

Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium

Volume 12

Article 14

12-1-2019

Review – Courtney Hall Lee, *Black Madonna: A Womanist Look at Mary of Nazareth*

Claudine Pannell-Goodlett

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/jbcts>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pannell-Goodlett, Claudine (2019) "Review – Courtney Hall Lee, *Black Madonna: A Womanist Look at Mary of Nazareth*," *Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium*: Vol. 12, Article 14.
Available at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/jbcts/vol12/iss1/14>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium* by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlangen1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

***Black Madonna: A Womanist Look at Mary of Nazareth.* Courtney Hall Lee. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books. 2017. xiv, 136pp. \$20.00. Paper ISBN: 9781498293792**

The images of Mary of Nazareth, mother of Jesus are often depicted in sacred art, greeting cards, names of churches and organizations, religious icons, stained glass windows, garden statues and so on. However, the iconic images of this woman seldom prompt questions such as, who was Mary of Nazareth, really? What is her status in religious traditions and practices other than Christianity or Catholicism? What was her daily life experience as a young woman, wife, mother, cousin, friend, or role model? Does her identity hold meaning in the current reality of Black women in America or other parts of the world?

Black Madonna: A Womanist Look at Mary of Nazareth illuminates an iconic figure not only for the dedicated scholar or theologian but presents Mary as a woman of stature for people of all faith traditions and ethnicities. In this timely work, Courtney Hall Lee examines several topics including the effects of slavery, social identity, social inferiority and social stereotypes on Black women and the concept of Black motherhood. The book provides an insightful overview of traditional Mariology that accentuates the history of beliefs about Mary in Eurocentric Christian and Islamic faith traditions. Finally, Hall creates a frame for conceptualizing a womanist Mariology. The book ultimately arrives at the place where racially motivated gun violence by police officers against Black children comes face to face with Black motherhood.

Hall summarizes the current state of womanist theology and briefly presents the work of several womanist scholars. From this she concludes that a womanist Mariology honoring Mary as a Black Madonna provides a new concept of Marian veneration through a womanist purview. Hall closes the discussion announcing that now is the time to "intimately know the mother of our Jesus Christ [because] no one is as important to the Black family as a mother." (xiv)

At the outset, Hall identifies herself as a Black Protestant woman having been taught to be like Sarah, Ruth and the Proverbs 31 woman. Without much consideration or understanding of the concept of intercessory prayer or Mary's role in it she recognizes that the Protestant

conversation about Mary has been limited to two main points: she bore Jesus in a manger and she saw Jesus after his resurrection.

Lee offers the reader an opportunity to go beyond traditional images of Mary and Black women and identify ordinary experiences that project significance and meaning for daily living. However, a major shortcoming of the book is that the examples of such experiences presented are limited to only those of motherhood and losing a child due to racial injustices accompanied by the consequential pain and suffering. Although she recommends M. Shawn Copeland's four strategies for developing a womanist view and study of Mary, the perspective and influence that other Black Catholic women bring to the conversation about who is Mary, the mother of Jesus, is conspicuously absent.

Hall accurately reveals that Black women are able to form their own theology of liberation by establishing an irreplaceable union with Jesus Christ. More specifically and importantly is that Black Catholic women's spirituality is deeply rooted in the Eucharist, communion with the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. However, the lament and voices of women who bear intimate witness to the personhood of Mary and Jesus of Nazareth are silent. The questions: What was Mary's daily life experience as a young woman, wife, mother, cousin, friend, or role model? Does her identity hold meaning in the current reality of Black women in America or other parts of the world? Other critical questions outside of motherhood, remain unanswered. Without a full appreciation for an understanding of and testament to the presence and experience of God in everyday living, how would we answer these important question?

Claudine Pannell-Goodlett, Ph.D.
Folayan Consulting
Jacksonville, FL