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A COVENANT MODEL OF ECCLESIOLOGY FOR BLACK PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: SPANNING THE CHASM BETWEEN BLACK THEOLOGY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN FOLK RELIGION

By

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To Barbara,
"... whom my soul loves."
Song 1:7a NRSV

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INTRODUCTION

The militancy of the black power movement in the sixties surfaced out of great dissatisfaction with the traditional pastoral strategies of black churches. Black power demanded the "complete emancipation of black people from white oppression by whatever means black people deemed necessary."[1] Prior to the sixties, black churches were the primary sites where African Americans learned oppositional politics as well as survival skills.[2] Nevertheless, traditional pastoral strategies were challenged by the voices of black identity and black empowerment. Advocates of black power questioned whether these traditional strategies were still useful in the post-Civil Rights era, or whether they promoted unhealthy passivity and mental distress.[3]

The recent successes and frustrations of the Civil Rights movement fueled the passion of black power and black theology. The black power movement voiced radical resentment towards an oppressive gradualism mediating civil liberties and compromising immediate reparation of

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[1]James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 6.

[2]Hart M. Nelson and Anne Kusener Nelson, *Black Church in the Sixties* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 100. See also Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

[3]bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 143.

inequalities.[4] Black theology claimed that western Christianity was ideologically riddled with oppressive racial omnipotence and images of superiority. Black theology, therefore, sought to liberate black religious thinking from the ravages of white ideology.[5] In the effort to give black power a theological voice, the black theology project advanced liberation under the black power slogan "by any means necessary." Its rhetoric of violence muffled the popularly touted voices of integration. Not only did the black theology project adopt the black power slogan, it heralded Eldridge Cleaver's threat, "We shall have our [humanity]. We shall have it or the earth will be leveled by our efforts to gain it."[6] Black theology equated black power with God's power working on behalf of and alongside the black struggle for socio-political power and liberation.[7]

In a short period of time, the rhetoric of this political agenda created a chasm between the black theology project and the black churches. A principal disparity between the functional claims of their respective

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[4]Vincent Harding, "Black Power and the American Christ," in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979*, ed. Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 39-40.

[5]Gayraud S. Wilmore, ed., *Black Theology*, 72.

[6]The National Committee of Black Churchmen, June 13, 1969, "Black Theology," in *Black Theology*, 102.

[7]James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 56.

theological interpretations of faith and ministry constituted this rift. On the one hand, the black theology project regarded black churches as spiritually removed or "other-worldly." In July of 1966, for example, the newly organized National Committee of Negro Churchmen issued a statement on black power: "Too often the Negro church has stirred [*sic*] its members away from the reign of God in *this world* to a distorted and complacent view of *an otherworldly* conception of God's power."[8] With such claims, proponents of black theology addressed the message of the black power movement to black churches. Black theologians charged that black churches abandoned their liberation history for an ineffectual spirituality, and therefore failed to confront adequately the concerns of black people living under racial and economic oppression.[9]

On the other hand, even the black churches that embraced the identity politics of blackness for its significance to self-esteem and empowerment[10] did not endorse the entire campaign of the black theology project.

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[8]The National Committee of Negro Churchmen, "Black Power," in *Black Theology*, 27. The *italics* belong to the text.

[9]James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church, Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going?* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1948), 99-121. See also Mark L. Chapman, *Christianity on Trial: African-American Religious Thought Before and After Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 69-100.

[10]See Statements from Black and White Caucuses, National Council of Churches Conference on the Church and Urban Tensions, Washington, D.C., September 27-30, 1967, "The Church and the Urban Crisis," in *Black Theology*, 43-47.

The majority of black churches criticized the movement for its inherent reductionism and divisiveness. Black churches contested that black theology advanced black power at the expense of the gospel message of universal Christian love. They found great difficulty in resolving the tension between the potential use of violent power and the ultimacy of reconciliation. For example, the National Baptist Convention argued that black theology sacrifices the universality of the Christian gospel for a narrow accommodation of blackness and liberation. Moreover, it contended that essentialized blackness further perpetuates the polarization of society.[11] The churches responded by assenting to their identity as a community united by God's liberation -- but not over and against the universal demands of the gospel message. The black theology project retorted that Christian love must begin with and be defined by blackness.[12] Therefore, Christian love must be identified with justice and power. Any other position renders Christian love meaningless.

Black theology produced considerable gains in challenging the social conscience of black churches. Although black theology continued to criticize the churches' preoccupation with spirituality, personal piety, and institutionalism, it stressed the biblical foundations of

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[11]The National Baptist Convention, "The Basic Theological Position of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.," in *Black Theology*, 260-261.

[12]Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 53.

the movement within the black churches' early historical tradition.[13] In particular, the central role of the Exodus narrative was consistent with its eminent regard in black churches. Even the call for unity under the banner of blackness used familiar language of corporate identity and community.

Notwithstanding, black churches preserved the centrality of an individual's salvation and the reconciliation of humanity envisioned in the Kingdom of God as the defining characteristics of their ecclesial self-image. The churches defined the universality of the gospel message in these appeals to the traditional interpretations of the faith community. Blackness did not replace the metaphoric identity of the churches. However, it did present a direct challenge to the churches' social activity in their respective communities. Blackness was endorsed as the rallying call to unite in radical fervor for the socio-political and economic liberation of black Americans.

Reconciling the prophetic discernment of black theology with the faith interpretations of the gospel by black churches became a principle task for several leading figures.[14] James Deotis Roberts has been among the most

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[13]James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, Seabury Press, 1975); idem, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972; reprint, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

[14]It is important to recognize that the National Committee of Negro Churchmen (NCNC), later known as the National Committee of Black Churchmen (NCBC), viewed their role as mediators between black power and the black

explicit. Roberts calls for a balance between the "search for meaning" in black religious life and the need for protest and liberation.[15] Faith interpretations of meaning have empowered African Americans, so that "instead of hatred and revenge [their] Christian faith enabled [them] to transmute suffering into many victories in [their] own lives and in the lives of other blacks and whites."[16] Black theology reminds us that "at the same time, we seek to transmute suffering into victory; we must strive to transcend suffering that we as individuals and as a people may know the liberty of [children] of God here as well as hereafter."[17] Reconciliation and liberation work hand in hand through suffering and against suffering.[18]

If I understand Roberts correctly, liberation ethics is best grounded in the faith interpretations of the gospel in black religious life. The prophetic task of black theology

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Christian faith. See Chapman, *Christianity on Trial*, 75-83. In this context, however, I am referring to those authors who have challenged the dialectic between black theology and black churches. These include: Cecil W. Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology* (Nashville: AMEC, 1975); Major J. Jones, *Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971); idem, *Christian Ethics for Black Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974); Olin P. Moyd, *Redemption in Black Theology* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1979); James Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971); and idem, *Black Theology Today: Liberation and Contextualization* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983).

[15]Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 42-43.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid., 59.

[18]Ibid., 59-60.

is the "reconception" of the faith, but within black religious folk life.[19] This requires an exploration of the dynamics of faith in the actual faith community. In this context, theologians interpret revelation from within, rather than imposing interpretations upon the faith community.[20]

James Cone replies that he and Roberts simply have "different theological perspectives of love, reconciliation and violence."[21] And indeed, this is precisely Roberts' point. Nevertheless, Cone views his work in *The Spirituals and the Blues* and *God of the Oppressed* as establishing a foundation for black theology within black religion.[22] In turn, Roberts contends that Cone merely presents his own theological interpretations. For Roberts, the exploration of faith and meaning in black religious life comes before the task of theological interpretation.[23]

The intractable character of these debates reinforced the gulf between black churches and the black theological academy, thereby compromising collective reform in the black community and white American society. While many black

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[19]Roberts, *Black Theology Today*, 60.

[20]Ibid., 42.

[21]James H. Cone, "An Interpretation of the Debate Among Black Theologians," in *Black Theology*, ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, 2d ed., vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 430.

[22]Ibid., 434; See also Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*; idem, *God of the Oppressed*.

[23]Roberts, *Black Theology Today*, 87.

churches have increasingly adopted the rhetoric of black theology, both groups express great concern over their inability to bridge their respective religious and social platforms. Moreover, both groups acknowledge great frustration at their increasing inefficacy in stemming the social fragmentation and economic disparity sweeping over the African American community. In view of the rift between black churches and black theology, I emphasize the unresolved conflict between their theological convictions. An introspective analysis of this conflict reveals unexplored dynamics of revelation and faith by which black churches remain estranged from black theology.

I suggest that black theology's sweeping disparagement of the "other-worldliness" of black churches indicates a misdiagnosis, which actually bares a "missed-diagnosis." In the wake of federal laws securing the legal rights of full citizenship, the closing years of the Civil Rights movement renewed a sense of attainable personal fulfillment among African Americans. I contend that this early hope fed upon the individualism pervading modern American culture. American individualism prevails upon both religious and secular black life. Whether surfacing in conservative values, hedonistic lifestyles, or a capitalistic devotion to personal privilege, the post-Civil Rights era induced a greater assimilation of white American individualism. Individualism in contemporary black religion regenerated and reinforced the domination of personal salvation and

religious piety in American Christianity. Unfortunately, the influence of individualism in the dynamics of faith and black religious life has continued unhindered. Herein lies the crux of the problem between black churches and black theology. Black theology has failed to explore these dynamics and no longer remains grounded in black religious experience.[24] As a result, black churches have found themselves not only effectually dismissed by increasing numbers of constituents, but also divided by the actual gains of the Civil Rights era. An analysis of these dynamics will help to redirect black theology's understanding of the pastoral and, subsequently, redefine a relationship between the pastoral and the prophetic in the ministry of black churches.

This dissertation assumes the voice of a strong polemic for the sole purpose of flushing out the complexities involved in the dynamics of faith and revelation. I acknowledge that much of black theology is concerned with practical theology, especially regarding its prophetic intent. Interpretations of beliefs and the historical

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[24]To the credit of black theologians, relatively early publications have broached the complexities of American capitalism. At times these studies acknowledge the confluence of individualism, but usually from the perspective of economic and class issues. See James H. Cone, "Black Theology and the Black Church: Where Do We Go from Here," in *Black Theology* (1979); Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982).

tradition lie at the forefront of practical theology.[25] My desire is to move black practical theology into an exploration of the dynamics of faith and revelation in black religious folk life. I assert that the chasm between black churches and black theology extends along these lines.

This chasm continues to expand despite the genuine efforts by proponents of both groups to build a practical bridge. Black churches contend that the black theological academy simply misrepresents the churches' position on liberation. Liberation has always been a vital goal in the churches' agenda and a significant facet in their understanding of biblical Christianity.[26] Despite charges of indifference to social and political issues and irrelevance to the everyday lives of their people, the churches believe they continue to be God's instrumental witnesses to the gospel message of salvation and liberation.

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[25]Many have been particularly concerned with the articulation of black religious belief systems in the perspective of black theology and liberations ethics (cf. n. 14 above). See also James Harris, *Pastoral Theology: A Black Church Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); Henry H. Mitchell and Nicholas C. Cooper-Lewter, *Soul Theology: The Heart of American Black Culture* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986); Gayraud Wilmore, *Last Things First* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982); and idem, "Pastoral Ministry in the Origin and Development of Black Theology," in *Black Theology*, vol. 2 (1993).

[26]Cecil Wayne Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology* (Nashville: AMEC, 1975), 71. See also Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson, *The Negro Church* (Salem, NH: Ayer Company, Publishers, 1933; reprint 1988), 281-292 passim. Although Mays and Nicholson determine that "other-worldliness" and "escapism" pervade black churches, they document the churches' various efforts to maintain a campaign of liberation in black wholeness and practical skills.

The self-image of black churches involves a caring community that cultivates both spiritual and social liberation. The Black Church[27] has been the only viable black institution in a very white America. From its genesis, it has nurtured the spirit of liberation. With most gains in civil liberties or in the alleviation of black suffering, black churches have stood on the vanguard of protest and social appeal.

The relevance of self-image remains critical in the growing rift between black churches and the black theological academy. Both the ministry and mission of black churches directly reflect their operative self-image. If the churches view themselves as agents of liberation, then they can only regard charges of "other-worldliness" as misinformation or spiritual ignorance. Preaching God's liberation of black humanity occurs weekly throughout African American churches. These churches understand liberation as a transformation of souls as well as society. Liberation from sin, hopelessness, and worthlessness entails liberation from racism, sexism, poverty, and exploitation. Some argue quite emphatically, therefore, that liberation from the latter conditions requires liberation from the former. In a society where the powerful will not relinquish power, where the rich will not redistribute wealth, and where self-interest shuns social interests, liberation can

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[27]I use the capitalized term "Black Church" when referring to the institutional presence of black churches in the black community or American society. Otherwise, I refer to black churches in the lower case to include the various traditions in African American Christianity.

only begin within the black community. Nurtured from there, the witness of black churches to God's social gospel may take the traditional road which appeals to human and moral conscience. It may also assume the form of protest and demand. But to charge black churches with forsaking the gospel's liberation ethic commonly results in adversarial posturing and deafness.

The charges of black theology against black churches may hold substantial truth. Yet, if black theologians were to dig deeper into an objective analysis of the churches' self-understanding in addition to their social image, I believe that they would gain a more substantive hearing among the churches. By avoiding adversarial rhetoric, the black theology project might gain insight into the black churches' diffidence to the charges of other-worldliness and social irrelevance. Within this approach the central question becomes, "In what manner do the black churches regard themselves as a liberating force in white America?" Such pursuits reveal how the black theology project can effectively fulfill its prophetic calling to black churches.

In the same vein, those who align themselves with the traditional black churches cannot dismiss black theology as reductionistic. Black theology roots itself in the historical Black Church. It expends great effort to retain this connection. For that reason, black churches can press a dialogue with black theologians concerning their disapproval of black religious folk life. This exchange

would ask, "Has black theology forsaken traditional forms of pastoral care in its liberation ethics?," and, "Why does it regard the main staples of black preaching as socially ineffectual, or even subversive?" Such questions seek to unearth the substantive disparities which lie beneath the adversarial and nostalgic rhetoric.

In his article, "Liberation Theology and the Black Church," Benjamin Chavis presses black theologians in their conceptualization of theology itself. In his view, black theology employs theological concepts whose legitimacy remains parasitic upon white western Christianity and American society.[28] Chavis redirects black theology's methodology. He requires black theology to address the black churches' experiences of Christianity as well as the human encounter with oppression in black life. This obliges black theology to interpret theological concepts which presently exist in black churches. In this process of interpretation, Chavis cautions black theologians not to dismiss the churches' own conceptualizations or theological criteria.

Chavis believes that black liberation theology constitutes the substance undergirding praxis in black churches. If his assertion bears weight, black theologians can reconnect their work to black churches by investigating praxis for their theological conceptualizations. Perhaps,

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[28]Benjamin F. Chavis, "Liberation Theology and the Black Church," *CRJ Reporter* (Spring 1980): 36.

then, black theologians might begin to redefine liberation ethics on behalf of black churches. Otherwise, their "other-worldly" indictment will remain impertinent to black churches. In my view, Chavis' redirection compels black theologians to consider the following questions: "How do the churches actually view liberation theology?," and, "In what manner do black churches believe they minister to their people within a liberation ethic?"

This study offers a viable avenue for black theology to realign itself within black churches without compromising its prophetic identity. A historical study alone will not provide all the tools needed to construct a viable bridge today. However, a historical reassessment will clarify the critical contents of the dispute. Tracing the early evolution of this rift will present the "sacred" agenda of each alliance. Within areas of sacred identity and mission, great misunderstandings and the misappropriation of accusations are revealed.

In his book, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*, Cecil Cone critiques the black theology project for its failure to secure its impetus within black religious experience. Cone argues that the starting point for black theology should be black folk religion. Any other point of departure, including liberation, leads to identity confusion for black theology.[29] For Cone, the starting point of liberation indicates that black theology is preoccupied with

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[29]Cecil Cone, 18.

white Eurocentric theology and secular black power.[30] Immersed in apologetics, black theology fails to address the present substance of black religion. Cone's critique insists on the primacy of black religious experience within black theology.

The black theology project claims that its foundation lies in the pre-Civil War black churches. It contends that the pre-Civil War churches discerned the fundamental tenet of the gospel message as liberation. It was only after the Reconstruction era that black churches lost this authentically "black" understanding of the gospel message. In this judgement, black theologians, like James Cone, anathematize black churches as other-worldly. And as Cecil Cone observes, black theology, thereby, breaks with black religious experience. Therefore, he insists that black theologians reconceptualize their treatment of liberation from within black folk religion.[31]

This dissertation attempts to follow Cecil Cone's recommendation. I believe such an effort might provide a more critical, or "prophetic," tool for the adherence to social action among black churches which black theology aspires to achieve. If black churches have lost the prophetic dimension in their religious experiences, then a reconceptualization of their sacred identity and mission by black theology is warranted.

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[30]Ibid., 113.

[31]Ibid., 118.

Attending to the sacred identity, mission, and praxis of black churches initiates a venture into ecclesiology. Ecclesiology clarifies the essential characteristics of the Church. Often the Church is defined with metaphoric images drawn from biblical texts.[32] These metaphoric images do not necessarily restrict the Church theologically. They are appropriated in order to interpret the Church's mission and ministry in the world. Ecclesiology contemplates the historical, scriptural, and psychosocial dimensions of the Church. In other words, a functional theological conceptualization of the Church distinguishes between the purposes of gathering together and the practices emanating from therein.[33] Accordingly, the tenets of our ecclesial theology and tradition shape our preaching and pastoral ministries. Preaching and pastoral care are inextricably understood within the mission of the Church. They proclaim and develop the Church's mission, even as they respond to it. Inasmuch as ministry distinguishes the Church, it is determined by the life of the Church. An ecclesial image, therefore, sets forth a contextual model forming the Christian community and ministry. Such models shape the

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[32]See Paul Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960). Minear identifies ninety-six biblical metaphors or images for the Church from the New Testament alone. For a brief summary of Minear's dominant themes, see Peter C. Hodgson, *Revisioning the Church: Ecclesial Freedom in the New Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 28-35.

[33]Regis Duffy, "Ecclesiology and Pastoral Care," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, ed. Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 332.

role, structure, and content of pastoral care in general, and preaching in particular.

The use of models can be either explanatory or exploratory.[34] While the explanatory use will help to evaluate how traditional images have been synthesized, I hope to incorporate the exploratory, or heuristic, use of an ecclesial model. This venture will offer insights into the practical theology of black preaching and pastoral care.

In studying the ecclesiology of black churches, one is easily tempted to begin with creedal concepts. Typically, apologetic categories have been drawn from the Apostle's Creed -- the *one*, *holy*, *catholic*, and *apostolic* church.[35] These dimensions of the church are useful in formulating a universal, and thereby more general, theological understanding of the Christian Church. They do not comprise the distinctive qualities of black ecclesiology. However, it does not follow that they are irrelevant. Instead, the point is that the formation of black churches was not motivated by dissension over doctrinal conceptualizations of

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[34]Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 24-25.

[35]Critical studies on Christian ecclesiology use this creedal formula to evaluate the theological and institutional character of the Church. For a variation of applications, see Yves Congar, *The Mystery of the Church* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1960); Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1987); Peter Hodgson, *Revisioning the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988); Eric G. Jay, *The Church*, vol. 2 (London: SPCK, 1978); Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967); and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Church*, trans. by Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983).

the Church. Black churches were formed as independent worship communities attempting to provide a religious environment free from racist practices.

On this point, James Cone cautions that the Church must not be defined by any narrow representation of those who attend and comprise the actual congregation.[16] He insightfully argues that the reduction of ecclesiology to this human criteria confers an undesirable authenticity to the historically racist practices of white Christian churches. Some transcendent understanding of the Church is critical to the integrity of the Church. For Cone, the Church ultimately represents a people who have been called together by God's self-revelation in the liberating gospel message of Jesus Christ, and share in the activity of the Holy Spirit in the liberation of humanity.[17] While this study challenges the definitive interpretation of liberation in black theology, Cone correctly requires a transcendent determination of the Church. The role liberation plays in the ecclesiology of the Church is pivotal to this dissertation. Liberation remains an undisputed criteria in the mission of the Church. Nevertheless, the manner in which black theology positions prophetic liberation over and against contemporary black folk religion and ecclesiology creates a grievous point of contention. This contention begs the following question: "Does historical liberation as

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[16]Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 66.

[17]Ibid., 63-65.

the point of departure for black theology betray Cone's own warning against existential reductionism?"

Drawing from the Christian Scriptures, Cone demarcates three primary functions of the Christian Church: preaching, service, and worship. Preaching is the spoken word calling people into the fullness of being in relationship to God and each other. Service is the activity of the Church that participates in advancing this fullness of being in the world. Worship, in turn, is the Church presently actualizing or manifesting such being.[38] For Cone, these functions identify the gospel message within the rubric of liberation ethics. For my purposes, Cone's notion of a transcendent understanding of the Church, along with its functions, provides the essential foundation for an existential hermeneutic in ecclesiology. This criteria constitutes the viability of an existential approach to ecclesiology. And since the inception of black churches occurred in contention with abusive social manifestations of theological interpretations, an existential hermeneutic is not merely possible but required.

Within sociology of knowledge, African theologian Bonganjalo Goba argues that people derive knowledge from their social context, which in turn contributes to their individual and communal horizons of religious meaning.[39]

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[38]Ibid., 70.

[39]Bonganjalo Goba, "Towards a 'Black' Ecclesiology," *Missionalia* 9 (August 1981): 47-48.

Social context, therefore, influences the theological interpretations of ecclesiology. An exchange occurs between the biblical or doctrinal theology of the Church and the existential conceptualization of ecclesiology. Goba identifies this outgrowth as a "self-conscious ecclesiology," which he defines as "a theological awareness of the Church as part of human reality."[40] It follows that a self-conscious black ecclesiology emanates from the black experience of oppression. Goba agrees. This ecclesiology, in turn, accents socio-political liberation. However, in his framework for a black ecclesiology, Goba turns to the cultural religious milieu of the black Christian community.[41] While Goba is not critical of the role of liberation in black theology, he does, like Cecil Cone, wish to reformulate the work of black theology within black religious experience. Consequently, reflexive continuity between transcendent and existential conceptualizations of the Church is vital in order to prevent a divisive misrepresentation of black folk religion.

This study starts with the formulation of black ecclesiology in the adaptation of western Christianity. In chapter one, I explain how the ecclesial model of black churches was formed through preaching and pastoral care

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[40]Ibid., 50. Goba borrows the term "self-conscious ecclesiology" from Colin Williams. See Colin W. Williams, *The Church*, vol. 4, New Directions in Theology Today (London: Lutterworth, 1969).

[41]Ibid., 55.

under the direct impact of historical conditions. I show that African American Christianity developed through a synthesis between white American Christianity and an African world-view containing spiritual and cultural values. Within this synthesis, I argue that the African American Church tradition in preaching and pastoral care developed under two major fronts: 1) the search for the meaning and value of life in relation to God and neighbor; and 2) pastoral efforts in teaching coping skills, nurturing black personhood, and inspiring hope.

In chapter two, I assert that a dominant ecclesial model emerges from the historical experiences of the black religious folk tradition. Along with a pastoral focus in spirituality and black wholeness, this ecclesial model sustains a socio-political agenda and a prophetic appeal for liberation. The biblical covenant tradition provides the dominant ecclesial image in black churches. I demonstrate that a covenant model evolved from four primary biblical tenets through black preaching and a communal experience of pastoral care. These tenets are: 1) creation and *imago dei*; 2) the Exodus narrative; 3) conversion and the suffering of Jesus; and 4) eschatology and the Kingdom of Heaven.

Chapter three assesses the rise of the black power movement and black theology. I critique black theology's notion of liberation ethics, in contrast to its own evaluation of the traditional ecclesial model. I maintain that black theology's disparagement of black churches in

charges of inner spirituality and other-worldliness is a misdiagnosis, due largely to a "missed-diagnosis" of the impact of American individualism. Black churches understand liberation as both spiritual and historical. Their neglect of historical liberation is not due to the absence of liberation ethics in their spirituality. Rather, this neglect arises from an invasive influence of American individualism in black religious folk life which disrupts corporate solidarity and contributes greatly to both the displacement of black churches and the fragmentation of the black community.

In chapter four, I conduct a systematic analysis of the convergence of American individualism and racism upon the black community and black churches. The impact of these cultural experiences creates personal and communal identity conflicts. The disruption of communal solidarity once gleaned from shared suffering raises conflicts of communal responsibility and accountability. In the end, a reassessment of the prophetic voice of black theology reveals that it, too, struggles under similar identity conflicts.

Next, I turn to a direct treatment of the prophetic office in covenantal theology. Chapter five reintroduces the relationship between the prophetic and pastoral elements of black ecclesiology by redefining prophetic revelation for black theology. Through the biblical covenant traditions, I assess prophetic consciousness and prophetic inspiration in

terms of the divine perspective of humanity and the religious community. The prophetic and the pastoral should not be considered mutually exclusive. Pastoral events often sustain the prophetic. In turn, the prophetic reflects back on the pastoral and religious folk life with correction and direction. Judgement and liberation do not comprise the goals of prophecy. They are oracle forms, and constitute some very important contents of prophecy. Yet, along with these contents are appeals to repentance, conversion, and justice. Ultimately, the prophetic intends reform and reconciliation.

And finally, chapter six presents the immediate task of redefining black ecclesiology. I relate prophetic reform to the interrelationship of repentance, liberation, and reconciliation as they participate in redemption history. The tension between the contemporary world-view and the particularity of human need contributes to a significant loss of connection between presently lived experiences and the historical narratives that once gave meaning to experience. Charles Gerkin offers a narrative method for practical theology which exposes what he calls competing narratives in American life between the self and the corporate community. In light of Gerkin's method, I explore H. Richard Niebuhr's understanding of the dynamics of faith and revelation for a Christian community. In applying this method to African American religious culture, I turn to pastoral theologian Archie Smith. Smith deals with western

individualism, communal values, and the black religious tradition. In application, I argue that unity between the individual and the communal can be elicited from a proper understanding of the prophetic and can, therefore, re-establish its relationship with the pastoral.

CHAPTER I

SHAPING BLACK ECCLESIOLOGY: PREACHING AND PASTORAL CARE

Slavery and a pervasive social system of racism for free Blacks violently disrupted the Africans' world-view. The separation of these Africans from their ancestral home, traditions, culture, and language caused the disintegration of religious traditions and patterns of living. However, it is far too simple a conclusion to suggest that these conditions were sufficient to obliterate every vestige of African cultural and religious influence among the victims of American racism. People cannot dismiss their world-view and religious underpinnings in such a sweeping manner. Obviously, the slave trade incurred great faith crises in the Africans' religious world-view. Yet, under extreme coercion to abandon all cultural heritage, these faith crises had their own compelling effect; forcing the search for understanding and meaning.[1] A very difficult process of interpretation began. The initial resources for interpretation were the Africans' respective world-views and religious traditions. As Peter Paris explains:

> . . . different groups brought their respective cosmological understandings with them and gradually shaped a new world of spiritual and moral meaning by appropriating and interpreting various elements in their new environment in

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[1]William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 12.

> accord to their African cosmologies. Thus, the condition of slavery did not cut them off from their ultimate source of meaning, God, who was the reservoir for all their religious and moral strivings.[2]

The influence of African spiritual values endured within this process of interpretation. African cosmologies held the interrelationships between the divine world, nature, and the human community in an intimate balance.[3] Molefi Kete Asante explains that "in African philosophy there is a commitment to harmony that some might call spirituality. It is the manifest essence of a search for resolution of cultural and human problems."[4] Asante identifies three fundamental themes of African spirituality: human relations, humans' relationship to the supernatural, and humans' relationships to their own being.[5] Asante contends that these spiritual values, as key elements drawn from African culture, must be weighed in any analysis of African American culture.

Historian William Montgomery clarifies the vital role of African spirituality within the slaves' new world. The disruption of the African world-view caused by the slave experience only intensified the "great importance of

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[2]Peter J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 35.

[3]Ibid., 43.

[4]Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 172.

[5]Ibid., 168.

religious beliefs in providing Africans with a sense of personal worth and security, and the glaring inconsistency between those beliefs and the Africans' new surroundings."[6] This unresolved conflict resulted in a drive to restore the balance, or harmony, exemplified by Asante's notion of spiritual values. Yet, any attempt to practice African religious traditions posed a violent threat to life and health. Although the American slave system was intent upon the complete destruction of African cultural and social traditions, it is naive to assume that the slaves could completely disavow their cultural heritage and spiritual values. Montgomery finds it much more plausible that the African slaves recognized familiar belief patterns and spiritual values within the Christian religious system of the slaveholders and white America.[7]

The intentional destruction of social cohesion among the slaves may mislead some to dismiss the enduring quality of Asante's notion of spiritual values. Racism and slavery did make every attempt at social bonding extremely precarious at best. The assault on social relationships did not end with language and culture. The disruption of familial bonds was not simply a de facto consequence of an insidious system, but rather a designed objective.[8] E.

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[6]Montgomery, 14.

[7]Ibid., 17.

[8]Wallace Charles Smith, *The Church in the Life of the Black Family* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1985), 32-33. See also Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The*

Franklin Frazier argues that the destruction of all traditional social and familial continuity was so complete that any retention of traditional religious values became meaningless.[9] For Frazier, Christianity provided a new source of social cohesion. But in emphasizing the agency of Christianity, Frazier dismisses the abiding influence of African culture. I agree that Christianity did in fact become a source for social bonding and support. Nonetheless, while Frazier does well to acknowledge the depth of devastation caused by the American slave system, he does not give appropriate recognition to the resilience of spiritual values undergirding the African cultural and religious world-views.

Henry Mitchell shares this criticism of Frazier's position. It would have been virtually impossible to wipe out all influences of African religious and cultural values. The slavery system did violently attack African culture and social cohesion. Yet, even with the loss of language, customs, and religious practices these people still faced spiritual crises in their new encounter with evil. Mitchell contends:

> To kill a culture you have to kill the bearers of that culture. That is to say, the life stance and world view of a people are deeply ingrained and not readily changed. To have life is to depend on these defenses . . . , pressure to destroy them

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Enduring Legacy of African-American Families (New York: Touchstone, Simon and Schuster, 1992), 96-143.

[9]E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), 6.

> often succeeds only in driving them underground. . . . To stamp out a culture and its world view would require total genocide, or total and permanent separation of all bearers and receivers. There is more and more evidence that slave mothers, and sometimes fathers too, participated in the raising of their children. The passing on of a culture and world view were inevitable, ...[10]

I am not arguing here in behalf of lavish theories embracing a comprehensive syncretism between western Christian and African religious practices.[11] However, I am suggesting that there is an irreducible influence from African religious cultures which played a vital role in the slaves' and early free Blacks' encounter with western racism and Christianity. Although early generations of African Americans born into slavery and a racist social system did not possess extensive knowledge of their African folklore, I allege some parental or generational transmittance of their African world-views.[12] This influence includes their

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[10]Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Belief: Folk Beliefs of Blacks in America and West Africa* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 37.

