

Ann Cover
DIV 4107
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Talking Paper -- Should Issues of Human Sexuality Be Preached from the Pulpit?

Both morning sessions of the conference, "The Black Church and Human Sexuality", were filled with lively discussion and were enriching experiences for me. Yet the second morning I found myself engaged on a very personal level.

Although the topic for that second morning was "Preaching and Teaching on Sexuality", the four panelists finished their presentations with little mention of preaching. Dr. Alton Pollard spoke very candidly about a "Black Political Leadership Culture" wherein some African-American pastors and other leaders are "allowed" to teach and preach sexual "repression" (in his terms) to the laity of the church and to the community while acting out in sexually promiscuous ways, especially if their call for and work toward justice for the Black community is a prominent part of their ministry. Dr. Victor Anderson renounced his dependence on the Bible as the source of authority in defining for him the tenets of sexuality- and sexual orientation. He cited Aristotelian philosophy as embodied by Aquinas as his own basis for God being the Judge of life, and sexuality being most crucially about "right desire" and "right respect" for the other -- to whomever one is attracted. Mr. Dwayne Jenkins pleaded for churches to be open to the kind of realistic education about sexuality and HIV/ AIDS that organizations like his own could provide for the Black community at large and specifically for the Black church. Rev. Clifford Smith spoke for Ms. Watson regarding her challenge to the Black church to call the perpetrators of -sexual -violence -to accountability-and to-provide for the safety and validation of feelings for the-victims. Rev. Smith also shared- his experience in teaching adolescents and single adults about what he considers the essence of sexual responsibility vulnerability, mutuality, common expectations, power-sharing, and intimacy.

But it took challenge from the audience for the panel to publicly address the issue of preaching about sexuality from the pulpit, To the degree to which this panel was in agreement regarding the need for honest teaching of sexuality in the church, the panel held no consensus in regard to preaching the same. The responses included 1) begin by dropping the clichés so hurtful to gay and lesbian people, 2) do not preach on sexuality if you have not been educated beyond a singular viewpoint, in order that you harm none, and 3) recognize the need for pastors to be empowered to preach about sexuality.

The discussion became very personal for me when a clinical psychologist (woman) in the audience raised the question, "Should we empower pastors to preach about sexuality when many have embodied promiscuity?" (paraphrase) Dr. Pollard attempted an honest answer to her challenging question, stating that humility is a characteristic needed from the pulpit. The discussion of the entire group then focused for a while on the fact that many ministers/ preachers are placed on pedestals. These pedestals not only include an expectation of extraordinary lifestyle/ living but also an expectation of having "the" answers to life's most complex events and dilemmas.

In the midst of the discussion, was drawn into my own memories of being forced to develop my own theology of preaching for a homiletics class, and of accepting the first invitation to preach in my home church (to my own children and husband, to the people who have nurtured me in faith for the last decade). At this point in time I am at peace preaching only when I acknowledge that the words spoken are mine, a reflection of my worldview and my own theological tenses My

peace comes from trusting that the Holy Spirit who is among us in that gathering takes my words and interacts with each person uniquely. It is only in that interaction that the Word of God is spoken. think we (both African-American and white congregations) do our pastors a disservice by putting them on pedestals. thought back to what Rev. Monica Coleman had said the morning before as she addressed pastors in the audience regarding their ministry to victims of sexual violence: be willing to not know the answers and do so publicly-from the pulpit. We need to empower our pastors to struggle with us, to welcome conversation and questions, to lead the community/congregation in raising the hard questions, and to empower the congregation to discern God's will for our lives.

I sat in the conference during that second morning's discussion and reflected on how well several of the panelists had "preached" about sexuality over the course of both mornings. Mr. Jenkins, Dr. Pollard, Rev. Coleman, and Rev. Williams had presented the real stories of either their own lives or the life experiences of others. The presentation of those stories "preached" many messages. In the stories-not any absolute answers, we in the audience (holding a variety of view points about human sexuality) heard our own messages of challenge and call to ministry. Perhaps pastors need to be empowered to preach as such-to tell the real and the hard stories of life experiences and then to invite the Holy Spirit's power of grace to work among us-over time, again and again.

Talking Paper #3

Dialogue

Endora L. Harris

African American Church: Ministry to Black Families

Dr. Forrest Harris, professor

11-28-00

The Black Church, Sexuality and Sin

Isolation, confinement, intimidation, control, ignorance and lack of Love were the emotions experienced by enslaved African men and women. Their sexuality became the means of economic wealth to the white slavocracy. Black women were hardly considered women. In fact, Sojourner Truth exposed her breast, in protest, to an audience of white men and women in 1858. Many black historians assert that slavery produced the black female wench who was only good for reproduction by any means necessary and the black male buck, who was nothing more than a walking sperm bank. He was expected to stick and move and please brothers don't wear your feelings on your sleeves. "You didn't know and had no control over who was going to be the father of your child. It could be anybody from the master, to the overseer, to Tom who the master said you were going to have a baby by. The only thing you knew, at some level, was that the baby was yours. For nine months you had control," explains Gayle K. Porter, a clinical psychologist and director of the Johns Hopkins East Baltimore Community Mental Health Center.[i]

There were the perpetuation of child abuse and sexual abuse on an entire society in which beating and raping was neither secret nor metaphorical.[ii] What are the long-term effects of the aforementioned atrocities on a community of people? Did slavery spawn anger, low-self esteem, depression and self-hatred? How is this list of negative emotions manifested today? Can the sexuality of African-Americans be properly conveyed without relating the ramifications of the rage that contemporary blacks have inherited from their ancestors? Is this rage played out in the communities' sexuality?

