LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

TRANSITIONING A TRADITIONAL AFRICAN-AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCH IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

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By
Dante D. Wright I

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ABSTRACT

TRANSITIONING A TRADITIONAL AFRICAN-AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCH IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

Dante D. Wright

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Mentor: Kevin King

This project will examine how one church, Sweet Home – The Pinnacle of Praise, rose to the challenge of transitioning from being a traditional black Baptist church to a church equipped to meet the needs of a diverse yet crumbling American culture. The rationale for selecting this topic was the observance that in the 21st century, many black Baptist churches are, to some degree, failing to meet the needs of a fast growing postmodern culture. The potential value of this topic can be seen as a testimony that transformation is possible, practical and it positions the church for success in reaching today’s postmoderns for Christ. The approach of this project will be practical and it will demonstrate how this church utilized biblical principles, African-American history, and black liberation theology as a blueprint to restructure the church to meet the needs of this changing culture

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Introduction

Purpose

In recent years, the black church has come under scrutiny for having an acute case of irrelevance in the black community as well as in the church body. Such an opinion was voiced in an article by Dr. Eddie S. Claude, Jr., *The Black Church Is Dead*, wherein his first statement reads: “The black church, as we’ve known it or imagined it, is dead.”\(^1\) Claude offers the following three points in the above article to support his opening statement:

*First*, black churches have always been complicated spaces and their pastors are quite conservative. *Secondly*, African American communities are much more differentiated. The idea of a black church standing at the center of all that takes place in a community has long sense passed away. *Thirdly*, we have witnessed the routinization of black prophetic witness. Too often the prophetic energies of black churches are represented as something inherent to the institution…\(^2\)

If in fact, such irrelevance in the African-American church has occurred, it is the opinion of this author that the real cause lays in a seismic shift that has taken place within the 21\(^{st}\) century black church. The seismic shift is that the black church has put social and traditional issues as a priority over God’s Word and His kingdom.

This author also believes that there is hope because there is a divine remedy for such an alleged acute case of irrelevancy, and that is, the infallible Word of God. Peter Gomes, in his book, *The Good Book*, speaks truth to power when he quoted Martin Luther’s Reformation slogan, “*sola scriptura*, by Scripture alone.”\(^3\) The authority of the Bible should never be substituted for the authority of the denomination or the authority of tradition. Scripture, the


\(^{2}\) Ibid.

infallible Word of God, is God speaking. In the book, Pulpit Crimes: The Criminal Mishandling of God’s Word, James R. White said this about tradition: “Tradition is examined by, and if necessary, rejected on the authority of Scripture.”\(^4\) James White also states, “This is why tradition trafficking must be recognized and dealt with early on. When a person spends their entire life, in essence, threading their own tradition into the very fabric of Scripture, there comes a time when they can no longer tell the difference between the two even in the strongest light.”\(^5\)

This author firmly believes that some, but not all, black churches have substituted the Gospel of Jesus Christ for a feel good religion of name it and claim it, blab it and grab it, prosperity gospel, which has resulted in causing some black churches to suffer from an over-indulgence of cotton candy preaching. What is cotton candy preaching? Cotton candy preaching, as defined by this author, is preaching that is sweet, but has no substance. Cotton candy preaching is also preaching that serves an appetizer, but does not offer the full course meal. In an effort to address this issue, this author, who serves as a senior pastor, had a divine directive eight years ago to begin a process of spiritual transformation within the Sweet Home Baptist Church of Round Rock.

This 100-year-old church had experienced some extreme challenges and setbacks in its recent history. What had once been a thriving church had dwindled to only about 60 active members. This newly called senior pastor accepted the call and the responsibility to provide pastoral leadership to this fledgling congregation. Under the divine authority of God and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this new senior pastor soon began a transformational process or


\(^5\) Ibid., 10.
better yet, a spiritual makeover, of leading the congregation to become a biblically transformed church in the 21st century.

This spiritual makeover started by refocusing the congregation to put tradition and cultural biases behind them and to focus on and live out the Great Commission, which is found in Matthew 28:19-20. Jesus says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Statement of the problem

The relevancy of the black church is in question. This thesis project seeks to chart the story of a church’s transformation from a traditional black Baptist church to one that meets the needs of nontraditional and diverse people. This thesis also serves to develop a model of engagement with the postmodern world utilizing the inerrant Word of God, along with the jewels of black liberation theology and storytelling, to meet the needs of diverse people with diverse needs.

Terminology Defined

The black church experience is, as it were, the soul of the black community. Throughout this project, specific words and/or phrases, which are used to communicate that experience, will be given great attention; therefore, they are defined to provide readers with a greater understanding of their use within the context of this project. The following words or phrases of special reference are: black church, black experience, liberation, reconciliation, transitioning, transformational, and traditional.

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6 Matthew 28:19-20, NASB.
The black church is a technical term that defines “the collective identity of African American Christians in both academic and societal contexts.” As C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya define it, the black church is a “sociological and theological shorthand reference to the pluralism of black Christian churches in the United States.” While there are differences in the definition of black Christian churches, the term helps to concretize black church studies. For the purpose of this study, the author defines the black church as the historical black denominations, the black churches in the white denominations, and the African diasporan Christian adherents in the United States. The black church, while not denominationally monolithic, is unified by its historical and continued experience in the United States, known as the black experience.

Black Experience

7 Stacey Floyd-Thomas et al., *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), xxiv


9 Lincoln recognizes that the definition encompasses “any black Christian person” if they are members of black congregations, yet for his study, he focuses the definition of the black church to those who are in the “independent historic and totally black controlled denominations.” C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 1. Stacey Floyd Thomas et al., also recognizes that the black church includes the historical black denominations, black churches in white denominations, non-denominational churches with multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial parishioners and black clergy with black cultural identities. See *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), xxiii-xxiv. Anthony Pinn also understands the historical definition of the black church to mean the historical black denominations, and at best the black congregations in white predominantly white denominations. Pinn rejects this definition on the basis that it is biased against “smaller and more theologically creative modes of religious engagement.” Using Peoples Temple as a framework to engaged the old definition the black church and by extension ‘blackness’ and how that plays a role in our definition of black religion. For his definition see chapter three of his book entitled, *Understanding & Transforming the Black Church* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010).
The black experience defines the conditions of being black within different contexts and historical settings. It is descriptive of an investigative view into the mind that reveals the raw materials of the black pilgrimage, which tell the story of how black Americans got over. The black experience is the collective struggles of black people under the arms of slavery, Jim Crow, The Civil Rights Movement, and most currently, the false sense of a post-racial society. While the Black church is not monolithic as it pertains to denominations, worship styles, doctrinal views, or even views on justice, it is monolithic as it pertains to the black experience because the experiences of historic and continued oppression, struggles, and misrepresentations created what is known as the black church.

Liberation

According to Merriam-Webster, liberation means “a movement seeking equal rights and status for a group.”\textsuperscript{10} The word liberation as used with black liberation theology throughout this project requires an in-depth definition before the project can be further explored.

The founder of black liberation theology, Rev. James Cone, defines black liberation as “mainly a theology that sees God as concerned with the poor and the weak. At its core, black theology is an effort to make the gospel relevant to the life and struggles of American blacks, and to help black people learn to love themselves. It’s an attempt to teach people how to be both unapologetically black and Christian at the same time.”\textsuperscript{11}


Reconciliation

Merriam-Webster defines *reconciliation* as “the act of causing two people or groups to become friendly again after an argument or disagreement, or the process of finding a way to make two different ideas, facts, etc., exist or be true at the same.”12

Transitioning

In Merriam-Webster’s Learner’s Dictionary, the definition of transitioning is stated “to make a change from one state, place, or condition to another: to make a transition.”13 Rick Warren presents the perfect illustration of the usage of this word in relation to transitioning a church from one state to another when he wrote, “Today, tens of thousands of churches are transitioning from being program driven to being purpose driven.”14

Transformation

According to Merriam-Webster’s Learner’s Dictionary the word *transformation* means, “Complete or major change in someone’s or something’s appearance, form, etc.”15 Further, as it relates to this project, transformation is seen in the vision statement of the Sweet Home Baptist Church of Round Rock, which reads, “To see Sweet Home become a Christ-centered, commission committed, community connected, body of believers.”

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Tradition

Again, having consulted the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, it defines tradition as “an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or a social custom).”\textsuperscript{16}

Statement of Limitations

One concern of the author is the problem with resources concerning the black church and its practices. Engrained in the black church tradition is a history of oral tradition that is both a cultural expression and a consequence of oppression. The Black Church in the African American Expression by C Eric. Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya gives credit to both Africa and white oppression.

In west African cultures, history and genealogy were recorded through oral transmission and memory, constantly repeated on ritual occasions and passed on from generation to generation. The skills of storytelling and oration were highly valued and prized. The development of the African American heritage of oral tradition received its impetus from two influences: Africa and slavery. The slave system feared the literate slave and placed a ban on teaching slaves to read and write. From songs and sermons to an ever-expanding array of speeches, jokes, folk tales, musical forms, raps, and street talk, the African American oral tradition has been a creative reservoir for black culture.\textsuperscript{17}

It is therefore necessary to state the importance of the oral tradition in the black experience. “Any study of black religion…should take into consideration orality – acts of utterance, and aurality – acts of listening and attentiveness, as integral to understanding the

\textsuperscript{17} Lincoln, 227.
richness of black religious experiences.” No academic endeavor that critically engages the black experience can be done without the careful examination of the oral tradition. “Failure to do so would result in missing a large part of the story of black religious experience in socio-cultural contexts.”

Because of this problem, this author agrees with J. Deotis Roberts when he offers a paradigm for the inclusion of the oral tradition in theology. J. Deotis Roberts states that “since [the] black religious is mainly an oral tradition, and since it is more intuitive than conceptual, we need a way of doing theology that is based on image-thinking.” David Emmanuel Goatley more explicitly links J. Deotis Roberts’ idea of image-thinking and the oral tradition as interlocking parts, saying that, “the oral character of the African American narrative…has an inherent imaginative quality,” and that image-thinking, “is a large part of the black experience.” So as this author presents the historical and current research in the black experience, there is a wealth of information from the oral tradition not readily accessible to the researcher or the reader. Yet in the spirit of the African and Black tradition, the intuitive history recorded in the hearts, minds, and imagination of blacks guides the research of this thesis and takes form in vivid and theological image-thinking.

Theoretical Basis for Project

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18 Floyd-Thomas, 105.

19 Ibid.


It is time to sound the alarm, or better yet, it is time for all pastors, but in particular, black pastors and church leaders to blow the trumpet of change. In recent years, we have heard that hope and change were coming, but that was a promise of ongoing social change that has been on the forefront of America’s political agenda for many years. What we are really in dire need of is spiritual change or spiritual transformation. In the book, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*, by Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter, is a quote by J. Edwin Orr that states, “There have been instances in the history of the Church when the telling and retelling of the wonderful works of God have been used to reconcile the expectation of the faithful intercessors and prepare the way for another Awakening.”22 The need is now for a new awakening.

It is imperative that the black church press onward toward that higher mark of spiritual renewal and spiritual transformation. This author is not suggesting that the black church have a social awakening of its past. That is, a past that has been mired by discrimination, racism, inequality, and injustice. Instead, the black church and the black community should press onward toward a higher calling by refocusing the efforts and energies of its churches and communities. Succinctly stated they must once and for all cross the “Pettus Bridge” of hatred and inequality and begin to cross the biblical bridge of teaching, healing, and reconciliation.

It is imperative that the significance of the Pettus Bridge be clearly understood as to why it is mentioned in the context of this writing. Its significance is in direct relationship to merely one example of discrimination, racism, inequality, and injustice that has been suffered by black Americans in this country as captured in the following event:

On “Bloody Sunday,” March 7, 1965, some 600 civil rights marchers headed east out of Selma on U.S. Route 80. They got only as far as the Edmund Pettus Bridge six blocks away, where state and local lawmen attacked them with billy clubs and tear gas and drove

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them back into Selma. Two days later on March 9, Martin Luther King, Jr., led a “symbolic” march to the bridge. Then civil rights leaders sought court protection for a third, full-scale march from Selma to the state capitol in Montgomery. Federal District Court Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr., weighed the right of mobility against the right to march and ruled in favor of the demonstrators.\textsuperscript{23}

The biblical teaching found in 2 Corinthians 5:19-21 states, “That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”\textsuperscript{24} The need is clear and time is of the essence for spiritual transformation and a great godly awakening for a divided country and its churches.

A Personal Word

This author finds that in an effort to write about the black church experience from an evangelical perspective, there is a challenging dilemma to be overcome. That is to say, currently, there are very few serious evangelical evaluations of the black church in print. J. Deotis Roberts, when speaking about African religion, says that it has commonality with black religion because “it has been greatly neglected by western scholarship.”\textsuperscript{25} Tony Evans, in his dissertation, addresses the lack of evangelical critique and engagement on the subject of black liberation theology. He says, “Black Theology cannot be ignored and must be addressed from an evangelical perspective, for this theology that now rests primarily in the intellectual minds of


\textsuperscript{24} 2 Corinthians 5:19-21, ESV.

black religious scholars will soon be filtering down to the black pew.” In Most of the responses to and criticisms of the black church and its tradition, related to moving forward will be demeaned and judged as being primarily reflective of the “white theology” perspective, which black liberation theology rejects. If the black church is not careful, its tradition will move from a verbal to a vanishing reality. When speaking about his teaching experience in predominantly white seminaries, Kenyatta R. Gilbert explains the experience of students of color:

When I have taught courses in predominantly white settings the chief complaint of students of color is one that centers on the issue of cultural invasion. Cultural invasion is the act of the teacher—who becomes invader—imposing his or her own worldview upon students in ways that inhibit their creativity by dismissing, camouflaging, or curbing their expression. The domestication, as Gilbert asserts, happens when a professor invades, colonizes, and imperialistically removes the culture of the student in order to make that student think and act as the professor does. There must be diligence in critically engaging black theology. As a result, the sources and supporting material utilized within this thesis have been taken from both white conservative and black liberation theologians. In consideration of this, it is imperative to state a basic hermeneutical conviction that will display or highlight this author’s approach to black liberation theology and the black church tradition.

The conviction that is near and dear to the heart of this author is that the grammatical, literal, and historical approach to God’s Word (Scripture) is the one and only valid approach for grasping the meaning of the text. The black experience, the black church tradition, and black liberation theology must be exegetically examined in light of that hermeneutical approach.

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Anthony Bradley agrees that “understanding the black experience” must be “faithful to Scripture and orthodox Christianity.” When quotes are made from white evangelical scholars and conservative theologians, it is intended to reflect most, but not all, of the views of the author. It is the contention and opinion of this author that apart from this hermeneutical approach, all objectivity is totally lost.

**Statement of Methodology**

The proposed design of this takes the reader on a case study of Sweet Home – The Pinnacle of Praise – Baptist Church and its tradition. More specifically the experiences of the black Baptist church will be taken into consideration, because it is the faith tradition of the author. The project culminates in the presentation of how one particular black Baptist church, the Sweet Home Baptist Church of Round Rock, is being spiritually and biblically transformed by a systematic and strategic process for the purpose of reaching the American postmodern culture for Christ.

Chapter 1 of this thesis project lays the major groundwork for the historical birth and growth of the black church in the United States. A major portion of this chapter focuses on the development of the invisible institution of black religious worship. Black liberation theology will also be explored so that the reader will have a better grasp of black liberation theology. Finally central ideas in worship will also be discussed such as preaching and worship styles. Chapter 2 focuses on bridging the racial divide found in our churches. Focusing on the Word of God, forgiveness, and racial reconciliation the author constructs a plan for different racial groups to

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29 Yet the reader must understand that black church studies consider the collective contributions of the black church. While black church studies outline the contributions of the historical black denominations, its goal is for a cohesive history of Black church studies as a whole.
work together for the kingdom of God. Chapter 3 moves the conversation to the case study of Sweet Home - The Pinnacle of Praise. This case study walks through this historically black Baptist church and shows how it has been making steady strides to transition from a traditional black Baptist church to one who can meet the needs of the postmodern world. Finally chapter 4 focuses on reaching the postmodern world for Christ by offering various methods to preach the same gospel.

**Review of Literature**

*Publications and Articles*

*Liberating Black Theology, Anthony Bradley*

Anthony Bradley’s book is one that gives a good account of the historical birth and tenants of Black Liberation Theology. He helps to flush out the ramifications of Black Liberation Theology. Bradley also helps the reader to place in context the writings of Black liberationists such as James Cone, by explaining the historical backdrop of his writings as well as those who have influenced Cone. While Bradley talks about the historical development and tenants of Black Liberation Theology, he offers a critique by stating that Black Liberation was built upon a victim mentality and offers a paradigm shift through centering on orthodox faith and filtering the black experience through that channel.

*A Black Theology of Liberation, James Cone*

James Cone is considered the Father of Black Liberation Theology. His concepts are the platform for which other Black Liberation Theologians emerge, as well as Womanist Theologians (also known as black feminists) who find their voice and critical differences. *A Black Theology of Liberation* helps the author historically map out the tenants of black liberation. It serves as a snap shot of the minds of black theologians in the late 1960’s.
Black Theology and Black Power, James Cone

*Black Theology and Black Power* is the first written book on the systematic approach to Black Liberation Theology. If nothing else this book is important because it articulates the first thoughts of Black Liberation Theology. Historically it combines the militant struggles for societal and political liberation with Cone’s view of the gospel message. To understand current strands of Black Liberation Theology one must read this book to understand its foundation.

God of the Oppressed, James Cone

The focus of *God of the Oppressed* is on the experience of the Black Christian as it relates to suffering and as it relates to God. It deals with the age-old problem of suffering and evil, and ultimately affirms the Black Christians belief in God’s love and God’s power. This book serves as groundwork into the black experience of suffering in what is known as the “promised land” for the majority. While our white brothers and sister in Christ may see America as the symbolic “promised land,” Black Christians must critically engage that reality that it has not always been our “promised land,” but rather hell on earth, yet God is still in control.

African American Christian Worship, Melva Wilson Costen

*African American Christian Worship* describes the rituals of African Americans from slavery to the present. This book covers concepts on the invisible and visible institution, African influences that have impacted African American religious worship experiences, the development of historically black denominations, and the emergence of the modern worship experience of Black churches. This book serves as an invaluable tool that allows the reader to understand the continued protest of African Americans, from slaver to present, against complete assimilation into a foreign way of worship.

Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America, Michael Emerson
Divided by Faith is a book the centers around race and evangelical churches. While evangelicals have strove to bridge the gap between races, it has proven unhelpful. With evangelical’s focus on individual salvation and faith, racial and social ills are often overlooked. This book serves as a resource that offers statistics and interpretations of those statistics that help to shed light on the problem. While it does not dismiss nor deny the strides that have been made in the quest to bridge the gap between races, it does contend that what has been done has not done enough to effect the real change needed.

The Black Church in the African American Experience, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya

C. Eric Lincoln’s book charts that history of the African American Christian experience. This book takes us on a journey through slavery, the development of denominations, Jim Crow and the Civil Rights. This work pays special attention to clergy and their roles, politics, economics, women in the church, the youth of the church and the music of the church. It acts as an important book for the historical development of the Black church.

An Encyclopedia of African American Heritage, Marvin A. McMickle

Marvin McMickle’s book not only covers the religious life of the African American, but also the contributions of the African American across various areas of society. This book acts as an encyclopedia, in that it gives a synopsis on the history and impact of different people and entities. For the purpose of the thesis this book serves as historical evidence of the struggle of Black people in the United States.

Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years, Henry H. Mitchell

Black Church Beginnings is used as the premier book on Black church history and resourcing. Henry Mitchell is considered one of the top scholars in the field of the Black Church
hence the heavy leaning on his work in this thesis. He vividly details the struggles and victories of black religious life and offers a host of citations, and influential persons and entities for further private research. Mitchell’s book is used to expound in detail the struggle and victory of the black church.

*Who Runs The Church?*, Paul E. Engle and Seven B. Cowan

*Who Runs The Church?*, is a book on differing church polities and their pros and cons. This book is used as a resource to understand various congregational models of polity, as well as others. For the purpose of this thesis this book was used to define the difference between single-lead congregational model and a plural-lead congregational model. The book also helped Sweet Home – The Pinnacle of Praise, navigate the definitions that we historically fell under and then helped us move toward the plural-elder lead congregation we are now.

*City of Round Rock General Plan*, http://www.roundrocktexas.gov

The *City of Round Rock General Plan*, also found in the appendix of this thesis, is the initial plan for Round Rock since 2000. Although the plan has been modified, the general plan has been steadily moving forward. The plan helped Sweet Home – The Pinnacle of Praise to see what the city had in store for it’s inhabitants, and as a result it has helped up concretize our vision and mission as well as how we will continue to engage with the city. As the city grows and changes, the church is not positioned to meet the ongoing needs of the community.


James Evans’ article helps to concretize postmodern thought. Furthermore it helps to discuss what the African American church has to offer as it relates to narratives. Evans helps the reader to see the postmodern and their search for truth in terms of colliding stories. By showing
that post-moderns are socially concerned and spiritually active, he helps the church see how they can ignite the gospel narrative to not only effect change but to teach ultimate truth to those looking for a story.

*Black Church Studies: An Introduction, Stacey Floyd-Thomas et al.*

*Black Church Studies* is an introductory book that covers a wide range of ideas in the black church, from history, to biblical studies, to social ethics, to Christian education, to preaching, to worship. This book serves the author as a tool to help identify the invisible institution, the definition of black church, and the history of the black church. Moreover it serves as an invaluable tool in the personal development the author.

*Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities, Robert M. Franklin*

*Crisis in the Village* is a book about problems found in black America pertaining to family life, church life and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. For the purpose of this thesis the focus has been placed on the black church and its role in transforming the communities it dwells in. Franklin offers various models for the church to transform the community. One of which is a five-phase model that plugs people in to the church at various levels of engagement and training. From charity to transformation, the model encourages upward mobility to the transformation phase but also recognizes where people may be in their ability to get involved, hence the different levels of involvement.

*Scriptures*

Matthew 28:19-20

After Jesus’ death and resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples to empower and commission them to make disciples, marking them for the kingdom, they are to live by the
tenants of the faith. These tenants include the moral and ethical teachings of Christ. The author sees this text as an explicit call for the disciples of God to transform the community.

2 Corinthians 5:19-21

The context shows that in the ministry of reconciliation the role of the Christian is to allow God to appeal to the masses in order to tell them that they have been reconciled through Christ. It is the attitude of the evangelist to see the potential of every human being, willing to spread the gospel of reconciliation through Christ. This passage helps to inform how churches are to interact with this postmodern world. While the church may not understand the all the tenants of postmodernism, her mission is to allow God to speak.