[11]Melville Herskovits argues that African retentions pervaded Negro culture. In his book, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Herskovits identifies and refutes five common myths regarding Negroes as inferior, primitive people. E. Franklin Frazier is most emphatic in rejecting Herskovits notions of syncretism. He holds that the campaign of deculturation in American slavery successfully destroyed African culture in the slaves. And thereby, Christianity provided a new form of cultural and religious cohesion. For a brief overview of the Herskovits-Franklin debate, see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 48-55.

[12]Given the disruption of traditional familial bonds, I use the term "parental" to include adopted and imposed familial relationships common to the slave experience and

spiritual understandings of the world and values for living. The slaves' encounter with the western world and Christianity peered through these lenses. Therefore, I support the theory that the appropriation of western Christianity among African Americans found strength in the recognition of familiar spiritual values and folk traditions within biblical Christianity.

The First and Second Great Awakenings enhanced the practical adaptation of American Christianity.[13] The emotional fervor experienced in the camp meetings of American revivalism held great appeal for the slaves and free Blacks. Emmanuel McCall suggests that one major effect of the Great Awakening was the "religious expression peculiar to blacks was [now] free to fully express itself."[14] McCall believes that the black worship experience previously created in clandestine gatherings found open release through the impact of revivalism.

Emphasis upon individual conversion led to the egalitarian reverberations of revivalism. Albert Raboteau contends that religious individualism fostered an inherent

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kinship culture of African Americans. See Smith, 21-42; Billingsley, 101-107.

[13]C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 6. Lincoln and Mamiya point out later that because of the early constraints on black attendance at white churches and the development of black churches, the Second Great Awakening had greater effect in black life than the first revival (p. 348).

[14]Emmanuel L. McCall, *Black Church Lifestyles* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986), 27.

inclusiveness.[15] Moreover, the intensity of the revival period made Christianity more openly accessible. Raboteau explains that "stressing the conversion experience instead of the process of religious instruction made Christianity more accessible to illiterate slaves and slaveholders alike."[16] The insurgence of revivalism among slaves and free Blacks opened doors previously closed to black folk religion. Black preachers received licenses to preach on occasion to white congregations as well as to slaves. Raboteau notes the increasing access of black preachers to slaves both in private meetings and those gathering in black churches. In short, revivalism led to the evangelization and inclusion of slaves and free Blacks in a large scale effort of missionary outreach not only in independent churches but also directly on some plantations.[17]

Black Preaching and the Use of Scripture

Thus far, I have shown how the adaptive qualities of African spirituality amid the conditions of racism and slavery became fertile soil for Christianity among early African Americans. The transition to Christianity entailed a discriminating process of adaptation. Through history African American churches have developed a "black hermeneutic" for the unique interpretation and application

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[15]Raboteau, 132.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid., 148-150.

of the Bible in black preaching. Early African Americans began to shape a praxis-oriented ecclesiology through creative preaching and the worship experience in "hush harbors"[18] and the few independent church meetings.

Mitchell argues that black religion must be appreciated in the light of its "underground folk phenomenon."[19] He contends that the black church tradition was born out of an attempt to recreate African worship practices and communal ideals of living.[20] Behind such claims, Mitchell places heavy emphasis on the sonority and musicality of oral communication in communal patterns of participation.[21] Slaves became increasingly familiar with the Bible through black preachers who would interpret scripture through the dramatization of the biblical story and its application to African American life.

Frazier asserts that the Bible eventually became the slaves' primary means of adapting Christianity.[22] Christianity then became a new religion altogether for these early African Americans. Unlike Frazier, I hold that the intrinsic values of African spirituality aided in the appeal

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[18]Ibid., 215; This phrase refers to the secluded bush arbors, thickets, woods, or ravines where slaves would worship clandestinely despite threats of severe punishment.

[19]Mitchell, *Black Belief*, 103-104.

[20]Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 30.

[21]Ibid., 31.

[22]Frazier, 10-11.

and adaptation of the Christian faith. Mitchell suggests that the slaves adopted and then adapted the belief system of their "conquerors" because African culture taught them to learn about the gods who gave their enemy victory over them.[23] Though this contention is difficult to substantiate, it is clear that the actual process of adapting Christianity would have accelerated with the increasing loss of their native language, and thereby their folklore, proverbs, and idioms.

Historian Lawrence Levine explains that any discussion of the early slaves' exposure to Christianity apart from their religious folk beliefs is shortsighted. Actually, the influence of African religious folk beliefs was most likely increased by the prolonged delay by slaveholders in allowing the proselytization of slaves.[24] When these conditions changed, the slaves were not passive recipients of Christianity. Slaves commonly rejected, even if silently, sermons proclaiming God's will for submission to their masters. Black preachers preached quite different sermons

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[23]Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 56. Here, it seems Mitchell is relying heavily on Melville Herskovits. In his defense of African cultural heritage, Herskovits explained that a defeated tribe would naturally view the gods of their conquerors to be more powerful than their own. In turn, the new African slaves would have regarded the European and American god similarly. In America, however, Protestantism would make any syncretism between the African gods and the American god most difficult. See Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 72.

[24]Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 60.

in private than those in the company of white congregants.[25] Clear distinctions were drawn between the gospel message of God and the unacceptable religion of the white preachers. Certain scriptures were even used to validate some sacred folk beliefs.[26] It, then, follows that some value system beyond mere human survivalism functioned as a criteria for the slaves' religious beliefs. Consequently, it was not difficult for the African slaves and free Africans to accept the centrality of the Bible. And as Levine suggests, "if the Scriptures could be used to validate sacred folk beliefs, the latter could be helpful in making Christian beliefs more vivid and immediate."[27]

These observations indicate that the evaluation of black ecclesiology involves an unique role of Scripture. The biblical stories, especially those from the Hebrew Scriptures, appeared quite similar to the African ancestral faith narratives.[28] From the Gospels, Jesus quickly became the fond personification of the slaves' own suffering. Simply put, "the Bible filled the void once occupied by an awesomely authoritative oral tradition."[29] The Bible was

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[25]Ibid., 45-48.

[26]Ibid., 57.

[27]Ibid.

[28]John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 21, 72-74.

[29]Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 57.

appealing due to its own oral heritage.[30] Despite the inherent literacy of its printed composition, early African Americans adopted the Bible in the form of an oral tradition in English.[31] Slaves commonly learned the biblical stories orally. Often, the slaves would translate central plots or themes from biblical stories into songs relating to their own struggles.[32] Full of stories and wisdom literature, the Bible proved extremely relevant to the common experiences of black slaves and oppressed free Blacks. The early African Americans were interested in God's word and will for them. They focused on God's activity in human history and life in the Spirit. They did not perceive their devotion to the Bible as anti-intellectual. Rather, they accepted it as a book about God, Christ, and God's people.

The black preacher presented and interpreted the biblical stories into the language and familiar experiences of black life.[33] For Mitchell, it is imperative that black preachers continue to translate learned language and concepts not only into indigenous vocabulary, but also into images and metaphors which are common to the black

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[30]For an explanation of the oral heritage of the Bible, see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1982), 38, 74-75, 99.

[31]Henry H. Mitchell, "Continuity of African Culture," in *This Far by Faith: American Black Worship*, ed. R. Hovda (1977), 14.

[32]Raboteau, 241-243.

[33]James H. Harris, *Preaching Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 60.

congregation. Consequently, black churches have established a religious cultural tradition in which the congregation prefers the use of imagery and concrete visions in preaching as opposed to learned abstractions.[34]

Imagination should be seen as an aid to the narrative system -- creating and increasing understanding in the hearer. Drawing from the common experiences of black life, illustrations convey the message of the text. Often, they parallel the biblical text. The Bible provided historical examples of divine intervention and God's will. In turn, black preachers strive to make the message come alive in the hearers. The style is performative.[35] The preacher combines imagination, language, and delivery as tools of interpretation and application. John Blassingame describes the performative style:

> The black preacher had special oratorical skills and was master of the vivid phrase, folk poetry, and picturesque words. . . . the sermons of black preachers excited the emotions. . . . 'Descriptions, exhortations, appeal [*sic*] formed the warp and woof. The whole being expressive of . . . all negro experiences, trials, comforts, and assurances.'[36]

Increased access to scholarship provided tools for translating the biblical message into the language and images of the black hearer. The preacher risks failure to

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[34]Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 18-21.

[35]Harris, 58.

[36]Blassingame, 131. In his description, the author quotes in part from Charles A. Raymond, "The Religious Life of the Negro Slave," *Harper's Magazine* XXVII (Sept 1863), 479-485.

connect with the black congregation if the message is not translated in this manner.[37] And as stated above, a black hermeneutic interprets the Bible in terms that can be readily grasped and applied. Even today,

> black illustrations tend to stick very close to the gut issues of life and death, of struggle and frustration. . . . In [this] last decade of the twentieth century, . . . the masses of Blacks are still forced to wonder about their very survival and their ability to hold on until they receive some relief in their situation.[38]

Doctrine is also communicated in the form of stories. Both the preacher in preaching and the congregation in hearing envision the story. Surely other cultures share the Word in these ways. However, black preaching uses these methods because of their extraordinary dominance in the culture.[39] The ministry and mission of black churches are grounded in the story of God's involvement in humanity.

Ed Wimberly advances his understanding of the Black Church as the story of God's activity and interests. "The unfolding story of God's rule and reign is characterized by God's leadership and story for the purposes of liberation, healing and wholeness."[40] The genre of story reveals how slaves and early free Blacks viewed the Church's emerging role in God's activity. Black churches were the only places

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[37]Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 56-62.

[38]Ibid., 67.

[39]Ibid., 63-75.

[40]Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 25.

where these early African Americans experienced the liberty to participate in God's story. They accepted and revered the Bible not only as evidence of God's activity in past and present history, but also as the anticipation of God's future activity.

Although black preaching can be traced to the late colonial period,[41] the first influx of black preachers probably came from those house slaves who worked most closely to the slaveholders.[42] During slavery the most effective way to gain any education was access to white society. This exposure was frequently experienced in the master's home and travels. These experiences served slaves in developing perhaps their first leaders. The question of the preacher's formal training only influences the manner of activism. Many early black preachers were typically those who acquired reading skills or some level of primary education.[43] Whether through apprenticeship or tutoring, Blacks were mostly self-taught until college and seminary training became available.[44]

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[41]William H. Pipes, *Say Amen, Brother: Old-Time Negro Preaching, A Study in American Frustration* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992 edition), 63-64. See also James Weldon Johnson, *God's Trombone* (New York: Viking Press, 1932); and Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (Washington D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1921, 1945).

[42]Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 44-46.

[43]Charles V. Hamilton, *The Black Preacher in America* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1972), 89.

[44]Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 46-55, 87.

The early generations of black preachers started predominantly in apprenticeship positions under more mature preachers. This tradition prevails today. Generally preachers learned the Bible through storytelling and incredible memory skills. Mitchell believes these skills were descendant from their oral traditions in African culture.[45] God was held as the primary teacher. The subsequent generations of preachers furthered this self-guiding training method. As reading skills grew, training became more and more entrenched in white teachings and culture. Since scholarship on the integrity of black culture was scarce at best, black culture became increasingly judged as lacking intellect and sophistication. Often, the black preacher has been the reigning caricature of such charges.[46] Not only does this racist perception endure, but a class stratification has grown in relation to formal education pursued within white culture. Even within the black religious community severe divisions exist over the gift of divine inspiration accompanying "the call to ministry" and the need of formal academic education.[47] Alternately, twentieth century efforts to preserve the integrity of black heritage result from greater access to education. In the final analysis, the ability of the black

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[45]Ibid., 40.

[46]Beecher Hicks, Jr., *Images of the Black Preacher* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1977), 31-32.

[47]Hamilton, 88-109.

preacher to be an agent of individual and community transformation becomes most important.[48]

While the preaching moment is central to the black worship experience, the black congregation is an integral part of the black preaching event. Ultimately, Mitchell demonstrates that black preaching creates a dialogue with the hearers. The preacher ...

> must bear deep in the condition of the people, and out of this comes the easy dialogue between preacher and the people, whose lives are intimately close together - so close together that the themes which invade the consciousness of the one also invade the other.[49]

This worship style reflects the larger dialogical West African culture. Black congregations feel free to express themselves, which is seen as meaningful participation in the preaching event. Historian Eugene Genovese relates the participation of the black worshippers directly to African community worship. The community worships "God in a way that integrated the various forms of human expression - song, dance, and prayer, all with call-and-response, as parts of a single offering the beauty of which pays homage to God."[50] The call and response patterns are commonly invoked by the preacher.[51] Yet, the spirit of participation alters the character of the preaching moment itself. It,

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[48]Hicks, 86-87.

[49]Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 106.

[50]Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Random House, 1972), 234.

[51]Ibid., 240.

too, becomes a communal event. The preached word becomes a communal activity.[52] Usually, though, black congregations respond to the preacher when something mentioned touches upon the life experiences of the hearers. The preacher enters each preaching task with this goal. A peak interest in communal participation often occurs in a celebrative movement during the preaching event. For Mitchell, participation finds its ultimate expression in celebration. The hearers personally and emotionally identify with the message. The worship environment invites their expressions of identification and personal bonding with the meaning of the message and the other participants.[53] Celebration also functions as a tool of religious instruction. The experience of celebration can equip people with an intuitive sense of core beliefs.[54] Preachers often intend or prepare sermon celebrations with this goal in mind. Mitchell contends that people will remember what they celebrate and put those experiences to work in their daily lives.

Black spirituals cultivated another significant form of community participation in worship. This musical genre exhibits the interpretation of biblical folklore in a range

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[52]Evans E. Crawford and Thomas H. Troeger, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 37-42.

[53]Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 33-35.

[54]Ibid., 51.

of emotions.[55] Spirituals reflect the common experiences of the slave in both their pain and hope. What appear as polarities in the spirituals actually function to interpret the frustrations and, yet, faith in black life. They are the expressions of black religion, "wrought out of the experience of the people who encounter the divine in the midst of historical realities."[56] The spirituals survive in expressions of community worship. Their function as a source of strength thrives in a communal spirit of faith.[57] Beyond the coded speech[58] common to the spirituals, this music functioned as a source of communal solidarity, cooperation, and strength for living.[59]

Black preaching and black worship have established a tradition centered in nurturing black wholeness and empowerment for living under oppressive conditions. The preaching task has focused on interpreting biblical Christianity in the interests of black humanity and faith development in black life. The anticipation of God's activity in human history makes socio-political activism

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[55]Blassingame, 137.

[56]Cone, *Spirituals and the Blues*, 28.

[57]Ibid., 30.

[58]The coded speech of the spirituals included reference to secret meetings as well as asserting black dignity and resistance. See Miles Mark Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (New York: Citadel Press, 1953), 41, 66-67, cited in Cone, *Spirituals and the Blues*, 15-16; and Raboteau, 247-248.

[59]Blassingame, 145-148.

extremely important to understanding black preaching. Whether in antislavery preaching or exposing the systemic racism of today, socio-political activism weighs heavily in the level of the black community's trust in the black preacher's competence. As the center of black worship, preaching functions within a communal effort to nurture black personality under the biblical revelation of God's activity in spiritual and historical liberation. From these experiences in communal worship and black preaching, a black tradition of pastoral care emerged.

Pastoral Care and Preaching in Black Ecclesiology

Ed Wimberly is a leading figure striving to give pedagogical form to pastoral care in the African American Church tradition. For Wimberly, African American churches develop their understanding of pastoral care in a campaign for the meaning and value of life. They concentrate great effort in nurturing the black person, teaching coping skills, self-worth, and social justice. The church intends to empower the individual to value self while living in a society that does not. These characteristics of black pastoral care relate significantly to Molefi Asante's notion of African spiritual values. Like Asante, Wimberly holds that spiritual values indicate the significant and symbolic views of people. His outline of spiritual values in black pastoral care correlate closely to Asante's fundamental

themes. For Wimberly, black churches communicate the following values:

> 1) the inherent worthiness of each person as unique; 2) the inner potential for growth and development in relationship to God and others; 3) the primacy of caring relationships and supportive relationships in community; and 4) the power of God working through community as well as the unconscious to build up the lives of the community and its people.[60]

The corporate character of care reflects African values, which placed an individual's life in relation to the environment, community, and cosmology.[61] Therefore, black pastoral care evolved from corporate responses to the racist social system which violated such values within the Christian world-view.

Emerging from the historical influence of spiritual values, Wimberly defines five basic themes of pastoral care that originate from the black Christian experience. These themes are:

> 1) the corporate understanding of the human personality, 2) the protest theme, 3) the emphasis on the support systems, 4) a belief in an active God of history working in behalf of the poor and oppressed, and 5) a belief in the soul as closely akin to God.[62]

The source of these values is God. Wimberly explains that when individuals come together for worship they share these values and their mutual worth as children of God. Hence,

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[60] Edward P. Wimberly, *Pastoral Counseling & Spiritual Values: A Black Point of View* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 32.

[61] Ibid., 27-28.

[62] Ibid., 42.

pastoral care must be rooted in these values and the community which shares them. For both the slave and ex-slave, the physical and spiritual worlds were interrelated. Undergirding these spiritual values and themes of pastoral care is the perceived unity of all reality, which includes God and human experience.[63] The pastor becomes the agent of God's concern for the person and the community.

Experiences unique to black persons, both cultural and historical, have distinctive consequences for pastoral care. Experiences of racism and injustice shape the black perspective of how African American Christians struggle with their environment. For Wimberly, the distinct emphasis in the pastoral care of black churches is its corporate nature. He suggests, "the term *corporate* means that the care of the individual is the function of whole community, rather than the function of the pastor or any other specially designated person who possesses specialized skills."[64] Wimberly asserts that the corporate nature of pastoral care emanated from African heritage and the experiences of racism and segregation. African social patterns centered around the concepts of unity and harmony with all creation. Social isolation and the struggle to survive in America made mutual dependence a practical necessity for black life. This relationship quite naturally lent itself to a collective consciousness.

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[63]Ibid.

[64]Ibid., 26.

Through a narrative approach, Wimberly examines African American hermeneutics inherited from "life within a community of faith."[65] Herein, the world-view of the community, which includes spiritual values, operates as an interpretive guide in the hermeneutical process.[66] Because of its narrative character, African American pastoral care for the individual thrives in community. Wimberly explains the hermeneutical process for personal wholeness:

> The faith community's hermeneutics was a communal, participatory process of mutual storytelling, drawing on images indigenous to the particular culture. The experiencer brought his or her experience to the community in the form of a story. The community listened to the story to ascertain whether or not the story was consistent with other stories heard in the community of faith. If the story was analogous to other stories shared in community, then the vision and its interpretation were communally confirmed. Thus, the hermeneutical process was the interpretation and reinterpretation of experience via a model of communal-analogy-storytelling-listening.[67]

Because of the respect for personal experience, the communal hermeneutic does allow for new encounters and new interpretations of meaning. The community of faith is therefore expanded by the introduction of new experiences.[68] Wimberly then presses the hermeneutical process to weigh the cultural dimensions of the faith community. He explains:

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[65]Edward P. Wimberly and Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Liberation and Human Wholeness: The Conversion Experiences of Black People in Slavery and Freedom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 13.

[66]Ibid., 14.

[67]Ibid., 75.

[68]Ibid., 76-77.

> Here the central hermeneutical task is to ascertain what God did at the level of culture to help the faith community express God's liberating work. Through the medium of ritual - which includes music, instruments, art, patterns for body movement, symbols, images, values and language - God enabled the faith community to express what God did to bring wholeness to persons. It was through the cultural expression of ritual that the central liberating acts of God were made available to the wider community and to future generations of the faith community.[69]

The ritual life contains the world-view and the interpretations of meaning gathered by the community of faith. It also perpetuates the meaning for gathering itself. Wimberly highlights the Negro spirituals as a prime example of ritual life in the slave community. I take this to mean that ritual life in the black religious community embodies preaching and worship as well. Wimberly's narrative hermeneutical process presents pastoral care within a cultural interpretation of God's activity in the faith community. This includes God's liberating activity in social justice as well as in personal wholeness.

The pastor uses narrative methods in both the worship experience and counseling. Pastoral counseling occurs within the relationships between ministers who possess counseling skills and individuals or families who have sought out the services of those skills.[70] Wimberly designates pastoral counseling under the liberation ministry of the Church. It is understood that the traditions of the

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[69]Ibid., 88-89.

[70]Wimberly, *Pastoral Counseling & Spiritual Values*, 20.

Church are also resources used in the counseling relationship. Citing Olin Moyd, Wimberly suggests how pastoral counseling is a facet of the Church's liberation ministry: "Liberation has three dimensions: 1) liberation from external oppression, 2) liberation from sin and guilt, and 3) liberation to share in community with others who are liberated."[71]

Pastoral counseling, however, does not comprise the full breadth of ministry in the Church. It is a part of the liberating and redemptive work in the mission of the Church. In seeking to help free people from the internal and interpersonal distresses which prevent them from living fully as the children of God, the goal of pastoral care is grounded in the growth of love toward God, the self, and others.[72] The narrative approach in black pastoral care employs a wide range of stories to connect or reconnect people to "God's unfolding story" with humanity.[73] Wimberly develops this narrative method in what he calls an "eschatological plot." He argues that plots in the narrative method buttress the images, metaphors, or anecdotes of our faith stories. The eschatological plot is "the dominant plot that gives meaning for the African American Christian . . ., one that envisions hope in the

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[71]Ibid., quoting Olin P. Moyd, *Redemption in Black Theology* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1979), 28.

[72]Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, 27.

[73]Ibid., 15.

midst of suffering and oppression, because God is working out God's purposes in life on behalf of persons."[74] Wimberly does distinguish the use of storytelling in preaching and worship from its use in pastoral care. He seems to limit the functions of storytelling in preaching and worship to proselytizing and praise, while its function in pastoral care is growth-oriented.[75] As I will show in greater detail, Wimberly stipulates an undesirable separation of preaching and worship from pastoral care. His distinction is even more difficult to understand when he later illustrates pastoral care functioning in a worship context.[76] Accordingly, I suggest that preaching and worship function as pastoral care in the African American faith community.

Though Wimberly insightfully develops the historical and spiritual dimensions of African American pastoral care, he woefully neglects the role of preaching as one of its major, if not primary, facets. In an early work, *Pastoral Care in the Black Church*, Wimberly constricts the dimensions of preaching to a secondary role in the scheme of pastoral care.

In outlining the domain of pastoral care, Wimberly relies on four functions derived from pastoral theologians, William Clebsch and Charles Jaekle. Clebsch and Jaekle

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[74]Ibid., 13.

[75]Ibid., 17-18.

[76]Ibid., Chapter one.

depict the functions of pastoral care as, "the ministry of the cure of souls, . . . directed toward the *healing, sustaining, guiding,* and *reconciling* of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns."[77] In brief, the four functions are defined as follows:

> 1) *Healing* is the restoration of persons to some level of wholeness, which also attempts to achieve a new level of spiritual insight and welfare.
> 2) *Sustaining* seeks to help persons to endure or transcend those circumstances which are not likely to give way to restoration or healing.
> 3) *Guiding* assists troubled persons in making difficult choices in thought or action which affect both the present and future state of the soul.
> 4) *Reconciling* seeks to re-establish broken relationships between persons, and between a person and God.[78]

Wimberly may have dismissed a fuller recognition of black preaching within the functions of pastoral care due to Clebsch and Jaekle's own specifications. Here, they argue that pastoral care should be distinguished from other ministerial roles which not only include preaching, but also teaching, worship, and community relations.[79] I suggest, however, that Wimberly insufficiently addresses how the historical context of African American Christian Church

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[77]William A. Clebsch and Charles R. Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc.,1975), 4. Clebsch and Jaekle actually adopt their first three functions of pastoral care from pastoral theologian Seward Hiltner. They have added reconciling as a fourth function. See Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958).

[78]Ibid., 8-9.

[79]Ibid., 3.

traditions alter the specifications of Clebsch and Jaekle's four functions of pastoral care.

Wimberly's leading principle is that "sustaining and guiding became the dominant forms of pastoral care in the black church because of the historical-cultural circumstances that existed in America."[80] It is difficult to understand why Wimberly renders healing and reconciling as secondary functions of black pastoral care,[81] especially since he alleges that the historical-cultural circumstances of black churches alter Clebsch and Jaekle's notion of pastoral care functions. Instead, Wimberly believes that healing and reconciling were subsumed under the sustaining and guiding functions due to the pervasive assault of racial oppression on black wholeness.[82] I maintain, to the contrary, that the assault of racial oppression actually contributed to the prominence of the healing and reconciling functions, particularly in regard to black preaching as a form of pastoral care.

Wimberly fixes upon the corporate identity of ministry in black churches and the community as resources for pastoral care.[83] The world-view of the slaves, and subsequently ex-slaves, perceived the immanence of God in

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[80]Edward P. Wimberly, *Pastoral Care in the Black Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 121.

[81]Ibid., 20.

[82]Ibid., 18-23.

[83]Ibid., 28-29.

the life of the community. This world-view also perceived within community the resources of spiritual values in the pastoral care function of sustaining.[84] Wimberly locates the guiding function in the office of the pastor. As a symbol, the pastoral office represents the community's identity, which embodies its values and mission. The pastor symbolizes God's involvement with humanity, and thereby is granted authority in the guiding function of pastoral care.[85]

Wimberly relegates preaching to a secondary function subsumed under either sustaining or guiding. Only in the event of persons in crisis does he grant preaching the status of pastoral care.[86] Otherwise, preaching falls under a blanket effect of the therapeutic context of black worship. Such worship is empowered as a community resource for pastoral care. Wimberly does not stand alone on this point. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes characterizes the social role of black churches as a "collective therapeutic experience."[87] She maintains that black churches provide asylum for freedom of expression. Like Wimberly, Gilkes highlights healing in the collective experience. In this

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[84]Ibid.

[85]Ibid., 35-36.

[86]Ibid., 56-57.

[87]Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "The Black Church as a Therapeutic Community: Suggested Areas for Research into the Black Religious Experience," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 8 (Fall 1980): 39.

context, ministers and congregants alike function as therapists. The preacher is recognized for her/his symbolic role within the therapeutic capacity of the church community.[88]

Despite his own disclaimer, it seems that Wimberly has accepted Clebsch and Jaekle's narrow definition of pastoral care. I have shown that black preaching and the worship experience evolved as major facets in communal care, providing survival and growth resources for black wholeness. The African American adaptation of biblical Christianity and the formation of black churches advanced upon the functional primacy of black preaching in the communal worship life.[89] Moreover, I hold that preaching has been a dominant feature in all four of Clebsch and Jaekle's functions. Care for black wholeness, which includes healing amidst sustaining and guiding, and the reconciliation of humanity to God, to self, and to each other have been among the fundamental facets of black preaching and the worship experience.

To illustrate my point, I first turn to the healing function. The slaves' adaptation of Christianity, itself, sought to heal black wholeness through black preaching. The restoration of black wholeness to the full biblical sense of humanity as created directly by God, in the image of God, certainly qualifies as a healing ministry. Olin Moyd characterizes black preaching as therapeutic care in healing

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[88]Ibid.

[89]Lincoln and Mamiya, 346.

and empowering black people.[90] Given the historical-cultural context, black preaching undeniably qualifies as a primary function of care. In fact, preaching and community worship provided the principal forms of pastoral care. Any discussion trying to determine an ordinal hierarchy between preaching and community is futile. Borrowing from the language of Clebsch and Jaekle, black preaching indeed seeks to achieve a restoration of black wholeness which leads to a new level of spiritual welfare. Pastoral healing should not be limited to issues surrounding physical ailment, which I believe Wimberly verges on doing. And yet, while spiritual and emotional troubles certainly qualify as debilitating ailments, they also are chief concerns in the pastoral healing ministry of black preaching.

Secondly, the reconciling function in pastoral care dominates black preaching's focus on the alienation of humanity from God, and between people themselves. Even the restoration of black wholeness within the healing function serves the reconciliation of humans to each other and to God. Black churches understand the need for reconciliation in many relational spheres: human sin, the black person's self-image, the black community itself, and the interracial society-at-large.

Any form of liberation from oppression does not preclude the continuation of broken relationships between

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[90]Olin P. Moyd, *The Sacred Art: Preaching and Theology in the African American Tradition* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1995), 84, 94.

the oppressed and their oppressors. J. Deotis Roberts argues that Christian liberation desires reconciliation.[91] Roberts is convinced that the goal of Christian ministry is liberation and reconciliation together. Christian liberation ministry preaches a gospel message of reconciliation.[92] Wimberly agrees that "the goal of liberation is to restore persons to wholeness and mend broken relationships with God and with persons."[93] Unfortunately, he fails to recognize the dominance of liberation preaching in the history of black churches. Reconciling liberation is central to black preaching. Whether liberation is meant to reconcile persons to their biblical sense of being, to reconcile persons to one another, or to reconcile all to God, it functions as a dominant feature in pastoral care through black preaching. The centrality of the preaching event, itself, suggests its primary functions as pastoral care within black churches.

In the midst of racial injustice black churches fulfilled the communal, psychological, educational, economic, and political needs of black people. Slavery, segregation, and systemic racism in America have excluded black people from equal opportunities in society and human fulfillment. In short, black churches became the primary support system for much of black America. Wimberly's notion

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[91]J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 72.

[92]Ibid., 192-193.

[93]Wimberly, *Pastoral Care in the Black Church*, 75.

of the corporate nature of ministry in black churches is consistent with their ecclesial identity and mission. The corporate identity of black churches acknowledges mutual responsibility. This mutual responsibility becomes a divine imperative. Hence, a communal ecclesiology conveys both sacred identity and sacred mission.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL MODEL OF ECCLESIOLOGY IN BLACK CHURCHES

The Church as Refuge

I contend that African American ecclesiology developed through the practices of preaching and pastoral care. This stands in stark contrast to many Protestant traditions which drew upon doctrinal formulae for their foundational understanding of preaching and pastoral care. Thus, ecclesiology directly shaped praxis. However, in African American churches their preaching tradition, along with a communal form of pastoral care, shaped ecclesiology. My interest in the dominant historical model of black ecclesiology is stimulated by the challenges facing black churches from black theology. Frequently, these challenges disparage black churches with allegations of practical irrelevance to the current experiences of African Americans.[1]

This chapter scrutinizes the conceptualization of an African American historical model of ecclesiology. The determination of the irrelevance of black churches under this model remains the task of another chapter. Here, I attempt a historical and theological evaluation of church

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[1]My introduction outlines the charges levelled by black theologians adding to the voices of the black power movement. For a more detailed account, see James Cone, *My People*; and Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 119-125.

ministry in black preaching as the core material for the subsequent task. Such a study will lead to some important questions in later chapters: Do the contemporary challenges from black theology require a new model of African American ecclesiology? How do new historical conditions alter the relationships between preaching, pastoral care, and ecclesiology in black churches?

