

Courage to Teach for Courage

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ABSTRACT

Katie Geneva Cannon is internationally well-known as a distinguished womanist Christian Social Ethicist. Her publications, lectures, preaching, and leadership in the American Academy of Religion, Society of Christian Ethics, and the Presbyterian Church USA are evidence of her renowned scholarship. Yet, her global persona as a scholar is seldom connected to her identity as a teacher. This essay considers the identity of Cannon, the teacher – whose love of teaching was intertwined with her courage to teach – both of which were as unconventional as her unconventional scholarship. Content analysis of her publications, particularly those on womanist pedagogy, her published syllabi, interviews, and testimonials of former students advance the argument that Cannon embodied her concept of “unshouted courage” as she taught in religious and theological classrooms throughout her career. This essay has two goals. First, this essay describes Cannon’s “unshouted courage” to teach against White supremacy and patriarchy in the academy while arguing that the aim of her teaching was for the assertion of the humanity of all Black people. Second, the essay constructs an outline of a womanist pedagogy that is indicative of courageous teaching that results in courageous students who embody the courage to act on behalf of and for the humanness and well-being of the Black community. The essay argues that Cannon’s love of teaching was woven into her courage and commitment to advance the humanity of Black people.

Introduction

Teaching is the love of my life.¹
- Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon

Katie Geneva Cannon is revered by former students and colleagues around the globe as a preeminent theologian, thinker, writer/publisher, and teacher. While these attributes are understood as interrelated and interdependent for an outstanding scholar like Cannon, her teacher persona merits close attention because it informs why she was an extraordinary scholar. The quote by Cannon at the beginning of this section was captured in her portrait/biography in the

1 Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, *I've Known Rivers: Lives of Loss and Liberation* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 33.

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