

Womanist theologian Delores Williams dies at 88

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(Courtesy of Union Theological Seminary)

Delores Williams, one of the founders of womanist theology, died on November 17 at the age of 88.

Williams, a Presbyterian, taught theology at Union Theological Seminary for 13 years until her retirement in 2004. Before that, she taught at the historically Black Fisk University in Nashville.

In 1993, Williams published her seminal book *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, which compares the plight of Black women in the United States to that of Hagar in the Bible—forced surrogates, alone in the wilderness, able to rely only on God. It was also in this book that Williams laid out one of her most controversial claims: that a God who saves via suffering cannot be a true savior for Black women.

Rather than viewing the cross as the place where Jesus conquered sin, Williams looked to the wilderness, where, facing temptation, Jesus outlined his vision for righting wrongs and creating wholeness on both the personal and communal levels.

On Twitter, Kelly Brown Douglas, Washington National Cathedral's canon theologian, said Williams's work created a pathway for Black theologians to discover their unique voices.

"Delores Williams was a pioneer of womanist thought who shifted the paradigm of how we think about the cross." she wrote. "With boldness and courageousness, she claimed her voice even as many in the church rejected her claim that there is no 'power in the blood.'"