Luke 4:18-19

It is the belief of the author that this passage is the mission of Christ for the world. Christ is concerned not only for the spiritual wellbeing of the people, but also for the physical wellbeing. David E. Garland states that, “Jesus proclaims that his mission will be to bring good news to the poor and to proclaim God’s acceptance of those whom others may want to write off as unacceptable.”30 Reading Isaiah 61, Jesus proclaims that the year of the Lord, or the year of Jubilee, is now commencing. Upon further reading of Luke’s passage, Jesus extends the recipients of the year of the Lord to the gentiles, which incited a mob against him. Jesus was concerned not only for his own people but for all of humanity. This passage gives the blueprint for touching the lives of the people spiritually and physically.

Deuteronomy 10:18-19

Moses, while speaking to the people after the receiving the new stone tablets describes God as one who is concerned about the orphans, widows, and foreigners. All of these groups had little to no power in Israel and in many ways need to be taken care of. Moses declares that God loves these individuals, therefore the community should love them as well, in particular the foreigner. This author believes that this understanding of God does not just pertain to the Israelites but to the Christian. We are told to be concerned about individuals who are considered less fortunate. This passage teaches whom we should be concerned about.

Ezekiel 22:29-31

As part of a list of grievances outlined by God to Ezekiel, this passage shows God’s concern when people mistreat others, when a nation founded by God and professing to be God’s does not act with Godly concern for the less fortunate. This passage acts as an image our society, and many times our country, that consistently says we are a nation under God, that our beginnings were founded on God, yet we often fail to take Godly concern for the less fortunate. This passage acts a reminder that oppressed people can and will oppress people, therefore vigilant striving for Godly concern and justice is necessary.

Isaiah 61:8

Isaiah 61 is well known for its first two verses that are partially read by Jesus in Luke 4. Isaiah 61 outlines the restoration of Israel. Verse 8 begins with a conjunction, linking the previous ideas with what will come. Because God loves justice and hates what is wrong God will restore Israel. Edward J. Young says, “He [God] loves judgment and hates the thing taken away
in injustice.” This is not only a common theme in the Old Testament but also part of the character of God that looks at oppressed people as recipients of his restoration.

Ephesians 2:14-16

A careful reading of this passage shows that the Gentile believers are prejudice against the Jews. Paul reminds them of their once isolation, alienation, and separation from God. Seeing the division among mankind as a physical representation of the attacks from the cosmic powers and spiritual forces of evil, Jesus Christ not only brings spiritual peace but also physical peace and reconciliation so that different ethnic groups can live together and worship the same God. The author contends that God’s redemption not only had spiritual ramifications (that now all have the opportunity to know God) but physical ramifications (that as was intended from creation, mankind can live in harmony with one another). The hostility among people in different socio-economic statuses, socio-political statuses, ethnicities, cultures, and racial groups have now been eradicated through Jesus Christ thereby establishing the message of peace to be preached instead of hostility.

Amos 5:19

The immediate context is that God is declaring that the rituals and sacrifices of the people mean nothing to Him. The religious observance has become so ritualistic that it means nothing especially since they have been mixed with idolatrous worship. Chapter 5 depicts how unjust and how oppressed the people are. While the people are being oppressed the temple is routinely

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offering sacrifices that have not meaning. In the end God declares that the sacrifice that he
wishes for is justice and righteousness. This author contends that instead of locking ourselves up
in our churches each Sunday singing our praises, and offering our sacrifices, we should be
concerned about justice and righteousness. We are not to stop our worship but in order for it to
be authentic, the communities we are in should begin to justice and righteousness.

James 1:22-27

When talking about what is expected by every believer, being a doer of the word is the
mark of maturity. While talking about being a doer of the word, James defines religion, not as
the scriptures we quote or the style that we worship in. Religion is defined by what one does for
the less fortunate. Particularly in passage that is the orphan and the widow. While pietism is also
part of the definition, James reminds us that our personal pietism must also be coupled with
communal concern.

Romans 9:1-5

Paul is outlining his hurt and longing for his people, the Jews and their salvation. As Paul
sees it he would give anything, including his place with Christ, to see his brothers, the Jews
saved. It is the belief of the author that this passage offers a framework for how we are to
respond to people who are lost. We should be willing to give up our place with for our brothers.
While this is hyperbole, the kind of fervor we should have for soul winning should be sacrificial.

Joshua 4

In this chapter Joshua instructs the people pick twelve men, one from each tribe to pick a
stone so they can build a memorial. The memorial serves as a reminder that God dried up the
Jordan River to allow the Israelites begin to take the land of Canaan. It further reminds that
people that what God did at Jordan He also did at the red sea. This memorial is also to serve as a teaching tool for the Israelites, when their children ask them about the stones. They are to be markers of history. The author believes that black society must tell its story, and must leave monuments that act as history lessons for generations to come. This thesis is but one peace of the story we must tell.

Exodus 1:1-14:31

The Exodus story, primarily the first 14 chapters, is the story of the Israelites moving from freedom, to bondage, to deliverance. The story shows the longing of the people to be free, their hope and doubt in God and Moses, the struggles the people faces, and their ultimate release from bondage. Often times this story is used to talk about the spiritual deliverance we all find in Christ, but black Christians have historically used these passages to parallel the Israelites story with their own struggle for freedom and equality. It is unique in that black people identify with God being the God of deliverance not only spiritually, but physically as a group of people. The author contends that the exodus story best maps out the experience of the black slave in America. With people such as Sojourner Truth, Fredrick Douglass, W. E. B. Dubois, and Martin Luther King, Jr. being our Moses’ throughout the generations.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Paul, when defending his apostleship and the rights that come with it, decides to submit his freedom to the gospel message. Paul contends that in order to save people who do not share his convictions, he submits himself to the customs and culture of those specific people groups without compromising the gospel. By doing so he is able to win people for the kingdom. Paul understood that while the message of Jesus Christ doesn’t change, the method used does. Paul
serves as a reminder to this author that in order to reach the current culture the method of our evangelism, preaching, and social concern must change while the Gospel remains the constant.

Acts 28:30-31

While under house arrest in Rome, Paul gathered the Jewish community together to spread the Gospel of Christ. Acts accounts that Paul was there two years welcoming anyone who was curious about his message into his home in order to spread the Gospel. Surely Paul was met with differences opinion, yet Paul continued to welcome those differences in order to have a conversation about Christ. This is a principle that the author believes should be in every believer. A welcoming, non-judgmental spirit is key to reaching a crumbling, yet curious culture.

Micah 6:1-8

After reciting the Exodus story, the passage asks questions about what kind of sacrifice God is pleased with. The questions point to ritual worship. The people of Israel have become accustomed to blindly offering sacrifices, to blindly offering superficial devotion that Micah has to remind them of what God truly desires: justice, mercy, and humble devotion to God. This text causes this author to ask of our own society, have we become too ritualistic? Have we decided to ritualistically give God honor instead of honor God with the sacrifice of ourselves?
CHAPTER 1
THE GENESIS OF THE BLACK CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

The areas of examination for this thesis shall be to look at how black churches evolved in this country and struggled for independence. This examination shall be a guide which describes the establishment of the Invisible Institution as defined by Albert J. Raboteau, in *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution* to be, “Black religion under slavery.”1 The goal is to place the development of the black church in the eras of Slavery, Reconstruction to Jim Crow, and the New Civil Rights movement. It shall further include a sampling of the historical black churches of the past along with highlights of some of the personalities that were instrumental in laying the foundation for black churches.

*Slavery and the Invisible Institution*

An examination of the genesis of black churches in this country must first begin with some historical understanding of when and how African people were transported to this country. Henry Mitchell, in his book, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years*, states, “the arrival of the first Africans to this country to be in 1619 in Jamestown, Virginia.”2 During the years of African slave transportation to the United States between 1619 and 1866, 450,000 African people were forcibly uprooted from the African continent and transported to this country in slave ships under deplorable, inhumane conditions and treated as

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less-than human beings. The following account is an excerpt from an eye witness to such deplorable conditions. The ship referenced was called the *Feloz*, commanded by Captain Jose' Barbosa, bound to Bahia, Brazil.

She had taken in, on the coast of Africa, 336 males and 226 females, making in all 562, and had been out seventeen days, during which she had thrown overboard 55. The slaves were all enclosed under grated hatchways between decks. The space was so low that they sat between each other's legs and were so close together that there was no possibility of their lying down or at all changing their position by night or day. As they belonged to and were shipped on account of different individuals, they were all branded like sheep with the owner's marks of different forms. These were impressed under their breasts and on their arms. The mate informed me with perfect indifference, 'burnt with the red-hot iron.'

The historical significance of the aforementioned eyewitness account provides an understanding of the initial experiences for many African people even as they journeyed to this country. This information has been included in this thesis project in an effort to provide an understanding of the experience for African people in this country. It also provides the backdrop of historical evidence to chronicle the continuing struggle through the centuries of African people in this country.

African people transported to this country face many adaptations from that of their mother continent. Included among these adaptations were the language, people, culture food, and yes, religious worship, to name a few. The popular belief that Africans “were largely stripped of their native culture and religion during or after their voyage to these shores” is not the findings of Mitchell. On the contrary, Mitchell states, “there is much hard evidence proving that Africans retained a great deal of their original cultural heritage. This was especially true of religion,

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which was much harder to stamp out than visible behaviors, such as style of labor.”

Through the years, the significance of religious beliefs, worship and religious practices fostered the need for churches that supported, understood and embraced the African heritage became more and more important to African people.

An example of the transition of Africans to this country can be seen in the adaptation from the use of the “back-straining, short-handled hoe of their native culture to that of the long-handled hoe of the North American culture was quite simple. However, “the tenacity of the community embraced traditional belief system was far greater and it was the people’s survival kit.”

Another tool in the arsenal of the African people’s survival kit was that of the elusive, yet effective concept which is now referred to as, the *Invisible Institution.*

Whereas, the hopelessness of slavery brought about open wounds, scars, bruises, and fatigue in the slave both physically, mentally, and spiritually, there arose an invisible and elusive balm to heal the raped and battered slave. It was invisible and elusive only to the slave masters and to the larger society, yet it was plain to see, and to grasp, for the slave. There was no formal name at the time of its creation, yet Black academicians have named it the ‘Invisible Institution.’ Delores Williams defines the Invisible Institution by linking the miraculous, redemptive work of God to the everyday struggles of oppressed people. While reading this excerpt, imagine the struggles of the blacks and notice that the definition is their life experiences interacting with God’s deliverance.

The black church is invisible but we know it when we see it: our daughters and sons rising up from death and addiction recovering and recovered; our mothers in poverty raising their children alone, with God’s help, making a way out of no way and

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5 Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings*, xv.

6 Ibid.
succeeding; Harriet Tubman leading hundreds of slaves into freedom; Isabel, the former African-American slave, with God’s help transforming destiny to become Sojourner Truth…the black church is invisible, but we know it when we see oppressed people rising up in freedom.7

The Invisible Institution is the “clandestine or ‘invisible’ nature of events where mutual relationships, worldviews, behavior patterns, and social and political action were ‘officially constituted’ by the slaves.8 While the Invisible Institution is “foundational to the subsequent establishment of African American ‘visible institutions;’” i.e. denominations, social clubs, fraternities, schools, etc.; it is the thought of this author that the visible institution did not replace the Invisible Institution. There may no longer be a need to meet in secret, yet there is still a need to develop and train our clergy and parishioners in the Gospel that is culturally, ethnically, and racially sensitive, as well as takes into consideration the ever present oppression and struggles we still face. The Invisible Institution run parallel with the visible institution, when the societal structures hinder the visible institution from speaking up. Martha Simmons and Frank Thomas help to further the idea of the invisible institution.

By invisible institution, we also mean the cultural context—blacks participating in social and religious practices from preaching to conjuring to rebellion-hatching, to mourning, to moaning, to calling on Jesus as they knew him, all of which was done—allowed blacks to establish a cultural shelter for a new black identity in a strange land. This invisible institution existed alongside the churches that blacks attended with whites alongside the gospel that was preached by whites who advocated submission and docility among slaves.9


The inception of the *Invisible Institution* of the early slaves was indeed a church without walls. It was a church without a formal polity or even organized denominations, yet it was an important part of the lives of slaves as they came together in search of something more than life had dealt them at that time. As this thesis progresses, it shall unfold how the *Invisible Institution* of the early slaves matured and became visible, valuable and victorious.

In his book, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans*, Albert J. Raboteau writes the following perspective: “Thousands of Africans from diverse cultures and religious traditions, forcibly transported to America as slaves, retained many African customs even as they converted to Christianity.”10 It is not hard to understand that although Africans were forcibly transported to this country, they still retained a reasonable portion of their African religious heritage. The essence of that belief system was not as easily destroyed as transitioning, for example, from one type of farm equipment to another. Blacks were intentional and purposeful in maintaining and developing their own special uniqueness. Around the world, in every continent and every country, people are unique with fascinating and varying qualities. Many maintain their drive to survive and retain the core value of who they are. Along the way, they develop ways to maintain certain characteristics of their uniqueness even under difficult circumstances. This also held true for African people who were transported to this country. Henry Mitchell further reveals that:

> It has been only in the past twenty years that scholars of African-American history, culture, and religion have begun to recognize that black people created their own unique and distinctive forms of culture and worldviews as parallels rather than replications of the culture in which they were involuntary guests.11

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The process of blacks carving out for themselves a culture within a culture and a worldview unique to themselves was not easy and it certainly did not occur over the short term. In spite of all the obstacles, black people were diligent and steadfast in their pursuit of their own uniqueness. African people were brought to this country in the early 1600s and this process has been ongoing through several hundred years. The process of African people and their struggles to be treated as human beings in this country is further shown as Lincoln and Mamiya expound on this through the following observation, “Two hundred and fifty years of slavery were followed by one hundred years of official and unofficial segregation in the South and in the North.”\(^{12}\) During this time, many blacks continued to suffer needlessly, shamelessly and mercilessly at the hands of white Americans, yet they have persevered. The general consensus of the deplorable treatment of African people in this country was supported at all levels of society and government as Lincoln and Mamiya state:

> The trauma of being officially defined by the U.S. Constitution as ‘three-fifths’ human, and treated in terms of that understanding, the struggle of the African-American people to affirm and establish their humanity and their worth as persons has a long history.\(^{13}\)

What an indictment against this country and its deplorable treatment of black people. What two-fifths of black people were considered not human? Such treatment against black people has laid a strong foundation for hatred among the two races in this country. Tony Evans, in his book, *Oneness Embraced*, states:

> … my ancestors had to endure the agony and shame of American slavery. They were viewed as less than human, savages, thus giving sanction to the abuse and misuse of the legal system of slavery. The fact that my African ancestors were primarily perceived by whites as savages in need of civilizing gave rise to one of the most inhumane systems of

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\(^{12}\) Lincoln, 3.

\(^{13}\) Lincoln, 4.
injustice ever to be perpetra...ted against human beings. It is a system that we are still seeking to recover from today.”

However deplorably blacks were treated by white Americans in this country, somehow they were able to cling to something bigger than their struggles. They held onto a belief that someday, some way and somehow they and their families would experience more from living life than what they were experiencing at that time (the time of slavery). They had hope for freedom. That hope for freedom was expressed in their prayers and in the spiritual songs they sang as they cried out to their God. Lincoln and Mamiya define freedom for blacks in this manner: “During slavery it (freedom) meant release from bondage; after emancipation it meant the right to be educated, to be employed and to move about freely from place to place. In the twentieth century freedom means social, political and economic justice.”

In the black experience, freedom was rooted and grounded in the belief that there existed a higher power than man. It was the “black sacred cosmos.” Lincoln and Mamiya describe the black sacred cosmos in this manner:

The black sacred cosmos or the religious worldview of blacks is related both to their African heritage, which envisaged the whole universe as sacred, and to their conversion to Christianity during slavery and its aftermath. For black Christianity, the Christian God ultimately revealed in Jesus of Nazareth dominated the black sacred cosmos.

The freedom of blacks and their acceptance as people with souls were somewhat intertwined. It is most appalling to see the depths to which white America would go to try to further dehumanize African people. The U.S. Constitution in particular, declared that Africans

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15 Lincoln, 4.

16 Lincoln, 4.
were only three-fifths human.\textsuperscript{17} Seemingly race superiority took on an altogether demonic image and purposeful intent to destroy African people.

As a matter of record, “Africans were not supposed by many masters to have souls to be saved until Bishop Gibson of London wrote a second round of forceful pastoral letters in 1727, over 100 years after the first arrivals.”\textsuperscript{18} While Bishop London wrote letters to open the possibility for missionary efforts to begin on behalf of slaves, it was with the clear understanding that, “Souls would be free in Christ, but chains on bodies were unchanged.”\textsuperscript{19} The institution of slavery in this country had been planted, taken root and was promoted, practiced and protected at all levels of American society and government.

Then there were the two Great Awakenings which occurred during the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries. The following is a brief description of both. In \textit{The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever}, Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter offer this perspective on the first of these two Awakenings:

The First Great Awakening flashed like a bolt of lightning on a dark night across the German skies, crossed the ocean to America, jumped over to England and from there went on to touch the world. … The Holy Spirit began falling on the aristocracy of Germany, the poor masses of England, and the rich merchants of Connecticut.\textsuperscript{20}

It has been thoroughly documented that from Germany to America to England those experiences of the presence of the Holy Spirit during that period had a profound effect upon the

\textsuperscript{17} The 3/5 Compromise happened during the 1787 United States Constitutional Convention. This compromise was over the amount of representatives a state could have as well as how much a state could be taxed. The convention decided that slaves would count as 3/5 of a person and would count toward the number of representatives slave state could have (which would be more representatives than they would have without slaves), and the amount of taxes they would have to pay (which would be substantially less that what they would pay if slaves were considered fully human). In both cases the slave states received the better deal.

\textsuperscript{18} Mitchell. \textit{Black Church Beginnings}, 26.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter, \textit{The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever} (Virginia Beach: Academx Publishing Services, Inc., 2005), 55.
church as it was known at that time. Towns and Porter describe one such experience as noted by Jonathan Edwards thusly, “an extraordinary sense of the awful majesty, greatness and holiness of God, so as sometimes to overwhelm soul and body, a sense of the piercing, all seeing eye of God so as to sometimes take away bodily strength.” One after another, these types of Holy Spirit filled experiences were occurring throughout New England communities and people were being converted to a strong belief in Jesus Christ. Towns and Porter also said, “As people were converted, they developed an intense passion for God. They longed to be more perfect in humility and adoration.”

It is not surprising that several great church leaders emerged and were developed during this time. Among these leaders in America were Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield. It is also reported the Methodist church was born out of the First Great Awakening. This First Great Awakening continued for about fifty years globally and about ten years in America.

Reconstruction Era: 1865-1877

This begins the transition toward reconstruction of a nation. History overlaps itself and ushers in what Henry Louis Gates referred to as the New Civil Rights Era. According to Stacey and Juan Floyd Thomas in Black Church Studies – An Introduction, the Second Great Awakening “significantly transformed American society and culture during the first half of the nineteenth century, a change to which the contributions of African Americans were central.”

This Second Great Awakening was a major proponent in the confrontation of the enslavement of African Americans in this country which was led by groups referred to as abolitionists.

21 Ibid., 63.

There were two abolitionist group movements that “arose and continued up to the climax of the American Civil War.” This first abolitionist movement, formed in the South, was supported “with the help of a small number of free black and sympathetic white people.” The second abolitionist movement was a movement of the North and was supported by “white and black antislavery advocates in the North, with strategic outposts in the upper South. Many of the men giving leadership to the northern movement were black ministers. Many of these clergymen used the platform of church pulpits to ‘attack slavery, racial discrimination, proslavery white churches and the American Colonization Society (ACS).’”

The Second Great Awakening which began around 1800 was instrumental in creating a “desire among whites and blacks for separate worship in separate congregations.” This desire for separate worship and separate congregations rose, in part, due to the fact that “white members were not nearly as happy as their black colleagues were with the spontaneity and free expressiveness of Great Awakening style worship.” These distinct differences in worship styles, played an important role in the ultimate separation of the congregations.

The emergence of legally sanctioned separate black churches “early in the Reconstruction era” became both a need and a desire among blacks. However, there was no magic formula or process by which separation was achieved, as it was different “from church to church and city to

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23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Mitchell, Black Church Beginnings, 46.
27 Ibid.
28 Lincoln, 21.
city.”29 Since there was no established process or formula for achieving total separation of the black church from the white church, the process varied and took time to accomplish as stated by Lincoln and Mamiya, “No single example can be said to be completely typical, but the First Baptist Church of Richmond is a fairly good numerical example of the simple problems of overwhelming radical proportions and the overcrowding of space.”30 The following timeline shows the growth of black Christians compared to that of the growth of white Christians between 1780 and 1841 in Richmond, Virginia:

- 1780 - The First Baptist Church of Richmond was founded in.
- 1800 - There were 150 blacks and 50 whites.
- 1838 – There were 1600 blacks and 350 whites.
- 1841 - The 387 white members sold their building to the 1708 blacks for $6500.00, half the appraised value. The renamed First African Baptist Church was set apart.31

The total separation of this African church from the white church was not complete for some years to come. The following excerpt details an example of the struggle blacks had to endure in their desire to be a separate church from whites:

… in 1849, the property title (of the above referenced First Baptist Church of Richmond) had to be vested in the new trustees of the new First African Baptist Church of Richmond, and these trustees had to be elected by the church’s black members from the separating minority of whites. Members of the Supervising Committee had to be appointed by the Baptist Association, and also came from three white churches. This white committee chose as the first pastor of the separated black congregation, Dr. Robert Ryland, President of Richmond College.32

Historically, some black churches were still under the control of white Americans. It is important to remember that this church was founded in Richmond, Virginia in 1780 and still, in 1849 (69 years later), whites maintained control. Mitchell said, “even if the white Baptists had

29 Ibid., 47.
30 Ibid.
31 Lincoln., 47.
32 Mitchell, Black Church Beginnings, 47.
sought to grant full independence, the 1838 Virginia Legislature denied permission for any independent black church.”\textsuperscript{33} Several questions come to mind as one ponders this particular interest of white Americans in this now separated black church: \textit{Why was it so important for white Americans to deny full independence to a black church? Why was it important for white Americans to maintain control of a separated Black church? Was it out of fear? What was the real reason for the denial?} These questions will be answered in the following paragraphs.

Mechal Sobel’s summation of the comparison of black church independence patterns in Virginia versus those in Georgia thusly: “Whereas white Baptists in Georgia sought to infiltrate and dominate black churches, those in Virginia … chose [as required by law after the Nat Turner Rebellion] to maintain black churches as branches,” which they supervised and carefully controlled.”\textsuperscript{34}

There is one example after another that clearly demonstrates the denial of white Americans for blacks to have total church independence was simply based on control as revealed by previous information. That control seems to have been based on fear.

It must be understood that prior to 1800, no church, North or South, evolved without some form of white denominational recognition, trusteeship of land title, and/or certification to the government by respected whites that the blacks involved would cause the slave system no trouble.\textsuperscript{35}

It appears that the mindset of whites was strategic in that, if they purposefully maintained control of the black church, they would know if the blacks were plotting any type of uprising. The following excerpt would also tend to support this understanding: It is obvious from the two previous perspectives that one other major factor for the denial of white Americans for blacks to

\textsuperscript{33} Mitchell, \textit{Black Church Beginnings}, 48.


