academy of Religions/Society of Biblical Literature, is an effective platform to identify her contribution to the academy, black liberation theology, and society. It is relevant to consider Morrison's appeal to Cannon. If Cone's concern was "liberation for all," Cannon shared with Morrison the exclusion of religion, and by extension and consequently, the Humanities from contemporary academia. Cannon's exploration of the intersections between religion and literature was no secret. The work of Alice Walker, in particular, the concept of womanist had become inscribed in Cannon's naming and development of womanist theology.<sup>15</sup> (Cannon 1995: 23).

Speaking to an audience basically concerned with the issue of religion, it was imperative that Morrison, as novelist, address the connection between continuity, fecundity, and the renewal of literature and other cultural artifacts. This assertion that had significant meaning for Morrison appealed to Cannon through its power to fashion myths with significant capacity to exorcize hell.

Cannon, and the Amen Corner's, enthusiastic embrace of Morrison's presence at the Academy's annual meeting, provided the opportunity to express the author's importance to womanist religious scholars. In honoring Morrison, Cannon stated that the Nobel Laureate's "literary clairvoyance gives us almost unbearable descriptions of the multilayered misery and contradictions in the black American experience."<sup>16</sup> She added, "Deservedly, Morrison is one of the novelists liberation theologians turn to most often. Her narrative powers exemplify truth claims about bygone days of slavery and interweave the mythic into survivalist intentions of freed people."<sup>17</sup> She concluded that "Morrison's oeuvre speaks directly to womanists, black women religious scholars who affirm an intimate connection between justice making and the meaning of authentic faithful discipleship."<sup>18</sup>

14 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 200.

15 Katie Canon, *Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 23.

16 Cannon, "Trouble in Paradise," 27.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

Within the framework of Morrison's lecture, "Trouble in Paradise," Cannon defined the pedagogical strategies the Nobel Laureate used to interrogate the concept: Morrison challenged her audience to think about what, precisely, paradise really is, and by talking about the difficulty in writing her then forthcoming novel, *Paradise*, a richly detailed portrait of a black community in Oklahoma. In turn, Cannon structured her response to engage Morrison's lecture according to the fundamental challenges the novelist posed. What challenges did Morrison pose? What note did I take of Cannon's response and voice?

The first challenge was "to bring into sharper focus the re-imagining of blissful abode in a capitalist political economy thriving on marketable evil." In her critique of religious production, Morrison claimed that "Religious language is sometimes forced to bankrupt its subtlety and its mystery in order to bankroll its effect."<sup>19</sup> In response, Cannon articulated her understanding of the work of the Academy:

This means that, in the work world of the Academy of Religion, we need to embrace a vision of paradise that integrates character and behavior. An internal ethical criterion of heaven and earth being intimately in tandem, possibly touching, requires humans to participate responsibly in the world. Authentic faith can never be divorced from practical life. Since reality hinges on the moral laws of the universe, we need to be honest, just, and loving if we are serious about changing conditions that thwart life.<sup>20</sup>

In response to Morrison's proposal that "a sensitive, nuanced overview of the five traditional characteristics of paradise that must be examined, beauty, plenty, rest, exclusivity, and eternity,"<sup>21</sup> Cannon's conclusion was "Essentially, paradise, in the context of religious studies, is a utopian value that cannot be limited and bound."<sup>22</sup> At its best, a theo-ethical vision of paradise closes the circle of meaning securely around the fact that who we are determines what we ought to do; the flesh and blood of what we do tells others who we are.<sup>23</sup>

The second challenge that Morrison posed to the American Academy of Religions was the need to investigate the malignant push-pull tension between

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19 Ibid, 32.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid, 34.

