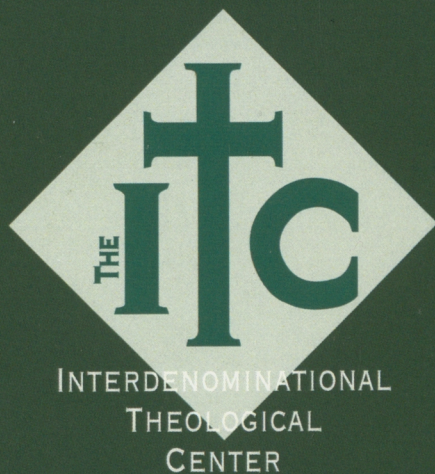


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*Exploring Pentecostalism in the
African American Tradition*

Volume 44, Fall 2016 / Spring 2017

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Fall 2016/Spring 2017



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A Brief Word from the Editor

I would like to thank Dr. Harold Bennett, President-Dean of the H. Mason Theological Seminary, for serving as the guest editor of this issue of the *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*.

This issue focuses on Pentecostalism and has valuable knowledge ranging from the beginning of the denomination to its current and diverse practices. I hope scholars, students and laity alike will find these articles informative and offering needed sources for additional research.

I take this opportunity to apologize for the delay of printing and distributing this Journal issue. Our goal going forward is to print and distribute the journal on a regular basis in the Spring and Fall annually. This issue is Volume 44 and comprises Fall 2016 and Spring 2017. You should receive the Volume 45 Fall 2017 issue by July of this year.

On behalf of the members of the editorial board and Journal consultants, I would like to express my appreciation for your loyal and continuing support.

Temba Mafico
Editor

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Essays on African-American Pentecostalism: Introducing the Discussion

Studies conducted by the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life and the World Christian Database indicate that Pentecostalism is a complex, mushrooming, phenomenon on the worldwide religious scene. In fact, the literature indicates a proliferation of Pentecostal traditions in Latin America, West Africa, and in the United States.¹ At the center of this type of Christianity is belief in a baptism in the Holy Spirit. This baptism is an encounter between the Holy and the human being, which can best be understood by comparing it to two agents involving themselves in an intimate socio-psychological encounter, where one agent/entity is the "Divine Essence" and the other is the human being.² Within this Journal, the term Pentecostalism denotes that religious tradition that gives particular attention to how this encounter between the Sacred and the human being evidences itself in non-rational, psychomotor phenomena, dynamic worship experiences, healings, and in a vast array of "gifts" and "powers." Concomitant with this experience is *glossolalia* or the spontaneous, unrehearsed tongues-speech in an unknown language, which is believed to be a significant indicator that the moral agent has experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Accounts in the book of Acts and 1 Corinthians inform the theological visions in the Pentecostal traditions.

Within the African-American religious context, two major brands of Pentecostalism are present. It is important to note that the conversation about Pentecostalism amongst mainstream America in general and amongst Blacks in America in particular often reach back into the past and connect with William Joseph Seymour and his groundbreaking work in Los Angeles, California, and to the efforts of Charles Harrison Mason, Sr., and his work headquartered in Memphis, Tennessee, during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The work of Seymour at 312 Azusa Street, on the one hand, laid the groundwork for two Pentecostal theological or Christological trajectories in the Black Community. The issue of whether to view the Holy as a group of three or as a single entity, that is to say, whether one should speak or articulate an understanding of the Holy in a *Trinitarian conceptual framework* or *Jesus Only-Oneness* language is perhaps the main theological issue that distinguishes these two religious subgroups and informs subsequent doctrines that comprise the official ideologies of these faith communities. The work of Bishop Charles H. Mason, Sr., on the other hand, led to the formulation of an expression of Christianity that is authentically Black (there will be more discourse about the Pentecostal experience, its "Blackness" and its roots later in the essays in this Journal).

¹Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life. "Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals." <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/spirit-and-power/> (accessed September 25, 2017).

²Rodney Stark, "A Taxonomy of Religious Experience," *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion*, 5 (1965): 97-116.

ETHNOCENTRIC AND AFRICENTRIC PENTECOSTAL MORAL DECISION-MAKING

Harold V. Benatti

Exploring Pentecostalism in the African American Tradition

Introduction

As a Pentecostal theologian, I feel compelled to respond to the question: "What is the ethical framework that governs the African-American Pentecostal? Is Africentric Pentecostalism?"¹ I do not mean to suggest that Pentecostals can use to frame their beliefs and values. I am simply asking for the rightness or wrongness of the actions of the African-American Pentecostal in whom they are formulating value judgments. This is the issue of ethics in African-American Pentecostalism. The question is: What is this paper is not the first attempt to answer this question. In fact, it is a method in Ethics, it charts

¹ I am currently a professor of theology at the Charles H. Mason Theological Seminary at Washington, D.C. I am also a member of the Department Chair and Associate Professor of Theology at the same institution.

² I am not suggesting that the African-American Pentecostal has a point of view, formulated by a single individual, but rather that the point of view, interests, and agenda emerge from the African-American Pentecostal community in the African Diaspora.

THE BIBLE AND AFRICENTRIC PENTECOSTAL MORAL DECISION-MAKING

Harold V. Bennett¹

Abstract

The following article elucidates a framework for moral decision-making, which reclaims features of African traditional religions and includes these ideas in an approach that can be used by African-American Pentecostals to justify moral claims. The suggested approach privileges the role of the human agent, not a collection of texts, in determining the rightness or wrongness of an act, or states of affairs in the world. This paper, too, invites the African-American Pentecostal to appreciate the fact that the Bible is not, a comprehensive ethics manual to be regarded as the Word of the Radical Presence. The essay closes by showing how the present model has the philosophical capital to make a strong case for what can be viewed as the distinguishing features of an Africentric Pentecostal ethical methodology and to position African-American Pentecostals to use the Bible responsibly in deciding the goodness or badness of choices and particular moral actions.

Introduction

The primary task this essay sets itself is to respond to the question: "Which tenets should inform the conceptual framework that governs the use of the Bible in moral decision-making in Africentric Pentecostalism?"² Is there a robust model Black Pentecostals can use to frame their beliefs about what light the Bible can cast on the rightness or wrongness of the moral action in the private sphere or when they are formulating value judgments about the current state of affairs in African-American communities in the twenty-first century? While this paper is not the first attempt to situate the Bible in the discussion on a method in Ethics, it charts

¹Harold V. Bennett, Ph.D., is the President-Dean of the Charles H. Mason Theological Seminary at the Interdenominational Theological Center. He is also Department Chair and Associate Professor of Religion at Morehouse College, Atlanta, GA.

²In the present essay, the adjective Africentric denotes a point of view, formulated by persons of African descent and whose characteristics, interests, and agenda emerge from the general predicament of persons of color in the African Diaspora.

a new direction in this area by framing the conversation on moral philosophizing in an Africentric Pentecostal context.³ Therefore, this essay identifies and builds upon three claims that are critical to moral decision-making in the Black Pentecostal traditions: (1) Belief in the always immediate, direct experience of “G-o-d”; (2) Belief in total obedience to the direct experience of “G-o-d,” and (3) Belief that the Bible, in some way, discloses the will of “G-o-d” in regards to defining acceptable conduct for human beings.

Belief in the accessibility of The Radical Presence is one major tenet in Africentric Pentecostal moral philosophy. In this article, the present author adopts the term The Radical Presence and uses it as a descriptor for “The Holy.” The Radical Presence, then, represents what Western Christians commonly call “God,” Arab speaking Christians call “Allah,” the Yoruba might call “Olodumare,” or the Ashanti might call “Nyankopon.” The present author uses The Radical Presence for “The Holy” to draw attention to the deeply held view by Black Pentecostals that The Holy is always near, available, and waiting to reveal The Radical Presence's self; consequently, a direct experience of “The Holy” is always possible.

The belief that obedience to The Radical Presence is fundamental to determining appropriate moral conduct is a second major tenet in Africentric Pentecostal decision-making. This approach to distinguishing good moral actions from bad moral actions bases itself neither in ascertaining the consequences of actions nor in raising questions about the qualities or moral characteristics inculcated by moral actions in an agent. The good in this approach is simply “doing what The Radical Presence says or instructs the agent to do.” Since Pentecostal moral philosophy works with the assumption that correct moral action is doing what The Radical Presence commands humans to do, moral philosophers would contend systems for determining proper moral living in Black Pentecostalism are akin to what is commonly known as Divine Command ethics.⁴

Believing that knowing the will of The Radical Presence emerges from reading the Bible is a third central idea in the moral, epistemological framework of Black Pentecostals. These camps share assumptions about the role that the Old and New Testaments should play in deciding the

³For a very good publication that casts light on methodological issues involved in using the Bible in moral deliberation, see Charles Curran and Richard McCormick, eds., *The Uses of Scripture in Moral Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984).

⁴Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics* (New York: OUP, 2015), 67-71.

rightness and wrongness of behaviors and in evaluating current states of affairs in the world.⁵ Noteworthy is it that because Fundamentalists, too, hold a similar, if not the same belief as Black Pentecostals that the Bible is a necessary part of the picture in regards to identifying those actions that are praiseworthy and those actions that are blameworthy, Black Pentecostals are often identified but incorrectly referred to as Fundamentalists.

Regardless of the brand of Black Pentecostalism, it is commonplace for African-American Pentecostals to maintain that the Bible speaks clearly and constructively to every moral problem on the human scene. The argument, on the one hand, can be made that African-American Pentecostals assent to what the present article calls *inherent absolutism* in regards to the Bible. Inherent absolutism refers to the belief that the Bible contains some special axiological property that is independent of the state of mind of rational subjects, and that this intrinsic feature of the Bible positions it to be viewed as the container in which all ethical truth is present or originates. This assumption reveals essential philosophical and hermeneutic pre-commitments accepted by Black Pentecostals about the moral positions in the Bible, namely that the points of view on a moral action in ancient Israel and in the first century Christian communities should be the standard for evaluating human actions on the current scene.

By accepting inherent absolutism in regards to the Bible, the person affirms that act "X" is right or good *if and only if* act "X" corresponds to the moral positions in the Bible; consequently, the agent is making a normative claim about the moral points of view in this literary corpus. Ascribing superiority to the moral positions in the Bible, however, cannot but provoke a series of intellectual crises for individuals who seek to use this document to discern moral direction in the twenty-first century. Four features of the moral positions in the Bible justify this claim. (1) The Bible contains competing ideas about the same moral issues, e.g., beliefs about intermarriage, the distribution or recipient(s) of the tithe, and reasons for

⁵The Church of God in Christ (COGIC), headquartered in Memphis, Tennessee, is the largest of the African-American Pentecostal groups in America and is a notable example of the Trinitarian camp in Black Pentecostalism, and the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW), headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana, is a notable example of the Oneness camp amongst Black Pentecostalism. For a listing of Black Pentecostal organizations in America, see Wardell J. Payne, ed., *Directory of African American Religious Bodies*, 2nd ed., (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1995), 152-191.

keeping the Sabbath.⁶ (2) The Bible admonishes problematical, unacceptable moral behavior on the part of human agents. The Bible orders actions, which a person in the twenty-first century would consider appalling and in most cases, would never do. For instance, the Bible asserts that a person whose conception is the result of incest be disallowed from membership in the congregation of YHWH. What is more, the Bible bans the grandchildren of these persons from participating in the life of a local faith community.⁷ Should persons whose conception is the result of incest be disallowed from coming to Church? Should the descendants of these persons be banned from participating in the life of a local faith community? It stands to reason that most Black Pentecostals would answer *no* to both questions. (3) The Bible contains instances of alarming behavior on the part of the deity, wherein YHWH punishes innocent people for actions for which they neither initiated nor for which they were personally responsible. One example is an episode in the David traditions in the Hebrew Bible. The Deuteronomistic Historian (DtrH) tells the story of the deity instructing David to take a census, and the same narrative indicates that God punished the people because David counted them. Seventy thousand human beings died because of nothing they did; Israelites and Judeans lose their lives because of the actions of David.⁸ (4) Many issues that are features of the contemporary moral landscape and that are core themes in African-American social ethics and political thought were not features of the moral landscape in ancient Israelite society. The prison industrial complex, federal spending on education, colonial domination, racial stereotyping, healthcare, racial injustice, and voters rights are major socioeconomic and political issues for African-American societies, but these subjects receive virtually no direct treatment in the Bible.⁹ The agent who is seeking to use the Bible to decide pressing moral issues in the twenty-first century and who accepts the position that the rightness or wrongness of an act consists in duplicating behavior in the Old and New Testaments has a complex situation on his or her hands, especially when

⁶See Deut 7:1-6 versus Deut 21:10-14; Deut 14:22-29 versus Mal 3:10; and Ex 20:11 versus Deut 5:15.

⁷Deut 23:3

⁸This episode in the life of David appears in 2 Sam 24:1-16. First Chr 21:1-15 offers an alternative account of this event, by contending that Satan not YHWH told David to count the people.

⁹Animal rights, biotechnology, environmental ethics, globalization, transgenderism, and the use of social media, just to name a few, are principal ethical issues for current mainstream American society, but the Bible gives no straight forward, direct treatment of these subjects.

the agent has to adjudicate issues which are foreign to the worlds from which the texts in the Bible come.

If determining right and wrong in Africentric Pentecostal moral philosophizing emerges from compliance with the will of the *Radical Presence*, and if knowing the will of the *Radical Presence* emerges from the reading of the Bible, the critic can argue that three components minimally comprise moral decision-making procedures in African-American Pentecostal moral philosophizing. These *pieces* are the following: the Radical Presence, a literary text, and an agent, whether the agent is acting as an individual or as a person in a community.¹⁰ The former refers to an agent, who is acting on behalf of him- or herself, and is exempt from answering to anyone for his/her decisions or actions; the latter denotes a person who is acting on behalf of a group and is in a web of relationships where he/she has to answer directly for his/her decisions and actions. Since it is axiomatic in Black Pentecostalism that the Bible occupies a key place in systems for discerning and gaining insight into the Radical Presence and into delineating proper moral action, and since this article casts light on biblical interpretation, it is both a journey into Africentric Pentecostal constructive ethics and a voyage into biblical hermeneutics.¹¹ This article, too, expands the work begun in Africentric biblical hermeneutics with the publication of *Stony the Road We Trod*, by focusing on ideas that should inform efforts to appropriate the moral points of view in the Bible in the African-American Pentecostal tradition.¹²

It, therefore, comes as no surprise that there is a pressing need to place beliefs about the Bible in Africentric Pentecostal moral theorization under comprehensive inspection. This present article argues that appreciating fully the role the moral agent plays in moral decision-making positions African-American Pentecostals to welcome critical scholarship on the Bible and use the Bible responsibly in determining the rightness or wrongness of an act, or states of affairs in the twenty-first century. That is to say, accepting the fact that the rational being identifies and ratifies the select moral traditions in the Bible, empowers the agent to act responsibly,

¹⁰This essay will use the term agent to refer to the rational being involved in the decision-making process. As a rational being, a person has the ability to involve himself or herself in that kind of abstract thought that can appreciate potential, non-actual states of affairs in addition to deciding how he or she will use his or her free will. These distinguishing characteristics of agents are critical to the discussion at hand.

¹¹The belief that the Bible has a special status in processes for deciding the rightness or wrongness of an action informs but does not constrain the procedure for determining the rightness or wrongness of an act in the deliberations of the present author.

¹²Cain H. Felder, ed., *Stony the Road We Trod* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

and moves skillfully from textual instance in the Bible to the formulation of appropriate moral claims in response to controversial issues in Africentric Pentecostal ethical discourse on the present scene. This conceptual framework, too, positions the African-American Pentecostal agent to demonstrate through argumentation, when and how those moral ideas in the Bible might be mistaken, at least on some points. The next section of the article identifies vital beliefs in regards to how Black Pentecostals should view the Bible in its moral decision-making processes.

Re-Envisioning the Bible in Africentric Pentecostal Moral Theorization

First, the agent should work from the position that words in the Bible are different from the *Word*, i.e., the moral and theological *truths* of The Radical Presence. The Bible itself is a three-dimensional physical object, which our eyes can see, and our hands can touch. The *Word* of The Radical Presence is not three-dimensional. Since Bibles are limited, by being located in space and time, the same Bible cannot be in all places at the same time. The agent can place the Bible in his or her suitcase or travel bag. The rational being can add the Bible to his or her iPhone or iPad. The *Word* of The Radical Presence, however, is bound neither by space nor location. The ontological status of a Bible is that it is physically constituted; therefore, it cannot exist without the actuality of other material items. Most of all, the Bible is destructible: one can slice it into pieces by placing it into a shredder. The existence of the *Word* of the Radical Presence does not depend upon the actuality of a material substance: the *Word* of The Radical Presence is timeless, ever-present, unmade, limitless, indestructible, and non-physical. Since the *Word* of The Radical Presence and the Bible have fundamentally mutually exclusive essential properties, it follows that these items ontologically are not the same items.¹³

Second, the agent must accept that the Bible did not drop down from the sky on a silver platter as a completed project. Biblical scholarship confirms that subgroups or blocks of materials comprise the Bible and that

¹³Since the Word of the Radical Presence and the words in the Bible are not identical, the agent must raise the question: in which way does the Bible represent the Word of the Radical Presence? This question deserves attention because the agent in Africentric Pentecostalism seeks the Word of the Radical Presence in regards to moral decision-making in his/her life.

these materials appeared at different periods in the history of ancient Israel. While some of these data appeared before the Exile, other collections of data appeared during the Exile, and other subgroups of materials in the Bible appeared after the Exile. What is more, subgroups of materials in the Bible took shape in different locations in the biblical communities, among different social groups. The lore of ancient Israel was collected and assembled into larger literary units, and by late in the first century CE, the First Testament had been codified by the rabbis. The Bible, therefore, appeared in stages, and it is a by-product of human culture. It contains specific modes of expression that emerge from culture, politics, and group dynamics. The Bible, too, is a literary by-product of rational beings, who mainly inhabited Northeast Africa and the African land mass.¹⁴

Third, the agent must recognize that the Bible is a literary product with competing translations in its reiterations. The versions of the Bible are legion. These versions of the Bible are present for distinct social groups, racial groups, religious groups, and linguistic groups. Moreover, there can be differences in how these versions translate into English wordings that appear originally in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts. One example from the Old Testament illustrates this point. Opposing translations of Prov 18:24 are present. The KJV says: "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." The NIV contains the translation: "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." While these versions of Prov 18:24b agree in their translation of the Hebrew into English, these texts contain different wordings for Prov 18a. The translation of the KJV answers the question: what must a person do to attract many friends? The translation of the NIV casts light on what happens to a person who has many friends?¹⁵

Fourth, the agent must understand that the Bible is not a moral actor. It does not reach out to the rational being. The individual, instead, chooses to reach-out to the Bible, through reading it. The decision to read the Bible was an expression of the power of the human being. It was not a product of external forces that either constrained or determined his/her

¹⁴Syria-Palestine is an extension of the African continent, and it is probable that many of the persons or subgroups who are responsible for preserving, collecting, and assembling the Bible were inhabitants of Syria-Palestine. For further discussion on Syria-Palestine as an extension of the African Continent, see Cain H. Felder, "Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation: A-J*, ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1999), 14.

¹⁵I would translate Prov 18:24a to read: a man of friends will break himself into pieces. I would agree with the translation of Prov 18:24a that appears in the NIV.

behavior. The fact that the agent resolved to read the Bible indicates minimally that other possible courses of action were present. By focusing his/her attention on the Bible, the individual reveals something about his/her ability either to act or not to act as he/she sees fit. That is to say; the agent initiates the act of reaching out to the Bible. It is an uncompelled behavior; consequently, it demonstrates freedom of the will. The person picks the day and time he or she will read; he or she selects the place where he or she begins to read; he or she decides the sequence in which he or she reads, and the rational subject determines the agenda or the goal for studying the Bible. The words of Renita J. Weems are apropos, for she says, "the agent can decide for what he or she will read." The act of reaching out to the Bible through reading it is a voluntary, intentional act that grounds itself in the free will of the moral agent.¹⁶

Fifth, the agent must recognize that the Bible does not tell its reader how to interpret it. Since the decision to read the Bible is a demonstration of free will, it is important to mention that interpretation of the Bible, too, is a volitional, willful enterprise. How the person views, Scripture is in his or her control. The moral agent chooses the lens through which he or she views the Bible. It is important to mention that objects, which require interpretation, are passive—*a priori*: by themselves, these items say nothing. Paintings, sculptures, and works of literature often require an audience and an interpreter to give them meaning and signification, especially when the author or originator of the work is unknown, not present, or leaves nothing behind to explain or to cast light on his/her creation. The Bible is an inanimate, contingent literary object. In the case of many documents in the Bible, the author or originator of the work is both unknown and not present. No writer of the documents in the Bible is present to tell the reader how to understand the specific document he/she produced that appears in the Bible. By itself, the Bible says nothing. It does not tell its reader how to interpret it. The meaning of the passages in the canon is not autochthonous in the texts themselves. The data in the Bible requires interpretation.

In other words, the reader assigns meaning to a text in the Bible. In this hermeneutical circle, the moral agent decides which particular idea(s) or sense to give to the data in the Bible. This business of assigning meaning to a text brings into play a host of issues, chief of which are the psychology and social location of the hermeneutical agent. This feature of the

¹⁶Renita J. Weems, "Reading Her Way Through the Struggle: African-American Women and the Bible," in *Stony the Road We Trod*, ed. C. H. Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 64.

interpretive process could include beliefs about the Bible as well as matters relating to gender, economic status, educational level, religious/denominational affiliation, and political stance. This means that prejudices and other internal, mental phenomena shape how the agent goes about assigning meaning to a literary piece in the Bible. These inner states of the individual are critical elements in this hermeneutical enterprise.

Sixth, the individual has to accept that the status of the moral ideas in the Bible resides not in the specialness or uniqueness of the act articulated in the Bible itself, for there are other Scriptures in the World's Religions that contain the same moral points of view and prescribe the same states of affairs in the Bible. The Pentecostal moral agent elevates the Bible to a place of prominence in his or her hierarchy of sources that inform his/her moral epistemology, and this philosophical move gives the Bible importance. The Pentecostal moral agent could allow the *Koran*, *The Holy Odu*, the *Guru Granth*, or some other religious texts to provide examples of living well, aids to spiritual formation, insights into reality, or standards for deciding in what does moral living consist. Without adherents or the consent of an agent, the Bible, by itself, contains no intrinsic property, which gives it the right to be the fundamental source for constructive moral philosophy. The Bible does not assign itself a place of superiority in the moral epistemology of the person. The agent must hand over moral authority to the Bible if he or she chooses.

Seventh, the agent should embrace the belief that reading the texts in the Bible breaks grounds for direct revelation from the Radical Presence. The soil of African traditional religions nourished this ideology, for according to the classic works on African Religion(s) by Mbiti, Ray, and Magesa, belief systems of Africans presuppose and embrace the following tenets and exhibit these common phenomena: (1) the "immediacy of the Holy;" (2) the belief in spirit possession; (3) the belief in expressing a personal religious encounter with spirits through psycho-motor phenomena, e.g., dancing or speaking in an unknown voice or language.¹⁷ Given that many slaves from West Africa brought their religious beliefs with them to America, it comes as no surprise that retentions from African traditional religions, i.e., beliefs in the immediacy the Radical Presence, and traditional Christian beliefs meshed in the fresh, religious ideology

¹⁷John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1991), 153-162; Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 111-115; and Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 229-234.

formulated by slaves in the antebellum South.¹⁸ The belief about the immediacy of the Holy in African traditional religions clears space for other claims from Christianity about the Holy to find their way into the religious world-views of Africans in America.

While the moral agent should seek to cast light on the meaning and signification of moral ideas, and instances of moral behavior in the Bible for today, he or she must appreciate the limits of human reason and philosophizing. Successful articulation of the connection and relevance of the norms in the Bible for moral action on the contemporary scene requires the guidance of the Radical Presence. What are the abilities of the proposed model? The next section articulates several strengths of this newly proposed set of beliefs for viewing the Bible and their implications for understanding agency in Africentric Pentecostal moral deliberation.