\textsuperscript{35} Mitchell, \textit{Black Church Beginnings}, 48.
have total church independence was the “slave system” itself. Many white Americans wanted to protect and control what they considered a right and a privilege to own slaves. The following account is how black churches were organized:

In most cases the segregation of congregations was supposedly amicable, but in every case the black congregation had no choice but to accept assistance and continued supervision of a pastoral nature. This was true in both the North and the South in the early years, and continued in the South right up to the Civil War. In the South, white official pastors were discharged the minute the Union troops took possession. In the North, the presence of whites faded as the assistance always needed by new congregations was replaced by black mutual assistance.\textsuperscript{36}

There were at least three other compelling factors that contributed to the necessity for the separation of black churches and white American churches: “The inevitable desire of mixed churches to separate by race came to a head with the organization of black churches in the last half of the eighteenth century.”\textsuperscript{37} There were three other differences that contributed significantly to the need for separation of black from white churches. Those differences were differences in class, culture, and control factors. These factors were clearly identifiable as certain groups (White Baptists and Methodists) began to prosper both financially and socially. The differences in class, culture and control that mostly definitely affected the need for separation between black churches and white churches are briefly defined as follows:

The class factor. This issue evolved as the White Baptists and Methodists both North and South, engaged in social and economic upward mobility. The culture factor. The issue of worship was illustrated concerning the First African American Baptist Church in Richmond. As white Baptists became more affluent and socially respectable, they were still more important was the refusal of whites to share organizational power or control with African Americans, whether slave or free.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36} Mitchell, \textit{Black Church Beginnings}, 49.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
The challenges with the three c’s of class, culture, and control, reveal that to some extent, control is still an issue that confronts some of today’s racially mixed congregations. During this time in U S history, including the post-World War II era, the control factor was an important issue. Mitchell so candidly points out that the two latter factors “bore heavily on the terms of actual independence.”

Even in the post-World War II era, the greatest challenge facing ethnically or racially transitional congregations has been, and still is, how to settle the issues of culture and control. In other words, the ones who provide the financial resources tend to insist on control, but those who provide the participants want equality of vote, regardless of how much they can or cannot give. Nothing much has changed for

The question of control makes determining “a fully separated…congregation of African Americans” very challenging. To that end, Mitchell states, “Thus it becomes difficult to declare exactly when the first church of supposedly independent African Americans began, since there was a question of whose independence was greater, as well as who met for worship first.”

In the absence of absolute organizational chronology ‘Appendix A’ shows the evolving and emerging denominations in the history of the black church.

As the growth of black churches continued, so did the emerging personalities and pioneers of her earliest history. There were so many great men and women through the years that have contributed so much to the growth and sustainability of the black church, to the freedom black Americans, and even to the American society in particular. Therefore, it is fitting to share the names of some of those deserving pioneers on whose shoulders the black church stands.

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39 Ibid., 53.

40 Ibid.

41 Mitchell, Black Church Beginnings, 53.

42 Ibid.
Listed below is only a small sampling of those faithful pioneers of yesterday, documented in part, by Marvin A. McMickle, in his book, *An Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritage*. The following pioneers were among the first to lead the way for the beginning of the black church in the United States: Bryan, Andrew, 1737 - 1812 was “among the first black men in American history to be ordained to the ministry and assigned to a congregation.”\(^{43}\) Andrew, in a sense, set the stage and led the way for other black ministers to be ordained for the primary leadership position in African American churches.

As the years progress, we see other black ministers began to rise to pastoral leadership in black churches. The first black Baptist church to be organized in the United States (1773-1775) was located in Silver Bluff, South Carolina. George Liele, 1750 – 1820, a slave, was allowed to serve as preacher to that congregation. Thus Liele may have been the first black preacher to an organized congregation in America.\(^{44}\) The process of change is often a process carefully molded in the clay of time. This was especially true with total black leadership of black churches. Regardless of the time this change took to be widely manifested, the course of black church leadership was planted and continually growing.

Another example was Joseph Willis, 1758 – 1854, “A free black slave native of South Carolina and who founded, in 1805, the first Baptist church of any race west of the Mississippi. Willis was effective with whites and blacks, and organized in Louisiana the first five churches, which he then organized into the Louisiana Baptist Association in 1818.”\(^{45}\) It now appears that black leadership of black churches was becoming more commonly accepted and black ministers

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\(^{44}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{45}\) Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings*, 51.
were continuing to move forward. Richard Allen, 1760 – 1831, “organized a new
denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first fully independent black
denomination.” Pastoral leadership in black churches embraced a newcomer as Ms. Jarena Lee,
1783 – 1855, was the first black woman to achieve recognition as a preacher in the United
States. This small sampling of the first black minister heroes of the black church were
instrumental in building the foundation on which the black church of today stands. The
challenges of years gone by and the foundation that has been laid is still being built upon.

In more modern times of the twentieth century, the following pulpiteers have been very
successful in contributing to the continual growth and sustaining of the black church in this
country: Sandy Ray, 1898 – 1979, had a unique preaching style and he became one of the most
widely heard and greatly loved preachers in this country. Gardner Taylor, who was the eulogist
at Ray’s funeral spoke these words:

> At the height of his pulpit oratory it was hard to tell whether one heard music half
spoken or speech half sung … He was president of preaching, ambassador
plenipotentiary from the imperial court of King Emmanuel. He was the crown of
the pulpit, a flaming herald of Calvary’s news.48

There are so many great black preachers from the twentieth century that could be
highlighted; however, for the brevity of time and space, only two more shall be included in this
theses. William Borders, 1905 – 1993, “was known as, ‘the Prophet of Wheat Street’. He was
the pastor of a five-thousand-member congregation in Atlanta, Georgia and was a civil rights
activist even before Martin Luther King, Jr.”49 Lastly, there was Gardner Taylor 1918 – Present.

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46 McMickle, 2.
47 Ibid., 8.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.,3.
Taylor’s life involved an event that changed the course of his life and ultimately lead him into ministry. The short version of his story is as follows:

Taylor been accepted into the University of Michigan School of Law when he was involved in a terrible automobile accident that claimed the lives of two white men. Taylor was exonerated of any wrongdoing by a white witness. This experience not only literally saved his life, but from that moment, his mind turned toward the ministry.\(^{50}\)

That concludes the first phase of the abolitionist movement. McMickle reports the second phase of the movement as, “ending the practice of slavery among those black people who were born in the United States before and after 1808.”\(^{51}\) However, like many other causes for blacks in this country, McMickle reports of the second phase of the abolitionist movement the following: “That form of slavery did not end until after the end of the Civil War … Slavery was officially abolished when the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified on December 6, 1865.”\(^{52}\) That act in and of itself was a major accomplishment; however it did not immediately solve the problems for African American people. As Martin Luther King Jr. quotes Lyndon Johnson on emancipation: “Emancipation was a Proclamation but not a fact. The pen of the Great Emancipator had moved the Negro into the sunlight of physical freedom, but actual conditions had left him in the shadow of political, psychological, social, economic and intellectual bondage.”\(^ {53}\)

\(^{50}\) McMickle, 84.

\(^{51}\) McMickle, 84

\(^{52}\) McMickle, 221.

At that time, a staggering number of “more than four million black people were living as slaves in the United States,” \(^{54}\) according to McMickle. It is noteworthy to also capture some of those avid supporters of this movement. Black and white leaders alike united in this effort. Among the white leaders were, “William L. Garrison, many notable black religious leaders, such as James Pennington, Sojourner Truth, Samuel Cornish, Samuel R. Ward, Ringgold Ward, Alexander Crummell, Peter Williams, Jr., and Henry H. Garner, were also active in the abolitionist movement.” \(^{55}\)

While there were religious movements occurring within the black church, there were also specific racially motivated, political movements that in one way or another impacted the black church because it impacted black people. Two that were noteworthy are the *Colonization Movement* and the *Emigration Movement*. McMickle defines colonization as, “The attempt to resettle black people in new communities outside of the United States.” \(^{56}\) This movement met with fierce opposition from most black leaders, most notably Frederick Douglas. McMickle records Douglas and other black leaders’ opposition to colonization as follows:

… they viewed America, not Africa or Haiti, as their native land. They objected to the idea that whites could bring blacks from Africa to labor in lifelong slavery generating wealth for their owners and for American society. Then, either because slaves became free or slavery was abolished, those same whites wanted to remove black persons from the country they had helped to build. \(^{57}\)

It is reported that the colonization movement was also supported by the highest political officer of this country, President Abraham Lincoln. His proposal, as recorded by McMickle was:

“… for the free blacks living in the United States and for black people who would become free

\(^{54}\) McMickle, 221.

\(^{55}\) Ibid.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 240.

\(^{57}\) McMickle, 51.
as a result of the Emancipation Proclamation, would have resettled free blacks on the island of Vache, off the coast of Haiti.” 58 Sadly, the “initial group of five hundred colonists were sent in 1862 of whom two hundred died within two months of arrival from tropical diseases and other hardships.”59

The second of these two movements was the Emigration Movement. McMickle states the emigration movement was black leaders “call to renounce American citizenship and establish a new home for themselves in Canada, the Caribbean, or various locations in Africa.” 60 McMickle also adds the following: If colonization was perceived as a solution for white people on how to remove an unwanted black population, emigration was understood as a solution by black people who no longer believed that their assimilation into American society was possible or desirable. 61

Civil Rights: The Movement of the 20th Century

There were several other movements in this country that directly involved and/or were started by or for the so-called benefit of blacks. The most significant of these movements that fostered black church involvement was, of course, the Civil Rights Movement, which involved a plethora of personalities, black and white, from various economic and professional backgrounds. The most notable leader of the Civil Rights Movement was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a black Baptist minister from Atlanta, Georgia.

Lincoln and Mamiya states, “From the beginning, the Civil Rights Movement was anchored in the Black Church, organized by both black ministers and laity, and supported

58 Ibid., 241.
59 Ibid., 241.
60 Ibid., 56.
61 Ibid., 240.
financially by black church members."\textsuperscript{62} Other civil rights’ groups such as “Congress of Radical Equality (CORE) and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were influenced by black church culture …”\textsuperscript{63} There has been an enormous amount of research done on the Civil Rights and its impact on this nation from various perspectives, but the perspective that is relevant to this thesis is the black church.\textsuperscript{64} Yet it would be unrealistic to think that the Civil Rights Movement had 100% of the black church participation. The truth is, all black churches were “not unanimous in its affirmation of solidarity and social activism, however, and in dialectical fashion it became a beneficiary of the black consciousness movement it had helped to spawn.”\textsuperscript{65}

The information in this chapter is intended to be has been enlightening, informative and to offer a sad reminder of the cruelty of racism and prejudice in this country. Søren Kierkegaard said, “Life is lived forward, but life is understood backward.”\textsuperscript{66} This racism and prejudice also affected the black church. However, in spite of such struggles and challenges, the black church is still thriving and remains a vital part of the black lifestyle and this country in general. It is because of the importance of the black church that she must be strengthened and revitalized.

\textsuperscript{62} Lincoln, 165.

\textsuperscript{63} Lincoln, 165.


\textsuperscript{65} Lincoln, 165

\textsuperscript{66} J. Deotis Roberts, \textit{Africentric Christianity: A Theological Appraisal for Ministry} (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2000), 88.
spiritually from the inside out. While many of the strong church leaders of the past are no longer among us, God is still raising up new leaders, to be the next group of spiritual visionaries for His people and for their future.

The Historical Leadership of the Black Church

The Genesis of the Black Church section of this thesis has established the fact that the black church, since the late 1800s, was led by the black pastor. Brian K. Blount offers the following perspective on the leadership of the black church leader:

Without question, the black preacher has been in the center of defining the black religious experience as it has existed in this country. Early on, the black preacher took the lead in refashioning the Christian gospel in ways that made it contextually relevant to those who hungered to hear the gospel proclaimed in an idiom they could understand.\(^67\)

This thesis shall set forth the various responsibilities of the leadership of the black pastor. The black pastor was considered a servant to the people. His duties were spread across a broad spectrum of responsibilities. The black pastor not only conducted worship services, served as Bible teacher, performed baptisms, weddings and funerals, but he had a significant number of other duties and responsibilities. Those additional duties and responsibilities included, but were not limited to: counselor, mediator in family affairs, employment advisor and civic and political leader. It was the expectation of the black pastor to serve not only as spiritual advisor, but also as a financial expert and legal advisor. He was sought after to provide direction and comfort for those who were depressed and those who often felt defeated and disenfranchised.

Floyd Massey offers what the black pastor was to the church and the community in his book entitled, Church Administration in the Black Perspective. Massey said, “The pastor was the preacher, prophet, priest, patriarch, program-promoter, church name promulgator, God’s

anointed and representative of the Eternal.” As previously stated, the called profession of a pastor is one that carries grave responsibility and also one that requires a strong commitment of time, prayer, effort, and perseverance. The responsibility of this call can be so demandingly overwhelming that, as Massey stated, “no person, common sense intact, would seek to be a pastor on their own accord.” Pastors are to be grateful that it is God who does the calling.

In many black churches, there existed a dynamic relationship with the black pastor in the life of the black church and community. The pastor was viewed in part, as the shepherd who not only provided leadership in the church but also was the one who fed the people the Word of God, protected them, admonished them, and encouraged them. This dynamic relationship was threefold and understood in this context according to Massey, “the pastor was the shepherd, the flock was the congregation and the sheepfold was the church building.” Those who truly believe they have been called to pastoral leadership, must understand and trust God to walk with them every step of the way. In many cases, especially in the early days of the black church, pastors were overworked and underpaid for all that they invested in obedience to their pastoral calling.

Several other authors have pinned similar positions of agreement relating to the leadership of black church leaders on behalf of the black church and community. In his book, *Transformative Pastoral Leadership in the Black Church*, Jeffrey Tribble stated the following, “At the start of the twenty-first century, the black church is being transformed by internal and external forces. As in the past, the social crises in the Black community placed special burdens

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69 Ibid., 45.

70 Ibid, 25.
on the Black church.”\textsuperscript{71} The social crises in the black community included: racism, discrimination, hatred, poverty, an unjust legal system, inadequate education, and Jim Crow laws. A mere sampling of racism, discrimination, and hatred can be seen in this country’s history in regard to blacks in the following historical accounts: “The Bomb Heard Around the World,”\textsuperscript{72} as told by one of the survivors, Carolyn McKinstry, of the deaths of four teenage black girls killed in a church bombing. This bombing occurred at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, on Sunday, September 15, 1963.\textsuperscript{73}

Another incident of racial discrimination was George Wallace, when he served as governor of Alabama. This incident occurred on June 11, 1963, as Governor Wallace stood in the registrar’s office of the University of Alabama in an attempt to uphold his slogan that promised “Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!”\textsuperscript{74} This blatant attempt to maintain racial discrimination and racial division was demonstrated as Governor Wallace physically positioned himself in a doorway in an attempt to block the entry of “Vivian Malone and James Hood, two black students.”\textsuperscript{75}

The case of Brown v. Board of Education was a landmark United States Supreme Court case for educational equality. In this case, separate but equal public schools were declared unconstitutional. This decision was rendered on May 17, 1954, with the Warren Court's


\textsuperscript{73} Leslie V. Tischauser, \textit{Chronology to Jim Crow Laws} (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishers, 2012), xxiii.

\textsuperscript{74} Tischauser, 143.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
unanimous 9–0 decision. The following judgment was written on May 31, 1955 and signed by Chief Justice Warren:

On consideration whereof, it is ordered and adjudged by this court that the judgment of the said District Court in this cause be, and the same is hereby, reversed with costs; and that this cause be, and the same is hereby, remanded in the said District Court to take such proceedings and enter such orders and decrees consistent with the opinions of this Court as are necessary and proper to public schools on the a racially nondiscriminatory basis with all deliberate speed the parties to this case.76

This ruling of the Supreme Court was pivotal for blacks and a significant platform for integration; it was a major victory of the Civil Rights Movement. The last of this sampling of racial discrimination in this country was that of Jim Crow Laws. According to a book written by Leslie V. Tischauser, *Jim Crow Laws*, she offers the following as a definition of Jim Crow Laws:

The term Jim Crow refers to a series of laws and ordinances passed by Southern states and municipalities between 1877 and 1965 legalizing segregation (the physical separation of individuals based on race, gender, religion or class) within their boundaries. It also refers to a way of life in which whites and blacks lived in two vastly unequal communities in the South. One of them – the white, had all the power, wealth, and privileges while the other – the black, faced daily unending incidents of terror and humiliation, with hardly any freedom, very little wealth and absolutely no justice.77

The aforementioned incidents were only a minute sampling of racial discrimination in this country that significantly and negatively affected blacks in the most deplorable and degrading manner. The leadership of the black church often stood in the gap between this country’s system of social injustice and the black community. H. Beecher Hicks, Jr., in his book, *Images of the Black Preacher: The Man Nobody Knows*, contends, “… as long as the black

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77 Tischauser, 1.
church exists, the black preacher will be burdened and blessed with the responsibility of leading black people in the most intimate and critical experiences of their lives.”

The black church leader was not only the voice of the church, but his was also the voice and the advocate for the black community. In *An Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritage*, Marvin McMickle states: “one of the great legacies of the Black religious community has been the angry cry of the voice of the Prophets.” The black preacher, in many instances, served as the voice of the black community during some of the darkest struggles of racial discrimination in this country. As stated in *A Journey Through the Jungle*, Sandy Ray enforces, “The Black preacher was the voice in the wilderness known as racism.” The black church leader bears the burden of caring for the people holistically. Whereas there were abundant resources and services available to white Americans on a large scale, few such resources and services were available to black Americans.

There are those who may think black church leaders are only concerned about the “soul” of man; however, their concern is for the “all” of man. There is a plurality of responsibility, concerns, burdens, and blessings for the black church leader in caring for God’s people who have been kissed by nature’s sun. For those who maintain that all Christian leaders experience similar responsibility and concern in caring for any flock of God, be assured there is a different paradigm when plagued with American racism.

Others may choose to voice opinions that differ from this point of view, however, until someone has lived life under American racism as blacks have, there is really no real concept of

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79 McMickle, xiv.

what that life feels like, not looks like as depicted in books and movies, but what it actually means to live such a life. Many black church leaders have been a driving force in working to bring about the necessary national social awareness to positively affect necessary social change for blacks in this country. There have certainly been many others (including other clergy) who have been instrumental in supporting and fighting for the social change for the cause of blacks; however, this section of this thesis is dedicated to *The Historical Leadership in the Black Church*.

*The Theology of Black Liberation*

It was during the 2008 Presidential campaign, when the world and America’s conscience was shaken as it was awakened to the reality of Black Liberation Theology. The first sound bites and images of Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. (then candidate Barack Obama’s pastor) aired on Fox News. Dr. Wright’s preaching was seemingly angry and filled with hatred against whites and America as a whole. Many Americans, especially in the white communities, wondered if this pastor was un-Christian and unpatriotic. The inquiring minds of some black Americans, white Americans, and brown Americans wondered what was the meaning of Black Liberation Theology and where did this theological system originate? Before black theology can be critically and accurately analyzed, there must be a clear working definition of what it means. An accurate definition for Black Liberation Theology must be defined in three major areas. The first area is the faith of the black Christian, the second area is the black experience, and the third area is the big idea of liberation.

Black Christians plus their faith equals God’s great liberation. James H. Cone, the godfather of black theology, defines it this way: “Black Theology is a theology of liberation because it is a theology which arises from identification with the oppressed Blacks of America,
seeking to interpret the gospel of Christ in the light of the Black condition.”

Bruce L. Fields articulated Black Theology from the statement by the National Committee of Black Churches in 1969 which stated:

Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black theology is a theology of “blackness.” It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says “no” to the encroachment of white oppression.”

In Field’s definition, he defines black theology this way, “Black Theology involves the process of formulating theology from the perspective of an oppressed people. It seeks to interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ against the backdrop of historical and contemporary racism.”

Through the magnifying glass of black theology, the foundational aspect of Christianity, the illumination of the black experience, and the power of God’s liberation through Jesus Christ is revealed. If one is to fully understand and ascertain black theology, all three of these ingredients must be mixed together to grasp its full meaning and understanding.

**The Origin of Black Theology**

Black theology, like any other religious movement, has a beginning. This beginning can be better illustrated or visualized by the biblical account found in Exodus chapter 3 when God’s chosen people were under the oppression of Pharaoh. Black Americans identified with this account because of the similarities. Like the Israelites, the American black slave was mistreated.

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83 Ibid., 15.
and dehumanized by an unjust system. In *The Gospel According to the Marginalized*, Harvey J. Sindima describes the origin of black theology this way:

> African-American theology is a theology of liberation that emerged out of the Civil Rights and African-American Power Movements of the 1960s...Black theology emerged as an interpretation and an attempt to reconcile the message of these two movements, the Civil Rights and Black Power. Black theology arises from black religion which goes back to the time of slavery. Contemporary black theology, however, traces its “origin” to the summer of 1966, when African-American clergy formed an ad hoc national committee of black churchmen.84

Anthony Bradley, in *Liberating Black Theology*, sums up the origin of black theology in the most simplistic way when he states, “Black theology originated as a reaction to the lack of attention paid to the plight of blacks by Protestants during the Civil Rights Movement.”85

Bradley highlights also James Cone as the developer of black theology in the late 1900s. Bradley describes Cone’s reason for developing black theology to have been born:

...out of a frustration that at no point in his seminary or Ph.D. studies at predominantly white schools, was there any discussion about racism and segregation in America. While completing a Bachelor of Divinity program at Garret Biblical Institute (now Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary), his frustration turned into what may seem like bitter anger.86

Bradley further explains that Cone’s “experience of encountering racism among United Methodists at Garrett, along with his professor’s refusal to see ‘racism as a theological problem,’ prompted Cone to attempt to make these theological connections on his own.”87 According to Bradley, Cone’s perspective was, “it seemed that despite studying during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, the central problems being addressed in American theology were issues only

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85 Anthony B Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 34.
87 Ibid.
in the European context."\(^{88}\) James Cone’s theological background as stated in Bradley’s book, was “derived from philosophers and theologians such as Immanuel Kant, Jean Paul Sartre, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Albert Ritschi, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich and other neoorthodox theologians."\(^{89}\) Such influence in Cone’s perspective demonstrates that he desired to look beyond the nineteenth century mindset to develop a theology that was truly unique to the black experience.