The ecclesiology of black churches developed within what is commonly referred to as a "refuge" paradigm.[2] This image includes concerns for the survival, nurture, and growth of African Americans through the Christian faith. The church fulfilled the emotional, spiritual, and sociological needs of an alienated people. It provided a community that affirmed, even nurtured, black humanity and worth in an otherwise hostile and degrading social existence.[3] Curtis Bruce argues that it is "both reasonable and necessary for black souls to secure 'psychological space' needed for cultivating an enriching moral climate in which self-enhancement could occur unhampered."[4] The effect was empowerment for living anew. Historically, this refuge image arose from a corporate identity established in

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[2]Frazier, 44-46.

[3]Vergel L. Lattimore, "The Positive Contribution of Black Cultural Values to Pastoral Counseling," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* XXXVI, no. 2 (June 1982): 108.

[4]Curtis E. Bruce, "Nurturing the Souls of Black Folk," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* XXX, no. 4 (December 1976): 261. For a similar defense of the psycho-social role of black churches, see Mays and Nicholson, 93.

response to oppression. Peter Paris explains this phenomenon:

> Whenever persons are rejected by society, the result is a loss of place; the result is exile. Whenever a pattern of rejection persists from one generation to another and is firmly rooted in an ideology, the rejected ones become destined to a veritable permanent state of exile wherein they have no sense of belonging, neither to the community nor to the territory. Since it is necessary for persons to be nourished by a communal eros in order to become fully human, an imposed exile necessitates the formation of a substitute community, and, as we have seen, that has been one of the major functions of the black churches.[5]

Here, Paris clarifies the role that social context played in the formation and function of the black community. The American slave system, Jim Crow, as well as economically and socially systemic racism created the need for a protective community, which thereby provided the support necessary for survival. The slaves' adaptation of American Christianity aided in the transmutation of the experiences of western racial subjugation into a religious folk community offering strength and growth. Preaching became a primary vehicle in this evolution.[6] Because of the strictly limited access to social opportunities black churches became the institutional centers of practical and intellectual motivation. Black preachers stood in a dominant role of leadership extending from the pulpit ministry. The African slaves and early free Blacks came to establish communal care through the worship

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[5]Paris, *Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, 59.

[6]Mays and Nicholson, 17, 58.

life of black religious folk practices and eventually black churches.[7]

The dimensions of this psychosocial image were not devoid of socio-political activity. The refuge function of the church was not escapism.[8] Although criticisms against this model have been levelled historically by proponents of heightened political and even revolutionary appeals, black churches have commonly fostered black wholeness and human rights. The refuge image of the Church constructed the foundation of the churches' socio-political presence upon the critical evaluation of human value and human needs -- which included liberation. A confluence of psychosocial and socio-political interests emerged under this historical ecclesial model.[9] Paris views this development as the

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[7]William B. McClain, "Free Style and a Closer Relationship to Life," in *The Black Experience in Religion*, ed. C. Eric Lincoln (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974), 4-6. This essay first appeared in *Christianity and Crisis* XXX, no. 18 (November 2 and 16): 250-252.

[8]Perhaps one of the strongest criticisms of black religion, and Christianity in general, comes from African American psychiatrists William Grier and Price Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York: Basic Books, Publishers, 1968), 196-197, 208-209. For a descriptive account of black religion as escapist see Joseph R. Washington, Jr., *Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States* (University Press of America, 1984), 95-104, 130-133.

[9]Lincoln and Mamiya, 202-212. Contrary to some broad claims by a few black theologians (see Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1972), Lincoln and Mamiya illustrate how black churches have been involved in various forms of political activities, even during the controversial post-Reconstruction and pre-Civil Rights years. However, the manner of political action often assumed a "low-profile" or "behind-the-scenes," non-confrontive approach.

natural consequence of a people facing dehumanizing social conflict. He asserts that "black churches aimed at socializing their members into creative forms of coping along with the development of imaginative styles of social and political protest . . . ."[10]

James Cone agrees that the Black Church, from its inception, has been the primary place where African Americans have found relief from the harsh realities of racial and systemic oppression. Typically, the black religious folk experience empowered persons for living in such stark realities. But for Cone, black theology reveals the liberation message of the Gospel and, therefore, the true mission of the Black Church.[11]

Black theologians base their liberation ethics in the historical roots of the pre-Civil War era of black churches. Their disparagement of the refuge image lies in an "other-worldly" depiction of contemporary praxis within black churches that lacks radical "this-worldly" liberation ethics. To counter this charge, it is important to understand the self-image of black churches and the religious folk perspective of their historical legacy. I maintain that a basic conflict in the functional meaning of the refuge image greatly impedes the dialogue between black churches and black theology. Since black theology insists

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[10]Ibid., 6.

[11]James H. Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 136-137.

that black churches have lost a critical relevance to socio-political liberation ethics, it will be helpful to make a distinction between the contemporary image of refuge and its historical meaning. The term "refuge" no longer conveys the same meaning between contemporary black churches and black theology. For black churches, the refuge legacy sustains an interrelationship between spiritual faith and liberation. This self-image underpins the black churches' understanding of Christian ministry.[12] For black theology, refuge perpetuates an escapist mentality that neglects the practical demands of liberation ethics.[13] The challenge this conflict presents is the reconceptualization of an ecclesial model mutually acceptable to contemporary black churches and black theology. Such a model would recapture a common hermeneutic for their respective platforms and future dialogue.

In the previous chapter, I began with the roles of preaching and pastoral care in the historical development of black ecclesiology. From the primary content of early black preaching and communal care, I suggest a "covenant model" for revisioning black ecclesiology. I reserve the use of "refuge" to indicate the "other-worldly" psychosocial interpretation of spirituality in black churches held by

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[12]Benjamin E. Mays, *Seeking to Be Christian in Race Relations* (New York: Friendship Press, 1981), 81-85. See also Chapman, 39-41.

[13]Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 200, 221, 226. See also Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 142.

black theology. The covenant model indicates the confluence of the psychosocial refuge image and liberation ethics in the early black churches. The biblical covenant tradition will also aid my critique of the narrow employment of the prophetic office espoused by the black theology project. Overall, the covenant model will facilitate a dialogue between the black churches' self-image and the critique ventured by black theology.

Some Basic Considerations in Modeling Black Ecclesiology

The Church is commonly understood within its social function in society. Admittedly, much of this essay has focused on the social solidarity and communal activity within black churches. American religion, in particular, is often preoccupied with social values enabling the successful functioning of the institutional Church.[14] The Church may seek to reform society or seek to stabilize it. At times one of these functions may dominate the life of the Church to the detriment of the other. When the normative function of the Church takes on an uncritical life of its own, inconsistencies with its religious values and identity arise.[15] With regard to American slavery and racism, many mainstream churches declined their prophetic commission, and became either willing partners in the sins of society, or at

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[14]David O. Moberg, *The Church as a Social Institution: The Sociology of American Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 135.

[15]Ibid., 137-138.

least partners by neglect. Black theology raises a similar question concerning the actual functional role of black churches. Have black churches allowed their traditional social function to outweigh their critical function in society?

My reconceptualization, or remodeling, of ecclesiology directly seeks continuity between the Black Church's social function and its religious values and identity. Black theology has done well to expose the contemporary discontinuity between the churches' historical prophetic role in the political liberation of African Americans and its contemporary social failings. Notwithstanding, I maintain that a conflict among the interpretations of the liberation ethics present in black churches remains unresolved and, therefore, a major factor in the chasm which exists between black theology and black churches. My effort to reconceptualize black ecclesiology is designed to establish a common hermeneutical model for contemporary black churches and black theology.

In their methodology for practical theological reflection, James and Evelyn Whitehead ground theological thinking in the experiences and needs of people.[16] Theological reflection in these matters becomes the responsibility of the faith community. In the faith community, contemporary experiences, culture, and the

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[16]James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 9.

Christian tradition converge. The Whiteheads maintain that when these voices are allowed to dialogue in practical theological reflection the faith community ventures self-correction more effectively.[17] Within a similar process, David Moberg characterizes the churches' role in society as either stabilizing or reforming. The actual role is determined somewhere between identification with the "contemporary cultural conditions" within society and the "transcendent interpretations of life" drawn from religious faith.[18] Both the Whiteheads and Moberg contemplate the critical relationship between the churches' religious obligations and their social obligations.[19]

The same goes for the evaluation of biblical resources. The Whiteheads view the formation of the Christian tradition through the revelation of Scripture and the history of

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[17]Ibid., 10-12.

[18]Moberg, 137.

[19]The use of the term "obligations" is borrowed from Moberg. I use obligations to indicate the duality of Church responsibilities which sometimes come into conflict, and other times are functional matters of great debate. This essay argues for an interrelational model as opposed to a dialectic one. Lincoln and Mamiya propose a dialectical model for black churches. They offer six pairs of dialectical polarities (i.e. priestly versus prophetic functions, other-worldly versus this-worldly) which reflect the complexities of black churches. They view the strength of these dimensions in their dialectic tension. I argue, to the contrary, that the chasm between black churches and black theology is due to a lost mutuality characterized by their respective and separate dialectic methodologies. My reconceptualization of an ecclesial model attempts to establish the interrelationship between the pastoral and prophetic, etc. See Lincoln and Mamiya, 10-16.

ecclesial interpretations.[20] James Gustafson explains that the church community maintains its continuity, that is "its social identity and inner unity," through internalized meanings acquired from the Bible, creeds, rites, and symbols.[21] Moreover, the church community establishes "particular meanings" that are drawn from the historical experiences of individuals and the group itself.[22] The Bible is commonly considered the primary source of Christian revelation for, and through, the Church.[23] The Bible comprises a common memory for the Christian churches. Yet, part of the common memory of a community is a subjective understanding of past history applied to present history.[24] Continuity is maintained by returning to the biblical sources for the principal interpretations of meaning gathered in the Church's history.[25]

Consequently, the use of Scripture in the life of the Church reveals dominant paradigms of meaning produced

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[20]Whiteheads, 7-8.

[21]James M. Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 43.

[22]Ibid., 44.

[23]Dulles, 176. See also idem, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1983), chapters XII-XIII.

[24]Gustafson, 72-74.

[25]Ibid., 82.

through historical contexts.[26] A methodological review of these paradigms exposes how they evolved and continue to function within the Church's ecclesiology. Avery Dulles suggests that a model of ecclesiology becomes a dominant paradigm when it successfully relates the tradition to present problems in the life of the Church.[27] In the language of Gustafson, I take Dulles' point to mean that a model becomes a paradigm when it maintains continuity between the Church's past social identity and inner meaning and its ability to address the present. This may explain why the model of black churches as "refuge" no longer successfully functions as a paradigm for black ecclesiology. What then becomes a viable course for the reconceptualization of black ecclesiology? In this effort, I maintain that preaching and pastoral care function as the

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[26]Eugene Ulrich and William Thompson, "The Tradition in Theological Reflection: Scripture and the Minister," in *Method in Ministry*, ed. James and Evelyn Whitehead, 29.

[27]Dulles, 29-31. Noted philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn, acknowledges that a common understanding of paradigm refers to an accepted model or pattern. Yet, he distinguishes a successful paradigm from normal science. Normal science is the activity involved in establishing the promise of a successful paradigm. Therefore, I acknowledge that this project employs an heuristic methodology of normal science. My use of the covenant model may be, in Kuhn's terminology, a pre-paradigm, or simply paradigmatic. The success of the covenant model as a paradigm can only be determined under further application and analysis. See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 23-34.

normative activities interpreting meaning in the contemporary experiences of the faith community.[28]

As stated above, I propose that the African American preaching and pastoral care traditions comprise an ecclesiological paradigm that may be understood as a "covenant model." This model allows for both the retention of African spiritual values and the adaptation to western Christianity through black preaching and a communal ethos of care. In brief, this model reflects Asante's summary of spiritual values under two major fronts. First, the covenant model addresses the search for meaning and value of life in relation to God and neighbor. Second, it focuses on nurturing the black person, teaching coping skills and self-worth, and empowers one to seek the fullness of life. In turn, the adaptation to Christianity is most effectively seen through the interpretations of meaning and identity derived from Scripture. Therefore, in the functional organization of black churches, preaching thrives at the center of worship and the communal experience.

The Covenant Model

Contributing specifically to the development of a covenant model, I identify four major biblical tenets in black preaching and pastoral care commonly distinguished as

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[28]Gustafson, 63-65; See also Donald Capps, "Bible: Pastoral Use and Interpretation of, " in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, ed. Rodney Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 82-85.

defining revelation for black churches and black theology. These tenets have contributed collectively to the formation of an African American Church ecclesiology. The four biblical tenets are: 1) creation and *imago dei*; 2) the Exodus narrative; 3) conversion and the suffering of Jesus; and 4) eschatology and the Kingdom of God. What follows is a brief characterization of each biblical tenet in black preaching as they have shaped ecclesiology.

1. Creation and *imago dei*:

Black churches were places where black persons could go not simply to escape the horrors of racism, but to celebrate their full humanity as beings created in the image of God. Even in the "hush harbors" of the "invisible institution"[29] during slavery, black people identified with the Genesis teaching that humans were created by God, in God's own image. The slaves rejected both the white masters' and white churches' teachings which relegated them to an ontologically inferior position. Along these lines, the development of black identity is grounded in the biblical understanding of creation in the image of God.

Henry Mitchell insists that belief in God as Creator was a familiar doctrine in African religious folk traditions. In fact, Mitchell points out that the creation

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[29]The term "invisible institution" refers to the black religious folk experiences of the slaves' clandestine worship practices. See Frazier, *The Negro Church in America*, passim.

doctrine of the Hebrew Scriptures bears great similarity to African religious myths.[30] Through Egypt, African culture had substantial influence in both Hebrew and Greek cultures. For Mitchell, then, African slaves could easily recognize the similarities. Recognition of similarities in mythic content could only aid in the adaptation of western Christianity.

The biblical notion that all creation was "good" confirmed not only the African value of human life, but all life. Mitchell contends that the slaves' interpretation of the goodness of all life buttressed the indispensability and divine sanction of freedom. Creation of all humans in the image of God affirms this divine sanction. Creation in God's image meant that all humans are entitled to be free.[31] Denial of this basic right is in direct conflict with the biblical view of creation and God's relationship to humanity.

This understanding of creation in the image of God became a foundation for the adaptation of other component tenets of the biblical narratives, such as the Exodus story. Here, however, it is important to acknowledge the role of divine sanction and authority. J. Deotis Roberts insists that the affirmation of creation and human life was an

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[30]Mitchell, *Black Belief*, 67, 110.

[31]Ibid., 120.

absolute necessity for any formulation of black theology.[32] Within the spectrum of the creation story, Roberts underscores the distinction between God's will and human disorder. The result is the affirmation and insistence upon God's intention for the freedom of all humanity. James Cone articulates well the impact of creation doctrine:

> For to affirm that human beings are free only when that freedom is derived from divine revelation has concrete political consequences. If we are created for God, then any other allegiance is a denial of freedom, and we must struggle against those who attempt to enslave us. The image of God is not merely a personal relationship with God, but is also that constituent of humanity which makes all people struggle against captivity.[33]

The ultimate power behind faith in God as Creator lay in the belief of God's absolute sovereignty. Dearing King understands the sovereignty of God as the substructure undergirding black worship. Sovereignty was a necessary attribute of God if black people were to maintain any vestige of hope. God's sovereignty held ultimate power even over the human masters. Hence, divine sovereignty heightened the appeal of the Christian God.[34] Even in his discussion on predestination, Mitchell also places the sovereignty of God in partnership with the African

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[32]J. Deotis Roberts, "Black Consciousness in Theological Perspective," in *The Black Experience in Religion*, ed. C. Eric Lincoln (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1974), 103.

[33]Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 145.

[34]Dearing E. King, "Worship in the Black Church," in *Black Church Lifestyles* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986), 72-73.

understanding of the doctrine of creation. He states, "in a world view of vibrant affirmation of life, God's final authority underwrites and guarantees the evaluation of existence as good."[35] The biblical notion of God's sovereignty empowered the slaves' and free Blacks' claims upon creation doctrine in their adaptation of Christianity.

2) The Exodus Narrative:

The appropriation of the Exodus experience of the Israelites connoted prophetic discernment for the slaves. The Black Church evolved out of the slaves' and free Blacks' struggle for wholeness, meaning, and freedom. The Exodus story provided a historical vindication of God's value of black humanity. Both slaves and free Blacks identified with the Hebrew people enslaved in Egypt. The association between African slavery and Hebrew slavery determined God's desire for black freedom. The appropriation of the Exodus tradition to the contemporary struggle of an enslaved people nurtured a sense of corporate identity under this God's very interest. Thus, the notion of God's sovereignty unfolds into the resiliency of a Christian folk tradition among African Americans.[36]

While the need for community gave birth to black churches, it did so under an image of covenant community. The covenant model contained the image of refuge or

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[35]Mitchell, *Black Belief*, 76.

[36]King, 72.

sanctuary. This refuge, however, was not escapism in any futile sense. Any lack of revolutionary activity was not due to a lack of socio-political motivation.[37] Concerned efforts in the healthy survival of African Americans was at once both a pastoral and political activity.[38] Survivalism in black folk religion nurtured the spirit of protest and action in the struggle for freedom.[39] It sought to nurture the person's human value before God. An identity as God's "new" chosen people created a community of faith.[40] In this light, the formation of corporate identity served liberating purposes. The refuge component sustained the slaves' and free Blacks' corporate identity, which was grounded within their human value. Liberation methods commonly centered around meeting daily needs. In their transformed identity, the American Christian slaves forged both a renewed and new sense of meaning and purpose.[41]

The American slave system, as well as Jim Crow, induced a corporate identity despite great efforts to destroy corporate solidarity or community. Slaveholders sought to strip the slaves of their African culture, which included language and tribal identities. The loss of these cultural

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[37]Genovese, 278-279.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 36-38.

[40]Raboteau, 311. See also Levine, 33; This author points to several examples of slave spirituals in which the slaves identified themselves as the people of God.

[41]Raboteau, 311.

distinctions and the blanket effect of a social system based on racial stratification created a de facto corporate categorization.

The appropriation of the Christian God and biblical stories transformed the corporate identity from an imposed condition into a source of strength. Peter Paris explains that categorization by race was not intrinsic to African cultures.[42] Regardless of the dehumanizing effects, pervasive alienation by race was an ideological creation of the western slave system and social discrimination within western society. In the adaptation of Christianity under these conditions, slaves and free Blacks began to employ a positive corporate identity based upon race. This transformation is evidenced, for Paris, by the appearance of such terms as "African" in the language of early black Americans' self-identification.[43] Paris reminds us, however, that the positive corporate identity created by early African Americans required a transcendent source. He states, "the strength of the community's unity depends on the power of myths, customs, and rituals that are expressive of their collective self-understanding and capable of inspiring their loyalty to the community's primary cause."[44] It was within this notion of transcendent cohesion that, under the appropriation of the Exodus narrative, the African

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[42]Paris, *Spirituality of African Peoples*, 72-73.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Ibid., 74.

American corporate identity adopted a covenantal affiliation to God.

This covenantal relationship relies heavily upon the value of the human being established in creation. The individual is particularly valued by God. As a created being, one inherits a covenantal relationship with the Creator, who is intimately concerned for and involved in the liberation of creation. Black churches view their corporate identity similarly. The Exodus narrative is a historical account of God's self-revelation as One who is invested in the plight of oppressed humanity.[45] God's actions in history not only confirm God's sovereignty, but also God's alliance with humanity, as well as God's will. James Cone summarizes that Israel's covenant relationship with God was rooted in God's actions and revelation in the Exodus narrative. He posits, "the centrality of the Exodus for Israel's consciousness, seen first through the people's recognition of deliverance, was further developed at Sinai, as Exodus became the basis for Israel's covenant with Yahweh."[46] The Exodus narrative revealed God's passion for the liberation of oppressed humanity. Therefore, the liberation of the Hebrew children revealed God's concern for the enslaved Africans. The covenant projects God's will and continued involvement. Following the Exodus narrative, black preaching nurtured a covenantal corporate identity

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[45]Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 65.

[46]Ibid., 64.

among early African Americans. Liberation of black humanity concerned both the social and spiritual self. The Black Church is where this liberation was first prophesied, preserved, nourished, and actualized.

3) Conversion and the Suffering of Jesus:

The conversion experience was one of the more penetrating influences of western Christianity upon the American slaves and early free Blacks. Stemming from the evangelical Protestant movement, African American Christians emphasized liberation from human sin and spiritual bondage. In this respect, American revivalism held great impact and appeal for the slaves and free Blacks.[47] Emphasis upon the conversion experience transcended social stratification, despite racist efforts to teach otherwise. Historian Albert Raboteau noted, "the essential dynamic of the conversion is an inward, experiential realization of the doctrine of human depravity, divine sovereignty, and unconditional election made vividly apparent to the imagination and the emotions."[48] As a result, the growing knowledge of the

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[47]Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 32-33. See also Bruce A. Rosenberg, *Can These Bones Live?* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 19-21; and Raboteau, 132.

[48]Raboteau, 268. The use of the term "election" in this citation should not reflect any theological determination by this study. The reader should place emphasis upon the impact of conversion in the African American religious folk tradition. A very different discussion would consider the theological implications of election vs. free will.

Bible continued to cultivate the theological underpinnings of freedom.

Ruby Johnston holds that a review of conversion experiences reveals patterns in the early African Americans' struggle with their dehumanized status. In its inherent doctrine of human value to God, the conversion experience to Christianity captivated many slaves and early free Blacks.[49] Black theologian Cheryl Sanders directly relates the conversion experience to the use of Scripture. She reports:

> The hearing of Scripture is frequently cited in the ex-slave accounts as a critical factor leading to conversion. Ex-slave converts tell of their response to Scripture as preached, taught, or read aloud, either in conjunction with other critical factors, or as the sole and sufficient element in the conversion experience.[50]

In her review of ex-slave accounts Sanders identifies that black preaching and black churches did attempt to undermine slavery by promoting of the gospel message of freedom. Preaching freedom from personal sin led not only to a recognition of human value, but also inspired efforts at physical freedom and transformation of the social order.[51] Sanders' investigation confirms these biblical interpretations in the conversion experiences of slaves regarding their social context.

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[49]Ruby F. Johnston, *The Development of Negro Religion* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 24.

[50]Cheryl J. Sanders, "Slavery and Conversion: An Analysis of Ex-slave Testimony" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1985), 40.

[51]Johnston, 36.

The essence of the conversion experience cannot be limited by the appeal to spiritual freedom. There remained a tension concerning how a person should understand the full pursuit of freedom. In the ideals of those converted, facing slavery and socio-political racism, a quandary endured between the passive and active expectations of freedom.[52] That is to say, an affinity exists between being freed by God and proactively seeking freedom. The dilemma of the black convert was a question of how to confront the evil of racism -- by enduring bondage patiently until God brings a new age of freedom into reality, or by taking the initiative to escape or overthrow it.[53] The end of slavery did not resolve the passive and active dilemma in the functional role of conversion-salvation. Black preaching and pastoral care continued to labor between these pursuits of freedom and the full realization of God's intentions for black humanity.

A similar dilemma exists within the traditional notion of redemptive suffering held by most black churches. Identification with the Christ as a suffering servant dramatized God's egalitarian concern for black humanity. Simply put, Jesus suffers with us. The risen Christ liberates us from spiritual and emotional bondage, heals us from physical suffering and mental distress, and cares for our humanity as any other. The Jesus of the Gospels

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[52]Sanders, 204.

[53]Ibid., 205.

liberates our souls, even while we yet anticipate historical freedom.[54] Through the conversion experience one discovers a haven from judgement and the conditions of life which assault black wholeness.

Suffering is transformed by the image of Jesus as the suffering servant. J. Deotis Roberts notes, "the suffering servant title refers to humiliation, undeserved suffering that is to be redemptive. Suffering can be a means to redemption."[55] Along with Roberts, I must caution against a common misunderstanding or abuse of redemptive suffering -- that God intends suffering for some, and therefore avoiding or resisting suffering undermines a divine plan.[56] Roberts does well to warn against this misappropriation:

> As those who know the depths of undeserved suffering, may we somehow find a clue to its meaning in the example of Christ. To seek suffering as an end in itself is to court an empty and meaningless martyrdom. But to transform suffering into a moral and spiritual victory over evil is to live redemptively, it is to use the suffering which is ours rather than to be used by it.[57]

I believe Roberts' warning unearths anew the relationship between the spiritual and social implications emerging from Sanders' view of the conversion experience. The correlation

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[54]Lincoln, *Black Experience in Religion*, 107.

[55]Roberts, "Black Consciousness," 107.

[56]For one of the more extreme positions in this portrayal of black suffering see Joseph R. Washington, Jr., *The Politics of God* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). For refutation of Washington's position see C. Eric Lincoln, *Black Experience in Religion*, 143-146.

[57]Roberts, "Black Consciousness," 107.

reflects God's ability to transform suffering redemptively for the sake of humanity.

African American interpretations of conversion, salvation, and redemptive suffering are illumined by a covenantal understanding of personal identification with the suffering servant, Jesus. Grounded in the survival and nurture of humanity under God's sovereignty, preaching and pastoral care orient black churches to freedom from the ultimate bondage of human depravity, whether spiritual or social. Even in the face of insurmountable oppression, God's message of salvation refutes the ultimate victory of evil. In this light, survival can be one of the greatest acts of faith, a defiance of the evil. Survival need not limit itself to a passive and impotent acceptance of historical conditions. Survival may in fact be part of humanity's proactive participation in the redemptive activity of God. Redemptive suffering is not acquiescence to the atrocity of suffering. It is, rather, God's promise in Jesus Christ, to work redemptively even in suffering.[58] Survival is not the end. Again, it becomes a means through which God works in history either in behalf of, or along with, humanity. Here is the apex of the correlation. Survival and refuge need not be in dialectical opposition to socio-political liberation ethics. In the covenant model, the former nurtures, expects, and pursues the later.

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[58]Lincoln, *Black Experience in Religion*, 107.

4) Eschatology and the Kingdom of God:

In similar fashion to conversion and redemptive suffering, a contextual understanding of eschatology also distinguishes a covenant model of black ecclesiology. Linked with the biblical view of salvation, the future perspective envisioned the imminent consummation of God's activity in human history. The work of liberation begun by Moses and secured by Jesus will be complete in the kingdom of heaven. Eugene Genovese actually suggests that black eschatology emerged out of an unified image of Moses and Jesus.[59] In short, the slaves forged a corporate story of deliverance within the this-worldly and the other-worldly. Jesus perpetuates the image of Moses as the chosen deliverer, but becomes a more intimate intercessor. Genovese surmises that the assimilation of Moses to Jesus translated into spiritual freedom.[60] The resurrection of Jesus and the greatly anticipated kingdom of heaven secured eventual liberation and wholeness even in the face of present enslavement, segregation, or subjugation.

Theologian George Cummings discloses that eschatology is the theological vision of hope.[61] The culmination of salvation history in the kingdom of heaven ultimately

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[59]Genovese, 252-253.

[60]Ibid., 254-255.

[61]George C. L. Cummings, "The Slave Narratives as a Source of Black Theological Discourse: The Spirit and Eschatology," in *Cut Loose Your Stammering Tongue: Black Theology in the Slave Narratives*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins and George Cummings (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 54.

fulfilled the gospel promise of complete freedom for the African slaves and early free Blacks. Cummings explains that a preponderance of religious black folk expression (i.e. preaching, prayers, and the spirituals) exercised eschatological hope.[62] Admittedly, eschatology has been a primary source of the "other-worldly" emphasis in black churches. Yet, other-worldliness does not exhaust the meaning of eschatology in black folk religion. The various forms of religious expression commonly contained themes of protest and freedom. They sustained hope and nurtured the practical quest for liberation.[63] Black eschatology does not separate "other-worldly" and "this-worldly" hope. The greatest possible distinction is at the same time the greatest parallel -- other-worldly promise translates into this-worldly hope.[64]

The other-worldly and this-worldly relationship in eschatology reflects a dichotomy between the future and present. For theologian Hans Küng, the central question in deciphering the meaning of biblical eschatology is, "What does the reign of God, which is already irrupting into the present, mean for the concrete existence of [humankind],

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[62]Ibid., 55-56.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Ibid., 58. See also Genovese, 248-249. Both Cummings and Genovese highlight eschatology in the scholarship on black preaching and the Negro spirituals.

what meaning does it give to [human] life here and now?"[65] This question demonstrates that the meaning of eschatology does not actually lie in the future. It lies in the present implications for human life as God intends. Lawrence Levine comments on how black eschatology had immediate impact in the present: "The thin line between time dimensions is nowhere better illustrated than in the slave's visions of the future, which were, of course, a direct negation of [his/her] present."[66] Envisioning the triumph of salvation in the future kingdom of heaven, whether in preaching, the spirituals, or the quiet musings between preacher and parishioner, assured the oppressed of God's promises and divine activity in the present. Still, Küng cautions one not to remove the element of expectation from eschatology.[67] Expectation preserves the hope necessary for living in the present age. Future expectations invoke responsibility for the present. Likewise, future hope sustains and empowers us in living in the present.

In historical terms, James Cone tries to unravel the tie between the present and future for black churches:

> . . . the 'otherness' of salvation, its transcendence beyond history, introduces a *factor* that makes a difference. The difference is not that we are taken out of history while living on earth - that would be an opiate. Rather it is a *difference* that plants our being firmly in

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[65]Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 61.

[66]Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 38.

[67]Küng, 66.

> history. . . . It was this knowledge that enabled black slaves to live in history but not to be defeated by their limitations in history.[68]

Cone suggests that the function of eschatology is inextricably linked to present survival. To lack future vision is to succumb to the ravages of despair and passivity.[69] He goes on to explain that the meaning of liberation cannot be confined to history. If confined to history, liberation becomes too limited by humanity. Instead, liberation breaks into the present as a source of transcendence.[70] This is the experience of liberation imbued with divine promise when defined by an eschatological future. And as Cone illumines, "liberation then is not simply what oppressed people can accomplish alone; it is basically what God has done and will do to accomplish liberation both in and beyond history."[71]

Black eschatology within a covenant model of the Church nurtures the quest for justice in history. It should not, however, be torn from the quest for spiritual wholeness. Black ecclesiology embraces both the emotive and practical pursuits of liberation. Spirituality is in partnership with liberation politics. The covenant model in the Black Christian Church tradition holds these attributes together.

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[68]James H. Cone, "Evangelism and Politics: A Black Perspective," in *Black Theology* (1979), 541.

[69]Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 132.

[70]Ibid., 159.

[71]Ibid., 160.