Today, there is a move in the black church. Its genesis is with blacks who regard themselves scholars or intellectuals. Their goal is to rid the church of all the traditional biblical views of sexuality. They deduced that the Bible is an unfit source of information regarding the sexuality of human beings. They want blacks to throw away their cloaks of ignorance, but to do this, blacks must agree with them relating to the futility of Scripture in matters of sexuality. All blacks must become skeptics and doubters. Intellectuals proclaim from their lofty places that there is no sexual sin. Sin only includes improprieties committed against fellow human beings. Sexuality, that is human sexuality, to put it in secular terms, is the hot topic of the day!

To discuss the sexuality of blacks without a biblical perspective is a complete travesty. For those who are truly Christian, holding to biblical truth, excluding all excessiveness, the Bible is the one determining factor regarding sexuality. The goal of this paper is to rehash points made about sexuality during the conference and class. In addition, I will attempt to make a determination regarding those who should set forth policy regarding black sexuality in the church.

"We don't know what people were created to be or anything about their sexuality. The biology of sexuality is a mystery to us. How can we question the sexuality of another human being?" The class said.

"Sexuality is a hard topic in the church. During slavery black bodies were not seen as sacred," he said, "Flesh was exploited for the benefit and power of others. Blacks did not understand what it meant to be in relationship with others, as a result. Black males struggle today because they are portrayed as sexual beings only, he continues, black sexuality is skewed because of slavery. Moreover, the sexual ideology of both black females and males have been imbued by white male violence."

He said, "the issues have gone unaddressed in the black church, so they are unpacked. How will the black church address the black family and matters of sexuality. "

Not only is there sexual violence in black families; it owns a pew in many black churches. In fact, in the past, black churches have protected offenders and perpetuated their crimes because of cowardice in such matters. Until now, the black church has remained silent on the issue of sexuality, except for sending abused women back to their violent husband and, in essence, to their death.

Throughout this dialogue there were some reoccurring questions. Is the Bible the only source for sexuality? Is it as a metaphor, symbol or science? What sexual themes are played out in the Bible? Does the Bible support a system of structure for the black family? Many even questioned the validity of the Bible and its authoritative nature especially within the black church.

"We don't have precise understanding of the sexuality of human gender roles. I didn't know the difference between male and female when I was a kid. I was taught how to be a male," he said.

"Why are pastors viewed as fathers in the black church? In the United Methodist church they are one of us. They [pastors] have to roll up their sleeves and work along side us. By the way, we have homosexuals in our church and they have the gifts of the spirit. They have God given talent. What's the big deal God has accepted them," She said.

"The church sure isn't a safe place for most homosexuals," he said.

She questioned, "What is holiness? Is it appropriate to love some one for several years and then express that in a sexual way?"

"We can hate and still love God and they [biblical authors] can still love God and write such things in the Bible," she exhorted.

"What is marriage? Is it simply a social construct for people to exist legally or is it a covenant relationship between two people?" they moaned.

In contemplative thought regarding the classes' dialogue, the question of theology sprang up. Clearly there were some theological variances. My interpretation of the conversation led me to believe that most of the people in class as well as the panelist were Diest. According to what I heard and understood, the only way to know God is through reason, nature or science. These are the tenets of Diesm. Is this Christianity?

The Enlightenment dawned on the horizon and reason ruled the day and in liberal circles continues to wield the sword. In 1650 Europe, the Enlightenment was the impetus for a new kind of Christian thinking. This new thinking allowed Christians like others before them to "adapt Christian thought to them." "Doubt over faith and uniformity over divine interventions" was the tune of the day says Roger E. Olsen in his book, *The Story of Christian Theology*. He goes on to say, "both considered themselves Christians but their methods and ideas were antithetical in many ways to traditional Christian customs of thinking and viewing nature." Leading Diest's goal was to "transform Christianity into a universal natural religion of pure reason." [iii]

John Toland, the father of Diesm, said, "There could not be two equal authorities-reason and revelation- for it is reason that judges the truth of revelation. So sovereign reason replaces the witness of the Spirit in Christian authority. Therefore, the natural religion of reason is the standard by which every positive religion, including Christianity, is judged." [iv] Well, the "common Notions" of Diesm are reminiscent of the points made in the classroom and at the conference.

There is a thrust to understand God by human reason. Can humans out reason God? Because of skepticism towards institutions and traditions, many have gone off the deep end in trying to understand God by reason.

God says, "Although I call to you and ask that we reason together, my reason and thoughts are much higher than yours, so how can you understand or judge my ways using your finite, human reason?"

This human reason is elite, prejudice and limited. It exclude any biblically based spirituality. Their universal sphere is unable to grant any knowledge beyond it limitations especially as it relates to other variances relating to proposed views on sexuality. For instance, demonology is not an option, but "there are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence, the other is to believe, and to feel and excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors," Says C.S. Lewis in his book, *The Screwtape Letters*. Of course this is all nonsense to those who ascribed to the tenets of Diesm.

So what's the point of all of this? Remember my stated goal! Who has the right to write policy for the Christian, black church? Should people who are hostile towards God and his word determine what God says regarding sexuality? Are those who completely reject the Bible as authoritative

capable of determining the needs of blacks? Does human reason, intelligence and doubt outweigh faith in God? Who has the right to determine what God says about human sexuality?

