



***I FOUND REST WHEN I STOPPED CHASING GOD.***

## **INTERLUDE: ME & THE COLOR PURPLE**



The womanist theological tradition places Black literature and the experiences of Black women as a foundational basis for theological reflection, presenting it as a substantial ground for developing theology. As a non-binary, post-Christian womanist, this project builds upon the work initiated by Coleman, addressing the need for a theology that is non-dual, non-binary, transcolonial and cosmotheandric.

This approach aims to develop a functional theology that transcends traditional dichotomies, fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of both the divine and human experience. The foundation of this radical ethical spiritual tradition is my journey of following Jesus beyond the realms of whiteness and conventional Christianity.

Arriving at post-Christian R.E.S.T. (Radical Ethical Spiritual Tradition) dismantled the external pursuit of God, the relinquishment of personal agency, and the exclusive reliance on intuition for guidance.

Embracing self-actualization and authenticity illuminated the nuances of an emerging epistemological framework in my life. I veer away from defining it as liberation theology because it transcends the anticipation of divine salvation. Instead, finding divinity within my queer nonbinary identity catalyzed a profound sense of renewal during Pride in the Pews, a gathering for queer exiles of the black church.

While matriarchs in the church offered a sense of belonging, it was a flawed mirror of my true self. I encountered bullying within the Black community, especially in church environments. My journey was characterized by a constant feeling of being both too much and not enough, as I navigated a world that appeared reluctant to embrace the entirety of who I am.

The vulnerability required to attend this conference, committing to authenticity despite deep-seated fears, was transformative as a panel of trans women discussing Alice Walker's "The Color Purple," prompted me to publically name myself and confess that I had always found safety in being invisible. If anyone could teach lessons on sourcing safety, embracing vulnerability without fear or shame—it's black trans women .

I shared with them how my journey had always been a struggle, caught between feeling like too much and not enough, navigating a world that compelled me to live fragmented and serve a god who seemed hesitant to embrace all that I am. For the first time, within this crucible of self-discovery, my past, present, and future fused into a moment of profound clarity and reconciliation.

When one of the panelists invoked Shug Avery's words, "It pisses God off to walk past the color purple and not notice it," everything clicked. I grasped the concepts of sin and salvation anew. If sin is finding safety in invisibility, then salvation is the complete embrace of my authentic self. This view posits sin as anchored in shame and the fear of judgment, suggesting that sin extends beyond traditional moral failings to include the denial of one's true identity and the retreat into obscurity driven by fear. Therefore, liberation from this sin involves a bold move towards visibility, authenticity, and self-acceptance, confronting the shame and fear intent on silencing our true selves. By embracing our authenticity, we break free from sin's confines and affirm our identities' inherent worth and dignity, untouched by external judgments. This realization underscored the divinity within and beside me, leading me down a path of self-actualization, renewal, and the rediscovery of my sacred self.

The color purple was not only a representation of the complexity and beauty of my nonbinary identity but an insight that represented a full-circle moment for me. As a post-Christian, I was reclaiming my tradition within the framework of womanist thought, which emphasizes self-theologizing and values the literary contributions of Black women. This alignment with the womanist tradition highlighted a return to my roots, where personal experience and the collective wisdom of Black women's narratives guide my understanding of the divine.

"The Color Purple" serves not just as a contrast but as an alternative, challenging the valuation and judgment placed upon "otherness." This perspective suggests that radical ethical spirituality must be anchored in tradition, presenting tradition not as rigid or binary but as inherently queer, much like my own identity. It represented a middle ground, a space where I found god in me and loved them fiercely.

My vocational workshop, grounded in a radical ethical spirituality informed by tradition—or REST—aligns deeply with my commitment to promoting self-actualization among Black students. This framework crystallized during a moment of profound clarity at the Pride in the Pews conference on Spelman's campus. Where only 10 years earlier, in my role as a campus minister at the Atlanta University Center, this same setting had sparked my commitment to guiding Black students toward a deeper understanding of God. This experience—a fusion of personal memory, reconciliation, pain, vulnerability, authenticity, self-actualization, meaning, and purpose—rekindled my appreciation for the ethnographic religion of the Black church—and the indispensability of tradition.

I came to understand that tradition is neither static nor merely inherited; it is dynamic and conjured anew by each generation, blending the wisdom of the past with the present's realities. It's within this creative tension and the act of conjuring that we truly find ourselves. Tradition is not just a legacy handed down through the ages; it is actively shaped and reimagined by us. It acts as a compass on our spiritual journey, offering hope and resilience, and igniting our imagination.

This perspective on tradition cultivates harmony, highlighting our unique beauty while integrating us into a collective tapestry. It confronts and deconstructs binaries.

Just like me and the color purple.