

Katie Geneva Cannon's Canon on Womanist Ethics:

Reflections from African-South Africa

Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele)

ABSTRACT

My encounter with the works of the late Katie Geneva Cannon in the early nineties was timely. In my naivety, as I grappled with my ignorance and resistance to gender-identified frameworks, and in my earnest search for a liberative African women's framework, I found the works of womanist scholars like J. Grant, R. Weems, D. Williams, and K.G. Cannon to be most helpful and appropriate. Committed to the liberation and transformation of the lives, especially of African American women in the *here and now* through her womanist ethics, Cannon challenged and resisted the death-dealing forces of White supremacy/ racism, White patriarchy, Black patriarchy (especially within the Black Church), capitalist political economy, sexism, and homophobia, among others.

The important questions which form the core of the investigation in the present essay are: What constitutes the canon of Cannon's womanist Christian ethics? How can Cannon's womanist ethics contribute to the affirmation of the lives of African-South African women?

Introduction

I first met the (late) Katie Geneva Cannon in the early nineties through her article titled: "The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness."¹ At that point, I was grappling with the challenging task of self-mentorship in a heavily androcentric context of the biblical studies' academic guild. To use one of Cannon's phrases, in such a context, I would have been designated "One of the Canonical Boys."² While Cannon was a Christian ethicist and I a biblical scholar, I fell in love with her work(s), especially given the resonances between the African American

1 This important contribution by Cannon to Black womanist scholarship in general, and womanist Christian ethics in particular, was first published in Letty M. Russel, *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Westminster Press; 1985), 30-40.

2 Katie Geneva Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*. (New York: Continuum, 1995), 122.

Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) is a Professor of Old Testament Studies in the Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies at the University of South Africa.

<masenmj@unisa.ac.za> .