This covenant model profiles the relationship between black humanity and God, individually and corporately. A covenantal understanding of creation and *imago dei* conveys the inherent and inalienable value of the person to God. Early in the African American encounter with Christianity, the Exodus narrative advanced the adoption of the covenant model for black humanity and black churches. It solidified a corporate identity under the sovereignty of God, the Creator and Liberator. Like the Hebrew children, they would experience historical liberation by the hand of God. Black humanity could find sustenance and empowerment in the character and promises of the biblical God.

The conversion experience reconciles the valued person and God in an experience of personal and spiritual liberation. Salvation envisions spiritual and historical liberation in reconciliation, but empowers humanity in living redemptively here and now. Identification with the suffering of Jesus seems to span both individual and corporate experiences. God's understanding and immanence in the black struggle with oppression are assured through the suffering Christ. God's activity transforms suffering and uses it redemptively. Ultimately, the covenant culminates in the eschatological liberation and reconciliation of humanity.

CHAPTER III

REDRESSING BLACK THEOLOGY TO BLACK CHURCHES

Black Theology's Critique of Black Churches

I hold that the historic development of black churches occurred through the covenant model of ecclesiology. This model also bears the historic roots that black theologians claim in the quest for liberation. Black theology insists that the pre-Civil War black churches understood liberation as the foundational message of biblical Christianity. The ties between pastoral practices and the prophetic demands for liberation could not be severed.

The covenant model embraces this relationship between the pastoral and the prophetic. A communal milieu distinguishes pastoral practices in the covenant model of black churches. Pastoral practices also sustain the prophetic ministry of the church in empowering individuals and communities with theological and psychosocial tools for living. Black theology places prophetic ministry within a radical notion of liberation ethics considered essential to living as a people of God. The covenant model sustains the prophetic tradition by clarifying God's desires for black humanity. Therefore, black theology strives prophetically to hold black churches accountable to their covenantal heritage.

In this chapter, I will argue that the covenant tradition contains two major, but mutually dependent images -- refuge and liberation. A proper discussion of black ecclesiology will weigh their relationship. These images shape the churches' life and mission. Refuge and liberation reflect the pastoral and prophetic ministries of the historical Black Church. The critique of black churches by black theology does not reject the covenant model presented in this study. Rather, black theology maintains that the refuge image has become a predominant, if not sole, representation of the churches' contemporary presence in the black community. Black theologians accuse these churches of lacking prophetic liberation ethics. Consequently, they charge that black church ministries increasingly neglect the practical needs of African Americans and their communities.

Along with Gayraud Wilmore, I am convinced that the chasm between black theology and black churches evinces a lost synthesis between "liberation and sanctification," or more specifically between "the radical message of black liberation" and "the message of healing and self-fulfillment through a saving faith in Jesus Christ."[1] Black theology recognizes that the refuge image in black churches was instrumental to their formative years. Black churches grew from their "underground folk" existence into conventional institutions as havens from racist practices in white

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[1]Gayraud S. Wilmore, "Pastoral Ministry in the Origin and Development of Black Theology," in *Black Theology*, vol. 2 (1993), 119.

churches. As James Cone points out, black churches had already begun to flourish prior to the expulsion of African Americans from white churches in the post-Civil War years. Unfortunately, Cone ultimately views these events within a transmutation of black churches from an ecclesial form of protest into one of escapism.[2]

Cone acknowledges that the end of Reconstruction gave way to an insidious form of racism in America. A pervasive system of Jim Crow and a rampant use of violence against African Americans made survival and freedom more elusive than ever. In questionable response, black churches uncritically assimilated moral interpretations of religious life dictated by the white majority.[3] For Cone, black churches thereby forsook their prophetic voice and liberation ethics. He contends that black churches compromised their "drive for equality."[4] Instead, they focused on religious piety, moralism, and a campaign of personal responsibility for rising above racial discrimination. And by the time of the early twentieth century, black churches had lost their militant edge. The integral relationship between the refuge image and liberation ethics of the covenant model was therefore disrupted. Gayraud Wilmore explains the effect of the disruption:

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[2]James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 104.

[3]Ibid., 105.

[4]Ibid.

> Shorn of roots in the radical Black tradition of the mid-nineteenth century, Black Christians turned inward to worship a White, Americanized Jesus - the image of their own psychic void - and traditional Black spirituality that had always kept one eye open to the pragmatic requirements of existence under oppression became uncoupled from a sense of the church's historic cultural vocation to transform the whole of Black life.[5]

With the turn toward religious piety, black churches in the Reconstruction era operated chiefly within the refuge image of ecclesiology. Here, the most pertinent questions become: Did this move by black churches abandon the drive for equality?, and, Does the refuge image really forsake the liberation ethics of the churches' prophetic tradition?

In answering these questions, the churches' own agenda, within their historical context, is extremely important. The churches' self-image reflects their ecclesiology.[6] In turn, ecclesiology encompasses the interpretations of the churches' mission and ministry, or in other words their sacred agenda.[7] The historical context determines not only the needs of people, but also what interventions are the most practical. This methodology has been characterized as a black hermeneutic. As I explained in the introduction, an existential approach to black ecclesiology includes transcendent sources drawn from biblical Christianity. The covenant model emerges as a transcendent paradigm of

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[5]Wilmore, "Introduction," in *Black Theology*, vol. 1 (1993), 219.

[6]Johannes A. van der Ven, *Ecclesiology in Context* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, Publishing, 1993), 183.

[7]Ibid., 201.

ecclesiology from this historical hermeneutic. The tenets of this model, defined in the previous chapter, serve as measuring rods for evaluating the strengths of contemporary interpretations.

Regrounding black theology in black religious experience requires a practical understanding of the churches' contextual sense of ministry. It appears that after the Reconstruction era personal spirituality became an accessible form of practical empowerment. Black preaching and pastoral care focused on the liberation of individuals from the rancid power of personal sin and social racism. Spirituality enhanced the quality of life for African Americans even in the face of racism. As a viable means of practical intervention, black churches became the primary sources of social welfare, and worked extensively in the education of the black masses.[8] The churches shouldered an unenviable task in balancing a critical stance against black suffering with the practical means to nurture spiritual and historic liberation.[9]

Cone's assessment of the frustrations experienced by the post-Civil War churches is reasonably deduced. The long awaited emancipation from slavery did not usher in the anticipated life of freedom. The era of Jim Crow thrived until the onset of the Civil Rights movement. That is not

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[8]Woodson, 242-260.

[9]Ibid., 277-279.

to say, however, that it went unchallenged.[10] In this regard, reliance upon the spiritual resources of the tradition does not necessarily indicate a defeated drive for equality. Contrary to Cone's assertion, black churches turned to these spiritual resources in the very pursuit of liberation.[11] Hampered by the lack of political and economic power, black churches possessed few resources beyond the spiritual and moral dimensions of their religious faith. Since practical theology is particularly concerned with viable means for ministry, any consideration of revolutionary forms of resistance involves larger issues than the ethics of the cause alone. One cannot condemn a people's struggle for survival. Nor can one dismiss their drive for liberation when they have determined survival as the viable means. In this vein, a careful analysis of black ecclesiology reveals major social determinants in the churches' stake in spirituality and religious piety.

As I stressed in chapter two, conversion experiences and identification with the suffering of Jesus were central

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[10]Black theologians have brought to the forefront of discussions many historical black figures who labored at great personal sacrifice and risk against the social and economic apartheid here in America. The more prominent figures include Ida Wells-Barnett, Henry Turner, Sojourner Truth and Marcus Garvey.

[11]Chapman, 132. Chapman underscores the major criticisms of Cone's portrayal of the post-Civil War black churches. These critics argue that these churches continually related liberation to the gospel message in black religious folk life. In this discussion the author cites Rufus Burrow, Jr., *James H. Cone and Black Liberation* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1994).

traits in the development of the covenant model in black ecclesiology. Behind the appeal of these experiences, an implicit egalitarian meaning for African American humanity subsists. The gospel message stressed God's personal concern for their spiritual, emotional, and physical suffering. Although the emancipation of African Americans created very real expectations of long-awaited civil liberties, it did not, in fact, usher in access to civic power. Overt resistance still meant torture, or death. Consequently, reliance on the refuge functions of the church remained the most viable strategy in the drive for equality and liberation among African Americans.

Black churches were not silent regarding social injustice. The very persons that black theologians cite as their heroic figures actually emerged from the ranks of black churches.[12] Still, I do not overlook the deficient social reform resulting from the predominance of the refuge position. And this consequence remains a reasonable point of criticism and redress. Black theology, however, has not given sufficient attention to the function of liberation ethics present in the church as refuge. Herein, the disparagement of the churches' spiritual ethos is the result of a misdiagnosis.

The misdiagnosis names the spiritual ethos, or refuge function, as the cause behind the lack of liberation ethics and prophetic action among black churches. I contend,

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[12]Lincoln and Mamiya, 202; also cf. n.7 above.

however, that the disparagement of this spiritual ethos is a result of a "missed-diagnosis." Perhaps the greatest oversight of black theology has been in its under-estimation of the impact American individualism asserts upon black churches, black religious folk life, and black secular life as well. Simply put, I believe that the prophetic campaign of black theology is significantly compromised by this "missed-diagnosis."

The Impact of American Individualism

The individualism endemic to the age of Enlightenment did not spare black religious life. Though black churches nurtured a communal form of care, American culture remained intrinsic to the often "unreconciled strivings" of African American "double-consciousness."[13] Thus, black churches emphasized personal salvation and religious piety under the impact of American individualism. By the middle of the nineteenth century American religion was swept by the flow of this privatization. As Robert Bellah summarizes:

> By the 1850's, a new pattern of religious life had emerged, significantly privatized relative to the colonial period. . . . Religion did not cease to be concerned with moral order, but it operated with a new emphasis on the individual and the

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[13]William E. B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (reprint, New York: Bantom Books, 1989 edition), 3. Dubois argued that African American life is marked by the struggle to merge their two unreconciled cultural heritages, "Negro" and "American," into one consciousness. Double-consciousness, therefore, persists in the continued struggle against racism. My use of the term suggests an implicit role of double-consciousness in the assimilation of American religious life and, consequently, western individualism.

> voluntary association. Moral teaching came to emphasize self-control rather than deference. It prepared the individual to maintain self-respect and establish ethical commitments in a dangerous and competitive world, not to fit into the stable harmony of an organic community.[14]

The reliance of black churches upon the refuge image reflects the broader trend of religious practices within the United States. The Second Great Awakening continued to accentuate the personal experience involved in conversion and salvation.[15] Much like the slave religion of the antebellum period, the religion of ex-slaves and their progeny indicates the complex influences of western revivalist Christianity and American individualism.[16] Consequently, the characterization of black churches as otherworldly is a result of superficial estimations of the spiritual interpretations of life in general, and black life in particular. More accurately, the evangelical conservatism common to black spirituality added to the "ambiguity" of political activity, but did not remove it.[17] Pastoral counselor and ethicist Archie Smith asserts that black worship and even revivalism in black churches intimated a therapeutic connection between moral religious

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[14]Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 222.

[15]Clebsch and Jaekle, 31.

[16]Lincoln and Mamiya, 228.

[17]Ibid., 229.

life and liberation ethics.[18] Thus, the drive for freedom was not lost.

Black theology has not conversed practically with these spiritual interpretations held by the churches. The influences of American individualism show that evangelical revivalism cannot simply be scorned as accommodationalism in black churches. Even the uncritical adoption of white religious pietism is best evaluated within the churches' interpretations of the potential social effects of piety in refuting the dehumanizing tenets of racism. My point is that black churches sought to confront social racism by morally counteracting racist characterizations of black humanity. Therefore, I agree with Albert Raboteau who suggests that black churches in the post-Reconstruction period continued to embody the hopes and drive of the antebellum churches.[19]

Black theology reflectively places black churches of the post-Civil Rights era under a general indictment of the post-Reconstruction churches. In the spirit of black power, black theology contends that black churches "shrank behind walls of religious otherworldliness and distracted themselves with institutional maintenance and ecclesiastical politics."[20] James Harris believes that black churches and

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[18]Archie Smith, Jr., *The Relational Self: Ethics and Therapy from a Black Church Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 76.

[19]Raboteau, 320.

[20]Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 218.

their pastors have been seduced by "symbols of achievement and progress."[21] Conversely, black churches have maintained that institutional growth enhances black autonomy and liberation by strengthening their social presence in white America.[22] Harris actually lauds the campaign of independence which institutionalization claims. However, along with the turn to religious piety, he protests institutionalism as a misadventure in the pursuit of status and acceptance by white society. Harris' criticisms become more harsh when appraising evangelicalism and religious piety within black churches. His assessment of white evangelicalism in black religion actually begins a potentially constructive methodological evaluation of black religious folk life. Unfortunately, the development of Harris' appraisal arrests in the social sins of white evangelicalism and the black churches' sin of accommodation. He misses the cultural influence of American individualism altogether.[23]

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[21]James H. Harris, *Pastoral Theology: A Black-Church Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 17.

[22]Franklin, 414.

[23]Concluding his assessment of black assimilation, Harris misquotes Gayraud Wilmore in a passage which could have led his analysis to the threshold of individualism. He cites, in part, "Because [the majority of black preachers and their people] have an understanding of redemption that cannot admit the sanctification of secular conflict and struggle" (p. 27). Besides reducing the citation to an incomplete thought, the reference omits Wilmore's insight to the religious and cultural emphasis behind evangelicalism. Wilmore actually states, "Because their sense of sin is personal and individualistic they have an understanding of redemption that cannot admit the sanctification of secular

I disagree with Peter Paris' argument that African Americans have never bought into the western notion of individualism.[24] Perhaps, his focus on how the church community functions in black folk religion causes Paris to underestimate the ravines furrowed by western individualism in both black public and religious life. As black churches focus preaching and pastoral ministries on personal salvation, inner spirituality, and religious piety, the ideology of western individualism invades their sense of corporate identity and communal responsibility. The disruption of corporate identity and communal responsibility only increases amid the struggles for socio-economic advancement conditioned by individualism in a systemically racist society.

One of the early and more radical pastors in the black theology project, Albert Cleage, noticed the pervasive impact American individualism exhibited in black folk religion. In his book, *Black Christian Nationalism*, Cleage argues:

> The chasm which separates us from God is our own selfishness and individualism, which makes us more concerned about our individual salvation than we are about the liberation of all Black people. The liberation of all Black people is salvation for each of us. In seeking after individual salvation, each individual is struggling to get to heaven through something which God can do for [him/her]. In struggling for the liberation of the Black Nation, we submerge our individualism and struggle together to realize the will of God for all Black

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conflict and struggle" (Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 246).

[24]Paris, *Spirituality of African Peoples*, 120-127.

> People in our everyday lives right here on earth.[25]

Cleage asserts, therefore, that a gospel of liberation must replace the gospel of salvation. He considers the gospel of salvation a denial of collective responsibility for social sin.[26] Cleage's radical rejection of personal salvation and other-worldly spirituality did not receive wide reception among black churches. Unfortunately, Cleage's critical insight to the disruptive impact of individualism in black religious life and the black community received little attention amidst the radical voice of his black Christian nationalism. Here, again, a lack of attention to the traditional black churches' own understanding of the relationship between refuge and liberation appears to compromise prophetic reform.

With the ebb of the Civil Rights movement, alienation of the black community increasingly spurred internal conflicts far exceeding any previous period. Much like the post-Reconstruction era, the Civil Rights movement heightened the expectations of attainable personal liberties. The unrelenting depravity of racist power, though confronted by a new American consciousness and legal intervention, continued to manipulate reform in a course of

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[25]Albert B. Cleage, Jr., *Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1972), 188-189; See also Chapman, 91-92.

[26]Ibid., 186-187.

mediation and gradualism.[27] The resurgence of distrust among African Americans should not be surprising. A history of black alienation, inundated with compromised promises and unfulfilled commitments, has created great distrust.[28] A social climate of constricted opportunity extending from the Civil Rights era not only perpetuated black alienation, but fragmented the black community as well. Bellah describes this conflict between aspirations and opportunity:

> The great burst of freedom made possible by open housing and antidiscrimination laws found black Americans by the millions wanting to leave overcrowded, decaying urban ghettoes and poorly rewarded occupations. As the fortunate and determined entered middle-class neighborhoods and middle-class occupations, they left behind people unable to get a toehold in the labor market, for at the same time industrial jobs were drying up in inner cities. The isolation and demoralization of an 'underclass' had begun.[29]

I must add, here, that Bellah's summary only sketches the systemic economic conditions which African Americans faced. The well known experiences of "last hired and first 'laid-off,'" or the last promoted, or "Sorry, the apartment has just been rented, . . . the house has a pending sale," were the constant reminders that racism would not relinquish its choking grip on the lifeline of African Americans. Despite the legal pressures, white America was determined to set

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[27]J. Deotis Roberts, "Black Theology in the Making," in *Black Theology*, 2d ed., rev., vol. 1 (1993), 120.

[28]Lincoln and Mamiya, 213.

[29]Robert N. Bellah, et al., *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 24-25.

conditions and limits to their responsibility for social reform.

Bellah notes that black churches were not spared in the fragmentation of the African American community.[30] Their long history of communal support in shared suffering was disrupted by their own fragmentation along the same lines as the larger black community. The prominence of American individualism in the black religious culture, most vivid in evangelicalism, subverted a mutuality between black churches and their communities. Personal salvation and religious piety emphasized an individualistic morality in black churches. Archie Smith attributes the social displacement of black churches to the impact of this individualism.[31] He suggests that the moral vision of many black churches unwittingly conforms to the materialism and class structures of American culture.[32] It seems, therefore, that religious individualism in black churches marks a major disruption in communal solidarity.

The Civil Rights movement unintentionally, but dramatically, unveiled identity conflicts within the black community. Even the black power campaign for economic and socio-political liberation in black theology did not evade the ravages of these identity conflicts. Black theologians themselves have acknowledged their early preoccupation with

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[30]Ibid., 212-213.

[31]Archie Smith, 123.

[32]Ibid.

acculturation in the white academy.[33] In addition, a fundamental individualism within conversion and personal salvation still earmarks identity conflicts in the communal solidarity of black churches, as well as between the churches and the black community. Without malicious intent, the divestiture of racist power under Civil Rights legislation backlashed in the loss of corporate reform. The actual gains of the Civil Rights era seemed only to feed the appetite of American individualism. Black churches found themselves effectually dismissed by increasing numbers of constituents, and the fragmentation of the African American community expanded. As cultural critic, bell hooks, observes:

> the identity crisis we suffer has to do with losing a sense of political perspective, not knowing how we should struggle collectively to fight racism and to create a liberatory space to construct radical black subjectivity. . . . When black people collectively experienced racist oppression in similar ways, there was greater group solidarity. Racial integration has indeed altered in a fundamental way the common ground that once served as a foundation for black liberation struggle.[34]

Racism has become more difficult to fight in that it has been publicly decentralized. The experiences of racism, especially systemic racism, vary among economic classes and between genders. Consequently, identification of the evil, as well as the perceived ingredients for liberation also

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[33]Cecil Cone, *Identity Crisis in Black Theology*, 113.

[34]bell hooks, *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 36-37.

vary greatly. Under the confluence of a capitalistic individualism and resilient racism, black churches contend with the frustrations of unrealized values and unmet needs. A lack of corporate resolution and the limitations of individual power have resulted in what Cornell West refers to as nihilism; "the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and {most important} [*sic*] lovelessness."[35]

Black theology justified its project as a rejoinder to revitalized radical African Americans who were in need of a religious foundation in their quest for liberation. The fragmentation of the African American community and the displacement of black churches augmented any secular or religious attempts at social redress. Black theology made a distinction between contemporary black churches and the religious sustenance necessary to meet the "real" needs of the black community. Gayraud Wilmore agrees that the appeal of black religious folk life has been in its' traditional role in meeting these identified needs. Notwithstanding, he differentiates black folk religion from institutional black churches: "Black folk religion has never ceased providing the resources for radical movements in the Black community while the organized church receded into white evangelical pietism."[36]

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[35]West, *Race Matters*, 23.

[36]Gayraud S. Wilmore, "Black Power, Black People, Theological Renewal," in *Black Theology*, vol. 1 (1993), 133.

The Bifurcation of the Black Community

The disparagement of black churches stems largely from concern over two significant groups within the black community. There seems to be an unquestioned consensus among black ministers, theologians, politicians, and laypersons, alike, that the church is out of touch with the lives and concerns of black urban youth and the black middle-class. The problems facing black churches are augmented by a detaching bifurcation of the black community into two major class divisions: "a coping sector of middle-income working class and middle-class black communities, and a crisis sector of poor black communities, involving the working poor and the dependent poor."[37] Black urban youth, by and large, find themselves imprisoned within cells of the poor-in-crisis. Growing numbers of black urban youth are completely unchurched or have minimal interaction with the church. Increasingly, black young adults and the middle-class are searching elsewhere to meet their needs and interests.[38] In short, the present experiences of these two large groups directly challenge the social role of black churches today.

In what he has coined "nitty-gritty hermeneutics," Anthony Pinn employs the medium of rap music in an analysis of black urban youth experiences. He finds a pervasive critical stance among these young black urban rap performers

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[37]Lincoln and Mamiya, 384.

[38]Ibid., 344-345.

against black ministers as well as black churches.[39] Black ministers are accused of extreme passivity, and black churches are indicted with a general lack of significant community involvement. Pinn observes the belief that black churches rarely extend themselves beyond the spiritual, thereby resulting in a neglect of the difficult, concrete issues in black life. Black churches are therefore deemed counterproductive to the development of black wholeness and black America.[40] It appears that in the radical voice of rap music, Pinn unearths a struggle between opportunity and meaning, which corresponds to West's notion of nihilism. The strife of nihilism, however, does not rest solely within the black urban youth. Many acknowledge its manifestation among the black privileged-classes.

While not specifically criticizing black churches, sociologist James Blackwell notes the disparagement dividing many black middle-class persons from the larger black community. He argues that social stratification directly and negatively impacts black unity. The advantaged black classes often "blame the black lower classes for the failure of the latter to become fully incorporated, if not fully assimilated, as equals in the larger stratification

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[39]Anthony B. Pinn, *Why, Lord?; Suffering and Evil in Black Theology*, (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1995), 132.

[40]Ibid., 133.

system."[41] Not surprisingly, this is not an one-sided argument between the black classes. Blackwell adds, "the fact remains that lower classes are highly suspicious of middle and upper-class blacks . . . [which] leads often to generalizations concerning the interest of middle and upper-class blacks . . . ."[42] These issues not only divide black public life and the Black Church, but spawn great rifts between black churches, themselves. As the differences in class experiences of needs and opportunites enlarge, communal solidarity declines. Cornell West explains that class polarization not only creates problems of communication, but also a spiritual crisis of distrust, disrespect, and a diminished influence of black churches.[43]

Denials of individual wants and human needs have direct impact upon personal identity, social relationships within the subculture, and the dominant culture as well. Sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann explain that personal identity is formed in a socialization process.[44] Successful socialization requires a relative congruity

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[41]James E. Blackwell, *The Black Community: Diversity and Unity* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 96.

[42]Ibid., 97.

[43]Cornell West, *Prophetic Fragments: Illuminations of the Crisis in American Religion & Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., and Trenton: Africa World Press, 1988), 69.

[44]Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, 1966), 173-174.

between objective and subjective reality.[45] Since subjective reality includes personal identity in plausible structures of reality,[46] disruption in the expected transformation of society creates incongruity.

The denial of expected civil liberties and economic opportunity extending beyond the Civil Rights era created gross incongruity between the anticipated objective reality of equality and the subjective experiences of black Americans. A small growing black middle-class and an entrapped, but expanding, black underclass struggled with a resurgence of unsuccessful socialization due to persistent racism in American society. Black churches were displaced from their historically central role in the then fragmenting black community. I maintain that a central cause in the displacement of black churches was their own unsuccessful socialization of black humanity. Their ecclesial image and ministerial praxis emphasized a re-ojectivication of reality based on equality in a religious culture of individualism and the subsequent privatization of religion.[47] Conversion,

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[45]Ibid., 163-164.

[46]Ibid., 154.

[47]I am aware that the impact of American individualism in the privatization of religion raises questions commonly associated with the "secularization" of religion, which lies beyond the scope of this dissertation. Berger suggests that secularization can be weighed through a variety of ideas, which may include: rationalism, industrialization, urbanization, and pluralism. Following Berger, further study in the African American period of urban migration during a period of massive idustrialization would be particularly relevant to the growth of religious individualism and pluralism in the secularization of religion among African

or personal salvation, and religious piety could not sustain congruity between the subjective reality of black Americans and the expected objective reality of equality. Experiences in unsuccessful socialization commonly result in fragmentation or, as Berger and Luckmann name, identity conflicts which include disidentifications and alternative identifications.[48]

Prior to the Civil Rights movement, personal salvation and religious piety functioned as successful modifications of socialization. Black churches, therefore, offered what seemed to be the only viable "alternative plausiblity structure." Typically, religious institutions serve integrative sociological functions in society. These may include cultural, economic, and psychosocial integration.[49] Berger and Luckmann refer to such modifications as a process of re-socialization.[50] Re-socialization establishes a new "plausible structure" of reality. This new structure

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Americans. See Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1967), 126-147; also idem, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1969), 20.

[48]Ibid., 166-172.

[49]Peter L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies: Christian Commitment and the Religious Establishment in America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1961), 72. The term "integration," here, means that "religion serves to maintain the social structure by integrating and sanctifying the commonly held values on which that structures rests." Thus, Berger describes the sociological function of religion as a "socializing agency" (Ibid., 97).

[50]Berger and Luckmann, 157.

enables personal identification that transforms subjective reality. Berger and Luckmann point to conversion as a historically successful paradigm of re-socialization. Herein, the church community provides "the indispensable plausibility structure for the new reality."[51] The legitimacy of the Church in the transformation of subjective reality is sustained by its ability to maintain re-socialization. Otherwise, re-interpretation and transformation of subjective reality, and therefore motives and actions as well, are disrupted.

Berger and Luckmann's argument offers an effective evaluation of the displacement of black churches and the fragmentation of the black community. The re-socialization process in black churches, forged in a paradigm of individualism, or personal salvation and religious piety, could not sustain its independent plausibility. The expected changes in objective reality stemming from the Civil Rights era disrupted the dominant process of re-socialization among black churches.[52] The consequences have been an insurgence of identity conflicts and unsuccessful

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[51]Ibid., 158.

[52]The disruption of plausibility structures moves the person outside of the traditional conceptions of reality. The plausible structure no longer sustains the person's perception of experiences or social circumstances. In the face of pluralism, a person may also regard a social structure as only partially plausible and, therefore, struggles between "competing or and often contradictory plausibility structures." Berger, *Rumor of Angels*, 43-45 & 54-55.

socialization under the incongruity of unfulfilled expectations in a new objective reality.

The struggle facing black churches is no less a question of ecclesiology than it is a question of liberation.[53] The question becomes: How does the church project itself, its message, and its mission? The predominant refuge image in black churches has failed to sustain effective social reform even within the black community itself. The circumstances of fragmentation require attention to corporate and cultural identity, as well as values and needs, in the quest for liberation from racial oppression in all its socio-political and economic forms. Neither short-sighted survivalism, nor essential notions of blackness can adequately comprise the central pattern of liberation in the ecclesiology of black churches today. Victor Anderson argues that African American theology must be able to deal with the complexities, as well as the diversity, of black identity with regard to values and needs not merely for survival, but also for cultural and individual thriving.[54]

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[53]Ven, 131-135. Ven relates religious socialization to the convictions, values, motives and methods of the church community, which include the present ecclesial image, or "religious self-attribution" of the Church. Self-attribution may involve individual or collective identity. Therefore, I consider Ven's use of self-attribution in religious socialization to include how personal identity and communal identity are involved in a viable ecclesiology.

[54]Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness* (New York: Continuum Publishing, Co., 1995), 157. I understand individual thriving quite differently from individualism. Individualism disrupts corporate solidarity in the pursuit

Practical theology presses beyond a rhetorical indictment of black church practices and examines the conditions contributing to any hindrance or misunderstanding in the churches' mission. This methodology is an effective foundation for redressing black theology to black churches. In the next chapter, I turn to a systematic analysis of the convergence of American individualism and racism upon black urban youth and the black middle-class. These two groups are commonly cited in discussions of the fragmentation of the black community and the displacement of traditional black churches. Therefore, I include black churches and black theology in this methodological application. The impact of American culture exposes a disrupted relationship between the refuge image and liberation ethics of the covenant tradition. Since I have suggested that the covenant model of black ecclesiology is a viable paradigm for practical theology, a review of the biblical covenant tradition follows the next chapter.

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of self-interests. The opportunity and enhancement of individual thriving, for each and all, is a goal of communal action and therefore a communal responsibility. Herein, I hold that individual fulfillment means something quite different from self-interest.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONVERGENCE OF AMERICAN INDIVIDUALISM AND RACISM

The Displacement of Black Churches in the Fragmentation of the Black Community

Pastoral theologian David Augsburger argues that western thought centers upon the individual as the irreducible value of society. Social relationships function only as means toward the ends and desires of individual life. Thus, society is an association of individuals who cooperate to realize individual goals.[1] As opposed to communal identity, Augsburger characterizes individual identity as:

> . . . an inviolate unit of value, a supreme value in and of itself. Social relationships arise not from any corporate solidarity but from the consent of autonomous individuals and the social contracts they pledge to one another.[2]

Despite the reality of some conformity in group identity, Augsburger argues that a group-centric society may in fact contain greater individuality among its members. These cultures nurture individuals in solidarity with others. This dynamic occurs not only within family systems, but also in a social web of mutual dependence. Individuality is felt

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[1]David W. Augsburger, *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 85.

[2]Ibid.

as one feels that s/he is a vital part of the social community.[3]

In relating individuals to community, Martin Buber makes a helpful distinction between community and collectivity. He distinguishes collectivity as a "bundling" together, as opposed to a "binding" together in community.[4] Collectivity, then, becomes an alternative to community and communal responsibility in the interests of self.[5] Along this line, I contend that western individualism disrupts the group-centric strength of the African American social and religious community. Consequently, the primary function of communal reinforcement in the refuge tradition of black churches suffers greatly.

Under the loss of communal reinforcements, the effects of American individualism can incur critical personal faith reflection and potential crises. The position of one's individual perspective gains ultimate authority. Individuation characteristically disrupts previous dependence on external authority.[6] Persons seek individuality in their faith commitments, beliefs, and lifestyles, as opposed to corporate values or group

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[3]Ibid., 95-99.

[4]Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. by Ronald G. Smith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 31.

[5]Ibid., 31-32.

[6]James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith, The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1981), 179.

identity. Self-delineation and self-actualization become both primary and ultimate concerns. One's faith identity is no longer defined by interpersonal circles, or derived from one's meaning to others.[7] Therefore, the evangelical portrayal of personal salvation and religious piety unwittingly fosters a privatization of black religious life.