I can't begin to discuss the nature of sexuality until the true police makers are determined and seated at the table. Blacks who are enraged, filled with hatred and exact self-hatred towards other blacks are diseased. Those who are angry and short on self-esteem are unhealthy. Nothing but a "triangle of pathologies" exist according to Daniel Patrick Moynihan. As a result, these kind of black people are incapable of determining the policy and the source of policy within the black church. More often than not, the goal, for them, is to purify the body politic by eliminating those who are capable of creating a diversion within the body. Blacks who don't understand holiness or the construct of marriage should not be in any position to discuss church policy before a captive church congregation or any other group of blacks. These are a part of the "elemental truths" of God's word and only infants are confused regarding them. At this point, the limitations of human reason are obvious.

Scripture is supreme was a sort of theme of John Wesley. Even he, with all of his reason, knowledge and education would not dare question the authority of God's word. Instead, he included reason, tradition and experience as essential interpretive tools for theology. Hence, the Wesleyan quadrilateral consist of four essential sources and tools of theology--Scripture, reason, tradition and experience.[v] According to Wesley all of these sources played a role in Christian thought so rather than reject them he put them in their proper perspective. His quadrilateral never became an equilateral because he continued to argue for the supreme authority of Scripture; "the others never overshadowed it." [vi]

Blacks who want to either throw the Bible away completely, or proof text the Bible so that they can justify their own behavior are not people I will listen to in dialogue regarding sexuality. Both extreme measures stand outside of the Great Tradition of Christian teaching. "A reasonable mini that uses logic and a warm heart and mind illumined by the Holy Spirit" in addition to the inspired word of God are need along with the elements of Wesley's quadrilateral are needed for proper biblical interpretation.

When blacks who are healthy and capable of mature biblical interpretation pull a chair up to the table of theology, I am ready to eat [discuss the topic of black sexuality]! Until then, I will not sit with people who have no interest in understanding the biblical perspective concerning sexuality because they worship their own opinions, they have chosen their own way, and it does not include God but god. Whatever the case, if black parents can determine the rules for children living in their homes so can God. Like black parents, he, too, says, "If you are going to live in my house, you are going to live by my rules because I bought you into this world and I'll take you out!"

[i] Jonetta Rose Barras, *Daddy's Little Girl: The Impact of Fatherlessness on Black Women*, (The Ballantine Publishing Group: New York, 2000), p 48.

[ii] Deborah Gray White, *Arnt'l a Woman* (W. W. Norton & Company: New York), 1999, P 9.

[iii] Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*, (Intervarsity Press, Illinois 1999) p 531.

[iv] *Ibid.* 527.

[v] *Ibid.* 513.

[vi] *Ibid.*

Cherie A. Booker
The African American Church: Ministry to Black Families
Dr. Forrest Harris
The Black Church & Human Sexuality Conference
November 28, 2000

The conference on The Black Church and Human Sexuality, and this course in general, rather than raise issues for me, has given me a "language" with which to articulate ideas, feelings and convictions I have long held. From the opening service on Wednesday evening where Dr. Alton Pollard focused on John 3:16 and Jesus' call for "whosoever," to the final session I attended on Thursday afternoon where Dr. Randall Bailey, in response to a somewhat distressed attendee's inquiry, "If not the bible then what?" empathetically suggested that along with the bible we must claim our experience with God and in some instances that will have to be in spite of what the text says. More than anything, the conference challenged attendees to think differently about very familiar passages in the bible and to begin entertaining the possibility that the biblical texts may not contain the final word on human sexuality neither is it the best place for one to turn for guidance on sexual behavior.

Because of my belief that for black people to flourish as a distinct cultural group and be empowered in the Western world, we must come into a conscious understanding of what it means to be black, the panelist that resonated most with me was Dr. Pollard. For too long christianization has meant westernization and for people who are not western, this has been extremely problematic. We have, as Dr. Pollard suggested, internalized values that produce incongruity in our life styles. It is therefore imperative that we come to an understanding of the value of cultural memory. It is my contention that the only way to achieve this cultural memory is to first value our African heritage enough to invest the time necessary to learn it and then teach it to our children. In my study of the Literature, Religion and Faith of the Hebrew Bible, it has become very clear to me that the Jews have survived and flourished in their Diaspora not because of their ability to assimilate, but because they were very clear about what it meant to be Jewish, they wrote it down (the Pentateuch), canonized it, and throughout the centuries, have consistently taught it to their children. They defined themselves. As African people in the Diaspora, we must also define ourselves. As Dr. Renita Weems so often says about her LRF course, "The stories of the Hebrew Bible do not tell us what God said, but rather they tell us what Israel said God said." As wonderfully empowering and affirming as Israel's story may be, and as many parallels with our own experience as we may find in their narratives, theirs is not our story. Africans in the Diaspora, as we begin the process of defining ourselves by, as Pollard says, "adding names to the Bible" and telling our own stories about God, we must also establish a pragmatic ethos of, "the moral and ethical components to being black" says Pollard.