Using the Bible in Africentric Pentecostal Moral Decision-Making

This essay contends that the person, in consultation with the Radical Presence, plays the key role in defining those acts, which are good, and in identifying those behaviors, which are bad in Africentric Pentecostal moral decision-making. Accepting this proposed conceptual framework positions African-American Pentecostals to welcome critical scholarship on the Bible and to use the Bible responsibly in determining the rightness or wrongness of an act or state of affairs in some of the most distressed communities in the twenty-first century.

First, the proposed model places the agent, not the Bible, at the center of the hermeneutical enterprise. This situation now means that the human being can continue to interpret the Bible with extant models for reading this document, or the agent can formulate fresh models for interpreting this literary corpus. What deserves mentioning here is that every person who reads the Bible, reads it through a particular lens, and that one's interpretive lens is either an angle of vision on interpreting the Bible that the agent has adopted without giving any serious thought to his or her approach, or it is a method for reading the Bible that the person has consciously chosen and vetted. The Africentric Pentecostal agent now has

¹⁸Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 161-168; Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: "The Invisible" Institution in the American South* (New York: OUP, 2004), 48-75; Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 139-180; and James A. Noel, *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 150-158.

the opportunity to use instances of oppression and other forms of marginality that were corollaries of race, class, and gender as backdrops against which to sculpt paradigms for articulating possible meanings of the Bible. For African-American Pentecostals, this means that they can select models for interpreting the Bible, which emerge from the plight or predicament of persons of color in the African Diaspora.¹⁹

Second, the proposed model helps the Africentric Pentecostal moral agent to appreciate ethical and theological diversity in the Bible. Ethical and theological pluralism is the counter-argument to the belief or doctrine that ethical and theological monolithicity are distinctive of the ideology in the Bible. Just think about it, different notions of the *Radical Presence* and views about the moral life appear in the canon.²⁰ Adopting this model allows the individual to appreciate the richness of the features of the moral and theological landscape in ancient Israel and to have a realistic view of the primarily written corpus that informs beliefs about right and wrong in the life of African-American Pentecostal communities.

Third, the proposed model allows the moral agent to be aware of hermeneutical pluralism on the present scene. We should be mindful that the reader assigns meaning to most written texts in general and the Bible in particular. Since there is a plethora of readers, i.e., hermeneuts in the Black Pentecostal community, it stands to reason that there will be different ways in which to interpret the same lexical data in the Bible. For instance, it stands to reason that the lens Black Pentecostals from the 1950's and 1960's used to read and understand the Bible are different from the lens used by Black Pentecostals in 2017. It, too, is possible to argue that the lens Black Pentecostals in urban, culturally diverse areas, use to read and understand the Bible could be very different from the lens Black Pentecostals in rural, culturally homogenous areas, use to read and understand the Bible. Embracing hermeneutical pluralism invites the agent

¹⁹With the publication of *Stony the Road We Trod*, a fresh epoch in biblical interpretation appeared. This project was a major investigation into and illustration of current approaches toward studying and interpreting the Bible from an African-American perspective.¹⁹ Over the next thirteen years, the academic community published two major anthologies in black biblical hermeneutics. These texts were *Yet with A Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation* and “Yet with a Steady Beat: Contemporary US Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation.” These publications collectively represent the avant-gardes in recent attempts of persons of color to make sense of the biblical text.

²⁰Contrast salient ideas in Gen 1:1-2:4a and Gen 2:4b-ff; Exod 37:1-9 and Deut 10:1-5; and Josh 10:12-15; 2 Sam 24:1-2 and 1 Chr 21:1-2; Ps109 and Mat 5:43-47; Mk 6:8-9 and Matt 10:9-10.

to acknowledge that no one single hermeneutical strategy has a monopoly on truth.²¹ This method of exploring the Bible invites its disciples to consider the contribution that other strategies for reading the Bible can make to the business of understanding the canon. This claim invites the community to pay close attention to the ideas and presuppositions that the reader brings to the text. What is more, it guarantees that the Hebrew Bible continues to have meaning for readers today.

Fourth, the proposed model positions the individual to study the Bible with a concern for disenfranchisement in the biblical community. This means that the agent can affirm socioeconomic asymmetry in the biblical communities, by seeing the biblical community as she was: Israel was a social collectivity like any other community in the ancient Near East. Ancient Israel was replete with internal power struggles and economic agendas. Israelites fought, hated, oppressed, murdered, and stole from each other and others around them. Recognizing that marginalized persons were present in the biblical community and that a constellation of factors converged to work to the disadvantage of these persons is so important because the disenfranchised, oppressed, and the marginalized are prominent socioeconomic subgroups in Black Pentecostalism. Concern about moral issues relating to this aspect of the human experience should not get dismissed once one begins to read the Bible and to contemplate proper moral action on the present scene.

Fifth, the proposed model provides an opening for groups, and in this instance local congregations, to use the Bible in the construction of or in the establishment of valid moral judgments regarding issues, which receive little or no direct attention in the Bible. By including all affected persons in the conversation and allowing them to articulate their views on a particular problem, agents take ownership in moral judgment, and perhaps a consensus develops, or some level of agreement arises. Through dialogue, agents express their interests and respect the intentions and desires of others. People can enter I-thou relationships with each other. Through communication, via speech acts, agents can harness the power of discussion, namely by taking advantage of having conversations that are free from coercion and manipulation. Agents see each other as subjects and affirm that all persons can make contributions to understanding and appropriating the data in the Bible in regard to resolving conflicts once an issue ascends to the status of a moral problem. Because morally autonomous creatures comprise human communities, and because they

²¹John H. Hayes, ed. *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), contains examples of strategies for reading the Bible on the current scene.

often have conflicting beliefs about *the good* and *the right*, rational discussion, which builds upon I-thou relationships, should be the context for determining *the good* and *the right* and those judgments that are morally valid. From this exchange over ideals, a consensus can develop or some level of agreement can arise, in spite of differences in class, race, or gender. This process is clearly a corollary of the new proposed method for viewing the Bible and understanding agency in moral decision-making in African-American Pentecostal moral philosophi-zing.²²

Sixth, the proposed model challenges the moral agent to reach-out to the Radical Presence. It permits the *Radical Presence* to encourage the person to explore the text with an eye toward personal spiritual formation and to develop a set of virtues in himself/herself, which abet in becoming more sensitive to the will of the Radical Presence. These moral and spiritual ideas can help the individual to become a better person and can help him or her in his or her ability to talk about how the Bible can help to elucidate the salvific actions of the *Radical Presence* in the lives of human agents. What this means is that the proposed strategy introduces a move into the strategy for reading texts that is absent in both Fundamentalist and Evangelical epistemological circles. Moral decision-making in the African-American Pentecostal tradition clears space for the Radical Presence to have ongoing, dynamic, and personal dealings with the agent. Allowing space for the Radical Presence to deal personally with the agent within the Africentric frame of reference positions the Black Pentecostal agent to be more aware of the direct, intuitive encounter of the Radical Presence he or she can experience.

Conclusion

The Radical Presence assists the moral agent in his or her spiritual formation, by pointing out that some texts in the Bible give us examples of how we should never act. In this way, the proposed method has the philosophical capital to navigate the complex literary terrain in the Old Testament and the ability to assist the reader as he or she seeks to answer the tough current moral and theological questions that can arise from an attempt to apply the moral points of view in the canon to moral issues on the current scene.

²²For a helpful treatment on how agents can reach morally valid claims as a social group, please see Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991).

The moral agent, therefore, must allow The Radical Presence to usher him or her into a realm where he or she can understand the Bible and gain valuable insights into what is the Word of The Radical Presence for specific moral acts and states of affairs in the here and now. Informing this statement is the claim that words in the Bible are not the *ipsissima verba*, the very words, of The Radical Presence. The Word of the Radical Presence is eternal, omnipresent, uncreated, unbound, and beyond destruction. The Bible, however, is located in time and space, and it can be destroyed. While the Bible is distinct from the Word of The Radical Presence, it, however, plays a critical role in the agent hearing, deciphering, and gaining access to the Word of The Radical Presence. The proposed moral epistemological approach proffers that the direct intervention of The Radical Presence makes it possible for a person to understand and appreciate the data in the Bible, and to hear, decipher, and gain access to the Word of The Radical Presence in order to use it to decide appropriate moral behavior in the twenty-first century.

The proposed moral, epistemological model allows The Radical Presence to help the moral agent to understand that the Word of The Radical Presence is much bigger than a collection of written texts. The Bible is a product of the Word of the Radical Presence, and The Radical Presence uses the Bible to communicate truths to the moral agent. In fact, The Radical Presence and *the* Word of The Radical Presence both antedate the Bible. In fact, the Bible itself clears space for arguing that written texts are not the only means that The Radical Presence uses to communicate with people.

The Psalter says:

The heavens are declaring the glory of God;
And the firmament is proclaiming God's handiwork.
Day to day is pouring forth speech,
And night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words,
Unless their voice is not heard.
Yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world (Ps 19:1-5)²³

Noteworthy, then, is it that the Bible itself indicates that human experience and other phenomena too are conduits by which the agent

²³Translation is mine.

acquires knowledge of truth and receives disclosures from the Radical Presence; consequently, the Bible indicates that it is one and only one source for discerning the voice of the Radical Presence.²⁴

Clark Pinnock's comments about the Bible and the role it plays in helping the agent to perceive the Word of The Radical Presence are helpful, for they articulate tenets about discerning moral truth and hearing the voice of the Radical Presence that has been commonplace in African traditional religions and the Black Pentecostal traditions. Pinnock says: "The Bible should be viewed as part of a larger revelatory work of the Spirit who is always present in the community of faith helping people to interpret God's will for their lives."²⁵ This conceptual framework held by Afro-Pentecostals casts light on a type of allegiance in a specific tradition regarding hermeneutics, moral authority, and moral philosophizing methodology. It is to The Radical Presence not to a text to which the Black Pentecostal moral agent owes allegiance. This proposed pattern for doing ethics has its center in an encounter with The Radical Presence, i.e., being in touch with something bigger and far more precious and powerful than the Bible, as the ultimate source for delineating good and bad deeds. The Bible itself contains a passage that articulates this situation: It says: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Cor 4:7).²⁶ Allow me to use my Africentric Pentecostal Biblical hermeneutic: Why not think that the treasure is the eternal and limitless Word of the Radical Presence and that the earthen vessel or container is the Bible? The Word of The Radical Presence comes to us through human language, a social convention that is tied to location, culture, and other human phenomena, but the Word of The Radical Presence is the gem, and it antedates the instruments that articulate it to humanity.

Hopefully this article has made some contribution to the conversation on the role that the Bible can play when African-American Pentecostals seek to discover and extract moral norms from the information that it contains and when they attempt to apply responsibly those moral points of view in the Bible to states of affairs and ethical problems on the current scene.

²⁴See Prov 1:7 and Eccl 4:1-2.

²⁵Clark H. Pinnock, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics," *JPT* 2 (1993): 3-23.

²⁶Translation is mine.

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CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST LEADER-ACTIVISTS – MAJOR PROGENITORS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PENTECOSTAL FEMALE LEADERSHIP

Glenda Williams Goodson¹

Abstract

The work of early Church Of God In Christ (C.O.G.I.C.) pioneers is mainly remembered as the work of men. This essay considers that in a culturally confining society that, as a whole, saw Black sanctified women unfit for leadership, the sisters' products—building schools, organizing conventions, changing nations—ran counter to expectations. It is of interest that a group labeled marginalized, ignorant and downtrodden moved skillfully through multicultural settings, responded to hostilities from those in their communities, and handled conflict with male constituencies with grace and advocacy. If language is about meaning, once the meaning of Pentecostal femaleness in sharing what it means to live out the sanctified life is understood, then the myriad activities in which lasting fruit are produced makes sense.

Introduction

W.E.B. Du Bois is quoted as saying "But what of black women?... I most sincerely doubt if any other race of women could have brought its fineness up through so devilish a fire." Certainly, this is true for early 20th century Church Of God In Christ (C.O.G.I.C.) women in ministry (hereafter referred as leader-activists). I have coined the term because of the vigorous intersection of leadership and trench creds in their campaign to spread Pentecost, which both embraced and transcended early traditional churchwomen's roles. These leader-activists believed that sanctification cleansed the believer, and that Spirit Baptism empowered for service. This belief would undergird them as they served through distinct ministries which would be tried in the fires of hostility from those early 20th century communities who did not understand Spirit Baptism and

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some males within the ranks of C.O.G.I.C. who refused to accept the model of Charles Harrison Mason, Sr., the founder of the Church Of God In Christ, Incorporated, who urged anyone, whatever the gender, to use his or her anointing and talents to go into the everywhere to teach and preach the kingdom of God.

Cultural norms had a defining affect upon females operating through dual identities and roles. Through the dynamic experience of Holy Ghost Baptism, as at the day of Pentecost, these leader-activists were distinct in their character, their successes, their dress and their roles. Until the most recent past, little attention has been given explicitly to the industry of C.O.G.I.C. leader-activists. God has used various ways in which to express Godself to God's world. There is a reality in God allowing God's power and might to be revealed through the feminine appeal throughout the generations. Today, especially as corridors of power open further, and new opportunities continue for all women, the Twenty-first Century Pentecostal female would do well to reflect upon the failures of the past as teaching sources and successes of the past as occasions of humility to expand the Holiness-Pentecostal doctrine. As a Twenty-first Century leader-activist, I offer this essay as a spirited defense of the work of these pioneers and add to the growing corpus of scholarship documenting their work.

Research on Women in the Black Church

Researchers such as Evelyn Brooks-Higginbotham have produced much-needed volumes on the work of Black women in the Church. In *Righteous Discontent*, she cites a term describing the Black Church coined by E. Franklin Frazier as a “nation within a nation.”² If that is so, then the seemingly invisible work of the women of the Church Of God In Christ can be described as a nation within a nation *within a nation*. Brooks-Higginbotham's work focuses on women in the Baptist church, and this publication invited me to search for work done on women in the Holiness-Pentecostal traditions. After reading everything I could about the women of the sanctified church by women such as Cheryl J. Sanders and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, growing up in the Church Of God In Christ (C.O.G.I.C.), it was my desire to hear what was said *about* women in the church *by* women who were a part of the movement. In the early 80s I set out on a journey to capture the stories of these women and found that,

²Evelyn Brooks-Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 11.

initially ridiculed and ostracized by brothers and sisters of other denominations, they remained true to their faith and articulated this faith by forming strong networks and organizations to move the church forward.

It is important to note that a growing literary corpus has emerged, including Chapters in books, dissertations, and press publications on women in the Church Of God In Christ.³ Other published and self-published books are now being penned by Church Of God In Christ authors including *Roots Out of Dry Ground – The Mother Reatha Herndon Story*.⁴ Reatha and her twin Leatha, born in the Oklahoma territory before its becoming a state, served as itinerant preachers who “prayed out” and organized up to 100 C.O.G.I.C. congregations throughout the United States beginning in the early 1900s.

Pentecost Empowers all Genders in Los Angeles

In 1906, a phenomenon occurred in California that would change the religious landscape of America and the world. Tucker writes that this was a “third force” in Christianity.⁵ This third force of Christianity’s geographical center of gravity moved to Los Angeles and was called the Azusa Street Revival. The revival, characterized by ecstatic worship, *glossolalia* (speaking in an unlearned, unknown tongues by the speaker) and instances of divine healing, was the culmination of a series of events that began to unfold a half-decade earlier when on January 1, 1901, students at Charles Fox Parham’s healing home and Bible school experienced an outbreak of *glossolalia*, which was identified as the “initial evidence” of Holy Spirit Baptism.⁶

Early African American Women at Azusa Street

³See Adrienne Israel, “Mothers Roberson and Coffey-Pioneers of Women’s Work: 1911-1964, in *Bishop C.H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ*, edited by Ithiel Conrad Clemmons (Lanham: Pneuma Life Publishing, 1996), 101-122; and Anthea Butler, *Women in the Church of God In Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2007).

⁴Doris J. Sims, *Roots Out of Dry Ground* (Memphis: COGIC Publishing House, 2015).

⁵Anjulet Tucker, “Get the Learnin’ but don’t lose the Burnin’”: The Socio-Cultural and Religious Politics of Education in a Black Pentecostal College” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2009).

⁶Estrela Alexander, *The Women of Azusa Street* (Laurel MD: The Seymour Press, 2012), 9.

While much has been written about male leadership, African American women played a significant and active role in the birth and development of Pentecostalism in America. Lucy Farrow (the niece of abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass), pastored a small church in Houston, Texas. After hearing of Spirit Baptism with the sign of speaking in tongues, she became the first African American recorded to have received the Baptism in the Holy Ghost. She began teaching the doctrine to her congregation, including William Seymour. Although Seymour did not receive the Baptism, Neely Terry, a member of a Holiness Church in Los Angeles pastored by Julia Hutchins invited him to Los Angeles where he preached the Baptism in the Holy Ghost with the sign of speaking in tongues. Upon being banned by Hutchins because of the doctrine, he was invited by Richard Asbery to relocate to Bonnie Brae Street to continue his teaching and prayer meetings. The majority of initial attendees were female African American domestic workers. When the porch collapsed under the weight of those from every demographic, the meetings were moved to 312 Azusa Street. This meeting would last approximately three and one-half years and individuals were sent out by the Holy Ghost to globalize the message of Pentecost. One black preacher, Ophelia Wiley, a member of the evangelistic team spread the news of the revival throughout the United States.

Church Of God In Christ Founder Charles Harrison Mason Receives Holy Ghost Baptism with the Sign of Speaking in Tongues

Some records indicate that Charles Harrison Mason, Sr. was born September 8, 1866, on the Prior Farm near Memphis, Tennessee.⁷ As a child he was miraculously healed of yellow fever. He was influenced greatly by the writings on sanctification by Baptist preacher William Christian or Methodist Evangelist Amanda Berry Smith.⁸ In 1893, he preached his first sermon on sanctification from 2 Tim 3:12-13. Upon entering Arkansas Baptist College, Mason met Charles Price Jones and other ministers who believed in sanctification, and these ministers began to preach that message. By 1897 the growing hostility over the doctrine of

⁷German R. Ross, *History and the Formative Years of the Church of God in Christ (Memphis: Church of God in Christ (Publishing House, 1969), 14. Although his obituary dates his birth in 1862, census record caused the Church to set the date to 1864; consequently the year of his birth is uncertain.*

⁸ Calvin White Jr., *The Rise to Respectability*. Fayetteville, (University of Arkansas Press, 2012), 16-17.

sanctification and healing cost Jones and Mason fellowship with their Baptist association.⁹ The National Baptist Convention expelled Jones and Mason, and these two individuals continued to preach and teach sanctification in an organization, which became known as the Church of God in Christ, a Holiness organization. In this new organization, Charles Price Jones was chosen as overseer. In 1906, Jones sent Mason, W.S. Pleasant, and J.A. Jeter to Los Angeles to investigate the occurrences of the Azusa, Street Revival. While at Azusa Mason receive the Baptism in the Holy Ghost:

After a while my very soul began to cry to God just like a pump without a sucker, and after a while you catch the water and the man is strong, even physically, so, after a while my desire seemed to become intense within me, and every breath seemed to become heavier as I looked to God. I sat there a while and I heard a sound just like the sound of wind, a great wind. I heard the sound like in the Pentecost. I heard it just as real. I sat there, some on my left, some on my right, and I gave up to God, not resisting him; I determined not to resist him, and after a while I went through a crucifixion, and after I had gone through that I was completely empty, my mind was sweet, at rest; my flesh was sweet, at rest. I sat there a while giving up to God. The anthem of Heaven seemed to rise then; I felt myself rising out of my seat, without any effort. I thought at first it was imagination; then I saw it wasn't imagination. Well when I was drawn to my feet there came a light in the room above the brightness of the light of God. When I opened my mouth to say "Glory to God," a flame touched my tongue and my English left me, and I said "Glory" and then my hand was moved by the power of the Spirit of God. He had complete control of me. Now when this was over I was filled with the presence of God. I didn't move a foot; I sat there just as I am sitting now; I knew everything going on; the people even talking in the room. I was looking at them just as I am looking at you. God didn't knock me out. I saw others that were knocked out.¹⁰

⁹Bishop Ithiel C. Clemmons, *Bishop C.H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ*, 21.

¹⁰Glenda Williams Goodson, *Royalty Unveiled: Women Trailblazers in Church of God In Christ International Missions 1920—1970* (Lancaster, TX: HCM Publishing, 2011), 69.

Returning to the South, Mason and Jones split over the issue of *glossolalia* and Mason reorganized The Church Of God In Christ as a Holiness-Pentecostal organization in 1907.

Mason Immediately Appoints Women to Strategic Roles

Mason allowed tremendous freedom for women's ministry, possibly drawing upon the inspiration of the prophet Joel:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon *all flesh*: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; And also upon the servants and the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.¹¹

God made Godself known in a new and powerful way through the Holiness-Pentecostal movement and with the great number of women from traditional Baptist, Methodist and other mainstream denominations joining the newly established Church Of God In Christ, space would be given to women. Despite subordination to secondary leadership functions, women were open to forging space in the new organization's growth. Mason's keen insight is said to have linked the West African dual sex system firmly to the foundational structure of the new movement. Adrienne Israel notes many West African women wielded authority in spiritual as well as domestic affairs: "To institutionalize their power they formed solidarity groups from which they gained a strong 'psychological sense of self-esteem.' Some West African societies ensured women political power...by developing what anthropologists have called a 'dual-sex' system. Women's councils not only governed women's affairs but their representatives voiced women's interests from the village to the king's court. Although the dual-sex system gave prominence to women in community affairs, they remained, as a group, subservient to husband."¹²

¹¹KJV, Joel 2:28-29.

¹²Glenda Williams-Goodson, "The Church Of God In Christ Transforms Women's Ministries Through the Influence of Chief Apostle Bishop C.H. Mason," in *With Signs Following The Life and Ministry of Charles Harrison Mason* ed. Raynard D. Smith (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publications, 2015), 75.

Within the context of his times, Mason made things fairer, was progressive in defining gender roles and generous in allowing women the freedom to walk worthy of whatever calling God's plan desired them to fulfill. Mason began his search for a female to oversee the women's ministry. It is asserted that he initially would choose Lillian Brooks; however, because she was just north of her teens, she declined that role. After meeting Woods (Robinson), Brooks urged Woods to attend the Pine Bluff, Arkansas Convocation and in 1911 she attended the National Convocation in Memphis, Tennessee.

Lizzie Woods Robinson – from Slave to Organizer

In 1911 while conducting a meeting at the Baptist Academy in Dermott, Arkansas, Mason met an ex-slave born Elizabeth Isabelle to Mose Smith and Elizabeth Jackson in Phillips County, Arkansas, on April 5, 1860. Church Of God In Christ Bishop and Historian A.T. Moore interviewed Robinson in 1945 shortly before her death where she says she was five years old when Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves and remembered all the grownups being very “jubalistic.”

During slavery, it was against the law for Blacks to be taught to read and write. However, from their first days out of bondage, freed slaves demanded formal education. When schools for freed people opened in early 1865, they were already overcrowded and within the year of Black freedom, thousands of former slaves crammed into churches or under trees to learn. While the Freedmen's Bureau did not hire teachers, or operate schools, they rented buildings for school rooms and assisted Missionary Societies and Northern Whites, and provided books, transportation, and protection against those who would oppose Black literacy. Blacks, fortunate enough to gain an education, took a proactive role in educating their brothers and sisters.¹³ After freedom her mother sent Lizzie and her siblings to school where she learned to read and by age eight her mother had her read the Bible to adults in the community.

Lizzie Woods Receives the Baptism in the Holy Ghost, is Excommunicated; then Appointed General Overseer of Women's Work in the Church Of God In Christ

¹³Glenda Williams Goodson, *Rediscovering An American Classic Essays on the Life of American Educator Dr. Arenia Cornelia Mallory 1926–1976* (Lancaster, TX, HCM Publishing, 2016), 5.

As an adult, she read Joanna Moore's *Hope Magazine* and became sanctified. Taking ownership of her skills as an entrepreneur, she sold *Hope Magazines*. Becoming so successful, Moore recommended that the American Baptist Association invest in her leadership by sponsoring her entry to the Baptist Academy in Dermott, Arkansas. After two years of training, she became Matron of Girls there. She met Charles Harrison Mason at the Academy in 1911 and received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

I was sanctified in the Baptist School but did not have the Holy Ghost. Elder Roach was pastoring the Church of God in Christ at Dermott at that time and Bishop Mason came there to preach and came to the school. Brother Mason began to teach us, I told him that I had been living right for six years but I hadn't been baptized with the Holy Ghost. So, I received the baptism of the Holy Ghost that day.