I have argued that the disparagement of black churches has been mired in a battleground of the psychosocial and political evolution of resistance to racial oppression. Somewhere between the ideology of black power embraced by black theology and the traditional refuge image within black churches significant segments of the black community remain disenfranchised. In particular, black urban youth and the black middle-class feel the Church has become irrelevant to their daily struggles. I have suggested that at the core of their frustrations lie displaced identity conflicts. How, then, do these personality issues continue to disrupt the community ethos once offered by the traditional Black Church?

Erik Erikson observed the development of negative identity between the various conflicts of ego-centric and group-centric relationality. Resisting negative identity, oppressed people such as African Americans may cultivate an alternative psychosocial evolution into an ideology of

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[7]Ibid., 173, 182-183.

"pseudospecies."[8] This ideology reflects the identity development of essentialized blackness embraced by black theology.[9] Within Erikson's hierarchy of the positive and negative faces of psychosocial identity, the possibilities of self-hate, inferiority, rage, and rebellion extend along a continuum. In all this, Erikson reminds us that "identity development has its time, or rather two kinds of time: a developmental stage in the life of the individual, and a period of history."[10] Thus far, this study has focused on the latter concept of time. However, here, I wish to consider the former concept of time in the terms of personality development. I find that the struggles of identification with black churches by black urban youth and

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[8]Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1968), 41-42, 241, 298-299. In defining "pseudospecies," Erikson states: "to have steady values at all, [they] must absolutize them; to have style, [they] must believe [themselves] to be the crown of the universe. To each extent, then, that each tribe or nation, culture or religion will invent a historical and moral rationale for its exclusively God-ordained uniqueness, to that extent are they a pseudospecies" (p. 241).

[9]Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness*, 13. Though Anderson seems to misapply pseudospecies as the negative identification of "others" (pp. 12 & 77), he insightfully exposes that black theologians have developed an essentialized determination of black identity based on racial genius. The idea of ontological blackness, then, becomes a methodological or ideological mirror reflection of white racist aesthetics of European genius. It is this construction of natural superiority or essentialized genius that Erikson names under pseudospecies (cf. n.8 above). The negative "othering" becomes the projection of a pseudospecies (Erikson, pp. 41-42). Nonetheless, Anderson is still correct in pointing out the results of the ideological mirroring involved, "ontological blackness signifies the blackness that whiteness created."

[10]Ibid., 309.

the black middle-class correlate closely to Erikson's life-stage conflicts.

Erikson emphasized that American group identity supports an individual's ego identity so long as the former does not negate, but rather contributes to the free development of, the latter.[11] This study is concerned with the breakdown of group identity caused by the experiences of western individualism and racism. Erikson constructed his life cycle theories upon stages in the psychosocial development of persons. Each stage is characterized by a developmental task brought on by a psychosocial crisis or conflict. Each crisis is marked by the challenge of a new change in one's perspective on life. Insufficient resolution of these crises, and therefore the lack of task completion, may impede the developmental stage maturation of personality.[12] For the sake of brevity, I identify the primary developmental task for black urban youth in the Adolescent stage, and the Young Adulthood Stage in the onset of crises encountered by the rising black middle-class.

Augsburger has constructed a valuable tool for structuring a life-stage analysis of the effects American

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[11]Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980), 42-43.

[12]Ibid., 53-57. A lack of resolution in stage tasks may impede personality development, but does not necessarily render a person unfit for social development and responsible citizenship. A person may mature through the various age transitions in life without incident, and still possess unresolved issues from an earlier stage conflict in personality development.

individualism and racism have in the subsequent fragmentation of the black community (see Figure 1). He begins with a quadrangular evaluation between internal vs. external control/power and internal vs. external responsibility. Augsburger explains that the poles of internal and external power reflect the extent to which a person feels in control of life or feels controlled by life.

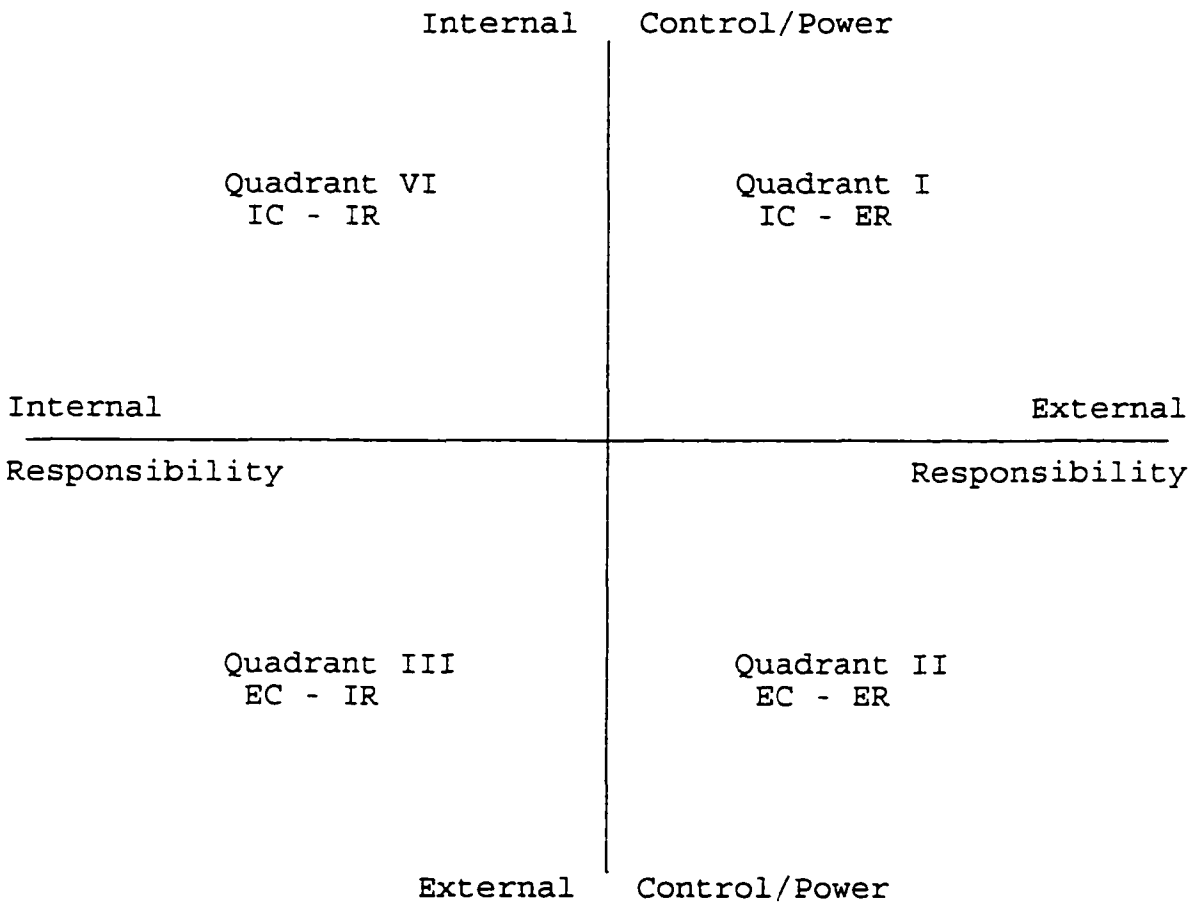

Figure 1[13]: The Conflation of Control/Power & Responsibility

[13]Augsburger, 95.

One's social experiences directly impact the perception of internal or external control. Racism encountered by ethnic minorities and economic stress by lower-class people affect the sense of control. These persons are mostly found in the external control category. It is important to note that external control may take form in positive expressions, such as religious beliefs. Notwithstanding, negative impressions predominate. The internal and external continuum grants insight to the common world-view of persons facing racial and socio-economic oppression.[14]

The poles of internal and external responsibility relate the level of credit or blame people place in themselves or the social system. At the internal end, one feels personally responsible for one's problems or achievements. At the opposite end, the social system is to blame or credit for one's failure or success, respectively. Therefore, the internal and external poles not only impact beliefs and values, but also motivations and goals in life. For example, in persons who believe that their inabilities directly account for their failures, self-blame may curb motivation. When individuals believe the social system is at fault, expectations call for social accountability in correcting the situation or environment.[15] Augsburger points out that western societies typically consider the individual personally responsible. He notes that this trait

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[14]Augsburger, 91-93.

[15]Ibid., 93-94.

often results in the white majority characterizing poor Blacks as unmotivated or even possessing inferior abilities. Of course, the responsibility continuum may be interpreted differently between cultures. Nonetheless, an emphasis on internal responsibility without some regard for the social situation may become quite oppressive.

The conflation between control and responsibility produces four unique interpretations of personal experiences. In brief, someone falling within the first quadrant exhibits the interplay between internal control and external responsibility. This person possesses belief in his/her own ability and identity, but feels society is responsible for the lack of opportunities, or lack of access to them. Next, someone from the external control and external responsibility grouping (quadrant two) feels no personal control, and insists on the heightened responsibility of society to effect change. A person from the third quadrant also feels that control lies externally, but is riddled with the guilt of internal responsibility. Quadrant four depicts persons who feel both internal control and responsibility for their successes or failures.[16]

To understand how American individualism and racism converge upon these four poles, I will consider Erikson's life-stage analysis within Augsburger's quadrangular schema. However, I begin by making some judgements in the proper quadrant assignments for traditional black churches, black

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[16]Ibid., 95-99.

theology, black urban youth and the black middle-class (see Figure 2). I place persons living under the predominant refuge image of black ecclesiology in the first quadrant. These people believe in internal control. In fact, they organize black churches upon this foundation. Yet, they also believe that the social system is primarily responsible for the personal and social ills experienced by their people. They would contend, moreover, that society is responsible for the correction of these problems. One may argue that the mere existence of the institutional Black

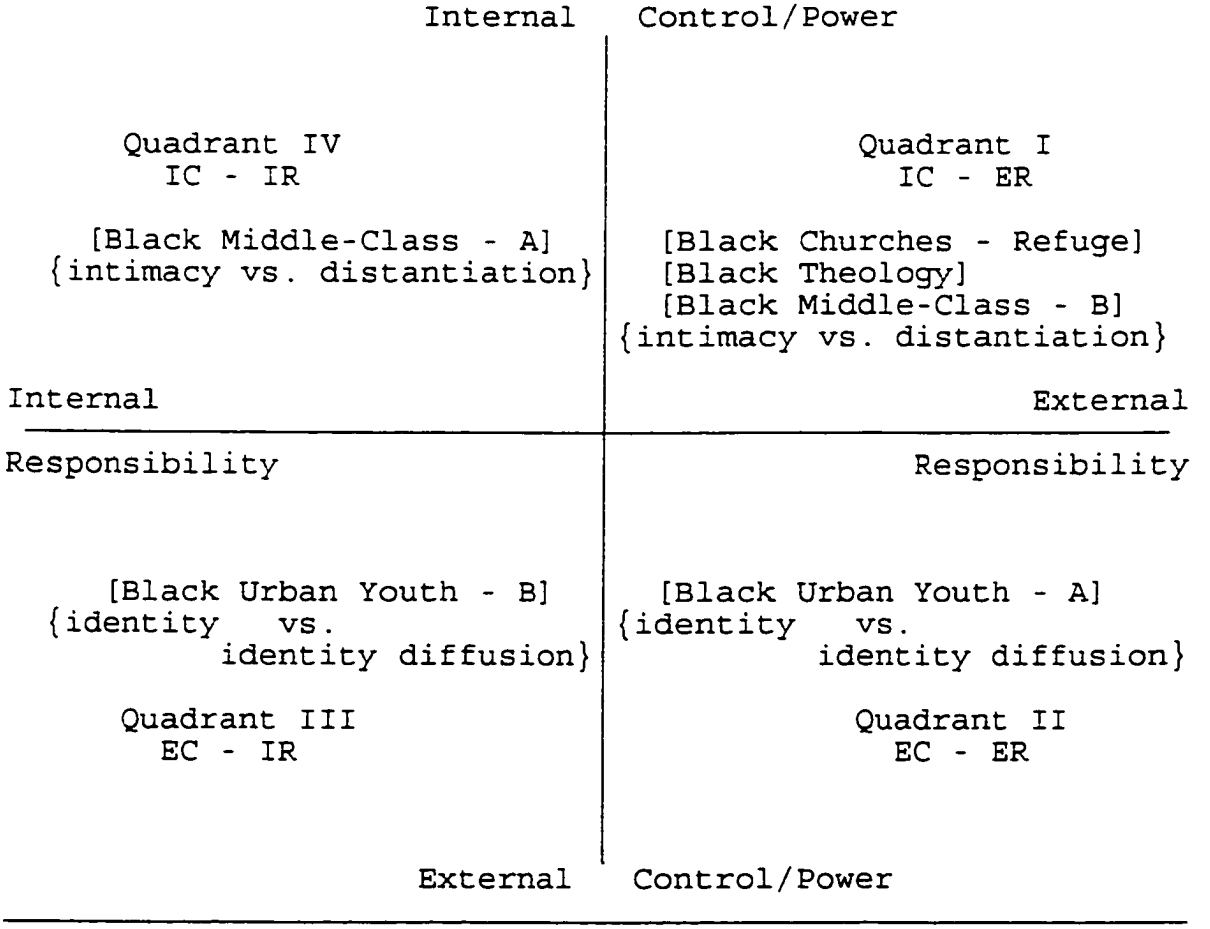

Figure 2: The Convergence of Individualism & Racism

Church would place many of these proponents in the fourth quadrant. I believe this would be a fair assessment only insofar as people do accept internal responsibility for their own lives. The emphasis, however, lies within the belief that the social system is primarily responsible. A strength of the institutional Black Church may be the realization that one cannot wait for the social system to acknowledge its full responsibility.[17]

Advocates of black theology and black power also fall within the first quadrant. The appeals to conscience have two fronts. The first is an internal sense of control to define oneself within a positive identity, thus empowering the individual in the active search for liberation. The second front is an acknowledgement of the moral responsibility of society to correct social injustice. The message of racial pride and cultural identity is an appeal to the internal control to define oneself. Black liberation theology builds upon this foundation in the confrontation with society, holding it accountable for its oppressive practices.[18]

Black urban youth who feel disjoined from the Church may fall into the second or third quadrant; that is, the external control-external responsibility quadrant or the external control-internal responsibility quadrant, respectively. Within the second quadrant people feel

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[17]Harris, 17. See also Lincoln and Mamiya, 7-8, 17.

[18]Augsburger, 96.

completely marginalized. Both control and responsibility lie outside of the individual. Augsburger stresses that for people in the second quadrant, particularly minority persons, the experience of marginalization in an otherwise open society is overwhelmingly oppressive. The felt impotence results sometimes in passivity and, quite often, in a pervasive sense of helplessness.[19] Notwithstanding, the evaluation of passivity in the final determination of responsibility is frequently misleading. Poverty, unemployment, underemployment, inequities in public education, and lack of marketable skills-training remain the stronger determinants in the realities of external power and external responsibility. Any attempt to treat the maladies of the second quadrant must extend beyond the symptoms to the viral infection. Social scientist Douglas Glasgow observes:

> Continuing to treat the symptoms rather than the causes of underclass development among Blacks is a useless effort; concentrating on treating individual Black youth for deficits rather than on correcting the structural factors that limit equal opportunity only perpetuates inadequate institutional services for ghetto populations and rehabilitative programs that do not create clear paths to real achievement for ghetto youth. Removing the dichotomy between mainstream-propagated expectations and limited available options could encourage large numbers of Black youth to successfully engage in realistic activity for achievement.[20]

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[19]Ibid., 97.

[20]Douglas G. Glasgow, *The Black Underclass: Poverty, Unemployment and Entrapment of Ghetto Youth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 153.

Black urban youth who fall into quadrant three feel that the power to create change or determine the course of one's life lies outside of the individual. The dominance of internal responsibility, however, often constrains these young persons to view themselves as they are socially characterized, in negative identities. This creates the double impact of powerlessness and self-blame.[21] Glasgow warns that the greatest danger in self-blame is the acceptance of negative characterizations. Internalization of failure results in the pathology of personal inadequacy.[22] Oftentimes, attempts to work with these youth concentrate solely on the psychological level. These efforts are frequently frustrated by a lack of attention to the social system itself. The ultimate danger is that they perpetuate power imbalance and the status quo.[23] Due to racism, Augsburger warns, some may even reject their own subculture in striving to emulate the dominating culture of society. Augsburger contends that counseling should not assist any acculturation efforts which sacrifice the person's own cultural values. Though the desires of these individuals are to avoid feelings of inferiority, their problems are only augmented.[24]

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[21]Augsburger, 97-98.

[22]Glasgow, 66.

[23]Smith, 40-41.

[24]Augsburger, 98.

The crisis for the adolescent stage is "identity vs. identity diffusion." The adolescent stage task is the integration of hope, will, and competence. Notwithstanding, Erikson argues that ego identity development cannot be isolated to each childhood stage task. The stages are interdependent. Unsuccessful integration may impede later ego identity development, or may call earlier stage tasks into question. A stalled personality stage development, however, does not necessarily preclude maturation. Still, unsuccessful integration may characterize the pervading state of ego identity and world-view. For the adolescent, one "looks most fervently for [people] and ideas to have 'faith' in, which also means [people] and ideas in whose service it would seem worthwhile to prove oneself trustworthy."[25] The virtue of fidelity is developed through a validation of the trustworthiness of individuals and social contingencies. Erikson characterizes this stage by the opportunity to make decisions on aspects of duty and service. When the adolescent is not permitted fully to make this search, or finds it filled with unresolved frustration, the estrangements encountered may take expression in radical resistance in the former case, or strong ideological claims in the latter.[26]

The danger of these estrangements is identity confusion, or identity diffusion. In practical terms,

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[25]Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 128-129.

[26]Ibid., 130, 235.

Erikson argues that estrangement is typically marked by an inability to determine an occupational identity. Given the protracted length of adolescence today, I believe that an early emphasis on occupational identity may be misleading if interpreted too literally. The vital feature of Erikson's occupational identity is best understood in his description of the adolescent stage task. Maintaining the integrity of the search for an occupational identity is an important criteria in the formation of ego identity. As Erikson explains:

> In their search for a new sense of continuity and sameness, adolescents have to refight many of the battles of earlier years. . . . The sense of ego identity, then, is the accrued confidence that the inner sameness and continuity prepared in the past are matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others, as evidenced in the tangible promise of a 'career.'[27]

Disturbance of the search results in temporary over-identification with heroes, cliques, or crowds. At times, the adolescent may appear to incur a loss of identity. Other times, s/he may become quite intolerant, cruel, and destructive. The adolescent is caught in a psychosocial stage between "the morality learned by the child and the ethics to be developed by the adult."[28] In terms of social values, Erikson likens it to the confrontation between ideology and aristocracy.

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[27]Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 261-262.

[28]Ibid., 263.

Black urban youth in both the "external control-external responsibility" and the "external control-internal responsibility" quadrants experience disruption in their search for fidelity. How, then, does fidelity relate to adolescent ego identity? Continuity in the developing ego identity is disrupted because the disturbed youth is either incapacitated by negative self-images, or no longer believes in the trustworthiness of the social system. The distrust extends from a pervasive sense of denied opportunity to a lack of fairness even in menial opportunity.[29] Erikson stresses that "the development of a healthy personality depends on a certain degree of 'choice,' a certain hope for an individual 'chance,' and a certain conviction in freedom of 'self-determination.'"[30] External control disrupts the confidence of freedom in self-determination and the choices realistically available. Under the conviction that external responsibility belongs to a society unwilling to comply freely, the black urban youth loses hope for effective change. And, as mentioned in the previous chapter, some social critics attribute a pervasive hedonism to the loss of trust and future hope. Accordingly, American historian Christopher Lasch further perceives such hedonism as a disguise in the struggle for survival and power.[31] Those

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[29]Glasgow, 82-84.

[30]Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 99.

[31]Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 66-68.

youth who acknowledge external control but retain a sense of internal responsibility are plagued by self-blame and potentially self-hatred.

Black urban youth frequently respond to the frustrations of the adolescent stage task in the patterns typified by Erikson. Reshaping ideology as well as forming closed alliances mark their reactions to the overwhelming realities of external control and the inner conflict over responsibility. Here, the role of Augsburger's internal worth and identity continuum is helpful.[32] Some black urban youth are able to retain a degree of personal worth regardless of their social esteem. Others locate their worth in the esteem found in closed groups or alliances. The point is that even radical venues of expression (i.e. rap music) and violent fidelity to cliques (i.e. gang allegiance) are vestiges of internal worth and ego identity,[33] though riddled by identity diffusion. The disparagement of black churches by black youth does not reflect rejection as much as a lack of trust. The churches fail to sustain the fidelity of these youths in Erikson's sense of psychological necessities: choice, chance, and self-determination.

At the risk of over-simplification and a narrow understanding of Augsburger's schema, I initially place the black middle-class within quadrant four. Persons in this

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[32]Augsburger, 104.

[33]Glasgow, 88-89.

quadrant believe they possess control in their lives and feel they are responsible for their achievements. In a time when the clamor over Supreme Court Judge Clarence Thomas can still be heard, it is important to remember that internal control and internal responsibility have produced more than one world-view. Still, Thomas is illustrative of those upwardly mobile Blacks whose attitudes align most directly with Augsburger's fourth categorical description. Augsburger stresses that individualism is the central trait of internal control and responsibility. More so than in the third quadrant, failure is interpreted as the lack of personal effort, skills, or abilities. This viewpoint is pervasive among those middle-class Blacks who feel disconnected from the African American community as well as black churches. Conservative, privileged Blacks are accused by many within the African American community of having "sold out" in an assimilation of white culture as a means for personal achievement. Moreover, the general perception holds that with achievement, an excessive liberal individualism among middle-class Blacks seems to disavow communal responsibility.[34] Even for those who might acknowledge responsibility, a general feeling of distrust by the under-privileged, and in particular urban youth, prevails.[35] Hence, many middle-class Blacks often feel isolated from the African American community. Admittedly,

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[34]hooks, *Killing Rage*, 165.

[35]Glasgow, 122-123.

this isolation is at times self-imposed by their conservative socio-cultural stance. The result has been a growing class division within the black community.

The ideology of the black power movement raised the question of betrayal by middle-class Blacks into heightened debate. Even religious cultural critics who dispute the efficacy of essentialized blackness, such as Cornel West, have challenged the neo-conservatism which has taken root in the black middle-class. West accuses these conservatives of a misguided assault, which accents black behavior and black moral responsibility as the causes for the lack of socio-economic advancement among the black poor.[36] bell hooks claims that the class divisions resulting from such assaults deepen the wounds of internalized negative identities among the under-privileged black poor. She writes:

> Class divisions among blacks in a racially desegregated society have been the breeding grounds for those who are privileged to internalize contempt and hatred of the black poor and underclass. . . . The attitudes, assumptions and critical thoughts about underprivileged blacks shared by privileged blacks are presented as though there is no danger of class biases potentially distorting their perspectives.[37]

Many middle-class Blacks, however, claim they have unique experiences that challenge the parameters of quadrant four. Yet, bell hooks notes that some middle-class Blacks

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[36]Cornel West, *Prophetic Fragments: Illuminations of the Crisis in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, and Trenton: African World Press, Inc., 1988), 55-63. See also idem, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 71-90.

[37]bell hooks, *Killing Rage*, 166-167.

feel no need to press beyond the mentality which Augsburger locates in internal control and responsibility. She suggests that increased status and economic privilege have mediated the raw experiences of racism. Consequently, a liberal individualism is able to take root far more easily. The ideology of this liberal individualism among the black middle-class is shaken when they encounter persistent racism, whether it is willful or systemic. hooks acknowledges that middle-class rage begins to resurface as these people attempt to build upon their status or means of economic privilege.[38] When this rage surfaces, I believe that middle-class Blacks experience an awakening, at some variant level, to the improprieties of the internal control and responsibility quadrant. I believe that they acquire a modified world-view of the internal control vs. external responsibility perspective (quadrant one).

I place the initial experiences of the growing black middle-class in the young adult stage. These experiences, however, frequently continue well into the adult stage. The young adulthood stage faces the crisis of intimacy. Erikson holds that identity formation does not end with adolescence. After some reasonable level of identity is established through the adolescent stage, the task of young adulthood is "intimacy vs. distantiation." The young adult seeks engagement with others in an effort to form concrete

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[38]Ibid., 16-17.

affiliations and commitments.[39] The avoidance or threatened loss of such intimacy results in what Erikson calls isolation, or distantiation. More precisely, distantiation is "the readiness to isolate and, if necessary, to destroy those forces and people whose essence seems dangerous to one's own."[40] The intimate engagement of others involves "self-delineation." When young adults are not able to resolve the strain upon self-delineation between identity and engagement, they may either isolate themselves, or attempt mutuality by "narcissistic mirroring."[41] The young adult may attempt to resolve the tension of this stage in forms of discipleship or apprenticeship. These frequently unsuccessful mutations of intimacy result in deep introspection and self-testing. Isolation is thereby intensified by a weakened inner continuity and heightened shame.[42] Ultimately, the intrinsic conflict between intimacy and distantiation rests in the character of affiliation with others. Positive affiliations involving intimacy build upon mutuality. The virtue of this stage is love, in which the essence of mutual verification becomes a risk.[43]

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[39]Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 263.

[40]Ibid., 264.

[41]Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 134.

[42]Ibid., 135.

[43]Erik H. Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1964), 128.

Middle-class Blacks enter this stage claiming a distinctive sense of personal identity. Though some may argue that their own struggles with racism affect much of their distinctive identity formation, the fact remains that they seek intimate engagement of others based upon individual ego identity. The internal control and responsibility quadrant from Augsburger's schema shapes their engagement with white society. These persons seek opportunities while believing that their individual strengths and personal identity will receive the just rewards of successful engagement. The intimacy they seek is defined by their chosen affiliations and relationships. When they are able to advance socio-economically and develop social relationships, they attribute success to their own abilities and mutual reckoning.

The conflicts encountered in quadrant one by middle-class Blacks are frequently evidenced by their isolation from the African American community. In some cases, this isolation may be imposed, since less-privileged Blacks consider the quadrant one middle-class stance a rejection of their cultural identification. The charge is not without substance. Remember that Erikson defined distantiation to include the attempt to destroy, or differentiate from, those forces which threaten one's own perceived essence.[44] Identification with less-privileged Blacks may risk engagements with the larger society. Here, distantiation

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[44]See n.40 above.

takes on Cornel West's notion of assault on black behavior and black moral responsibility.[45] Engagement, or intimacy, is then sought through a liberal individualism.

Middle-class Blacks who redefine themselves within loosened parameters of Augsburger's quadrant one do so under the frustrations of self-delineation. For these persons, the strong beliefs in internal control and internal responsibility (quadrant four) do not survive the ravages of interpersonal and systemic racism. Their experiences of racism undermine the role that internal responsibility plays in their self-determination. With the pertinacity of internal control beliefs, these frustrated middle-class Blacks become introspective. Their privileged status now becomes a source of their frustration. They feel anger over their stifled attempts to redress racism, and guilt over the questionable right to complain when compared with less-privileged Blacks.[46] Isolation persists in their deficient identification with the lower classes. Even their rage, as bell hooks asserts, is adulterated by Erikson's notion of narcissistic mirroring. It is this mirroring activity that often begins to separate American individualism, or narcissism, from the social values of individuality.[47]

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[45]See n.36 above.

[46]Ellis Cose, *The Rage of a Privileged Class* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993), 13, 36.

[47]Lasch, 9-10.

Thus, the continuity of one's ego identity is weakened by a pervasive lack of mutuality.

When middle-class Blacks experience racism in their professional careers, in the common market place, or in everyday life, their perceived sense of advancement and status exacerbate their frustrations. Journalist Ellis Cose argues that race never becomes an irrelevant factor for the black middle-class, despite the extent of their achievements. Cose cites endless examples of privileged-class Blacks who are ultimately frustrated by the impenetrable wall of racism, and rudely awakened from their own surreal belief that they had overcome racial boundaries. These experiences fuel black middle-class outrage. Cose asserts:

> Taken separately, such episodes may not amount to much; everyone, regardless of race, experiences occasional slights and even outright rejection. But for many black professionals, these are not so much isolated incidents as insistent and galling reminders that whatever they may accomplish in life, race remains their most salient feature as far as much of America is concerned.[48]

Black middle-class rage is symptomatic of ego identity struggles not only between isolation and alienation, but also between advancements and impediments. Liberal individualism versus communalism is the battleground of the former struggle, while insurgence versus assimilation may best particularize the latter. Even the efforts of middle-class Blacks to express their outrage, or attempts to

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[48]Cose, 55.

ameliorate internal identity discord, are not without conflict. Cose deduces internal conflict as some privileged Blacks feel they have no comparative right to complain, given their socio-economic status and lifestyle, in the face of overwhelming black suffering.[49] Many, however, feel stifled by white reactions to their complaints of racism. Cose surmises that white Americans frequently prefer to believe that racism does not exist on a pervasive level or simply do not give black middle-class complaints serious weight. However, the reluctance to voice rage is not simply acquiescence to the frustrations caused by disbelievers. Many become dispirited, since their complaints may worsen the experience or compromise their positions. Cose explains that somewhere between white deafness and white resentment, white America is "likely to dismiss the [black privileged-class] complainer as a chronic malcontent or a maladjusted person who perhaps needs to be eased out."[50]

A similar fear of retribution also silences those privileged Blacks who wish to advocate for other Blacks, or black causes. These internal conflicts are easily perceived in light of the cultural criticism against such silence. With a little more skepticism, hooks contends that privileged-class Blacks themselves wish to silence expressions of rage, not in the interest of reducing reactionary racism, but in securing their own access to

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[49]See n.46 above.

[50]Ibid., 33.

privilege.[51] When enraged themselves, she charges, "it is a narcissistic rage rooted in the ideology of hierarchical privilege that says 'they,' not all black people, should be treated better."[52] If hooks is right, a much more contentious narcissism becomes another distinguishing feature of American individualism.

A transition from quadrant four to quadrant one among some middle-class Blacks does not appear to mitigate the bifurcation of the black community. My placement of black urban youth and the black middle-class in Augsburger's quadrangular schema exposes the resulting conflicts between individual and communal relations within the African American community and black churches. Moreover, this analysis of the "control" and "responsibility" continua closely relates individual and group identity to the disparity between black churches and these two focus groups. I have concentrated on the emerging struggle between American individualism and communal identity. Interpersonal and socially systemic racism exacerbate this identity conflict within the African American community. A major strength of black churches and black theology has been their emphasis on black identity, or self-esteem. Erikson's personality stage-development theories within Augsburger's schema adds insight to the fragmentation of the black community and the critical remoteness of black churches.

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[51]hooks, *Killing Rage*, 29.

[52]Ibid., 28.

Fragmentation results from conflicts in ideological interpretations of life between ego-centric and group-centric perceptions. Understanding the conflation of American individualism and racism affecting the African American community may guide black churches in regaining practical relevancy and communal identification.