Throughout the conference, as it has since my first semester at Vanderbilt, the issue of context and its relationship to interpretation once again seemed to be a central theme. This was particularly evident in Dr. Victor Anderson's treatment of the issue of sexual orientation. I must say that his discussion on the genetics of sexual orientation was a bit confusing but my overall understanding was that to some extent he would agree that sexual orientation is a biological issue. In other words homosexuals do not choose their sexual orientation. This conference was the first time I have been in a setting where homosexuality was discussed in such a manner that it was not portrayed as abhorrent, antisocial behavior. Anderson's discussion of his personal experience with his brother's death from AIDS and his interaction with his family surrounding the issue of his own sexual orientation, made this issue real for me and for the first time I could appreciate the parallels that are so often drawn between the black experience and the gay and lesbian

experience. For the first time it occurred to me that just as it is a "double whammy" to black and female, it must be triple the pain to attempt to negotiate one's way in American society as a person who is black, female and lesbian or black, male and gay. It is unfortunate that, for the most part, the black church may not be a safe haven for black homosexuals given that, according to Dr. Pollard, "its core values were derived from listening to people who hurt." Justice, righteousness, love, freedom and equality are the foundation upon which the black church was built and these same principles must continue to be applied in our encounters and relationships with "Whosoever."

Monica Coleman's treatment of the issue of sexual violence and the appropriate response of the church was particularly enlightening and resonated with me because of the way in which she articulated the fact that it was not a women's issue but everyone's issue, not simply because of the violence itself but more importantly because of its effects on the violated and in turn its effects on those with whom they are in relationship for the remainder of their lives. I have often thought about the horrors of being sexually violated and how devastating it must be for the individual, but I have never given much thought to how that experience plays itself out as the victims try to live in community with others and especially in the church. The notion that the church's first response may be to question whether or not someone is telling the truth is appalling and I concur with Ms. Coleman when she suggests that the business of the church is to believe people and help them work through the trauma. I would add however that the church must do this in a responsible manner, being sensitive to the fact that often the perpetrator is as much in need of their counsel as the victimized, particularly if he or she is someone who lives in community with the victim. Here the church must hold fast to the concept of the imago dei we are all made in the image of God and as such it is the church's responsibility to treat us all with love thus reducing pain rather than inflicting it.

In conclusion, as earlier stated, this conference has given me a language with which to articulate many of my previously held convictions regarding human sexuality and the way in which it is addressed, or not addressed, in the church. Additionally, as I reflect on the experience, I realize that I also gained insight into new understandings of old issues. I have a greater appreciation for the challenging issues surrounding sexual orientation, sexual violence, MV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. As our communities continue to deal with these issues, the church must develop ministries designed to empower its members and the larger community as we seek to come to terms with and define the ethical and moral components of being black and to rediscover the core values upon which the black church was founded, justice, righteousness, love, freedom and equality.

Paula C. Hoos
Ministry to Black Families
November 28, 2000

As a human anatomist with graduate training in reproductive biology, I am "at home" describing the anatomical structures and processes involved in sexual behavior. In fact, before entering seminary, I taught human anatomy and embryology in the medical school. I recognize that my background and, therefore, my comfort level discussing issues of sexuality is unique. However, even given that, I am constantly amazed by the embarrassment people of faith experience when discussing their God-given sexuality and their obvious discomfort in even naming the pertinent body parts. Paradoxically, those same people frequently become quite vocal when talking about homosexuality, adultery, and the "proper" role for women in marriage or in society as a whole.

They can quote "chapter and verse" to support their views that homosexuality is a sin, women are to be submissive to their husbands and silent in church, etc. Moreover, in American churches, difficulty discussing issues of sexuality appears to cut across racial cultural, and class differences. The reasons for their embarrassment as well as their opinionated stance on moral issues are, undoubtedly, complex and not easily reduced to a single cause. However, I suspect that undergirding their attitudes is the influence of the church (in particular, the white European church) and the associated influence of puritanical morality which dominated the development of American culture.

Although the Black church is profoundly influenced by its African heritage, the Black church in America is also heir to this tradition. It inherited the white Protestant view of solo scriptura and the Bible became its primary authority for theological reflection. Therefore, understanding what the Bible say about sexuality and how biblical sources are used in prescribing ethical behavior is crucial. Perhaps the biggest "aha" moment I had during our class discussion on sexuality and attending the conference on "The Black Church and Human Sexuality" was the moment I realized the absolute centrality of scripture in the Black church. When Alex said that, in the Black churches, the Bible was the authority forcefully implying that there was no other source for theological reflection for most people in the pews, I recognized the overwhelming influence of the scriptures in guiding (or misguiding) ethical thinking. The Bible left unchecked by tradition, experience, and reason (my Wesleyan roots are showing) can be a dangerous thing. Professor Bailey astutely pointed out obvious difficulties with the Deuteronomic laws concerning adultery, the aphorisms in Proverbs, and the attitudes in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians and rightly concluded that the Bible - as a product of a patriarchal, heterosexual society - is a dubious source for formulating sexual ethics. He suggested, "if the Bible is to be used for describing healthy relationships between men and women, we must claim the problem and then work against it." It is, therefore, crucial to put the Bible in dialogue with other sources.

As a anatomist/theologian, I believe one way we can do what Professor Bailey suggests is to dispel the myths of sexuality and sexual behavior by engaging in discussions that include "hard core" science and then examine our sexuality in light of the theological norms suggested by Smith in his book, *The Church in the Life of the Black Family*. Naming the body parts and processes, much like naming in the scripture, allows us to claim them as our own. It removes the veil of mystery associated with genitalia so that we can look at our bodies with new eyes and appreciate the incredible beauty, complexity, and intricacy of the human form. Continued use of euphemisms or street slang prevents us from seeing us as we truly are - exquisite creatures, beautiful children of God. We are created male and female in the "image of God" to be God's instruments to bring about liberation of all creation and to exhibit love and justice in our relationships with each other. Since we are created by God as sexual beings, evaluation of the morality and appropriateness of our relationships and behavior must be grounded on how well those behaviors reflect God's kind of love and justice. We must, therefore, openly discuss both the physicality and spirituality of our sexuality in order to be the fully human children of God which God intended us to be.