The Spiritual Connection Between Black Theology and Christian Theology

Christian theology and black theology begins and ends with God. What sets the relationship apart is the hermeneutical lens through which black theology is seen. Black theology focuses its lens on God and what He does in the light of the oppressed condition of man. Black theology’s spiritual focus zooms in on God’s amazing activity among the oppressed in bringing change and liberation to fruition through the liberating power of our emancipator and liberator, Jesus Christ, whose reason for coming is stated in Luke 4:18: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”\(^{90}\)

James Cone articulates how black theology and Christian theology join forces:

Because I am a Christian, my theological reflections start with Jesus. The Jesus, about whom I speak, however, is not primarily the one of Nicaea and Chalcedon, nor of Luther, Calvin, and Barth…I turn to the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul and of the spirituals and gospel music, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Martin Luther King Jr. This Jesus of

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\(^{88}\) Ibid.  
\(^{89}\) Ibid., 37.  
\(^{90}\) Luke 4:18, ESV.
biblical and Black traditions is not a theological concept, but a liberating presence in the lives of the poor in their fight for dignity and worth.\textsuperscript{91}

Anthony Bradley also emphasizes how black theology and Christian theology come together in holy, spiritual wedlock when he said, “In Black theology the New Testament reveals the good news that Jesus Christ came to liberate the poor and oppressed victims and to inaugurate God’s Kingdom.”\textsuperscript{92} Cone also captured this idea when he wrote,

Christian theology is a theology of liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{93}

Many in the black church tradition hold the theological position that God displayed his loyal relational love to Israel when He delivered them from (Pharaoh’s) oppressive bondage. The black church sees this in how God delivered them from slavery and racism. In a real sense, God is seen as the God of the oppressed. While a common critique of the black church tradition is that it overemphasizes the Exodus story, this critique comes without acknowledging the significance of Jesus in the life of the black church tradition, and it de-emphasizes the Exodus as the event that shaped the national, moral, spiritual, and physical makeup of the Israelites.

The Exodus was an unforgettable experience for the Israelites that helped to shape their culture. It perpetrated a movement from physical oppression to physical liberation, from spiritual oppression to spiritual liberation, and from national oppression to national liberation. It was an event that shaped and molded how the Israelites should govern their lives. The Exodus principle is simple: do not do what has been done to you. Therefore, the Exodus serves as a reminder to the people to remember where they have come from, the salvation that was received, the God

\textsuperscript{91} James H. Cone, \textit{God of the Oppressed} (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), xiii.

\textsuperscript{92} Bradley, 74.

\textsuperscript{93} Cone, \textit{A Black Theology of Liberation}, 17.
who brought them out, and what is required of them in return. God reminded them of the Exodus as He was outlining what He expected from the Israelites.  

Furthermore, the Exodus was a lesson that attempted to teach the Israelites to hate injustice and oppression. It also acted as the litmus test for punishment and judgment when the Israelites did not hold to the standard that God has set. Scripture tells us that God “executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows his love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.” This particular passage continues by employing Exodus language as God commanded the Israelites to act as God acted, saying, “so show your love for the alien for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.” As it pertains to punishing the Israelites, Scripture is explicit when it characterizes the disobedience of Israelites not only as idolaters, but also as oppressors. They treated others as they had been treated; therefore, they were punished.

“The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice…Thus I have poured out My indignation on them I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath. Their way I have brought upon their heads,” declares the Lord God.

In the black church tradition, God is the God of the oppressed who blatantly tells us that He “love(s) justice.” Jesus, therefore being God, also loves justice and is the Messiah of the oppressed. The meta-narrative is salvation, and the God who saves is eternally concerned with the oppressed. Since it has been argued and articulated that black theology is concerned with the oppressed condition and Christian theology is viewed as a liberating theology that focuses on the

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94 Exodus 19:4-6, 20:2; Leviticus 11:44-45, 22:32-33, 25:35-38; Deuteronomy 5:6, 7:7-11

95 Deuteronomy 10:18, NASB.

96 Deuteronomy 10:19, NASB.

97 Ezekiel 22:29, 31, NASB.

98 Isaiah 61:8, NASB.
divine acts of Jesus Christ, Cone points out that the relationship between Christ and black theology go hand in hand when he paints a picture with these words, “Jesus Christ is the subject of black theology because He is the content of the hopes and dreams of black people.”\footnote{Cone, \textit{God of the Oppressed}, 30.} Cone furthers his argument regarding the relationship between Christian theology and black theology when he said,

> It is my contention that Christianity is essentially a religion of liberation. The function of the theology is that of analyzing the meaning of that liberation for the oppressed so they can know that their struggle for political, social, and economic justice is consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any message that is not related to the liberation of the poor in a society is not Christ’s message. Any theology that is indifferent to the theme of liberation is not Christian theology.\footnote{Sindima, 146.}

The Spiritual Relationship Between Black Theology and the Black Experience

Outside the saving and redemptive power of Jesus Christ, the black experience is the most dominant force to understanding black theology. Major J. Jones said, “One cannot glean in the full meaning of the black experience unless he understands something of the meaning of slavery in the light of the black experience. Such knowledge can be acquired only if slavery is seen from a Black frame of reference.”\footnote{Major Jones, \textit{Black Awareness} (Nashville: Abington Press, 1971), 20-12.}

Slavery was the foundational focal point in which black theology got its existence. The oppressive and evil acts of slavery robbed and dehumanized the black race. Acts of lynching, terrorizing, and mutilation caused black people not only to be impacted by their horrible experience and plight, it caused them to draw closer to God for His liberating power. Cone describes the black experience this way:

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\footnote{Cone, \textit{God of the Oppressed}, 30.}
\footnote{Sindima, 146.}
\footnote{Major Jones, \textit{Black Awareness} (Nashville: Abington Press, 1971), 20-12.}
There is no truth for and about black people that does not emerge out of the context of their experience. Truth in this sense is black truth, a truth disclosed in the history and culture of black people. This means that there can be no black theology which does not take the black experience as a source for its starting point. Black theology is a theology of and for black people, an examination of their stories, tales, and sayings. It is an investigation of the mind into the raw materials of our pilgrimage, telling the story of “how we got over.”

The black evangelical, Anthony B. Bradley, explains the black experience this way,

To begin to understand the role of the Christian church in the African-American experience, one must revisit the history of Western slavery in Africa and its practice in the United States... The Christianization of slaves was understood by some as another form of colonialism for the United States. In actuality, dehumanization of slaves resulted as slave masters denied them full understanding of their humanity in Christ. Instead, the slaves were taught that their situation was a curse from God because of their blackness, and extension of the larger curse of Ham.

The black experience has not always been a negative experience. Too often the black experience has been used to play the race card by taking on the victim’s role. If one is not careful he or she will allow the negative experiences to override the positive blessings that God has bestowed upon black Americans. Helmut Thielicke, in *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, helps to refocus not on a personal experience of life, but to keep the focus on the Christ when he said:

> My plan is simply this: every theological idea which makes an impression upon you must be regarded as a challenge to your faith. Do not assume as a matter of course that you believe whatever impresses you theologically and enlightens you intellectually. Otherwise suddenly you are believing no longer in Jesus Christ, but in Luther, or in one of your other theological teachers.

The black experience has played a major role in moving our country forward. It is through the black experience that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. received the Nobel Peace Prize. It

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102 Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 16.

103 Bradley, 122-123.

was through the Black experience that an African-American has been elected to serve two terms in the highest office in our country, President of the United States of America.

Black theology and the black religious experience were and are the driving forces that motivated black ancestors and Dr. King to believe and to have a dream. Their dreams were of a better America where all mankind would be treated equally. Dr. Martin Luther Jr. articulates this dream with poetic, powerful, and profound words of his famous “I Have A Dream” speech found in Appendix C.

It remains a fact that racism and racial injustice are still prevalent in this country. At the same time, it is also a fact that because of the efforts, sacrifices, and dedication of black church leaders and others who united together in their cause, that changes have been made in our government and other areas of society that are less oppressive for Black citizens. Melva Wilson Costen paints the picture of resistance through church life. At a time when it was not safe for slaves to worship God in their unique way, they opposed the injustice, by creating the “Invisible Institution,” or secret places of worship; they found space to develop their own understandings about God. “Although risky, such secrecy transcended the daunting eyes and ears of slave holders and overseers.” A former slave, as recorded by Costen, describes the use of Negro spirituals in resisting the oppression of the slave masters. Listen to his words:

Steal away to Jesus…mean dere gwine be a ‘ligious meetin’ dat night. De masters … didn’t like dem … meetin’s, so ous natcherly slips off at night, down in the bottoms or somewhere. Sometimes us sing and pray all night.  

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106 Ibid.

Here the slave understands that the spirituals, while religious, are also freedom songs. They are sung to gather the slaves for singing and prayer, against the wishes of the masters, and naturally they would pray for “freedom, liberation, and deliverance.”\textsuperscript{108} The Invisible Institution is “considered foundational to the subsequent establishment of African American ‘visible institutions:’ congregations, denominations, schools, burial associations, fraternal orders, sororities, political movements, and organizations for the pursuit of justice and equality.”\textsuperscript{109} Faith played a large role in slaves finding self-worth and dignity despite the outcry of the master, thereby changing religious and societal structures.

The rise of black denominations originated “because of societal injustices and inequities,”\textsuperscript{110} because there was a “need for sincere love and unity in the beloved family of God,”\textsuperscript{111} a love that was not readily given them by Euro-American denominations and churches. Once again we see faith as the drive for creating a space for blacks to be seen as valuable and for them to develop their own religious identity. For in these spaces, “unhealthy societal structures can be transcended in worship as the gathered community, consciously or subconsciously, reacts to established structures while generating new ones.”\textsuperscript{112} Not only did faith in a loving God help create black denominations, black faith leaders with extraordinary oratory skills helped to create these said black denominations.

Whenever African Americans of unusual power preached with such force that Euro-Americans were also moved, steps were often taken to ‘silence’ them. It is understandable, then, that leadership for the establishing of separate worshiping

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{111} Melva Wilson Costen, 66.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 67.
congregations and ultimately separate denominations stemmed primarily from the efforts of pioneering preachers. Such power from the pulpit was apparent in each denomination where preaching by African Americans was permitted.\textsuperscript{113}

In the fight for the abolition of slavery and during the civil rights movement, black faith leaders played pivotal roles in changing the societal landscape. “Independent Black churches of the antebellum North were especially significant in the abolitionist movement”\textsuperscript{114} because “these clergy used their pulpits to attack slavery, racial discrimination, proslavery white churches, and the American Colonization Society.”\textsuperscript{115} During the civil rights movement “churches became gathering and training places for protestors,” and “preachers articulated the connection between the gospel and the movement.”\textsuperscript{116} The biography of Martin Luther King Jr., which was written by Stewart Burns, gives a clear example of the role of the minister in the Civil Rights Movement:

Ministers took turns leading prayers for success of the meeting, strength of spirit to carry on nonviolently, strength of body to walk for freedom, and for all people to live in justice and equality. The Reverend Seay led the assembly in ‘a prayer for those who oppose us,’ the toughest of the prayers. By forgiving their adversaries, protesters sought to convert them in their hearts, turning enemies into friends, moving toward reconciliation and a new relationship. Loving their enemy would loosen the grip of fear, fortifying their courage when faith might falter.\textsuperscript{117}

Not only were preachers heavily involved in the movement, but laypersons who felt their faith in God compelled them to act. The civil rights movement included “lay church leaders and community activists as well, many of whom had still deeper roots in their local black

\begin{thebibliography}{11}
\bibitem{113} Ibid., 70.
\bibitem{114} Stacey Floyd-Thomas et al., \textit{Black Church Studies: An Introduction} (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 14.
\bibitem{115} Ibid., 15.
\end{thebibliography}
communities than the ministers.”\textsuperscript{118} The role of the black church was to “instill and spire key black moral values in non-clerical leaders…by emphasizing the desire for freedom, justice, and equality at the core of black Christian beliefs.”\textsuperscript{119} It was church life, faith, that gave the movement strength, and it was the auxiliaries of the church that trained lay leaders to “handle money, speak in public, and work on behalf of the less fortunate.”\textsuperscript{120} Most of the leadership that came from the auxiliaries was from women, for many of the auxiliaries were established and ran by women.\textsuperscript{121}

One can see that the prophetic voice of not just black preachers, but black people, have helped to shape, and guide our society and government to become more just. Without the experience and pushback of blacks the society could not face, nor continue to face, its original sin. Furthermore, without the continued experience and pushback of blacks, the society would soon forget its original sin.

**Spiritual Connection Between Black Theology and Liberation**

The engine that drives and moves black theology is liberation. The motif of black theology is God’s activity with man. Emmanuel McCall defines the idea of liberation like this,

Liberation theology tries to affirm that each man is a whole personality and cannot be dissected by those who would acquiesce to business or political brokers who would abuse the Christian faith to justify their own lustful greed. Liberation theology demands that the prophetic voice authorized by God and demonstrated by Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Jesus the Christ, not be silenced by those who help the religious institutional bureaucracies greased with green backs.\textsuperscript{122}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118} Floyd-Thomas, 36.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Emmanuel McCall, *Black Liberation Theology* (Nashville: Boardman Press, 1972), 324.
\end{itemize}
Black Liberation Theology demands and requires hope and freedom for those who have been oppressed. It totally rejects the ugly reality of racism, oppression, and genocide. Black Liberation Theology seeks to challenge the church into self-examination and charges the culture to champion the cause of the poor, oppressed, and disenfranchised.

_The Black Church Experience: The Word_

In the black church, outside the presence and the power of God, the most powerful voice is that of the black preacher. In his book, _On the Jericho Road_, Dr. J. Alfred Smith Sr. sagaciously suggests, “The highest object in an African-American Baptist church is the pulpit. This is symbolic of the importance placed on both the message and the messenger.”

H. Beecher Hicks Jr., in his book, _Images of the Black Preacher_, sounded the alarm on the importance of preaching in the Africa-American church when he said:

> Search for the root of black religion, and one will find preaching. Search for the sustaining factor of the black church, and one will discover preaching. Search for a starting point for a meaningful ministry, and one must inevitably begin and conclude with preaching. Black people are people of the Word. They are, by culture, a preaching-oriented people. They come from a preaching tradition…Indeed, the whole of black worship is centered around a powerful sense of expectancy for the preaching of the Word.”

In the black culture, the black preacher’s voice represents what John the Baptist’s voice meant in the New Testament. Gardner Taylor said:

> Who can forget the great New Testament preaching of John the Baptist, in the desert preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin and yet able to speak to Herod that his morals were not pleasing to God. John’s preaching got him beheaded, and yet he marched resolutely by way of a cross on a hill to shout in a cemetery.

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123 J. Alfred Smith, Sr., _On the Jericho Road_ (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 36.


125 Gardner Taylor, Foreword to _Preaching with Sacred Fire_ by Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), xxi.
H. Beecher Hicks describes the voice of the black preacher this way:

The years of the 1950’s and the 1960’s saw a nation of black people rise to claim their God-given right to freedom and dignity. For many of those years a black Baptist preacher named Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Washington, D.C. as well as around the world, gave voice to the plaintive cries of his people.\textsuperscript{126}

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., like many other Black preachers, represented the Black community as their prophet or spokesman who spoke up and out against the social ills that were plaguing our country such as racism, segregation, discrimination, and injustice. Gardner Taylor said:

Preaching is a way that African Americans have sung the faith that the dark past has taught us. Specifically preaching with sacred fire is the way that we extracted hope from the lessons of faith that years of slavery, segregation, and racism have taught us.\textsuperscript{127}

It has been well stated and documented that it is through the preaching voice of the black preacher that black Americans have kept their faith, hopes, and dreams alive. Henry Mitchell in his book, \textit{Black Preaching the Recovery of a Powerful Art}, highlighted this point when he said:

Before the day of great choirs and other attractions, these black churches grew by leaps and bounds because they offered a warm fellowship in a cold, hostile world. And because they had already matured in the early churches a powerful black preaching tradition.\textsuperscript{128}

Frank Thomas further enlightens this point when he said:

Even during the most difficult and oppressive times, the delivery, creativity, charisma, expressivity, fervor, forcefulness, passion, persuasiveness, poise, power, rhetoric, spirit, style and vision, black preaching gave and gives hope to a community under siege.\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{126} Hicks, 11.

\textsuperscript{127} Taylor, Foreword to \textit{Preaching with Sacred Fire}, xxii.


\textsuperscript{129} Frank Thomas, Preface to \textit{Preaching with Sacred Fire} by Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), xxiv.
Black preaching at its best can be better understood, described and appreciated by focusing on the two major areas: (1) Black hermeneutics and (2) the art form of black preaching.

**Black Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is very important in any theological system, but it is very important in understanding the theology system of black hermeneutics. The African-American preaching perspective defines it this way, “Effective black preaching concerns itself with the extraordinary experiences of a people and their God.”\(^{130}\) In *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America*, Anthony Bradley states:

> The implication for hermeneutics in black theology requires that all exegesis be grounded in the presupposition of God in Christ as the liberator of oppressed victims. A theology developed in light of Christ liberating activity must be based on the following four guidelines: 1) There can be no Christian theology that is not social and political; 2) Theology cannot simply repeat what the Bible says or what is found in a particular theological tradition; 3) Theology cannot ignore cultural tradition; and 4) Theology is always about the liberating of oppressed victims.\(^{131}\)

Black hermeneutics and its interpretation of Scripture are grounded in the interpretation of the black experience. James Cone and other leading black theologians believe that it is totally impossible and unimaginable to be truthful about theology if it is totally disconnected from the human experience.

In his book, *Introducing Black Theology*, Bruce L. Fields quotes James Evans’ argument on hermeneutics, “James Evans argues that an authentic hermeneutics, or the act of interpretation must advance the primary theme of liberation. Liberation captures the real, visceral character of the human struggle against the principle of evil in the world.”\(^{132}\)


\(^{131}\) Bradley, 59.

Historically speaking the Bible, the eternal and infallible Word of God, has been the main authority in the black worship experience. During the period of slavery, the Bible was used to direct the slaves or the black communities toward their quest for freedom, both spiritually and socially. This quest for spiritual freedom and social freedom can be seen in how blacks viewed the Word of God.

Blacks took the Bible seriously for reasons easily traceable to their African roots. In their African roots, they had known huge quantities of memorized material…

In the Yoruba religion they have odus. Each odu has two hundred proverbs, so that some of those Yoruba priests may know about as much verbatim as we have in the whole Bible…This explains to a large extent the way in which blacks adapted themselves to the Bible. The Bible was largely reflecting the kind of culture out of which they came.  

Historically speaking, when it came to God’s Word, blacks never put themselves in a position to be over the Word of God, meaning they had authority over God. Blacks never put themselves side-by-side with the Word of God because that would have made them equal with God. Rather, blacks put themselves underneath the Word of God so that God could be the supreme authority over their lives. When looking through the lens of black hermeneutics, the black preacher led the slaves to keep their eyes focused on Jesus. James H. Cone said in *God of the Oppressed*, “The Jesus of the Black experience is the Christ of Scripture.”  

However, a friendly reminder must be expressed, and that is, blacks must never allow their blackness to overrule and override God’s infallible Word.

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134 Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 102.
The Art Form of Black Preaching

While Black Christians must be careful not to allow blackness to overrule God’s Word, there still must be recognition of the uniqueness of the legendary art form of black preaching. Black preaching throughout its inception has often been imitated by other races, but never duplicated. Walter Thomas, Sr. explains the art form of black preaching in More Power in the Pulpit. He said, “Preaching is a noble art and science. It is art in how we present it; it is science in the message we present.”135 Black preaching at its finest is not just filled with inspiration as most critics would suggest, but black preaching at its very best is also filled with great intellectual information about the black experience and the liberating power of Jesus Christ. Some critics over the years have bombastically barked stereotypes toward black preaching. Warren Wiersbe highlighted this point in his book, Preaching in Black and White, when he said, “The saying in seminary was that black preachers had more heat than light, while the white preachers had light, but no heat.”136

Cleophus J. LaRue describes black preaching like this:

African American preaching at its best has remarkable strengths. The making of an effective black preacher does not begin with formal studies, but rather in the formative stages of the preacher’s life. It is there that the black church molds and shapes a preacher’s thought–world in the richness and depth of the black religious experience. Owing to this reality, black preaching is not so much taught as it is caught.137

There are many characteristics that make up the art form of black preaching. In his book, I Believe I’ll Testify, Cleophus LaRue quotes William B. McClain’s, The Renewal of Sunday Worship, where he lists the following characteristics of black preaching, “Biblical emphasis,

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137 Wilson, 293.
prophetic preaching, poetic style, dialogue, preaching that is declarative rather than suggestive, and preaching that is life situational and contains some element of hope.”

Henry Mitchell gives the greatest attributes of black preaching which has been the cornerstone of black preaching and has survived over these decades. First among the characteristics was intonation or whooping. This is the chanting or sing-song style of delivery in black preaching. Second was spontaneity, which means the ability to respond to the movement of the spirit among preacher and congregation, and to express deep feelings without shame. Third was the basic structure of the sermon, which Mitchell characterized as imaginative, narrative, and prone to generate an experiential encounter.

It is this author’s opinion the art form of spiritual imagination and the black preacher’s rhetorical skills represent the two major ingredients to the secret of black preaching. The word “Spiritual”, according to Webster’s dictionary can be defined as, “of, relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit.” In Black preaching, when the spiritual connects with imagination, you have a preacher with a spiritual, sanctified imagination.

In a Beeson Divinity School lecture, Dr. Maurice Watson, described this experience in this manner: “the wedding between homiletical creativity and hermeneutical accuracy come together.” He further expounded that “it is when the wedding takes place between the cardiological, the heart, and the cerebral brain.”

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139 LaRue, *I Believe I’ll Testify*, 33.


141 Beeson’s Pastor’s Conference held at Samford University, Birmingham, AL on July 18-22, 2011,
Gardner Taylor, the dean of black preaching, defined spiritual imagination as “the mysterious romance between preparation and inspiration.”\textsuperscript{142} This spiritual or sanctified imagination has been used throughout the ages of black preaching since its inception in the seventeenth century. The tool of spiritual imagination was used to retool or reshape the Christian gospel message. This made it contextually relevant to those who thirsted and hungered to hear the good news of Jesus Christ proclaimed in a simple way that the listeners could understand.

Often in the black church service someone in the congregation can be heard to say, “Paint the picture preacher.” This word of encouragement is intended to remind the preacher that people are listening and need him or her to provide mental pictures with language to help them see the gospel.\textsuperscript{143}

The true purpose for one to use his spiritual imagination is not to show off his or her brilliance, but to be used as an art form for turning the audience’s eyes into ears. This imaginative art form is what windows are to rooms. Windows help people to look out and to look in. The art form of spiritual imagination can be seen in a sermon done be Dr. E.V. Hill when he expounded on Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” and Philippians 4:7, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Dr. Hill opened the ears of the audience so that they could look out of the windows of life to see what a praying mother and the grace of God could do in a child of God’s deliverance.

The story is told of a young, black man who went away to college with far less money than was required to pay his expenses. As the young man stood in the cashier’s line, he began to get nervous because he knew he did not have enough money to pay the required amount. As he

\textsuperscript{142} LaRue, \textit{I Believe I’ll Testify}, 73.