I am not interested in locating blame. Rather, I do insist on both the desire and responsibility of churches for a healing and reconciling ministry. Black churches are weakened by their lack of mutuality with black urban youth and the black middle-class. Traditional faith structures, such as the refuge image, do not hold up in the face of black urban youth experiences. The stark obstinacy of churches against reshaping both their message and model creates insurmountable contradictions for these youths. Even the churches' association with the black middle-class suffers from polarization over internal power and internal responsibility. Churches end up either participating in black middle-class distantiation, or enlarging their alienation in the black community. A lack of coherency between faith claims and church praxis impedes a necessary synthesis between ecclesial interpretations and lived experiences, particularly in the existential needs of the community.

The alternative for these churches is to develop an expanded faith identity with greater personal attention to the contradictions between the tradition's ecclesial model

of ministry and the community's practical struggles. The churches do recognize the oppressive existence of minority life within a society which systematically denies or neglects responsibility for its crippling oppression. Yet, the churches' uncompromising focus on internal power, despite external responsibility, contributes to identity diffusion among black urban youth and distantiation among the black middle-class. How then do the black churches begin to bridge the widening gulf between these groups and themselves?

Ed Wimberly places heavy emphasis on the corporate understanding of the human personality and support systems in the dimensions of the black Christian experience.[53] I do not believe this corporate understanding of care has been irretrievably lost under the impact of individualism. The refuge image of black ecclesiology has succeeded in preserving the communal values of its historical heritage, if not its practical efficacy. Alternately, questions still remain regarding whether or not the liberation ethics of black theology adequately redresses the impact of religious individualism.

Reassessing the Prophetic Voice of Black Theology

Black theology has been quite progressive as a prophetic voice in white America and western culture. It

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[53]Edward P. Wimberly, *Pastoral Counseling & Spiritual Values*, 41-42. See also Wimberly, *Pastoral Care in the Black Church*.

has challenged the social evils and ideology of racism rooted throughout American public and private spheres. Black theology has held white society accountable to its own democratic principles, exposing injustice culturally, politically, and economically. Black theologians have challenged the state of modern democracy with a Marxist critique of western capitalism. In critical reflection, they have begun to redress their own classism and sexism. Black theology has also entered into critical evaluations of its relationships with Pan-African, Latin American, and Asian liberation theologies. In short, the maturation of black theology has produced a prophetic national and international voice.[54]

This study calls into question black theology's prophetic role in the black religious community. Black theologians have tried to establish themselves within black folk religion through an appeal to their common metanarratives: the Exodus event and social ministry of Jesus. Beyond this move, however, black theologians created an adversarial dialectic with black churches, between the predominance of a spiritually pietist religious folk

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[54]Cornel West has classified four stages in the evolution of black theology. His last two stages are "Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of White North American Theology" (1969-1977), and "Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of U.S. Capitalism" (1977-to at least the time of publication, 1982). He then calls for a fifth stage, "Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Capitalist Civilization." See, Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 103-106.

tradition and a rigorous social or historical understanding of liberation ethics.

Black theology anathematizes the predominating refuge image in black churches. They view the refuge image as devoid of the tradition's liberation ethics. Therefore, pastoral ministry, as it is practiced in black churches, requires restructuring aimed at social action. The effort to restructure pastoral theology is not without merit. And the appeal to the origins of the religious community is within the biblical tradition of prophetic inspiration.[55] However, a neglected analysis from within the pastoral ministry functioning in contemporary black religious folk life compromises the prophetic office of black theology.

A historical metanarrative functions authoritatively in the biblical prophetic tradition.[56] Yet, how the religious cult envisions and practices ministry implies an existential interpretation of the faith tradition which has emerged from the metanarrative. I have maintained that a covenantal model of black ecclesiology emerged historically as the churches' self-interpretation. The pastoral and prophetic ministries of black churches were envisioned within the

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[55]I develop the biblical tradition of prophetic inspiration in greater detail in the ensuing chapter. Here, the point is that the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures intimately associated religious life with the historical covenant community.

[56]The term "metanarrative" refers to the spiritual interpretations of a historical narrative held by a faith community. The narrative is imbued with a transcendent authority as a pivotal revelation of God, God's will and divine activity in humanity.

refuge image and liberation ethics that comprise covenant theology. The disruptive predominance of the refuge image in contemporary black churches has been judged explicitly by prophetic black theology, but has not been accurately understood. It is painfully clear that our black churches claim more of liberation ethics within their spiritual religious life than black theology grants. Any objection over the functional accuracy of this claim remains premature until black theology pursues an objective methodology for a practical theological analysis of black ecclesiology, and therefore black churches' pastoral ministries.

In the previous section, I systematically analyzed the effects individualism and racism have when they converge upon African American life experiences. Augsburger's schema and Erikson's life stages reveal important dimensions of the interpersonal fragmentation of the African American community. Black churches face dislocation from their central position in the communal and individual responses to social oppression. The emphasis upon inward spirituality is most evident in the churches' focus on personal salvation and religious piety. Outside of the Civil Rights era, their strongest attention to social presence has been an overwhelming concentration on their institutional development. Some critics even point out the reluctant involvement of black churches in the Civil Rights movement. Institutionalism has resulted in some objectionable

expenditure of both human and economic resources.[57] In all these grievances, there is little analysis of the actual contemporary influence that American culture asserts in black ecclesiology.

Black theology has succeeded in exposing the isolative practices of contemporary black churches. It has called churches into accountability to the practical needs of their people. Black theologians identify the problem as a loss of the liberation ethics once located in the churches' biblical understanding of Christianity. They maintain that black churches compromise the controversial demands of liberation ethics in the gospel message for an accommodational approach to religion and white America. Consequently, these churches continue to forsake their liberation heritage.

Under the charge of accommodationalism, black theologians reject the popular social program of integration. Their argument holds that integration has become a device of exploitation.[58] Extending from the black power movement, black theology argues that integration, for white America and white churches, does not mean equal opportunity and social mobility. White America uses socio-economic and systemic power to manipulate the access and flow of social integration. It has become a means to control the radical demands for change. Integration,

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[57]Lincoln and Mamiya, 228-229.

[58]Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 17-19.

therefore, results in a perpetuation of white supremacy and black inferiority.[59]

Gayraud Wilmore states that there has been a misapplication of Christian theology to the social ideal of integration.[60] Ideologically, the displacement of racial identity became the gauge of social integration. Unfortunately, this means that white perceptions of social and religious acceptability become the canon for any transformation of our society. In essence, integration for America means "desegregated, but White."[61] Black theology insists upon the value of black humanity and black power. For Wilmore, black theology reasserts the religious ideal of God's love revealed in freedom and black wholeness. Cornel West identifies the methodology that black theology employs as a "dialectic methodology."[62] Throughout this study I refer to black theology's methodology as an adversarial dialectic. I argue that black theologians rely on the dynamics of persuasive rhetoric in their sweeping assessments of contemporary black religious cultic practices. West explains that a dialectic methodology is focused on negation and opposition. Black theology,

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[59]Ibid.

[60]Gayraud S. Wilmore, "A Black Churchman's Response To The Black Manifesto," in *Black Theology* (1979), 94-95.

[61]Ibid., 95.

[62]West, *Prophesy Deliverance*, 108.

therefore, has not developed its own notion of liberation.[63] Borrowing from West's insights, I reassert that black theology lacks a methodology that engages in an "internal" dialogue with black churches regarding religious cultic practices in preaching and pastoral care.

The prophetic office of black theology requires a methodology grounded in practical theology, which seeks an internal transformation of black religious life; that is, internal to the religious cult tradition. The dialectic method in black theology has produced an unsuccessful attempt to create a counter-hegemonic culture. Explaining this very point, West first defines a hegemonic culture:

> A hegemonic culture subtly and effectively encourages people to identify themselves with the habits, sensibilities, and world views supportive of the status quo and the class interests that dominate it. . . . A hegemonic culture survives and thrives as long as it convinces people to adopt its preferred formative modality, its favored socialization process.[64]

In contrast, a counter-hegemonic culture resolves

> . . . to opt for a transformative modality, a socialization process that opposes the dominant one; . . . it fosters an alternative set of habits, sensibilities, and world views that cannot possibly be realized within the perimeters of the established order.[65]

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[63]West's criticism of the dialectic method in black theology is reflected in Victor Anderson's image of black theology as an ideological mirror of white Eurocentric theology; cf. n.9 above.

[64]Ibid., 119.

[65]Ibid., 119-120.

Black theology grounds its liberation ethics in the black community. Theologically, it places this responsibility within black churches. Black theology insists that the goal of liberation is both the primary and ultimate meaning of the Christian gospel message. Liberation involves the freedom of persons, personhood, and individuality. However, if freedom is the ultimate expression of liberation, then what are the implications for the future of community? Concerned with the beguiling effects of individualism within individuality, Robert Bellah asks, "But what do you aim for once you have been liberated?, . . . But where should the struggle lead?, . . . But what are [individuals] going to do with power?"[66]

These questions should raise concern over the preeminence of individualism within the quest for liberation. Herein, black theology fails to establish a "counter-hegemonic black religious cult" for its prophetic liberation ethics. Individualism remains the dominating hegemonic culture in American religious life, both white and black. The lack of a counter-hegemonic formulation for black religious cultic practice results in what West describes as a neo-hegemonic culture: "Neo-hegemonic culture constitutes a new phase of hegemonic culture; it postures as an oppositional force, but, in substance, is a new manifestation of people's allegiance and loyalty to the

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[66]Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 21.

status quo."[67] American individualism in black religious life disrupts the development of the counter-hegemonic religious culture desired by black theology. Instead, a neo-hegemonic culture has developed, which embraces black personhood and liberation, but does not curb the negative impact of American individualism upon the black community and the religious cult. The fragmentation of the black community and the displacement of black churches illustrate the neo-hegemonic cultural deviations germinating between black churches, the black middle-class, and black urban youth.

The liberation ethics of black theology, alone, does not successfully define a counter-hegemonic religious culture for black churches. In disparaging the churches' spiritual interpretations of liberation, black theology perpetuates the isolation of its ecclesial religious cult. The covenant model of black ecclesiology not only reestablishes the interrelatedness of refuge and liberation, but also sustains a prophetic paradigm for a black practical theology. For black churches, liberation contends with spirituality and social freedom. Neither individuality, nor liberated individuals, can ultimately be self-sustaining. I agree with Bellah that freedom, in and of itself, is not capable of sustaining either public or private life.[68] Hence, a renewed affirmation of the interrelationship

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[67]West, *Prophesy Deliverance*, 120.

[68]Ibid., 143.

between spiritual and historical liberation in God's abiding covenant with black humanity constitutes this challenge to black theology.

Black ecclesiology, or more specifically its covenant model, becomes a far more appropriate point of departure for black theology. The covenant model will reground black theology in black religious experience. It preserves the relationship between the refuge image and liberation ethics, which is integral to black ecclesiology. Traditional black churches do not perceive the refuge image as devoid of liberation ethics. If black theologians desire to bridge this gulf with black churches, a reassessment of contemporary black spirituality is necessary. This methodology follows Cecil Cone's corrective for the black theology project.[69] The covenant model reestablishes a common authority and cultural hermeneutic for black theology and black folk religion. In so doing, the interrelationship between the refuge image and the liberation ethics of black ecclesiology becomes the lens through which a critique of black churches and black theology can be constructed. Black practical theology envisions a renewed, though redefined, relationship between the tradition's pastoral spirituality and the prophetic campaign for black freedom and wholeness. This re-orientation in ecclesiology could be advanced quite

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[69]The reader may wish to cross-reference my discussion of Cecil Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*; see Introduction above.

dramatically once black theology concedes that it, too, has supplanted the covenant model with its own uprooted agenda.

CHAPTER V

PROPHETIC BLACK THEOLOGY AND THE COVENANT

Black theology stands within a prophetic biblical tradition. The accent on liberation characterizes its prophetic voice. Black theologians contend that black churches have forgotten this historical interpretation of the gospel message. Rejecting the predominance of the refuge function of black churches, black theologians turn to the prophetic office, appealing to the immediate responsibility of socio-economic and political freedom of African Americans. They contend that the refuge function has become antithetical to the practical drive for liberation. In the revolutionary language of the black power movement, black theology makes liberation the principal agenda for black church ministry. The central ideas behind the campaign of black theology have been black identity, or self-esteem, and black liberation by any means deemed necessary. Black churches have embraced the former principle, but remain opposed to the latter. This rift between black churches and black theology has grown due to the pervasive disparagement of the refuge image of ecclesiology. Black theology builds its ideal of the prophetic from this derision of black religious life and the primacy of liberation ethics.

Black theology's appeal to the prophetic tradition is best evaluated in the biblical context of the covenant model. The foundation of biblical prophecy is a covenantal relationship between the Hebrew people and Yahweh. In chapter two, I argued that a similar covenantal relationship demarcates historical black ecclesiology. The covenant model, therefore, serves as an important methodological tool in my critique of black theology. Chapters three and four reappraised the refuge image in the contexts of black religious life and American culture. My present task is to reground the liberation ethics of black theology in covenantal biblical prophecy.

Prophetic Consciousness

When speaking of prophetic consciousness, it is easy to assume that one is dealing with a special mind-set that originated in the Hebrew prophets. Though this may be true to some limited extent, I place particular emphasis on the guiding images and sacred mission of the classical prophets within a religious cultic tradition. The prophets did not receive their call to prophetic ministry outside of a religious culture. The life of the religious cult, in fact, is central to the prophetic ministry. Therefore, it seems necessary to begin with the prophets' own orientation toward the religious life of the Israelites.

Walter Brueggemann suggests that the task of prophetic ministry is to proclaim and nurture an "alternative

consciousness" oriented toward a "newness" in relating to God, the religious community, and humanity.[1] This "newness" is usually seen as a corrective to the consciousness of the dominant culture. Immediately, however, questions arise regarding how one identifies the dominant culture. Certainly, prophetic communities have been part of the dominant culture as well as marginalized by the dominant culture. The relationship between the prophetic community and the dominant culture throughout the history of the Israelites cannot be distinguished by a single voice. The classical, or latter, prophets of the Hebrew Bible are commonly classified among the pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic periods of Hebrew history.[2] Each age characterizes a distinctive consciousness between social identification in the dominant culture and subjugation under another dominant culture. Even in the ages of subjugation, prophetic consciousness also addressed the principal disposition existing within their own subculture. In either situation, a prophetic or alternative consciousness critiques the contemporary social order and directs it toward socio-religious reform.[3]

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[1]Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 13.

[2]Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 158, 161-164, 171.

[3]Brueggemann, 13-14.

Prophetic black theology acknowledges the dual responsibility required in presenting a "newness" in the consciousness of black religious life. It addresses the needs and concerns of a people who live under an oppressively dominating culture. Yet, black theology also directs its voice toward the dominating culture. In either case, it calls for social accountability. In this vein, black theology points to an alternative consciousness within the black community. Here, the distinction lies in religious meaning, which informs macro and micro levels of social relationships.

A prophetic alternative consciousness is not an independent ideology. By independent ideology I refer to an isolation of the secular order of life from a religious world-view. Religious life in the prophetic tradition does not isolate secular matters. Actually, within the cult of the Israelites, religious life was all encompassing.[4] Yahweh was therefore involved in all aspects of the world. Humanity not only had a stake in this divine activity, but shared in it as well.[5] How persons conducted themselves in public and private matters could not be detached from their religious understanding of human relationships and their

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[4]Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker, vol. I (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 152-153.

[5]Ibid.

relationship with Yahweh.[6] Prophetic consciousness attempts to root self-identity in this relationship to Yahweh. Therefore, a prophetic black theology cannot isolate black life from the context of black religious consciousness.

The idea that prophetic alternative consciousness involves the interrelatedness of private and public life raises important implications for interpreting the content of prophecy. If the central context of the prophetic tradition is Israel's relationship to Yahweh, and therefore human relationships as well, what constitutes prophecy in general? Commonly, modern culture reduces prophecy to predictions of the future. The directive of alternative consciousness, however, dictates the contemporary historical period as the focus of prophecy. Future prophecy is then understood within the contemporary historical interpretation of religious and public life.[7]

Another common reduction of the prophetic tradition is in the area of social action. Brueggemann resists the primary coupling of prophetic consciousness and social action. His misgivings about this immediate association lies in the narrow identification of prophetic concern.

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[6]Ronald E. Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant*, Studies in Biblical Theology (Naperville, IL: Alec R Allenson, 1965), 16-17.

[7]von Rad explains that even when the prophets refer to the future they are, in fact, deeply concerned with the past. The prophets viewed themselves, in the present, as standing in a pivotal turning point in Israelite history. See Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker, vol. II (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 299.

Brueggemann is careful to equate social action with more normative understandings of pastoral ministry and acts of worship. He contends that prophetic alternative consciousness is a far more "radical" notion than a social action agenda implies.[8] From within the earliest biblical prophetic traditions, however, Brueggemann concedes that the claims upon human justice and liberation are given radical viability when held by an oppressed "intentional community" of faith.[9]

Like Brueggemann, black theology suggests that God's will for freedom is the primary bearing for marginalized people. A dominating oppressive culture will obviously find other qualities of biblical religion most germane. The conflict between central interpretations of prophetic consciousness then becomes a difficult platform for black theology. Social justice maintains significant preeminence in prophetic communication to the oppressive culture as well as the marginalized community. The challenge for black theology lies in the condition of mutuality between social action and religious piety. Prophetic consciousness does not treat religious piety aside of a social consciousness per se, but rather insists upon their mutuality.[10]

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[8]Brueggemann, 28.

[9]Ibid., 29.

[10]Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, trans. by Moshe Greenberg (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 158-160, 345. Kaufmann emphasizes that the treatment of moral and religious sin together uniquely distinguishes the classical

Therefore, the newness called for by an alternative prophetic consciousness does not create a new religion. Newness envisions alternative realities for the deceptions of the dominating culture.[11]

Neither alternative consciousness nor its prophetic newness are independent enterprises. The prophet does not communicate secular notions of social morality. As Abraham Heschel asserts, "the prophet's task is to convey a divine view, ... [speaking] from the perspective of God as perceived from the perspective of [the human] situation."[12] Hence, prophetic intention abides in the discernment and declaration of God's desires within the human situation.

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prophets from the historical books of the Hebrew Bible. The historical books view Israel's sin primarily as idolatry, marked frequently by a preoccupation with ancient eastern customs. Although Kaufmann's work in Jewish theology has been criticized as reductionistic, his position on the mutuality between religious piety and social justice in prophetic consciousness is substantiated by other biblical scholars. Brueggemann posits two major trajectories in emerging from the covenant traditions that extend into prophetic consciousness. These trajectories are social justice and religious purity. The priestly office in and along with the religious cult were responsible for ordering secular and religious life in the maintenance of social justice and well-being as part of public worship and holiness. Justice and holiness characterize the ordering of community and relationship with Yahweh. The prophets do not reject or stand against the cultic worship of Yahweh, nor do they subjugate it to social justice. The critique of the prophets redresses religious self-indulgence and the lost mutuality between the cult and social ethics. See Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 187-193, 677-679.

[11]Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 49.

[12]Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, vol. I (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), *x*.

The prophet engages the human situation with the divine perspective.[13]

Heschel points out that interpretations highlighting the passion for social justice among the prophets often identify the tradition as a religion of morality.[14] It seems that black theology's disparagement of contemporary black spirituality indicates a similar understanding of the prophetic. To the contrary, however, Heschel contends that the prophetic tradition places justice within an intimate relation between God and humanity. In this relation, God is ultimately defined neither by social justice, nor liberation alone. Justice and liberation stand in reciprocal relationships with such other religious principles as repentance, mercy, grace, and forgiveness.[15] Consequently, Heschel places the prophetic tradition under the discernment of divine pathos.[16] I believe that within the divine pathos of the prophetic, black theology may begin to discern just how black churches view their own spirituality. This is not to say that the churches do not require a prophetic corrective from black theology. My desire is to reposition

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[13]Ibid., 24.

[14]Ibid., 218.

[15]In more precise terms than Heschel, Kaufmann explains that justice and righteousness are virtues modeled by God, and expected of the Israelites. Under these virtues, biblical justice upholds equality in the law, which includes men and women, social and economic classes, and non-religious matters. See Kaufmann, 319-322.

[16]Heschel, 217-219.

black theology within the religious life of black churches, where black theology can develop a mutual understanding of revelation for its prophetic inspiration.

When referring to prophetic inspiration as the initiation of a new alternative consciousness, the initiator is God. Prophecy, therefore, indicates God's communication or revelation. According to Heschel, God's communication marks the prophetic event.[17] Prophetic inspiration is God's communication not only to the prophet, but to the life of an intentional faith community. It is not human correction. In what he calls *anthropotropism*, Heschel describes the prophetic experience as "a sense of being pursued."[18] Anthropotropic experiences by their very nature are not sustained as isolated events. They occur in some relation to humanity's turning to God. Heschel identifies such events in our worship practices as *theotropism*.[19] Though Heschel characterizes theotropism by the priestly or pastoral ministry, the strength of his argument lies in the dialogical relationship between anthropotropic and theotropic experiences. Both experiences mutually sustain the prophetic tradition. He explains:

> Anthropotropism finds its supreme expression in prophecy; theotropism, in psalmody. Characteristic of the former is the election or the call that comes to a prophet from above; characteristic of

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[17]Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, vol. II (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 216-217.

[18]Ibid., 220.

[19]Ibid.

> the latter is repentance and conversion. One must not assume, however, that both types are mutually exclusive. The existence of the prophet, for example, is sustained by both kinds of events. And conversion, the structure of which is theotropic is often accompanied by an anthropotropic experience.[20]

The gulf stretching between black theology and black churches betrays the necessary relationship between anthropotropic and theotropic experiences. Black theology disparages the predominance of the refuge function in black churches. The refuge image of black ecclesiology, therefore, abdicates its social responsibility defined by the liberation ethics of black theology. Conversely, black churches view the refuge function within the convergence of anthropotropic and theotropic experiences in religious life. This perspective is best illustrated by the central roles that conversion experiences, personal salvation, and religious piety have assumed in black religious life and church ministries. Though black theology correctly challenges the churches' neglect of social responsibilities in prophetic ministry, its critical assessment of the refuge function lacks attention to anthropotropic-theotropic interpretations of black religious piety.

In making a liberation ideology its point of departure, black theology has made an unsuccessful attempt at redefining black religious life. I have argued that the neglected impact of American individualism has been a major contributing factor. Black churches also have been blind to

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[20]Ibid., 222.

the disruption that American individualism causes in the convergence of anthropotropism and theotropism. Heschel discloses the correlation that I raise:

> Where theotropic moments determine the ultimate image of existence, directedness of the mind upon the divine may become, in extreme cases, the exclusive standard and principle of judgement. Focused upon the Beyond, the mind begins to disregard the demands and values of here and now, sliding into resignation and withdrawal from action, moral indifferentism, and world denial.[21]

As a response to social powerlessness, black churches adopted theotropic campaigns of spiritual salvation, moral purity, and institutionalism in trying to overcome the perverted ideology at the core of racist practices.

Black churches perceive such efforts within the convergence of liberation and refuge, or anthropotropism and theotropism, respectively. However, I maintain that the evolution of American individualism in black religious culture disrupted the social efficacy of their ecclesial praxis. Theotropic events mark the predominance of the refuge function within black churches. Therefore, for black theology, this juncture becomes a critical point of exploration in assessing the inefficacy of the Church as refuge and the loss of its prophetic liberation ethics. The covenant model of black ecclesiology would facilitate this exploration.

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[21]Ibid., 222-223.

Covenantal Theology and Prophetic Inspiration

The biblical tradition of prophecy did not seek to introduce new doctrines about God. The prophetic tradition is rooted in the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites.[22] Yet, religious life under the covenant was not limited to personal worship. Social justice was integral to covenantal theology. Both the community's and the individual's relationship to Yahweh hold direct implications for social and interpersonal relationships among the Israelites. The prophets relied heavily on the mutuality between religious life and Yahweh's moral law. The authority or justification of moral life was not independent of God's will and sovereignty.[23] A similar mutuality was found between personal piety and communal worship. Community worship maintained the importance of individual devotion, but certainly could not neglect the socio-ethical demands of the covenant.[24] Therefore, the basis of social ethics was grounded in the religious cult of the covenant.

The prophets redressed the breach of covenantal law in the lives of the Israelites. The foundation of social morality rested in the ethics of covenantal law. However, as Ronald Clements cautions, the prophets did not function

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[22]Clements, 16.

[23]Gerhard von Rad, *God at Work in Israel*, trans. John H. Marks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 185-186.

[24]Clements, 86, 99.

as legal reformers.[25] The prophets did urge adherence to covenantal law. Yet, their concerns are best viewed in the context of the religious cult. The prophets did not permit the religious cult of the Israelites to stratify personal religious piety and social ethics. Obedience to the covenant and, therefore, to Yahweh required both.

Understanding this relationship between personal piety and social ethics holds significant implications for black theology and black churches. It obliges black theology to recognize the appropriate referential authority for its prophetic judgement upon black churches. Liberation does not singularly comprise the covenant relationship with God. Prophecy concerning liberation is held in mutual association with the religious worship of Yahweh. Covenantal theology ties these together so intricately that liberation and social justice must be considered acts of worship themselves.[26] The prophetic task, then, of black theology is in re-establishing its liberation ethics within the pastoral praxis of black churches. The personal spirituality common to contemporary black religious life is not rejected by the biblical covenant tradition. A spirituality that lacks social justice is the point of redress. Therefore, the covenant tradition becomes the biblical source of prophetic inspiration in black theology.

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[25]Ibid., 79-80.

[26]Ibid., 99-101.

Relating the prophetic office of black theology to the biblical covenant tradition immediately presents a dilemma. Just which biblical covenant should serve as the referential authority for black ecclesiology? The traditional covenant model of black ecclesiology, of course, will be the focus of prophetic inspiration in black theology. Here, however, the difficulty is in determining the biblical covenant most apropos for guiding black theology in this venture. The two most prevalent choices in prophetic biblical literature are between the Mosaic (Sinai) covenant and the Davidic (Zion) Covenant.

It is not surprising to find that many churches regard these covenants in a fluid progression of Israelite history. Little attention is given to the geographic and historical divisions of the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Biblical scholarship, however, holds the two covenants in distinctive traditions.[27] The Mosaic covenant reflects a tradition of protest within the social and theological development of intentional communities of faith. The Davidic covenant emerges out of a tradition of triumphant political consolidation substantiated by a theological vision.[28]

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[27]Walter Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 13-14.

[28]Ibid.

The allure of bilateral theological interpretations is understandable. Strong relationships between the two covenant traditions do exist. Biblical scholar Jon Levenson suggests that the Sinaitic tradition of covenant renewal and the Zionistic tradition of royal dynasty do coexist theologically in biblical literature.[29] He convincingly argues that Sinai covenant traditions were, in parts, assumed into the Zionistic traditions.[30] This argument, however, does not advance a common interpretation of the two covenant traditions. Even where there exists good evidence of the influence of the Sinai covenant during the times of the exilic and post-exilic prophets, the royal tradition of the Davidic covenant endured as the immediate authority. Its emphasis is on Yahweh's unwavering commitment to the nation through the Davidic lineage. Although the Davidic covenant marks a major transition in prophetic literature, there is no suggestion by the prophets that it actually forgoes the Sinaitic covenant.[31] Levenson asserts that nothing exempts the Davidic dynasty from adherence to the Sinaitic covenant.[32] In fact, when the classical prophets

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[29]Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai & Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985), 187-217.

[30]Ibid., 199, 206.

[31]Ibid., 99.

[32]Ibid.

address the monarchical dynasty, they refer to the neglect of covenantal (Mosaic) law.[33]

The proclamation of the Sinai covenant is given in Exodus 19:3-8. Based on what Yahweh did in the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt, a special covenant relationship was formed.[34] The focus of the Sinai covenant lies within the moral character of the relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites. The authority of the covenant is Yahweh's sovereignty as evidenced by divine acts in the Exodus event, which include the Sinai experiences. Both parties of the covenant, Yahweh and the Israelites, accepted certain responsibilities. However, the relationship was not a partnership between equals.[35] The Israelites accepted conditions of obedience to Yahweh under compliance to the terms of the covenant. The Decalogue in Exodus 20:2-17 and Book of the Covenant in Exodus 20:22-23:33 provide the basic contents or stipulations. These covenant stipulations became commandments and laws. Adherence and defiance held consequences of the blessings and curses of Yahweh, respectively.

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[33]Brueggemann, *Theology of Old Testament*, 197.

[34]Levenson, 24-26.

[35]Ibid., 26-30. Levenson relates the Sinai covenant to the suzerainty treaties of the ancient Hittites. The suzerain is the higher monarch who enters a treaty of protection on behalf of a lesser monarch, or vassal. In return, the vassal accepts stipulations to the favor or protection of the suzerain.

Prophetic traditions constructed a theology of Israelite history based upon interpretations of adherence or defiance of the covenant. Levenson observes:

> The curses and blessings of the covenant formulary enables the prophets of Israel to provide a theology of history. Adversity - drought, famine, epidemic, defeat, or whatever - could be accounted for by reference to a violation of covenant obligations. Conversely, the prosperity and tranquility of either the past or the coming age could be seen as a consequence of faithful partnership with God.[36]

Due to the moral emphasis within covenantal law, one begins to perceive the reasoning behind prophetic inspiration. Prophecy was riveted upon the moral sensibilities of the Israelites. According to Levenson, "Israel was able to develop a coherent correlation between experience and morals, especially public morals, the relationship between [a person] and [his/her] neighbor."[37] The covenant was not limited to codes of religious ceremonial or personal worship. As mentioned above, personal and social morality were held in the same regard as ceremonial acts of worship. The covenant decreed these ethical social obligations as integral to the religious cult.[38]

Brueggemann ties the moral agency of the Sinai covenant community to its Exodus liturgy. The Sinai covenant forged an alternative community whose ideology was based upon

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[36]Ibid., 55.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Clements, 75.

liberation from oppression.[39] This community would be unlike the socio-political systems of their former oppressors in Egypt, as well as distinctive from the Canaanite order of society. It is insufficient to argue that the alternative consciousness of this community was the monotheistic worship of Yahweh alone. The covenantal worship of Yahweh made moral claims upon Israel's identity. The correlation, then, between covenant and morality weighed directly upon prophetic inspiration. Clements stresses, "the prophets must consequently be regarded, not simply as teachers of morality, but as [spokespersons] of the covenant, for the morality which they taught implied the existence of a unique bond between Yahweh and Israel."[40]

Directly associated to the moral accountability of the covenant community, prophecy's liberation ethic plays a prominent role. Brueggemann still places the Sinai covenant within an overarching theme of liberation. The Sinai tradition itself, along with the covenant's stipulations for its recitation,[41] relies upon the Exodus event of liberation. For Brueggemann, the Exodus story unified previously fragmented family clans and tribes into a

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[39]Brueggemann, *Social Reading of Old Testament*, 267.