African American Church: Ministry to Families

Talking Paper # 3

28 November 2000

Randy Holste

Alton B. Pollard, III and His Understanding of Past and Present Black Societies

At this past week's event, I was given the opportunity to catch an inside glimpse of an important establishment of the Western world, the life and breath of the African American church. I grew up here in the South, North Carolina to be exact, and my previous understanding of Black congregations was somewhat painted over by the dominate, oppressive culture that claimed superiority over me. The realism that emanated from this forum painted a new picture to replace the old one that had been painted long ago, by the wrong artist. I only allotted a short time to visit the intriguing site, but I found it very rewarding, nonetheless. When I had the opportunity to pop my head in Alton B. Pollard, IH was discussing his understandings of the past African communities and today's African American communities. His primary focus being on Marriage and Sexuality in both societies. Let's take a closer look at my discernment of his presentation

One of the exemplary points I feel Dr. Pollard was expressing was that the notions and understandings of "marriage" are drastically different than they once were in the communities of Africa. Marriage between two peoples once meant a new and different life for the community, for the couple committed themselves to it, before they committed themselves to their relationship to one another. The extended or "inner generational" family in African times of the past were very important, they made up the community in which the couple lived. Their coming together in the act of marriage, in so many words literally brought together the entire community. The belief in biological regeneration and traditional roles played very big parts in the past African societies; the bride and groom's participation in this event continued their family's long-lived heritage of strengthening the community. In today's African (American) society, the couple takes a conflictual and blatantly opposite understanding, placing premier emphasis on the relationship to one another and placing communal benefit as an optional, worth-while commodity. I am not exactly sure as to why the drastic change occurred, but I have my own theories, however, I will not clarify them for it would take me off my intended path. It was my understanding that Pollard truly felt compelled to say that marriage, in the Black Family and community, must be seen as an institution that could, and should in fact, change the life of the surrounding black society for it is necessary for sustaining its identity. With this point, I would have to agree with Dr. Pollard. All marriages, especially those communions of African American peoples, should, in so many ways, focus on the benefits the marriage might have for the surrounding community, not with their lustful, sexual, human relationship to one another. The bonds produced in the communal marriage are much stronger and more miraculous than any that are created by sheer lust and physical desire. It takes rationalizing to understand his point and after taking the time to look for it and see it for what it truly is, I see it as a viable, life-giving understanding for the African American peoples. Let's look at this understanding in a little more detail

To view marriage as a communion of two independently lustful persons coming together because of physical allurements is all too common in today's society. The all too familiar phrases of "you complete me" and "I don't know what I would ever do without you" that fill the phone lines, letters, e-mails and ever so soft spoken whispers in the lovers ear dominate our world view of what love and relationship should be like. This Euro-American view of marriage and/or relationships built on love has turned us away from the true and more blatantly beneficial aspects of the marriage vows, especially the African American followers. To marry for individual, lustful reasons, as portrayed by today's society, is to represent an uncertainty about the love for one's own self, thinking he/she needs someone to fill the empty void. To have such a notion, represents to me, an unhealthy lifestyle, for individuals who do not truly love themselves are marrying others for the sole rationale that the other person might help them find that love they do not have. These persons are dealing with issues of low self-esteem and confidence. They do not have the understanding that they are "good", just as they are, for if they did they would not marry for such saddening and heart-wrenching reasons. It is no wonder the life of the Black family is in such

disarray; the individuals who make them up have come to the disillusioned conclusion that they are not even enough to love themselves as human beings.

If the African American population, and all people for that matter, had stuck with their roots and traditional images of marriage, these illegitimate notions would have never surfaced. They would have been secure in their own self worth for love of community means love of one's self. One cannot love something, namely a community or family unless it first loves it's self So to marry another person and have the marriage focus primarily on the betterment of the community is to represent a full and better life for the individual, in turn, the relationship, in turn, the surrounding community and family and, in turn, the world. To me, this is a much better scenario than the one previously spoken about (i.e. the Euro-American view of relationship and marriage) for it is one of empowerment and true, unexplainable, divine love.

Dr. Pollard, was correct when he said the institution of marriage has changed ultimately for the worst in the Black understanding because they are allowing the white, oppressive, supposedly dominate class find one more way to control the masses of African American citizens in the United States. The oppressors lead the so-called minority masses to believe that they are not individually sufficient, therefore worthless and not "good" or worthy of a complete, justifiable love. Mr. Pollard believes, as do I, we must break free from this misconceived notion and love thyself so that you can become a true participant in the community. To be in the community, in relationship is to ultimately find God's presence.

