Harry V. Richardson

EARLY BLACK METHODIST PREACHERS

The first Methodist preachers proclaimed the Gospel to all people, white and black, bond and free. Many slaves welcomed the message and came as they could to hear it. The Methodist Gospel and pattern of religious experience was simple, personal and readily comprehended by Blacks as well as whites. Richard Allen, himself a Methodist convert and preacher said that the Methodist form of faith was the best for his people. A further reason for the popularity of Methodism among the slaves was the fact that the early preachers actively sought the slaves, made them feel welcome at the preaching services and took them into the “societies.”

In the beginning, Methodist preachers were few; and those few were traveling evangelists. They aspired to convert a continent. They covered vast “circuits” that extended often into several counties and sometimes into more than one state. Travel was slow and hazardous and there might be several weeks between a preacher’s appearances at a given point.

In the interim, between the preachers’ visits, the converts were kept “in the way” by local leaders. Among whites, these leaders were heads of “classes,” which were the basic units of Methodist organization. Among Blacks, the leaders were often volunteer Christian workers, persons who had heard the Methodist

1 Dr. Harry V. Richardson was president of The Interdenominational Theological Center, 1958-1968.
2 This is a section of a book on Black Methodism published in the C. Eric Lincoln Series by Doubleday, Spring of 1976.
4 The sad thing is that many churches today are so cold that church seekers are forced to visit church after church before they find one that they feel welcome.
5 It is obvious that the slave preacher was like the apostles in the Early Church, especially the Apostle Paul who was an itinerant preacher on missionary journeys to visit and also found churches across countries.
message, who had felt its saving power in their own lives and were anxious to impart it to their fellows.

Who were these Black preachers? Unfortunately, we do not even know the names of most of these early black leaders, to say nothing of the story of their lives. We do know that they were largely responsible for the preservation of the faith and its transmission among slaves in the early days. A few examples will show their significance.

On one of his trips through South Carolina in 1788, Bishop Asbury saw a slave fishing on the bank of a stream. “Do you ever pray?” asked the bishop. “No sir,” the slave replied. “Bishop Asbury alighted from his horse, sat down by the slave’s side, instructed and exhorted him. The poor man wept; the bishop sang a hymn, knelt with the astonished slave in prayer, and left him.”

Forty-eight years after this interview, a Methodist itinerant preacher visited a plantation where it was reported that there were many black but unrecognized Methodists. He found between two and three hundred members in a society. The itinerant preacher asked to see the leader. He was taken to a hoary headed old black man with palsied limbs but a smiling face, leaning on a staff. “He looked at me a moment in silence, then raising his eyes to heaven, he said, ‘Lord, now leitest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.’ He asked me to have a seat. ‘I have,’ he said, ‘many children in this place. I have felt for some time that my end was near. I have looked around to see who might take my place when I am gone. I could find none. I felt unwilling to die and leave them alone, and have been praying to God to send someone to take care of them. The Lord has sent you, my child, and I am ready to go.’”6 “It was Punch. The Bishop’s passing word had raised up an apostle who had, through all these years, been ministering to his neglected people.”

Slaves at first would gather at Punch’s door for conversation and prayer. Eventually crowds came. The overseer

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6 He was repeating Simeon’s words in Luke 2:29-33.
opposed these meetings, and Punch had to work with small groups in homes. But despite opposition from overseers and masters, Punch continued to give religious leadership for near half a century to his fellow slaves. The only name that we have for this saint is “Old Punch.”

In the mission to the slaves conducted in the first half of the nineteenth century, the volunteer black workers played a large and important part. White preachers or missionaries did the preaching and catechizing, but it was the local black leader, male or female, who kept groups together and made the teachings a part of everyday life. In his work in a mission in Beaufort, South Carolina, a missionary reported that the two or three hundred Negro children whom he catechized “were kept together under the care of an elderly female.” He did not give the name of the “female” who performed this important and doubtless wearying work.

A similar instance of volunteer leadership is recorded about the mission on a Louisiana plantation. “Agreeable surprises sometimes awaited a missionary [He would find] a society, rudely organized there before him, with its stated times of worship, its rules, and its members. By purchase or partition of estates, or by immigration, a religious Negro or family of Negroes was thrown like leaven into an ignorant mass of his fellow beings, and became a source of instruction and a center of life which took form and grew, even under unpromising surroundings. One missionary to such a sugar plantation in Louisiana found over thirty ‘members’ he had to begin with.”

We do not know the number of these humble workers. There must have been many hundreds. They were found in all denominations. We do know that they were largely responsible for making the Christian faith a living fact in the lives of slaves and

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free black people in America in their day, and thus were responsible for its transmission to later generations.

Very early in the evangelical movements, beginning in the latter half of the eighteenth century, men began to appear who were not satisfied to be just unordained lay workers. They aspired to the full Christian ministry. They wanted to preach the Gospel to all who would hear, and to be leaders of regularly organized congregations. They arose in all of the evangelical bodies. Among Baptists there were such men as David George, (c. 1775), preacher of the first Baptist Church at Silver Bluff, South Carolina; George Liele of Burke County, Georgia, an eloquent preacher to Blacks and Whites; and Andrew Bryan (1737-1812), founder of the First African Baptist Church of Savannah. There was John Chavis (c. 1801), who was made a missionary to slaves by the Presbyterians and, most unusual, Lemuel Haynes, a man of learning and eloquence who through all of his life, pastored only white Congregational churches in New England.\textsuperscript{10} The account here, however, is concerned mainly with Methodism, which had its full share of the early black preachers.

Among the earliest black preachers in the Methodist Episcopal Church were Harry Hosier, Absalom Jones, Richard Allen, Daniel Coker, Abraham Thompson, James Varick, Christopher Rush and Henry Evans. All of these men began their preaching careers in the Methodist Episcopal Church. With the exception of Harry Hosier and Henry Evans, however, they all later withdrew from the Methodist Episcopal Church and joined or started other denominations. It is in connection with the other bodies that their names became best known. Absalom Jones, for example, left the Methodist Church to become the rector of the African Episcopal Church of Saint Thomas in Philadelphia, the first black Episcopal priest in America. Richard Allen was a preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church for 36 years until the founding of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination in which he became the first bishop. But they all began in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The main reason these men left the Methodist Church was the reluctance of that body to accept them fully into its ministry. The Church did recognize their preaching and organizing abilities, especially in the work with Blacks, and used them as exhorters and local preachers, the lowest orders in the Methodist hierarchy. But despite repeated appeals over a long time, the Church would not ordain them as deacons, the middle rank, and certainly not as elders, the highest rank. It was not until 1800 that the General Conference agreed to ordain even black deacons.

The reasons usually given were, first, that the black men were uneducated, which was true. Most could hardly read or write, if at all. Also Blacks had difficulty traveling freely enough to meet the demands of the Methodist itinerancy. Yet against these reasons is the fact that these same men made phenomenal contributions to the new denominations that they joined and in some cases helped to start. The thought cannot be downed that these men could have done within the Methodist Church what they did outside it had the Church decided to utilize their abilities and had given them the necessary training. The Episcopal Church, for example, waived the requirement for knowing Greek and Hebrew in the case of Absalom Jones, thus making it possible for him to render his remarkable leadership to the Philadelphia congregation of blacks. Also some of the black preachers were striking exceptions. Daniel Coker was not only well educated, but he taught school in Baltimore and published what is perhaps the first pamphlet produced by a black man in America.

For the lives of the earliest preachers, records are few and fragmentary. Only in one or two cases do we have anything like adequate biographies or autobiographies. In most cases we only have passing references or comments by interested persons. But such records as we do have indicate that the early black preachers, though lacking in education, were men of intelligence and

dedication, and were possessed of remarkable preaching and organizational powers. All were converted in true Methodist fashion; they believed and preached the true Methodist doctrine; and they were aflame with the passion to spread the good news of the love of God, the saving power of Jesus Christ, and the need to flee from the wrath to come by accepting Christ as personal savior.

Most famous among the early Negro Methodist preachers, of course, was Harry Hosier, or as he was popularly known, “Black Harry.” He was a truly remarkable man. Unfortunately, we do not have a full biography of him, but we do have allusions to him in contemporary writings and more comments on his great preaching than on any other early Negro preacher. He is mentioned nine times in Asbury’s Journal; as many times and at greater length in Garrettson’s writings; and several times in Coke’s Journal. He was the first Methodist preacher white or black, whose preaching was commented upon in a New York newspaper, The New York Packet.13

Hosier served as Bishop Asbury’s traveling servant. He also traveled with Bishop Coke, Freeborn Garrettson, and Richard Whatcoat. Physically, he was “small in stature, and perfectly black, but had eyes of remarkable brilliancy and keenness.”14 He was uneducated. He could neither read nor write, but he had a quick mind, a most retentive memory, and such an eloquent flow of words, which he could soon put into almost faultless English.” His natural and marvelous oratorical gifts made him one of the wonders of his time. Dr. Benjamin Rush, the distinguished Quaker of Philadelphia said, making allowance for Harry’s illiteracy; he was “the greatest orator in America.”15 Bishop Coke with whom Harry traveled in 1784 said that he was one of the best preachers in the world.

14 Abel Stevens, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, II. pp. 1748
15 Stevens, Ibid, p. 174
I have now had the pleasure of hearing Harry preach several times," he wrote in his journal. "I sometimes give notice immediately after preaching, that in a little time he will preach to the blacks; but the whites always stay to hear him. Sometimes I publish him to preach at candle-light, as the Negroes can better attend at that time. I really believe that he is one of the best preachers in the world — there is such an amazing power as attends his word, though he cannot read, and he is one of the humblest creatures I ever saw."16

Harry "acted as servant or 'driver' for the eminent itinerants, but excelled them all in popularity as a preacher, sharing with them in their public services, not only in black, but in white congregations. When they were disabled by sickness or any other cause, they could trust the pulpit to Harry without fear of unfavorably disappointing the people. Asbury acknowledges that the best way to obtain a large congregation was to announce that Harry would preach; the multitude preferring him to the Bishop himself."17

Harry preached frequently in Maryland, but mostly in the North. He was very popular in Philadelphia. Bishop Asbury complained in his Journal, that if Harry would go with him to Virginia and the Carolinas to preach to the Blacks and they could spend six months there, "it would be attended with a blessing." But Harry was unwilling to go.18 In 1790 Harry traveled with Freeborn Garrettson. At Hudson, New York., Garrettson says:

"I found the people very curious to hear Harry. I therefore declined preaching, that their curiosity might be satisfied. The different denominations heard him with much admiration, and the Quakers thought that as he was unlearned he must preach by immediate inspiration.19 At another town in the same area,

17 Abel Stevens, op. cit., pp. 174-5.
18 Francis Asbury. Journal, entries for June 29,1780, and October 27, 1781
19 Freeborn Garrettson, The Experience and Travel of Mr. Freeborn Garrettson, Philadelphia, Parry Hall, 1791, p. 225.
Garrettson writes: “I rode in the afternoon and preached in Salisbury, in a part of the town in which I had never before been, and I think I have never seen so tender a meeting in this town before, for a general weeping ran through the assembly, especially while Harry gave an exhortation. The Lord is carrying on a blessed work here.”

Harry accompanied Garrettson on his pioneering excursion into New England, going as far as Boston. In all of the cities Harry preached regularly, his audiences numbering hundreds, and on one occasion in Providence, more than a thousand. He was not entirely free from the rebuffs that the early evangelists received, however. In Hartford, Connecticut, the people received him “very uncivilly.” Asbury relates that in Maryland “certain sectarians are greatly displeased with him, because he tells them they may fall from grace, and that they must be holy.”

This latest statement by Asbury is the best indication that we have of what Harry preached. All the other statements are about how he preached and the powerful effects of his messages, but we have no clear examples of his sermons or his theology or his social opinions. Since his messages were received with such rapturous praise by nearly all who heard him, it can safely be concluded that he preached the typical Methodist form of the Christian Gospel and that he was non-controversial in his social preachments.