After receiving the Baptism in the Holy Ghost, Robinson was fired.

Mason's core strength was to identify strong female leaders the church needed to collaborate with in spreading the gospel of holy living through sanctification and the power of the Holy Ghost. There is not much documentation of his *discussing* women's role as leaders and activists in ministry. He just allowed them to *do* ministry. This worldview caused him to appoint Robinson General Overseer of Women's Work. Mason's use of the term Overseer of Women's Work may have been intended to note that a separate work for the women was to be recognized. However, according to Butler, the term 'overseer,' used in the New Testament to designate a bishop, was bestowed on Robinson to solidify her appointment over all women's activities. In effect, Mason made Robinson a bishop over C.O.G.I.C. women.¹⁴

Robinson immediately took to the task and served courageously while battered with rotten eggs and beaten for her stand in holiness and Pentecostalism. Finding that the work among the women lacked organization, Woods used the organizational skills gained through her entrepreneurial activities with *Hope* to create a system for women's ministry. The Women's Department would become a tightly organized network of leader-activists serving as home and international missionaries, evangelists and preachers. But first, they had to be organized. After

¹⁴Anthea Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 41

discovering two major groups of women working in the church—one group praying and the other group studying and teaching the Word—she merged them. This united team became the first auxiliary of women, the Prayer and Bible Band. Possibly building upon her entrepreneurial skills in selling *Hope* magazine, she also led the women in fundraising. It is reported that the first bank account for the C.O.G.I.C. in the amount of \$168.50 was made from Bible Band funds. Later Woods-Robinson led the women to act as key fundraisers in building Mason Temple, the national headquarters in Memphis.¹⁵

The women understood that the work of domestic and international missions was vital because souls were at stake. They wished to undergird the work of women who left the comforts of home to risk their lives for the cause of Christ. Home missionaries were trained to share the love of Jesus through practical means. For example, in the 1940s, long before the federal Head Start program, Lydia Hinsley cared for the children of working mothers and opened a nursery in the lower level of Hinsley Cathedral COGIC where her husband was pastor.¹⁶

Robinson Organizes Home and Foreign Missions

In 2017 Church Of God In Christ ministries were active in 83 countries. While there were some males traveling outside the United States, most pioneer international missionaries were female. In 1926, Robinson laid the groundwork for an official Missions Department when she introduced Elder Searcy to the Church Of God In Christ National Convocation. After its reorganization, the Department had grown to such an extent that the C.O.G.I.C. expanded its reach to a number of Third World countries. Undergirding the vision of Mason that the Church Of God In Christ “go into the everywhere,” it was Robinson who appointed some of the most erstwhile international missionaries pioneering the work outside the United States by spreading the gospel, building missions, medical clinics, schools, and mission towns throughout the world. Some of these women and their areas of work are the following:

¹⁵The historic Mason Temple, C.O.G.I.C.s national headquarters, with its 7500 seating capacity, served as an intersection between the church and civil rights activities in Memphis during the 1950s and 1960s. On April 3, 1968, the night before he was assassinated Dr. Martin Luther King gave his prophetic “Mountaintop” speech there.

¹⁶*The Whole Truth*, Volume XIV, No VI, COGIC Headquarters, Memphis, TN June 1981, 7.

Elizabeth White Tour began in 1929/1930 – sent to Liberia as First Church Of God In Christ Missionary to Africa (worked with Nyambo people at Bonniken, established the Liberian C.O.G.I.C. at Wissikeh, Wuluken, Tobou Chiefdom).

Willie Curtis Ragland Tour 1934 – 1946—Missionary to Liberia (Tugbaken Mission Station) *Beatrice S. Lott Tour 1939 – 1962*—Missionary to Liberia (Tugbaken Mission Station) *Martha Barber Tour began circa 1945*—Missionary to Liberia (Tugbaken Mission Station).

Robinson described her job as having the “general supervision over all the women’s work, and to evangelize and systematize the work among the women.”¹⁷ Kelly Mendiola states “With women in foreign fields as missionaries, women planting churches as evangelists and missionaries to non-C.O.G.I.C. areas, a magazine, *Lifted Banner*, and Prayer and Bible Band Topics, Mother Robinson’s Women’s Department was systematized and organized as she had set out to do.”¹⁸ The work would further explode from the organizing efforts of Mother Robinson to include the birth of auxiliaries and units as the Women’s Department developed a formal structure, the Women’s International Convention. As Overseer of Women’s Work and National Mother Robinson traveled to 26 cities in one year organizing the work of the women through Prayer and Bible Bands and appointing State Mothers (State Overseers) to oversee the work of the women in the States where the Church Of God In Christ expanded.

Lillian Brooks Coffey – Second General Super-visor

On December 13, 1945, at 2:20 a.m., Lizzie Woods Robinson died of sudden cardiac failure, at the age of 85 in Memphis, TN. Now Lillian Brooks Coffey was unanimously appointed Second General Mother of the C.O.G.I.C. Coffey met Jesus as a girl in a Sunday school class taught by Bishop Mason. As she grew, Mason observed her intellect, wit, and commitment and trained her in all aspects of the work of the Church Of God In Christ. Before her appointment as General Mother, Coffey focused not only on the sanctified women of the denomination but to the betterment of the Christian woman’s condition. Because of WWII, America tightened

¹⁷Ibid, 42.

¹⁸Kelly Willis Mendiola, “The Hand of a Woman: Four Holiness-Pentecostal Evangelists and American Culture, 1840-1930” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2020).

its belt including rationing food. Coffey successfully requested permission from the Bishop's board to purchase a suitable home at 154 Arden Park in Detroit, Michigan, as a rest home for Christian Missionaries, who made an outstanding contribution to humanity and religion regardless of race, color, or creed inside and outside of C.O.G.I.C. In the midst of the war, the women liquidated the mortgage in five years.

Church Of God In Christ adherents experienced difficulty being accepted in the larger Black church community. Coffey's foresight in opening her home was indicative of her willingness to form alliances outside her denomination and race for the betterment of the Women's Department and the condition of women and their families. Because men were overseas fighting, 18 million women entered the workforce including African American C.O.G.I.C. women such as the late Theda Wells who worked in an Oregon shipbuilding yard. While many of these women were formerly field workers and domestics, now they entered the middle class where they could earn an average of \$2,000 per year. Coffey's keen insight caused her to re-engineer the Women's Department to include units encompassing Leadership, Administrative, Missions, and Service to make it accessible to the needs of all women.

The Beginning of the Greatest Women's Convention in the United States Led by Black Women

One of the crowning achievements made by Mother Coffey was the birth of the Women's International Convention. Her testimony reveals that in the 1950 C.O.G.I.C. Holy Convocation during the Women's Day "On Monday morning, between 9:30 and 10:30, [the WIC] was begotten by the Holy Ghost." Bishop Mason drew up and signed an agreement authorizing his support. The women also had an invitation from Bishop Samuel Crouch, who had been appointed President of Missions in 1937, to hold the convention in Los Angeles. Much, much work went into planning what would become the largest gathering of Black women in America and Red Card Delegates, a term coined by Lelia Mason Byas, paid \$100.00 each for room, board, sightseeing, and registration.

The program for this first convention included issues of concern to the Women's Department, Christian education and education at large, racial issues, and Missionary activity. They would "Mak[e] known ONE purpose through every act and expression to abolish slipshod methods and indifferent attitudes toward Missions in this first meeting of its kind." Missionary activities addressed the needs of women in their homes and

communities as well as foreign missions. The keynote address was given by Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, whose National Council of Negro Women formed an alliance to engage the women of the C.O.G.I.C. in civic responsibilities. Attending missionaries joined by State Mothers marched with banners unfurled representing the various states and countries that C.O.G.I.C. women's missionaries served in, to accentuate the focus on missionary activity. At that first Women's Convention, Mother Coffey presented to Bishop Samuel Crouch \$10,000 in cash, in a paper bag as a donation from the Women's Department for the missions' work of C.O.G.I.C. By 1965 The November Missions Report documents that Supervisor Annie Bailey and the Department of Women reported \$10,475 to Missions while the same year Supervisor Mattie McGlothen with \$5,230.71 (worth about \$36,000 in 2016 dollars). Additionally, under Coffey's administration, the Women's Department reportedly supplied one-third of the national church budget.

Believing that the church is to uplift every community she finds herself, these leader activists acted upon that belief with the Women's International Convention desegregating Albany, New York hotels in the 1960s.

Street Preacher Anne Pennington Bailey Changes a Nation

Although Lillian Coffey would continue in her role as General Supervisor until her death in 1964, like Robinson before her, she gave her "daughters" the mandate to accept Mother Annie Bailey as the third General Supervisor. She was born September 22, 1894, in Temple, Texas. In 1915 Annie Pennington (Bailey) stopped by a revival on her way to the movies to ridicule the saints. After hearing the testimony of a woman who had been bedridden with tuberculosis and healed, she was saved and filled with the Holy Ghost. This was problematic in that her family was considered middle class and most middle class Blacks at that time did not associate with *holy rollers*. She soon left her home in Texas and traveled with Elder J.E. Bryant, Mother Hattie Robinson Fray and Mother M.M. Jackson to Buffalo, New York. Joined by Mother Lula Cox of New Jersey and Mother Nancy Gamble of Indiana the team worked fervently as evangelists and pioneers preaching, playing guitar and singing while they established the C.O.G.I.C. ministry in New York City, New Jersey, D.C., Maryland, Connecticut, Springfield, and Boston. These courageous C.O.G.I.C. pioneers took the message of holiness and Pentecost to tenement houses, backyards, sheds, and basements.

General Supervisor Lizzie Robinson appointed Bailey the first National Women's Department Financial Secretary but one of Bailey's outstanding accomplishments was the salvation and empowerment of Joseph Paulceus. At the time there was violent opposition to Holiness-Pentecostal men preaching on the street so sometimes they would have the women preach. While Bailey preached Paulceus was convicted, saved and filled with the Holy Ghost. Soon he met with Bishop Mason who gave him money and a tent and he returned to become the founder of the first Pentecostal church in Haiti. By the time Bishop McEwen and Mother Coffey journeyed with Dorothy Webster Exume to install her in Haiti as Administrative Missionary, the C.O.G.I.C. had grown to over 10,000 members. In 1927 Bailey was appointed State Supervisor of Maryland. Because of her faithfulness and organizational skills, C.O.G.I.C. jurisdictions were established in Delaware and Washington, D.C. in 1928. After the death of Lillian Brooks Coffey, Senior Bishop O.T. Jones, Sr. appointed Bailey as International Supervisor of Women in 1964.

Since its birth, the Church has not been without problems and the leader-activists used their spiritually sensitive ears and influence to assist in guiding the church during turbulent times. During the *years of reorganization of the Church* (1961-1968) Bailey, called The Darling of the Brotherhood, led the women in prayer, fasting, and continuing the vital work of women's ministry as the men fought for ecclesial power through the court systems after the death of Bishop Mason. While in office she added seventeen new auxiliaries including the Business and Professional Women's League. She also vowed that she would not only help at home but in mission fields that she may never see. She helped Foreign Missionary Pearl Page Brown board 70 boys and girls at the Cape Palmas, Liberia West Africa Mission. She died in 1975 in Detroit.

The Church Of God In Christ and Education

One female ex-slave said, *I just want to read from the Holy Bible before I die.*¹⁹ Historically, the church, the family, and the schools have worked together and served as anchors of Black communities. Clergy believed that if America was indeed one nation under God she should reflect biblical principles and, because of their visibility in the community, spoke boldly in fighting for justice. One of those principles was the freedom to learn. Tucker writes "Black churches formed the core of black educational philanthropy in the South. In poorer communities, black

¹⁹*Rediscovering an American Classic*, 1.

church-run schools were the only schools available. Before (and after) universal education was put into place in 1870, church-run schools filled the void. Some of the church-run schools became colleges. Well-known Morehouse College was started and met in the Springfield Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia, and Spelman College got its start in the basement of Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta. Wilberforce University (1865) supported by the AME Church, Morris Brown College (1881) and Livingstone College in 1879 were both Church established.²⁰

Pinkie Duncan Establishes the First C.O.G.I.C. School

Many met the newly formed Holiness-Pentecostal church with skepticism and disdain. C.O.G.I.C. members, along with their children were ostracized. Due to the hostile environment, a space for their children was required. Miss Pinkie Duncan was the first known foot soldier to attack ignorance when she started her educational pursuits in the basement of St. Paul Church Of God In Christ, Lexington, Mississippi. Sister Duncan was undaunted by the mud floors. Bishop Charles Harrison Mason encouraged the beginning of what was then known as the Saints Home Industrial School in 1918. He was pastor at St. Paul and his children were the first students along with the Cooper children (Goodson 2002:20) Duncan understood that those children of the families who joined the new church were persecuted because of their religious beliefs and required a sensitive hand in spiritual and educational development. Professor James Courts of Lexington, Mississippi, a county school teacher, offered to help Sister Duncan with the work. In 1919, the State Board appointed him to the position of principal, which he held from 1919 until his death in 1926.

Mason Taps Arenia Cornelia Mallory

The vision of Bishop Charles Harrison Mason, to take the message of Jesus Christ into the everywhere, reached Illinois where Arenia Cornelia Mallory was saved. Bishop Mason seemed to have an unusual knack for discovering individuals with keen abilities. After identifying them, he would next mentor those individuals to transform the development of the Church Of God In Christ into the premier organization that God promised him upon his acceptance of his call. By the time Mallory met Mason, her intent was to travel to Africa to serve the Lord Jesus among her brethren

²⁰Tucker, 64.

there. Mason saw something in Mallory and asked her to journey south to serve the Lord and her church as a piano teacher. Her early life was one of privilege. Her father was a businessman and there were musicians and entrepreneurs counted among family members. Emblematic of their status as members of the Black middle class were the facts that her mother was the first female African American Italian harpsichordist in the United States. Family members were also vaudevillians, performing in variety shows across the country. Ethel Waters, her sister-in-law, would play a tremendous role in fundraising efforts. According to Tucker, Mallory's graduation from the Whipple Academy of Music provided further evidence of their status.

She accepted Mason's offer and found that education at the Saints Industrial, owned by the Church Of God In Christ and chartered by the State of Mississippi in 1918, while filling a void, was treated haphazardly. Mason advanced female leadership when soon after she arrived Professor Courts died, and he appointed her with the responsibility of the school as Principal. She worked hard to overcome negativity both within the church and without. Without because she entered the Southland as a Northerner who may bring new ideas to upset the community's social mores (she was threatened with lynching), while she was resisted from within the church because she was female.

Mallory had confidence that providing education for the children of the saints as well as sharecropper's children would promote a broader understanding of the sanctified church while serving as a venue for the upward mobility of Blacks in Holmes County, Mississippi. The task would be daunting but Mallory was firm in her belief that the God she served would make a way for her to accomplish her assignment. She proceeded to develop an expanded curriculum for the school and invite other denominations to send their children. Soon the student population swelled to 350 and included Catholics.

Strategic Partnerships

Believing in the power of strategic partnerships, Mallory saw possibilities of galvanizing the community—the religious community and poor sharecroppers—to educate those who would be informed and effectuate change. During 50 years of leading the school, Mallory grew Saints to receive accreditation, making her the first African American President of a Black College. At the close of the Mallory era, it was reported that more than 32,000 students had matriculated through Saints.

It was no small task but Dr. Mallory knew how to work with almost everyone as she focused on her assignment. Among those giving tribute to the work of her hands were college and university presidents, political figures and individuals from every spectrum of corporate and business life.

Women who would succeed in life necessarily have to have strong personalities. While tolerating belittlements graciously, Arenia Mallory was said to be tough and circumstances would prove it. Bishop Mason and Azusa Street leader Apostle W.J. Seymour envisioned a multiracial body of believers working together for the cause of Christ's kingdom. When three White teachers ventured south to begin service at Saints, it is recorded that local segregationists ordered her to rid the school of them. When she would not comply, segregationists threatened her with lynching. It was only when White businessmen came to her one night and pleaded with her not to be the cause of a bloodbath in the area that she relented.

Through Dr. Mallory's religiously based activism with organizations such as the National Council of Negro Women where her friend and mentor Mary McLeod Bethune served as founder and president, she accomplished much. She was also connected to the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, the nation's oldest African-American Greek letter sorority. It was through this partnership that she accomplished a great feat. Because of the medical needs of Blacks in the Mississippi Delta were extensive and, because most Blacks in the Mississippi Delta were extremely economically disadvantaged or severely poor at best in 1934, Alpha Kappa Alpha sponsored the Mississippi Health Project to bring primary medical care to rural blacks. Members of the sorority financed, designed, and implemented the project, which was active for two to six weeks every summer from 1935 to 1941. The Mississippi Health Project was the brainchild of a Mississippi native and California resident, Dr. Ida Jackson. Dr. Dorothy Celeste Boulding Ferebee, a member of the sorority and a practicing physician in obstetrics and gynecology, was appointed the project's medical director. Initially staffed by Dr. Ferebee and volunteers, the first medical clinic was headquartered at the Saints Industrial School in Lexington, associated with the Church of God in Christ.

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REVELATION AS REVOLUTION: BLACK PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY AS A MEANS OF RADICAL SOCIAL CHANGE

Aaron Howard¹

Abstract

Two critical works recognizing the correlation between Black Pentecostalism and black Power were written in the last years of the 1970s, both dissertations are still unpublished. In 1978 at Howard University, James Tinney completed “A Theoretical and Historical Comparison of Black Political Movements.” He compared the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, The Black Panther Party, and Black Pentecostalism, and concluded that Black Pentecostalism was not anti-political, non-political, or other-worldly in nature.² In the following year, Leonard Lovett, an ordained Church of God in Christ preacher, completed at Emory University his dissertation, “Black Holiness-Pentecostalism: Implications for Ethics and Social Transformation.”³ Lovett's study stands as a needed theological counterpart to Tinney's political project. Lovett's insightful overview and analysis provide a comprehensive socioethical treatment of Black Pentecostalism, and it serves as my point of departure for the premise of this paper. The present essay argues that Lovett's Black Pentecostal theology of pneumatological liberation recovers the indispensability of revelation for initiating the social and political activism that, due to their beliefs, history, and experience, Black Pentecostals are best in position to pursue.

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²James Tinney, “A Theoretical and Historical Comparison of Black Political Movements” (PhD diss., Howard University, 1978).

³Leonard Lovett, “Black Holiness-Pentecostalism: Implications for Ethics and Social Transformation” (PhD diss., Emory University, 1979).

Pneumatological Liberation

In his dissertation, Leonard Lovett analyzes Black Holiness-Pentecostalism by theological and ethical claims, a task that, at the time of the dissertation's completion, had not previously been attempted by scholars. Lovett surveys the history of Black Pentecostalism and traces its development through five Black Pentecostal groups, a practice of his methodology that reaches into the present. In comparing and contrasting their doctrines and core beliefs, Lovett identifies the theological norms that inform and constitute a Black Holiness-Pentecostal ethic. Pentecostal scholarship was still burgeoning at the time of Lovett's publication, and much of his work is tasked with introducing Black Pentecostalism to the broader academy. However, he marks himself as an innovative, ground-breaking scholar by helping to inaugurate a dialogue between black theology, black power, and Black Pentecostalism, a sorely needed conversation that prophetically identifies the revolutionary possibilities in Black Pentecostalism, and offers a compelling and cogent critique of both black theology and black power ideologies. Most valuably, Lovett outlines a framework for liberation that transcends the boundaries of racially defined blackness by linking liberation to an encounter between the human and the divine, defined as revelation.

In his last chapter, "Pneumatological Liberation," Lovett announces "that liberation, a product of divine power, comes not in opposition to Black Power but is the most authentic Christian expression of it, the power of the Spirit which frees and unites."⁴ He elaborates by saying that "authentic liberation can never occur apart from genuine Pentecostal encounter, and likewise genuine Pentecostal encounter can never occur unless liberation becomes the consequence."⁵ Lovett finds that a true spiritual encounter with God produces the type of transformation that forms the basis for an ethic and theology that privileges the poor. Lovett is suspicious of any ideology whose result is racial division, and he favors the theme of reconciliation espoused by J. Deotis Roberts, a critic and contemporary of Cone, whose conciliatory impetus Cone soundly denounces in *God of the Oppressed*.⁶ Lovett agrees that Roberts' positioning of reconciliation as intrinsic to liberation, which means that blacks must forgive, and whites must repent, evokes the soteriology and

⁴Lovett, "Black Holiness-Pentecostalism," 138.

⁵Ibid., 145.

⁶See James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), 239-240, and 243-244.

radical transformation that is at the heart of Black Pentecostalism's pneumatology.⁷ Before providing his conception of pneumatological liberation, Lovett is careful to reject the insularity and separatism that sustains both black power and black theology. However, Lovett recognizes black power's potency as a symbol that points to a deeper reality; a reality in which the actualization of Black Power itself participates. This is because Black Power foregrounds questions of power that had long since lain beneath the surface of societal consciousness. In demanding answers to these questions, the oppressed are simultaneously empowered, and the oppressor is challenged to act to eradicate his or her acts of injustice.⁸

Liberation as Spiritualization

Lovett propounds a dual definition of pneumatological liberation that includes spiritualization and humanization.⁹ Lovett defines spiritualization as an existential transformation that occurs when revelation—God's self-disclosure through his spirit—is received by individuals. This contact between the Spirit of God and humans results in a radical transformation of human consciousness, fundamentally altering the way one perceives oneself and the world. This conversion means that "the shift to a new center of life provokes a transformation of a person's moral identity and the system of values by which human life is lived."¹⁰ Using Isaiah's vision in the temple in Isa 6:1-8 as paradigmatic of the spiritualizing process, Lovett identifies three stages toward empowerment. First, the prophet looks upward and sees the Lord, thus recognizing the greater, all-encompassing power of God. Next, the prophet sees himself, and exclaims, "Woe is me, I am undone" (Isa 6:5). Lastly, the prophet, looking outward, sees the oppression of his people and presents himself to God as the one who will help negate their oppression and maximize their deliverance, thus saying "Here am I, send me."¹¹ Through the process of spiritualization, the powerless become powerful due to transformation of the ego. Lovett draws implications for the poor and oppressed who view themselves as powerless to transform the systems, regimes, and institutions

⁷Lovett, "Black Holiness-Pentecostalism," 149.

⁸Ibid.,

⁹Ibid., 162.

¹⁰Murray W. Dempster, "'Evangelism, Social Concern, and the Kingdom of God,'" in *Called & Empowered*, eds. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 26.

¹¹Lovett, "Black Pentecostal-Holiness," 163-164.

that maintain their economic and psychological subjugation. Therefore, spiritualization represents an infusion of power from outside of the oppressive structures, which can lead to massive mobilization among a group of people who are now infused with self-worth, lasting significance, and a sense of purpose and ability.

The Role of Revelation

Lovett also depicts revelation as foundational to lasting liberation and empowerment. The empowerment of spiritualization is a type of revelation wherein God reveals something to people about their divine vocation to liberate the marginalized. Pentecostals already distinctively value experiential revelation as central to their beliefs, illustrated by belief in *glossolalia*, divine healing, miracles, and exorcisms as the definitive criterion for identifying traditional Pentecostal believers.¹² Furthermore, ecstatic experiences, dreams, visions, and other supernatural manifestations are at the core of Pentecostal religion. Regrettably, the magnitude of revelation in actualizing liberation has been mainly ignored within the Western church, and especially amongst Pentecostals. For example, Matthias Wenk observes that in Western Europe and America most Pentecostals are vociferously opposed to liberal perspectives on moral issues such as abortion or homosexuality, but mostly silent regarding questions of globalization, economic justice, and the environment.¹³ Wenk illustrates that for many Western Pentecostals, revelation has been conditioned by middle class, individualistic values and norms that prioritize piety, problems of personal sin, and a one-sided definition of the kingdom of God. It is at this juncture that Black Pentecostals like Lovett are most helpful for recapturing the social issues catapulted beyond the spirit's purview by Western Pentecostals.

Black Pentecostals' conception of liberation as subsumed within revelation also chides other theologians for their inability to suggest a

¹²Here I do not assert that the experience of these manifestations is the touchstone for whether one is Pentecostal, but rather, whether one believes that they exist and are beneficial to Christian life. This means that a person can never have spoken in tongues but still be Pentecostal by virtue of a belief in speaking in tongues as something available and desirable for all Christians.

