

Mitzi J. Smith. *Chloe and Her People: A Womanist Critical Dialogue with First Corinthians*. Eugene: Cascade, 2023. 136 pages. \$16.85.

In *Chloe and Her People: A Womanist Critical Dialogue with First Corinthians*, Mitzi Smith provides an ingenious and needed womanist dialogue with 1 Corinthians. Recognizing the authoritative position of the Pauline biblical corpus within traditional Christian doctrine, its influence in historical and contemporary society, and its problematic assertions toward women, enslavement, and the bodies and knowledge production of enslaved and formerly enslaved persons, Smith offers a womanist critical rhetorical reading of 1 Corinthians that engages both scholars and pastoral practitioners who are concerned with issues of injustice, inequity, and non-inclusion that have been historically justified by Pauline texts. Unlike most Pauline scholarship that has used historical-critical methods to justify or offer apologetics for Paul's teaching, this reading places the contextual analyses of 1 Corinthians chapters 1–4, 7, 11–14 in dialogue with Africana women's histories, artifacts, epistemologies, voice, traditions, and struggle toward unconditional liberation (Smith, 6). Her analysis sheds light on the embedded misogyny, patriarchy, and ambivalence toward enslaved persons in Paul's message to the Corinthians.

In chapter 2, Smith uses Antoinette Clark Wire's reconstruction of the Corinthian women prophets as a basis for her identification of the Chloe in 1 Corinthians 1 as a prominent freedwoman who was an owner of enslaved persons. Recognizing the prevalence of Chloe in the nomenclature of enslaved persons, Smith ingeniously places the 1 Corinthians Chloe in conversation with Frances Watkins Harper's Aunt Chloe poems to give voice to Chloe's stigmatization. In Chapter 3, Smith analyzes 1 Corinthians' discourse on divine and worldly knowledge to reveal Paul's rhetorical construction of binary epistemologies aimed at dismissing alternative cultural methods of wholistic knowledge production. Smith envisages Apollos as a revival for control over the Corinthian community. Diminishing the authority of the Alexandrian-born apostle Apollos' eloquent teaching privileges Paul as the sole arbiter of divine proclamation and authority. The diminishing of Apollos' culturally based knowledge is juxtaposed against the contestation of Black bodies and Africana wholistic ways of knowing.

In chapter 4, Smith provides a womanist critical reading of 1 Corinthians 11:1–16 by placing Paul's directives on the respective covering and uncovering of women's and men's hair and the glory, length, and cutting of hair in dialogue with issues concerning the natural hair of African-descended persons. Hair becomes a symbol of a divine hierarchy in which women are subordinated to men. Furthermore, the Pauline discourse on hair length and glory has served to dishonor Black natural hair and normalize whiteness. Placing Paul's hair doctrine in conversation with the historical and contemporary criminalization and policing of Black hair, Smith brings to light the ways in which Black women have struggled to conform to images of normative whiteness regarding their hair while others have "transgressed gendered and racialized norms" regarding hair (65). Her discussion reveals Paul's need to control bodies in Corinth and continued attempts to control Black bodies through constructed norms of white superiority and anti-Blackness.

Smith further discusses Paul's rhetorical construction of sexual politics and sexual ethics in chapter 5. Smith's close contextual reading of 1 Corinthians 7 and 13 identifies Paul's sexual ethic and politic of monogamy to be motivated by a need to avoid sexual immorality and promote self-control, not a commitment to love or marriage. Smith places Paul's 1 Corinthians 7 and 13 texts in conversation with the historical context of the African American quest for affirmed loving relationships, recognizing the systemic barriers that have impeded successful

Black partnered relationships and the ways in which the language of self-sacrifice and esteeming another above oneself have contributed to domestic abuse.

*Chloe and Her People* is an invaluable contribution to womanist scholarship. It is a bold rhetorical analysis using Smith's impeccable biblical scholarship to address Pauline texts that have continued to perpetuate gendered and racialized trauma for generations. As a scholar, I am elated by the wealth this book brings to womanist biblical discourse. Preachers who are committed to proclaiming a liberative message of racial and gender justice will find this book an indispensable resource. As a pastoral practitioner, I recognize, as Smith does, the ways in which Paul's doctrines have become embedded in the foundation of Christendom. Thus, there remains a need for further scholarship that employs Smith's groundbreaking work, particularly in the areas of homiletics and pastoral theology, in order to disrupt the status quo of the patriarchal, culturally denigrating Pauline apologetic and Pauline-affirming interpretations that are so pervasive in the Christian church and androcentric and racist cultures.

Lisa Maxine Goods, D. Min.

Ph.D. Student, Christian Theological Seminary

Affiliate Associate Professor of Preaching, Fuller Theological Seminary

Pasadena, CA