It is said that near the end of his life, Harry became addicted to drink. In the opinion of his peers, he “fell from grace.” Abel Stevens, the Methodist historian, says, “Though he withstood for years the temptations of extraordinary popularity, he fell, nevertheless, by the indulgent hospitalities which were lavished upon him. He became temporarily the victim of wine, but had moral strength enough to recover himself. Self-abased and contrite,
he started one evening down the Neck, below Southwark, Philadelphia, determined to remain till his backslidings were healed. Under a tree he wrestled in prayer into the watches of the night. Before the morning God restored him to the joys of his salvation. Thenceforward he continued faithfully. He resumed his public labors, and about the year 1810 he died in Philadelphia, “making a good end, and was borne to the grave by a great procession of both white and black admirers, who buried him as a hero, once overcome, but finally victorious.”

But despite any weakness or limitations in thought or training, for a black man and a slave, or near slave, to rise to the top of a respected profession, equaling or excelling the greatest in the field, proves that here we are in the presence of a truly rare human being who used his great gifts as best he could for the betterment of his fellow humans.

In their religious work, Richard Allen and Daniel Coker are known first as leaders of the separate black Methodist congregations in Philadelphia and Baltimore, respectively. They are much better known, however, for founding the American Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church in 1816. Coker, a brilliant but, erratic man, was elected first Bishop of the new denomination, but for unknown reasons declined to serve. He soon left America for Africa and died there after establishing several churches in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Upon Coker’s declining, Allen was immediately elected and ordained, thus becoming the first effective Bishop in the new denomination, and the first black bishop in Protestantism. He filled the office of bishop with efficiency and distinction, giving to the new church stability, respectability and growth. A brief sketch of his life and work is recounted in another book.

Many other able men were drawn into the ministry of the A.M.E. Church. Chief among them are Morris Brown, William Paul Quinn, and that most remarkable man, Daniel A. Payne. All

22 Abel Stevens *History.*, p. 175.
of these men became bishops in the Church. Descriptions of their work are found in the chapter on the A.M.E. Church.

The ministerial leaders in the founding of the A.M.E. Zion Church were Abraham Thompson, June Scott, William and Thomas Miller, William Carman, Leven Smith, James Varick and Christopher Rush. Except for Christopher Rush biographical information is meager indeed. We do know that all of these men were zealous for freedom of worship among their people; they were active in founding the Zion and Asbury churches in New York City and separate black congregations in New Haven, Long Island and Newark, N. J. The name of Varick occurs most frequently but comparatively late. He was active in forming the association of churches that led eventually to the creation of the new denomination. He was elected Superintendent of the associated congregations in 1822.

Abraham Thompson was the central figure in organizing the Zion congregation and in carrying on the negotiations with the parent church. The most powerful figure in the early Zion denomination, however, was Christopher Rush. He was the preacher, evangelist, organizer and leader who led the church in its early formation and into its early growth. He also gave to the Church its first history, which still is the basic source of essential information.

In addition to these men of whose lives we know a little, there were the great number of other men on the plantations of the South who played a most important part in keeping the faith alive among their fellow Blacks. In the Mission to the Slaves we hear much about the heroic, self-sacrificing service of the white missionaries or preachers. Indeed, the Mission was almost glorified in Southern writings as an example of Christian service at its best. We hear almost nothing of the black workers who were "assistants" to the missionaries in their work and who were largely responsible for the wide acceptance and intimate application of the faith in the daily lives of the Blacks. Once in a while their names are mentioned in the contemporary literature, often with appreciation for what they were doing. Emanuel Mack, Silas
Phillips, Nace Duval and Sancho Cooper are a few of the names mentioned.23

William Capers, the founder of the Mission among Methodists, has much to say about the black religious leaders. He had great appreciation for their work and for them as persons. He said he always had a group of them about him. Among those he mentions are Castile Selby, Amos Baxter, Thomas Smith, Peter Simpson, Smart Simpson, Harry Bull, Richard Halloway, Alex Hanston, “and others.” Some of these were devout laymen; some were unordained local preachers and exhorters. All were used as “assistants” in the work with the slaves. Yet despite the fact that history has passed them by, it was these little known persons, men and women, who took to their fellow blacks whatever healing and strength religion held for a soul under bondage.

Greatest of the Southern Methodist preachers by far was Henry Evans, the founder of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Evans was a contemporary of Harry Hosier; Hosier died in 1806, Evans in 1810. Evans was fully as great as Hosier, and possibly greater in some ways. While Hosier enjoyed almost unbroken popularity and eager reception, Evans at first encountered severe opposition and persecution and at least three times risked his life. Hosier was a traveling evangelist who thrilled varying crowds. Evans, with equal popularity and power as a preacher, stayed in one community and built a lasting church. Hosier’s work was limited to preaching. Evans was also a pastor who had a visible effect on the morals of his community. Hosier preached to Whites and Blacks in the North where it was permitted.24 Evans preached to Whites and Blacks in the South where it was socially disapproved and later legally forbidden.25

24 Abel Stevens, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, IV, p. 225.
25 The Story of Henry Evans and an evaluation of the early black Methodist preachers will appear in a subsequent article.
Oswald P. Bronson

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INTERDENOMINATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER

The emergence of the Interdenominational Theological Center has considerable significance for theological education in general as well as the educational needs of the black ministry. The significance of its impact is implied in the elements used to construct an educational philosophy. Its significance is seen in its contribution to ecumenicity and to the wider American culture.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) is in the unique position which affords it the opportunity to develop a functional philosophy of theological education for American Protestantism. The functional philosophy as suggested in this paper departs from the classical approach with its emphasis upon the transmission or impartation of information. While not denying the heritage, however, its focus is upon the tasks to be performed in the parish ministry. The tasks are not disconnected from the past and the "Given" inherent in the Christian faith, but placed into a living continuity with the heritage, the Gospel, contemporary culture and the Black experience. The ITC takes into its curriculum the streams of real life flowing through the participating denominations and deals with the situational needs in terms of the impact of theology, ecumenism, scientific insights into human behavior and the culture upon pastoral function. To use the functional philosophy suggested in this paper means that the central concern is the practical performance in a real situation using bibliographic resources to interpret the meaning and the relevance of the Gospel to the situation in which the students in training find themselves. It means that the curriculum grows out of

26 Dr. Oswald P. Bronson was president of The Interdenominational Theological Center, 1968-1975.
the dialogic continuity between the Christian faith and the problems the minister faces in the exercise of his ministry.

The significance of this philosophy for theological education is not that the ITC can claim to be the seedbed for functionalism in seminary training, but that it joins a trend in theological education, which relates the message of the Gospel to the cultural situation influencing the "functioning" and the "problem solving" apparatus of the parish ministry.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR ECUMENICITY

It is important to note that a major interest in ecumenicity was not the primary motivating force which gave rise to the Interdenominational Theological Center. The denominations accepted the plan because it rescued their dying theological institutions from utter obliteration and protected denominational interests while, at the same time, it provided an accredited seminary education. However, the emergence of the ITC does provide a unique organizational facility for conversation and experience in ecumenicity. The organization, life, and work of the ITC challenge the students to see the wider context of theological education and the manner in which their respective denominations participate in the ecumenical dialogue. The students are not simply exposed to ecumenical pedagogy, but actually participate in an ecumenical dialogue both in word, study and relationships that is facilitated by the organizational plan of the ITC.

Along with the students, sponsoring denominations have a new channel of communication across denominational lines in the origin and continued existence of the ITC. Mutual concern for the academic pursuits of the ITC brings the sponsoring denominations around the conference table where ecumenical insights are more likely to emerge than would be the case if they remained in isolation from one another. However, the significance is more than conference table experience; the denominations are engaged in an interdenominational project during which the "wholeness" of the church can be momentarily experienced in actuality.
THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE BLACK CHURCH

The Black Church has been accused of being other-worldly, existing outside the main stream of Protestant thought and experience, and lacking a meaningful theology and a real sense of mission. However, the emergence of the Interdenominational Theological Center gives evidence of a creative vitality at work within the black church. The participating denominations are being exposed to the mainstream of Protestant thought and theology out of which should develop a real sense of mission and a better balance between its decreasing “other-worldly” character and the temporal situation. The Black Church sees itself as having a prophetic mission to the mainstream of Protestant thought.

In addition to its ministerial training program, the ITC also has a theological educational plan for laity. This “lay training” program not only acquaints laymen with contemporary Christian education theories and methodologies, but also with the meaning and importance of an effective lay ministry as the church. Through discussions and interdenominational experiences in the ITC such concepts as ecumenicity, Koinonia, covenant community, people of God, priesthood of believers, and lay evangelism, come alive. Lay people are challenged to see the church in its “wholeness” and the relationships of their respective denominations and local churches to the ecumenical church. The opportunity to study church history enables laity to see the historic roots of the Black church. The ecumenical church of which blacks are a part dates beyond slavery. The historic stream out of which the Black church emerged began in the faith of the New Testament community in the life, work, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The most significant aspect of the existence of the ITC for the Black church is the educational facility it offers for the theological preparation of the Black ministry. It is difficult for any group to rise higher than the vision of its leadership. The Interdenominational Theological Center provides an accredited theological education for the Black ministry which many would
not have been able to receive otherwise.²⁷

Of further significance is the fact that the ITC rescued four tottering schools from total termination. The four schools are: Gammon Theological Seminary (United Methodist); Morehouse School of Religion (Baptist); Phillips School of Theology (Christian Methodist Episcopal); and Turner Theological Seminary (African Methodist Episcopal). Through the mutual efforts of these four schools, the Interdenominational Theological Center was chartered in 1958. The Center’s plan of agreement, which provides both for the Center’s own common property and the continuation of the four schools as distinct identifiable institutions, is the genius of the plan. The Center not only affords the continued identity of the schools and an accredited theological education, but also provides guidelines for future endeavors in interdenominational educational efforts.

What the denominations were unable to do singularly/they now do jointly. They did not have sufficient resources to develop and maintain competent training schools as individual denominations. The formation of the Interdenominational Theological Center provided a means for effective cooperative action capable of successfully meeting the obstacles that ordinarily must be surmounted in the operation of an accredited institution.

The most recent additions to the Interdenominational Theological Center are: Absalom Jones Theological Institute (Episcopalian); Charles H. Mason Theological Seminary (Church of God In Christ); and Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary (United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.). Declaring the significance of the Interdenominational Theological Center to be rooted in the meaning and importance of the Church to the Black people in the past and present as well as its potential for the future, Dr. Henry P. Van Dusen said:

The significance of this school is very vivid. Let me try to express it by an illustration. If an atomic bomb were dropped on Manhattan and destroyed Union Theological Seminary, it would not destroy theological education. It would be very tragic. It would result in the death of approximately a thousand faculty, student, and staff members, but it would not destroy theological education. Those prospects for study at Union would go on to Yale, Boston or elsewhere and theological education would continue. Neither would theological education be destroyed if some catastrophe were to destroy any one of the denominational schools. If a catastrophe were to destroy ITC, it would be absolutely irrevocable and irreparable. There would be no other school to pick up and carry on the education of Negro ministers. There is no other school in the front rank in the education of the ministry for the Negro race.28

It is interesting to note a striking parallel between this statement of Dr. Van Dusen and the statement regarding the significance of Gammon by Reverend A. C. Haygood in 1886.

THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE BLACK REVOLUTION

Joseph A. Washington accused the non-violent movement of being theologically inept. He questioned Martin Luther King’s assertion that love is the regulating ideal of the civil rights movement. The dynamic of the present Black revolution is anger, a burning desire for dignity, justice and equality before the law. The principle of love, says Washington, was imported, decorated with Christian trappings and added to the movement to control physical conflict and bloodshed.29

In attacking what he calls King's syncretistic religion, Washington declares:

The error in syncretism is that it is blind to the honest differences inherent in various faiths. In seeking the lower common denominator among religions there is the risk of rubbing out the authentic dimension in each. This is the grave error of all Negro religion, and it is due to the lack of theology... the syncretistic element in King is due to the dominance of philosophy over systematic theology... Thus King, in the midst of the crisis, was in no position to add to the theological dimension—he was in need of a guide for action. As we have seen, he turned in his need to the inspired example of Gandhi and the method of non-violence.\(^{30}\)

In making these assertions, Washington fails to realize that the demand for freedom and justice was characteristic of the prophetic faith of the Old Testament. This desire did not alienate the Hebrew prophets from God; rather they linked social justice to true religion as one of the outcomes of a living faith in God. There is also serious doubt concerning his charge that the Black church as a disengaged institution from the mainstream of Protestant thought is an alien institution. Does a lack of knowledge of Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, Tillich, mean spiritual ineptness? Is a highly technical theology a pre-condition for the presence of the Holy Spirit? Was King in error for teaching love even if other motives were present? Did not Jesus and the Apostles, New Testament writers, teach love to a community of persons who were capable of both love and hate?

While Washington's statements regarding the Black church and the civil rights movement may be inconsistent, naive and sometimes irresponsible, one of the significant outcomes of his study is the need for an adequate theological rationale for the civil

\(^{30}\) Ibid, pp. 9-10.
rights movement. The importance of theology for the Black revolution is that it keeps before the participants the meaning and relevance of the Christian faith for the aggressive correction of evil. Otherwise the movement degenerates into a fragmented activism lacking the direction of an eternal dimension and spiritual depth so necessary if the experience is to be redemptive both for the oppressed and the oppressor.

The significance of the Interdenominational Theological Center for the Black revolution is that through its graduates, its extension program for laity and in-service ministers, and institutes held throughout the participating denominations, the ITC has the rich opportunity of strengthening the theological framework for the movement. By continuously showing that the Christian ethic roots in the Gospel and is a response of faith and gratitude to God's self-disclosure in history and that the Christian ethic calls for responsible decision-making and action in which the Christian faith is the determining dynamic, the ITC may channel into the Black revolution not only a theology, but positive attitudes toward a theological norm. Many of its graduates will return to areas of service where the struggle for justice, equality and dignity is in progress.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CENTER FOR THE WIDER CULTURE

The emergence of the Center speaks to the distorted images of the Black community held in the wider culture. Through these images, the culture tends to see the inferior schools, churches, and the general life of the Black community as an innate characteristic of black people. These images often prevent the wider culture from perceiving the environmental manipulations that give rise to negative conditions which elicit and reinforce negative responses. The genius of the Black community is reflected in its ability to transcend these imposed barriers and produce a quality institution. The ITC presents a more accurate image of the Black church and ministry to the wider American community. This new image facilitates real dialogue across racial lines.
The creative vitality within the Black community could not find fruitful expression without those persons within the wider community who see beyond the negative images of the Black. The Interdenominational Theological Center would not have been possible if it had not received the unselfish and perpetual assistance from persons and agencies within the larger society. The Center, therefore, represents a new level of interracial cooperation.

In view of the changing times, the ITC would limit its usefulness if it focused its attention only upon the needs of the Black community. With its competent interracial faculty, interracial and international student body, and excellent facilities, the Center can join with other seminaries throughout the world in promoting the educational process, and in providing a stabilizing religious faith in times of national and international crisis. It can help to sharpen the nation's conscience, develop responsible attitudes, and improve moral conduct in all areas of life by sending into the American society and the world trained, dedicated ministers capable of making the Christian religion a vital, creative and transforming experience. However, before it can accomplish this task, it must be able to sustain itself in spite of the challenges that confront it.

SUMMARY

Inherent in the structure and operation of the Interdenominational Theological Center are elements that give rise to a functional philosophy. The Center's emphasis upon professional orientation in preparing for those performances necessary for an effective parish ministry in a time of rapid cultural change supplies the major basis for this philosophy. In adopting this approach the Center joins with an increasing number of seminaries taking a realistic approach to the functional problems of the parish in the context of the Christian faith.

While ecumenicity was not the primary motive that brought the Center into being, however, the organizational plan provides experiences in ecumenicity. The significance is not
limited to conference table sessions, but includes the actual participation of the member denominations in an interdenominational cooperative undertaking. In such an atmosphere, the likelihood of ecumenical insights increases.

The Center represents creative stirrings within the Black church. Laity is exposed to concepts and experiences in the New Testament doctrine of the church and their relevancy to present concerns. Black ministers receive a competent theological education that would have been impossible in the unaccredited denominational schools. The Center preserved those schools while at the same time it provided quality education in an interdenominational setting.

The Center has a responsibility to the Black subculture. Black students from southern communities make up the overwhelming majority of the student body. They bring their background experiences to the Center for interpretation and clarification in the context of the Christian faith. The Center further relates to the subculture through the participating denominations. This relevancy is expressed not only in polity classes sponsored by the participating denominations, but also in the very life and atmosphere of the school. It is for this reason that the Center is in the front rank for the education of the Black ministry. The current focus is upon Black students; however, the Center is eager to have students from all races and nationalities.

The Center not only has the task of strengthening the theological framework of the civil rights movement, but it also has the unique opportunity to present a better image of the Black ministry to the wider culture. Its emergence witnesses both the creative vitality at work within the Black community and to the fruits of interracial cooperation. The combination of the creative forces operating within the Black community in dialogue with persons of the wider community who have real vision and concern have produced a theological school capable of rich contributions both to the Black community and to the larger American community.
ORDER, CHANGE AND THE FUTURE: NAMING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

It is by intention and design that the order of service for this inauguration is both churchly and academic. Apart from my own proclivity in the matter, however, there is much to commend it, historically. Higher education in America grew out of the desire of early evangelical Christianity to educate a “literate and godly clergy” and to rear all youth in schools and colleges where “knowledge and vital piety” would be united in such a way that faith and wisdom would be nourished as an inevitable occurrence.

In the early life of the American Republic and on into the late 19th century, college presidents (male of course), were members of the clergy to “insure” the continuing relationship of moral and literary learning.

But there is a much deeper reason for uniting church and school in the liturgy of this inaugural service. It is hoped that this will make a statement to all that the Interdenominational Theological Center, a nexus for the theological education of Black ministers of seven denominations, can serve no greater purpose than to be joined to their churches in witnessing and training women and men to serve creatively and redemptively in the midst of the tumults of our day.

Introduction

My conviction that a sermon-address for an occasion such as this should be firmly rooted in scripture has led me to select a passage from the Old Testament lesson which you have just heard.

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31 This is the inaugural address of President Grant S. Shockley delivered on October 6, 1976 in Sisters Chapel, Spelman College as the third president of the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia.
(Exodus 3:13-18). It is the familiar passage that contains the story of the burning bush revealing God to Moses as he tended Jethro’s flocks on the slopes of Mount Horeb:

Then Moses said to God, “if I come to the people of Israel and say to them, the God of your father has sent me to you, and they ask me, ‘what is his name?’” What shall I say to them? God said to Moses, “I am Who I am,” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, I am has sent me to you.”

Or, to use a more scintillating translation, “God said to Moses, say to the people, “I will be who I will be.”

In theological education, as in everyday life, where once we thought of the new only in relation to the old, we must now learn to think of the new in relation to the future. For what is truly new must be “something that never was.” The text which you have just heard means just that! It speaks of a changeless God of order and ultimate authorship who is always acting in changing ways to realize God’s nature and purpose in the ongoing history of the people. And we come to know God best as we divinely become inventors of a future that is assured because GOD IS: God is who God was, God is who God is and God is who God will be.

But what is the larger context of this cryptic passage, unique in its attempt to reveal a new name for God and a new mission for God’s people? How does this relate to theological education, generally, and to the Interdenominational Theological Center, particularly? Let us review the passage for some further understanding.

Moses was keeping the flocks of Jethro in the land of Midian. God appeared to him in the form of an angel and spoke to him from a burning bush that was not consumed. God called Moses from the burning bush and Moses responded by moving toward the bush until God’s voice commanded him to take off his shoes before treading on holy ground. God then reminded Moses that he was the God of his fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. This caused Moses to hide his face in holy
fear and awe. It is then that God tells Moses of his concern for the affliction of the Hebrews in Egypt and promises that they would be delivered. God then makes it clear that Moses has been selected for this mission of deliverance and Moses makes it equally clear that he is not the person for the job!

After being reassured by God that he would be with him in this mission of liberation, the prelude to an even larger objective, Moses consents, reluctantly, on the condition that God would give him a name that would convince the Israelites of his authenticity. The name that God tells Moses to tell the people is a new name by which God is to be known — for God is about to do a new thing.

There are three things in this passage that are worth considering as we seek to endow theological education here at the Interdenominational Theological Center with substance and “soul” as well as with integrity and vision: (1) the God of Moses is a living God; (2) the God of Moses is an acting God; (3) the God of Moses is a God for the Future.

A LIVING GOD

The God of Moses is a living God. The burning bush that was not consumed is a divine symbol of God’s living presence — omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. Surely the hymnist had this concept of God in mind when he wrote:

“Immortal, invisible God only wise
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes.
Most blessed, most glorious the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious Thy great name we praise.”

No wonder God said to Moses, “Do not come near; take off your shoes for the ground on which you stand is holy ground. Here before God’s very eyes was being revealed the dynamic eternal reality which is set at the heart of universal existence. Isaac Watts speaks of this in the verse:
The Lord Jehovah reigns, His throne is built on high; The garments he assumes are light and majesty; His glories shine with beams so bright No mortal eye can bear the sight. Moses hid his face lost in wonder love and praise!

Moses was not only made aware of the power and authority of God in the burning bush, but he was also made acutely aware of God’s eternal presence: “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’ and I will be your God.” Here is another meaningful insight. God’s eternal presence does not mean that God is just “everlasting.” It means rather God’s total presence in our midst — Emanuel, God with us! It is like Meister Eckhart’s “now moment” or The Buddha’s “single instant awakening” or Wittgenstein’s triumphant phrase, “he lives eternally who lives in the present.”

There is, however, a basic distinction to be made here. God’s presence in the world is more than an abstract presence — more there than here — it is a “real presence.” It is more than “an ineffable experience” — it is a relationship. This is unique, perhaps, in the faith of the Hebrews. From them the existence of anything is always more than an idea. It is a bond with another person. God revealed in the Bible is never alone. “God” is he who is with someone: “But I will be with you and this shall be the sign for you that I have sent you...” Yahweh becomes the God of the Covenant “because he is the God capable of being with someone.”

Fear not I am with thee
O be not dismayed
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid;
I’ll strengthen thee, help thee and cause thee to stand
Upheld by my righteous omnipotent hand!
AN ACTING GOD

The God of Moses is a God who acts. In revealing the divine nature in the burning bush God was more than a living presence. God did not stop with a description of his power, his presence and his covenant. The God of Moses continued to reveal himself to us as an acting God.

The drama of the Bible is a rehearsal of those acts. It unfolds the mighty acts of God in Creation. The God of Israel is the Creator of heaven and earth; God is exalted and transcendent:

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand
And determined the heavens with a span
And comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure,
And weighed the mountains in scales
And the hills in a balance (Isa 40:12)

The God of Moses and the God of the Bible is a God of creative order. As we read:

Lift up your eyes on high
And see, who has created these?
He who brings out their host by number
And calls them all by name:
So great is his strength and mighty his power
That not one is out of its place (Is 40:26)


Just as the Bible tells the story of the redemptive acts of God, it unfolds the record of God's judgment. Through the preaching of the prophets, God weighed the sins of Israel and the sins of the nations and found them wanting. They found racketeering in the
market places, corruption in the courts, the irresponsible exercise of power in palaces, licentious living among national leaders, wasteful luxury amid squalid poverty, sordid immortality of all kinds and narrow racial exclusivism. In the midst of these conditions and situations the prophets gave us these priceless insights: (1) Israel’s failure was not due to the lack of spiritual resources, but it was due to collective moral bankruptcy; (2) Israel’s sin could not be assigned to the social environment, but to personal defection; (3) Israel’s national collapse was as much the result of internal as external enemies.