DIV 4107

James H. Macomber

Nov. 28, 2000

Third Paper: The Black Church as a Key to Dealing with Sexually Transmitted Diseases

I was able to attend only part of the Thursday afternoon panel discussion on what has to say about sexuality. Nevertheless, there was a considerable amount of discussion worth thinking about. The three panelists, Rev. Bailey, Rev. Marbury, and Rev. Ware, seemed to emphasize that the Bible's contribution to understanding sexuality issues is at best limited. There is, for example, the warning in Leviticus 15 about bodily impurity thereof. The Biblical text allows Jesus only one possibly sexual encounter according to one panelist, and the text keeps sexuality generally within the realm of the dirty. Yet the text can help with regard to understanding sexual violence, and it can do so even when it is not helpful but rather hurtful. The Hebrew Bible stories of Tamar and Hagar may be helpful here. However, Rev. Ware argued effectively that there is a strong reluctance in the Black Church to address such important contemporary issues as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

It seems to me that predominately white churches probably have much the same reluctance to deal with this social problem that affects the whole community, However we need to keep in mind that there are plenty of community agencies-hospitals, health boards and departments, and health awareness agencies-to which whites have free access while Blacks may perceive that they do not. Thus, once again, we encounter institutional racism issues that dictate that black-controlled institutions are best equipped to serve the Black community. Since the Black Church is the most visible, most comprehensive ministerial entity for the Black community, it makes sense that the Black Church would be in the best position to serve the needs of the Black community with respect to STDs and related sexuality issues. Thus, the reluctance of the Black Church as explained by Rev. Ware can be seen as problematic.

Of course there are many social problems that have arisen from the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We have witnessed that HIV has become an STD, particularly for many demographic constituencies that were not affected in the early years of the AIDS epidemic in this country. HIV has become a heterosexually transmitted disease, so it affects women as well as men.

According to Rev. Ware, this has hit the Black community particularly hard. She explained a number of specific problems and issues that relate to HIV/AIDS as an STD. One such problem is the HIV testing was not done on "non-profile" people-what I took to mean gay men and intravenous drug users-until recently. Furthermore, Black Churches strongly discourage workshops that address safe sex and use of condoms. The result is that many in the Black community play "Russian roulette" with their sex lives. Rev. Ware sees a compelling need for workshops where protective techniques are addressed. She obviously realizes that saying "no" is not enough; this is a technique that simply does not work.

Education about sexual choice is what is needed. Having full knowledge of the implications of choice and taking responsibility for one's own sexuality is a fundamental need. One must learn how to keep control of oneself. However, the fact that we all live in our own contexts complicates matters. This diversity of context leads to different views of sexuality just as it leads to differences in denominations. Yet it seems that Rev. Ware would agree that social institutions, and the Black Church in particular, face a challenge in getting past the limited usefulness of the biblical texts in order to deal with the challenge of HIV/AIDS as sexually transmitted disease. The second of these papers addressed the Black Church as the key to the survival and well being of Black people. This third one sets out a specific challenge to the Black Church is that key role for the Black community.

Michelle R. Jackson
Cultural Denigration, Sexual Expression
African American Church: Ministry to Black Families
Dr. Forrest Harris
November 28, 2000

Cultural Denigration, Sexual Expression

Although my exposure to the conference on Black Sexuality and the Church was limited, the effects of comments made by speaker, Kelly Brown Douglas, were not. She commented on (and this is my interpretation) a mainstream cultural conspiracy that left African Americans believing that their intrinsic value was less than that of everyone else around them. She suggested that once African Americans have internalized this belief, they then began enacting this belief through various outlets. Her contention is that sexual relationships are prime outlets for that belief.

I wonder if anyone could practically refute such a claim. Surely one only need listen to a "Snoop-Doggy-Dog," (a well known rap singer) song in order to see that many black men view their sexuality as a tool designed for selfish and immediate gratification. At the same time, it becomes clear that these same black men view black women as merely objects that serve as outlets for their physical needs. Indeed, such a snapshot of contemporary, black culture is sad; but sadder still is the fact that it is largely black, teenage girls, and black, young adult women who buy the music that make these men millions of dollars. The money spent by black women on this

type of music communicates a message to millions of black men. It says, "We agree with what you're saying about us. And not only do we agree, but we want to hear more of the same."

I remember sitting inside the house that I had recently moved into in Washington D.C., when I heard the foulest and filthiest language being blared through the walls of my home. When I stepped outside, the scene that I purveyed shocked me. Apparently a neighborhood resident that was also a disc jockey had set up his equipment on the back balcony, and had proceeded to throw an impromptu block party. While the artists varied, the general message was the same. Black women and black girls were called sluts, bitches, whores, hoes, cunts, dirty, gold-diggers, etc. Yet even more shocking than the unexpected loud music and its explicit content was the fact that a crowd of largely young, African American women had surrounded the back of this man's home. They were dancing to the music. Many of them had small children with them who were dancing as well. At least one young woman was holding a baby girl on her hip as she gyrated to the beat of the music. Most of them knew the words and were singing along with the music. When I asked the disc jockey to turn the music down, the crowd of women joined him in mouthing obscenities at me. Black men and black women uniformly unaware of how destructive their collective behavior is to themselves and their offspring.

Certainly a horrible self-image plays a large part in the propagation of such behavior. Yet there is another issue to consider. That issue is the availability of recreational options and emotional outlets. In same manner that basketball is relatively inexpensive and available to nearly every person within the African American community, so is sex. When I speak of expense I do not speak of unwanted pregnancies, emotional and physical battering, and the shattering of individual and collective spirits. I am speaking in terms of U.S. currency only.

Poor, black youths and adults cannot afford dates to the movies, they cannot afford to send wine and roses. They do not have cars with which to transport themselves or their prospective dates. They do not have recreational facilities and athletic teams at their disposal. Their existence is one of survival.