¹³ Matthias Wenk, "The Holy Spirit as Transforming Power Within a Society: Pneumatological Spirituality and its Political/Social Relevance for Western Europe," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11.1 (2002): 131.

reliable, definitive course of action that leads to amelioration of social conditions. Cornel West states, “Black theologians all agree that black liberation has something to do with ameliorating the socioeconomic conditions of black people. But it is not clear what this amelioration amounts to.”¹⁴ For West, this deficiency originates from the lack of clear-cut social theory to produce a substantive political program or social vision. West’s insight, while identifying the inadequate attention given to capitalism and economic systems by black theologians, somewhat overstates the issue, for even he agrees that the dialectical methodology of Marxists discourages discussions about the ideal society and what ought to be.¹⁵ Furthermore, in propagating progressive Marxist social theory as a clear-cut means of diagnosing injustice, West forgets that investigating the nuances of Marxist thought is competently achieved by the sociologist, philosopher, and political scientist, but less so by the layperson, the theory is designed to liberate. This leads ultimately to the simple question of methodology that underscores the hesitancy of many who desire liberation—namely, what are they supposed to do?

Compounding the confusion is that “oppression” as a designation for a material condition exacerbated and maintained by an outside hegemony no longer registers with most middle class blacks. Cheryl Sanders’ wrote *Empowerment Ethics for a Liberated People* precisely for this reason. Sanders perceives that black people have made the transition from victimization to moral agency and are therefore more in charge of their institutions and resources. She assumes that “The ethics of liberation grounded in the dialectics of oppressor versus oppressed needs to be modified to provide more suitable norms for moral decision making by those who have moved beyond liberation and protest to assume positions of spiritual and material empowerment.”¹⁶ However, Sanders’ misidentification of inclusion as empowerment is an error that other black theologians have also made.¹⁷ For example, being included in the upper echelons of management within an oppressive corporation hardly means that one has the power to alter its practices. Thus, the question of what ought to be done remains.

¹⁴Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2002), 111.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁶Cheryl L. Sanders, *Empowerment Ethics for a Liberated People: A Path to African-American Social Transformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 2.

¹⁷West disagrees with an assessment of empowerment as middle class status that leaves the imperialist, capitalistic system intact. West interprets Sanders’ empowerment simply as “inclusion.” For more on this critique of traditional notions of liberation propounded by black theologians, see *Prophesy Deliverance!*, 112.

In answering this question, Cone believes that the next actions of the oppressed, *whatever* they might be, already begin creating the liberation sanctioned by divine revelation. As Cone expresses,

Thus the criteria of ethical judgment can only be hammered out in the community of the victims of injustice. But since God's will does not come in the form of absolute principles applicable for all situations, our obedience to the divine will involves the risk of faith. The risk of faith means that the oppressed are not infallible. They often do not do the will of God which they know, *and do not know the will of God which they proclaim* (emphasis mine).¹⁸

And again,

But the gospel of Jesus means liberation; and one essential element of that liberation is the existential burden of making decisions about human liberation without being completely sure what Jesus did or would do. This is the risk of faith.¹⁹

Cone's evisceration of revelation's ecstatic and miraculous elements means that he is forced to identify the oppressed community as detached from an active, divine assist, which thus leads to a truncated outcome—an attempt at liberation that is derailed soon after leaving the station. Cone's ethic must proceed largely by "trial and error," a principle that is certainly part of *every* revolutionary movement, but as the dominant guiding principle for black Christians pursuing social transformation is largely unsatisfying and abortive. Admittedly, faith is a part of every theological enterprise, including attempts at social transformation. However, Cone's approach emphasizes faith at the expense of a risk made exponentially more uncertain by a lack of immediate transcendent revelation. This revelation, intrinsic to Black Pentecostal belief and practice, is needed to direct the oppressed community toward realizing its liberation.

Paul Tillich's observations regarding revelation provide an effective rubric for determining how revelation is constituted. For Tillich, revelation is comprised of mystery, ecstasy, and miracle. Tillich also identifies three facets of a genuine miracle. First, a genuine miracle is astonishing, unusual, and shaking. Secondly, it points to the mystery of being in a definite way. Third, it is an occurrence, which is received as a

¹⁸Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 208.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 222.

sign-event in ecstatic experience.²⁰ For Tillich, the objective occurrence is the miracle, while the subjective reception appears in ecstasy. What is revealed is the mystery or ground of being that is never *fully* disclosed, but is manifested in particular contexts. This revelation cannot be simply reduced to history, groups, or individuals. For Tillich, it is history's transparency to revealing the mystery that is revelatory, but not history itself. Furthermore, only as groups of people are transparent for divine disclosure are they revelatory. However, this cannot "be foreseen or derived from the qualities of persons, groups, and events."²¹ Groups and personalities become mediums of revelation in connection with historical events of a revelatory character—with this character comprising an ecstatic experience.

Such an interpretation of revelation parallels Black Pentecostals' understanding of the Spirit's activity within the black Christian community. In cohering with Tillich, Black Pentecostals understand revelation as experiential, being received in the depth of one's struggles, decisions, and conflicts.²² The gifts of the Spirit embody the Holy Spirit's leadership and direction of the Christian community to his desired ends and purposes. This pneumatological liberation supersedes the conceptions of the personal and individual that pervade contemporary Pentecostal theology, and opens out into the institutional, the global, and the cosmic. The Holy Spirit is a reminder of Christ's reign over all powers, processes, and systems, but even more importantly, he discloses the methods by which Christ desires to combat those structures which are unjust, oppressive, and contradictory to humanity's reflection of God's image.

James Forbes, Black Pentecostal preacher, social justice activist, and former pastor of the historic Riverside Church in New York, powerfully broadens traditional Pentecostal assumptions regarding revelatory activity to include liberation induced by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In "Ministry of Hope from a Double Minority," Forbes associates black liberation with pneumatology and challenges Black Pentecostal preachers also to discern this obvious connection. Forbes declares, "Indeed the traditional spokesmen of the Pentecostal movement have usually been too caught up in 'spiritual things' to pay much attention to the oppression of black people. But to me, the incongruity is that the power of

²⁰Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Volume 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 117.

²¹*Ibid.*, 120.

²²*Ibid.*, 127.

the Holy Spirit was never related to the theme of liberation.”²³ Twice, seemingly appalled at the egregious error, Forbes rhetorically questions how Pentecostal preachers could have missed this interrelatedness. Forbes also offers commentary on Luke 4:18, the oft-quoted verse where Jesus declares, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.” Forbes attaches this verse’s significance to the antecedent event in Luke 4:14, where Jesus, after being tempted, returns in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. Thus, for Forbes, the correlation between being filled with the power of the Spirit and performing acts of justice is conspicuous. This conspicuous correlation does not merely privilege the social work of the Holy Spirit over against the personal. Rather, the Spirit chooses according to sovereign design the degree of each that a person’s ministry will entail. Forbes summarizes his prophetic pneumatology by saying,

There was a time when life in the Spirit was associated primarily with the joy and peace of the individual. But one of our strong emphases at St. John’s is that the work of the Holy Spirit is bigger than simply bringing a good feeling to someone who is down in the dumps. This is not to be minimized. It is crucial. But Jesus promised to send power so that we could be witnesses for him. That is big business of cosmic scope. The Spirit we talk about empowers people to find personal fulfillment so that they will be freed up to participate in the work of liberation. The Holy Spirit may lead us into a special concern for deliverance from personal bondage—drug addiction, alcoholism, mental illness or social maladjustment. On the other hand, he may empower us to combat institutional racism or injustice in the courts. When he gives the assignment he also gives the power and guidance to accomplish the task.²⁴

Both Cone and Forbes admit that one cannot always be certain of the impending course of action. However, Forbes expands Cone’s reliance on the community to include revelation instantiated in manifestations of the Spirits’ activity amongst the community so that humans can follow the

²³James Forbes, “Ministry of Hope,” 307.

²⁴James Forbes, “Ministry of Hope from a Double Minority,” *Theological Education* 9.4 (1973).

Spirit's leadership into possible political and social activism. As Forbes proclaims of the Holy Spirit,

But we are not sure of how, when, or where he shall manifest his presence, for he works according to the mystery of his own plan and purpose. We stand ready and open to progress with him wherever he shall lead us and to be used of him according to his sovereign will.²⁵

Forbes' awareness of the Holy Spirit's adaptability to differing settings and contexts echoes Tillich who realized that revelation is always for someone in a concrete situation of concern. This is where social theories and methodologies run around on the reefs of reason, for reason cannot completely give an account for realities that are themselves unreasonable, including despotic governments, repressive regimes, and rapacious institutions, nor can any methodology work in all cultural, social, and institutional contexts. The corruption endemic to human institutions will always remain, but it is the Holy Spirit whose revelation directs humanity within particular existential realities toward confronting the powers that usurp God's claim to sovereignty.

Liberation as Humanization

Lovett's other strand in pneumatological liberation is humanization, which refers to making and keeping human life more human. In light of his attention to the poor and oppressed, making life more human can be interpreted in accordance with the Old Testament's view of people as divine image-bearers. Therefore, all people are worthy of dignity, respect, and value, because all are made in the image of God. Pentecostal theologian Murray Dempster unites humanization and social justice by portraying social justice as a biblical concept that is rooted deeply in the assumption that all men and women are bearers of the divine image, which surpasses philosophical concepts of justice awarded based upon merit, work, need, rank or legal entitlement. Dempster finds that "the Old Testament teaches that persons are entitled to just treatment on the basis that they are persons created in the divine image, nothing more or nothing less."²⁶ For Lovett then, political activism must be inexorably

²⁵Ibid., 310.

²⁶Murray W. Dempster, "Pentecostal Social Concern and the Biblical Mandate of Social Justice," *Pneuma* 9.2 (1987), 132.

linked to preserving a biblical conceptualization of humanity, and he declares “that there can never be a sociological divorce between Pneumatological Liberation and the political life of man, since politics has to do with humanization.”²⁷

The Journey to Personhood

Black Pentecostals are in the best position to exemplify this correlation because of their historical identification with both the black struggle and with the origins of Pentecostalism in America. First, the entire existence of blacks in America has been a long, arduous, political journey toward humanization. The journey toward humanization began with slave revolts and escape plots that declared black people’s right to freedom although a Constitutional amendment misconstrued them as three-fifths of a person. It was followed by black people’s active political protest against lynchings and dehumanizing Jim Crow laws that justified segregation under a myth of being “separate but equal.” Throughout this history, the Black church was actively involved and often leading the way in advocating for liberation through political participation and protest.

In their authoritative tome, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya critique the widely held view that the Black church is an intrinsically anti-political agency.²⁸ Their research indicates that during slavery numerous black clergy and lay persons became involved in the Underground Railroad to help slaves escape to the North. In a prominent example, the basement of Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia was used by Bishop Richard Allen—founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and its first bishop—to hide escaped slaves.²⁹ Furthermore, the three largest slave revolts in American history were led by slave preachers in the early to mid-nineteenth century. These revolts, fomented by Gabriel Prosser in 1800, Denmark Vesey in 1822, and Nat Turner in 1831, can all be described as revolutionary attempts to recover the divine image brutally effaced by white racism and slavery.³⁰ Even the communal gatherings in the “hush harbors” by worshipping slaves were acts of political subversion

²⁷Lovett, “Black Holiness-Pentecostalism,” 166.

²⁸C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 198.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 202.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 203.

punishable by severe flogging and even death.³¹ Following passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1867, thousands of former slaves registered to vote and elected twenty black congressmen and two black senators. Predictably, these political gains were vanquished by white backlash that erected electoral obstacles to disenfranchise blacks and sanctioned ubiquitous violence that enforced a new reign of terror. Thus excluded from the mainstream political process, for close to a hundred years, from the failure of Reconstruction until the passage of 1965's Voting Rights Act, the Black church was the primary locale of black political activity.³² Therefore, Dempster's assertion that the church needs to come to terms with "the pervasive politicization of all dimensions of human life,"³³ resonates more fully with black people who only survived due to the black church's radical political engagement and attempts at social reform.

Secondly, the origins of Pentecostalism demonstrate a radical process of humanization led by blacks during the Azusa Street Revival that touched the lives of all races, classes, and strata of American society. Pentecostalism, one of the largest and fastest growing religious movements in the world, while soon ramifying into several branches and streams, began as a predominantly black religious movement. The most profound experience of black humanization happened due to pneumatological liberation that occurred during the Azusa Street Revival, led by a black, partially blind preacher named William Seymour.

The Azusa Street Revival, which began in Los Angeles in 1906, is widely recognized as the birthplace of Pentecostalism, and one of its salient characteristics was "the freedom it granted all people, regardless of race, gender, or station in life, to be treated as equals. Anyone could play an active role in worship; no one was ruled out by virtue of gender, color, class, or previous condition of servitude."³⁴ Without political coercion or threat, the Seymour led Azusa Street revival flattened barriers of classism, racism, and sexism under the banner of Pentecostal worship and participation. Seymour even accepted hugs and kisses from white women and men in his congregation, a practice that completely eschewed cultural norms, and that showed his multiracial congregation's strong commitment to him and to his interracial vision.³⁵

³¹Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 212-218.

³²Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church*, 205.

³³Dempster, *Evangelism, Social Concern*, 35.

³⁴Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission & Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 137.

³⁵Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, 125.

It became one of the most racially inclusive, culturally diverse groups to gather in the city of Los Angeles at that time. It included people from all classes. It held the attention of the highly educated alongside the illiterate. It had something for new converts as well as for seasoned professionals in ministry. Even so, worship at the mission was undoubtedly heavily flavored by the dominantly African American character of its founding core membership.³⁶

The common denominator uniting this otherwise disparate group of people was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into their lives individually and collectively which led them to speak in tongues, shout in songs of praise, leap, run, jump, and embrace one another in gladness. Other manifestations of the spirit included falling down, jerking, rolling, and quivering.³⁷ That this ecstatic, exuberant practice of worship has compelling political implications is not readily apparent. However, occurring during an era when science and modernity had empirically declared the inferiority of blacks, Pentecostal practice collapsed the ideological barriers propping up the existing institutions to demonstrate allegiance to the lordship of Christ and not to prevailing societal norms or laws. Therefore, although the media frequently excoriated the revival, and police intervened to quell “disturbances,” the vision of beloved community so eloquently later espoused by Dr. King had already been concretized in the revolutionary worship of the Azusa Street Revival, a movement whose practice stripped American racist and sexist ideology of its potency and dominion while proleptically witnessing to the authenticity of Christ’s reign in which, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”³⁸

Confronting Institutions: The African World-view

If Black Pentecostalism theology truly has revolutionary implications, as I have claimed here, then pneumatological liberation, the theological tenet that defines my assessment of the Spirit’s role in the world, must have something to say about the tyrannical social institutions

³⁶Ibid., 88.

³⁷For a full account of the varying manifestations of worship during the Azusa Street Revival, see Robeck’s chapter “Worship at the Azusa Street Mission” in *The Azusa Street Mission & Revival*, 129-186.

³⁸Gal 3:28

that perpetuate oppression. Black Pentecostals have long been content to engage in interpersonal acts of social justice, including feeding the hungry, caring for the orphan, and visiting the sick. However, the same alacrity has not permeated their approach to confronting social structures and institutions although the Black Pentecostal worldview is amenable to this task. One prominent characteristic of Black Pentecostalism derived from its African origins is a holistic appraisal of reality that is not “disenchanted” like that of Western Theology. For instance, Africans often attribute the workings of government and unjust institutions to evil spirits. This worldview includes all segments of society within the Holy Spirit’s reach and influence, and it can also intensify Africans’ resistance to powers and institutions by portraying the government, institutions, and systems as evil forces on the wrong side of a divine battle or struggle.

In Africa, there are numerous divinities and gods that order individual life and the affairs of society.³⁹ Albert Raboteau, in describing the traditional religion of West Africa, states that “the power of the gods and spirits was effectively present in the lives of men, for good or ill, on every level—environmental, individual, social, national, and cosmic.” James Tinney also reports that the Pentecostal movement reflects its African heritage through its emphasis upon the spirit world. This means that the social and political order is also ordered by spirits and demons, and the degree to which a political system is just or benevolent depends upon to what degree its leaders are Holy-Ghost filled or demon controlled.⁴⁰ This enchanted worldview pertains to revolutionary social change for two reasons. First, it produces the ideological and psychological motivation needed to enter the political context and wage battle against the political forces (demons) that would turn life into a kingdom of evil.⁴¹ Secondly, the generalization of social, political, and spiritual problems as consisting of “multi-dimensional manipulation of persons and institutions by evil spirits” elicits multifarious efforts to engender social change. Meaning, attack strategies frequently shift from various focal points and types of political engagement to resemble a sort of “guerrilla” political activism.

Explicating the Powers

Theologian Walter Wink devotes an entire trilogy to the discussion of powers, replete with in-depth biblical analysis and exegesis of angels,

³⁹Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 8.

⁴⁰Tinney, *A Theoretical and Historical Comparison*, 233.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 241.

demons, principalities, spirits and institutions.⁴² Wink has observed the extremism within western societies that either attribute every act in the universe to an angelic or demonic force or completely deny the spiritual world's existence altogether. Within a society torn between the reductionism of science, and eerie accounts of strange beings, Wink recognizes that "between the rock of rejection and the hard place of hysteria, it is hard to find a place to locate the demonic on our current world maps."⁴³

Wink defines the powers not as separate heavenly entities with corresponding deities, but "as the inner aspect of material or tangible manifestations of power."⁴⁴ They do not have a separate, spiritual existence, and we encounter them primarily in reference to the material reality of which they are the innermost essence. Wink uses a "mob spirit," at a soccer match as an example. A mob spirit does not exist independently of the mob, but is formed when the crowd is collectively agitated to a certain degree. Thus, the Powers are "the simultaneity of two aspects in a single entity: an outer organization of power maintained by human personnel, role typifications, policies, structures, and building; and an inner or spiritual essence that is the corporate personality of the institution or system."⁴⁵ In Wink's system, institutions become demonic when they turn their back on their divine vocation, which is to preserve justice and resist oppressive tendencies. While Wink believes that segments of societies can be collectively demon possessed, including governments, economic systems, and entities, he understands them to be capable of transformation and not necessarily in need of annihilation, because all powers, insofar as they created, are at least partially inherently good.

Wink is right to attribute both benevolence and malfeasance to institutions, and his reconceptualization of the demonic can provide a means of discourse between both evangelicals and liberals alike. For Wink, the question is not whether demons are beings, but what do we *do* about the irrefutable manifestations of evil that currently exist. The traditional response of Black Pentecostals has been to pray for their

⁴²See the publications by Walter Wink: *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992).

⁴³Walter Wink "Demons and DMins: The Church's Response to the Demonic" *Review and Expositor* 89.4 (1992), 504.

⁴⁴Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 104.

⁴⁵Wink, "Demons and DMins," 504.

leaders, governments, and institutions, thus focusing on the inward state of conglomerates and asking God that spirits of “isms” are cast out.⁴⁶ This is problematic for its reticence to cohesively unite prayer with action to enlist the powers of coercion at their disposal. As Reinhold Niebuhr discerned, all governments and collective institutions will be shot through with deception, self-interest, moral failure, and allegiance to the status quo, and only coercion will cause them to abdicate their unjust positions.⁴⁷ While social improvement is possible, it is always conditional, incomplete, and ephemeral, because the nature of humans—especially collectively—is always fraught with the tension of what they should be versus what they are at any given moment. Predictably, most revolutionary movements simply exchange places with the oppressors, and they too become corrupted by power. However, pneumatological liberation engages both the spiritual and material realms to invoke change that continually prophetically speaks and acts from the margins to hold up mirrors of truth to the powers that be.

The Need for Self-Transformation

To effectively protest against and denunciate unjust institutions and powers, Black Pentecostalism must first recognize that it too has become an oppressive institution in its failure to advocate for the poor and marginalized, and for evidence of its unwillingness to include them within the life of the church community. Instead, Black Pentecostalism has increasingly been reinforcing class distinctions that exacerbate the disparity between those that are impoverished and oppressed, and those who are economically stable. For example, Lincoln and Mamiya identify the dissection of the Black church along class lines into a middle class church and a church for the underclass. Although the black underclass continues to grow, the black church, with its prosperity messages and conspicuous consumption of material goods, is more geared toward gaining middle class members, and is increasingly ill-equipped to include

⁴⁶Pentecostals will pray during prayer groups or collective worship that the (demonic) spirit of racism, sexism, greed, pride, etc. is cast out, meaning, chased away by the Spirit of God which alleviates them from having to do anything themselves. The “casting out” is left to the action of the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁷Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932).

the poor in its life and practices, thus exacerbating the social isolation that compounds inner-city poverty.⁴⁸

Isaac B. Laudarji and Lowell W. Livezey completed an ethnographic study observing the practices of churches in Chicago's Near West Side. In 1990, the neighborhood surrounding Chicago Housing Authority's Henry Horner Homes was 100 percent black with unemployment rates of sixty percent and an astounding poverty rate of eighty percent.⁴⁹ There were twelve churches within walking distance of the housing development, which houses the Near West Side's greatest concentration of the ghetto poor, and yet only one church, Revival Center Church of God in Christ, actually claimed participation of Henry Horner residents as members or regular church attendees, although several spoke of ministries *to* and *for* Henry Horner residents. Laudarji and Livezey found that while noble and beneficial, the social programs of most black churches did not draw the poor into a network of relationships that allowed them to effectively participate in the wider world. While Revival Center did draw the poor local residents into its church life, Laudarji and Livezey cited it as a good example of "the traditional introverted forms of Black Pentecostal social intervention," with no political activity beyond the circulation of petitions for a denominational member seeking public office.⁵⁰

This study parallels Omar McRoberts' research of black churches, many of which are Pentecostal, within Boston's crime-ridden and impoverished Four Corners neighborhood. He discovers that although this half-square-mile neighborhood is inundated with twenty-nine churches, church involvement in the life of the neighborhood is largely nonexistent. Many churches do not even realize that they are in a neighborhood called Four Corners, and their membership is comprised of largely middle class and working-class families who drive into the community from more affluent areas to worship. By viewing the activity in the streets as an embodiment of sin and moral evil, the churches hesitate to engage in

⁴⁸Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church*, 384. For more on the rising black underclass and its relationship to the black church, see Johnathan L. Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 201-206.

⁴⁹Isaac B. Laudarji and Lowell W. Livezey, "The Churches and the Poor in a 'Ghetto Underclass' Neighborhood" in *Public Religion: Faith in the City and Urban Transformation*, ed. Lowell W. Livezey (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 85.

⁵⁰Laudarji and Livezey, "The Churches and the Poor," 102.

revolutionary partnership with the oppressed against social institutions to transform their socioeconomic and spiritual condition.⁵¹

Thus, the Black Pentecostal church's adoption of Lovett's theology of pneumatological liberation that infuses the practices of the church to incorporate fully the poor into the life of the church while simultaneously engaging in "the violence of non-violence" to confront systemic injustice within the inner city is desperately needed. Pneumatological liberation stands in solidarity with Latin American liberation theology as a movement of the poor and for the poor, but it is not wedded to a Marxist social theory or any predetermined revolutionary methodology for its success. Rather, by relying upon revelation, it takes seriously Stanley Hauerwas' perception of the core issue: "The issue is how the church can provide the interpretative categories to help Christians better understand the positive and negative aspects of their societies and guide their subsequent selective participation."⁵² Notwithstanding charges to the contrary, Hauerwas does not demand the categorical withdrawal of Christians from civic engagement, but he admonishes the church that sometimes participation in government, economy, or the educational system is unwarranted, thus making this refusal to participate also revolutionary. However, by what means does the church ascertain the form that its civic participation and protest should take? Hauerwas concludes that such determinations can be made only by developing the skills of discrimination fostered in the church.⁵³

The Spiritual Gifts

For the Black Pentecostal, these determinations are pneumatologically governed through the *charismata*, the spiritual gifts that encompass the Pentecostal belief system. For our purposes, two will be mentioned here. They include the gift of discernment, and the gift of prophecy. Contrary to the patriarchal themes that dominate public images and authoritarian notions of Pentecostalism, these gifts are given to the entire community, including women. In Corinthians chapter 12 and 14, Paul is addressing the entire local church, and does not assume that only

⁵¹ Omar McRoberts, *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁵² Stanley Hauerwas, "Why the 'Sectarian Temptation' is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson," in *The Stanley Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Duke University Press, 2001), 102.