Finally, the drama of the Bible unfolds God’s mightiest act of all — incarnation. In the words of the writer of the Gospel of John, “... the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth...” The eternal entered time in the form of a person. What was really revealed in the activity of God through the life of Christ was the true and basic meaning of freedom in relation to God not just the meaning of “personal” freedom or freedom between persons. The Word which became flesh was the Word upon which everything depends. It is creative response to God’s action in life and time as they present their several circumstances. In and through Christ our Example, Redeemer and Lord — God imparts himself to us — finally acting on a cross for our redemption.

God not only acts redemptively in persons who are obedient to his will, but God acts through persons to redeem the history in which persons are enmeshed. In other words, God acts in the affairs of history through persons to change history. Let it not be forgotten that the voice of God did not come out of a “bush” except in a literal sense. The voice came out of a crisis in the life of God’s people.

Then the Lord said, “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry... I know their suffering, and I have come down to deliver them.

There are two observations that should be made here. The Gospel that we preach, teach and practice in theological education consists of more than an elaboration and refinement of an inert
corpus of truth. The Gospel is characterized in every aspect by concreteness and contemporaneity. There is simply no way it can be read or interpreted with integrity without confronting the concrete concerns of persons in their “situations-in-life” and commanding us to change those situations and enable persons to re-orient their lives through Christ. This seems to be the basic point in the “furious passage” in Luke 4:18, a clarion call to radical social change based on radical personal transformation:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

The activity of God occurs, if it occurs at all, in the midst of the trials and tribulations of the poor, the oppressed, the prisoners and the outcasts. It is here that God through the ministry of God’s servants, lay and professional, is seeking to redeem his people and change whatever systems that would keep them in bondage or negate their intended fullness of life in Christ. The theologian Freidrich Gogarten is correct when he says that “The Word of God and the word addressed to the world must never be separated. They must be held together in the event of revelation.” God called Moses to obedience in order that his purpose might prevail in the present, the here and now of time. God will be who God will be — Now! God is the Lord of history and God will always be acting as the Lord of history; must act in relation to God’s nature as Lord. Furthermore, God’s action speaks to the kind of response expected of God’s people. They are to be taught to act as those responding, momentarily, to the Lord of all history and every vicissitude.

There is another matter that calls for our attention in the burning bush passage. The faith that was revealed to Moses in the burning bush incident not only placed the “acts of God” firmly and squarely within history. That same faith generated and motivated a chain of events that moved God’s purpose toward its even larger goal. Recall these words in the text:
When you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain. (Exodus 3:12)

The reference to serving God upon "this mountain" is significant. It is really superfluous except for one important thing. It seems clear from this passage that from the very beginning, God never intended the liberation of the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage to be the sum and all of his relationship to them or of them to God. Liberation from Egypt was a prelude. It was a precondition to the larger purpose of making all of Israel God’s people and through them all people everywhere followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! In other words, liberation was a purposeful and necessary means to the kind of real freedom that God’s people must have to choose God’s mission in the world and be about that mission. Liberation in this fuller context is from “slavery” to “freedom” for “mission.”

What, then, are some implications of this for the Interdenominational Theological Center, a predominantly Black theological seminary? Several thoughts come to mind. First, an “apologia pro vita sua.”

Black people, because of centuries of oppression and racism have a basic need and a human right to affirm and enhance their existence in a hostile American society. We have a right to assess and appropriate the history, heritage and cults of any faith that will enable us to deal effectively with “the ultimate and violent issues” of life and death that face us in one form or another, daily.

Let us also say, proudly, that the Black Church has “acted” to meet these needs. Its entire history and present manifestation has been and is a tremendous witness to its attempt to articulate the religious experience from a Black perspective. Just recently, in the emergence of the “Black Theology” movement (contributed to substantially by members of our own faculty), this trend has climaxed in what has already proven to be one of the few original contributions to American theological thought. But what is “Black theology”?
Black theology is a theology of Black liberation. It seeks to plumb the Black condition in the light of God’s revelation of God as revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Freedom is the gospel. Jesus is the liberator.

Third, the Black Church, all Black denominations and Black constituencies in white denominations, have “acted” by bringing into being this Theological Center to raise up ministers, women and men, who are uniquely qualified by experience and training, to deal constructively with the Black condition from the perspective of the Gospel.

In the light of the passage cited above, however, we must do this and more. We must, in cooperation with others, seek to liberate Black and other minorities from physical, psychological, social, economic, political and cultural oppression. But when this has been done or as we seek to do this, we must also maintain a double-visioned understanding that the larger mission of liberation must find us creating, initiating and sustaining those kinds of concepts, policies and programs which, while focusing on a redemptive ministry amid the “existentialities” of the Black experience, nevertheless, will not lose sight of or concern for the future-in-the-making beloved community of a “kingdom beyond caste” or color.

As this begins to happen, the God of Moses and the Jesus of history will again be known as those who acted for God to reconcile and change, to redeem and restore. This, then, is our task in theological education at the Interdenominational Theological Center. It is to open ourselves, sufficiently, as students, teachers, administrators and trustees, to enable and support the kind of seminary that will train pastors to serve a Lord who is the same yesterday, today and forever and a God who is who he will be.

A GOD FOR THE FUTURE

In concluding this somewhat unorthodox inaugural sermon-address, still another dimension of the text must be treated. “I am who I will be” does not yield its deepest meaning until it is viewed...
from the perspective of the future. It is only in this dimension that it can be fully understood.

It will be recalled from the text (verse 13) that Moses had asked God to give him a name by which God could be described to the Israelites. Instead, God commanded Moses to be obedient to his will. This is a highly significant response. In essence, it means two important things. God's name will be revealed in God's action and in any event, God will be with us as an eternal presence. As one scholar points out, "God is saying that his presence is indeterminate, undefined, open ended... It is... something which as (its) nature is more and more known." The name of God, or the description of God's nature and being cannot be limited to form or matter, space or time dogma or doctrine. He will be who he will become as he fulfills his divine purpose, which is his nature, and keeps his holy covenant with humanity which is God's only obligation.

This is the key to the Christian faith, an implicit confidence in a God who is unfolding the richness of the total divine being for us in acts of creation, power, justice and love and whose holy presence is with us always to vouchsafe his eternal care. The radical question for the Christian is not to ask what the past was nor even when the present is — both must be dealt with as realistically, creatively and redemptively as possible. The question for the Christian is who and what, where and when is God revealed in Christ calling us to be and to do and to go. In the words of the poet,

"The world is a becoming world, a world ever surpassing itself, where the new proceeds from the old and yet at the same time is new and more.

The key to the future of the Interdenominational Theological Center, I like to think, is much like that. It is a quiet, firm confidence that students, faculty, administration, trustees, alumni and the community, working together can conceive, nurture and guide to maturity whatever future God wills for us. And in that future as in the past and present, the God who "will be who God
will be” is not only above us but is going before us as a cloud by day and as a pillar of fire by night. (Exodus 12:21) It is knowing that God, the Living One, the “I am,” is sufficient for every situation that could ever arise. There cannot be a time or an event or a circumstance, now or ever, which can separate us from that purpose and that mission. But Paul has said it well:

For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, or depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, Our Lord. (1 Cor. 3:7)

This, I submit, is the kind of God that the ITC needs for the interpretation of her past, the maximizing of her present and the envisioning of her future. A God who is undetermined, yet stable . . . bound yet free . . . able to meet the exigencies of the present, the imponderables of the future, the novel of the moment and the emergent opportunities of history.

This is the God of the Old and New Testaments, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Martin Luther King, Rosemary Reuther, Gustavo Guiterrez, Vine Deloria, Jr. This is the God of the future of the ITC. A God who has within self what has been called “the boundless life which embraces all and transcends all.” A god who is, and who was and who is to come. God alone is the one in whom we can put our trust. Few have said it better than T. S. Eliot who in his Choruses from the Rock would remind us that theological education, like the church, “. . . must be forever building, and always being restored . . . and all that is ill you may repair if you walk together in humble repentance . . . and all that was good, you must fight to keep with hearts as devoted as those of your fathers who fought to gain it.”

For such a venture in theological education, God calls us to join him. God summons us all — community, alumni, trustees, administration, faculty and students to an endless pilgrimage in the task of serving the present from the perspective of an age yet to come.
Within the last few years there has arisen a cluster of theological programs with a focus on human liberation. This movement is ecumenical, ethical and universal. It is, however, strongest in the so-called Third World. There is no universal agreement among the advocates concerning method or the particular focus of these theologies; but the formula of liberation from oppression radiates throughout all of them. All are concerned with “human rights” or making life more human, especially for the masses of oppressed people in each case. There is Black Theology, Latin American Theology, German Political Theology, Feminist Theology, African and Asian Theologies. In some cases we are talking about broad categories which must be sub-divided. But these titles provide us with a working list.

THE SITUATION

There is freedom ferment in our world. The occasion for this varies from continent to continent and from nation to nation. In some cases we have a revolt against racism—i.e., the United States and Southern Africa. In other cases we have a response to colonialism—i.e., most of the Third World. Presently we have a reaction to imperialism in the form of economic exploitation of the masses. Not only are Western countries involved, but multinational corporations are greatly involved.

A new consciousness has developed amongst the oppressed against their unjust treatment. The basis of protest is generally based upon race, class or sex. Any classification of these matters is too simplistic, but we are attempting merely to provide a handle for discussion of a complicated network of oppressions that have
given rise to this vigorous theological reflection around the globe.

It seems to me that a distinction needs to be made between various forms of oppressions. Oppressions based upon race and class involves the wholesale suffering of an entire people. Sexism, on the other hand, is a form of oppression which is internal or in-group suffering, exploitation or privation. In Latin America the masses of poor people suffer oppression at the hands of the privileged minority and from Western imperial powers which support those who exploit their own people. But because of the patriarchal and machismo characteristic of these societies, women are experiencing severe forms of oppression based upon sex. Racism and sexism differ from classism because they are clearly rooted in creation. If a society allows for upward mobility one may overcome his/her economic status and improve one’s plight. But we are stuck with our race or sex. I am aware that one can physically alter one’s skin-color as well as one’s sex, but this is often too costly on psychological grounds.

My real concern is to clarify the issues in order that we may see clearly what is involved here. Racism in the United States cannot be toned down by any comparison with any other form of oppression. It is the oppression of a whole people over hundreds of years. This includes men, women and children. Therefore, Blacks must be concerned with building stronger families. This does not mean that black women do not need to be liberated; for they suffer from both race and sex discrimination. Black male-female problems are Black family problems and not merely male-female problems.

White middle class men are oppressed. And white-middle-class women are oppressed. Many white men miss a wholesome relationship with their families because they are trying to be successful in their field whether they want to or not. In some sense success is their failure. Many live empty and lonely lives flying from city to city trying to make money to provide security for their families.
White middle class women are oppressed because they are often homebodies who build their lives around their husbands and children. There is more wife-beating in plush white suburbs than there is in the Black ghetto. There is often more alcoholism and suicide there. Affluence has its alienation and ills as well as poverty. When a white middle class man asked me how Black theology related to him, my response was: "Try to understand the way in which you are oppressed and how God speaks to you in your condition and this will help you to understand mine." Thus we must particularize the Gospel as it addresses us in our own condition and then reach out to others. The weakness of most white theologians, who are mainly male, is that they try to take on all these oppressions—if they are interested in the subject matter at all. In a real sense, only those who are aware of their oppression and God’s liberating word to them in the midst of their oppression can write a theology of liberation.

CONTEXTUALIZING IN LIBERATION THEOLOGIES

It is because we move from practice to reflection in liberation theology that we must move from the particular to the universal. Without a particular, concrete experience, the universal is abstract. It is by involvement in the experience of oppression—it is by developing solidarity with the oppressed that we understand the meaning of liberation.

In some cases as in Black Theology, Asian and African Theologies, the context is both positive and negative. These are culture-based as well as political in orientation. There is an affirmation of a heritage as well as protest against injustices. The Latin American liberation theologians have paid little attention thus far to popular religiosity and culture. This is the basis for Moltmann’s "open letter" to Latin American Theologians.