Budding artists cannot afford art supplies or classes. Musicians have no tutors. Yet, they do have sex. Its greatest cost comes with the purchasing of a condom, which is often times overlooked.

The black churches in these communities are of little help. Sex is often a taboo subject in church, so that the congregants are left to develop their own theology of sex. However, when sex is not taboo, it is unfortunately sensationalized. Normally a talented speaker will speak from the pulpit about the rampant abuses committed through sexual acts. But these speakers present these topics in an explicit and humorous manner. Although the audience is able to recognize themselves and their neighbors within the content of the "sermon," they are too busy enjoying the comments made, and laughing at the brazenness of the speaker.

Much like the women attending the block party, they also have their children present with them. The message that the children receive is that sex is bawdy, licentious, and funny. I join Kelly Brown Douglas in her concern about the degrading manner in which my African Americans have chosen to interpret themselves. I also agree that sex has become a way of expressing that hopelessness. I only add a reminder that the problem is in no way one-dimensional.

Andrea L. Roth Murdock
November 28, 2000
DIV 4107
Talking Paper #3

On Thursday, November 16, 2000, I had the pleasure of attending the first panel discussion at the seminar on The Black Church and Human Sexuality. The overall topic for the talks was Deconstructing Sexuality. I was very interested in this session because I have taken sexuality courses in the past and feel like it comes with a lot of assumptions and presuppositions. Deconstruction is an important part in finding truth and honesty when discussing important concepts. This is especially true when the topic at hand is one filled with emotion and personal ties. People are protective of their own sexuality and the sexuality of those they know and love. Also, people are often protective of the opinions of their churches and religious traditions. To focus on such personal aspects of life in a public setting, especially when trying to blend them in some way, is asking those present for a great deal of patience and openness for true communication. I feel like that was occurring during the first of the three panel discussions at the seminar. I am choosing to focus, for the purpose of this talking paper, on the presentation by the Rev. Monica Coleman and her perspective on how the Black Church can address the issue of sexual violence. Reverend Coleman brought up some points I have considered before and others I had not. Beyond that, all of her passions were true, heart felt, focused, and positive for her work.

The first point I would like to discuss is that of the church's work with people, souls, and God rather than with numbers and statistics. With my background in family studies and human services, the need to remember the focus is on people throughout all I professions was a point I have heard many, many times before. However, I know that it is one of the hardest to remember. In academic studies, it is common to talk about groups of people, percentages of a population, and trends within a subculture. What is challenging is learning about a culture of which you are not a part in a sufficient manor without generalizing to a point of misunderstanding. This confusion can happen within a culture as well between cultures. For example, it is one thing to say that (in general) white people do not understand the plight of Blacks. But, in the case of Rev. Coleman's discussion, it is another thing to say that white victims of sexual violence can understand Black victims of sexual violence better than Blacks who have never suffered the same fear and pain. What we must strive to do, as Rev. Coleman mentioned, is be a listening society, and more importantly, listening and believing churches.

Something else mentioned by Rev. Coleman that caught my attention was the comment that too often problems within the Black community go unreported because there is an attempt to keep a united front against racism. I had not heard this perspective before and found it interesting. Often, people try to discuss issues of racism as personal cases and not a societal problem. The same mindset also is used often in discussing the cases of sexual and/or domestic violence. People ask for the details of a specific incident without looking for societal ways to improve the situations bringing on these problems in the first place, The phenomenon of protecting one of "your own" in the face of the enemy even when that person has done you harm is not unique to African Americans However, in popular culture, it may be doing the most harm. Beyond the harm it is doing to the Black community itself in its protection of criminals, it also separates further the Blacks from the whites by perpetuating stereotypes such as an acceptance of crime in Black communities. In this portion of her discussion, Rev. Coleman also mentioned that within a tighter knit community, there is more chance for interaction between the victim and perpetrator than in a larger group of people. This casual meeting may continue to do harm to the victim long after the physical wounds have healed.

Finally, I will discuss some of the points made regarding the role of the church in the situations surrounding sexual violence, think understanding the role of theology in these situations is key. When facing someone who is questioning the loyalty of her or his God, how do we as people of faith respond honestly to that person and ourselves? I agree with Rev. Coleman in her statement that a victim cannot fake the kind of trauma that comes with experiencing sexual violence. If we as church people cannot believe them when they come to us with an issue from their own lives, how can we profess to believe in the indescribable events of the Bible? We must continue to struggle with the conflict that comes from the desire to take in the victims and protect them while wanting to avoiding those who have been sexual predators in the past. Rev. Coleman put it in the terms that God created and loved both the violated and the violator. If we accept this as true (and I am guessing most of us to some extent agree), than we too must reconcile our self-righteousness with our desire to show a Christ-like love to others. Most importantly, our role must be to show faith in others and what they say to be true, give them loving support throughout the healing process, and help them rebuild their trust in others by first finding trust in their faith and in their God.

Overall, this conference was very enlightening for me. I am sure I would have enjoyed the other discussions and was disappointed when unable to attend. However, the forthright communication that took place in my presence was informative. The discussion led by the Reverend Monica Coleman was especially interesting because she spoke to issues often seen as societal problems and not church problems. In relating how we interact with people who have been sexually violated, she clarified her position of where faith plays out its role in the dark world of sexual misconduct. In doing so, she reinforced the importance each of us plays in others' lives everyday.