\textsuperscript{143} LaRue, \textit{I Believe I’ll Testify}, 110.
remembered his mother’s words, “I’ll be praying for you,” something truly amazing happened as the young man experienced the following encounter:

Dr. Drew touched me on the shoulder and he said, “Are you Ed Hill?” I said, “Yes.” “Are you Ed Hill from Sweet Home?” “Yes.” “Was your principal R.V. Arnold?” “Yes.” “Have you paid yet?” “Not quite.” “We’ve been looking for you all morning and we were hoping we would get to you before you paid so we wouldn’t have to go through the ordeal of refunding you.” I said, “Well what do you want with me?” “We have a four-year scholarship that will pay your room and board, your tuition and give you thirty-five dollars a month to spend.”

Again, we see this explicit picturesque illustration of the art form of spiritual imagination through an excerpt from Robert Smith’s sermon taken from 1 Peter 3:18-22, *Going to Hell for All the Right Reason*. In this excerpt the black preacher’s aim is to show that Jesus went to Hell, for the right reasons in doing the preacher adds an element of creature genius to the story. When speaking of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ preacher imaginatively proclaims:

Jesus put His shoes of dignity under the hall trees of time, and leapt into the womb of a virgin, Mary. He took the train of nature, rode it for nine long months, and got off at a little town called Bethlehem. He was born in a stable, laid in a manger, and was wrapped in swaddling clothes.

After proclaiming that Jesus was falsely accused and hung on a cross, the preacher exclaims that “Three worlds lost their equilibrium: heaven, earth, and hell.” The preacher declares that Christ died on Friday, stayed in the grave three days, got up on Sunday, and appeared to over 500 people. Continuing his creative genius, he places Satan, Death and Hell in a conversation with one another. Jesus shows up and by using Psalm 24:7-10, he begins to give instructions to the Devil:

144 Bailey, 707-708.
146 Ibid.
The announcement was, ‘Lift up your heads, O ye gates. And the King of Glory shall come in.’ The devil stood at the gates of Hades and asked the question, ‘Who is the King of Glory?’ and Jesus answered the question by saying, ‘The Lord strong and mighty. The Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in.’ The devil asked the question again, ‘Who is the King of Glory?’ Jesus said, ‘I told you before and I’ll tell you again: the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. He is the King of Glory.’

After a short showdown with the Devil at the gates of Hell, Jesus enters Hell declaring He has the keys to Hell, Death and the Grave. Finally the preacher says, “He went to vindicate Himself and to tell us we are victorious through His victory over death, hell and the grave.”

Painting the picture has always been a major blueprint in black preaching. Charles Booth said, “My own experience has taught me that a good theological education and sound study habits will produce thoughtful and creative sermons.”

The Art Form of Black Rhetoric

Becoming a great orator or great preacher is like becoming a great artist; it requires one to commit his life to this task. In the black church, the pastor is not only required to show up to church in his Sunday best (clothing), but he is also required to poetically and rhetorically dress up and have great command of the English language in order to effectively communicate the good news of Jesus Christ.

In Stewards of the Story: The Task of Preaching, James Earl Massey said, “Preaching demands knowledge of how to use words, how to handle language and how to organize aspects

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147 Robert Smith, 55-56


of a subject for proper sequencing, proportion, unity and clarity." One word describes the system by which all these factors are understood and governed: rhetoric.

Rhetoric has to do with intention and design in speaking. Given the special nature and purpose of preaching, rhetoric is a proper province for our concern. Vocabulary, grammatical relations, and sentence technique are for the black preacher, no side issues at all. "Effective preaching calls for competence among speech levels and word meaning, in which rhetoric deals with."

Outside of the Bible and the power of the Holy Spirit, the greatest tool that a preacher has is his words. Richard Lischer, in his comments on black preaching, reminds us of how powerful words are when he said, "The black church, they remind us that the sermon is not a verbal essay, but an oral performance of Scripture that includes the whole congregation." That Southern Baptist giant and icon, Paige Patterson, offered up his voice of wisdom and encouragement when he described the rhetorical genius of black preaching as, "When it comes to rhetoric, the best Anglo preachers on their best days don’t preach as well as a good black preacher on his worse day."

It is common for a black preacher to carry in his spiritual medical bag, the Bible, which is the infallible Word of God, and his rhetorical preaching style to administer the medicine of the gospel message. Something happens when God’s Word enters His servant’s mouth. The prophet Jeremiah describes it as, "fire shut up in his bones." 

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152 LaRue, *I Believe I’ll Testify*, 19.

153 Ibid., 20.

154 Jeremiah 20:9, ESV.
Samuel D. Proctor said in *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, “Preaching has a perpendicular aspect to it, lifting the horizontal, mundane, pedestrian issues of living toward the face of God.”¹⁵⁵ He also goes on to say:

Great preaching can present Jesus to the modern mind transposing him from a world of goats, camels, fig trees, and mustard seeds to a world of crack, teenage gun fights, child abuse, stealing in high places, and education without values, keeping alive his transforming and saving power generation to generation. Preaching can see the work of the Holy Spirit in ancient Asian Minor and be open to seeing the same Spirit in a university, a board room, or congressional debate setting two thousand years later.¹⁵⁶ The heart and soul of black preaching is the black preacher’s skill of articulating the truth of the message with passion and the creativity of story-telling. Much of his passion is born out of the experiences of an oppressed life lived in this country. Jesus Christ is always at the center of the black preacher’s message. Jesus Christ is the supreme representative of hope and salvation based upon the faith that He is our Deliverer and our Redeemer.

*The Black Church Experience: Worship*

The independent black church in the United States was born out of a need for blacks to worship freely and in their own unique way. The quest for spiritual and social freedom can be seen from two perspectives: (1) in how blacks viewed the Word of God and (2) in their uninhibited praise and worship toward God. While it may be true that blacks share the core Christian ideology with traditional protestant churches, predominantly black churches have a unique perspective shaped by the institution of slavery and the black experience. James Abbington, in *Readings in African American Church Music and Worship*, points out that, “the black worship experience emerged from slaves needing to have a positive self-image, a

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 13.
wholeness in the midst of degradation, oppression, and suffering, and the need to respond to God’s incarnational presence in their midst.”¹⁵⁷

Through the blacks worship experience, members were able to embrace their God while simultaneously reaffirming their belief for deliverance from oppression. Unless one has experienced life in North America as a black, it really is difficult to understand why the black worship experience is so uplifting and demonstrative. There are those who may say, “it does not take all that!” Perhaps others may say, “The black praise and worship experience resembles that of ‘undignified praise.’” That may be true, but until you understand what the Lord had done in the life of Black people and their journey, there is no way for you to understand the black worship experience. Abbington further asserts that:

Worship in the black tradition is celebration of the power to survive and to affirm life, with all of its complex and contradictory realities. The secular and the sacred and Saturday night and Sunday morning come together to affirm God’s wholeness, the unity of life, and God’s lordship over all of life.¹⁵⁸

Blacks approach spirituality with a markedly different attitude, style, and emphasis, departing from their Euro-American counterparts in a number of crucial ways. The black worship experience consists of three major components: prayer, music, and preaching. When these three components are fused together, they produce an awe-inspiring combination of praise and worship that emits from the farthest depths of the souls of the worshipper.

Traditional black churches generally blur the line between the “secular and sacred.”¹⁵⁹

Black churches, unlike some other faith traditions, which hold a more compartmentalized position, have adopted a “holistic view of life and worship.” Spiritual experiences are not


¹⁵⁸ Abbington, 317.

intended to be separated from everyday life. In this way, since the times of slavery, the black church has played an integral role as the nucleus of black culture from which their values were shaped. Historically speaking, predominantly black churches were more than institutions or sacred places to revere God and to embrace Him as the Supreme Being of the universe. Many black churches simultaneously functioned as a “school, forum, political arena, social club, art gallery, and conservatory of music” as well. The black church provided a place where fellowship and community were stressed. There is also an emphasis on freedom and individual expression through a variety of ways that included the biblical word, song, dance and other expressions of thanksgiving and reverence. As noted by R. Clifford Jones in his article, *African-American Worship: Its Heritage, Character, and Quality*:

Community is a grounding principle of Black worship, understood by African-Americans as an encounter involving God, the worshiper, and the broader community. For them worship is not primarily the expression of one's private devotion to God, but is rather a community event. It is the “eschatological invasion of God into the gathered community of victims, empowering them with the divine Spirit from on high to keep on keeping on even though the odds might appear to be against them.”

In the black church, worship is more of an open, communal experience meant to be felt as a group. Everyone is encouraged to participate, and it is not uncommon for praise to be expressed “vocally and physically” by the entire congregation throughout the worship experience. During congregational song, members of the audience make hymns and spirituals

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162 Maynard-Reid, 60.

163 Costen, 18
their own, adding improvised embellishments.\textsuperscript{164} Jason Johnson described the black worship experience in much detail as he states:

Praising the Lord in the sanctuary of a black church is unlike any other worship experience. It is lively. It is engaging. It is emotional. Through spirit-filled music, moving liturgical dance, and youthful foot-stomping step teams, African Americans praise God from the bottom of the pews to the top of the rafters.

When you step into most African American churches on Sunday morning, the sights and sounds are unforgettable: choir members sway in unison, piano chords joust with organ riffs, and drums keep time with bass guitars. Dancers dress in multi-colored, layered fabrics and long, white flowing vestments lift holy hands to heaven as they leap through sanctified air. The congregants merge themselves with the spirit of the Lord as the choir’s soloist, eyes closed and head thrown back, sings with religious abandon. The scene plays out the same across the country and across denominations – Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal alike when the black fold begin to worship.\textsuperscript{165}

Regardless of denomination, “it is common for African-American church members to stand up and dance, shout encouragement to performers, sing along during musical performances”\textsuperscript{166} and clap and interject their reactions to the sermon as the preacher is preaching. Melva W. Costen confirms these actions when stating that it is only natural that worship trends are similar, despite differences in denominational polity and theology. “With the African kinship system still operating, many members across denominational lines are very much at home in any congregation.”\textsuperscript{167}

There is a keen awareness of both the past and the present, and of freedom in the hymns, yet even with individuality there is no chaos; everyone gets to make their own individual parts and there’s no wrong answer. The individual worship experience is effortlessly and seamlessly combined with that of the congregation in a harmonious way to heighten the overall religious

\textsuperscript{164} Pedrito Maynard-Reid, 62


\textsuperscript{166} Deborah Smith Pollard, \textit{When the Church Becomes Your Party} (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), 25.

\textsuperscript{167} Costen, \textit{African American Christian Worship}, 77.
experience. This recollection of experiences is what Jason Johnson was able to capture through the lenses of his camera as he traveled across the country and denominations to participate in and experience black worship. At the end of this journey Johnson wrote:

It has never been truer that “a picture is worth a thousand words” that in the case of the arresting and inspiring images found within the African American worship experience: allegorical images of struggle on the faces of saints and sinners alike; tears that flow triumphanty out of wells of joy and pain from internal demons still housed in the basements of our individual memories.168

Those who have truly experienced African-American worship, as those cited in this writing have attested, it is an uplifting, energized, deeply emotional, and reverent offering to the Lord from within the souls of the people. Dr. Cain Hope Felder quoted the following in Soul Sanctuary, “perhaps more significant than any other cultural expression among blacks, far outdistancing jazz or rap, athletics, or the arts, is the soulful worship service collectively perpetuated each week in the black church.”169 He describes the black worship service as:

The core element of African American spirituality…this soulful spirituality is reflected in the many different textures and hues of fervent prayer, songs of joy, sorrow, and paradoxical triumph, at times punctuated with a “holy dance” culminating in the preached word, followed closely by a benediction.170

Even today, in most black worship services, you will find that some methodologies may be different, but the basic premise of the experience remains the same. Bishop John Hurst Adams had the following observation regarding the black worship experience:

When you worship in the black church in America, you experience both our history and our hope…Likewise; worship in the black church…embraces openness to the new. Like creation, worship is a continuous process…This gift of celebrating and reconciling is another large contribution of the black church in America, one that is needed more

168 Johnson, 10.
169 Johnson, 13
170 Ibid.
urgently now than ever, as our world becomes global and flatter at the same time, and more complex and smaller”

In many black churches, the sanctuary (wherever that designation may be) is considered the most important place in the church. It is where the preached Word is most often delivered and where the congregation most often comes together in community for the worship experience. Jason Johnson states his perspective on the sanctuary as follows:

The sanctuary is the soul of the black church, and the soul is the sanctuary of our spiritual being…The black church’s impact on individual and community life, a life all too often threatened with crime, socioeconomic blight, and political disadvantage, has never been measured or fully appreciated. Over the years, the dynamics of the black church at worship have had a sustaining and healing impact on the lives of an important, but bedeviled American underclass.”

The great black pulpiteer, H. Beecher Hicks, Jr., expresses his perspective of the sanctuary in the following way:

Sanctuary is where my soul finds peace, where my soul connects to its Savior, where my spirit finds contentment, where my heart is at rest, where the pains and sorrows of this world disappear if only for a moment. I’m glad I found it…That Soul Sanctuary – it’s really my home [emphasis added].

Worship service across America, in most churches, on any given Sunday morning share at least one thing in common and that is, the belief in the one, true, living God. Many also share the common tenets of the preached word, music, and prayer. However, one of the major differences in worship styles is the expressive enthusiasm and rich communal camaraderie of the black worship experience.

171 Ibid, 154-155.
172 Ibid., 9; 15.
173 Ibid., 157.
CHAPTER 2
CROSSING THE BRIDGE OF RACIAL DIVIDE

The Antidote for Our Racial Divide

Just when we thought our common enemy of yesterday was slowly fading away, its evil and divisive spirit have come back to open up old wounds and haunt our hills of today. The greatest threat in America today is not weapons of mass destruction, but the weapons of massive racism. There is no subject that can be more troublesome, emotionally explosive, and divisive than a discussion about race in America. America’s most polarizing and popular evangelical, Billy Graham, said, “Racial and ethnic hostility is the foremost social problem facing our world today.”

The awareness of racial division in America has been communicated by many observers in our society. Among those who have voiced awareness of our racial divisiveness is Michael Emerson. In Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race, Emerson said, “For race is intimately tied to the American experience.”

Yet another has spoken out, the dean of black preachers, Gardner Taylor, had this to say in The Words of Gardner Taylor, Volume 2: “The Kerner Commission issued a report saying that there are two Americas, one white and one black.” Americans are not the only ones who are observing the racial problems in our nation. The astute Swedish scholar and researcher, Gunnar Myrdal, is quoted by Emerson in Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of

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Race. Gunnar described America’s racism problem as “an American dilemma.”⁴ However, the great racial divide is not a “skin color” problem but a “sin” problem. Racism and hatred are blatant denials of the solidarity that we have in Christ. In Christ there is no partiality based upon one’s race or status, nor is there partiality as to whether one is a Jew or Greek, black or white, bond or free.

Racism scars the soul because it is an ugly, evil attitude that often leads to the commission of ugly, evil acts. “Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was right” when he said, “We must all learn to live together as brothers or we will perish together as fools.”⁵ The deadly poison of racism has infected this country and its citizens for far too long. Its epidemic consequences have touched, in one form or another, the entire country. Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson had this to say concerning the racial problem in America, “Racial and ethnic problems are too immense to be addressed with spiritual anemia and cynicism.”⁶

This culture code of racism divides our country in a major way. Look at the sad state of affairs that we are facing in our yet to be United States of America. We are a country more divided now than ever before. We are divided on the debt ceiling. We are divided as Democratic members, Tea Party members, and Republican members. We are divided in the House and Senate. Our Supreme Court was divided on key parts of the Voting Rights Act. We are divided on the sanctity of marriage, tax reform, immigration, and we are divided on ObamaCare. Even our major news sources, Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN, are all divided.

⁴ Emerson, 6.


But it does not stop there. Black America and white America were divided on the Trayvon Martin verdict. This verdict caused the highest office in the free world to speak out. In the Dallas Morning News, July 20, 2013, President Barack Obama implored and pleaded with the American people to “do some soul searching.”

“The nation’s first Black President, recognizing the difference between how whites and blacks were reacting to the Zimmerman verdict, sought to explain why the acquittal had upset so many African Americans.”

In the same Dallas Morning News article, President Obama is quoted to have said, “I think it’s important to recognize that the African-American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and history that doesn’t go away.”

Time Magazine described the President’s efforts differently. Michael Scherer and Elizabeth Dias said, “The President, meanwhile, has so far proved too divisive a public figure to oversee a national conversation on race, despite occasional efforts in his first term.”

In this same article, Time Magazine presented statistical data from the Gallup Poll on our country’s racial divide, “While the Gallup reported 70% of Americans believed in 2008 that race relations would improve with Obama’s election, only a third now believe Obama’s victory fulfilled that promise.”

In dealing with the racial divide, this author does not want to be caught on the wrong side of spiritual history for loving God with all his heart and mind and hating his brother of another color whom he sees every day. In the book, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr.: The* 

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8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.


11 Ibid.
Word that Moved America, Richard Lischer quotes King’s view on racism, “I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless night of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality.”¹²

Gardner Taylor, in How Shall They Preach, revealed racism as not just a one ethnic group issue when he said:

For instance, racism is not merely an oppression by one people of another with all of its resultant group guilt, group degradation and social disorder. Racism is set against the “one blood” tie which God ordained in our creation. Racism, whether it be the reaction of a majority position or the reactionary toughness and terrorism of an outraged minority, assaults the mandate of our creation that we human beings are to have dominion over the “fish in the sea, the birds of the air, and every living creature that crawls on the earth,” not over each other.¹³

What has happened that we have allowed those sacred and famous words, which are found within our nation’s Pledge of Allegiance, “… with liberty and justice for all,”¹⁴ to settle into rigor mortis? Our divided country needs an antidote. The antidote that we need is the power of God to move on the church so that authentic racial reconciliation is practiced. The antidote for racial harmony still requires a lot of work.

The antidote of white theology and black theology has overshadowed God’s theology. It is imperative that black theology as well as white theology refocus its spiritual lenses toward uplifting the human dignity of all ethnic groups and races because all black men, white men, and brown men have been created in the image of God (Imago Dei). The antidote for racial

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¹² Richard Lischer The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 124.


reconciliation should not be some political tactic or an organizational priority, but it should be a Christian imperative.

In the writings of Apostle Paul, a scriptural and theological basis for reconciliation is provided. This antidote overshadows black theology and white theology because it is God’s theology. On God’s authority and through His written Word, the antidote for our country’s racial divide can be obtained. The infallible Word of God brings us together and does not divide us. In 2 Corinthians 5:18, Paul said, “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,” 15 and also in the book of Ephesians, Paul said:

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.16

One of the central tenets of evangelical Christianity is its total reliance upon God’s authoritative Word to lead and guide believing Christians toward moral and ethical behavior. God is and will always be the antidote that bridges our racial divide, brings forgiveness, and ultimately results in racial reconciliation. It is imperative that the church and its pastors, under the authority of the Word of God, speak up and speak out about this issue. God has not given a prophetic voice to the office of the President of the United States, but he has given this voice to the preacher, priest, and prophet. Amos understood this when he said, “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”17 The process of spiritual renewal and the refocus toward racial reconciliation will help black America and white America build

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15 2 Corinthians 5:18, NASB.
16 Ephesians 2:14-16, NASB (emphasis mine).
17 Amos 5:19, NASB.
stronger bridges toward healing, forgiveness, and racial harmony. The late great Peter J. Gomes described the process of racial reconciliation this way when he said, “Reconciliation is the bringing back together of that which has been broken, separated, and estranged.”  

_The Infallible Word of God_

God’s infallible Word has always been and will always be the antidote to bridge the country’s racial divide. One of the issues of our crumbling culture is that we refer to, or rely on, other books and human wisdom before we seek the Word of God as an antidote for our crisis. The actual teaching of the eternal Word of God must be the focal point, or better yet, the antidote that bridges our racial divide. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul declares, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”  

Kevin J. Vanhoover rightly exclaims, “God’s revelatory words always accompany God’s redemptive deeds. When God speaks, God acts; therefore, God is present.”

As people of the Bible who believe in the authority and infallibility of the Scripture, who also believe in the unique, revelatory nature of the Word of God as the truth of God, and who takes seriously the Word of God as the sole authority and as a most important resource, we must be diligent to embody the reconciliation for which the Word of God calls. The Word of God teaches, “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude

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19 2 Timothy 3:16-17, NASB.

themselves.\textsuperscript{21} If God’s Word presents actions, and we are to follow those actions, then we are to live as the Word instructs, love as the Word instructs, and reconcile as the Word instructs.

Although Karl Barth did not subscribe to the infallibility of Scripture, when speaking about the interpretation of Scripture, the various hermeneutics of the church, and the ways in which the church tries to deposit its traditions onto the Holy Word of God, he warns of destruction when the church becomes self-governing and outside the will of God. He warns:

There can be undeniable tensions and party conflict like those between Catholicism and Neo-Protestantism, or like the internal Catholic battles between Realists and Nominalists, Episcopalians and Curialists, Benedictines and Jesuits, or the internal Neo-Protestant between Orthodox and Pietist, “Positives” and Liberal.” And these may give the deceptive appearance that the church is really alive. But it does not live in the inner movement of these tensions. In them we see rather the process of decay to which the church is at once subject when it ceases to live by the Word of God, which means by Holy Scripture.”\textsuperscript{22}

Karl Barth confirms that tensions and conflicts arise from extra-biblical hermeneutics, or “the denominator of this or that philosophical dialectic,” which “ultimately reflects[s] only the deep disunity of man with himself.”\textsuperscript{23} We must come back to the Word of God as our road map for unity. We must act with the action of God. As Vanhoover says, “to be the people of the gospel, evangelicals must take up their book and walk.”\textsuperscript{24} (2002) We have the Word of God in hand and as we walk the brick road of truth, we must understand that the major problem with race-based theology is that it places the culture’s experience over the authority of the Scripture. Herman Bavink reiterates this in Reformed Dogmatics when he said:

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] James 1:22, NASB.
\item[23] Ibid.
\item[24] Vanhoover, 48.
\end{footnotes}
As the Word of God [the Bible] stands of high level above all human authority in state and society, science and art. Before it, all else must yield. For people must obey God rather than people. All other [human] authority of Scripture extends to the whole person and over all humankind. It is above the intellect and the will, the heart and the conscience, and cannot be compared with any other authority. Its authority, being divine, is absolute.  

The word of God was and still is prevalent in today’s erroneous Christian theology, especially those justifying racism and slavery. It is the result of bad hermeneutics that has caused such a deep racial divide. For example, in *Slavery Ordained of God*, Fred A. Ross said, “Slavery is ordained of God…to continue for the good of the slave, the good of the master, the good of the whole American family until another and better destiny may be unfolded.” Also, George D. Armstrong wrote in *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery*, “that Christian slavery is God’s solution of the problem [relation of labor and capital] about which the wisest statesmen of Europe confess themselves at fault.”

Black American’s plight was that they had been oppressed and ignored by history and by an erroneous Christian doctrine. James Cone said, “The Negro was taught that his enslavement was due to the fact that he had been cursed by God. His very color was a sign of the curse, which he had received as a descendant of Ham. Parts of the Bible were carefully selected to prove that God had intended that the Negro should be the servant of the white man” It is this kind of intellectual arrogance and moral judgment that has caused biblical skepticism among blacks. Cone further added, “It is a sad fact that white church’s involvement in slavery and racism in America simply cannot be overstated. It not only failed to preach the charismatic Word but

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27 Ibid., 23.  
maliciously contributed to the doctrine of White supremacy.”