⁵³ Hauerwas, "The Sectarian Temptation," 106.

one person carries the burden of gift expression. Paul's depiction of giftedness as instantiated in each of the members comprising the church staunchly reprimands those churches whose leaders assume godlike status for their sole ability to prophesy or discern the Spirit's activity. Instead, the shared practices of prayer and worship create a space wherein the Spirit lovingly reveals the church's role in its community and context. Always included in this collective revelation will be God's compassion for the oppressed and marginalized. The spirit will speak to both personal, spiritual oppression and to the avaricious principles guiding many governmental, capitalist, and societal entities—principles that also restrict the true freedom of individuals. However, many Black Pentecostal churches erect boundaries around the Spirit's activities by limiting his role to the sanction of middle class values and material wants.⁵⁴ A revolutionary pneumatological liberation will open the doors of our confining ideological spaces to release the Spirit into unfamiliar territories that will subvert the status quo and confront the self-interested origins of our deepest desires.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that pneumatological liberation as propounded by Leonard Lovett represents a theology that is revelatory in content, prophetic in its confrontation and evaluation of powers and institutions, and firmly rooted in the history and culture of Black Pentecostalism. The first revolutionary act will be the recovery of Black Pentecostal voices like Lovett, Brazier, Forbes, and Tinney within the academy to posit a theology that takes seriously the political implications of Black Pentecostalism and the plight of poor people beset by an inequitable justice system, substandard housing, inadequate education, and overall neglect. The next step includes recognition by the Black Pentecostal church that witnessing to the peace and justice of Christ will often involve political activism and public protest. Most revolutionary action will be the conjoined efforts of the church and academy in realizing radical social reform, an expectation that Cone envisioned, but which never materialized. What the theological academy needs least is another ethic that escapes embodiment in church life and practice and instead

⁵⁴See Jonathan L. Walton, *Watch This!*, for a compelling critique of the elements within the theology of some prominent Black Pentecostal preachers whose sermons reinforce middle class values and desires.

becomes fodder for endless critique and analysis. However, if it is to fulfill this task, critical issues remain.

First, the Black Pentecostal church must eradicate its anti-intellectual tradition by impelling its leaders and pastors to attend seminaries and divinity schools to gain the conceptual categories needed for effective engagement with realities that must also be thought through, and not simply danced around and preached to. Niebuhr's Christian realism illuminates the deception intrinsic to the powers and suggests that potential activists must, in order to identify it, be well-versed in the themes and language of globalization, capitalism, and institutions, and also conversant in womanist, liberation, and other contextual theologies that provide the hermeneutical lenses for identifying deception and abuses of power. The lines of demarcation, as Wink explains, are not black and white, and distinguishing between what is institutionally oppressive and what is socially beneficial takes careful discernment. The exploitation of people of color by an unjust prison system that justifies its actions as a "war on crime" proves this fact.⁵⁵ While the Spirit lends his voice to the task of liberation, Pentecostals must avoid bypassing higher learning, an avoidance that only increases the intimidation caused by the labyrinthine nature of political and social institutions.

Another issue is that the lack of women featured in this study illustrates the male-dominated arena that the Black Pentecostal church and black power were in the 1970s, and in many cases, continue to be. Since then, there are large numbers of black women who are entering the theological academy thereby sweetening a revolutionary chorus traditionally composed of only male voices. These female voices are still excluded from ordination within the largest Black Pentecostal denomination, the Church of God in Christ. It is hoped that the Black Pentecostal church will open its highest ranks of leadership to more Black Pentecostal women who will add their voices to a chorus begun by Tinney, Lovett, Forbes, and Brazier, but which is by no means complete. While the church will have to start slowly, taking careful steps toward revitalization of blighted communities and full incorporation of the poor into church life, we can be certain that the path is not merely discovered, but most certainly revealed.

⁵⁵For an in-depth explication of race related oppression involving the American prison system, see Becky Pettit and Bruce Western, "Mass Imprisonment and the Life Course: Race and Class Equality in U.S. Incarceration" *American Sociological Review* 69.2 (2004):151-169.

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FROM THE WOMB OF BLACKNESS TO BLACK HOLINESS-PENTECOSTALISM

Leonard Lovett¹

Abstract

This essay proffers that Black Holiness Pentecostalism shares the legacy of Black slave religion. This heritage consists in but is not limited to rituals, patterns of worship, preaching, testifying, shouting, and to the singing of members in the faith communities. How this heritage was bequeathed to Black Holiness-Pentecostalism or the route that these traditions traveled to arrive in Black Holiness-Pentecostalism is not always clearly delineated, but their presence is attested in five primary Black Holiness-Pentecostal groups. Since this article avowedly suggests that a historical continuity is present between African traditional religions and the Black Holiness-Pentecostal Movements in America, it should come as no surprise that a brief overview and delineation of major Black Holiness-Pentecostal groups in chronological sequence will be helpful in appreciating how it is that Black slave religion shapes Black Holiness-Pentecostalism on the American scene. Present within the corpus of Black Holiness-Pentecostalism, too, is a discernible epistemology, i.e., a way of knowing. Being Black, poor and Pentecostal, a condition of triple jeopardy, Black Pentecostals developed a worldview much closer to the reality of the world than that of the privileged. To see and construct social existence only from the vantage point of the privileged can, in fact, impose a severe limitation on one's ability to engage the Holy in a robust way. It is for these reasons the present essay contends that the legacy of Black slave religion informs Black Holiness-Pentecostalism.

The Primary Subgroups

United Holy Church of America

This religious movement dates from a revival meeting conducted at Method, North Carolina in 1886. Several personalities are associated with its

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beginning. The following figures contributed to the founding of this group: L. M. Mason, G. A. Mials, Isaac Cheshier, H. C. Snipes, W. H. Fulford, and H. L. Fisher, who later became president of the movement. It originated as a representative holiness group and is among the first holiness bodies on record then to become Pentecostal. The first convocation was held at Durham, North Carolina in 1894, and the headquarters became established in that city. A division occurred in its early development over the belief in the necessity of the Lord's Supper for salvation but was resolved in 1907. Such a controversy was not uncommon among Black Protestant churches at the turn of the century as they sought to accommodate themselves to a rapidly changing social situation.

When the holiness message began to spread to other cities rapidly, some groups severed denominational ties while others retained theirs. Those who severed their ties were known as the "come-outers" and became members of the United Holiness Convention. Severe criticism of the "in-church people" by their denomination gradually drove the two groups together. In 1900 both groups merged and consented to use the name Holy Church of North Carolina. "Virginia" was later added as the movement spread northward, and in 1916 at Oxford, North Carolina, the name was changed to the United Holy Church of America.

Church of Christ Holiness, U.S.A

This movement emerged between 1894-96 under the leadership of Charles Price Jones (1865-1949), a Baptist preacher in Jackson, Mississippi. While pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church, Selma, Alabama, Jones experienced dissatisfaction with his personal religious experience. After acceptance of the holiness message Jones attempted to remain a Baptist pastor and was later voted out of the Baptist Association. It was in 1900 that Jones formed the Christ's Association of Mississippi of Baptized Believers and developed an anti-denominational stance. This holiness body rejects tongues as the initial and only evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Jones is regarded as one of the founders of the Church of God in Christ because of his affinity with and influence upon Charles H. Mason, Sr.

Church Of God In Christ, Incorporated

This movement was co-founded by Charles H. Mason, Sr. around 1897, and it originated at Lexington, Mississippi. Mason, a former Baptist pastor, was expelled from that denomination in response to his teachings on

sanctification. Mason had earlier received sanctification and was part of a body of radical "come-outers" who formed a group referred to only as "The Movement." In 1897, the revival had made its way to Lexington, which was sixty miles north of Jackson, Mississippi. The late Elder John Lee gave Mason permission to use his living room, which was too small due to the large crowds that turned out to hear the preaching of Mason. A Mr. Watson generously donated an abandoned gin house located on the bank of a little creek, consenting to the use of it for the revival. Opposition increased to the point that shots were fired into the services, but none were fatal. The emerging movement was present mainly in three states, i.e., Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas. The Church of God in Christ chose Charles Price Jones as General Overseer. Mason was appointed to preside over Tennessee, and J. A. Jeter was appointed to preside over Arkansas.

The transition in the Church of God in Christ occurred when Mason embraced the Pentecostal message and attested to the baptism in the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues as the sign of the presence of the Spirit. A general meeting of the then Church of God in Christ convened at Jackson, Mississippi, in 1907, and the body agreed to sever the fellowship with Mason and his followers due to Mason and others' acceptance of the Pentecostal message. Mason convened a similar meeting in Memphis, Tennessee, and this gathering constituted the first General Assembly of what we know today as the Church of God in Christ, Incorporated. This body unanimously chose Mason as Chief Apostle. The Headquarters remains in Memphis.

Fire-Baptized Holiness Church of God of The Americas

This group initially began as an "association" after separating from the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church, a white church body, which had originated in Anderson, South Carolina, between 1890 and 1898, under the leadership of Benjamin Hardin Irwin. A fundamental tenet of Irwin and the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church was belief in a *third blessing* and a series of other baptisms in the Holy Ghost subsequent to conversion and sanctification. In 1908, blacks in the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church desired to form their organization so, they formally withdrew from the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church and established the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church of the Americas. William E. Fuller, a phenomenal administrator and evangelist from South Carolina, planted many congregations of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church of the Americas and was its first Bishop. Today this denomination remains relatively small in comparison to its contemporaries.

Pentecostal Assemblies of the World

This Apostolic Pentecostal body emerged between 1906 and 1914 by way of Los Angeles, California and Hot Springs, Arkansas. There is some disagreement and controversy as to whether the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (hereafter cited as PAW) preceded the Assemblies of God (1914) by its emergence in Los Angeles as early as 1906. Garfield Thomas Haywood, an African-American and one of the first Presiding Bishops of the movement confirms the early founding of the "original" organization.² It originally began as an interracial body, and by 1924 whites had formed the Pentecostal Church Incorporated, a constituent body of the United Pentecostal Church, which was formed by a merger in 1945.

The "oneness" issue in 1914, which wrought havoc within the Assemblies of God movement influenced the early development of the PAW. The "oneness" issue is a theological point of view, which replaces the notion of the Trinity with a single, Jesus only view of the Holy. Frank J. Ewart and J.J. Frazee were advocates of this view. The founding of this denomination is a merger between the General Assembly of the Apostolic Churches and a group on the West Coast using the name PAW, naming E. W. Doak chairman and Garfield Thomas Hayward as secretary.³ As late as 1921 Haywood denied any connection with the Assemblies of God, holding credentials with PAW from 1911, contending that it is impossible to "go back" to a place you have never been.⁴ Haywood and his colleagues in their stand for their oneness doctrine were denounced as "hay, wood, and stubble" with the added remark referring to Haywood's publication, "they are all in wilderness and they have a voice in the wilderness."⁵

From the Womb of Blackness

Indeed, it can be candidly stated that Black Holiness-Pentecostalism shares the legacy of Black slave religion whose historical roots are anchored deep in African and Afro-Caribbean religion. The importance and significance of African survivals within Black religion in the New World

²Morris E. Golder, *History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World* (Indianapolis, Indiana, n.p., 1973), 31.

³Fred J. Foster, *Think It Not Strange: A History of the Oneness Movement* (St. Louis, Missouri: Pentecostal Publishing House, 1965), 72ff.

⁴Golder, *History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World*, 38.

⁵Carl Brumback, *Suddenly From Heaven* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1961), 208.

have been the subject of much debate among anthropologists, sociologists, and historians.⁶ The present study will draw on these sources for purposes of comparison where necessary, rather than attempt a thoroughgoing analysis of Black Holiness-Pentecostalism vis-à-vis African and Afro-Caribbean religion during the slave period.

However, it should be stated that it is primarily in worship, form, religious expression and lifestyle rather than a codified belief system that Black Holiness-Pentecostalism shares in the legacy of Black slave religion. It was from slave religion that a "Black style" of worship developed in an unstructured way as Black slaves encountered the Almighty God of their ancestors. Gayraud Wilmore reasons that since most of the first enslaved Africans brought to the American colonies came from the Antillean sub-region, it is possible that some of them had already made a partial transition from their native religions to Christianity prior to any systematic-evangelization on the mainland.⁷

The degree to which these Christianizing influences modified slave religion is a matter that requires a far more detailed treatment than is available to the present study. It was the slave's adaptation to Christianity without being wholly divested of his/her native religious "worship style" which is of importance as we view the historical roots of Black Holiness-Pentecostal religious lifestyle. We, furthermore, are reminded that even though slaves were uneducated regarding Western standards, their ancestral religions and the religious consciousness, which they engendered, were highly sophisticated and supportive of complex cultural systems. Wilmore further asserts:

Well into the early nineteenth century, the slaves relied upon the most elemental presuppositions of a primitive religious consciousness to give consolation and meaning to their existence. Whatever the specific beliefs that had been salvaged from Africa, or from their

⁶For discussion on the various positions present on Africanisms in the religious contexts of enslaved Africans in America, see: Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of The Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1941), 207ff; and E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Press, Orig. Copy. 1963), 1-19. The present article will return to this issue shortly.

⁷Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (New York: Doubleday & Company 1972), 7.

sojourn in the West Indies, they came under the most vigorous assault by the Protestant missionaries.⁸

It is known that Blacks as enslaved human beings were introduced to America in the Southern colonies where the Cavaliers and Huguenots, for the most part, were in control. They were said to be far more free and tolerant in their religious views than the Puritans in the Northeast. It was under the influence of these two groups that Black slaves in parts of the South reinterpreted and remade their religious practices. While the masters exposed slaves to their religion, only the fringe of their religious activity was shared. While the slaves were physically "in" enough to "feel" the spirit of their master's religion, their African cultural background, to a large extent kept them intellectual "out."⁹ In fact, Black slaves were able to co-opt the outward observable acts of their masters and interpret them in terms of their original culture did they discover genuine spiritual meaning and religious vitality.

During the extended period of slavery, the religious freedom meted out to enslaved Africans provided the best avenue of articulation and meaningful expression when other ways were closed. It was under such conditions that slaves developed a strong, simple faith permeated with ample beliefs from their African past. Such conditions provided fertile soil for the birth and growth of a much later phenomenon known as Black Holiness sects. Carter G. Woodson stressed the similarity of African religion with the Hebraic background of Christianity and contended further that the African stories of creation and belief in the unity of God paralleled Christian theology. There was so much correspondence between the two traditions, Woodson argued, that about the only change that the Negro slave made was to label as Christian what the enslaved African practiced in Africa. Many of the slaves' worldview, Woodson contended, was survivals of the African belief in animism.¹⁰

No serious discussion of the survival of African religious influence is complete unless one acknowledges our indebtedness to E. Franklin Frazier, a prominent black sociologist who argued for a sharp break with the African past and Melville J. Herskovits, the famed anthropologist who made a case for continuity with the same. It was by no means accidental that Herskovits

⁸Ibid., 16.

⁹William A. Clark, "Sanctification in Negro Religion," *Social Forces* 15, no. 4 (May, 1937): 544-551.

¹⁰Carter G. Woodson, *The African Background Outlined* (Washington, D.C.: Association for the Study of the Negro, 1936).

spent a significant portion of time studying large segments of peoples undergoing a cultural change in contrast to an exclusive focus on the study of stable societies. In Herskovits' analysis, the concept of cultural reinterpretation informs the rest of his arguments. Implicit within the concept of cultural reinterpretation is a recognition of the fact that every phenomenon in human behavior has two aspects: its form and its meaning. In societies where contact with other peoples are at a minimum and where a maximum of cultural integration has occurred, it is difficult to distinguish between form and meaning.¹¹

Herskovits believed that as people moved from one culture to an alien one, there was a tendency to adopt new forms more readily than new meanings. He asserted:

There is little question that under acculturation, form changes more readily than meaning. This brings us back to the concept of cultural reinterpretation, as we study the phenomenon, we see more and more clearly that peoples adopt new forms more readily than new meanings; that characteristically they assign old meanings to the new forms, thereby maintaining their preexisting systems of values, and making the break with established custom minimal as far as their cognitive responses are concerned. On the emotional level, they retain the satisfaction derived from earlier ways, while adopting new forms that seem advantageous to them.¹²

In direct opposition to this viewpoint, E. Franklin Frazier insisted that due to the emasculating process of slavery, Negroes brought to America were stripped entirely of all the vestiges of the African heritage. This notion held true for Frazier in his study of two fundamental institutions of the Black community—the Black family and the Black church. Speaking of enslaved Africans, Frazier observed, "of the habits and customs as well as the hopes and fears that characterized the life of their forbears in Africa, nothing remains."¹³ Once the Black family was destroyed as the result of forced servitude, Frazier further contended, it was the Christian religion rather than

¹¹Melville J. Herskovits, *Cultural Relativism: Perspectives in Cultural Pluralism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 180.

¹²*Ibid.*, 180.

¹³E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969. Originally published in 1939), Part I.

any vestiges of African culture or religious experience that provided a new basis of social cohesion for Black slaves transported to North America.¹⁴

It can be candidly stated that while the debate on African retentions in Slave culture was not fully resolved during the lifespan of Herskovits and Frazier, both served to enrich the other and to foster continuing discussion relative to the issue of African survival in the New World, especially in the American south. In reviewing the spiritual experiences of slaves, one can readily identify certain vestiges and links which emanated from Africa and shape part of a tradition. Genovese pointed to such a link when he asserted:

In the southern U. S. the combination of hostile white power, small plantation and farm units, and the early closing of the slave trade crushed much of the specific African religious memory . . . But since the denominations could not easily absorb the African impulse, they found themselves defeated by it in two sometimes complementary and sometimes antagonistic ways: Large residues of "superstition" remained in the interstices of the black community; and Afro-Christianity arose as something within the Euro-Christian community and yet remained very much without.¹⁵

Since religion permeates the whole of life amongst subgroups in sub-Saharan West Africa, it is in that field of culture, denominated as supernatural that one will discover that peoples of African descent manifest the purest and most extensive range of Africanisms. The various recorded instances indicative of this phenomenon document the determination of the enslaved Africans to rescue as much as possible their aboriginal beliefs from the debacle of slavery. Herskovits asserts:

Where Catholicism was the religion of the masters, the problem of retention of African religious practices was simpler than in Protestant countries. For example, in countries like Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, West African and Congo cults flourish in such purity that, as we shall presently see, they lay bare significant facets of African religion that have heretofore been shown most difficult, if not impossible to study in Africa itself. The analysis of the Shouters sect in Trinidad

¹⁴Ibid., 14.

¹⁵Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, N.Y. Vintage Books, 1972), 211.

documents the manner in which the aboriginal patterns were transmuted into Protestantism.¹⁶

Roger Bastide contributes to the discussion by viewing religion within Black communities as the main factor for solidarity.¹⁷ Conversion of the American Negro to Christianity was originally reserved for house slaves, but gradually spread until soon after the Declaration of Independence—a period that coincided with the epoch of religious revivalism—it had reached the bulk of the Black population. Bastide then asserts:

That is why the religion of the Negro community is a revivalist creed, affective rather than moral or rational. Worshippers want external evidence of being "saved"—visions, dream, trances, and emotion is cultivated at the expense of reason.¹⁸

In brief, Bastide argues that affective religion operates in functional liaison with the social and economic program of the Black community and is not to be explained in terms of any "African heritage." In effect, affective religion is a response and not a museum piece. If the lower class American Negro's religion tends to be affective, it is not in consequence of some African survival, but is what it is because the slave restricted, dominated, exploited, rejected, or channeled his/her need for security and compensation into Christianity, which the enslaved African adopted as a means of coping with harsh oppression. Bastide further contends that in the United States of America, the Negro has preserved no trace of African ancestral religion; in the slaves' quest for violent emotionalism, for some affective faith, the enslaved African has borrowed wholesale from North American revivalism—itself a continuation of Scottish revivalism. Bastide finds support in Guy Johnson who made a thorough study of the Gullah Negroes, reputed to be one of the most traditional communities in the United States located on the coastal sea islands of South Carolina. Johnson found nothing in those Negro churches which did not also feature in those of the whites: hand-clapping, rhythmic swaying of the body in time with the music, the practice of "bearing witness" or making "public confession" were all common practices in both races.¹⁹

In contrasting white revivalism with Black religion, Bastide, using Hortense's analysis to make the argument, reveals that in white revivalism

¹⁶Melville J. Herskovits, *New World Negro* (Indiana: Minerva Press, 1966), 15.

¹⁷Roger Bastide, *African Civilization in the New World* (C. Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd. 1972), 203.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 163.

one always finds large numbers of nonparticipating onlookers who remain outside the infectious mood of excitement: whereas among Blacks, everyone without exception is a performer. The predominant feeling, which emerges from the "testifying" of whites is fear of eternal damnation; whereas the most common sentiment among Blacks is hope—hope for salvation, deliverance from the bondage of a symbolic Egypt. Among Europeans, ecstatic possession, when it occurs, tends to assume the form of hysterical cries, and bodily movements are far more violent or convulsive. Among Blacks, such movements tend to be rhythmic and organized.²⁰

Bastide advances his most potent argument in discussing the consequences of the slave's reaction to certain biblical texts, which reminded them of their own condition, such as the story of Egyptian bondage and the subsequent liberation by Moses, or the Babylonian captivity. Popular also were texts dealing with the apostles that demonstrated the existence of certain relevant phenomena in the primitive church—e.g., prophetic utterance, or the ability to speak with tongues through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Bastide concludes:

Such were the original guiding forces behind African-Protestant syncretism, which led to a quite different orientation, in the general direction of angelism, messianism, and the reinterpretation of African ecstatic possession in terms of revivalists' sects or the descent of the Holy Ghost.²¹

Bastide's argument is reductionist, to say the least, in his assertion that Black religion is affective rather than moral or rational, for when a human being is encountered by the Spirit, the emotion, intellect and the volition are affected in various ways. What is at stake for this analysis is that Black slaves in the New World exercised a great deal of rationality in adapting to a new social order, that religion within the African context of joint traditional beliefs played a major role in the survival process, and that the similarities within Black Holiness-Pentecostalism are not merely coincidental, but have important historical roots and precedents. African survivals in the New World and especially in religion were sustained to a large degree by two acculturative processes occurring simultaneously. There was the interaction of Africans from differing cultures within Africa resulting in a variety of customs and practices that were distinctly African. There was

²⁰Roger Bastide, *African Civilization in the New World*, 163.

²¹*Ibid.*, 203.

the interaction of African and Western cultures, which resulted in the transformation of the cultural patterns of both groups, for where European practices were weak and relatively subordinate, African survivals were correspondingly strengthened. The slave came out of cultures that were sufficiently stable to ensure the persistence of those practices whose value and superiority alone were crucial in maintaining their existence.²²

The survival of certain Africanisms in Black religion and especially within Black Holiness-Pentecostalism is further testimony that Africa slaves emerged from an experience which was sufficiently entrenched to make possible the persistence of African customs and traditions. It has been cogently argued that where European practices were relatively weak, the opportunities for African survivals were correspondingly strengthened.²³ The South was a natural habitat for the birth as well as the development of Black Holiness-Pentecostalism. Despite the federal legislation of 1807, slaves were continually brought to the New World, so that by 1836, several thousand were reported taken into Texas annually. Bay Island, in the Gulf of Mexico, was a depot where at times as many as 16,000 Africans were on hand to be shipped to Florida, Texas, Louisiana and other markets in the South. As late as 1859, Blacks were openly advertised for sale, and most Southern cities had depots where one could purchase newly-arrived Africans if Blacks from the upper South were not desired. Such cities as Vicksburg and Memphis received large contingents of imported slaves during this period.²⁴

Indigenous Parallels

There is some evidence to suggest that certain "Africanisms" and African parallels such as the sacred dance, spirit possession (Baptism in the Holy Spirit within Black Holiness-Pentecostalism), call and response and *glossolalia*—all of which are freely appropriated within Black Holiness Pentecostalism and reflect African influences—are by no means coincidental.²⁵

Most persons who are intensely familiar with Black Holiness-Pentecostalism would, for the most part, agree that the genius of the movement lies within the freedom of the corporate body as much as its

²²John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Vintage Books, 1947), 40-41.