[40]Clements, 80.

[41]Levenson, 29. Levenson demonstrates the fourth common element of suzerainty treaties as the deposition of its text and its periodic recitation. In his comparison, he cites the Sinai obligation for its reading three times a year as a liturgical reaffirmation of the covenant.

community of Israelites.[42] Since the covenant is grounded in the liberation of the Israelites, their new alternative community is evidenced by the liberation ethics present in their own social interactions.[43] But, the question still remains, "Is liberation the ultimate character of the Sinai covenant?"

Brueggemann argues that covenant theology models a different relationship to God as well as mediating social life. It serves as a guide in repudiating social exploitation in the cause of social justice.[44] Herein lies the substance of liberation. Brueggemann asserts that liberation directs the community's own social practices and even social reorganization. Liberation is not limited to Israel's emancipation. The Exodus event and the covenant require the social practices of a liberating justice as well. Covenantal liberation therefore engages in repentance and social reform.[45] Liberation is an appropriate voice of prophetic inspiration. However, it must serve as an impetus for social morality dictated by a unique relationship to God. Within this understanding, liberation is misunderstood when lifted to the ultimate expression of God's covenant with humanity. It is indispensable, and even primary. Yet, it must operate within the greater ends of God's will for

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[42]Brueggemann, *Social Reading of Old Testament*, 268.

[43]Ibid., 64.

[44]Ibid., 61.

[45]Ibid., 61-64.

human relationships. Repentance and reform become the initial visions of liberation. For Brueggemann, prophetic inspiration moves from the deed-consequence formula[46] of the Sinai covenant into the establishment of an intentional alternative community.

The viewpoint of prophetic inspiration in Israelite history and covenantal law should not be characterized as legalistic. While specific practices are mandated by covenantal law, prophetic inspiration is more accurately understood in the language of a covenantal theology interpreting religious and social life. The pre-exilic prophets grounded repentance and social reform in a sense of public theology uniting social justice and religious life. Therefore, prophetic inspiration actually places social justice within a proper covenantal understanding of religious life. Though the covenant would serve to unite the previously loose associations between family clans and tribes, the Israelites would come to understand their identity by embracing more than tribal unification. The idea that God's will can be known through the covenant implies a special knowledge among the Israelites which characterized their religious and moral responsibilities.[47]

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[46]Ibid.; From an analysis of Deuteronomic theology in the book of Judges, Brueggemann establishes a fourfold formula involving deed-consequence and cry-save constructions which contribute to the formation of Israelite community. See chapter 4: "Social Criticism and Social Vision in the Deuteronomic Formula of the Judges," 73-90.

[47]Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, vol. I (Philadelphia: Westminster Press,

Hence, covenantal knowledge molded Israel's self-identity. Biblical scholar Walther Eichrodt suggests that the formation of a covenantal relationship with Yahweh established a socio-religious "historical self-awareness."[48] He characterizes this knowledge, or self-identity, in the terms of an "interior attitude toward history."[49]

How, then, is this historical self-awareness addressed in covenantal theology and prophetic inspiration? The pre-exilic prophets related their condemnation of Israelite religious cultic practices to social injustice. Hosea actually mentions the breech of the covenant law.[50] Verse 6:7 reads,

> *But at Adam they transgressed the covenant;*
> *there they dealt faithlessly with me.*[51]

1961), 39.

[48]Ibid. Eichrodt's thesis proposes that the Israelite religion developed under the primary concept of covenant. He argues that a "covenantal relatedness" involves Yahweh, the Israelites, and foreign nations, including notions of community and individuals. Brueggemann explains that Eichrodt's argument stands against a rationalistic individualism common to modernist interpretations. Despite Eichrodt's confinement of the Hebrew Bible to one controlling concept, Brueggemann confirms the great importance of covenantal relatedness in the Israelite religious traditions. See Brueggemann, *Theology of Old Testament*, 28-31.

[49]Ibid., 41.

[50]Hosea refers to the covenant or law in verses 4:6, 6:7, 8:1 and 8:12. These texts are cited as evidence of Hosea's deep concern over the cultic traditions of Israel. See Hans Walter Wolff, *Amos the Prophet* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 54-55; and Eichrodt, 51.

[51]*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, ed. Bruce Metzger and Roland Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press). The remaining biblical citations

Again, in verse 8:1, the prophetic voice is grounded in the language of covenant,

> *Set the trumpet to your lips!*
> *One like a vulture is over the house of the Lord,*
> *because they have broken my covenant, and*
> *transgressed my law.*

Hosea is the only one among the classical pre-exilic prophets to specifically mention the covenant. It is, therefore, especially significant that in each case the covenant validates the prophet's attention to Israel's religious cultic practices.

Despite the literal references of covenant and law, modern scholarship has questioned the prominence of a formal covenant theology among the pre-exilic prophets. Hosea's critique is actually more poignantly directed to Israel's religious character, particularly in regards to political matters.[52] Consequently, an alternative presence of covenantal awareness underlies early prophetic literature. Herein, Eichrodt's notion of "an interior attitude toward history" among the prophets guides my re-evaluation of Israelite theology and prophetic inspiration.

Hans Walter Wolff develops a strong correlation between the oral traditions of Israelite clan wisdom and the prophetic content of the book of Amos. He determines a close correlation between the language of "justice" and "righteousness" and the clan wisdom literature of

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will also be taken from this text.

[52]Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), 114-117.

Proverbs.[53] In particular, this correlation surfaces in conditions for the religious cult. Wolff cites Proverbs 21:3 and Amos 5:7 & 15:

> *To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.* (Prov. 21:3).

> *Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground! . . . Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate.* (Amos 5:7 & 15).

According to Wolff the clan wisdom of Proverbs places the call to justice and righteousness within a negative cultic decree. The parallel with Amos becomes clearer when one sees that the emphasis on justice and righteousness is followed by a shift to the direct speech of Yahweh:

> *I hate, I despise your pilgrimage festivals, and take no delight in your solemn assemblies.*
> *Surely if you offer up to me burnt offerings, I will not respond favorably; and the well-being sacrifices of your fattened animals I will not look upon.*
> *Take away from me the sound of your songs, and to the music of your flutes I will not listen;*
> *but let justice flow like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.* (Amos 5:21-24).

Amos proclaims Yahweh's condemnation of the cultic practices of the Israelites. Like the clan wisdom from Proverbs, Amos places the themes of justice and righteousness within a negative cultic decree. There is no reference to sacrifices mandated by covenantal law. With the overall absence of direct reference to covenant and law, biblical scholars suggest that the oral heritage of Israelite culture is

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[53]Wolff, 56-66.

reflected in Amos.[54] Therefore, in addition to the actual references to covenant law in Hosea, Amos is indicative of the functional role Israelite history plays in the religious traditions. Prophetic inspiration for social justice correlates this historical legacy to the Israelites' religious cultic practices in what would eventually become biblical tradition.[55]

The pivotal phenomenon in the Israelites' historical self-awareness is the liberating activity of Yahweh in the Exodus event. Liberation, however, did not constitute the ultimate knowledge of Yahweh. Biblical scholar John Collins admits that liberation alone may determine judgement upon political oppression, or may even indicate divine selection. Yet, the Israelites' Exodus history, or liberation history, implies a broader field for their divine relationship and social life.[56] I take this to mean that liberation history created the context for understanding the proper use of freedom. The Exodus event lives on as more than the evidence of Yahweh's sovereignty. Freedom was not the goal in itself. Collins contests any idea suggesting that biblical liberation points to "autonomous independence."[57]

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[54]Ibid., 63-64; See also John H. Hayes, *Amos, The Eighth Century Prophet* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 172-173.

[55]Hayes, 175.

[56]John J. Collins, "The Exodus and Biblical Theology," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 24 (1995): 154.

[57]Ibid.

The Sinai covenant defined the responsibilities of freedom in religious and social life. The Israelites were not released from these covenantal obligations by any compromised status of their freedom.

A covenant theology develops as the prophets relate the responsibilities of freedom within an intentional alternative community molded by Yahweh.[58] Prophetic inspiration does not prioritize freedom over the religious and social responsibilities of the Israelites. In fact, the covenant and the relationship with Yahweh preclude "autonomous freedom."[59] Hebrew Bible scholar Kathleen Nash asserts that biblical liberation "automatically evokes covenant."[60] Prophetic criticism exposes the failure of the community to establish liberation in the terms of justice as their own social identification. Therefore, religious worship is socially conditioned by obedience to the covenant.[61] Hence, within Israelite historical self-awareness, and therefore covenantal theology, liberation is more accurately understood within an integral relationship with repentance and social reform; inseparable from the religious cultic life of worship.

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[58]Ibid., 156. Collins makes this point in contention with Jon Levenson's argument that the Exodus experience primarily illustrates the election of Israel (pp. 154-165).

[59]Brueggemann, *Theology of Old Testament*, 200.

[60]Kathleen S. Nash, "Let Justice Surge," *The Bible Today* 31 (September 1993): 266.

[61]Ibid., 268-269.

The harsh reality of the exilic period led to a reinterpretation of the Sinai covenant tradition. Despite a covenant renewal in the reform of Josiah in Jerusalem (622 b.c.e.), the Davidic dynasty could not prevent the fall of Judah and the religious crisis of the exilic period.[62] The Davidic dynasty and its covenant tradition drew upon an ideology of divine selection to embrace a monarchical reign quite reflective of Canaanite political society.[63] The Davidic dynasty did not mark a blind introduction of eastern monarchical structures to Israelite history. The inception of Israel's kingship was not initiated by Yahweh, but by the Israelites themselves (I Samuel 8:4-9).

In unique political dynamics, the king had to contend with the roles of the priest and prophet. The king actually assumed responsibilities of religious leadership.[64] Eventually that role would become predominantly characterized by the management of military power. Yet, the king was still held accountable to the covenant. The priest would maintain primary responsibility for the religious cult under the covenant. Prophetic designation of the king and its implicit divine accountability would also endure.[65] Eichrodt insists that the political power of the king could

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[62]Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 24.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Eichrodt, 438.

[65]Levenson, 190-191.

not conflict with divine decrees. The king could then be described as a "servant of the covenant of God."[66] For Eichrodt, the history of kingship which eventuated in the Davidic dynasty is best understood as the development of a religious institution.[67] The Davidic dynasty succeeded in reconciling the prophetic tradition and the priestly institution under the monarchy.[68]

As explained earlier, though the Davidic covenant would supplant the predominance of the Sinai covenant, it could not ignore it. Levenson illustrates this point with the Book of Micah. In short, Micah was a Judean prophet who relied heavily on the Sinai covenant tradition (Mic 6:1-8). Micah reveals that the address of the Sinai covenant was not limited to the northern kingdom and did in fact survive within the Davidic covenant tradition in Judah. Emphasis on the survival of a remnant from the exilic period places Micah well within the royal theology of the Davidic covenant (Mic 5:6-8).[69] If, therefore, Levenson's argument for the co-existence of the Sinai and Davidic covenant theological traditions holds true, then, "What, if anything, did the Davidic covenant add to the covenantal theology of prophetic inspiration?"

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[66]Eichrodt, 439.

[67]Ibid., 436.

[68]Ibid., 446.

[69]Levenson, 195-200.

Although much earlier than the exilic period, the Solomonic reign is most illustrative of the problems produced by the Davidic dynasty confronting covenantal theology. Solomon's grand achievements spawned oppressive social conditions. Brueggemann suggests that Solomon's kingdom had lost much of the alternative consciousness raised by the prophetic voice of the Mosaic covenant.[70] Solomon was primarily concerned with the solidification of kingship under the Davidic dynasty. Even the completion of the Jerusalem temple would serve such ends. Solomon achieved excessive wealth, but did so under an oppressive social system. Brueggemann argues that oppressive social policies were able to endure due to the wealth of the controlling class and "the establishment of a controlled, static religion in which God and [the] temple [had] become part of the royal landscape, in which the sovereignty of God [was] fully subordinated to the purpose of the king."[71] Thus, the actual freedom and voice of God became part of the king's reign itself. The traditional role of the prophet was effectually undermined. And the king, his court, and the controlling class monopolized interpretations of well-being, justice, and religious sanction.[72]

Brueggemann sees two major theological developments resulting from the displacement of a Mosaic alternative

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[70]Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 30-32.

[71]Ibid., 34.

[72]Ibid., 36-37.

consciousness by this royal consciousness of the Davidic dynasty. First, the Davidic covenant became the embodiment of social and religious order endowed with a far more centralized power of interpretation.[73] Monarchical solidification displaced religious leadership.[74] Prophetic concern, therefore, intensified over the myopic perception of the monarchy, the imposed conditions of injustice, and the subjugation of covenant obligations. Prophetic judgement against the monarchy pronounced the violation of God's will and sovereignty. With the centralization of political, religious, and ethical power in the monarchy, prophetic judgement declared social righteousness as the divine will for the state. The static shape of institutional religious leadership had become an earmark of the royal dynasty and led to its ultimate rebuke under prophetic inspiration.[75]

The second theological development derived from the Davidic covenant, as highlighted by Brueggemann, was the emergence of messianism. Originally, the Davidic dynasty was to embody the ultimacy and survival of God's purpose for the state. The king received God's anointing and,

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[73]Ibid., 39. Brueggemann actually refers to this development as a 'creation faith." It is difficult to establish his precise meaning. His use of the term "creation" is vague and raises alternative interpretations. Here, I believe he means the power to define the religious and social life of the state under the royal covenant.

[74]Eichrodt, 451.

[75]Ibid., 454-456.

therefore, bore great responsibility as the essential advocate of God's willful relationship with this intentional community. Herein, Brueggemann locates the introduction of messianism despite the abuses of kingship by the Davidic dynasty.[76] Eichrodt likens the development of a messianic future among the prophets to a transformation in the understanding of God's purposes in the Davidic covenant.[77] Emerging from judgement in the exilic period, the surviving remnant represented God's transformation of destruction into salvation and kingdom building. The messianic image of prophetic inspiration moved from the figurehead of political kingship to a reconciled community in social justice and righteousness.[78]

The exile would bring about the repentance of a surviving remnant to embrace the prophetic expectation of an eschatological judgement on the Gentile world accompanied by the full realization of the kingdom of God.[79] Eichrodt argues that the message of impending judgement carried both universal and individualistic implications. The experience of exile created a deep sense of personal sin, repentance, and righteousness. The post-exilic exodus, along with apocalyptic judgement and the eschatology of the kingdom,

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[76]Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 40; and idem, *Theology of Old Testament*, 172.

[77]Eichrodt, 454.

[78]Ibid.

[79]Ibid., 467.

did not release the individual, nor the community, from the memory of sin. Biblical scholar Bruce Birch explains that the forgiveness of Yahweh elicited a response from the Israelites. Prophecy called for repentance as part of Yahweh's acts in rehabilitation and restoration.[80] Exilic and post-exilic prophecy "deepened the consciousness of sin, . . . [and] took care that God's activity as Judge within the covenant people should remain a present reality to each individual, so preserving the hope of salvation from being turned into a false self-confidence."[81]

This new consciousness emphasized "reconciliation" to God and to each other under the prophetic redefinition of Davidic covenantal theology. Previously, prophetic inspiration still held the Davidic dynasty accountable to the religious obligations of the Sinai covenant in social justice and righteousness. The Davidic covenant could not simply ignore the authority of its precursor. In fact, prophetic inspiration held the Davidic dynasty directly responsible to Mosaic law as God's new covenantal vassal. However, in the reconciliation of the surviving remnant, the prophetic tradition transferred the promises and

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[80]Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 289-291.

[81]Eichrodt, 468-469. See also Birch, 293-297; and Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: The Babylonian and Persian Periods*, trans. Margaret Kohl, vol. II (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 101-111.

responsibilities of the Davidic covenant directly to the people themselves.[82]

The post-exilic remnant survived through Yahweh's saving grace. Collins suggests that prophecy functionally recapitulated the deliverance from Babylonian exile as a "re-enactment" of the Exodus paradigm.[83] Salvation and reconciliation would now characterize Israel's history, and, therefore, self-awareness as the chosen people. Prophetic inspiration still carried over the repentance and reform message from the Sinai tradition. However, covenantal theology would now center repentance and reform within God's will and activity in behalf of reconciliation. And therein, Israel survived as a servant of Yahweh toward such ends.[84]

This consciousness in prophetic inspiration can not be adequately defined by liberation per se. Rather, liberation functionally remains the initial scope of prophetic inspiration, but does not consume its field of view nor its ultimate vision. In short, prophetic inspiration moves liberation from its historical metanarrative (the Exodus event) into a covenantal theology that disallows detachment from repentance, reform, and reconciliation. It reorients the relationship between the historical metanarrative and its meaning in an intentional alternate community.

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[82]von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, 239-240.

[83]Collins, 157. See also James M. Ward, *Thus Says the Lord: The Message of the Prophets* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 85 & 106-107.

[84]von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, 216.

Prophetic inspiration, thereby, operates under the objective of practical theology, interpreting revelation for, but also from within, the life of the faith community.

Prophetic Practical Theology for Black Churches

Practical theology is particularly concerned with the praxis of Christian ministry. It is not an exercise in systematic theological technique. Instead, it defines the theological grounds and methods for the church's mission, presence, and practice of ministry.[85] How, then, is a prophetic, practical theology best formulated? Does the liberation ethics of black theology offer a sufficient hermeneutic for prophetic inspiration? Can the dialectic methodology of black theology serve the functional requirements of practical theology?

While a dialectic methodology may prove useful to theology, it does not provide the necessary tools for a praxis-oriented enterprise. I have argued that a methodology suited to the development of a black practical theology is critically absent from the black theology. I also maintain that such a methodology is necessary for black theology to become the prophetic voice it seeks to be for

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[85]Edward Farley, "Practical Theology, Protestant," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 934. See also Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 8-9, 55-57. Browning argues that all theology properly conceived is fundamentally practical theology. He distinguishes specific theological attention to Church praxis as strategic practical theology, which involves a practice-theory-practice methodology.

black churches. My employment of the covenant model follows a heuristic methodology well suited to the tasks of practical theology. The covenant model explores the historical development of black ecclesiology and the constructive criteria for its interpretation of the churches' mission and ministry. A prophetic, practical theology moves beyond constructive interpretations to explore the reevaluation and redefinition of praxis within the churches' biblical tradition. The covenant model of black ecclesiology is particularly helpful insofar as it encompasses the same biblical tradition on which black theology makes its prophetic claims, namely, covenantal theology.

Covenantal theology functions as a practical theology in the biblical prophetic tradition. The Sinai and Davidic covenants were the two principal covenants for Israelite prophets. In them, prophecy claims its referential authority. The covenants served as the contractual reference of God's will for Israel. Obedience, judgement, grace, and salvation converge to comprise a practical theological interpretation of history and divine revelation. The immediate implications for God's covenant people are liberation, repentance, reform, and reconciliation. To isolate any one component as the preemptive indication of the prophetic tradition disrupts the full revelation of God's will for humanity. For black theology, the theme of liberation alone can neither adequately characterize God's

self-revelation in the prophetic agency of the Hebrew Bible, nor sufficiently comprise a practical theology for black religious cultic praxis. The prophetic voice of black theology has neglected the relationship of liberation ethics to the cultic life of black churches. The covenant theology of the biblical prophetic tradition cultivates the interdependence between liberation, repentance, reform, and reconciliation. I contend that the covenant model of black ecclesiology offers a constructive framework for black theology to establish a truly prophetic voice within black churches. Liberation ethics can make prophetic demands upon black religious cultic life. But, within a covenantal, practical theology, the prophetic tradition places liberation ethics in mutual interdependence with repentance, reform, and reconciliation.

When liberation is held in this context, it functions prophetically from within the religious cult. Appeals to heroic history, as is common in black theology, limit the prophetic to the authority of the tradition. A prophetic, practical theology speaks from the tradition, but struggles from within the dynamics of faith operating in religious folk life to reorient the Church toward its calling as an "intentional alternative community." In the next, and final chapter, I begin this task methodologically in order to expose further the essential dynamics at play in the practical engagement between black theology and black churches.

CHAPTER VI

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCHES

The covenant model of black ecclesiology places heavy emphasis on the biblical interpretation of black churches as "a people of God." Within this relationship, African American Christians know God as their liberator. Just as God is revealed in the activity of liberation, so too does the covenantal relationship with the Israelites reveal God's will for the faith community and humanity. Liberation was the pivotal historical event for the Israelites. The radical activity of God in the Exodus event and the Sinai covenant established an intentional alternative community, which was again reconciled in the post-exilic exodus and the subsequent re-orientation of the Davidic covenant. Judgement and liberation renewed the authoritative claim of God's sovereignty over the Israelites. Both covenant traditions defined liberation in terms of social justice. However, the radical quality of this intentional alternative community was not expressed by the threat of revolution. The covenants made radical demands upon the Israelites for social reform. Prophetic inspiration appealed to the authority of the covenant traditions. Therefore, prophetic reform becomes radical in God's judgement upon social injustice and the call for repentance. One can easily understand the temptation to identify prophetic judgement

with revolutionary ethics. However, the development of prophetic inspiration from the Sinai through the Davidic covenants highlights a reformist platform based on Israel's salvation by grace and reconciliation, not by revolution.

Unlike these reformist traditions, the black theology project understood its historical context as revolutionary. The liberation ethics of black theology made radical demands upon American society under the threat of revolutionary consequences. Violence became an immediate ethical alternative to both white qualifications upon social reform and its torpid progress. Black theology characterized its revolutionary liberation ethics in the biblical prophetic tradition, but without the covenantal understandings of reform and reconciliation.

Covenantal theology places the biblical prophetic tradition within the genre of social reform, which does not necessarily lack the radical demands of social justice. Liberation still remains the pivotal historical revelation of God's will for humanity. However, it is the covenantal relationship with God that defines the content and goals of liberation. Through a re-evaluation of its prophetic heritage, black theology could make significant strides in spanning the gulf with black churches in a covenantal theology of radical reform and reconciliation.

In this vein, a prophetic practical theology does not envision reform in religious isolation. Practical theology seeks reform within the life of the religious cult and

ministerial praxis. Prophetic inspiration interprets covenantal revelation of God's will and goals for radical reform. Radical reform insists uncompromisingly upon social justice, whether it be cultural, political, or economic. The covenant model of ecclesiology offers a methodological tool in reorienting prophetic black theology for black churches and delineating a radical reform of black religious folk life.

Black churches have failed to develop a radical reform acceptable to the various divisions within the black community. While black theology captured the rippling tide of revolutionary fervor of the sixties and seventies, it quickly became another victim in the fragmentation of the black community. Within this context, I have argued that American individualism disrupts the corporate identity of African Americans in religious folk life as well as in the larger black community. The loss of a common identity once provided by shared suffering transmutes pluralism in the black community into debilitating fragmentation.[1] Pastoral theologian Charles Gerkin establishes the problems of individualism as a competing narrative of American life. He explains:

> Recognition of this tension - between the primacy and autonomy of the self ('individuation,' in the words of many developmental psychologists) and of corporate group and commonly shared values and interpretive meanings - has become commonplace in

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[1]See chapter three above. See also hooks, *Yearning*, 36-37; idem, *Killing Rage*, 165-166; and Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*, 32.

> American popular culture in recent years. Whether that tension be labeled the contest between autonomy and heteronomy (by philosophers), between self-fulfillment and conformity (by psychologists), or between narcissism and group solidarity (by social psychologists), ordinary folk in American life today experience the bind of needing to be strong and self-sufficient and needing to belong.[2]

For Gerkin, individualism has created a self-fulfillment ethic as the organizing narrative for American life. The self-fulfillment narrative competes with other narrative structures for central meaning.[3] Gerkin is therefore concerned with the confusions people face in times when traditional theological images have become meaningless. The utilitarian individualism of our self-fulfillment ethics results in an American pluralism fragmenting Christian communities.

Black religious folk life did not escape this struggle unsullied. Individualism in black religious life has reoriented central biblical narratives toward a self-fulfillment ethic much like Gerkin describes. Even the advances made by the human sciences in self-esteem and human value reflect the appropriation of American individualism. Individualism has permeated individuality in religious and secular life with an egoism or narcissism. For black religious folk life, individualism became a deceptive bed-partner to the alluring egalitarian individuality of

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[2]Charles V. Gerkin, *Widening the Horizons: Pastoral Responses to a Fragmented Society* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 36.

[3]Ibid., 37.

American evangelical Christianity. Personal salvation and religious piety displace the kind of individuality-in-community which David Augsburger identified in group-centric cultures.[4] It seems that narrative interpretations of shared suffering during much of American black life were able to resist the fragmenting effects of American individualism until the ebb of the Civil Rights movement in the mid-twentieth century. The rise of a small privileged black class and the rampant growth of the black underclass characterized the fragmentation of the black community under the impact of pluralism. Traditional Christian narratives of identity and meaning could not withstand the debilitating effects of the individualism which permeates American pluralism. Dogged racism and socio-economic oppression continue to augment this fragmentation. Consequently, the individualism of black American evangelical Christianity hastened the displacement of black churches from their historical centrality in the black community.

Concerned with the fragmentation of modern society at the hands of pluralism, Gerkin turns practical theology to the narrative structures of human life. Narrative structures identify individual and corporate worlds of meaning which one uses to interpret experiences, values, and decision-making. Practical theology, which is praxis-oriented, seeks to reformulate one's narrative within

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[4]For Augsburger's contrast between ego-centric and group-centric cultures, see chapter four above.

Christian faith structures, says Gerkin.[5] His task becomes a narrative hermeneutical process of interpretation. The structure of Gerkin's model focuses the Christian narrative upon those competing narratives that comprise modern life. His schema for narrative practical theological thinking involves several movements. First, there is a movement from reflection on a present activity and human experiences to reflection on the past development of one's story. The process attempts to interpret and determine meaning which results from that activity. The next movement must then return to the present in order to move toward some future understanding of the same activity and its history.[6] The goal is a fusion of horizons of meaning between the Christian narrative and one's competing narrative.[7]

The displacement of black churches within the larger fragmentation of the black community makes a straightforward application of Gerkin's method rather difficult. The narrative structure of American individualism not only fragments the black community at large, but also disrupts the historical communal narrative of shared suffering and religious folk life. Consequently, Gerkin's method will require a reflexive examination between individual and

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[5]Gerkin, 54-57.

[6]Ibid., 65-67.

[7]Ibid., 61. Gerkin relies heavily upon Gadamer's hermeneutic theory of fusions of horizons. See Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984); and Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

corporate narratives of modern black life. The goal is to reformulate horizons of meaning between individual and corporate identity within a Christian narrative of black life.

In this enterprise, I am concerned that a fusion of horizons between individualism and communalism does not sacrifice individuality or pluralism. For Gerkin, the examination of biblical and historical narratives explores possibilities of normative Christian values for the interpretation of individuality and community. Immediately, problems concerning human history and divine revelation require attention. The function of past religious narratives hinges upon the identification and interpretation of revelation in history.[8] Earlier I argued that American slaves and early free Blacks identified and interpreted revelation in their own historical context from their biblical understanding of God's revelation in Israel's past. Yet, the utility of an ecclesial model depends directly on the horizons of meaning it holds in the present. Though one can identify models that point to divine revelation, the present interpretation, or application, of revelation is encumbered with historical difficulties.

In his book, *The Meaning of Revelation*, H. Richard Niebuhr explores the complications which historical relativism presents to revelation. In the simplest of terms, historical relativism involves the perceptions of

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[8]Gerkin, 56-57.

spatial and temporal relativity. Historical relativity makes any kind of knowledge conditional to a spatial and temporal point of view. Claims to universal knowledge, therefore, are themselves conditional.[9] Niebuhr also points out that historical relativity can be pressed too far, resulting in an individualistic subjectivism that isolates historical groups.[10]

Already the difficulties of identifying and interpreting divine revelation for practical theology become apparent. Is there a space somewhere between uncritical universalism and sequestered subjectivism for transcendent historical revelation? I use the term "transcendent" to mean revelation that conveys knowledge of God, including God's will for humanity, which survives historical relativism. Niebuhr suggests that theology can arrive at an understanding of revelation which establishes a "particular language" derived from identifiable patterns in historical revelation.[11] The historical relativity of revelation does not reject the potential of history to communicate religious meaning to present reality. Yet, the limitations of the historical present force one to begin with revelation from a confessional stance, "by stating in simple, confessional form what has happened to us in our community, how we came

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[9]H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1941), 5.

[10]Ibid., 12.

[11]Ibid., 13.

to believe, how we reason about things and what we see from our point of view."[12] In essence, one's initial response to revelation is confessional and communal. Otherwise, it becomes self-justification or self-defense, and therefore displaces the object of revelation, God.[13]

The confessional focus of Niebuhr's approach to revelation and theology offers a critical voice for Gerkin's narrative hermeneutic. Like Niebuhr, Gerkin begins with the present historical situation. In the fragmentation of the black community and the displacement of black churches, I explored the debilitating prevalence of American individualism in secular and religious folk life. Herein, a classic conflict between individuality and community emerges in the present historical narrative of black religious life in response to racial and socio-economic oppression. Persons enter the hermeneutical process with questions of meaning, value, decisions, and actions. Though they explore historical revelation in their narrative tradition for answers, they do so with suspicions of their own interpretations as well as the tradition's. The central goal is not a retrieval of "the good old days and ways," but is the discernment of God's redemptive activity in human life and history.[14] If, however, the process begins with the present historical narrative, which is characterized by

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[12]Ibid., 29.

[13]Ibid., 28-29.

[14]Gerkin, 72.

individualism, then the logical starting point for Gerkin's methodology is the individual.

In his book, *The Living Human Document*, Gerkin envisions life as a pilgrimage.[15] This paradigmatic image springs from his hermeneutical starting point in the "living human document," taken from Anton Boisen's methodology exploring human and religious experience.[16] Boisen emphasized the importance of a person's experience and how that person chooses to report it. In the form of a question, he asks, "How [do] religious experiences function to give shape to the encounters of individuals with problems of living?" To truly understand another person's experiences and story, Boisen required interpretations of one's language and world of experience.[17]

Gerkin describes his hermeneutical theory as "the hermeneutics of the self in the life of the soul." This

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[15]Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Revisioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 61. The image of pilgrimage conceptualizes an ongoing process interpreting a Christian world-view of the encounter with struggles and the meaning of life. Similarly, Lewis Sherrill identified pilgrimage as an operative interpretation of Christian life as opposed to life as a treadmill or as a saga. In short, pilgrimage "is open to more than the merely natural and human, so that human existence is consciously related ... to God who transcends nature and humanity, ...[and] is open to eternity." See Lewis J. Sherrill, *The Struggle of the Soul* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1951), 19.