Similarly, C. Eric Lincoln wrote in *The Negro Church in America*:

White western theology has contributed significantly to the involuntary invisibility of black people to black oblivion. And since theologically black people do not exist, white theology has nothing to say to them about the purpose and meaning of their lives, and by this pretension it confirms white religion in its racial parochialism while consigning black Christians to irrelevance.”

Before this author uses a broad brush to paint a guilty verdict on white America for taking the infallible Word out of context, there is another ethnic group who has been just as guilty as well, and that is black America. Yes, it is true that black America has been victimized. Bradley said, “Victimology keeps racism alive because many whites are constantly painted as racist with no evidence provided.”

However, black Christians have instituted a theology that ostracizes others and have created an exclusionist religion.

Through the hermeneutical lens of black America, they came up with a theology known as black theology. Bruce Fields describes black theology this way, “Black theology involves the process of formulating theology from the perspective of an oppressed people. It seeks to interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ against the backdrop of historical and contemporary racism.”

Likewise, the godfather of black theology writes,

In a society where men are oppressed because they are black, Christian theology must become *Black Theology*, a theology that is unreservedly identified with the goals of the oppressed community and seeking to interpret the divine character of their struggle for liberation. “Black Theology” is a phrase that is particularly appropriate for contemporary America because of its symbolic power to convey both what whites mean by oppression and what blacks mean by liberation.”

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29 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 72.


31 Bradley, 21.

Concretely, this means that black theology is not prepared to accept any doctrine of God, man, Christ, or Scripture which contradicts the black demand for freedom now. It believes that any religious idea which exalts black dignity and creates a restless drive for freedom must be affirmed. All ideas which are opposed to the struggle for black self-determination or are irrelevant to it must be rejected as the work of anti-Christ. 33

Anthony Bradley, in Liberating Black Theology, summarized the systematic approach of a book by James Evans Jr., We Have Been Believers, and a book by Ware, Methodologies of Black Theology, with a critique that they have systematically developed a theological argument that the black experience overrides the infallible Word of God. He wrote:

1) the black experience and its role in sacred history; 2) the belief that God is a God of liberation and is therefore black; and 3) the central message of the biblical text as liberation and the necessity of interpreting and applying it as such. The Black experience is the final authority in the interpretation and application of the biblical text and both are judged against how well they contribute to the liberation of oppressed African Americans in general and men and women respectively.” 34

This kind of theology only sees God on the side of the oppressed. Cone and other black liberalists are very critical of orthodox evangelical theology that believe and maintain the infallibility and inerrancy of God’s Holy Word. Roy Fish, professor emeritus at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary described Black Liberation Theology as “changing the nature of salvation from eternal to temporal, from spiritual to material, and from individual to communal.” 35

James Cone, in God of the Oppressed, further expands his argument and views on the infallible Word of God, which this author believes to be erroneous:

I still regard the Bible as an important source of my theological reflections, but not the starting point. The black experience and the Bible together in dialectical tension serve as my point of departure today and yesterday. The order is significant. I am black first and

33 James Cone, Black Theology & Black Power, 120.
34 Anthony Bradley, Liberating Black Theology, 142.
everything else comes after that. This means that I read the Bible through the lens of a black tradition of struggle and not as the objective word of God.\footnote{James Cone, \textit{God of the Oppressed} (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), xi.}

Any theology, black or white, that overshadows or gives a low view of the infallible Word of God is a worthless theology. Any form of theological work that denies the authority of the Word of God and the presence of God, regardless of race, is a demonic theological work. Joseph Jackson said,

\begin{quote}
Any theologian, be he black or white, that limits the redemptive effort of Jesus Christ to any race, to any color, to any nationality, or any rank or group in society [for he] denies and negates the positive principles of redemption as discussed above.\footnote{Joseph H. Jackson, \textit{The Basic Theological Position of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.} Vol. I, in \textit{Black Theology}, by James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 259.}
\end{quote}

Time is up and the spiritual clock has struck zero on black extremists and white extremists ginning up hatred and racial divide among people whom God created in His very image. America, which is led by leaders who knowingly and unknowingly embrace these principles, must take heed to ensure that its political agendas embrace the authoritative and infallible Word of God.

\textit{Forgiveness Is Essential}

This author postulates and has provided firm evidence that our country is in desperate need of racial reconciliation. The question that now remains is, “how to achieve racial reconciliation?” The process must begin with forgiveness, which is foundational to racial reconciliation just as it is foundational to any offense committed whether social, physical, psychological, or emotional. However, American generally seems to be selective in the people, events, and circumstances which receive forgiveness. For example forgiveness is demonstrated when fallen sports’ figures who have broken rules or the law are forgiven and reinstated to their
former position in their respective sports. Also some politicians are forgiven for immoral acts and retain or are restored to their government positions. Even some actors in Hollywood are forgiven for some ungodly act; however, when it comes to racial forgiveness, it appears difficult to overcome.

As Christian leaders, we need to consult our best example of forgiveness and learn from His teachings and His life. Jesus Christ was not only the best teacher ever to live, but He was also the best demonstrator of how we are to live successfully with one another. Christian leaders also need to be able to understand there are conditions that need to be satisfied if forgiveness is to be achieved. Geoffrey W. Bromiley stated, “Jesus recognized that there are conditions to be fulfilled before forgiveness can be granted. Forgiveness is part of a mutual relationship; the other part is the repentance of the offender.”

Therefore, forgiveness is participatory although it may not occur simultaneously with both parties. True forgiveness comes from a repentant heart.

The power to forgive brings with it the power to heal. Often times, due to stubbornness, hatred, or an inability to forgive, wounds are deepened and thrusts the wounded into the vast oblivion of not being able to forgive. This vast oblivion seems to be where our nation has plummeted as it relates to racial reconciliation. The lack of the desire or the inability to forgive one another for past immoral or unethical choices continues to plague our great country. In spite of this country’s great success in technology, medicine, and education, the ability to forgive one another has eluded many Americans and has caused people to act not as “one nation under God” but rather as a “divided nation under God.”

The evil act of racism has conquered, confused, poisoned, and paralyzed the hearts and minds of mankind to the degree that people will not forgive one another. It is because many

have failed to practice true racial forgiveness toward one another, and the lack of forgiveness has threatened to turn the American dream into a dreadful nightmare. Therefore, it is imperative that black America and white America become determined to avoid practicing a non-authentic forgiveness that is driven by self-aggrandizement, political pietism, and Christian quietism. J. Deotis Roberts pinpoints the problem when it comes to practicing real forgiveness with these words:

But it is sinful not to be able to forgive, just as it is sinful not to be able to repent. Both are unpardonable and are based upon a lack of sensitivity. Blacks and whites caught up in this bind should look again at Christian salvation as expressed in forgiveness. God has forgiven us our sins, not because we deserve it or have earned forgiveness, but because God loves us in spite of our fallenness.\(^{39}\)

What has been experienced in black America as well as in white America is that when people forgive, they forgive only for a season. When a different circumstance or event occurs that brings up painful memories of the past (e.g., Trayvon Martin case), people will go back to their hostility toward one another. Michael Battle said, “We must reconsider that it is possible to affirm the existence of God with your lips and deny His existence with your life.”\(^{40}\) That is what has been demonstrated when it comes to forgiving fellow human beings for the wrong that may have been done to one another. People pretend with their lips to forgive because God’s Word instructs them to do so, but through their actions and in their hearts, they continue to live in the horrible past of yesterday’s painful and heart-breaking memories.

Evidence of this can be found in the following statement that was taken from a press conference interview in the Southern Baptist Texan Newsthesis, “… Southern Baptists cannot


avoid their past as a convention born over a pro-slavery stance.” President Fred Luter, the first black president of the Southern Baptist Convention, gave the following biblical example of what it means to forgive and to live in a glorious future with our brothers and sister of another color as he responded, “All of us have done some things in our past we’re not happy about. We cannot do anything about the past, it is over with. However, we can do a lot about our future.”

Christian leaders should be determined and intentional in their efforts to press onward in a united effort to heal our nation of its unforgiveness and ultimately seek to achieve racial reconciliation. This is a very time-consuming undertaking as well as one that will require Christian leaders (especially clergy) to ascend from their ivory towers and safe havens of the church walls and come together as a united body fixated on sharing with and teaching others the absolute need of learning how to forgive and how to practice forgiveness as a lifestyle. The tragic result of America not learning how to forgive and not making forgiveness a part of the people’s everyday lives and practices is that it will keep everyone in bondage to an attitude and action of hatred, one race against another. Never will America heal from within nor rid itself of the destructive and divisive attitude of racism and never will the country achieve forgiveness that could result in racial reconciliation, if an intentional effort toward healing is not made on all sides.

Racial Reconciliation

Anyone who takes Jesus’ message of forgiveness to heart should be open to the possibility of race reconciliation between different ethnic groups. Today’s racial divide between white America and black America is due to unconfessed sin and mischaracterization between

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both ethnic groups. Racial mischaracterization impedes the process as well as the progress of racial reconciliation. Far too long, the racial divide of America has caused Christians to become disloyal and uncommitted to the gospel message of love. The lack of obedience to the gospel message of love and reconciliation has caused different ethnic groups to put up the invisible bars of hate and prejudice towards brothers and sisters who are of a different race. These invisible bars have handcuffed and incarcerated people far too long. James Cone brilliantly suggested, “No real reconciliation could occur between blacks and whites without telling the painful and redeeming truths about their life together”\(^{42}\)

In order for genuine race reconciliation to occur blacks as well as whites must take responsibility for their sinful actions of the past and lay down that heavy burden of hatred. People must exchange sinful acts of hatred for godly love. If true racial reconciliation is ever going to be achieved, black America and white America must have a desegregated heart. In Tony Evan’s book of illustrations, he said:

> God is not asking black to be white, or white to be black. He’s asking both to be biblical. If I say I am a Black Christian and somebody else says that they’re a White Christian, what they’ve done is made black or white an adjective…Your faith should always be in the adjectival position, so that you’re always adjusting the noun of your culture to the objective of your faith. In other works, you’re bringing who you are – your history, your background, and your culture to look like the adjectival description of what you say you believe about God and Jesus Christ.\(^{43}\)

In spite of the false doctrine that is crumbling our culture, we must realize that a desegregated heart does not view Christianity as a white man’s or a black man’s religion. In speaking on race reconciliation, Billy Graham declared, “Christianity is not a White man’s

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religion…Jesus belongs to the whole world.”  

Michael Battle wrote, “Genuine reconciliation can come only if people, both black and white, commit to a view of their sisters and brothers of different contexts, seeing all people created in the image of God and of infinite value of God.” It is at that moment when people view one another as God views them that they can experience what J. Deotis Roberts wrote, “There can be a revolution in race relations with reconciliation”

This author seeks to scratch the surface and unveil ideas on how racial reconciliation can improve this country. No longer can Americans afford to hide their heads in the sand like an ostrich when it comes to racism and racial divide. In the book, Radical Reconciliation by Allan Boesak and Cutis Paul De Young, Boesak said, “He envisioned reconciliation as harmony, justice, and peace.” For too long whites and blacks have lived on the island that is known as Cultural Isolation. This island prevents people from building a bridge of communication and establishing common ground. Black Christians and white Christians do have common ground and that is the redemptive work done on Calvary. The death of Christ on the cross is the universal symbol of the Christian faith. The cross provides a symbol of God’s love for the human race. The cross is the heartbeat for the biblical case for racial reconciliation. J. Deotis Roberts wrote, “Christianity is rooted in the belief that ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself’ (2 Corinthians 5:19), and that reconciliation between God and humans can be effected only through reconciliation between person.” Michael Battle said, “Hence the cross is a rejection of all hierarchies of power based on race, gender, and class.”

44 Emerson, 56.
46 J. Deotis Roberts, Liberation and Reconciliation, 9.
48 Roberts, 9.
When the values of heaven and the infallible Word of God are used as blueprints, it becomes easy to make moral, spiritual, and ethical decisions related to racial reconciliation. Ephesians 2:13-16 is a great passage or better yet, a great blueprint that gives the antidote for racial reconciliation.

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” 50

In the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 4, comments on reconciliation are discussed using Ephesians 2:14-16 as a reference. Since the dividing wall of hostility has been torn down, reconciliation can now take place.

…consequently, one new person has been created in place of the two persons, and both are now reconciled to God in one body through the cross. The lesson in all these passages is that in virtue of God’s own reconciling work in Christ, we sinners who accept God’s reconciliation should realize that this implies reconciliation with one another in all the estrangements of human life. We are thus to devote ourselves actively to the task of mutual reconciliation. 51

Through Christ’s death, reconciliation was extended in two directions. First, reconciliation brought humankind back to the Creator and those who accept Christ as Lord are reconciled to the Father. Second, once man has accepted Christ as Savior, they should become compelled to extend the reconciling power of Christ to others. Matthew 28:19-20 teaches that Christians should make, mark, and mature disciples of all ethnic groups to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the

49 Battle, 31.
50 Ephesians. 2:13-16, NASB
51 Bromiley, 55.
Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

If Christians as black Americans and white Americans become ambassadors for racial reconciliation, America could experience a great awakening of spiritual racial harmony and not continue to allow racial divisions to divide one another. As ambassadors for racial reconciliation, Christians must admit, submit, and commit. Christians must admit that sinful acts have scared one another, must submit to the Word of God and allow it to be a blueprint to fix racial divide. Finally, Christians must commit to developing stronger relationships with others who are of another race. J. Deotis Roberts wrote, “Any meaningful relationship between blacks and whites at this will need to involve a give and take relationship of mutual cultural enrichment.” We must commit to fighting racial injustice with God’s justice. We must continue to commit to the process of forgiveness. The process of forgiveness involves a change of heart and mind to achieve that which prayerfully will lead to our ultimate goal.

This author’s heart was overjoyed to witness the progress of America when in 2008 the first Black President was elected. Moreover, as a black evangelical Christian, this author’s heart was also overjoyed to see Fred Luter, pastor of the Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, Louisiana, become the first black to be elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). In the Associated Press, Bob Allen wrote about this great occasion. He said, “The election adds credibility to efforts by the denomination to shed its past image as defenders of slavery and Jim Crow in the south during the Civil Rights Movement championed by black

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Baptist like Martin Luther King Jr.” That spells a giant step toward RACIAL RECONCILIATION!!!

This monumental leap to embrace and elect Pastor Fred Luter as the first black president of the Southern Baptist Convention follows 165-plus years of Southern Baptist Convention history of an adverse relationship with blacks in this country. A very brief recap of that history is reported in the October 2012 issue of First Things magazine as follows:

1) In 1845, the SBC passed 31 resolutions on race. The convention also called for “the religious instruction of our colored population” …; 2) Lynching was finally condemned by the SBC in 1933; 3) A resolution denouncing the racial terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan was only passed in 1982.

It should also be understood that reportedly all of the SBC leadership did not embrace racism. As a matter of record, long before SBC leaders defied racism, one of its leaders, Victor I. Masters, wrote in 1915, “The white man cannot go to heaven, while he leaves the black to journey toward the pit.” There were also other leaders in the SBC who slowly began to change their bitter convictions relative to the race issue. Included among these were T. B. Maston and Foy Valentine and Billy Graham, who was previously quoted in this writing. Added to this list is W.A. Criswell, “who in 1968 publicly repudiated his fiery segregationist past.”

So as the years have progressed, there continues to be a realization that there must be changes in the racial relations of our country. This writer re-emphasizes that such changes must be initiated with a stamp of approval and the diligent and committed work of this country’s clergy who can lead this country to reach the objective of racial reconciliation. The truth is that

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55 Ibid.

56 George, 17.
the process of change is sometimes a long and arduous journey. As told by Timothy George, regarding the SBC’s long journey, he said:

In 1995, on the 150th anniversary of the Convention’s founding, the messengers denounced racism in all its forms as deplorable sin. They condemned not only the horrible evil of slavery in the past but contemporary racism, both individual and systemic. They also asked forgiveness “from our African-American brothers and sisters” and pledged to “eradicate racism in all its forms from Southern Baptist life and ministry.” What was new here was the recognition of the residual and long-term effects of slavery and the need for corporate as well as individual repentance.57

Even though it has been an extended journey for the SBC to reach its decision and to act upon its previous position on racism, it is also a testimony that Americans can move forward on racial reconciliation. As united people, we must proceed in such a way that racial reconciliation does not take such an extended time, but that together, side by side, racial reconciliation will be achieved.

When considering how long it has taken the SBC to change its position on racism in this country, Pastor Fred Luter made this comment after his election, “To see that God through his grace and mercy has allowed something like this to happen in my life, and to see it embraced by so many ethnic groups to affirm the vote is a moment I’ll never forget as long as I live.”58

Pastor Fred Luter voiced a sentiment similar to that voiced by many blacks when President Barack Obama was inaugurated after his first election as the first black President of the United States. These two elections parallel each other because of their significance in the lives of blacks, first in our nation then in the largest religionist convention in our country. Both of their elections were born out of a need for change and collectively by two groups of people: (1) a

57 Ibid.
group of people who lead the change and; (2) the other group who was in support of the change, and together they worked to make it happen.

Regardless of what critics may perceive about the election of Pastor Fred Luter as the first black president of the Southern Baptist Convention, this author believes it is a major step in the right direction to help heal a too long division between the races in this country. Once again, this author restates his position on who should lead this huge undertaking, and that is the united clergy dedicated to the cause for racial reconciliation.
CHAPTER 3

PROFILE OF SWEET HOME – THE PINNACLE OF PRAISE: TRANSITIONING FROM TRADITION TO COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

The Narrative of Sweet Home Baptist Church of Round Rock

The Sweet Home Baptist Church of Round Rock began in the rural farming town of Sprinkle, Texas, nine miles northeast of Austin, Texas. Reverend S. W. Wormley became the first pastor of Sweet Home, the second black Baptist church in Round Rock. On January 8, 1905, a number of leaders from the St. John Regular Baptist Association joined together, along with 22 former members of Good Hope Baptist Church, the first black Baptist church of Round Rock, to organize the new church. Brother Mitchell donated the land and named the congregation Sweet Home Baptist Church upon its establishment. In the 1940’s the congregation purchased a Lutheran church building in Hutto, Texas and moved the building to Round Rock where it remained until 1985. The church building was then moved to its current location at 800 Deepwood Drive, Round Rock, Texas.

This is the story that the church loves to tell the community, but the story only highlights its accomplishments and downplays its faults. It is the myth of Sweet Home. The truth is that up until a decade ago, the church was unresponsive to the community and full of internal rifts. In its 109 year existence, there has been very little evidence of the impact of Sweet Home on the communities in which the church was located. What has been a constant theme in the untold church history are scandals. When this author who is also its current pastor arrived at Sweet Home, the church was in shambles. The membership had gone from over 1,000 to 60 with only 20 attending church. The members were desperate to find a new pastor who could reverse their downward spiral.
The years leading up to this author’s (pastor’s) tenure were filled with accusations of rape and other sexual misconduct, embezzling funds, tyrannical leadership, and two major church splits. To be honest, the church was set up to fail from the start, but especially during the previous pastor’s reign. Between weak leadership, financial problems, and a faulty church polity, the signs of decline had fully blossomed and the church was on an increasingly downward spiral.

The church suffered from weak leadership because the previous pastor was manipulative and he trained the deacons and the ministers to be “yes men.” The deacons did not have the theological wherewithal to contest the pastor on biblical and church polity mishaps. The church’s bylaws had been lost, and the deacons were not trained to handle the increasing power of the pastor. Because many deacons were handpicked by the pastor, they did what he wanted them to do, rather than what was ethically, morally, and biblically correct. Still, there were some deacons who, like the pastor, tried to manipulate the congregation. Some were caught lying and stealing from the church. Sweet Home Church had a serious leadership problem.

Sweet Home also suffered from a financial problem. It was considered an affluent church in the suburbs of Austin, Texas and was considered a “silk stocking” church within the Austin black community. The members were educated and well paid. They were engineers, teachers, professors, doctors, lawyers, landowners, and many well established and respected leaders of the community were active at Sweet Home. The church had land to build on, plenty of money, plenty of resources, and plenty of ideas on which to put that money to use. Sweet Home purchased 21 acres of land that would be used to build a new state of the art worship center.

A lack of money was not the issue; rather, it was how the money was spent and who was able to spend it. Certain church leaders had access to the bank accounts but they should not have had this privilege, some were pocketing money to create lavish lifestyles for themselves, and the
pastor had an unrestricted church debit card. Before the congregation could fully grasp the severity of the financial problems, the 21 acres of land had been lost. The hopes and dreams of a new worship center had been dashed against the financial rocks due to bad business practices, poor stewardship, and inadequate communication. The land was sold to pay off $320,000 in back taxes. Unrestricted spending, embezzlement, and poor stewardship shipwrecked the credibility and financial stability of the church.

Sweet Home also fell under the Single-Elder Congregational church polity during the tenure of the previous pastor. In this particular church polity, there are two offices of the church, pastor and deacon, but the pastor has all of the power. Before the previous pastor, the church functioned under a congregational polity. Under this polity the church is independent and autonomous. The democratic process in the church rests “on the belief that Christ is the sole head of his church, [and] the members are all priests unto God.”\(^1\) Sweet Home members unknowingly made wrong decisions, or they were forced to vote on trivial matters. This continued to cause further rifts in the congregation. The pastor, deacons, and the congregation were vying for power at some point in their history.

Traditionally, black Baptist churches fall between the Single-Elder Congregational church polity or the Congregational church polity. Both of these find their philosophy within congregationalism, which asserts each local congregation’s “independence and autonomy.”\(^2\) “There is no ecclesiastical government or hierarchy with authority”\(^3\) over the local church. In the traditional black Baptist church, the deacons and congregation serves as the checks and balances


\(^2\) Patterson, 135.

\(^3\) Samuel E. Waldron, “Plural-Elder Congregationalism” In *Who Runs The Church?*, eds. Paul E. Engle and Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 188.
to the pastor. One problem with the traditional black Baptist church is that the congregations “know very little Baptist doctrine or polity.”⁴ This presents a problem when issues arise between the pastor and the congregation. The congregation is not doctrinally prepared to handle church struggles. Nor do they understand the structure of the church and the congregation’s vital role in it. In the Congregational church polity, the priesthood of all believers serves as the anchor for which the congregation settles disputes. When pastors were out of order, they were to be “rebuked publically as a warning to others.”⁵

This idea is found in 1 Timothy 5:19-20. The congregation is active in the discipline of both the ordained staff and the laity. However, the Sweet Home congregation gave all of their power to the pastor who manipulated them. Furthermore, Sweet Home had immature Christians who were trying to chastise different groups; this ultimately created more division. The church was in desperate need of a change. The ministry would not survive if the congregation stayed with the status quo. After much prayer and fasting, a transitional process was implemented.