All liberation theologies, except Feminist theology, give little attention to sexism. Feminist theology, thus far, represents mainly highly intellectual middle class interest. It is also mainly Western in orientation and is limited to the intellectual-linguistic tools of the very males being criticized. It is primarily Euro-
American and its scope is the North Atlantic community. Its strongest advocates are, to my knowledge, within this country. Most essays or books by Feminist theologians are not easy reading for seminary trained ministers. The writers seem to be writing mainly for the approval of the very male chauvinists they are criticizing. If their writings were more for consciousness raising and the involvement of women, even highly intelligent women who are not philosophically or theologically trained, their language and ideas will need to be simplified.

I have just read an essay by Pauli Murray, the first Black woman priest in the January 1978, Anglican Theological Review. She is an outstanding attorney, having graduated from Yale and taught at Brandeis. She also was a student of mine in Black Theology for a term. Thus she requested my response to her article. She did a critical review of Daly, Reuther and Russell. My greatest disappointment was that she did not have much to say about the peculiar experience of Black women on sexism and racism. Other Black female lawyers have frankly stated their problems with these oppressions. I have challenged Pauli to do so. But, I urged her to speak for her underprivileged sisters. If she will not speak for them, she should not expect the white feminist theologians to do so. Furthermore, I have assured her that my future writings will consciously deal with this problem. But, I will be concerned with all Black women in the setting of the Black family.

The context of African Theology is the traditional religions and the emerging nationalisms. But, as the Africans themselves have well said, in fact, there is one African people, whether in Africa, the Caribbean or the United States. This unity is, however, a unity in diversity. The Asians have a more complex situation. There are massive sub-continents in Asia with varied cultural and religious traditions. A contextual theology for India is vastly different from a Japanese program.
QUEST FOR A THEOLOGICAL METHOD

Much Western theology is attempting to ignore the challenge of political theologies at home and these contextual theologies in the Third World. There seems to be a contest among German theologians to see who can develop the most “scientific” system of theology. These theologians seek respectability in the academy; they have little interest in the church.

In our country the trends are mainly those initiated in Germany with some modifications by local flavor. Process theology seems to be the exception. It is Anglo-American, having developed mainly in this country. It is highly metaphysical and is beamed primarily toward the dialogue between theology and natural science. It has much to offer toward a theology of ecology. But when we take up the questions of oppressions and liberation in human relationships, its voice seems rather weak. Its terminology is too impersonal to comfort those that mourn. Its God is too weak to deal with ethnic suffering. It does bring a holistic perspective to reality and, therefore, can contribute to a real appreciation for the value of all creation and the inter-relationships between all existent realities. But when groups of humans of long-suffering look to the growing God of process theology they do not find succor. This God is caught up in a struggle between, as it were, an eternal crucifixion and Easter. A weak and powerless people need a strong God. When the foundations are shaking we need a Rock to cling to. Enough! I am sure these impressions will be challenged. Indeed, I welcome this!

Whereas classical theology has relied very heavily upon philosophy as its main interpretative instrument, the theologies of liberation must, I believe, turn increasingly to the social sciences and the humanities for help. A well rounded program of liberation theology must be holistic—it must be at once priestly and prophetic. Unfortunately, some programs are one sided. Much Latin American liberation theology, most German political theology and some Black Theology (i.e., Cone) is mainly prophetic in the sense of external protest. There is little inner-directed
prophecy; God’s judgment is always against somebody else. Much of Feminist theology is preoccupied with the gender of language rather than radical social transformation. Exceptions, to my knowledge, would be Reuther and Solle. We need an existential-political approach that would provide a means of applying the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole person and all of life. We need, for example, to be able to combine the insights of Kierkegaard, Freud and Marx to the insights of biblical faith and Christian theological history to provide a theological perspective on human hope.

Because liberation theologies provide the most significant ecumenical thrust for the latter 20th century, they have a cross-cultural frame of reference. Being existential, cultural and political in context, cultural anthropology as well as history of religions are useful tools for these theologians. In our effort in interdisciplinary study, we discover fresh insights and ways of thinking which enrich our understanding of the Christian Gospel and the worship and life-style which flows from such an understanding. One example is that the “either-or” way of thinking is supplemented by a “both-and” way of thinking. Asians and Africans seem to share in various shades of meaning along this broader view. We overcome the secular-sacred dichotomy and we discover a rich type of communalism. Many of these things have affinity with the biblical faith which has been confused or overshadowed by the impact of Greek and Teutonic thought.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We have attempted to describe the situation that has given rise to liberation theologies—the network of oppressions and the new political consciousness. Then, we explored the contexts in which these theologies are emerging—class, sex; race, as well as traditional religions/cultures of the Third World. And, finally we discussed methodology. We looked at a possible poly-methodical approach to the doing of theology. Beyond this we have suggested an open dialogue with Third World theologians in which Western theologians would be good listeners and learners. This last suggestion will be most difficult for Western theologians who have
been the makers and transplanters of theological systems. But it is most important that this path be pursued—it appears to be the best way forward.
With the founding of Wilberforce University and Ashmun Institute, now Lincoln University, Black theological education in institutional form appeared upon the American scene with great significance. For prior to this time, efforts at the general and theological education of slaves and "free Negroes" were fragmented and whimsical, dependent upon the goodwill of a particular slaveholder or an advocate of abolition. With the founding of these schools, seminaries and departments of religion were included in the curriculum of practically every Black college in America. Indeed, these schools were established for the catechetical training of Black religious leaders.

A recitation of the prominent schools developed for the theological education of Blacks is impressive. Even more impressive and time consuming would be a "parade of the great ones" educated in these institutions. Suffice it to say that most of America's Black religious leadership were drawn to the breast of these schools and nursed into personal, spiritual and social maturity.

The quality of education varied from institution to institution. Some were Bible Schools, training their students to interpret the Christian faith with a degree of competency. Others were carbon copies of institutions of the North, which reflected the pedagogy of the white missionaries who were instrumental in their founding. Thus, biblical languages, rhetoric, elocution, exegesis and a variety of other courses constituted the curriculum. These institutions and their students demonstrated a fierce determination to be free and to lift brothers and sisters from the trash heaps of
slavery and the ravages of discrimination.

When the Interdenominational Theological Center began in 1959, there were seventeen Black theological seminaries operational; only Gammon Seminary and Howard School of Religion were accredited. An important reason for founding ITC was to provide accredited, affordable theological education for a larger number of Black students. Harry V. Richardson, the first president of ITC, said, “in 1958 there were only 387 Black students registered in all degree programs at schools belonging to the Association of Theological Schools.”

While this number has grown dramatically to 2,917 today, the need exists for leadership that is biblically and theologically sound, sensitive and skilled in interpersonal relations. Leadership for approximately 65,000 Black churches in the United States must be properly educated. This is JTC's challenge. Thus, it is necessary to discuss the context, the content and the conduct of Black theological education.

The Context of Black Theological Education

Relevant theology is always contextual. This is to say that theology, from any perspective, must be related to its present circumstances. Having said this, however, it is necessary to emphasize that we must take full advantage of the past—its accomplishments, learning and insights. To neglect these truths is to fail to listen and be receptive to God in this existential moment!

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The Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches met in Vancouver, British Columbia. This Assembly called together persons from throughout the world to discuss and act upon those mandates which make us truly one in Jesus Christ. An emphasis of this Assembly was “Insights on Ecumenical Learning.” These goals are instructive for the discussion of the context of theological education:

• To help each other to believe in Jesus Christ as the source of life and to grow in faith as Christian persons;
• To discover together that God has given us one world;
• To participate in the struggle for global justice and peace:
• To participate in communities of prophetic witness;
• To relate our local struggles to global perspectives.

Contextually, the Black Church and Black theological institutions are laboring to become excellent centers of learning and sharing. Many people find it hard to accept Jesus Christ as Lord. Thus, the growth of many Black churches is waning, and people are distrustful of the church’s relevance. U.S. government sources indicate that, in 1984, 338% of Blacks live below the poverty level. Unemployment among Blacks is 18.3% and much greater for Black youth.

The national context in which we do our theological education is increasingly calloused. People are becoming less important. Our giant military-industrial machinery is growing at an alarming rate. Current national leadership finds it logical to increase our defense budget by $35 billion dollars next year and finds it difficult to appropriate $20 million to establish an Academy of

Peace and Conflict Resolution. Would not it be wonderful to "wage peace" instead of waging war?

Vancouver reminds us that Americans are part of one world and Christians and nonbelievers in other parts of the world must be considered in our theological reflections. The opportunity exists to make a witness that might break the cycle of hopelessness. By the year 2000 A.D. 393 million Christians will live in Africa alone. By that year the majority of the world’s Christians will live in Africa, Asia, Latin and Central America. While this citation might suggest Christian triumphalism, it has a sobering reality that addresses Black Americans and others with great challenge and profundity. These teaming masses are the "have-nots" of the world, and yet the Christian Church’s greatest growth is among them, the “despised and rejected.” Doesn’t the Bible speak of raising up stones to praise God’s name?

Consider these startling statistics concerning the situation of American and global “have-nots”:

According to the 1981 Census Survey, 32 million people or 14 percent of our population, including close to one of every five children, are officially poor in this land of plenty. Even more disturbing is one estimate that a third of all children born in the United States during 1980 will spend some time on welfare before they reach the age of 18. The top one percent of our population owns over 20 percent of all the wealth that can be privately owned in this country, while the upper 20 percent owns nearly 80 percent of the wealth. This leaves the remaining four-fifths of the population with only 20 percent or the same amount as the

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41 “Department of Defense Authorization Act,” U.S. Statutes at Large. (PL 98-525, 19 October 1984), 2492-2660. In 1984 Congress authorized an initial appropriate of $4,000,000; $6,000,000 in 1985; and $10,000,000 in 1986 (eds.).
43 Luke 19:40
top one percent enjoys;

and

- 460 million people are starving,
- 200 million people are unemployed,
- 75,000 people flock to the overcrowded cities daily,
- World population is about to double by the turn of the century,
- World resources are being depleted,
- The eco-system which encompasses and sustains all life is pushed to the outer limits of tolerance.

ITC's mission is to prepare men and women to minister effectively in a national and world context similar to that just described. While it is true that ITC must prepare persons for any ministerial task, it is a greater reality that its graduates will serve the poorest of the poor—the modern day "despised and rejected."

Let us not deceive ourselves concerning the extent of our progress. Much of Black America is less well-off today than in the past. Our mandate is to provide an educational climate at ITC that acquaints students with these facts of life. We must help them, by drawing on every biblical and social vestige of hope, to keep themselves and those they serve from sinking further into the pits of despair. Black theological education, in addition to its irreducible need to provide a sound theological framework for its community of learners, lifting the fallen, inspiring the rejected, strengthening the weakened, educating the hopeless. Black Theological education must help people appreciate the sacred by inspiring them to see God's will and love. How this is done is the topic of the next section of this discussion.

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The Content of Black Theological Education

Theological education from the Black perspective is one among many directions. Black theological education is related to the survival of the Black church and the Black community. The extent to which this specialized thrust is taken seriously will determine the extent to which it can make its greatest contribution.

Dr. Frank T. Wilson, former chair of ITC’s Board of Trustees, has provided the background for the discussion of the content of Black theological education. Writing in Periscope II, a journal highlighting 175 years of Black Presbyterianism, Dr. Wilson states:

The Black presence, perspective and participation in the total mission of the whole church will move into dimensions without boundaries or limitations as Black membership and leadership in [the] church move
• from grateful recipients to self-reliant contributors
• from faithful functionaries to resourceful practitioners
• from crafty verbalizers to committed craft persons
• from comfortable conformist to creative catalyst
• from ruffled reactors to forceful initiators.45

As we embody the curriculum, we want our students to know the strengths and weaknesses of their past. We want them to drink deeply from the fountains of knowledge. Our role is not to produce separatists but rather men and women who can articulate in voice and mind the certainty that God has brought them “through many dangers, toils and snares.”46

However, their education must enable them to recognize that Blacks were participants in building this country! We seek to move our students from “grateful recipients to self-reliant

46 Dr. Wilson was the editor of Periscope I and II, a publication in 1982-1983 developed by the Project 175 Committee, Office of Black Mission Development Program Agency, United Presbyterian Church in the USA.