[16]Ibid., 37. According to Gerkin (see p. 200), Boisen first developed his methodology in a lecture, beginning with the depth experiences of persons; later published in *Journal of Pastoral Care* 9, no. 1, 1950.

[17]Ibid., 39-40.

description delineates two major foci. First, the hermeneutics of the self presents human self-identity within a "range of connections, historical and eschatological, [and] that identity is also an unique self project given shape and meaning by the self's own interpretative and responsive process."[18] Therefore, one's change in the self is related to a process in the self's history, one's existential self-understanding, and one's relationship to an eschatological future. The second major focus concerns the life of the soul, which is understood as the "self's struggle with the conferred identity of the self's historical social context and the claiming of that identity conferred upon the self by virtue of its participation in the coming Kingdom."[19]

In his emphasis on the interpretations of the self, Gerkin would have done well to develop stronger attention to the care-seekers' concerns before exploring the narrative structures of meaning from the historical tradition. Gerkin seems almost absorbed in the function of a pastor's "pre-understandings" when entering serious dialogue with the care-seeker. While I agree that care-providers must possess some pre-understanding of their own horizons of meaning before they can begin dialogue,[20] a full exploration of the

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[18]Ibid., 73.

[19]Ibid., 100.

[20]Ibid., 57.

care-seeker's own horizons is a primary pre-requisite to the fusion process.

Gerkin is attentive to how a person interprets the events of one's life. One's own perspective is a primary interpretation. Pastoral attention should focus upon exploration of these interpretations. "Are the questions about what is really happening or has happened pertinent, or is our concern simply with what is or has happened as [the care-seeker] interprets those events?"[21] Herein, Gerkin addresses those who would argue for factual exploration. He feels factual exploration risks the impression of an "archaeological expedition." Gerkin also finds equal fault with an unconditional Rogerian style that questions neither truth nor fact. He contests that a Ricoeurian emphasis upon the languages of force and meaning actually holds in tension the extreme poles of experience and interpretation.[22]

Gerkin's method is particularly beneficial because he places the dialogue between actual personal experience and the care-seeker's interpretation within a triangulation of the self/ego, the social situation, and the interpretations of the faith and culture. Gerkin examines these poles in relation to a broader triangulation between the person's life, human history, and eschatological time.[23] As a

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[21]Ibid., 130.

[22]See Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996).

[23]Ibid., 102-117.

result, Gerkin establishes the praxis of pastoral ministry within a community of faith. Eschatological time centers humanity in the activity of God, "within the purpose and promise of God." Gerkin's narrative hermeneutic then places eschatological time in the discernment of eschatological identity. Eschatological identity is the vista of the self's history as a participant in God's eschatological future. Therefore, pastoral ministry takes place within the historical and theological dilemma of a person who "becomes separated from the meaning of [his/her] human eschatological identity."[24] In this context Gerkin applies his image of life as a pilgrimage.

The understanding of religious identity and the role it plays in the narrative interpretation of one's life converge under the critical impact of American individualism. The displacement of black churches in the fragmentation of the black community suggests the disruption of their religious identity in the covenant narrative. The unconditional investment in American religious piety by black churches elevated an individualistic narrative in black religious folk life. The cost has been an increasing separation from the historical covenant narrative. In the face of racial violence and the systematization of social oppression, a sense of community in shared suffering once preserved the biblical narrative of a peoplehood through the post-Reconstruction era. However, even this sense of community

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[24]Ibid., 69.

could not restrain the fragmenting effect of American individualism in religious life. The religious and social egalitarian appeal of American revivalism and evangelicalism became an immense inspiration for the churches' unbridled abstraction of personal salvation and religious piety from their historical covenant narrative. In Gerkin's language, black churches and religious life eventually became separated from their eschatological identity as a covenant community.

Additionally, the legal gains of the Civil Rights era did not curb the fragmenting effects of American individualism in black life. In chapter four, I analyzed the convergence of American racism and individualism upon black churches and the black community. The fragmentation of the black community-at-large exposed the rise of a small black middle-class in contrast to a disproportionately large, growing black underclass shackle by socio-economic oppression. It seems that legislation was successful only in deinstitutionalizing segregation. While the Civil Rights era may mark a change in the moral conscience of America, the legacy of racism is immediately apparent in white resistance to accepting the moral and economic responsibility of social reform. Acculturation characterized the access to privileged status by the black middle class. And the black underclass continued to grow under the lack of social and economic reform.[25] The

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[25]Bellah, *The Good Society*, 24-25.

historical communal narrative of shared suffering lost its bearing in characterizing black response to the times. Moreover, with the rise of religious individualism, black churches became an imperceptive accomplice in the separation of the biblical covenant narrative from black communal life.

This displacement of black churches within the larger fragmentation of the black community makes Gerkin's narrative movement from the present to the past a difficult prospect. Whereas the black theology project sought to reconnect black churches and the black community to a revolutionary narrative from the pre-Civil War period, I have argued that its failure lay in both a misdiagnosis and a "missed-diagnosis." Black theology argued for a radical agenda expressed by a revolutionary model of liberation ethics. In contrast, black churches adopted the language of black power in the terms of self-esteem and black wholeness. Black churches could not resolve the revolutionary narrative with either the present age, or with their own religious cult.

In similarly fashion, the pre-Civil War black churches were radical, but their radicalism was not commonly defined by revolution. Instead, black churches sought radical social reform. The term "radical" means the insistence upon the complete transformation of race relations and citizenship. Where black churches were unable to reform public life, their endeavor for liberation survived in the reform of spiritual life. What black theology identifies as

the "other-worldliness" of black churches is more evident of the conflict between revolutionary and reformist models of action than it is descriptive of the churches' understanding of liberation and social justice. The turn, then, to a revolutionary historical narrative by black theology fails in black churches first because of the misdiagnosis of the horizons of meaning in the churches' traditional historical narrative, and secondly because of the missed-diagnosis of American individualism in black folk religion.

In light of the failure of black theology to establish a common narrative with black churches, one may ask, "Can a reconstruction of the covenant model of black ecclesiology successfully fulfill the historical hermeneutical task of Gerkin's narrative method. Gerkin seeks a narrative hermeneutic of the Christian faith which will help reconnect the present age with its Christian eschatological identity. Black churches, however, face a more complicated task. Any construction of a normative narrative in western Christianity risks the exclusion of the particular life and faith struggles of African Americans. Even the appeal to the biblical narratives cannot escape such historical relativity. Gerkin seems to acknowledge this liability by establishing an "hermeneutic of suspicion" gauge. The search for historical horizons of meaning undergoes a suspicion of interpretations. Gerkin recognizes the

probability of historical prejudice in interpretations as well as blindness to external historical factors.[26]

The natural alternative for black theology and black churches has been a turn to their own historical and cultural experiences with Christianity. For Archie Smith, the aim is "anamnestic solidarity." The point of anamnesis is the memory or recovery of past experiences and "the rediscovery of the meaning of the church's task in the present time."[27] The failure of black theology to appropriate an anamnestic solidarity with black churches lies in the rejection of the reformist tradition in the churches. What recognition is given to the reformist traits come in the form of an oppositional dialectic, or a plain anathema.

The revolutionary character of black theology was indeed present in the early black churches, but was limited to the occasional heroic figures of insurrection and repatriation. Otherwise, mainstream black churches considered insurrection impossible due to the lack of available resources. Furthermore, the predominant reformist tradition of black churches sought the redemption of society by the intervention of God's activity. This position is not a judgement upon the revolutionary figures of black history. In fact, I make little distinction between the revolutionary figures in black history and the role of black churches in

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[26]Gerkin, *Widening the Horizons*, 64.

[27]Archie Smith, 21.

American history. Both sought radical social change. The ethics of method, or violent revolution, are properly weighed within the immediate historical social conditions.

It seems clear that the black churches of the post-Civil Rights movement, much like those of the post-Reconstruction era, did not view revolutionary violence as a practical nor redemptive means of social reform for their historical period. Such a conclusion does not imply that their preferred method of reform, being a religious piety aimed at the demonstration of human equality, was in line with the churches' historical Christian narrative. In fact, I contend that the acculturation of American individualism betrayed the churches' own agenda by disrupting the covenant interpretation of ecclesial presence. What exactly, then, do these observations mean for the recovery of a narrative past or anamnestic solidarity?

Black theologians and cultural critics in the past two decades[28] have exposed the painful betrayal wreaked by the blind acculturation of western ideology in materialism and capitalism. In this very perspective, Archie Smith observes the loss of . . .

> collective solidarity and common struggle for emancipation in an exploitive society that seeks to incorporate [black people and other oppressed minorities] within its existing ideology, structure, and system of values. . . . Uncritical acceptance of the dominant values of this materialistic society predisposes them to reach

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[28]See chapter four above for my discussion of the convergence of racism and individualism upon the black middle-class in particular.

> for the same commodity pacifiers that the system holds out to so many others.[29]

Smith argues that the loss of collective solidarity is a convincing indicator of a social amnesia to which black churches cannot afford complicity. The uncritical acceptance of western ideology and social values creates a false consciousness which legitimizes contradictions in the social system.[30] The complicity of black churches can be seen in the privatization of religious life. Individualism became the ideological foundation for this privatization. In black churches the result has been a detachment from its traditional social and historical foundation. Smith explains:

> When religion moves in this vein, it obscures the contradiction and the connection between personal life and the social structure. Whether intended or not, it serves to reproduce and to strengthen the separation of the personal from the social in consciousness and fosters the idea that personal life can be transformed apart from a transformation of relational patterns.[31]

The effect of individualism in black religious folk life lies in an externalization of historical narratives, or the loss of anamnestic solidarity. Past narratives of revelation no longer interpret present identity or the present course of history. The privatization of religious life leads to an individualistic internalization of present history. Perceptions of needs are based upon personal

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[29]Archie Smith, 17.

[30]Ibid., 161-163.

[31]Ibid., 168.

salvation and responsibility. Consequently, the loss of anamnestic solidarity is accompanied by the loss of corporate solidarity. The current movement in our society against reparation legislation, such as Affirmative Action, is an excellent example of the individualism pervading both white and black American culture. For the churches, the chief experience of social solidarity merely reflects the individualism of personal salvation. The church becomes a separate social body of "saved" individuals. Social responsibility focuses on proselytizing individual souls.[32] Expanding on Smith's argument, I refer to the privatization of religion as the internalization of salvation, or redemptive history.

Unfortunately, the dialectics between external and internal history introduce difficult associations in the displacement of black churches and the fragmentation of the black community. In human associations, H. Richard Niebuhr states that external history depersonalizes individuals into organizations of external bonds of interests or existential conditions. Internal history, therefore, becomes a community of selves with a past and a future.[33] Under the impact of American individualism, the externalization of history experienced by the black community seems consistent with Niebuhr's position. The separation from historical narratives of the black community introduced by a

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[32]Ibid., 49-50.

[33]Niebuhr, 51-52.

fragmenting individualism in both religious and secular life signifies an external view of history. It seems reasonable that Niebuhr's dialectic of internal history would apply as well. To the contrary, however, the character of American individualism in black religious folk life does not align neatly with Niebuhr's concept of internal history.[34]

For Niebuhr, association through an internal history "means community, the participation of each living self in a common memory and common hope no less than in a common world of nature."[35] I have just argued that the privatization of religious folk life internalizes narrative history. The church community is endangered by the externalization of its historical narrative of revelation and memory. More specifically, the loss of the covenant narrative of the black community characterizes the displacement of black churches as just another factor in the fragmentation of the black community. What is left of Niebuhr's notion of

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[34]James Fowler underscores the difficulties operating between Niebuhr's internal history and personal history. I find Fowler's warning particularly helpful in understanding the disruption American individualism causes between the internal history of the faith community and the person. For Niebuhr, personal history involves the self's encounter with faith through a community of faith. A person knows Christ only through the accounts and experiences of those other persons encountered in/from the community of faith. Niebuhr extends personal to include all categories of faith. Fowler argues that Niebuhr's categories of internal and external history then become ambiguous in the bifurcation of the person and history. The risk is a closed circle in what Fowler describes as "from faith to faith." See James W. Fowler, *To See the Kingdom: The Theological Vision of H. Richard Niebuhr* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 226-227, 244, 258-259.

[35]Ibid., 52.

community in internal history is a collective of individuals marked by a common interest in the personalization of religious life.

The functional amnesia of the past narratives of a covenant community within the internal history of black churches complicates the external history of the Church within the black community. Since internal history is reliant on faith interpretations of revelation in the churches' religious life, it does not translate well into external history.[36] Therefore, the duality between internal and external history is a critical hurdle in regaining the lost horizons of meaning from past narratives. Because churches typically profess faith-insights, which are not readily perceived from external viewpoints of history, Niebuhr suggests that the scrutiny extended by external history can become part of the internal history of the churches. These external views of history may then challenge the churches' detachment and self-exaltation of their inner life.[37] Therefore, in Niebuhr's terms, external history must become part of the internal history of black churches for an effective hearing to take place.

It is precisely within this confrontation that black theology insightfully chided black churches. The movement developed a theological voice for the challenges presented by the external historical viewpoint of a fragmenting black

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[36]Ibid., 61.

[37]Ibid., 63.

community. Unfortunately, black theology's renunciation of the personal spirituality, or "other-worldliness," within the churches' inner life dismissed the presence of a narrative memory of liberation of the soul and its egalitarian meaning for black life and black wholeness. This is the danger of *one-world thinking*. "One-world thinking, whether as this-worldliness or as other-worldliness, has always betrayed Christianity into denial of some of its fundamental convictions."[38] I believe the black theologians' reproach to black churches in a pre-Civil War characterization of liberation ethics failed due to an unresolved duality between the internal and external viewpoints of historical revelation. In turn, black churches externalized that part of black theology which did not align with their prevailing internal history.

This unresolved duality provides some direction in the practical attention to the fusion of horizons required in Gerkin's narrative hermeneutic.[39] I have established that

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[38]Ibid., 60.

[39]Diane Yeager emphasizes that Niebuhr actually sought to refute an epistemological dualism, or in his terms 'the problem of historical dualism.' Internal history cannot be subsumed in external history. Niebuhr makes no claim to a metaphysical solution, but suggests that if the dualism becomes problematic in the conceptual search for a universal statement, then such a search should be abandoned. A descriptive function should replace it, which would include confessional descriptions of personal experiences. Yeager warns, however, that this approach may run a risk of 'inner empiricism.' Yet, as pointed out in the text above, even in Niebuhr's reliance on conversion, or transformation, he resolves the conflict by explaining that external viewpoints of ourselves can then become part of our internal history. See Diane Marcia Yeager, "Reasoning Faith: H. Richard

the dominant narrative in the internal history of contemporary black churches is a pilgrimage in personal salvation and religious piety. In a controversial turn, black theologians provided a theological voice to the external historical perspective of a fragmenting black community. However, their liberation ethics remained an external history of the churches for a lack of mutuality with the prevailing understanding of liberation in the churches' self-image. I contend that the prophetic identity which black theologians claim is compromised by their oppositional dialectic over the "authentic" internal history of black churches. Existential liberation and spiritual liberation become stratified. A fusion of horizons in meaning becomes impossible due to the duality between this-worldliness and other-worldliness, between external and internal interpretations of historical narratives.

The historical covenant model of black ecclesiology reestablishes a strong mutuality between existential liberation and spiritual liberation. The biblical tenets of the covenant model maintain God's will in social justice and freedom of the soul from sin and oppression. Covenant theology grounds prophetic consciousness in an interdependent relationship between the religious cult and social justice. The viewpoint of external history that the prophetic tradition offers is divine revelation. Niebuhr

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Niebuhr's Renewal of the Theology of St. Augustine," Ph.D. Diss. (Duke University, 1981), 206-208.

contends, "The church's external history of itself may be described as an effort to see itself with the eyes of God."[40] Heschel regards prophetic inspiration as an anthropotropic revelation of God's interest in humanity.[41] Therefore, the biblical covenant narratives underpin the historical black covenant narrative as a hermeneutical device for black theology to become a prophetic, practical theology for black churches. A covenant model of black ecclesiology offers a prophetic consciousness insisting upon radical social justice for the oppressed of the community as an integral part of our spiritual inner life and cultic worship. When an external observation of the church finds a voice in practical theology, it becomes part of the inner life of the church. Practical theology then turns to the past narratives to rediscover lost or even new meanings which reconnect the past with the present as internal history.

Thus far, this chapter has focused on the difficulties individualism presents for Gerkin's hermeneutical method in relating past narratives and their horizons of meaning to the present life of black churches. In bringing this discussion to a close, the direct address of individualism in the praxis of ministry remains in question. Preaching and pastoral care carry the awesome burden of translating the recovered narratives of a covenant community. Then, how

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[40]Niebuhr, 65.

[41]See chapter five above.

does the pastor or preacher, as the local practical theologian, relate the communal responsibility of social care within and, yet, beyond the doors of the local church?

Paving an avenue to drive individualism beyond itself, Archie Smith explores the relational and reflexive character in human knowledge of the self and knowledge of others. This "relationality" is "a concept that seeks to strengthen awareness of the connection between self-affirmation and community empowerment in the light of the biblical covenant and the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ."[42] The relational self retrieves the interrelatedness and unity of human life which requires attention to community.[43] Smith is correct to assert that the disintegration of corporate responsibility is marked by a decaying corporate identity. In my view, individualism betrays the freedom of individuality by forsaking the preeminence of relationality. Instructing preaching and pastoral care in the relationality of humanity with God in terms of relationality between each other becomes a prophetic, practical task of Christian ministry.

The covenant narrative of black ecclesiology revisits the relations between the liberation of the soul in personal salvation and the liberation of social justice. Still, divine relationality insists upon human relationality.

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[42]Archie Smith, 211.

[43]Ibid.

Smith situates the relational self in reflexive activity between persons. He states:

> Reflexivity is the key for understanding the capacity of the self to bring a critical perspective to bear in the present light of the whole. . . . The self in relation and through critical discernment can gain awareness of the underlying social forces that move people and the institutional arrangements that contribute to their social isolation, apathy, and personal disintegration.[44]

The reflexivity required of the relational self establishes relationality with God in the interest and care of others. I find this same sense of reflexivity in the biblical prophetic ministry of the covenant community. Covenantal reflexivity reaffirms divine relationality within redemption history for humanity. That is to say, the covenant community is not simply a community living in the liberation wrought by God. The covenant community is an intentional community participating in the "modification of existence toward redemption."[45]

Black theologians identify divine revelation of the reflexive responsibility of humanity in the Exodus events of the Israelites and African Americans, respectively. The social ethics of liberation become the reflexive

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[44]Ibid., 215.

[45]Edward Farley, *Ecclesial Man: A Social Phenomenology of Faith and Reality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 125; see also chapters six and seven. Within the concept of redemptive history, Farley relates the participation of ecclesia in the modification of existence toward redemption to an understanding of human intersubjectivity and the co-intentionalities of ecclesial intersubjectivity with humanity.

responsibility of humanity under the revelation of God's desires for social justice. I agree that the reflexive argument of black theology seems compelling. Yet it presents a reductionistic problem for black churches. I have shown that the covenant model of black ecclesiology also emphasizes historical liberation as a pivotal event in our understanding of God's will for humanity. However, the narratives of the covenant model place the revelation of historical liberation within the revelation of relationality between Christ and humanity. Black theology makes historical liberation preemptive to spiritual liberation of sin, forgiveness, and love of the other. Unfortunately, the black churches' appeal to the universality of the gospel message does not include an impeachment of the individualism pervading black religious folk life. The horizons of meaning in the historical narratives of revelation between existential liberation and spiritual liberation thus remain disjoined.

The problem lies in the unity of revelation. Borrowing Archie Smith's concepts here, I find that in Niebuhr's definition of revelation he places reflexivity in the context of divine relationality. He states:

> Revelation means the movement in our history through which we know ourselves to be known from the beginning to end, in which we are apprehended by the knower; it means the self-disclosing of that knower. . . . Revelation means that we find ourselves to be valued rather than valuing and

> that all our values are transvaluated by the activity of a universal valuer.[46]

The covenant narratives of revelation in black churches elevate relationality between the historic values of liberation and spiritual values in liberation. Within this understanding, the reflexive agenda of black theology is vital to the future life of our churches. However, the ends do not supersede the means, nor are our Christian values easily stratified. The prophetic role of black theology is not lost.

Black churches need the voice of prophetic inspiration holding preaching and ministries of care accountable to the reflexive mandates of revelation. As a covenant community, persons participate in God's redemption history for humanity. The radical revolution of a prophetic Christian community is liberation in Christ's love, through Christ's love. A black practical theology serves black churches when it struggles with them in prophetic accountability to the relationality between divine liberation and human liberation.

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[46]Niebuhr, 111-112.

CONCLUSION

In the early stages of this dissertation, an advisor questioned, "What prevents this project from becoming an exercise in nostalgia?" This question has often guided the development of my thoughts, sometimes insightfully and other times rather peevishly. Hence, it is a question that deserves a direct reply. My first response points to the fragmentation of the black community, which remains the focus of both black theologians and black church leaders. Secondly, I find that the displacement of black churches from their traditional centrality in the black community heightens the critical need of scholarship in practical theology for black folk religion.

I do not argue for a return to the "good ole days." That would be nostalgic! I try, instead, to clarify the critical impediments to a mutual resolution of the dissension between black theology and black churches. In marking problems in the identification and interpretation of revelation, and the ensuing difficulties in cultural and religious criticism, I survey the chasm between black theology and black churches. Furthermore, I employ a historical hermeneutic to examine black religious folk life amidst the fragmentation of the black community. This process is part of the dissertation's continuous goal in extending a paradigmatic model for black practical theology.

Black theology expresses a strong resentment for what it calls the escapism and otherworldliness of black churches. The churches' reactions to these charges are rather strong as well. Similarly, I have never perceived the inner spirituality of black churches as lacking concern for liberation. I admit that our churches often ignore social accountability in ministerial praxis and lack responsible social ministry beyond seasonal philanthropy. Therefore, black theology does well to speak sharply.

As I have grown to understand liberation ethics in black churches, liberation of the soul, mind, and heart is indispensable to any struggle for liberation of the physical and social. Certainly, the early generations of American slaves and free Blacks had proven the qualitative value of this spiritual liberation. Consequently, I have always found black theology's portrayal and rejection of the spiritual life of black churches quite disturbing. I understand the atrocity of preaching and pastoral care that neglect social responsibility and ignore social accountability. But I cannot resolve myself to the blanket charge of escapism on black religious folk life. Liberation is functioning in black religious folk life. If this is the case, the causes of our social neglect must lie elsewhere.

In an age when those churches reporting the greatest growth rates often enjoy an evangelical worship experience and embrace ultra-conservative public politics underscoring personal religious piety and family values, the need for

prophetic practical theology could not be understated. These churches often profess great respect for programs of social ministry, but seem to view them in such campaigns as church building projects or quarantined educational and recreational facilities for "Christian families." A culture of individualism places the care of selves before the care of others. Even the now popular language of "American family values" appears to gain public value as an extension of the individual self -- to "me and mine."

In this cultural milieu, black churches have lost the covenant relation between spiritual intimacy with God and human care for others. American individualism disrupts God's will for humanity as revealed in the prophetic inspiration of a covenant community. Personal salvation is not the goal of redemption history, it is a "beginning again." Prophetic preaching not only insists upon human care but also maintains the correlation between human reflexivity and theological relationality, which characterizes prophetic consciousness. Prophetic ministry unites worship and praxis, salvation and social justice.

The need for practical theological treatment of preaching and pastoral care in black churches is great. This study centers on the development of ecclesiology in black churches as a methodological tool for practical theology. Historically, black preaching and communal care were the central and defining activities of black churches. These ministries are still central to black religious folk

life. Black churches still want a "preacher" in the pastor's office. And so often, the form and character of pastoral care is generated from the leadership ethos of the "preacher" and the charismatic relationship between preacher and congregation.

Black theology has devoted great effort to form social accountability in black churches. However, its dialectical method, by its very nature, only negates and opposes black religious cultic worship. Because of the black churches traditional self-image, the idea that they no longer operate in the liberation ethics of biblical Christianity can only receive wide rejection. Notwithstanding, I submit that black theology is justified in challenging black preaching and black churches. Black religious folk life is indeed often irresponsible in the content of our spiritual or emotional expression, and our churches are inexcusably negligent in practical and credible social ministries. In some churches, pastoral care seems altogether limited to the preaching event itself. The need for the prophetic voice of black theology persists. Yet, it is directly within the religious cult that the prophetic tradition remains a viable voice of correction.

The critical move in evaluating the efficacy of black folk religion is well within the genre of the biblical prophetic tradition. The failure of black theology to operate within the religious folk tradition compromises its message. I attribute a great deal of this failure to the

adversarial dialectic of black theology. Perhaps, the move to relate black theology to a historical interpretation of liberation ethics in the early churches is an attempt to ground its platform in the black religious folk tradition of contemporary churches. However, even in this historical move, the dialectic methodology creates an oppositional character to the relationship between social liberation ethics and a cultic worship that focuses on spirituality.

Neither then, nor now, do black churches hold spirituality aside from existential needs and the struggle with human evil. One only has to point to the innumerable examples of the stalwart senior layperson testifying to God's goodness, while even in the throngs of pain. Not so long ago, an experienced pastor and leader in one of the historical black denominations once commented that recent generations of ministers and congregations alike increasingly dismiss the public and private testimonies offered by our senior citizens. This pastor believes we need to listen closely to these testimonies of struggles and failures, to these stories of perseverance and victories, to the praises of deliverance and redemption, to the integrity of a life nurtured in the faith, and a faith matured in life. These testimonies evidence great ties between human liberation and spiritual salvation. Black folk religion relies heavily upon spirituality in the very struggles for existential liberation from human suffering and human evil. An oppositional theological method does not operate well

within these intricate associations. Methodologically, a great need exists for practical theology that addresses church praxis within black folk religion.

With such a move, tools for the redress of preaching and pastoral care become available to the churches themselves. Practical theology for black preaching and pastoral care will move beyond descriptive treatments of the tradition and build upon the methodological foundations set by the few voices, such as Mitchell and Wimberly, struggling to give pedagogical form to these ministries and their future development. Such efforts would include the theology of black preaching and pastoral care, as well as the content of theology operating within black preaching and pastoral care praxis. Herein, I have tried to form a methodological tool for black practical theology through modeling black ecclesiology. I have applied the covenant model of black theology heuristically in an effort to expose the chasm between black theology and black churches as a methodological rift in interpreting revelation, doing theology, and reforming black folk religion -- clearly, tasks properly treated in black practical theology.

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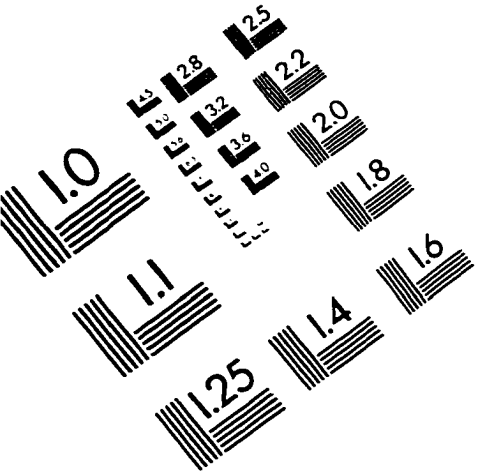

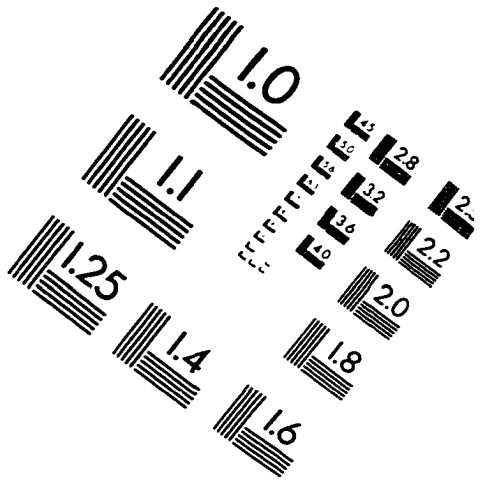

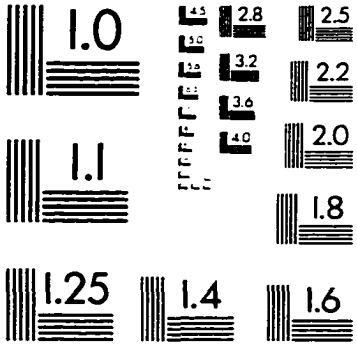

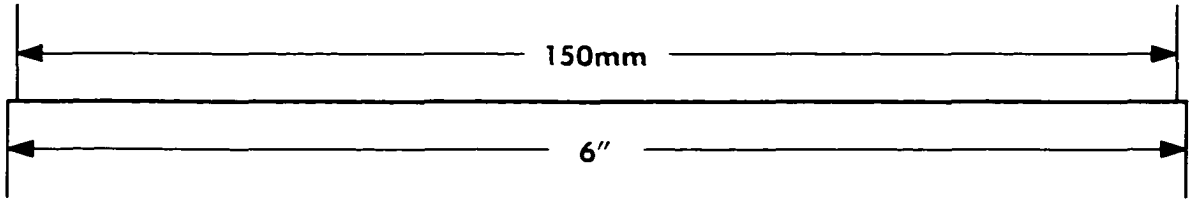

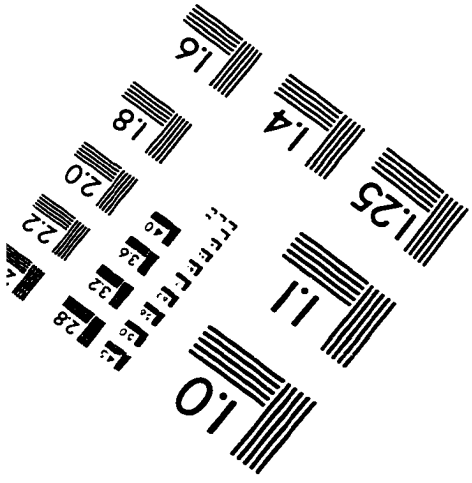

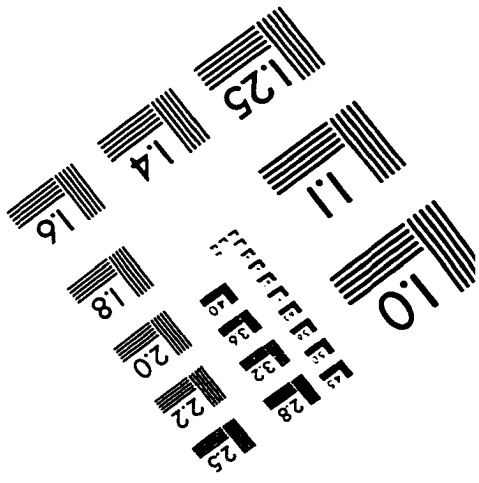

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