²³*Ibid.*, 40-41.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 183.

²⁵Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, 231.

intense spirituality. It appears that many of the vestiges of the African past, which supposedly disappeared under the pressures of slavery, periodically broke through disguised in the freedom of worship and lifestyle as espoused within Black Holiness-Pentecostalism.

The cross-section of a particular first-generation slave plantation would conceivably in some instances reveal the continuation of tribal patterns with witch doctors, priests, chieftains, warriors, hunters, craftsmen who worked in clay, copper, ivory, stone, bronze, and gold; women weavers, griots, and drummers. While on another plantation, no tribal continuity was preserved, to say nothing of a common language. In the latter setting, it is conceivable that the universal emotions of rebellion, self-expression, and anger were most suppressed. When these emotions manifest themselves within the context of the Christian church under the leadership of a preacher chosen from among these slaves, it is highly conceivable that the worship style and form of emotional expression would parallel those forms which were distinctively African.

For example, dancing in the African worldview expresses various forms and aspects of life such as victory in warfare, protection and forgiveness of the gods, good harvesting, death, birth, puberty rites, marriage, success in love, revenge, and the honoring of ancestors. Those dances, considered sacred, contained powerful teleological implications.

The largest African dance heritage is in those dances considered sacred; the end result, the supreme experience was possession; possession was the ultimate religious experience; to be possessed by a God who spoke through one was the aim of the drumming and dancing.²⁶

In a Black Holiness-Pentecostal worldview, dancing contains similar implications. Charles H. Mason, Sr. apologetically wrote after documenting dancing four times in the New Testament and several times in the Old Testament:

Dancing shows that we have victory--1 Samuel 18:6; Dancing of the people of God is to be in the Spirit of Jesus only, for as in Jesus only we rejoice and praise God, we must have Jesus and all Jesus, Jesus in all things in the church and His saints. The people of God do not

²⁶Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance in the United States, 1619-1970* (New York: National Press Books, 1972), 48.

dance as the world dances, but are moved by the Spirit of God. So you can see it is all in the Spirit of God and to the glory of God. It is not to satisfy the lust of the flesh, or the carnal appetite, as the world's dance, but only to glorify God and satisfy the soul. The world dances of the world, about the world and to the world. The children of God dance of God, for God and to the praise and glory of His name. They have the joy of the Spirit of the Lord in them. They are joyful in their King, the Christ.²⁷

For Mason, religious reality is divided into the sacred and the secular as is reflected in his reference to "dancing as unto the Lord" in contradistinction to "dancing of the world, about the world and to the world." In the African worldview dancing embraces the whole of life, but under the influence of Protestant missionaries, especially in Afro-Caribbean settings, dancing took on evil connotations. Very early in the history of the Shout, certain rules were developed--one of the most interesting being that the feet or legs must not cross. Emery says,

Dance was frowned upon by many Protestant churches in the South, yet the need to worship in this way had not been eradicated from the plantation slave. The Afro-American was forced to improvise and substitute to fulfill needs acceptably. The Black religious dance in this country was improvised to fit within the structure of the Protestant church. While not actually dances, the Shout and Ring Shout were certainly substitutes for the dancing common to African and West Indian religious ceremonies.²⁸

An essential improvisation within Black Holiness-Pentecostalism is that the purpose of the sacred dance is not possession by the Spirit, but rather one rejoices because the human spirit has become rejuvenated and energized by the Holy Spirit and the response may or may not be the sacred dance. In some West African circles,²⁹ religious dancing takes place until the deity possesses the devotee, and this often takes place in response to the beating of drums. In Black Holiness-Pentecostalism, sacred dancing and music, which

²⁷German Ross, ed., *History and Formative Years of The Church Of God In Christ* (Memphis: Tennessee, C.O.G.I.C. Publishing House, 1969). Charles H. Mason, Sr. "Is It Right for the Saints of God to Dance?" in German Ross, *History and Formative Years of The Church Of God In Christ* (Memphis, Tennessee: C.O.G.I.C. Publishing House, 1969), 36.

²⁸Emery, *Black Dance in the United States*, p. 120; see also Mason Crum, *Gullah: Negro Life in the Carolina Sea Islands* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1940), 140.

²⁹R. A. Schermerhorn, *These Our People: Minorities in American Cultures* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1949), 90.

may include drumming, is usually, but not always an integral part of praise and adoration to God.

Speaking in tongues is a significant corollary to dancing within Black Holiness-Pentecostalism. David M. Beckmann utilizing the insights garnered from the research of several anthropologists and historians argued the thesis that trance, of which speaking in tongues is a stylized form, is a gift which Afro-Americans brought with them into Christianity. He defines trance as an altered state of consciousness accompanied by agitation or activity. In trance, as in other altered states of consciousness, such as dreams and daydreams, visions and mystical experiences, the person's normal orientation to reality temporarily fades. Trance should be distinguished from these quiet states of mind, however.³⁰ Entranced activity might be speaking or singing, twitching or rolling, dancing or convulsing, but by definition there must be activity.³¹ After studying the trance experience and collecting data on some 488 representative societies all over the world, Bourguignon distinguished possession from trance. She further categorizes the trance experienced in some nineteenth-century revivalist religion and twentieth century Pentecostalism as a form of "possession." That among traditional societies in the world trance is most frequently interpreted as spirit possession in Africa and areas influenced by Africa, and further held that the possession-trance cult, paralleled within Christianity by some nineteenth-century revivalism and twentieth century Pentecostalism, is a predominantly African cultural configuration.³²

Possession-trance in Africa often includes the same two types of *glossolalia* found in Pentecostalism. One is rhythmic, alliterative pseudo-language. The other is actual foreign language; in most cases the person possessed has had previous contact with the language, even though he (*sic*) may be unable to speak it in his (*sic*) normal state of mind.³³

³⁰David M. Beckmann, "Trance: From Africa to Pentecostalism," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, no. XLV (January 1974): 1.

³¹Felicitas Goodman, *Speaking in Tongues: A Cross Cultural Study of Speaking in Tongues* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 58-60.

³²Erika Bourguignon, "World Distribution and Patterns of Possession States," *Trance and Possession State*, ed. by Raymond Prince (Montreal: R. M. Bucke Memorial Society. 1968), 5-25.

³³Beckmann, "Trance: From Africa to Pentecostalism," 13.

Speaking in tongues as a trance experience appears to be somewhat of a strained anthropological argument which would only have merit within Black Holiness-Pentecostalism in the sense that it is inclusive of "entranced activity." Beckmann is attempting to demonstrate that speaking in tongues, the most dramatic innovation of Pentecostalism has more important Afro-American and African antecedents. Within Black Holiness-Pentecostalism, speaking in tongues is viewed as evidence, though not the only evidence, of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is a sign whereby verification is given to the incoming of the Holy Spirit to dwell within the believer. It is more than a repetitive string of syllables; it is a way the human spirit attempts to express the inexpressible elation of its encounter with the Holy Spirit. In the words of Bruner, tongues-speaking, by being at the same time a highly spiritual and a highly physical experience, transforms the coming of the Holy Spirit into a knowable, clear and datable experience, manifest in time and space.³⁴

Speaking in tongues within Black Holiness-Pentecostalism is symbolic of surrender to God and is an indication that the Holy Spirit possesses the believer. The Holy Spirit merely seizes that member/organ of the body that no one can tame, namely, the tongue, using it to express praises to God. The Pentecostal antimonite with power is evidence of a new beginning, a new pilgrimage toward meaningful existence. Spirit-possession within the African worldview is transposed to (into) the baptism in the Holy Spirit with Black Holiness-Pentecostalism. The baptism of the "Holy Ghost" as commonly referred to is the cardinal belief among Black Holiness-Pentecostals.

Spirit Possession/Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Within Black Holiness-Pentecostalism the belief about the baptism in the Holy Spirit is thought of regarding the second or third crisis experience. While the Pauline view (regeneration, fruit of the Spirit, filled with the Spirit) is embraced, it is the Lukan view (power for service) as recorded especially in Acts that is given primary emphasis. All other doctrines and beliefs are considered secondary to a full reception of the Holy Spirit. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is held to be an encounter with God (subsequent to conversion) in which the Christian believer begins to receive the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit into his life. In regeneration, the believer experiences the Holy Spirit in the introductory ministry of the Spirit, but in

³⁴Frederick D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans 1970), 4.

the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the believer experiences the empowering ministry of the Spirit. It is the spiritual baptism where Jesus the baptizer exercises His sovereign will, control and possession of us through the person of the Holy Spirit.

The United Holy Church of America affirms its belief in the baptism in the Holy Spirit, viewing it as the gift of power on the sanctified life.³⁵ (Luke 24:49, John 7:38-39, Acts 1:5-8). This movement is open to various kinds of evidence of the incoming of the Holy Spirit including speaking in tongues. Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God of the Americas believes that "the Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire is obtainable by a definite act of appropriating faith on the part of the wholly sanctified believer, and that the initial evidence of the reception of this experience is speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance" (Acts 1:5, 8:7, 8:14-17, 10:4-46 and 19:6).³⁶ This Movement emphasizes Fire as much as the Baptism in the Holy Spirit using the scriptural sanction of Hebrews 12:29 "*For our God is a consuming fire.*" They radically contend and state that:

Fire is uncompromising. Fire Baptized saints will not compromise with the wrong in themselves. Fire will do four things: first, light up; second, warm up; third, purge; and fourth, purify. Fire Baptized folks are lit up, warmed up, purged and purified. When we use "Fire" in our name we use it as a symbol of the uncompromising God.³⁷

The baptism in the Holy Spirit with Fire is never assumed: it must be sought as a definite experience by the believer on the basis of one's faith. Experientially the Spirit baptism in this context is a radical encounter of the divine with the human spirit, infusing it with *dunamis*, transforming discipleship into horizontal responsibility. The Church of Christ Holiness U.S.A. concedes that every true believer is heir to the Holy Spirit and views the experience as subsequent to conversion, but in a terminological distinction does not view it as a "baptism" of the Holy Spirit. They contend that since the Holy Spirit's baptism of the whole church on the day of Pentecost, The Holy Spirit is referred to thereafter as a "gift" (Acts 2:38,39),

³⁵Manual, The United Holy Church of America. N.P: 1980, 9.

³⁶Fuller, W.E., *Discipline of the Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God of the Americas*, (USA: Board of Publications - F.B.H. Church of God of the Americas, 1978), 19.

³⁷*Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God of the Americas, Discipline of the Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God of the Americas* (Board of Publications of the Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God of the Americas: Atlanta: N.P., 198?), Preface.

a "receiving" (Acts 19:1,2), a "filling" (Ephesians 5:18), and "anointing" (1 John 2:27). The Holy Spirit is never again referred to as a "baptism," for there is but one baptism (Ephesians 4:1-5).³⁸ Tongues are not viewed as the only evidence, but merely as one Sign.³⁹

Garfield T. Haywood of the PAW stated that the "gift" of the Holy Spirit referred to the life, which was sacrificed and given unto us, and that it is the life of Christ Himself.⁴⁰ Haywood further held that to be born of the Spirit is to be baptized with the Holy Spirit,⁴¹ a view that is anti-Pentecostal. Golder appears to have been somewhat of a revisionist when he later wrote, "The Holy Spirit does not indwell the believer simply because he (sic) says, 'I believe'," as many evangelicals teach. St. Paul argues that the Holy Spirit comes after believing (Eph 1:13) and this is not synonymous with the baptism with the Holy Spirit.⁴²

Whatever way the baptism in the Holy Spirit is manifested or expressed among Black Holiness-Pentecostals, there appears to be a consensus that the experience is normative for all Christians, and that it endues them with power for more effective witnessing. It is a mountaintop experience received in the form of a special commitment. They agree with Kilian McDonnell that this power-generating, bridge-burning experience is the ultimate sign of the supreme relevancy of the Gospel. It is the sign that God is truly present in the consciousness of human beings and active in their personal history.⁴³

The view that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is normative for all Christians is consistent with the Church of God in Christ's view that we are not baptized with the Spirit to be saved and become the children of God, but that we are baptized with the Spirit because we are saved and are the children of God.⁴⁴ In this context, the Holy Spirit immanently indwells the soul of the believer empowering the consciousness of the believer for witness.

³⁸Church of Christ, Holiness, *Manual of the History, Doctrine, Government and Ritual of the Church of Christ (Holiness) U.S.A.* (Jackson: National Headquarters Church of Christ, Holiness, 1945), 24.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁰Paul D. Dugas, ed., *The Life and Writings of Elder G.T Haywood* (Portland, OR: Apostolic Book Publishers, 1968), 18.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 14.

⁴²Morris Golder, *The Principles of Our Doctrine*, (n.p.; n.p.196?), 14.

⁴³Kilian McDonnell, "The Ideology of Pentecostal Conversion" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 5, (Winter, 1968): 110.

⁴⁴Range, C.F., *Church of God in Christ: Official Manual* (Memphis: COGIC Publishing Board, 1973), 56.

Postscript

The infusion of African elements into Afro-American religion, especially in the South and particularly within Black Holiness-Pentecostalism hints at features, which suggest a process of indigenization. The element of call and response, a commonly identified "Africanism" can readily be discerned in the common ritual of Black folk-style worship among Black Holiness-Pentecostals. This notion can be identified in the preaching, testifying, shouting, and singing of adherents. The values attached to each component of Black folk-style worship are personal, unique and highly cherished within the tradition and can be identified in the preaching, testifying, shouting, and singing, of adherents. The values attached to each component of Black folk-style worship are personal, unique and highly cherished within the tradition. Intonation, moaning, tuning, and whooping are part of the preaching component in the Black worship experience, and these characteristics stem from the African custom of singing almost everything.⁴⁵ Moreover, the details of Afro-Christian mixture in the Black churches are hard to determine with confidence. African survivals would explain such historically puzzling features as the emphasis on spirit-possession, the "moaning" style of preaching, and the distinctive musical style in the worship services." Within Black Holiness-Pentecostalism preaching is always dialogical in spirit, mood and style. The preacher utilizes rhetorical quips frequently such as "can I find a witness" so as to encourage communal response.⁴⁶ The testimony service among Black Holiness-Pentecostals is a ritual in which believers express their private experiences with the Holy Spirit. Testimonies are spoken in a style of delivery of rhythmic cadence of free prose. Some are chanted or intoned in a quasi-solo song with repetition of words and phrases, which may be responded to by the congregation in our now familiar call and response. Within Black Holiness-Pentecostalism, the testimony serves a two-fold function. It is a mode of expression and a method of emotional release. Testimonies usually refer to praise for the gift of salvation, frequent miracles and experiences with God, which occur in the eschatological now where the past and present are fused into a meaningful event of celebration.

Black Holiness-Pentecostalism, too, rejects the abstract god of the Western philosophers and theologians and opted for the African concept of

⁴⁵Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (N.Y: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1970), 164.

⁴⁶Lester B. Scherer, *Slavery and the Churches in Early America 1619-1819* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 148.

god, the notion of a more concrete God who could be encountered at a profoundly personal level. Black Holiness-Pentecostalism opted for a God who was, in fact, the structure or context in which reality emerges and the totality of that reality. God is eternal and temporal, transcendent, and immanent. Black Holiness-Pentecostals' view of God is dynamic, for within Black Holiness Pentecostalism, the human spirit, is encountered by the Holy Spirit of God. Black Holiness-Pentecostalism welcomed the coming of the Holy Spirit not as an invader of the human spirit but rather as one who comes to *"keep you saved"* to console you through midnights of oppression and trials and be with you even to the end of the world. Discernible on the Black Holiness-Pentecostalism religious continuum is a dynamic worship style. Once its theology of power is developed, this could have profound significance for theology today. A theological-pneumatological discourse which takes seriously that the oral tradition, e.g., testimony, dance, song, spontaneity, has merit for Black Holiness-Pentecostalism and the broader culture.

The history of Black Holiness-Pentecostalism is exciting and full of triumphs as well as tragedies, full of promise and riddled with failures. The Black Holiness-Pentecostal leaders were the offspring of devoutly religious slaves whose African roots were deep within the Black religious tradition where freedom of worship and varied lifestyles were dominant motifs. The narrative of Black Holiness-Pentecostals is a story of a people, who felt the potency of the Liberator, Jesus Christ, and took His call to freedom and to experience Him seriously. Through the Black Holiness-Pentecostals, the "first love" broke through the boundaries of creeds, denominations, race and class to demonstrate that *"God has once again chosen the base things of this world to bring through the mighty, the foolishness of the world to confound the wise"* (1 Cor 1:27-29).

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“MAD WITH SUPERNATURAL JOY”: ON REPRESENTATIONS OF PENTECOSTALISM IN THE BLACK RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION

Eric Williams⁴⁷

Abstract

This article examines three distinctive impressions of Pentecostalism within the black religious imagination: Zora Neale Hurston, who engages Pentecostalism as primal African spirituality within the New World context; James Baldwin, whose representation of Pentecostalism focuses on the religious performativity and theatricality of the tradition; and Ithiel Conrad Clemmons, who argues for Pentecostalism as religious innovation, with much to teach the broader religious community about the importance of religious experience in the doing of theology. Hurston, Baldwin, and Clemmons being deeply ensconced in the complexity of black life and black religious culture, critique as well as affirm the power of the Pentecostal experience for individuals and their larger communities.

"[W]hen the Spirit of the Lord passed by, and, seizing the devotee, made him mad with supernatural joy, [this] was the last essential of Negro religion and the one more devoutly believed in than all the rest ... without this visible manifestation of the God there could be no true communion with the Invisible."⁴⁸

Early Impressions of Pentecostalism

Various elements of Pentecostalism as practiced by African Americans in the United States have received a fair share of attention in print literature over the past one hundred years. These references and interpretations have primarily been the writings of journalists, sociologists, religious historians, anthropologists, and others lacking firsthand knowledge of the tradition. Prior to any scholarly engagement of the tradition, the first recorded depictions of Black Pentecostalism were the characterizations and caricaturizations of journalist and newspaper reporters. These journalistic ethnographers captured the birth and

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⁴⁸ W.E.B DuBois, *Souls of Black Folks* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903), 134.

immediate aftermath of the Azusa Street Revival, which for many represents the mythic origins of the modern Pentecostal awakening. Birthed in an African American congregation in a Los Angeles ghetto, this local revival later spawned an international movement. These early chroniclers, themselves products of American racist ideology, in their reporting captured what they deemed as the bizarre and grotesque elements of this revival. By focusing on the religious frenzy, playing up racial stereotypes, and detailing transgressions of American racial, cultural and social mores, these reporters ultimately painted the African Americans who led and participated in this movement in a less than favorable light. Examples of this can be seen in two separate accounts from the *Los Angeles Times*, at the height of the revival in 1906:

Meetings are held in a tumble-down shack on Azusa Street, and the devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of mad excitement in their peculiar zeal. Colored people and a sprinkling of whites compose the congregation, and night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howlings of the worshippers, who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve-racking attitude of prayer and supplication. They claim to have the "gift of tongues" and be able to understand the babel.⁴⁹

In addition to disparaging the worshippers, a September 1906 account attacks the African American leadership of the movement. Calling the movement a "disgraceful intermingling of the races," a local newspaper reporter further states that these early Pentecostals:

cry and make howling noises all day and into the night. They run, jump, shake all over, shout to the top of their voice, spin around in circles, fall out on the sawdust blanketed floor jerking, kicking and rolling all over it. Some of them pass out and do not move for hours as though they were dead. These people appear to be mad, mentally deranged or under a spell. They claim to be filled with the spirit. They have a one-eyed, illiterate, Negro as their preacher who stays on his knees much of the time with his head hidden between the wooden milk crates. He doesn't talk very much, but at times he can be heard shouting, 'Repent,' and he's supposed to be running the

⁴⁹"Weird Babel of Tongues," *Los Angeles Times Daily*, April 18, 1906.

thing...they repeatedly sing the same song, 'The Comforter Has Come.'⁵⁰

These early printed accounts in both newspapers and periodicals both biased and prejudiced the early social scientific accounts of the fledgling (though soon to be burgeoning) religious movement, often leading to wholesale and categorical dismissals of both Black Pentecostals and the distinctive elements of their religious traditions.

Early Scholarly Observations

Immediately following the early journalistic accounts and their caricaturizations of the African American Pentecostal experience, the first scholars to critically examine this tradition were those trained within the fields of sociology and anthropology.⁵¹ Operating mainly from empirical epistemologies and employing the methods of the social sciences, by virtue of their training and modes of analysis, being preoccupied with the so-called "negro problem," these scholars showed very little interest in religious meaning. Seeking instead to discover what could be learned about cultural and social patterns in African American life, these early studies were particularly interested in the transformation of American religion and the attendant dynamics of black culture, migration, and urbanization.

Because of a lack of sensitivity to differences in theological beliefs, a significant problem attending these early social-scientific examinations was the tendency to situate and to interpret Pentecostalism within the sociological taxonomy of urban sects and cults rather than view the tradition as an institutional expression of American Christianity. By interpreting Pentecostalism within this strictly social-scientific gaze, these Pentecostals were often interpreted through theories of deprivation, anomie, millenarianism, and thus were dismissed as otherworldly, apolitical and socially disengaged.

Recent Developments and Alternative Representations

Within the past few decades, as the movement expanded within African American communities across the nation, more sophisticated

⁵⁰Jack Hayford, *The Charismatic Century: The Enduring Impact of the Azusa Street Revival* (Warner Faith Books, 2006), 77.

⁵¹These scholars include: Elmer T. Clark; Robert Mapes Anderson; and Sydney Ahlstrom.

interpretations of the tradition emerge by those who seriously engage in the study of both black religion and culture. These more nuanced and informed perspectives create a discursive space for interpreters of black religion from both inside and outside of the Pentecostal tradition; allowing those within the tradition to share their own stories and allowing informed outsiders to offer keen insights. This paper argues for three distinctive representations of Pentecostalism in the black religious imagination: 1) the outsider, Zora Neale Hurston, the folklorist and cultural anthropologist, represents Pentecostalism, or the sanctified church, in her writings as primal African spirituality within the New World context. 2) literary and cultural theorist, and former insider, James Baldwin, provides us with a representation of Pentecostalism that is focused on the religious performativity and theatricality of the tradition. 3) and finally, Ithiel Conrad Clemmons, Pentecostal pastor and theologian, and reflective insider represent Pentecostalism as religious innovation, with much to teach the broader Christian community about the importance of religious experience in the doing of theology. Hurston, Baldwin, and Clemmons are able to give sophisticated accounts of the “supernatural joy” experienced by Pentecostal believers, which earlier outside observers often dismissed as “madness.” All three, being deeply ensconced in the complexity of black life and black religious culture, critique as well as affirm the power of the Pentecostal experience for individuals and their broader communities. And while their particular insider/outsider statuses, as well as their religious backgrounds and academic training, provide different interpretations of the tradition, all three thinkers affirm the dynamic, powerful and multivalent meanings of Pentecostalism within the black religious imagination.

“Old Gods by New Names”: Pentecostalism as Continuation of African Religion

Perhaps one of the earliest scholars to comment upon the religious and cultural significance of African American Pentecostalism in both American religious life and culture is that of folklorist and cultural anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston. A student of renowned German-American cultural anthropologist Franz Boas considered the father of both American and modern anthropology, Hurston would devote her studies of religion, folklore, and anthropology to the cultural practices of African-descended peoples in the Americas. Though reared within the all-black township of Eatonville, Florida and describing herself as one “born with

God in the house,"⁵² it was from Boas and her other social-scientific tutors that Hurston would acquire and begin to employ what she once called the "spy-glass of Anthropology."⁵³ It was through the lens of anthropology that she would interpret various aspects of African diasporan religious life in the Americas.

Though much has been written concerning Hurston's intrigue with African retentions in the religious lives of the descendants of Africa in the Americas focusing primarily on her writings regarding Voodoo, Caribbean religions, conjuring traditions, folk religion and that which she called hoodoo beliefs, much less has been made of her reflections on African survivals within African American Christianity. Though Hurston herself was the daughter of a Baptist minister, as it relates to her writings on Afro-Protestant religious practices, she would relegate her anthropological observations to the shared ecumenical experiences of the conversion narratives, the call narratives, and the preaching traditions. However, it was in her research into African American Pentecostalism, the tradition which she called the sanctified church that would lead her to the conclusion that "the negro has not been Christianized as extensively as is believed. The great masses are still standing before their pagan altar and calling old gods by new names."⁵⁴ In as much as Hurston understood the tradition as having tapped into primal African spirituality and managed to remain unencumbered by the burden of black respectability and the gaze of whiteness, Hurston would provide an interpretation of Black Pentecostalism as both an essentially African and radically Re-Africanizing religious tradition.