Mary Allison Cates
African American Church: Ministry to Black Families
Prof Harris
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Talking Paper #3

No discussion about sexuality is complete without careful attention to the human predicament of embodiment, and the Black Church and Sexuality Conference was no exception. As Kelly Brown Douglas explained, embodied human sexuality is what gives humans the capacity to relate to each other and to God. The duality between body and soul is not just a psychological problem but also a spiritual and communal problem. Loving the whole of one's self is what enables one to love others and to love God. While the body/soul duality and the need for Church response is not specific to the African American community, much of the self-separation that the panelists spoke of was informed by African American experience.

Kelly Brown Douglas spoke of this duality in terms of black male homicide and black female teen pregnancy. Both are products of a sort of bodily hatred or self-hatred that often informs the African American experience. Black men are willing to kill others whose bodies look like theirs. Black women allow their bodies to be used as incubators for children. This body alienation brings to my mind our last class discussion in which we briefly examined slavery's impact on this problem. Women's bodies were used to satisfy the white slave owner's sexual desires. All slaves were seen as the property of the white man. It is no small wonder that the mind/body dualism is

part of the black existence. It is a problem as old as slavery and as modern as slavery's remnants in our society today.

According to Kelly Brown Douglas, it is the Black Church's job to convey to its children that their black bodies are beautiful in all of their distinctive qualities in order to discourage them from acting in self-negating ways toward other black bodies as well as their own.

Monica Coleman described the struggle of sexual violence victims to reclaim their bodies as their own. Relationships with the self, the community, and God are broken as victims "do not know what to do with their sexuality," are unable to trust those around them, and feel as if they have been forgotten by the God who is capable of far greater miracles such as parting the Red Sea. Coleman spoke from her own experience and the experiences of those she has counseled about the body alienation that causes one to vacillate between repression and promiscuity. What is unique about the effects of sexual violence among African Americans is that because black communities are frequently small and closely knit, both the perpetrator and the victim are likely part of the same community. This factor often serves to silence victims and to make the community less eager to respond. Coleman explained that the Black Church's job is to listen to and believe victims' stories, admit that the Church does not have all the answers, and be willing to journey with them toward healing.

Much of the dualism described by Kelly Brown Douglas and Monica Coleman sounds universal. African Americans are surely not the only ones who associate sin and gluttony and lust with their body selves, whose self-estrangement leads to broken relationships with others and God, and who are left trying to figure out what to do with their bodies. Is this unhealthy divided way of thinking and living merely a part of what it means to be American, or is it a product of white experience that has pervaded African American existence? Kelly Brown Douglas asserted that "the Black Church has adopted this spiritualistic dualism from the dominant culture." It is highly possible that slavery and the constant oppression of African Americans today are what lead African Americans to objectify their own bodies and to form tight communities that are unwilling to verbalize their weaknesses. No element of Black Church and Black culture can form outside of the injustice that has prevailed since the beginning of our country. However, I am left with the following question: Is the duality of the body and soul and the ill accord among selves, others, and God that results purely a product of white culture, or is there some figment of basic human tendency that divides one's self from within and without?

Black Church; Ministry to Families

Forrest E. Harris

Talking Paper #3

William Young 11/00

If the central goal of the Conference on the Black Church and Human Sexuality was to begin dialogue, it certainly served its purpose for me. The thought exuded out of it provoked thought from all who attended and were seriously interested. One thing I realized was that human sexuality is one of the most important issues of the church because of the emotional, spiritual, and positional prowess it has in the life of an individual, as well as the prowess it causes in a relationship. The power and being of sex is more than just physical intercourse, it really begins and ends in how one person treats another; how much worth a man gives a woman, and vice versa. In that light, I felt the conference did not treat enough the emotional and spiritual aspects of sex; we really did what has become the norm of the church, whether liberal, moderate, or

conservative, and that is just debate on the sociopolitical state of something that is spiritual before it becomes a public display,

The closest the conference really got to dealing with the emotional side of sexuality was the Thursday afternoon session. The issues given to the panelists to discuss (sexual behavior in the bible with married and un-married couples; the bible and sexual violence; STD's and the bible) seemed to be asked in a fashion that wanted answers that wanted to change our societies response to sex and its relationship to the bible. I appreciated the panelists and their admitted struggle with the ideas. They were real: they didn't claim to have the answers, as some of the audience probably came expecting. In fact, the point of the conference that day was clearly seen; it was not to provide answers, it was to begin the dialogue. The tragic problem of the church is that we document answers, most times ludicrous answers, to theo-spiritual queries that deserve debate and dialogue. The black church has not yet come to grips with the power healthy dialogue can have.

Having said that, the major struggle for me throughout the conference was not the issues addressed by the panelists, but it was the dialogue shared with the audience. Maybe it is due to my passionate attempts to openly seek truth and not doctrine, but many discussions I had with people after the conference, particularly Thursday, left me very exhausted and sometimes angry because many of my own people, some of them co-laborers in the preaching ministry, want to give a deaf ear to the obvious problems of the black community by communicating the bible in a staunchly literal and ultimately 'conservative' light. We know our peoples struggle with marriage, pre-marital sex, 'babies having babies', homosexuality; we know our youths struggle with their sexuality everyday, but we resign ourselves to the position of a theo-spiritual ostrich, sticking our heads in the sands of ignorance. Until the black church wakes up and stops ignoring sexuality and how we handle it as an intimate part of our spiritual response to the life God has given us, we will not be able to respond to the problems of the spirit that spill outward to our community. We must begin the dialogue, and allow it to continue.