**The Transitioning Process**

Ed Young stated in *The Creative Leader*, “Creative leaders don’t try to keep pace with cultural change, they set the pace. Creative leaders are trend setters for creative change, anticipating people’s changing needs within their dynamic environments.”⁶ Based on the motivating words of Ed Young, it was time to act. The church was also inspired by the words of

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Alexander the Great, “Weak leaders stay within safe boundaries. Great leaders march off the map.”

The old church structure was causing the author as pastor to burn out and was taking life away from my creativity. As Wayne Cordeiro said, “When your creative juices leave, one will find himself imitating rather than being innovative.” Many in the congregation could not see the signs of a leader in trouble. John Maxwell’s book, Developing the Leader Within You, provided teaching points so that the congregation could understand that the old structure was not structured for success. John Maxwell’s profile of a leader in trouble is as follows: 1) Has a poor understanding of the people; 2) Lacks imagination; 3) Has personal problems; 4) Passes the buck; 5) Feels secure and satisfied; 6) Is not organized; 7) Flies into rages; 8) Will not take a risk; 9) Is insecure and defensive; 10) Stays inflexible; 11) Has no team spirit; 12) Fights change.

Through this profile assessment, there rose the realization that these issues were present and yet the people did not know it. They just wanted one man to lead them to the Promised Land with no help. Marching off the map was something that this author (pastor) knew how to do, but realized changes could not be made in the present context with the leadership and the present structure that was in place. John Maxwell said in Developing the Leaders Around You, “Great leaders produce other leaders.” In response to that, the first year of work was to develop the church to become an elder led congregation. This idea at first was not looked at very favorably. Some of the followers of the old structure were fighting what was being done. For a hundred plus

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8 Wayne Cordeiro, Leading on Empty (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009), 23.
years, this church had been congregational led, and for three and half years, the church family was taught from Gene A. Getz’s book, *Elders and Leaders*. This single book along with the Bible, which is the book of authority, plus the workbook, *Elders and Leaders Field Guide*, transformed the church and its future leaders.

While training leaders for the new structure, the entire church received the initial four-year vision. This vision was put in place to help transition into the new structure. The vision also helped the congregation to become accustomed to sustaining a prolonged vision. Rick Warren’s Life Development Process and his base pad visual were utilized to create a four-year vision. While Rick Warren’s base pad is designed for the duration of four class times, it was used by the church for four years. Rick Warren’s base pad challenged the congregation to be “committed to membership, committed to maturity, committed to ministry, and committed to missions.”

Sweet Home employed the ideas of membership, maturity, ministry, and missions, to design a customized version for the congregation. The church’s *Model for Spiritual & Personal Development* presented a vision of Seeking Christ, Soaring in Christ, Serving Christ, and Sharing Christ. With each base pad came a brief description of what the year would teach and the Scripture reference that would be the year-long emphasis. Here was the vision each year:

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2006 – Seeking Christ
We desire to see Jesus exalted through biblical preaching and teaching. We acknowledge a need to grow and develop a close relationship with Him. We are committed to learn regularly from the Word of God as a church community, so as to be transformed by His Spirit. (Matthew 6:33)

2007 – Soaring in Christ
We desire to develop a habit of prayer and worship and apply what God teaches us to practical daily living. To develop daily devotion and study habits that they become central to every aspect of our life, individually and corporately. (Psalm 119:133)

2008 – Serving Christ
We desire to use the gifts that God has given us to build up the body of Christ. We support our members through prayers, practicality, and financial giving. (Ephesians 4:11-12)

2009 – Sharing Christ
We desire to be equipped and active in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Great Commission through evangelism. To teach and train others so that they will be equipped to live for Christ. To demonstrate by livelihood that Christian faith must be lived out in commitment. (Matthew 28:19-20)

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12 Our Ministry Model for Spiritual & Personal Development is adapted from Rick Warren’s *The Life Development Process*. His base pad is used for particular classes, while ours is for each year’s emphasis. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 144. The image above is an internal document of Sweet Home – The Pinnacle of Praise.
While Sweet Home was training new leadership and casting the initial vision, the church began doing a detailed survey of the city. At the time of the study, Round Rock had a population of an estimated 86,175.13 Major employers included Dell,14 Farmers Insurance Group,15 and Cypress Semiconductor.16 It’s combined property tax and utility rates were the lowest in the region.17 The city maintained a high quality of life while becoming a major center for economic development.18

Round Rock had seen numerical and economic growth over the years with overall growth being accompanied with “a slight increase in the diversity of the City’s ethnic composition”19 between the years 1990 and 1997. According to the 1990 census, the city’s population was, “74.5 percent white, 18.7 percent Hispanic, 5.3 percent black, and 1.1 percent Asian or Pacific Islander.”20 This is extremely vital to a predominantly black church as the congregation is looking beyond the year 2000. Round Rock is expected to continue to grow at a steady pace as seen here:

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13 U.S. Census Bureau. “Fact Finder2.” American Fact Finder. factfinder2.census.gov (accessed October 28, 2013). Because this study was done over about three years, the figures changed slightly.


18 City of Round Rock, 5.2.

19 Ibid, 3.7.

20 Ibid, 3.8.
The black population, while very small, continues to grow. In 1990 there were approximately 1,729 blacks out of the 33,179 residents, in 2000 there were 4,567 blacks out of the 59,995 residents, and in 2008 there was an estimated 7,702 blacks out of the 87,079 residents. These figures do not count those who live in Pflugerville, a city that is between Austin and Round Rock, nor does it count those who live in the northern most part of Austin.

While various maps have various ways of determining population growth, one thing is for sure, “all of the projections show the City’s population approaching 100,000 by the year 2020.”

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23 City of Round Rock, 3.10.
With a population cap at 236,000, Round Rock will bring “new opportunities for retail development and employment centers.”\textsuperscript{24}

Other areas of growth and development included the northeast area of the city that was preparing for its “first Higher Education Center…The Round Rock Education Center (RRHEC) will provide new challenges in providing transportation services”\textsuperscript{25} as well as other challenges. The new RRHEC, a collaboration of Texas State University and Austin Community College, opened its doors in August of 2005. This new facility helps to meet the needs of higher education within the Round Rock city limits by offering workforce training, certificates, associates, bachelors, and master’s degree programs.

The University of Texas is also approximately 15 miles south of Round Rock. Several other colleges, universities, and tech schools, such as St. Edwards University, Concordia Lutheran College, Huston-Tillotson College (now University), Texas State University-San Marcos, and Southwestern University, just to name a few, are local options for collegiate education. Round Rock Independent School District, at the time, consisted of 4 high schools, 8 middle schools, and 27 elementary schools.\textsuperscript{26}

Finally, the Austin-Round Rock area was not as religious as other major cities in Texas, nor did it meet the national average of 50.2.\textsuperscript{27} The Austin-Round Rock area was considered 44.7% religious, the Houston area was 49.9%, the Dallas-Fort Worth area was 52.2%, and the

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\item[24] Ibid, 7.8.
\item[25] City of Round Rock, 7.8.
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San Antonio area was 62.7% religious.\textsuperscript{28} From the percentages alone it is plain to see that this area is ripe for evangelism. Also the estimated median age in Round Rock in 2008 was 31.2.\textsuperscript{29} “The most prominent age group in this geography was age 25 to 34 years of age”\textsuperscript{30} and made up 17.4% of the population. Furthermore, 5-14 year olds (16.1%), 25-34 year olds (17.4%), and 35-44 year olds (17.3%) made up 50.8% of the population.\textsuperscript{31} If we were to add the 45-54 year olds (13.3%) that would put the percentage at 64.1%.\textsuperscript{32} Round Rock is an unchurched city, it is a growing city, it is a young city, it is a diverse city, and with the information gathered, the decision was made to branch out and capture what is great about Round Rock; its youthfulness, its growth, and its diversity while glorifying God for the opportunity to evangelize.

\textit{Structuring for Success}

In order to reach the community, the infrastructure of the church needed to be fixed. An employee handbook was first developed. The employee handbook describes in specific details the strategy, structure, and system for a staff member at the Sweet Home – Pinnacle of Praise Church. Each employee now goes through an orientation, concerning the staff policies and procedures. Currently, an employment agreement establishes a binding contract with the employee as well as clearly laid out expectations. Payroll is paid out bi-monthly on dates that do not change. This includes mandatory documentation that covers pay and benefits as outlined in the employment agreement and the personnel manual. Staff members and ministry leaders are

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Round Rock Chamber of Commerce, \textit{Round Rock Executive Summary Report With Charts}.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
also provided a copy of our organizational chart, which shows who reports to whom. In addition, each staff member and ministry leader and other volunteers are provided a copy of their job description and how they fit within the organizational chart. Finally, staff members and ministry leaders are taught the church bylaws that govern the conduct and expectations of Sweet Home – The Pinnacle of Praise.

All of this is done because the church wants everyone to be on one accord, having an understanding of how the church staff, ministry leaders, and volunteers should conduct themselves. Thus it was essential to have written procedures that are universal for the church. One of those important written documents was the bylaws of the church. The discovery was made during the transitional period that the bylaws had been misplaced and were not available. There was little to no consensus on how the church should be run, the definition of membership, how hiring and firing should be done, how finding a new pastor should be done, and how church discipline should be enacted. Bylaws were developed that structured the church for success that will reach far past this author’s (pastor’s) tenure.

As discussed in a previous section, Sweet Home historically utilized a congregational model of church polity where the congregation was in charge of making most decisions. The recent decades before this author’s (pastor’s) tenure, the congregation had leaders that transitioned the church into a Single-Elder model of church polity where the senior pastor made most of the decisions and held most of the power. The church became accustomed to the pastor doing everything, making all the decisions, spending the money at his leisure, and providing service for everyone. This had to change. The church was rapidly growing with radically new needs organically arising. Because of this, a decision was made to utilize a new church polity.
Plural-Elder Congregational church polity is a system that states, “each church should be led, under normal circumstances, by a plurality of elders.”\textsuperscript{33} Furthermore Plural-Elder congregationalism is inherently congregational in that each church is autonomous and independent from another. With the growth of the church, the leadership needed help governing it. So at Sweet Home, two offices of the church are recognized, elder and deacon. The elders establish “the policies that govern the church’s ministry, in line with scripture.”\textsuperscript{34} The elders are charged to govern the church, while the deacons’ only role is to offer service to the church. They are to “execute the church policies and ministries that have been established by the elders.”\textsuperscript{35}

The Council of Elders serves as the executive governing body of the church and is responsible for giving spiritual oversight to the congregation. They are responsible for policy decisions with regard to the affairs, functions, direction, and business of the church and strive to make decisions that reflect a clear biblical perspective in the interest of the church. The pastor serves as the chairman, with a vice chairman to lead in the event that the pastor is unable to perform his duties. The church also has an elder of finance, an elder to the staff, an elder of pastoral care, an elder of outreach, and an elder of congregational care. These elders help to lead and oversee areas of the church so that the pastor has the “freedom to set the church’s vision and ministry direction.”\textsuperscript{36}

After an infrastructure that worked for the church was designed, a ministry plan was designed that could allow the church to be all the members needed to be in Christ for the

\textsuperscript{33} Waldron, 188.

\textsuperscript{34} Tony Evans, \textit{Theology You Can Count On} (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008).

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
community. A strategic plan that crosses racial and cultural barriers was designed by first developing three statements and a set of core values, all of which are vital parts of the ministry.

Sweet Home’s mission statement is: *We Exist to Build Soldiers to Reach Sinners, to Resemble the Savior.* A mission statement is defined as “a broad, brief, biblical statement of what an organization is supposed to be doing.”\(^{37}\) It “affects planning the organization’s future”\(^{38}\) and it “stimulates the mind.”\(^{39}\) The mission statement is how the leaders and members accomplish the goals of the church.

The vision statement is: *To see Sweet Home become a Christ centered, Commission committed, Community connected body of believers.* A vision statement is defined as “a clear challenging picture of the future of the ministry as you believe that it can and must be.”\(^{40}\) It “creates a clear picture of that direction.”\(^{41}\) While the mission statement is said to come from the mind, the vision statement comes from the heart. It is supposed to be “an emotional thing.”\(^{42}\) The difference between the mission and the vision is that “the mission involves the hill your army needs to take, the vision is what your army will look like on top of the hill.”\(^{43}\) The vision is the picture of what the church will be.

The aim of the church is: *To do God’s Work, God’s Way, for God’s Glory.* These are the things to be accomplished as the church works toward the mission and continues to create the

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\(^{39}\) Ibid, 32.

\(^{40}\) Ibid, 41.

\(^{41}\) Malphurs, *Ministry Nuts and Bolts*, 93.

\(^{42}\) Malphurs, *Developing A Vision for Ministry In The 21st Century*, 32.

ultimate visionary picture. Doing God’s work, God’s way, for God’s glory are the goals that are to be achieved in every aspect of the journey to fulfill the vision. These help to provide a litmus test to discover if the plans pertaining to the mission and vision are done in excellence. If the church has not done the work of God, the way God intended, to glorify God, then the church has done them in vain.

Eight core values were also employed. Core values are defined as “the constant, passionate, biblical core beliefs that drive the ministry.” While the vision and mission are important, they only paint the picture and give the directions on duplicating the picture. The “church isn’t vision driven. It is values driven and vision focused.” The values of the church dictate what areas of interest the mission and vision intersect. They are the pulse of the church. Here are our core values:

We value and esteem the Bible as the foundation for maintaining spiritual health and its position as the central, focal point of every sermon and teaching. Expository preaching, its meaning and implications, is the soul food for our spiritual strength. We value Sweet Home as the place where the all sufficient and infallible Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached to the power of salvation. Teaching is biblical, sin is condemned, and worship is Spirit-filled.

We value prayer, coupled with the word, as the main avenue for communicating with God. Jesus is telling us that when we come together, instead of making the church a market place, we should make it a place where people can communicate with God. We value Sweet Home as a designated place to communicate with our God.

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46 Scriptural emphasis is 2 Timothy 2:15
47 Scriptural emphasis is Matthew 21:13
We value creativity as a gift from God to us. Human beings are made in the image of God, and we see that from the beginning our God is creative and instructs us to also be creative. We believe creativity should be celebrated and cultivated, and that our God gets the glory from the work of our hands.  

We value worship as an expression of our thanks and adoration to God for being God. We believe worship is more than singing songs. It is about giving allegiance to the God who loves us unconditionally. Romans 12:1 says, “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,” because that is your “spiritual worship.”

We value family; rooted in and shaped by godliness. We believe that families are only as strong as their spiritual fortitude. God must be the center of our families, so as to guide us into greater love for one another. It is the family that helps to display the great mystery of the relationship of God to His people. A godly family helps to depict God’s spiritual family.

We value social justice as a tangible way to see the kingdom of God here on earth. We believe God’s justice should be our justice, and that injustice can be alleviated here on earth. Jesus did not just proclaim a spiritual salvation, but a physical deliverance from the injustice we face while here on this side of heaven.

We value Christ as the head of the church and the mediation He has given to biblically qualified elders. We value leadership that exemplifies obedience, a love for God, and a willingness to shepherd God’s people according to the biblical pattern. While we value godly

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48 Scriptural emphasis is Genesis 1:1

49 Scriptural emphasis is Psalm 100:1-2

50 Scriptural emphasis is Joshua 24:15

51 Scriptural emphasis is Luke 4:18-19
leadership, we as a congregation hold ourselves to a standard that is likewise pleasing to God.\textsuperscript{52}

As Christians we value every person, as does God. We value the command to reveal and expose Christ to the unsaved. At “Sweet” Home, we value being the “fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.”\textsuperscript{53} Evangelism, our primary cause, along with discipleship (Christian education) is at the core of our ministry.\textsuperscript{54}

Once the leaders and staff had established the statements of the church that will guide the ministry to the fulfillment of the church’s purpose, a 5-year plan was developed, using the picture, \textit{Lord Build This House} by Leonard Freeman. A visual was provided for each year, building on top of each other. Each year represents a particular phase in the plan. Each plan is coupled with a scriptural theme.

While the church does not implement it the way Freeman’s church does, the members are intentional about planning events and months around the themes of that year. The themes have been \textit{Enlarging Christ’s Kingdom} (2011), \textit{Engaging Christ’s Kingdom} (2012), \textit{Encouraging Christ’s Kingdom} (2013), \textit{Empowering Christ’s Kingdom} (2014), and \textit{Emulating Christ’s Kingdom} (2015).

\textsuperscript{52} Scriptural emphasis is 1 Thessalonians 5:12

\textsuperscript{53} 2 Corinthians 2:15, NASB.

\textsuperscript{54} Scriptural emphasis is Matthew 28:19
Also, in order to reach the growing community, the church has developed a community action plan that is being slowly implemented to meet the growing needs of the community. The church recognizes that Christ is bigger than racial and cultural issues. The leaders and members have decided to allow the black hermeneutic to be governed by God’s radical love for creation. The church wants to do ministry where its leaders and members has been planted. Because the building is in the suburbs of Austin, the ministry is not in the inner city. For love’s sake there is a desire to reach out to the community. In *Multicultural Ministry: Finding Your Church’s Unique Rhythm*, Anderson rightly exclaims:

Evidence of this country’s rich racial mix is all around us in our schools, our stores, our neighborhoods, our recreational facilities—everywhere except our churches. Heaven may include every culture, tongue and tribe, but in the United States, Sunday morning remains one of the last bastions of ethnic separatism. It’s time to stop merely talking about multicultural worship and start living it.\(^5^6\)

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\(^{55}\) Leonard Freeman, *Lord Build This House*, (accessed August 8, 2010) http://www.blackartdepot.com/products/lord-build-this-house-by-leonard-freeman. This was adapted for the use of Sweet Home – The Pinnacle of Praise, to display our vision over the course of 5 years.

The church hears prophetic and chastising words and are engaged in creating an outpost for the kingdom of God that resembles the diversity found in the object of God’s love; human beings. Therefore, the church is determined to reach out to the community no matter the backgrounds of the people. The church developed community actions to show the community that its intentions are not to just acknowledge black issues, but to be a blessing to the community, transforming them into soldiers for Christ. Differences are welcome with an understanding that the essentials of the faith are what bind us together. In the extended plan, the church incorporates community actions such as a child care center, clothes closet and food pantry, partnerships with businesses, and professional counseling onsite.

While traditionally the church had looked through the lens of the black experience, today transformation is taking place because the focus is Christ and doing God’s work, God’s way, for God’s glory. The church values its experience as black people but understands that its value is defined through salvation and not through race. Justice that extends to all races and cultures is valued. It is for that reason that the church has been intentional to lead with the Word of God; plans, leaders, and the structure of the church are no longer set up to simply save black people and make them Baptist. On the contrary, the church is composed of blacks, whites, Hispanics, and blended families.

The church recognizes and teaches the essentials of salvation, unity, and essential doctrines, leaving room for those who come from various religious backgrounds to come along on the journey. For this reason, Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, Agnostics, Atheists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the unchurched come to a deeper knowledge of Christ, and join in the journey and mission which was given by Christ for the community. Leaders from
different genders, cultures, races, and denominational backgrounds are slowly being brought into the fold. The love of God and the unity of the saints is the glue that pushes the church forward.
CHAPTER 4

PREACHING FOR SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

The church was never birthed, established, or designed by Christ to be a movement that was against musical genres, particular races, equal rights, the use of alcohol, tobacco, or democrats and republicans. The movement of the church was to reach the least, the lost, and the left out with the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the Fall of humanity, humankind lost sight of and sinned against God Almighty, and for that reason, God the Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to provide a redemptive game plan for the world. Today’s church exists in a culture that, to a large degree, no longer values God’s Holy Word. The inerrant Word of God has taken a backseat to the new value system of cash, clothes, and creature comforts. However, the lordship of Jesus Christ is eternally relevant and eternally important because it is essential to human redemption. Christ has put out an APB (all-points bulletin) on the human soul. He goes after every lost sheep, sweeping the dusty floor of our lives trying to find every lost coin. He stays up late, waiting for every lost person to return home to the rightful place with the Father.

The new messiah of today, the holy healer, daddy grace, and the prosperity pimp have crippled this culture by capturing its imagination with empty rhetoric. The society of today is a crumbling culture where many have embraced the decision to exchange sound theology for bad psychology. The church is becoming the new theatre where people go to be entertained. In Preaching to a Post Modern World, Graham Johnston offers a great insight about this crumbling culture. He said, “The transition from the modern era to a postmodern era poses a grave
challenge to the church and its mission to its own generation.”

Stanley Grenz, in *A Primer on Postmodernism*, offered advice related to the challenge that lays before followers of Christ, concerning this new era. He said:

Confronted by this new context, we dare not fall into the trap of wistfully longing for a return to the early modernity that gave evangelicalism its birth, for we are called not to minister not to the past but to the contemporary context, and our contemporary context is influenced by postmodern ideas.... It would be tragic if evangelicals ended up as the last defenders of the now dying modernity. To reach people in the new postmodern context, we must set ourselves to the task of deciphering the implications of the postmodernism for the Gospel.

In this day and time, the disciples of Christ have become too timid to enter the pain zone of the least, the lost, and the left behind. In particular, Ralph Warnock emphasizes a critique made by J. Deotis Roberts against the black church, and that critique is “black churches are often burning with piety and emotionalism while those who are concerned about social change operate outside the church, believing it is not the nature of the black church to be where the action is.”

As this culture continues to crumble and the world becomes more shrewd and barbarous, it has been discovered that some modernist believers do not want to stand with the disenfranchised and marginalized of the world.

Postmodernists, regardless of religious affiliation, tend to be more apt to side with the disenfranchised. Yet they may lack clear religious affiliation because theirs “is a deep distrust of grand theoretical schemes which promise to explain and order reality for us.”

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and truth “is a narrative knowledge arising out of and responding to the concrete concerns and needs of human groups.”\(^5\) For people of the postmodern generation, their stories chart their spirituality and social struggle and only when varied stories collide does truth emerge. Tim Keller, in John Piper’s book, *The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World*, has this perspective on the postmodern culture:

This is not an abstract culture, but a culture of story and image. The gospel is not less than a set of revealed propositions (God, sin, Christ, faith), but it is *more*. It is a narrative (creation, fall, redemption, restoration).\(^6\)

The church must prepare itself to deal with the dilemma of this crumbling culture from the perspective of a two-sided coin. Side one of this coin deals with the redemptive work of mankind to make disciples who make a difference. Side two of this coin deals with the disciples going into the world to fight injustice with God’s justice to promote social change. If preaching is going to be effective within this postmodern culture, it must address the side of the coin that is held by postmodernists. Only by offering a redemptive story that engages the postmodern culture spiritually and through social justice will evangelicals be able to transform this current crumbling culture.

Graham Johnston warns, “You can no longer assume, for example, that your regular church listeners subscribe to a Christian worldview.”\(^7\) In order to deal effectively with this two-sided coin of the (spiritual) personal responsibility and social change of living out the good deeds of Christ, the preacher in the postmodern culture must reach humanity with the message of Christ (the good news of the gospel) while simultaneously teaching church members that they need to

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\(^5\) James H. Evans, Jr., 213.