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It is necessary to understand the polities of the six constituent seminaries that comprise ITC. Polity is designed to steer us through the obstacles of ecclesiastical structures. Its usefulness is creating love for the church and health for its body. It is not for maneuvering into position for greater acclaim. Here at ITC we want to prepare men and women who love and are willing to serve the church. Our aim is to weed out the prima donnas and to place greater emphasis on servanthood—persons willing to share God’s love in compassionate ways. Thus, we seek to move “from faithful functionaries to resourceful practitioners.”

Increasingly, the Black church is able to detect the difference between those who are merely skilled in communication and those whose whole being is engaged in the welfare of the people they serve. They can detect those who cloak their selfish desires in flowing, grammatically impeccable language. At ITC we will seek to recruit, educate and place students who are emotionally and intellectually honest, possessing integrity, driven by a love for industry, committed to Jesus Christ as Lord. Then, we will have produced a cadre of religious leaders who have moved from “crafty verbalizers to committed craft persons.”

Theological education in the Black Community must address the issues affecting the survival of a people. It cannot be cloistered, ivory-towered and hypothetical. On the contrary, it must be relevant, consistent, engaging, confrontational, and possessing the spirit of Jesus Christ. We must equip students to know the difference between legislation designed to buoy the human spirit and legislation cloaked as religious. We propose to

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47 These words are from the hymn, “Amazing Grace,” stanza three by William Walker and were included in Southern Harmony, originally published by Walker in 1835.
49 Ibid.
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offer an education that will create a love for justice and righteousness and knows that risk is basic to the Christian life. We will rekindle a fervor characteristic of our ecclesiastical forebears, to be harbingers of hope and faith. This is not an easy educational goal but a necessary one. Only by adopting such can we move from being a “comfortable conformist to creative catalyst.”

ITC offers the theological community, here and elsewhere, one of the most outstanding examples of ecumenical contextualization. To be sure, this kind of ecumenical endeavor has problems; however, the opportunities far outweigh the difficulties. Were it not in existence it would have to be created. Where else in the world do you have six denominations cooperating in a single program of theological education?

We are the largest and most ecumenical predominantly Black theological institution in the world, and we have much to offer the broader society. We can advocate a theology of suffering that leads to active involvement. Ours can be a contribution to urban life in America. From these walls can come persons attuned to "Third World" life and thought.

ITC can lead toward a global perspective of ministry and help develop a new understanding of ecclesiology. We can assist the Black church in moving from being “ruffled reactors to forceful initiators.”

We have discussed the context and content of Black theological education. Now, let us examine the conduct of this educational thrust.

The Conduct of Black Theological Education

Black institutions of higher learning began in less than auspicious circumstances. Under brush arbors, in railway boxcars, church basements, lodge halls, and in ministers’ homes, these

49 Ibid

http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/itcj/vol35/iss1/25
schools started. They struggled to educate a group only days removed from human servitude. Whether by the total support of Black men and women, or by the sacrificial and benevolent work of white missionaries from the North: these schools clawed out an existence that met a great need—the education of indigenous Black leadership.

Following in the noble tradition of the past, our unflagging efforts at ITC will be an administration that is efficiently run and fiscally sound. Faculty, staff, and students will be challenged constantly and assisted to excel as teachers, supporters and learners. We will attempt to conduct the affairs of this Institution in a way that every internal and external constituency will be encouraged to support generously these efforts. 50

There are over twelve hundred ITC graduates. 51 These men and women are working in every state of the union and on every continent, with the possible exception of Antarctica. They are prominently involved as pastors, bishops, chaplains, teachers, and administrators. Graduates from this Institution are giving visionary leadership throughout the world. As president of this Institution, it will be my full-time effort to provide lifelong education for our graduates.

With equal zeal, I will ask for their sacrificial financial support. Through our Office of Institutional Advancement, each alumnus/a will also be encouraged to give regularly in support of this Institution. ITC is too precious to be financially strapped. Each graduate will be challenged to contribute to their alma mater. The time is now; the need is now. There is no greater impetus to the conduct of strong theological education than the support of those beneficiaries of its mission. Similarly, corporations, industries, foundations and philanthropic individuals need to provide sufficient financial support for ITC and other predominantly Black theological institutions.

50 Ibid
51 Information supplied by the Office of Institutional Advancement and the Registrar’s Office of ITC
Conclusion

If the Black church and the Black community are to survive, ITC must provide quality leadership for Black theological education. This lecture has discussed the three components of such an education and the resultant challenge facing ITC.

The first of these concerns the context of this educational task. Here, relevant theology is contextual, and demands that ITC prepare men and women to minister effectively in a local, national and global environment. Secondly, the content of this enterprise is embodied in ITC’s curriculum, where students are taught to reflect upon the past, embrace the present and meet the future with determination. The goal is to inspire servanthood where persons share God’s love in compassionate ways. Thirdly, the conduct of Black theological education requires capable administrators, committed faculty, sufficient library resources, a dedicated support staff, and alumni who recognize and express their gratitude as beneficiaries of this educational experience.

As stated earlier, the survival of the Black church and the Black community is paramount. Therefore, ITC requests that foundations, churches, corporations and concerned individuals invest in this holistic program of theological education and its graduates with an understanding of God’s call to ministry.
In 1996, the film *Jerry Maguire* was nominated for an Academy Award for best picture. The film starred Tom Cruise, a handsome, popular Hollywood star who in the title role played a sports agent in the midst of emotional breakdown. Jerry Maguire, locked in his apartment, turns on his laptop computer in an effort to seek relief and redemption. He set out to write a one-paragraph mission statement for his life, hoping that it will serve as a compass for the journey ahead. When he stops writing he has a twenty-five page statement, outlining the necessity of instituting more humane practices and values into the corporate culture. He feels relieved after sending a copy to all of his colleagues, but is soon fired for pushing against the corporate grain. He finds spiritual fulfillment in a simpler life marked by honesty, commitment, sacrifice, and service. When a Hollywood superstar like Tom Cruise has a spiritual crisis on the big screen and touches millions of viewers, something significant is happening in our culture.

Clearly, large numbers of people are on a journey to discover spiritual fulfillment. The Gallup Poll organization continues to report that more than 90 percent of Americans believe in God. National news magazines regularly feature cover stories on prayer, angels, healing, the afterlife, and values. We have always known that America is a religious nation, marked by belief in God, church attendance, and appreciation for religious rituals such as weddings.

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*Dr. Robert M. Franklin was president of the Interdenominational Theological Center, 1997-2002.*
and so forth. But now it seems that Americans wish to become people with insight into the meaning of life and who commune with higher powers.

For people seeking to satisfy their spiritual search in organized religion, I think that a special kind of leadership is needed. Before focusing on the qualities that leaders ought to cultivate, we should consider the challenge of leadership in a broader framework. Despite widespread cynicism concerning leadership in our society, we still can be moved by the presence of authentic moral guidance. In our time, President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, Mother Teresa, and former President Jimmy Carter have challenged us to suspend our cynicism and to support those striving to promote our highest values.

Perhaps the culture is waiting for more leaders of this sort. The problem is that they are not easily made. In fact, we don’t know precisely what happens when a person becomes a leader. In his classic study of leadership, James MacGregor Burns has observed that:

Leadership is a process of morality to the degree leaders engage with followers on the basis of shared motives and values and goals. Leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers.

He also distinguishes two types of leadership. Transactional leadership establishes temporary contact with people for the purpose of exchanging valued things (jobs for votes, goods for money, or hospitality for a listening). Transformational leadership engages with others so that the leader and followers “raise one
another to higher levels of motivation and morality.” “Transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both. Perhaps the best modern example is Gandhi....Transcending leadership is dynamic leadership in the sense that the leaders throw themselves into a relationship with followers who will feel ‘elevated’ by it and often become more active themselves, thereby creating new cadres of leaders.”

I would like to build on Burns’ model of transformational leadership with a metaphor. Authentic leaders are like diamonds who typically exist in the rough, their value and potential unrecognized by most people. Over time a process of refinement occurs. The value within is hammered out through times of testing and crisis. Years of prison refined Mandela; a struggle with cancer gave Bernardin the power to teach us how to die with dignity; a life devoted to serving the poor has transformed Mother Teresa into a saint who challenges the materialism of our time.

Searching for Diamonds

I envision a diamond with seven facets, each representing a critical feature of religious leadership. I believe that all religious leaders and clergy should become public theologians like Martin Luther King, Benjamin E. Mays, Andrew Young, and Marian Wright Edelman of the Children’s Defense Fund. Public theologians are committed to presenting their understandings of God along with their ethical principles and values to the public for scrutiny, discussion, and possible acceptance. In contrast to sectarians theologians who understand that they are speaking for and to the community of believers, public theologians understand

themselves as ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). They stand between worlds, representing the distinctive vision and virtues of Christianity to a secular culture. They stand in a particular faith tradition but seek to address people from all walks of life. And they do so with a deep respect for the belief systems that others may already hold. Consequently, public theologians move into the public arena with a profound sense of humility, reverence for the sacredness of people and traditions, and, in view of their manifold limitations, a sense of humor about their noble calling. This is part of what it means to be a fool for Christ. As fools, we know how and when to laugh at ourselves. How different religious conflicts would seem today if believers would pause to laugh at themselves, their conceits, their mistakes, and their aspirations, and that God has entrusted humans with such great treasure of grace and truth.

The public theologian should first serve as an anointed spiritual guide. Spiritual guides understand their role in helping to lead people to a deeper experience of God. The spiritual guide, like a priest, mediates an encounter with the holy, sometimes through words, rituals, gestures, and silence. The guide also understands when to get out of the way.

Second, public theologians should be grassroots intellectuals who initiate and encourage informed public discussion. Such efforts revive the role of preachers in the early slave community, who often were the community’s most literate members and were relied on as interpreters of reality. Ministers served as public intellectuals and educators. Although members of contemporary communities discuss issues in barber shops and beauty parlors, at social events, and on the street, these discussions often occur outside a governing moral framework or without a sense of how to translate dialogue into public action. Grassroots intellectuals can bring this dimension to the conversation.
Third, public theologians should be *civic enablers* who understand how to empower neighborhoods both through the political system and volunteerism. Civic enablers should ensure that community members take advantage of the benefits of citizenship through voting and by holding public officials accountable. As political power devolves to local communities, enablers should take responsibility for convening meetings with elected officials and insisting that these officials become educators, willing to give citizens the power to understand and affect discussions about public policy and spending. Enablers should also help people realize the power that can grow from organized activism.

Fourth, public theologians should be *stewards of community economic development*. They should recognize the potential economic power of billions of dollars in aggregate income that African Americans receive and organize ways to harness it for community development. As we discovered in the Hampton survey, 57 percent of clergy believe that churches should own for-profit businesses. Good stewards identify and seize opportunities to make financial resources work more effectively for the improvement of living conditions.

Fifth, leaders should be Afrocentric *cultural celebrants* who proudly affirm our African past and use it to enrich our personal and collective lives today. Celebrants should design rituals to teach values that animate traditional African societies. However, they must be critical celebrants who bring those values and practices into conformity with the core values of the African American Christian tradition. For instance, it would not be desirable to impose the patriarchal practices of some African societies on women and men in the American context, who are striving for respectful relationships. Celebrants should also seek to build bridges to non-Africans who wish to work together for a better
society. As Dr. Manning Marable of Columbia University has noted, Afrocentric pluralism affirms particularity but also places its beliefs in relationship with the larger human family. By contrast, Afrocentric exclusivism seeks to separate humanity along racial and ethnic lines, thereby recapitulating the social evils which European racists had earlier accomplished.