In her anthropological writings dating back as early as 1926, Hurston would discuss the sanctified church as a highly distinctive form of both African religion (and to a lesser extent, American Christianity), and in doing so, would point to the need for further reflection upon the tradition. According to Hurston, "the rise of various groups of saints in America in the last twenty years is not the appearance of a new religion as has been reported. It is, in fact, the older forms of Negro religious expression asserting themselves against the new."⁵⁵ Seeing African American Pentecostalism as the return of the repressed in New World African spirituality, Hurston would argue that one of the geniuses of this tradition is that it functions as "a protest against the high-brow tendency in

⁵²Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on the Road* (Philadelphia: JB Lippincott, 1942), 266.

⁵³Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Publishers, 1935), 1.

⁵⁴Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church* (Berkeley: Turtle Island, 1981), 103.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

Negro Protestant congregations as the Negroes gain more education and wealth." ⁵⁶ In further lodging Black Pentecostalism within African indigenous spirituality, Hurston would go as far as saying that in the ecstasy-filled worship experience, the worshipping Pentecostal "congregation is restored to its primitive altars under the new name of Christ."⁵⁷

Hurston, working to counter the conventional perceptions that Black religious expression needed to be respectable, that is – to fit within white liturgical standards and structures – emphasizes the distinctive nature of black religious rituals when blacks refrain from religious performance under the gaze of whiteness. Hurston both locates and appreciates the more authentic spiritual praxis in these highly segregated worship spaces.

But not only for Hurston was Pentecostalism understood as a clear continuation of indigenous African religion in America, she would also see within the Pentecostal tradition the potential and power to re-Africanize other forms and traditions of African American music and spirituality. Seeing Black Pentecostal spirituality as a possessing and "revitalizing element in Negro music and religion" for Hurston the tradition's power rested in the spirituality's potential for: "putting back into Negro religion those elements which were brought over from Africa and grafted onto Christianity as soon as the Negro came in contact with [white religion], but which are being rooted out as the American Negro [sought to assimilate]"⁵⁸ Hurston points us to the reality that Africans were introduced to a very particular form of Christianity when they were involuntarily brought to the New World, what Frederick Douglass calls "slaveholding religion."⁵⁹ So, in pointing out the continuation of African religious rituals in America, Hurston reminds us that Africans had a vibrant and rich spiritual cosmology before contact with their Christian enslavers.

Understanding the sanctified church as a living and breathing African institution, for Hurston, nowhere was this African and re-Africanizing principle more clearly revealed than in the ritual performance of the 'Holy Dance' or shouting tradition. According to Hurston:

There can be little doubt that shouting is a survival of the African "possession" by the gods. In Africa it is sacred to the priesthood or

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., 104.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 118.

acolytes, in America it has become generalized. The implication is the same, however, it is a sign of special favor from the spirit that it chooses to drive out the individual consciousness temporarily and use the body for its expression."⁶⁰

Seeing the sanctified shout as "nothing more than a continuation of the African "possession" by the gods," according to Hurston:

The gods possess the body of the worshipper, and he or she is supposed to know nothing of their actions until the god decamps. This is still in most Negro Protestant churches [but] is universal in the Sanctified churches. They protest against the more highbrow churches' efforts to stop it.⁶¹

While Hurston highlights the ecstatic bodily practice of shouting, she also, more importantly, draws our attention to ways in which the sanctified church consciously resisted Western religious domination. In allowing their bodies to move in these spaces and in these ways, Pentecostals understood the tradition of holy dancing as both protest and praise. In highlighting this representation of Pentecostalism, Hurston depicts the deeply African and radically Africanizing nature of Black Pentecostal religious ritual. This influence would be felt in other Afro-Protestant congregations as time would evolve.

In light of Hurston's observations, many scholars would begin to consider the significance of Pentecostalism within American Christianity; to ponder the relationship between Black Pentecostalism to African religions, and to take seriously the sanctified church as a highly distinctive institutional expression of American religion and culture. It is within the writings of James Baldwin that we can see an even fuller representation of Pentecostalism operating within the African American imagination.

"No Drama like the Drama of the Saints Rejoicing": Black Pentecostalism as Religious Performance

Complementing the representation of the Sanctified Church as African religion offered by Hurston, and further complicating the power and beauty of that tradition, the celebrated African American literary and cultural theorist, James Baldwin also attends to Black Pentecostalism as a

⁶⁰Hurston, *The Sanctified Church*, 91.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 104.

neglected, yet powerful cultural and religious trajectory in American life. Like Hurston, whose father was a Baptist minister, Baldwin would receive his earliest religious instruction from his step-father, a Baptist minister in New York City. Though Baldwin would spend his early childhood years in his father's church, it was during the summer of his fourteenth birthday that according to Baldwin, he "underwent a prolonged religious crisis [and] discovered God, His saints and angels, and His blazing Hell."⁶² It was at this time, through a dramatic religious conversion, that young Baldwin was taken hold of by the fires of Black Pentecostal religion, and for three years he would become a member and an associate minister of a small Pentecostal congregation in Harlem. Of his time within this tradition, Baldwin would later write, that he grew up "in the shadow of the Holy Ghost."⁶³ And it was under the shadow of the Spirit that Baldwin, now an intimate insider, would become one of Black Pentecostalism's greatest admirers and one of its harshest critics.

Named by one of his critics as "America's inside eye on the Black Holiness-Pentecostal churches,"⁶⁴ Baldwin's writings would expose the world to the very inner life of this tradition by exposing the moral, cultural and theological worlds inhabited by those who dwelled within her gates, and the ways in which this religion was actively performed by those who believed. Beginning with the 1953 publication of his first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Baldwin would expose a wider, largely secular, audience to Black Pentecostal beliefs and practices including the "tarrying" prayer tradition, the tradition of holy dancing, and the moral imperatives of the holiness codes, which served as guides for the faithful in their quests to live "in the world, but not of the world." By consciously highlighting these particular practices, Baldwin emphasized both the percussive and performative nature of Black Pentecostal spirituality; thus providing us with yet another window into how Pentecostalism was envisioned within the black religious imagination.

As it relates to Baldwin's conscious representation of Pentecostalism as a dynamic cultural and religious theater, in the introductory notes to his 1954 theatrical debut, *The Amen Corner*, Baldwin reveals to his readership the logic undergirding his very conscious depiction of Pentecostalism as religious performance. In efforts of

⁶²James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dell Press, 1963), 10.

⁶³Fred R. Standley and Louis H. Pratt, *Conversations with James Baldwin* (University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 106.

⁶⁴Ithiel Clemmons, *C.H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ* (Bakersfield: Pneuma Life Publishers, 1996), vii.

shedding light upon his creative process while simultaneously bearing witness to the drama that is Black Pentecostal ritual performance, Baldwin would say of his corpus:

I was armed, I knew, in attempting to write...by the fact that I was born in the church. I knew that out of the ritual of the church, historically speaking, comes the act of theater, the *communion* which is the theater. And I knew that what I wanted to do in the theater was to recreate moments I remembered as a boy preacher, to involve the people, even against their will, to shake them up, and hopefully, to change them.⁶⁵

Drawing upon memories of his ministerial participation in the Sanctified church of his youth, Baldwin's literary musings on Pentecostalism sought to recreate both the drama and the communion of the Black Pentecostal worship experience. By depicting scenes of religious dancing, weeping, tarrying prayers, and other ecstatic liturgical gestures, Baldwin draws attention to both the individual and the corporate function of ritual performance within the Black Pentecostal tradition. While the singular individual may dance or rejoice, he or she is affirmed and supported by other cast members involved in the liturgical drama, who often join in with their acts of worship. Employing the language of phenomenology in his thick descriptions, Baldwin provides his readers with a hermeneutic, or lens of interpretation, for understanding the performance of Black Pentecostal worship.

In a graphic worship scene in the very first chapter of *Go Tell It on The Mountain*, Baldwin provides his readers with a critical gaze into both the context (theater) and event (production) of Black Pentecostal worship. As the scene unfolds, Elisha, the congregation's musician and friend of the young protagonist is overcome by the sacred while furnishing music for an all-night prayer meeting. Upon being seized by the Spirit and entering into what appears to be a state of ecstasy, Elisha, who initially played a supporting role in the production, now temporarily becomes the main character. Baldwin seeks to capture both the intensity and dynamism of the moment with meticulous detail as he explains:

He struck on the piano one last, wild note, and threw up his hands, palms upward, stretched wide apart. The tambourines raced to fill the vacuum left by the silent piano, and his cry drew answering

⁶⁵James Baldwin, *The Amen Corner* (New York: Dial Press, 1954), xviii.

cries. Then he was on his feet, turning, blind, his face congested, contorted with this rage, and the muscles leaping and swelling in his long, dark neck. It seemed that he could not breathe, that his body could not contain his passion, that he would be, before their eyes, dispersed into the waiting air. His hands, rigid to the very fingertips moved outward and back against his hips, his sightless eyes looked upward, and he began to dance. Then his hands closed into fists, and his head snapped downward, his sweat loosening the grease that slicked down his hair; and the rhythm of all others quickened to match Elisha's rhythm; his thighs moved terribly against the cloth of his suit, his heels beat on the floor, and his fists moved beside his body as though he were beating his own drum. And so, for a while, in the center of the dancers, head down, fists beating, on, on, unbearably, until it seemed the walls of the church would fall for very sound; and then, in a moment, with a cry, head up, arms high in the air, sweat pouring from his forehead, and all his body dancing as though it would never stop...he dropped like some animal felled by a hammer -- moaning, on his face. And then a great moaning filled the church.⁶⁶

With descriptive precision, Baldwin fleshes out the details of this actor in the throes of his performance for the reading audience. We are meant to hear the echoes of the tambourines and see the contortions of Elisha's body in rhythm with the clapping and singing. We are even called upon to imagine the vibrations of the "walls of the church" that may possibly fall as Elisha's body acts like a percussive instrument. Baldwin forces the reader to engage his or her imagination, even as he recreates a primal scene of worship from the Black Pentecostal tradition. We, the readers, become insiders – or actors – in the drama that Baldwin recreates.

Further underscoring the theatrical nature of Black Pentecostal religious performance, and demonstrating the deeply communal nature of the production, in his 1963 publication, *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin writes of his own experience within the tradition. Though having been disengaged from the tradition for some time, he continues to extol the beauty, significance and the indelible imprint left upon him by the tradition when he writes:

there is no music like that music, no drama like the drama of the saints rejoicing, the sinners moaning, the tambourines racing, and

⁶⁶James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (New York: Knopf, 1953), 15-16.

all those voices coming together and crying holy unto the Lord. There is still, for me, no pathos quite like the pathos of those multicolored, worn, somehow triumphant and transfigured faces, speaking from the depths of a visible, tangible, continuing despair of the goodness of the Lord. I have never seen anything to equal the fire and excitement that sometimes, without warning, would fill a church, causing the church...to rock. Nothing that has happened to me since equals the power and the glory that I sometimes felt when, in the middle of a sermon, I knew that I was somehow, by some miracle, really carrying, as they said, the “Word” when the church and I were one. Their pain and joy were mine, and mine was theirs – they surrendered their pain and joy to me. I surrendered mine to them – and their cries of “Amen!” and “Hallelujah” and “Yes, Lord!” and “Praise His name!” and “Preach it, brother!” sustained and whipped on my solos until we all became equal, wringing wet, singing and dancing, in anguish and rejoicing, at the foot of the altar.⁶⁷

Highlighting the soaring drama and moments of deep intensity within the worship experience he knew intimately, Baldwin provides the world with a representation of Black Pentecostalism that is inextricably bound with the theatrical. Baldwin’s detailed insider accounts, along with his ability to recreate this highly sophisticated moral and religious tapestry that is the African American Pentecostal experience, demonstrated that this tradition both merited and demanded further scholarly attention.

“Beyond Conceptual Language and Proposition”: Black Pentecostalism as Religious Innovation

Knowledgeable of both the anthropological insights of Hurston and the literary representations of Baldwin, the late Bishop Ithiel Conrad Clemmons, former Pentecostal minister and scholar from the Church of God in Christ, in both his pastoral and scholarly reflections would seek to provide an expressly theological interpretation of African American Pentecostalism. Like Hurston and Baldwin before him, Clemmons was also reared in the home of a minister; his father, Frank Clemmons, was a Pentecostal pastor and bishop in Brooklyn, New York. While Hurston was an outsider to the Pentecostal tradition and Baldwin was a former insider who eventually disengages from the tradition, Clemmons was a life-long

⁶⁷Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 33-4.

member, an informed and reflective insider, whose roots in Pentecostalism sustained him from the cradle until the grave. Clemmons, formally trained in the fields of theology and religious history, used his insights to reflect upon the tradition in which he was nurtured and in doing so, we are provided with a representation of Black Pentecostalism as religious innovation.

Grounding his theological perspectives within the critical disciplines of Church history, political theology, and Christian spirituality, Clemmons' distinctive vocation as a pastor-scholar provided him with a unique vantage for interpreting the tongues of his native African-American Pentecostal tradition to his interlocutors in each of the publics he engaged. As a Black Pentecostal theologian with an orientation towards history and Christian mysticism, in his own life and ministry, Clemmons endeavored to discern, embody and bear witness to the unique deposit of faith bequeathed to him by his enslaved African progenitors and his pioneer Black Holiness and Pentecostal forbearers. With his larger theological project critically situated within the religious experiences of New World Africans in the Americas, according to Wilmore, Clemmons' tracing of the activity of the divine in human history was critically aligned with the hierophantic nature of the larger tradition of African religion throughout the diaspora. According to Wilmore, within the wider African diasporan religious experience:

There [has always been], from the beginning, a fusion between a highly developed and pervasive feeling about the hierophantic nature of historical experience flowing from the African religious past, and a radical and programmatic secularity, related to the experience of slavery and oppression, which constituted the essential and most significant characteristic of Black religion.⁶⁸

Seeing himself as one who sought “to point out the hidden but powerfully present footprints of God in the affairs of [humankind] and nations”⁶⁹ Clemmons, according to theologian Harold Dean Trulear, “desired to strengthen the witness of his beloved [tradition] through proffering the spirituality of its founding fathers and mothers as a model

⁶⁸Gayraud S Wilmore. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 1.

⁶⁹Ithiel Clemmons, “What Price Reconciliation: Reflections on the Memphis Dialogue,” in *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 18, no.1 (1996): 118.

for contemporary ministry.”⁷⁰ For Clemmons, human history was the arena of divine activity and the faithful would do well “to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered.”

This belief that his predecessors had a revelation of the Sacred was central to both Clemmons’ historical and theological projects. Having embraced a high view of history and envisioning a constructive theological use for this history, Clemmons asserted that “[t]he recovery of a meaningful [contemporary] faith includes the discovery and the interpretation of God’s activity and power in the past and the discernment of how this same activity and power continues today.”⁷¹ Believing that the testimonies of his forbearers were crucial to this particular theological enterprise, Clemmons contended that:

through the use of narrative, the [contemporary] faith community [attempts] to interpret and reinterpret the experiences of its foreparents and interface these interpretations with the contemporary black experience. In this, the faith community attempt[s] to live out its historical faith in the contemporary context.⁷²

Any critical reading of Clemmons that takes his scholarship seriously must first contend with his constructive use of history for the purpose of creating a Black Pentecostal spirituality. For Clemmons, retrieval of this early history was crucial for understanding and appreciating what he saw as the innovative dimension of Black Pentecostal experience, that is: *taking seriously the role of religious experience as a point of departure for doing the work of Christian theology*.

Early on in his spiritual and theological development, Clemmons became interested in deepening his understanding of his tradition’s spirituality and theology of the Holy Spirit. Clemmons would come to see these aspects of his community’s theology as an ecumenical offering from his tradition to the broader church, with potential for opening up new avenues for both doing theology and promoting Christian unity. Realizing that these elements of Pentecostal theology “tended to move in the

⁷⁰ Harold Dean Trulear, “Ithiel C. Clemmons, Bishop C.H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ,” in *Pneuma: The Journal for the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 21, no 2 (1999), 350.

⁷¹ Ithiel Clemmons, “Shaping the Coming Era of the Church of God in Christ in Eastern New York, First Jurisdiction” (DMin diss., New York Theological Seminary, 1972), 14.

⁷² Ibid.

direction of an experiential theology focused on awe, mystery, and wonder,” Clemmons would argue that these emphases gave “rise to specific concern with dogma, worship and ritual.”⁷³ As one who consciously understood his Pentecostal faith within the context of the longer history of the Christian Church, Clemmons credited his Pentecostal fore parents for their boldness in safeguarding religious experience as a valid point of entry for doing theology.

In bestowing proper credit to his predecessors for their critical theological insights, Clemmons said that though these sainted mothers and fathers “did not have access to extensive academic opportunities” and “they were bereft of the intellectual tools with which to systemize their spiritual insights into theological discourse, literacy was not a prerequisite to revelation.” Clemmons further added, “God gave to them the wisdom to penetrate behind the walls of sophisticated Christian orthodoxy and [t]hey were able to get at and utilize genuine religious experience as a cure for the ills of their day.”⁷⁴ In defense of their oral theological method, Clemmons maintained that “[a]lthough these elements of faith may [have] appear[ed] to be put together uncritically within the framework of an ethno-religious impulse, this serious engagement of pneumatology occasioned an essential breakthrough within the Christian tradition.”⁷⁵ This breakthrough for Clemmons was his community’s modest ecumenical offering to the wider Christian church.

Seeing within his formative Pentecostal tradition a vibrant ecumenical witness and believing wholeheartedly that “Black Holiness Pentecostalism [possessed] the potential to give [a] much-needed fresh theological articulation to diverse [forms of] spirituality and [to] provide a pneumatology of spontaneity,”⁷⁶ Clemmons posited:

[T]here is little doubt among scholars, church leaders [and] laypersons today that the twentieth-century Pentecostal movement with its emphasis on pneumatology as the point of beginning in doing theology has challenged the traditional patristic, scholastic and protest orthodox theologies to go *beyond conceptual language and proposition to experienced presence*. Pentecostalism has come

⁷³ Ibid., 187

⁷⁴ Clemmons, “The Recovery of Biblical Holiness Part I: Holiness, The More Excellent Way,” audiocassette.

⁷⁵ Clemmons, “Shaping the Coming Era,” 167.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 175.

across as essentially an experience. This accounts for its potential enrichment of theological reflection and its danger.⁷⁷

In moving beyond conceptual language and propositional thinking as starting points for theological reflection to “experienced presence,” Clemmons argued that his tradition’s distinctive approach to theological praxis “continues to challenge any approach to theology that is primarily academic rather than experiential.”⁷⁸ Clemmons saw this as perhaps one of the chief virtues of his community’s theology.

On the Ecstasies and Epistemologies of Life: Black Pentecostalism as the Stuff of Artists, Preachers and Story-Tellers

Hurston (outsider), Baldwin, (former-insider) and Clemmons, (reflective-insider) offer three distinct lenses for envisioning Pentecostalism within the Black religious imagination. As an outsider, examining Black Pentecostalism from an anthropological framework, Hurston is keen to connect the “sanctified church” to indigenous African spirituality, even to the extent of questioning and dismissing the tradition’s claim to Christianity. Like Baldwin, Hurston highlights both the collective ecstasies of the congregation and the congregants’ personal experiences of the sacred. For Hurston, the beauty and virtue of the sanctified church lie in its ability to remain unencumbered by the pressures of Black respectability, oblivious to the white gaze, reconnecting with a grand tradition of African spirit possession, and its potential and power to help re-Africanize other forms of new world African spirituality.

Baldwin, a former insider, envisions Black Pentecostalism as a theater of the sacred. In this theater, worshipping black bodies are drawn together, through the experience of the Holy Spirit, into the religious performance. With greater interest in aesthetics than Hurston, Baldwin emphasizes the beauty of Black Holiness worship, whose elegance could rival that of the theaters of ancient Greece. In the experience of the sacred for Baldwin, worshippers stand outside of themselves, and being overwhelmed by the holy, constitute an extemporaneous liturgical drama.

For Clemmons, who understands himself as both an informed and reflective insider, interpreting Pentecostalism from the standpoint of

⁷⁷ Ibid., 173.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 174.

Christian pneumatology allows him to envision the encounter of the Spirit as the moment of revelation. Like Hurston, Clemmons also sees this moment as tied to the African past, through the deeply moving religious experiences of his enslaved African fore-bearers and their faith in the Almighty sovereign God who sustained them during the hell of American slavery. For Clemmons, this African past has been Christianized and sanctified, thus allowing the worshipper to experience the awe, mystery, and wonder of the Christian God. Clemmons sees this theology of “experienced presence” as innovative for Christian unity and theology today.

As this paper attempts to demonstrate, in the African American religious imagination, Pentecostalism is envisioned as being concerned with: spirit (both Holy Spirit and/or ancestral spirits); materiality (both collective and individual bodies); and claims to experience and revelation. Though the three figures I have chosen speak from different angles as it relates to their positionality to the tradition, each one is keen to affirm the ecstatic as a way of knowing and experiencing transcendence (or something greater and beyond themselves) in the varying contexts and rhythms of life. Moreover, representations of Pentecostalism are not confined to practitioners and scholars of religion, but they envision a much wider human community. As a subject of critical human inquiry, Pentecostalism provides for Hurston, Baldwin, and Clemmons, windows for understanding life, the very stuff of life, the way life is to be lived, loved, shared, celebrated, and given. As a source for religious, artistic, and cultural innovation, Black Pentecostalism continues to provide artists, storytellers, and preachers with the source material for their narratives of faith, suffering, struggle, and hope. And it is in this sense alone that the power and beauty of Black Pentecostal fire yet makes its adherents *mad with supernatural joy*.

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AFRICAN AMERICAN PENTECOSTALISM AND THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Frederick Ware¹

Abstract

In the United States, a commonly held assumption is that the Constitutional separation of church and state necessitates a separation also of religion and politics, justifies a secular state, and commends reason as the “neutral” language of the secular state as well as the public square itself. Against this assumption, this article argues that, in our pluralist society, if our moral and religious convictions unavoidably influence our interactions with one another, then African American Pentecostalism, as a distinct expression of belief, morality, and thought, has a place in the public square. The article not only extols African American Pentecostalism’s qualities that contribute to social and political improvement, but also points out its aspects that are irrelevant to, obstructive, or impractical in the public square. Still, Pentecostalism’s witness of encounter with the Transcendent (God) establishes a locus of value for challenging the secular state’s judgements about matters having moral and religious undercurrents.

Keywords:

Pentecostalism
Democracy
Public Square
Religious Freedom

A Definition of “Public Square”

The term “public square” has fared no better than other terms that enter regular usage but without increased knowledge or their meanings. Most persons intuit that the public square, by virtue of the adjective that modifies the word “square,” has something to do with that which goes on in public life. Fewer persons are aware of the literal and figurative meanings associated with the term.

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A public square is figuratively and literally a “place” of gathering and interaction for all persons comprising the body politic, with focused attention on the facilities, services, and privileges clearly distinguished from the amenities in areas of social life and voluntary associations recognized as “private.” In the literal sense, a public square is an open area at the intersection of two or more streets, a place where several roads converge upon the center of a township. The public square could be a place such as a market or building where persons can meet for talk and other exchanges. The term is inclusive of the government-supported places such as schools, parks, courts, offices, and agencies available to its citizenry. Once persons have been drawn into these and other spaces, a presumed courtesy and access to services are expected. Pentecostals are one among many groups in the American body politic who are drawn from their private practice of religion into the public square for engagement with countless others on a wide range of concerns and issues.