\(^7\) Johnston, 14.
extend a helping hand rather than wagging a pointed finger. In his letter from the Birmingham jail, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever effects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

Introducing a Radical Spiritual Game Plan

In light of an ever increasing postmodern population, there is an emerging church movement that seeks to address the needs of its postmodern culture. This movement has attracted much attention in recent years as can be seen in various books and actual church establishments devoted to this ever growing population. One of the most common words associated with this church movement is “emerging” or “emergent.” According to D.A. Carson, in his book, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, leaders of this movement are convicted that “changes in the culture signal that a new church is emerging.”

This emerging church has its focus on a segment of our culture, which is referred to as “postmodernists.” There are distinct characteristic differences between the two cultures of “modernism” and “postmodernism.” Carson distinguishes modernism this way:

It recognizes how much of what we know is shaped by the culture in which we live, is controlled by emotions and esthetics and heritage, and in fact can only be intelligently held as part of a common tradition, without overbearing claims to being true or right.”

On the other hand, Carson identifies postmodernism as having the following characteristics: “pursuing truth, absolutism, linear thinking, rationalism, certainty, the cerebral as

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8 “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Liberation Curriculum, Martin Luther King Jr. Thesiss Project, P.1. Page number references in the footnotes are in this source, unless otherwise indicated. 2 P. 9.

9 D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 12.
opposed to the effective, which in turn breeds arrogance, inflexibility, a lust to be right, the desire to control.”

The differences in the characteristics of the two cultures have, in essence, given birth to this new emerging church movement. The differences in the two cultures also bring with it the challenge of how to effectively minister to postmodern people. It is evident throughout our history that changes in the culture drives changes in other areas of society. Examples of changed areas include transportation and communication. Transportation is the ability to move from one place to another. There was a time in our culture when horseback and/or, horse and buggy were the primary modes of transportation. There still exists a need for transportation; however, the mode or method of transportation has tremendously improved since the times of early America. The method or modes of transportation have been developed and progressed from its earliest and primitive modes to the current fast, faster, even supersonic world of transportation.

Another area that has changed is communication. Through the years and decades, we have advanced from the telegraph to the telephone, which in and of itself was phenomenal in its day. However, technological advances in communication have far surpassed our imagination of yesteryear in all areas of the fascinating concept of communication. As the changing culture is perceived, basic concepts remain the same, but it is the method of “how” any subject matter is approached, which in many instances also have changed.

The same is true for ministering the gospel in this postmodern culture. There are those who understand and have accepted that the American culture has changed to the extent that there is a need to reach the postmodern culture. The church must change its method of relating to and

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10 Carson, 27.
interacting with people in today’s culture, but never change the message of the gospel. John Piper, in *The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World*, provides the following perspective about this from Tim Keller: gospel theologizing (gospel centered theology), gospel realizing (intimately knowing the gospel), gospel urbanizing (creating gospel communities), gospel communication (carefully thought out evangelism), gospel humiliation (the power of the gospel in weakness), and gospel incarnation (engage culture with a distinct alternative).¹¹

The process of changing our method starts with getting a clear understanding of “how” this postmodern generation interacts in today’s culture and how they process information. It is less likely that postmodernists will simply accept what is presented to them as fact. Postmodernists are not only thinkers, but they are also challengers of the status quo. Many of them have separated themselves from belief systems held by their parents and those of their parent’s generations, including religious beliefs and practices. Their once curious “whys” have developed into serious and challenging conversations that intelligently question some of the very basics of traditional religious beliefs. Consequently, evangelicals are faced with the question of how to effectively reach the postmodern generation with the gospel message.

Those who preach the good news of the gospel to this postmodern culture must display a balancing act in preaching. The balancing act requires the spokesperson of God to love God’s people and to love God’s truth. Some evangelicals have been accused by postmodernists of loving the Bible but despising the people. Graham Johnston spoke truth to power on this matter when he said, “Truth and love, one without the other just won’t do. The two must always walk hand-in-hand.”¹²

¹¹ Piper, 15.

¹² Johnston, 21.
It is imperative that the church ponders, studies, strategizes, and develops a radical spiritual game plan that stays faithful to the Great Commission, but its methods must be radically different to produce a spiritual awakening in this crumbling postmodern world. In this radical spiritual game plan, the preacher in the postmodern era must strive to reach humanity with the message of Christ, and at the same time, be creative with the method of the message. (e.g., Website, Facebook, YouTube)

Mark Driscoll, in *Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World*, highlights this point when he said:

> In our firmly closed hand, we must hold the timeless truths of Christianity…In our graciously open hand we must hold timely ministry methods and styles that adapt as the cultures and subcultures we are ministering to change. Practically, this means churches must continually ask questions about their use of technology…musical styles, dress, verbiage, building aesthetics, programming and the like. *Are they being as creative, hospitable, relevant and effective as possible to welcome as many people as possible to connect with Jesus and His church?*¹³

The radical spiritual game plan requires evangelicals to preach and teach creatively so that the gospel is still good news for today and not old news of yesterday. In the game of football, coaches study film of game plays of their opponents for hours upon hours with great intent and intensity to try to develop a strategic game plan that will defeat their opponents. Coaches also study and look for such things as play calling tendencies. They are also looking for down and distance tendencies as well as strengths and weaknesses of the opposing team players.

It is with the same tenacity of a coach that churches must study this crumbling culture for its strengths, weaknesses, and tendencies. Then develop a vibrant game plan that produces a spiritual awakening and radical disciples and a new found love for God and His local church.

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¹³ Piper, 143.
Graham Johnston gives evangelicals a game plan for studying the postmodern culture when he set forth ten distinctive hallmarks of a postmodern as follows:

1) They’re reacting to modernity and all its tenets. 2) They reject objective truth. 3) They’re skeptical and suspicious of authority. 4) They’re like missing persons in search of a self and identify. 5) They’ve blurred morality and are whatever is expedient. 6) They continue to search for the transcendent. 7) They’re living in a media world like no other. 8) They’ll engage in the knowing smirk. 9) They’re on a quest for common unity. 10) They live in a very materialistic world. 14

In studying the behavior of postmodernists, it is of great urgency that the church formulates a radical spiritual game plan from the playbook known as the Bible, so that Christ will be in the center of the church as well as this crumbling postmodern culture. However, before this can happen, the church must ask God for forgiveness for kicking Him out as well as inviting Him out of our lives, schools, and our courts. William Willimon is quoted in the book, *Christless Christianity the Alternative Gospel of the American Church*, as saying, “God forgive us for selling out our great intellectual treasure – the Gospel of God with us for a mess of psychobabble and pragmatic utilitarian self-help triviality.” 15

These egregious acts for which Willimon suggests that the church ask forgiveness has caused the church, as John Stott would say, to experience “growth without depth.” 16 In Romans 9:1-5, the articulate apostle and tent maker from Tarsus, Paul, displays for the church and evangelical leaders a radical spiritual game plan to restore the souls of the lost when he said:

I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my

14 Johnston, 26.


kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.\textsuperscript{17}

The Apostle Paul, in this text, speaks truth in love. Paul displays in his writing, a radical spiritual game plan that requires followers of Christ to become broken-hearted (sorrowful) because fellow brothers are unsaved.

When Paul looked at Christ, he felt great joy in his heart. However, when he looked at the condition of his brothers who were lost, he felt sorrow and was brokenhearted. Paul’s radical spiritual game plan moves himself from brokenness to an unceasing burden (anguish in his heart). Paul utters that he would be willing to sacrifice his place in heaven for the sake of his lost brothers. The radical spiritual game plan starts with the church having a deep passion for and a broken heart for the lost.

This radical spiritual game plan caused Paul to carry a burden of the lost. Paul’s radical game plan has a blessing attributed to it. This blessing can be seen in Romans 10:1 where he states, “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.”\textsuperscript{18} The radical spiritual game plan to attack today’s crumbling postmodern culture includes the same message that Paul used, but it must employ a different method. To reiterate, the radical spiritual game plan of the church must start with the church having a deep passion and a broken heart for the lost. The church, like Paul, must be willing to carry the burden of the lost. Only then will this crumbling culture be able to share in the blessings of salvation through Jesus Christ.

\textsuperscript{17} Romans 9:1-5

\textsuperscript{18} Romans 10:1
The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention has put together an evangelism initiative that can change the course of this crumbling culture. Their model is to “pursue, pray, plan, and plug into a local church.”¹⁹ The initiative of pursuing, means to intentionally cultivate relationships with the unsaved persons through various networks of social media, personal interaction, e-mail, and common interests, and begin a relationship with them.

Their game plan then encourages prayer with and for such individuals. Set aside times of intentional fasting and praying so that as your relationship with them develops, there will be an opportunity to share the gospel message of Jesus Christ to awaken their hearts to their need for Him.

After having built a relationship with them and praying for them, look for what the person’s hobbies and interests are so as to plan a time to be with them in their interests. This offers the chance to present the gospel message through hearing their stories, and sharing how the gospel intervened in your own story, which leads to inviting them to recognizing and accepting the intervening hand of God in their story.

Finally, plug-in the new believer into the life of the local church where other stories connect together, and where they are further trained and encouraged to share with their unbelieving friends how the gospel intervened in their story.

Preaching and Evangelizing for Social Change

There are conflicting theological views that are circulating around the church community, which advocate that individual salvation and social justice should not be the mission of the 21st century church in a postmodern world. In Intellectuals Don’t Need God, Alister McGrath said:

The problem is not simply how to make the Christian faith credible to the world, but for Christians to live consistently and coherently under their own claims of love and justice. This is not a matter of the world setting the church’s agenda, but of the church fulfilling its own. For the church to be the church it must be concerned to transform as much of this world, after the likeness of the homeland, as it possibly can.\(^{20}\)

Craig A. Loscalzo, in *Apologetic Preaching: Proclaiming Christ to a Postmodern World*, provides another reason why salvation and social justice are important.

In an era when many view Christianity as an antiquated religious option, unable to address the dilemmas of postmodern living, perhaps it is time for Christian apologetics to flourish again.\(^{21}\)

It is mind blowing to see someone proclaim Jesus as Savior without practicing justice for humankind. Within the public square, preaching, and evangelizing for social change should be done so creatively that it weaves heavenly hunger and earthly engagement. One of the greatest attributes of the black church has been and still is in some religious communities, to develop disciples to make a difference for social change. Ralph Warnock offers a critique by Dwight Hopkins on discipling to make a difference socially. He states, “Black theology equips the faith of black people with shoes that fit and trek toward liberation. While Walter Rauschenbusch, in *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, said, “The great religious thinkers who created theology were always leaders who were shaping ideas to meet actual situations.”\(^{22}\)

The actual bleak situation that the black community finds itself in is not a pretty picture. Another vivid image which parallels this bleak situation is rendered by Luke A. Powery, in *Dem...*  


Dry Bones. His commentary states, “Throughout the United States, many church buildings are surrounded by cemeteries like the Princeton Cemetery, suggesting that the church engages in a ministry of life and death.”

The black community finds itself viewed in a negative light when it comes to its social standing. In Dare We Speak of Hope: Searching for a Language of Life in Faith and Politics, Allan A. Boesak has researched several statistics that provide documented evidence regarding the social disparity of blacks in this country:

In the United States in 2014, the poor are not only a “permanent underclass”; they are an unmentioned, unremembered, underclass…But the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)…reveals the United States has the second highest rate of childhood poverty in the developed world – better only than impoverished Romania…And because the poor are not mentioned, the word “justice” is not mentioned either. Meanwhile, the criminal justice system is now the “new Jim Crow,” and the life span of the average young black man in the inner cities is as long as that of a peasant in Bangladesh.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 24.5% of African Americans have died from heart disease since 2008, and blacks are nearly twice as likely to have a stroke as whites and are more likely to die from a stroke than whites. In fact, blacks are more likely to have a stroke than any other racial and ethnic group; a bleak situation. The National Center for Education Statistics, reports that black students in fourth and eighth grade, while making

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27 Ibid.
significant advances in math, still come in dead last when compared to whites, Hispanics, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and American Indian/Alaska Natives; a bleak situation.

When looking at these sad and sadistic statistics, it causes you wonder if the black church has abandoned its social consciousness. Has the black church majored in fighting racism, but minored in combating social issues such as poverty, mass incarceration, AIDS/HIV, black-on-black crime, and social and economic inequalities to name a few? The answer is a resounding, “NO!” The black church and the black community are looking for answers, looking for help, and looking for hope.

The black community should not put their hope in the President of the United States, Barack Obama. Now in 2014, the President’s hopeful politics are now failed political experiments. Hope for the black community will not be found in the White House, but in God’s house. Kenyatta Gilbert, in The Journey and Promise of Africa American Preaching, quotes Dale Andrews’ idea of hope that the black church held in the past when he said, “[the black church] has always been a refuge – a reservoir of communal care, religious formation, and liberating hope.” It is urgent that black pastors and leaders stop playing their flutes and start blowing God’s prophetic trumpet and cry out for spiritual and social change in the black community.

If the black church is not careful, a detachment between the black church and the black postmodern community will become as divided as the East is from the West. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., gives a profound definition of the detachment when he said, “Too unconcerned to love

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and too passionless to hate, too detached to be selfish and too lifeless to be unselfish, too indifferent to experience joy and too cold to experience sorrow; we are neither dead nor alive, we merely exist.”

The time has come for the black church to be the leader in fostering liberation and social change like the days of old, during the Civil Rights era. In Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African Communities, Robert M. Franklin offers five phases to transform the black community: charity, support, service, justice, and transformation.

Phase one is the Ministry of Charity. This is the “most basic level, [where] no theoretical knowledge or insight is needed.” Franklin says charity is focused “upon direct, immediate relief of pain and suffering” and the only prerequisite for participation is that one needs to be “healthy, functional … [and] capable of experiencing empathy.”

Phase two is the Ministry of Transformational Support. This ministry focuses on “longer-term but not permanent counseling and assistance that facilitates the journey from dependence to self-sufficiency and self-determination.” This group helps people while they are transitioning from instability to stability. These are the life coaches and counselors. Counseling can be done formally or informally and requires some level of knowledge, whether formal or informal, about “psychology, sociology, and public health.”

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31 Robert M. Franklin, Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 162.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.
Phase three is the Ministry of Social Service. This is when “churches move beyond providing counseling to providing social services to a community.” Whether it is an after school program, a drug or teen pregnancy prevention program, classes on the Affordable Care Act, classes on understanding the democratic process, offering ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, or even classes on cultural identity, all of these are social services, depending on the service, that determines the level of knowledge and training necessary to perform the task.

Phase four is the Ministry of Justice. This is when “congregations move from providing services, support, and charity to people and focus upon representing the needs of people to the public systems and structures of power.” The ministry of justice is an opportunity to stand in the gap and speak on behalf of the least, the lost, and the left out. “The knowledge required here pertains to the nature of larger social systems, economics, politics, and theology and ethics.”

Phase five is the Ministry of Transformation. At this phase the congregation becomes a “leader or a co-leader in crafting a vision of the beloved community and then organizing the capital, mobilizing the people, negotiating the systems, and hammering out the details in order to develop new and better communities.” The knowledge required is interdisciplinary, because you must know “a fair amount about everything.” This is the phase where the church has become an architect in building a better society.

The goal of all five phases is to have people plugged in at every phase. As the people of God progress in their grasp of God’s great love for them, they should move toward phase five.

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35 Franklin, *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities*, 162.

36 Ibid., 163.

37 Ibid.,

38 Ibid., 163-164

39 Ibid.,164.
With each phase there is a deeper level of involvement and responsibility, spiritually, physically, and intellectually. The role of the church is to teach and provide space for the people in taking up their crosses in more involved and responsible ways that grow them spiritually, physically, and intellectually.

Creative leaders know what it means to challenge current social plagues by challenging the gods of this crumbling postmodern culture in working with and discipling others to help them overcome the barriers that limit the church in its quest to bring hope to the hopeless. The black church must participate by mobilizing its congregations to participate socially to heal the brokenness of our society with the hope of Christ. Raphael Warnock provides an excerpt of one from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s sermons wherein King argues this point when he gives the parallels of the kingdom of God in heaven and the kingdom of God on earth. Dr. King spoke these words:

The preacher must be concerned about the whole man not merely his soul, but his body. It is alright to talk about heaven. I talk about it because I believe firmly in immortality. However, one must also talk about the earth. It is alright to talk about long white robes over yonder, but I want a suit and some shoes down here. It is alright to talk about the streets flowing with milk and honey in heaven, but I want some food to eat down here. It is even alright to talk about the New Jerusalem, but one day we must begin to talk about the new Chicago, the new Atlanta, the new New York, the new America. Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the slums that cripple the souls, the economic conditions that stagnate the soul, and the city governments that may damn the soul is a dry, dead do-nothing religion in need of new blood.40

### APPENDIX A

**HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS AND DENOMINATIONS**

(Asterisks indicate founding dates of denominations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Congregation/Denomination</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1758</td>
<td>African Baptist Church (Bluestone)</td>
<td>Luneburg (Mecklenburg), VA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1773/75?</td>
<td>African Baptist Church</td>
<td>Silver Bluff, SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1784</td>
<td>Oldest Black Catholic parish</td>
<td>St. Augustine, Fl, Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1794</td>
<td>African American Episcopal congregation</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>African Zoar Methodist congregation&lt;br&gt;First African American congregation in the Methodist Episcopal Church</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Bethel A.M.E. Church&lt;br&gt;Joined with other churches to become the A.M.E. denomination in 1816</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1796</td>
<td>A.M.E. Zion Chapel</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1805</td>
<td>Ezion Methodist Episcopal Church</td>
<td>Wilmington, DE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1805</td>
<td>Union American Methodist Episcopal Church, Inc.&lt;br&gt;Traces its origin to the Ezion Methodist Church, which severed its ties with the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1813</td>
<td>Wilmington, DE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1807</td>
<td>First African American congregation of the Presbyterian Church</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813</td>
<td>Union Church of African Members</td>
<td>Wilmington, DE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1816</td>
<td>African Methodist Episcopal Church</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1820</td>
<td>African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829</td>
<td>First African American congregation among Congregationalists</td>
<td>New Haven, CT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>First African American congregation in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)</td>
<td>Midway, KY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1863</td>
<td>Seventh-Day Adventist African American Seventh-Day Adventists claim membership from the founding date.</td>
<td>Battle Creek, MI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1865</td>
<td>Colored Primitive Baptists of America</td>
<td>Columbia, TN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1867</td>
<td>United American Free Will Baptist Denomination, Inc.</td>
<td>Green County, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Colored Cumberland Presbyterian Church</td>
<td>Huntsville, AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1870</td>
<td>Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (formerly Colored Methodist Episcopal Church)</td>
<td>Jackson, TN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Congregation/Denomination</td>
<td>Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Church of Christ (Disciples of Christ)</td>
<td>Lenoir County, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An African American Body that is autonomous from the majority Euro-American Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1874</td>
<td>Second Cumberland Presbyterian Church</td>
<td>Huntsville, AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(current name: Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>First African American congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church</td>
<td>Orangeburg, SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1885</td>
<td>National Baptist Convention of America, Inc.</td>
<td>Shreveport, LA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1889</td>
<td>Church of the Living God (Christian workers for Fellowship)</td>
<td>Oklahoma City, OK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Believes that Jesus was Black, based on the lineage of Abraham and David</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1894</td>
<td>Church of God in Christ, Inc. (Pentecostal)</td>
<td>Memphis, TN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Founded in 1894 and incorporated in 1907</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1984/98</td>
<td>Church of Christ (Holiness)</td>
<td>Jackson, MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1895</td>
<td>National Baptist Convention USA, Inc.</td>
<td>Nashville, TN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1897</td>
<td>Church of God in Christ (Holiness)</td>
<td>Lexington, MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1897/1901</td>
<td>Church of God (Apostolic), Inc.</td>
<td>Danville, KY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1901</td>
<td>Church of God (Sanctified)</td>
<td>Columbia, TN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1903</td>
<td>House of God, which is the Church of the Living God, The Pillar and Ground of the Truth, Without Controversy, Inc.</td>
<td>Dickson, TN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1905</td>
<td>Free Christian Zion of Christ Church</td>
<td>Redemption, AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Church of God in Christ (Pentecostal) First incorporated body of Pentecostals</td>
<td>Memphis, TN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1908</td>
<td>Fire Baptized Holiness Church of the Americas</td>
<td>Anderson, SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1961</td>
<td>Reformed Church in America Related to the Dutch Reformed Church</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1988</td>
<td>National Missionary Baptist Convention of America</td>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1989</td>
<td>African American Catholic Congregation Declared independence from the Roman Catholic Church in 1990</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


APPENDIX B

Brown vs. Board of Education Judgment

Supreme Court of the United States

No. 1 ----, October Term, 1954

Oliver Brown, Mrs. Richard Lawton, Mrs. Sadie Emmanuel et al.,
Appellants,

vs.

Board of Education of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas, et al.

Appeal from the United States District Court for the
District of Kansas.

This cause came on to be heard on the transcript of the record from the United States
District Court for the District of Kansas, and was argued by counsel.

On consideration whereof, It is ordered and adjudged by this Court that the judgment
of the said District Court in this cause be, and the same is hereby, reversed with costs; and that this cause be, and the same is hereby, remanded to the said District Court to take such proceedings and enter such orders and decrees consistent with the opinions of this Court as are necessary and proper to admit to public schools on a racially nondiscriminatory basis with all deliberate speed the parties to this case.

Per Mr. Chief Justice Warren,

May 31, 1954.

[Signature]
APPENDIX C

Martin Luther King Speech

"I HAVE A DREAM . . ."

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Speech by the Rev. Martin Luther King
At the "March on Washington"

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down
in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in
the history of our nation.

Five score years ago a great American in whose sym-
boric shadow we stand today signed the Emancipation
Proclamation. This momentous decree is a great beacon
light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been
scared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a
joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.
But 100 years later the Negro still is not free. One hun-
dred years later the life of the Negro is still badly
crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of
discrimination. One hundred years later the Negro lives
on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean
of material prosperity. One hundred years later the
Negro is still languished in the corners of American
society and finds himself in exile in his own land. So
we’ve come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we’ve come to our nation’s capital to cash
a check. When the architects of our Republic wrote the
magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration
of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to
which every American was to fall heir. This note was a
promise that all men—yes, black men as well as white
men—would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life,
liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today
that America has defaulted on this promissory note inso-
far as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of
honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quickands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.

Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children. It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality —1963 is not an end but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual.

There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright days of justice emerge.

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And that is something that I must say to my people who stand on the worn threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protests to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to distrust all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny.

They have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone. And as we walk we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.

We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities.

We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their adulthood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "For Whites Only."

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We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and the Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote.

No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulation. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering.

Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our Northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

I say to you today, my friends, though, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice,

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s weller with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream . . . I have a dream that one day in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today . . . I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning. "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountain side, let freedom ring." And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New

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York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.

But not only that. Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill and molchill of Mississippi, from every mountain side. Let freedom ring . . .

When we allow freedom to ring—when we let it ring from every city and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last, Free at last, Great God a-mighty, We are free at last.”

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