Sixth, public theologians should be family facilitators. Recognizing the declining rates of marriage and family formation in the Black community, they should promote a culture of marriage and family. They should design programs to address the needs of single people, married couples, single parents, and others. Ultimately, they should seek to facilitate the growth of extended family networks.

Finally, public theologians should be *technologically literate visionaries*, aware of emerging technologies and trying to harness their potential to improve lives. Rev. Martha Erinkitola\textsuperscript{54}, an ITC student, established a cyberspace church featuring music, homilies, prayers, and sacred art for Internet surfers desiring spiritual refreshment. Recall from Jerry Maguire that the computer can become a tool for self-discovery, renewal, and empowerment—a very different picture of technology from what we saw of the computer “Hal” in *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Renewing American Society

My thesis is that the renewal of American civil society depends on vigorous religious groups doing their part to heal, reconcile, nurture, guide, discipline, and inspire individuals to join in authentic community. Churches can accomplish this goal in ways

\textsuperscript{54} Rev. Martha Erinkitola is a 1998 alumna of Morehouse School of Religion at the Interdenominational Theological Center and is Senior Pastor of The Pensacola Faith Based Coalition Church on Wheels, Pensacola, FL.
that differ from any other sector of civil society, incorporating the logic, as argued by Boston University economist Glenn Loury, that sustainable, good communities are built one persons at a time, from the inside out.

My concern, however, is that African American churches are not as ready as they should be to meet the challenges ahead. Although all faith communities will have a role in the renewal of civil society, Black churches play a unique role in Black, underclass neighborhoods with few other community organizations. Since the symptoms of poverty are concentrated in these communities, the most promising solutions will emerge within their boundaries. However, churches and other change agents will need the assistance of outside partners and supports to alleviate poverty in the long term.

During the 1997 commencement exercises at ITC, Dr. Gardner Taylor revisited the familiar passage from Ezekiel 37 regarding the valley of dry bones. He asked continually, “Can these bones live?” His question is suggestive for the challenges facing urban Black churches. The renewal of inner-city Black churches depends on a reckoning with the significant demographic, political, and cultural changes that have occurred in Black communities since the Civil Rights Movement. This process will involve self-assessment and self criticism. Healing will come only after we admit our illness. The churches must ask the surrounding community for a report card on past stewardship efforts. Churches must ask residents how the church can be a better servant and partner in community development. Church leaders must accept the harsh criticism and challenging suggestions, and even the outright rejection that some community members may express. This self-assessment will constitute part of the long and painful process of healing and empowerment that churches must undergo as they retool and re-engineer for the next century.
Churches and clergy must listen to indictments of their sincerity, relevance, and commitment, not in a defensive posture, but with humility and humor to admit willingly that they have been part of the problem for too long. Congregations are often not taken seriously as change agents in the community because they appear to be on the sidelines, avoiding the messiness of community politics and power dynamic. During the process of renewal, congregations must explore how they can serve as voices for social righteousness without entangling themselves excessively in partisan politics or, at the other extreme, maintaining their noninvolvement. Recall Dante's admonition that the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in times of moral crisis, seek to maintain their neutrality.

The good news is that dry bones can live if they can stand tough medicine. Clergy should take hope from the numerous institutions and resources available to assist in their retooling and leadership development. These include educational programs offered by the Institute on Church Administration and Management at ITC, the Congress of National Black Churches, the Urban Ministries Institute of Chicago, the Summer Leadership Institute on Community Economic Development at Harvard Divinity School, and the Information and Services Clearinghouse of the Howard University School of Divinity.

I began my book *Another Day's Journey* by describing my vision of the public theologian and pastor as one standing in a particular Christian tradition but speaking to all rational people. I admit my debt to professors and conversation partners at the University of Chicago during the 1970s and 1980s who were occupied with the question of the public role of religion, and who

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accepted my argument that, historically, African American leaders like DuBois and King assume that personal renewal and social change were an inseparable enterprise. I believe that the renewal of religious congregations, particularly Black churches, depends on their ability to retrieve this tradition of public ministry.

In the years ahead, I intend to work on the following dimensions of the renewal in public theology and ministry. First, I would like American seminaries to build churches' capacity to engage in comprehensive community development. Professors of social ethics, church and society, practical theology, and field education may be natural resources for initiating this work. However, they must be in conversation and partnership with colleagues in biblical, historical, and systematic theological studies to ensure that the church’s ministry evolves in dialectical relationship to Christian tradition and to contemporary realities.

Seminaries should contact community-development professionals in their area to explore possibilities for training clergy in assessing community needs and for mobilizing congregational resources on behalf of the poor. There are several national organizations that could serve as useful resources, including the National Congress of Community Economic Development in Washington, the National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions in New York, and the Local Initiative Support Corporation, which has regional offices throughout the nation.

Second, I think that churches should immediately attend to their support and services for so-called at-risk adolescents. In view of the discussion regarding the “coming storm” of juvenile violent crime, churches need to determine what role they will play in the lives of the prodigal sons and daughters of the future. Churches must ask what would have happened to the prodigal son in Luke if there had been no father and no open door to which he could have
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returned. This is a chilling prospect to raise regarding the biblical text in which a supportive family network is in place. For in so many of our communities there is no daddy and no open door. Churches can supply surrogate parents and support systems to insure that youths who want to reform their lives—who want to go home—have someplace to go.

Most churches have not taken ministries for children and youth seriously. That practice must change. As churches retool youth ministries, they should draw on the expertise in the Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA and YWCA. These agencies have much to teach if churches ask to learn. Drs. Edward and Anne Wimberly, who teach at ITC, have developed one of the most innovative and effective programs for training Christian educators in the educators' own development of ideas to help children and families. Their program should be studied by interested church workers. The Hampton University Ministers Conference has added an annual Christian Educators Conference, which may be the most significant ecumenical gathering of African American Christian educators in the nation. Their program should be studied by interested church workers.

Third, churches need to improve and expand their use of the media, especially radio and television. Although print media is valuable, it appears that radio and television reach larger segments of the population. My hope is that churches of a variety of theological and political perspectives will enter the marketplace of ideas. It is not useful or accurate to allow the public to conclude that all Christians embrace the theology and political ideas of a few conservation leaders. There has always been an enormous variety

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56 The Youth Hope Builders Academy at the Interdenominational Theological Center

http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/itcj/vol35/iss1/25
of perspectives within the church, and this variety should be evident on television and radio.

Seminaries should consider presenting mini-courses through televised and broadcast media. This would add to the intellectual capital of congregations while modeling tolerance, open-mindedness, and diversity to a cynical and searching public. As the great theologian and African bishop Augustine said of theological debate and conflict, “In all things that are essential to the faith let there be unity, in all nonessential, liberty, but in all things, charity.”

The call to action has sounded. Government agencies are calling for partners in social service delivery; nonprofit agencies are calling for greater collaboration among community-based organizations; the neediest individuals and families are calling for training, assistance, and care. People of faith now have an opportunity to answer the call, to become agents of community building and development. I have tried to offer vision and practical resources to help the church achieve a more vigorous public witness. It is an exciting time to be alive and working to uplift humanity. It is time to remember the words of the rabbi: “The world is equally balanced between good and evil; your next act will tip the scale.”
When I was teaching at Hampton University, Tony Brown made a profound statement several years ago at a Founders' Day event. He said that one of the central keys to success is that one must learn to become necessary. He was using the standard, logical context of a condition being necessary as opposed to a condition being sufficient. Historically, Black Colleges and Universities must remain a necessary condition to the antecedent of African American success in particular and to American and global success in general. Drawing an analogical similarity to the Historically Black Theological Schools, I contend that in order for Historically Black Theological Schools to become successful and survive, they must become a necessary condition to the antecedent of the success of the African American Church in particular and to the Church Universal in general.

In the laws of logic and according to the standard rules of reason, a necessary condition is defined in the following way. A condition is deemed to be necessary if the negation of that condition automatically negates the antecedent that stands in a conditional or hypothetical relationship with it. That being the case, then it will logically follow that if the Historically Black Theological Schools are a necessary condition to the African

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57 This paper was delivered in 2008 at the annual meeting of the Association of Theological Schools in the US and Canada by Dr. Michael A. Battle, president of the Interdenominational Theological Center, 2003-2009.
American Church surviving in particular, and the Church Universal surviving in general, then the negation of the Historically Black Theological Schools will automatically negate the possibility of the African American Church being successful in particular and the Church Universal being successful in general.

The challenge of the Historically Black Theological Schools is to become necessary to the success of the Church. The intervening reality; however, is that they have not yet become necessary. And because of that intervening reality, there is a sense of exigency on the part of the Historically Black Theological Schools (HBTS) to become necessary.

I am not suggesting that the HBTS are not needed; nor am I suggesting that they are not “needful.” But I am suggesting that they are not a necessary condition to the survival of the African American Church and the Church Universal.

If it were the case that the HBTS were a necessary condition, then its negation would negate the success of the African American Church. There is too much evidence of success in the African American Church without the HBTS having anything to do with making that success, to claim status as a necessary condition. In fact, it is the case—and I’ll use the inclusive possessive plural that we are not yet necessary. We must, however, become necessary.

The only denomination in the African American Church that has made us necessary to its survival is the AME Church. The AME Zion Church, the CME Church, none of the four Black Baptist denominations, the Church of God in Christ, none of the Apostolic Pentecostal Black Churches, and none of the Independent Black Churches have made us necessary. In fact, to some of them, not only are we not necessary to their survival, we
are prohibitory to their survival and are deemed to be problematic and not deemed to be an asset.

I contend that the Historically Black Theological Schools do make a critical difference— that we do add a significant amount to the formal education of the Church, and that our products (graduates) are actively involved in the process of making the Church better. But there is a perception that we are the antithesis of progress, in part because the Church in general and the African American Church in particular sometimes sees what we do in theological education to be antithetical to the cause of the Christ upon which the Church stands, and the foundation that the Church claims as its own.

In our process of being intellectual, in our process of being critical, in our process of deconstructing the faith that some students bring to our institutions, we have become so absorbed in the deconstruction process that we have forgotten that it is a tragic error to tear down anybody’s presuppositions without participating with them in building foundations for a new set of presuppositions to emerge by the time they leave our institutions. And, thus it is the case, as John Kinney said the other day — reference Jeremiah Wright — that after preaching an erudite sermon that probably would have gotten him a good grade in seminary class, a person came to him and said, “I didn’t need that (expletive deleted) that you gave to me today.”

We must learn how to become necessary to the Church. And the way we become necessary to the Church is by doing a better job than anyone else in preparing women and men who will equip the saints—who will go forth from our seminaries not just as great preachers but as persons who equip the saints. You don’t have to go to seminary to be a great preacher. If you don’t believe it, don’t go to your church on Sunday morning. Go to one of the churches where there is somebody who has never been inside a
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semiary and listen to some of their sermons, and you will discover that many of those sermons are not only well put together and homiletically sound, they are hermeneutically sound, and they're biblically solid. And then at the end of the day, people are actually saved after hearing the preaching.

We must do a better job of training people how to go forth into the Churches that they serve and the classrooms in which they teach and equip the people of God in the way that will indicate that the person doing the equipping has been equipped by the Christ who equipped His disciples. You cannot go back to that point unless in your equipping you demonstrate that you have a personal relationship with Christ. We must do a better job in spiritual formation if we are going to be necessary to the Church. Not only in terms of understanding the theoretical framework of spiritual formation and understanding how to design spiritual formation, and understanding how to distinguish one form of formation from another form of formation; we must demonstrate that we have had a personal relationship with the Christ upon whom the Church is founded and upon whom the Church is ultimately and absolutely dependent.

We must not wait until the Church sees us as being necessary, we must create the reality of our necessity. Tony Brown was saying that we must create the condition of being necessary. In order to create the condition of being necessary, we must understand the Church. We must understand what the Church needs, how the Church needs it, what the needs of the laity of the Church are, and what the need of the hierarchy of the Church is simultaneously. If we understand what the laity needs and do not understand what the judicatory heads need, we have understood only half the task. And if we understand what the judicatory heads need and don’t understand what the laity needs, we are still half-witted in our understanding of what the Church needs. We have to...
understand the needs of the Church, and we cannot wait until the Church meets us halfway.