23 Ibid, 35.

*paradiso* and *inferno*. Cannon responded that though Morrison was committed as ever to wrestling with *Paradise* as a moral compass, she asserted that hell does indeed provide answers to paradise's question.<sup>24</sup> Morrison's question concerning what the study of religion actually produces laid the foundation for Cannon to scaffold a number of critiques of the Academy. It is plausible to concede that Cannon saw the academy as hellish. Cannon identified two main dimensions of this hellish situation. Firstly, she claimed that Morrison's message said much about how essential it is for theologians to pay attention to the way bearers of inherited white supremacist privileges engage in disparaging remarks, grievous offense, and widespread assaults against people of color with impunity. Many who teach religion in colleges, universities, and seminaries participate in creating and sustaining institutionalized assaults that become living hells. Academic orthodoxy justifies such death-dealing behavior in a myriad of legitimating myths that sanction exclusive categories of reality. Power relationships in the ivory tower keep selected academicians in the traditional, hegemonic center as normative subjects while pushing the designated "other" to the despised periphery as marginalized objects.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, Cannon argued that due to an "invisible package of unearned assets," some members of scholarly guilds consciously minimize, ignore, trivialize, or deny institutionalized oppression. Others are indifferent to black misery and pain. However, in this hellish state of de facto racism, professors of religion differ greatly regarding the degree to which their interactions with racially ethnic colleagues and students inhibit their ability to see patterns of habituation and social forces as a result of destructive intellectual handiwork. Once the ready-made theological rationale for this type of dominant adaptation of systemic exclusion based upon rigid constructions of scholarly identity of excellence is in place, it becomes a cultural practice that takes on a life of its own.<sup>26</sup>

The third challenge Morrison posed to her audience was to elaborate rhetorical strategies in constructing texts in which religious belief is central to the narrative itself. As redacted by Cannon, the ultimate concern grounding Morrison's literary problem and its connection to the field of religion became very transparent in the third part of Morrison's lecture. Three fundamental points need to be made at this juncture. Firstly, Cannon's invocation of Morrison's interpretation of heaven was strategic, deliberate, and intentional. Anyone familiar with African-American or black culture would not fail to hear the rhetoric of signifying and call-and-response when Morrison declared: "My

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24 Ibid, 32.

25 Ibid, 32.

26 Ibid, 36.

literary problem is trying to use contemporary language to reveal not only what I believe to be the intellectual complexity of paradise, but to find language that seizes the imagination. Paradise is not about weakness. Nor is it naive or neurotic. But rather, paradise is sane, intelligent life itself.”<sup>27</sup> Secondly, it is critical to note that in the novel *Paradise* Morrison wanted to convey how it is impossible to disconnect the earthly achievement of former slaves and first generation children of freed people from their perception of the divine.

#### 4 Conclusion: Remember Katie Cannon and James Cone

Today, we are witnessing manifestation of the nightmare/hell in America, Europe, and around the world. The confrontation between two visions of society is as real as ever. In the midst of this situation, Katie Cannon and James Cone offer us significant resources toward negotiation of the passage between Heaven and Hell, Paradise and the Inferno. In the language of Vincent Harding who preceded them into glory, they were “signpost lives of our times”<sup>28</sup> Their language introduced new categories of thought into the academy, and called for new ways of practicing freedom, understanding identity, and organization of society. It is more important to learn from their example how to deal with the profound issues of our time, rather than to “mimic” them. Though some might argue that they focused more on social needs and ideas, the case can be easily made that their quest was for total existence. Ultimately, their intimate experience and knowledge of the black experience, in its *longue durée*, saved them from becoming adrift in the post-modern wilderness, and to develop brands of liberation and womanist theologies that contained significant clarity, and vision. They clearly recognized that two ideas of society confronted each other in the consciousness of a single individual like Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., or Toni Morrison. They clearly understood that the question of Paradise or two ideas of society, in which the old and the new generation, set face, each assured of its own right to power, was simply apocalyptic. Their faith, and those like Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, Audre Lorde, Oliver C. Cox, Walter Rodney, and others, kept them rooted and centered, as intellectuals. Depending on the form in which one embodies and seeks to resolve the problem facing contemporary black existence, the transition from what is considered old to the new can be perilous. It

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>28</sup> Vincent Harding, *Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 20, 74.

can lead to shipwreck. Cannon's reflections on Morrison's 1995 plenary address implicitly addressed the conflict between the older and the younger generation in quest of the new while stressing the need to recover a social vision in which the construction of texts in which religious belief is central to the narrative. In the final analysis, the lives and works of Katie Cannon and James Cone clearly demonstrate the centrality of religion in confronting power and organizing society on tracks that produce life for all.