Within American society, the concept of the public square is all the more tenuous because of the immense diversity and disparities within the nation’s population. More and more, diversity is being recognized and justified as a good thing for the United States. The legitimacy of institutions, organizations, businesses, and even churches is thought to be proven by whatever they can cite as evidence of their diversity. Unfortunately, the increased appreciation of diversity has not been accompanied by increased equality. The rates of poverty have increased, with the gap between the rich and poor more extensive than it has ever been in American history. The illusion that the United States had entered a period that is post-racial, upon the election of Barack Obama to the Presidency, has been overturned by the realities of persistent and pervasive racism exposed by rigorous scholarship and new waves of protest.²

Religion and the Public Square

The notion of a public square is further complicated by the confused and confusing position taken on the exclusion of religion from public life. In the United States, there is a Constitutional separation of church and state that is thought to require a separation also of religion and

²Scholarship of this kind is modelled in Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2014) as well as in the history of Black Lives Matter documented in Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor’s *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

politics and justification for a secular and supposedly neutral state. The First Amendment contains an Establishment Clause (that Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion) and a Freedom Clause (that Congress shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise thereof). The government is supposed to be neutral on matters of religion. The Congress is barred from making laws that impose religion upon the citizenry. Persons, as they are guided by conscience, are entitled to hold any religious belief so long as they do not violate the rule of law. Of necessity, in a pluralist society, the state must rest upon a non-religious foundation. The public square, in a sense, is “naked,” stripped of religion overt and subtle, except maybe for the “civil religion” of the state.

In theory, reason becomes the “neutral” language of the secular state, in contrast to religion, which is regarded as private and inaccessible to the population at large. This supremacy of reason has resulted both in the outright rejection of religion and the reduction of religion to its statement only in secular terms. Religious language, ideas, and values are excluded from the public square unless they can be translated in the neutral, universal terms of reason. Based on the association of religion with the irrational, the processes of government are thought to run smoothly when disentangled from religious traditions, communities, and organizations. Ironically, reason does not reign in the public square. Rather than debating the issues and attempting to win by rational argument, politics descends to *ad hominem* attacks, defamation, filibuster, and boycott to force the opposition’s submission.

In reality, (1) there is an uneven, inconsistent purge of religion from the public square and (2) religious convictions constantly influence persons’ dealings with each other in the public square. The practice of prayer has been challenged in public schools, either leading to its elimination or continuation under very stringent rules. Still, public schools manage ways to close for religious holidays such as Passover and Good Friday. No court rulings are made to invalidate closing of government offices on Sunday or Christmas Day, weekly and annual observances for Christians. In lived experience, the tug-and-pull of the political process invariably aligns the state, more or less, with whichever religious tradition that happens to prevail at any given time. And more often than not, religious faith has an indirect role in shaping public discourse and public policy. Religion continues to play an essential and influential role in public life, in spite of the decline in religious affiliation.

Partisan Politics in Christian Social Imagination

Studies, like the Pew Research Center's analysis of church membership and political party affiliation, show unquestionably the correlation of race, religion, and partisan politics in the United States.³ In the United States, Protestant Christian denominations are divided into their affiliations with and leanings toward Republican, Democratic, or Independent organizations seeking through the electoral process to acquire and exercise power in government. White Pentecostal churches, like most white Evangelical churches, lean towards the Republican Party. The Church of God (Cleveland, TN) leans 52% Republican, 26% Democratic, and 22% Independent. The Assemblies of God leans 57% Republican, 27% Democratic, and 17% Independent. The Mormon Church whose members are mostly white leans 70% Republican. The Church of God in Christ (COGIC), the only Black Pentecostal church included in the study, leans 75% Democratic, 14% Republican, and 11% Independent. Other historically black Christian denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church and National Baptist Convention lean 92% and 87% Democratic, respectively. The statistics disclose the apparent fact that, regarding Christian affiliation, the Republican Party's base is white Christian and the Democratic Party's base is black Christian.

African American Pentecostals' social imagination and civic engagement are heavily influenced as well as flustered by their location within the Democratic bloc. The Democratic Party is composed of three roughly equal groups: (1) the religiously unaffiliated persons of any ethnicity, (2) white Christians who are liberal not only in their political views but also in their theological perspectives, and (3) people of color who are religious.⁴ African Americans are the core of this third group. African American churches are morally and theologically conservative but

³U.S. Religious Groups and Their Political Leanings (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, February 2016): <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/23/u-s-religious-groups-and-their-political-leanings/>.

⁴Emma Green, "Democrats Have a Religion Problem: A Conversation with Michael Wear," *The Atlantic* (December 29, 2016): <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/12/democrats-have-a-religion-problem/510761>. The roles of religion and persons of faith in the Democratic Party are explored further in Michael Wear's *Reclaiming Hope: Lessons Learned in the Obama White House about the Future of Faith in America* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Books, 2017).

socially progressive. They are liberal on economic and civil rights issues, mostly limited to concerns with racial justice, but share much in common theologically with their white Evangelical counterparts who tend to vote Republican. For the sake of coherence, most African Americans are choosing the opposite extremes of liberalism or conservatism while a few are occupying the tensions of the middle. For example, Reverend William Barber has developed a theological position that marries the social progressivism in Democratic politics and Protestant liberalism. Leaving the Democratic Party for the Republican Party, Bishop Harry R. Jackson argues that moral conservatism carries with it a commitment to political conservatism.⁵ Counter to the prevailing trend of the Democratic Party's support of gay rights, Pentecostals like Reverend Leah Daughtry remain within the party and still hold to the traditional view of marriage between male and female.

The alignment of African American churches with the Democratic Party is as problematic as the alignment of white Evangelical churches with the Republican Party. African Americans regard religion as highly important in their lives but affiliate with a political party that has become increasingly averse to religion or imposes the rule of neutral (secular) language for any persons of faith desiring to speak. In the Pew Research Center's U.S. Religious Landscape Survey; 97% of blacks believe in God, with 71% convinced that God is personal and only 19% saying that God is an impersonal force or 3% claiming to be uncertain.⁶ The Democratic Party, still majority white like the Republican Party, makes overtures to various minority groups with promises to promote and protect the marginalized. The political rhetoric of the Democratic Party depicts African Americans, Latinos, women, and LGBTs as "victims" and represents Republican opposition as expressions of bigotry and racism, which might be true in some cases but not in all. Through the prism of partisan politics, African Americans assume that liberalism, more than conservatism, comes closest to the politics of Jesus.⁷ *The Open Letter to*

⁵Harry R. Jackson, *The Truth in Black and White: A New Look at the Shifting Landscape of Race, Religion, and Politics in America Today* (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline, 2008), 28, 106, 108.

⁶U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Affiliation: Diverse and Dynamic (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, February 2008):

<http://www.pewforum.org/files/2013/05/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>.

⁷Obery M. Hendricks, *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2007), 317.

Hillary Clinton Regarding Religious Freedom for Black America, signed by several African American clergy and scholars, states the demand of black Christians to be heard and their concerns taken seriously.⁸ The Republican Party reaches out to Christians, mainly white Evangelicals, and allows them limited expression of faith in public life. However, Jesus' solidarity with the poor and Hebrew Bible proscriptions against greed, selfishness, and injustice are very much at odds with the capitalism supported by political conservatives in the Republican Party.⁹ Whereas white Evangelical Christians grapple with reconciling the mandate of social justice with the political conservatism of the Republican Party, African American Christians struggle with reconciling their moral conservatism with the Democratic Party's liberalism.

Christian Interpretations of Civic Engagement

In addition to partisan politics, Christian faith and action is informed by other perspectives. Further complicating Christian social imagination are the broad, competing notions about social and political engagement held by Christians themselves. There are four perspectives that influence Christian thought. They are Christian Realism, Christian Idealism, Christian Reconstructionism, and Christian Communitarianism. Christian Realism is the dominant view. The other three views (Christian Idealism, Christian Reconstructionism, and Christian Communitarianism) vie against one another, with Christian Idealism having reached its height in the 1960s and laying the foundation for elected black political leadership and the political representation of other minorities. Among African Americans, the Christian Idealist view has enjoyed the highest level of acceptance. Of late, that is, since the 1980s, Christian Reconstructionism has dominated the interpretation of Christianity and morality in American public life mostly among Evangelicals. Since the 1970s, Christian Communitarianism has spread slowly and rather quietly among various Christian groups seeking to realize the potential of the Church as an autonomous institution for social change through reconciliation and community development.

⁸ Open Letter to Hillary Clinton Regarding Religious Freedom for Black America (Boston: Seymour Institute for Black Church and Policy Studies, 2016): <https://www.seymourinstitute.com/open-letter.html>.

⁹ Obery M. Hendricks, *The Universe Bends toward Justice: Radical Reflections on the Bible, the Church, and the Body Politic* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 116-119, 123, 139, 180-181.

Christian Realism is the view that, because humans are sinners, the moral principles that normally govern Christian life have limited or no application in public life, government, and international affairs. The role of democratic government is to maintain détente between competing interest groups. Democracy is all about maintaining order, national security, and the system of property.¹⁰ Effective political action is morally ambiguous and grounded in pragmatism.¹¹

Prior to Barack Obama's election to the Presidency of the United States, he leaned towards a Christian Idealist perspective, probably doing so because of his acknowledged admiration of leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Early in his term as President, in his Nobel Peace Prize Speech, he stated a perspective that aligns, even repeats, the tenets of Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian Realism. Claims made in his speech include: (1) A world without war is unrealistic; (2) Evil exists in the world and cannot be eliminated entirely from it; (3) Idealists like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., are not the only voices that we should consider in our decisions about war and peace; and (4) Though we cannot rid the world of war, we can control and contain war.

An exemplar of Pentecostalism within the framework of Christian Realism is John Ashcroft, former Missouri Governor, U.S. Attorney General and U.S. Senator. Ashcroft had a distinguished career in public office where he was more noted for his acumen in statecraft than for attempts to legislate Christian values. Other Pentecostals who could be characterized as Christian realists would be those persons in military vocations or public service roles where religious faith is regarded as private and kept separate from public life.¹² Bishop David A. Hall's concerns about COGIC members' not understanding and observing properly COGIC's pacifist position, which he talks about in his *Essays to the Next Generation*, underscores the problem of ethical dualism among those COGIC members adopting consciously or unconsciously some form of Christian Realism as their moral guide for vocations in military service.

As articulated best by Martin Luther King, Jr., whose activism has motivated many persons to adopt this perspective, Christian Idealism is the view that moral principles, resting upon God's eternal law, can be

¹⁰Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of Its Traditional Defense* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1944), 3, 40-41, 64, 73.

¹¹Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, 73.

¹²David A. Hall, *Essays to the Next Generation: An Interpretation of Church of God in Christ Faith and Practice in Context with Modern Issues* (Memphis, TN: David A. Hall, Sr., Publishing, 2004).

actualized (or approximated) in democracy and government when used for ordering and improving human life. When individuals, groups, and government work for the good, they achieve greater enrichment.¹³ Whenever the legislative process, of its own accord or by human sin, fails to produce greater freedom and justice for all citizens, it was necessary to exert pressure, through nonviolence, on governmental bodies for the formation of policy and laws conforming to the ideals (eternal law) of justice. Still, America, with all of its faults, plays a vital role in God's plan of redemption. Each forward development in American democracy is a victory that represents an accumulation of many short-term successes in the realization of God's kingdom.¹⁴ African American Pentecostals espousing versions of Christian idealism include the late J.O. Patterson, Jr. (COGIC bishop and former councilman and mayor of Memphis), Eugene Rivers (COGIC pastor, political commentator, and community activist), Leonard Lovett (ethicist and ecumenical officer for COGIC), and Leah Daughtry (House of the Lord pastor and former CEO of the Democratic National Convention Committee).

Christian Reconstructionism is the view that the United States of America is a Christian nation whose path to renewal (restoration) and charge of enforcing God's law is disclosed in the Bible.¹⁵ Other emphases include limited government, laissez-faire capitalism, fiscal conservatism, and identification of the "good citizen" with the "true Christian." Themes of Reconstructionism are echoed by Bishop Harry Jackson. He contends that African Americans are confronting problems that are mainly moral and spiritual.¹⁶ And these problems are unlikely to be resolved by the idealists because the protest methods of civil rights movement are outdated; new methods are needed for the present time.¹⁷ Personal responsibility, self-determination, and thrift are essential for change in individuals and the society.¹⁸ Racism is overcome by African Americans'

¹³John J. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Nonviolent Strategies and Tactics for Social Change* (Lanham, MD: Basic Books, 2000), 67; *Martin Luther King, Jr., Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 12-13, 180.

¹⁴King, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, 12-13.

¹⁵The theology of Reconstructionism was first laid out in *Rousas John Rushdoony's Law and Liberty* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1971; reprinted, Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2009).

¹⁶Jackson, *The Truth in Black and White*, 60, 68.

¹⁷Jackson, *Ibid.*, 194, 225.

¹⁸Jackson, *Ibid.*, 66, 138, 206, 210.

personal achievement and success, and then without the assistance of big government.¹⁹

Christian Communitarianism is the view that the church, not democratic government, is the principal realm where persons can discern and strive for the good. For the most part, Pentecostals have perceived themselves as a “separate” community. Empowered by the Spirit, the saints gathered together, holding each other accountable to the standards of holy living, caring for their families, building their churches and evangelizing the world. Pentecostals, who think of themselves as “in the world but not of it” and work for social change principally within their churches and faith-based organizations, may be classified as Christian Communitarians. T.D. Jakes’ Potter’s House, the base for T.D. Jakes Ministries, and T.D. Jakes Enterprises (for-profit operations) are an example of Pentecostal spiritual empowerment for evangelism, social service, and entrepreneurialism— building church and community simultaneously. The ministries of West Angeles COGIC, pastored by Bishop Charles Blake, similarly seek to bring personal and social transformation to persons through all means available to the church. In Bishop George McKinney’s *The New Slave Masters*, he suggests how churches may utilize their moral and spiritual resources to address various problems vexing African American communities in addition to their use of foundation support and government programs.²⁰ Several of Bishop McKinney’s ideas about how to create and nurture stable families and thriving communities have been implemented at St. Stephens Cathedral COGIC in San Diego. The quiet but extensive work of Arenia Mallory, Lillian Brooks Coffey, and others in education and women’s organizations

¹⁹Jackson, *Ibid.*, 210, 211, 228.

²⁰In George D. McKinney’s *The New Slave Masters* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications, 2005), he identifies the following problems facing the African American community: drugs (chapter 4); materialism (chapter 5); racism (chapter 6); desire for instant gratification and mindless pursuit of pleasure, such pornography, unnecessary credit-card spending, and gambling (chapter 7); rage (misdirected anger resulting from repeated injustice and violation (chapter 8); gangs (chapter 9); and abortion, absent fathers, and lack of caring adults in children’s lives (chapter 10). McKinney argues that civil rights laws and other forms of legislation are limited tools for dealing with these stated problems. According to McKinney, black people’s realization of freedom comes about not only in the acquisition and exercise of civil rights but also through the development of stable families and thriving communities that mitigate or resolve these problems.

built avenues for personal success and civic involvement for subsequent generations of Pentecostals.²¹

The Power of the Spirit for the Church and the World

Pentecostalism has its critics, few of whom can deny its latent potential. In James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, the African American Pentecostal church is depicted as a positive source of inspiration and community but a negative source of repression and hypocrisy, lacking the wherewithal to act in the world beyond its walls. Baldwin had a Pentecostal experience, lying prostrate at the altar, where he was "saved" and then "filled" with the Holy Spirit. At the age of 14, he became a Youth Minister, a stint that lasted for three years. After a year into his role of minister, he began to read and think critically and take notice of the flaws in himself and others in the Temple of the Fire Baptized.²² From his point of view, the principles governing the church were blindness, loneliness, and terror. He realized that his preaching was performance, driven by theatrics more so than by sincerity and truth. Behind the scenes, he saw the questionable dealings with the "Lord's money." In Baldwin's words: "The transfiguring power of the Holy Ghost ended when the service ended, and salvation stopped at the church door."²³ The commandment to love everybody was practiced only with regard to a select few within the church. He saw, as his only escape, leaving the church. Though critical of the Pentecostal church, Baldwin says that he had never seen any institution more powerful than the Pentecostal church. The excitement and the appeal of the Pentecostal church and the power of the Spirit were unlike anything that he had known or would ever know. He saw nothing comparable to this Pentecostal power.

Baldwin's desire for Pentecostalism to move beyond the interior of the church is met in James Forbes' description of Progressive Pentecostalism. By "Progressive Pentecostalism," he means the

²¹Anthea D. Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 118, 120-127. Arenia Mallory's work is described in E.M. Lashley's *Glimpses into the Life of a Great Mississippian and Majestic American Educator*, 1926-1976 (n.p.: 1977).

²²Baldwin's experience is examined from a scholarly perspective in Clarence E. Hardy's *James Baldwin's God: Sex, Hope, and Crisis in Black Holiness Culture*, 3rd edition (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009). Further insight into his life may be found in James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (New York: Dell Publishing, Co., 1953), a semi-autobiographical novel.

²³James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), 53-54.

advancement of Pentecostalism from preoccupation with individual experience and internal church affairs to concern for the larger context of society and the world. According to Forbes, the Holy Spirit's work is throughout the world in "every aspect of human or divine activity which brings us closer to the realization of the kingdom of God."²⁴ Forbes offers a translation of Pentecostalism into social action. The Pentecostal response to sickness is the quest for "deliverance and healing through medically scientific and spiritual means." For sickness of mind, Pentecostalism would offer counseling. The Pentecostal response to poverty is "feeding the poor, offering personal charity, and setting up social service agencies." Against racial, class, and religious injustices, he says that "[Pentecostals] will influence social, economic and political structures."

In the public square, African American Pentecostalism must speak to many issues. White Evangelicals' cries of moral outrage have garnered the most attention. Their issues of concern are about abortion, immigration, same-sex marriage, bathroom privileges for transgender persons, the Health and Human Services contraception mandate, and encroachments on religious freedom. These may be issues about which African American Christians care a great deal. However, these are not the only issues that persons of faith are compelled to address. The #BlackLivesMatter Movement is expanding African American Christians' moral concern beyond those moral issues of interest to white Evangelicals. The protest movement calls for attention to and action regarding the social practices that devalue and destroy black lives and those of other racial and ethnic minorities such as police brutality, mass incarceration, the defunding of public education, and environmental racism.

African American Pentecostalism in the Public Square

A sympathetic but critical interpretation of Pentecostalism does not summarily commend the movement to all sectors of society and the world. Whereas there are aspects of Pentecostalism that would prove to be beneficial to the world, there are some that are harmful. The negative qualities of Pentecostalism that ought not spread into public square are: the disunity (theological and political fragmentation) of Pentecostalism; patriarchal, authoritarian leadership; spontaneity (impulsiveness, dearth of planning, and loose organization); anti-intellectualism; magical thinking

²⁴James Forbes, "Shall We Call this Dream Progressive Pentecostalism?" *Spirit: A Journal of Issues Incident to Black Pentecostalism* 1, no. 1 (1977): 14.

(interventionist theory of divine action, with little or no human accountability for effecting change); and demonology (tendency to overly spiritualize social problems), lack of coherent and compassionate perspective on human behavior (e.g., sexuality and sexual orientation). These negative qualities singularly or together conspire to make Pentecostalism irrelevant to, obstructive, or impractical in the public square.

The public square could benefit from the exemplary features of Pentecostalism. The good or positive influences that could be cited to justify Pentecostalism in the public square are the witness of encounter with the Transcendent (God); egalitarianism; entrepreneurialism; and creativity. These positive qualities together encourage initiative and innovation for human improvement and adaptation to changing circumstances. At its best, Pentecostalism promotes freedom and equality and challenges the philosophical naturalism that deprives humanity of the wonder of and engagement with the sacred. As Forbes says, “The Pentecostal experience has helped to restore a sense of worth, identity, and God-relatedness to those who expose themselves to its influence.”²⁵

In light of these positive qualities, Pentecostalism merits not only a place but also freedom in the public square. For all Christians seeking to assert their presence and perspective in the public square, Karl Barth’s *Church and State* is an important text on the freedom of the church. He says, “[the State] is one of those angelic powers (*exousia*) of this age, which is always threatened by that ‘demonization,’ that is, by the temptation of making itself absolute.”²⁶ He says, “[the Church] is the actual community (*politeuma*) of the New Heaven and the New Earth, as such here and now certainly hidden, and therefore in the realm of the State a foreign community (*paroikia*).”²⁷ According to Barth, the responsibility of the Church is twofold: prophetic speech (i.e., acting as the moral guardian and “Watchman” of society) and prayer (i.e., intercessory prayer for the State and those persons who serve as representatives of the State.) The Church has an obligation to resist the State when it threatens the freedom of the Church. The Church must criticize the State.²⁸ This criticism of the State is a high honor that the Church gives the State. Why is it such a high honor? Because the Church is urging the State to function

²⁵Forbes, “Shall We Call this Dream Progressive Pentecostalism,” 12.

²⁶Karl Barth, *Church and State*, translation of *Rechtfertigung und Recht (Justification and Justice)* by G. Ronald Howe (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1939), 10.

²⁷Barth, *Church and State*, 10-11.

²⁸Barth, *Church and State*, 69-71.

as a State and then within the sacred order, for the divine justification that the Church proclaims is for the benefit of all persons living within the State. The State cannot make persons moral. Moral formation lies within the work of the Church. The State can utilize its power to punish infractions of law and by this threat of punishment bring persons into compliance, but the State cannot make persons moral. The basic civility needed in the society, the State cannot solicit from its citizens. Civility, which is moral behavior, is cultivated by the Church. As Robert Franklin says, “[moral] vision and capacity is in short supply in the leadership of our major institutions— the market, the state, and the criminal justice system.”²⁹

The church is needed in the public square. According to Barth, proclamation of the message of justification underscores a basic truth about humans: God values human life and goes to great lengths to save and fulfill it.³⁰ Thus justification presupposes that those who are justified are worth being justified. As a source and norm, justification affirms the sacredness, dignity, and worth of human life. The work of the church in the world is rooted in this ethic of human value. Christians, inclusive of Pentecostals, may labor towards “increasing civic participation (especially voting behavior), addressing income and wealth inequality (or advocating a ‘shared prosperity’), working for a more sustainable planet, and leading truth and reconciliation processes to heal racial divides and new xenophobia directed at immigrants and religious minorities, such as Muslims in America.”³¹

The Responsibility but Indeterminacy of Translation

The church working for the good of society is a matter that raises little or no controversy; the point of contention is mainly in the public expression of faith in language that is unapologetically religious. The government of the secular state rarely objects to churches’ service to the poor, even when this religious work is clearly motivated by faith. The public square is supposed to be devoid of explicit religious speech and, if religion appears at all in the public square, religious speech must be translated into the neutral, secular language of the square. This exclusion

²⁹Robert M. Franklin, “Rehabilitating Democracy: Restoring Civil Rights and Leading the Next Human Rights Revolution,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 30, no. 3 (October 2015): 426.

³⁰Barth, *Church and State*, 44.

³¹Franklin, “Rehabilitating Democracy,” 426.

is not only of religion but also of the opportunity for engagement with others in conversations on morality and religion in the public square. Most Americans regard religious faith as important to their lives. To exclude religion from the public square means that a large part of people's lives are overlooked.

Against this Rawlsian liberalism³², namely the notion of neutrality with regard to moral and religious questions in the public square, Jürgen Habermas argues that the secular state has an obligation to exercise impartiality towards religious communities and to communicate law and policy in neutral language, but individuals and groups participating in the public square have no such obligation.³³ The publically accessible language of the secular state is a language of transaction. The prohibition against speaking religion-specific values and beliefs is laid only on politicians and other functionaries of the State.³⁴ Habermas says, "We cannot derive from the secular character of the state a direct obligation for all citizens personally to supplement their public statements of religious convictions by equivalents in a generally accessible language. And certainly the normative expectation that all religious citizens when casting their vote should in the final instance let themselves be guided by secular considerations is to ignore the realities of a devout life, an existence led in light of belief."³⁵ Pentecostals must, therefore, participate in the public square as Pentecostals, and more importantly as Christians rising above the partisan divide and their sectarianism that minimizes their impact in the world beyond the walls of the church.

An often quoted passage from the New Testament by Bishop Charles Harrison Mason is: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim 2:1-2). Implied in his intercessory prayer for governing officials is a commitment to civility in the public square. Since acceptance of every point of view is not required or logically possible, mutual toleration may be the best for which we can hope in the public square.

³²In *Barack Obama's Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007: 219), he echoes this Rawlsian liberalism, when he states that, in our pluralist society, religious persons must "translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific values."

³³Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Square," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 3.

³⁴Habermas, "Religion in the Public Square," 8-9.

³⁵Habermas, "Religion in the Public Square," 9.

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