Sometimes in our arrogance, we have felt that what we have to offer is so wonderful and so great that the Church ought to meet us half way. We ought to go 99 per cent of the way and engage the Church where the Church is. The Church has already proven it can survive without us. We are not necessary to the Church; however, the Church is a necessary condition for theological seminaries. If you negate the Church, you automatically negate the need for theological seminaries. Who else is going to support a seminary if there’s no Church? Because the negation of the Church has the capacity to negate the HBTS, we ought to be the ones on the aggressive side. We ought to be the ones making the first steps. We ought to be the initiators in the discussion between us and the Church and not wait for the Church to come to us. We ought to be those who are proactive. We ought to be the ones who are engaging. We ought to be the ones talking to the Church and explaining to the Church why we are so valuable and we ought to do all we can to help the Church to understand and appreciate the value that we give.

Let me suggest a few other ways that we can become necessary. We can become necessary by intentionally educating our students to be life-long and continual educators of other people. If we produce graduates who, after graduating from seminary, stop reading, stop learning, stop writing, and stop preparing, then we have failed to meet the needs of the next generation. At a theological advisory committee for the Progressive National Baptist Convention, one of the lay persons said, “There is a great desire in the Church for ministers who are not only capable, but who are willing to spend time equipping and empowering the laity to understand and to do ministry. This person—a well-educated person with a Ph.D., and who had been
an educator for a number of years—said that she wanted to see ministers who were willing to help create a trained laity.

A young minister in Atlanta called me about six or seven months ago and said to me, “Doc., I’m having a problem.” I said, “What’s the problem?” He said, “Last Sunday we were dealing with the questions of HIV and AIDS and how God wrestles with HIV and AIDS, and people were asking me scientific questions.” He said, “I don’t have the answers, but I feel as a minister I need to answer the questions.” I said, “Man, what in the world makes you think that because you’re a minister you ought to know medicine?” Then, I said, “Why don’t you say to the congregation, ‘I really can’t answer that question; but, maybe if we bring some doctors and nurses in, we can have a discussion?’ We must equip our students to work with the vast resources in the laity; to see their gifts and to assist in the development of those gifts. This is what will make the difference between a seminary-trained clergy person and a person who is not seminary trained. The Church has got to see that there is market value to a seminary-educated minister in terms of his/her capacity to do a better job for the Church in the final analysis.

There is another trend in the African American Church. Dr. Edward P. Wimberly\(^58\) mentioned in a presentation that African American Churches are reaching a point that there is a more educated laity, and thus they are looking for a more educated clergy, but not necessarily in theology. Look in your town at the number of persons pastoring significant Black churches who have a Masters in Psychology, a Masters in Education, a Masters in Business Administration, or a Ph.D. in some area of science.

\(^{58}\) Dr. Edward Wimberly is the vice president of academic services/provost and professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at the Interdenominational Theological Center.
Churches are calling people that they appreciate for their experience in learning, but they are not necessarily calling people who have theological learning. The HBTS have to show that there is a distinct difference that a theologically trained person can make. We have to market what we produce. And we have to be able to demonstrate the market value of the persons we graduate. The way we demonstrate the market value of the persons we produce is by preparing them in such a way that they are more marketable than other persons who do not have a seminary education.

There is an illusion that sometimes occurs in seminary—hopefully not at ITC and at any seminary that I can remember. But there are some people who learn—unfortunately in seminary dialogue—that the minister is just another person and that it is unfair for people to expect a minister to live a life of a higher standard than the laity. That it is not right, that it is inappropriate to expect ministers to actually live right, because they are just human. Bishop John R. Bryant said—in a sermon presented several years ago—that “Not only does the Church have a right to expect that a minister lives a life of a higher standard, but God has a right to expect the same.” We have to graduate men and women who are bold enough and courageous enough to actually want to live right.

A recent graduate from ITC was called to a church that I knew very well. I knew the previous pastor extremely well. This newly appointed pastor told me the name of the church. And I said to him, “When you take that church, do everything you can to live holy, because that was a church that had been abused by a seminary-trained minister who did not live holy.” And I said to him that a testimony to ITC as well as to God would be in his capacity to go to that church and demonstrate to the best of his ability holy living. I wouldn’t say to him that he had to be perfect.
But he had an obligation to ITC to live a life that was exemplary of what we try to teach at ITC.

When our graduates go out and take churches and don’t do what they ought to do in those churches, it makes it not only more difficult for that Church to call another graduate from that seminary, but it cushions the people in the Church who say, “You don’t need those seminary people, anyway. They don’t know how to live for God. They don’t talk about sanctification. They don’t know anything about holiness. They don’t even bother to live right! All you have to understand is the theoretical understanding of Who and What God is. You don’t really have to know God in a personal way. Come on, that went out a long time ago. And today people don’t talk about personal relationships with Jesus Christ.”

In order to be necessary to the Church, we’ve got to talk about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And if we don’t affirm that Jesus Christ is Lord, and cannot affirm that Jesus Christ did die for our sins, then why be at seminary? Just be at a place to study religion? The seminary ultimately exists to serve the Church, and the Church needs people who believe in Jesus. And not people who believe in Jesus as one of the multiple options, but who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. While we can embrace the reality that there are other approaches to salvation, at the end of the day the Church proclaims the message of Jesus who said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” And we will proclaim that with power and with conviction. In order to be necessary, we have to go back to the foundation of teaching people to equip other people to believe that Jesus indeed is Savior.

Sometimes professors come to class to teach their issues. Their issues aren’t necessarily the issues that the people we’re

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training want to hear or even need to hear. I think we need to be very intentional about getting to know the Church. Can you imagine a medical school that had no real intentional relationship with hospitals? And a medical school where nobody in the medical school has spent any time in an emergency room over the last 15-20 years. You would probably have an ineffective medical school program. Or a law school where none of its orientation dealt with the practical aspects of the law. The theological seminary should be immersed in the life of the Church and should invite the life of the Church to its campus and at its location. We have been trying to do that at ITC. We volunteered on a number of instances to host occasions where community-oriented groups will come to us to meet with preachers to talk about how we can better be engaged with community. A disconnect between us and the Church is our liability, not the Church’s liability. For those of you who took Logic, you know you have this thing, if P, then Q. And then there is this conditional, hypothetical arrangement: P is the antecedent, then Q is the consequent, and P has to be a sufficient condition for the survival of Q, and Q has to be a necessary condition for the survival of P.

Now if I really want to push the claim, what we really need to create is a condition of bi-conditionality which says, P if and only if Q, which then means that P is both necessary and sufficient for Q, and Q is both necessary and sufficient for P. It all indicates that the Church is both necessary and sufficient for the seminary, and the seminary is both necessary and sufficient for the Church. But because we haven’t even arrived at necessity, we certainly can’t claim sufficiency, because sufficiency would mean that as a standard or condition on its own it is enough to guarantee the survival of the Church. I don’t think anybody is foolish enough to presuppose that the presence of a seminary in isolation to any other condition can guarantee the survival of the Church. It simply cannot. So certainly we are not a sufficient condition, but we ought
to at least aim to be necessary. And, again, I am not saying we are not needful; we are needful. We are needed. But we have not yet arrived at the point that we are a necessary condition. A good sign would be the major branches of the African American Church prescribing seminary education as a prerequisite for ordination.

I would presuppose that the AME Zion and the CME Churches may be the next behind the AME Church. It will be a long, long time before the Church of God in Christ and the Baptist Church reach that point.

Questions may be raised: What is the nature of partnership between seminary and Church? What is the seminary doing to address the Church’s pain? We see ourselves in the seminary as wanting to minister to the Church’s pain. But I so often realize that the people who come to seminary bring their own baggage, their own stuff with them to seminary. Instead of concentrating on teaching them the fundamentals of ministry, we at the same time, help them to deal with their own “stuff.”

Let me explain what I see as the Church’s pain. The pain that the Church has experienced—the laity of the Church and part of the frustration the leadership of the Church has experienced—is a disconnect between the academic revolution that often happens in the seminary and the practical on-the-ground needs where people and their lives are demonstrated day by day. Another part of the pain is the notion that sometimes the seminary presents itself as being smarter than the Church, superior to the Church, better than the Church. And so you have ministers who have not gone to seminary but are doing incredible work having the value of their work lessened simply because they have not gone to seminary.

You know how people react to things. Sometimes we react to pain by denigrating the source of our pain or what we think is
the causation of our pain. So, then, what happens is that we have ministers with successful ministries and churches with successful ministers that turn part of the internalized pain against the seminary and say it is the cemetery. It is the place where learning takes place but burning dies out.

Many times people who make statements like that are actually begging for conversation, and begging for recognition and acceptance. I remember a minister in Chicago—serving a brilliant church—a learned man in the non-formal way of being learned. But because he had non-formal learning and his capacity to enunciate was not great, and his verb-subject agreement was not always in line, those who were formally learned placed him to the rear. People who were members of his church, who felt that their souls were being regularly fed by him and that their lives were being sustained by him, acted out their pain by disregarding people who have theological education. The burden is on us to go and have conversation and to include in conversation the minister whose grammar is not correct, and have discussion about ways we can help them articulate.

When I was in undergraduate school in Hartford, Connecticut, I worked for a local church, and also taught a GED program four nights a week. I did it because I was at a very wealthy White undergraduate school and I felt guilty being there. So I wanted to go back into the Black community and do something. So I taught GED. And there was a guy who came to me and said, “I want you to work with me in my preaching.” So I said, “Okay, I’ll do it. I’ll volunteer to work with you.” (I wasn’t going to work with him in his preaching because I hadn’t gone to seminary yet; I was still in undergraduate school.) But preaching was not his problem. The guy could preach rings around me when

60 General Education Development that is equivalent to a High School diploma
he was asleep and I was wide awake. But what he needed most from me was a set of lessons on where to put an “s” and where not to put an “s.” What was plural and what was not plural. And so we spent Saturday after Saturday working on grammar. He eventually became a bishop in his denomination. But he spoke better as a bishop. He regarded theological education, not because he had one, but because somebody who was in the process of going for a theological education regarded him as significant and worked with him in that significant regard. So he was not hurt; he was not in pain.

Franklin Richardson, who was the General Secretary for the National Baptist Convention, was preaching a sermon at the installation of Jeannette Wilson, who became the new dean of the Doctor of Ministry Program at United Theological Seminary. His sermon raised the question, “What is there that the Doctor of Ministry is expected to be able to do that no other doctorate can do?” And he used the parable about when the disciples of Jesus could not help the wounded person who later went to Jesus and said, “Why couldn’t your disciples do this?” What he was saying is that seminary education prepares you to do something that nobody else on the face of the earth can do. That is to be able to offer wholeness and well-being to persons broken by pain.

Last week I was on a teleconference/press conference with the president of Morehouse School of Medicine, the president of the National Black Nurses Association, the president of the Latino Medical Association, and the president of the Urban League, and about four or five other people. The only seminary there was ITC, and the reason we were at the table was Health and Human Services said that emotional healing—they wouldn’t let us use the term “spiritual healing”—is necessary to holistic healing. They said that a theologically trained person is necessary to carry out the
equipping of emotional healers. Health and Human Services sees theological education as necessary.

Can you imagine what would happen if we could help the churches to see us as necessary? They would give more money. They would call on us for guidance. They would call on us for direction. And every time the church got ready to do something, it would call the local theological seminary and say, "We’re getting ready to do something, what do you think about it?" They cannot do that, however, if they think that we are going to be the Sadducees and Pharisees and rent our holy garments and look down at the Church. Who are we fooling? We are not necessary to them; they are necessary to us.

A member of the audience made this comment. "Of importance in theological education is how we define ourselves. Our conception is that we are servants of the Church. I am a servant of the AME\textsuperscript{61} denomination. As a servant of the Church, therefore, I have to know this body that I am serving. And although I am president of a seminary, I would not say that I have all the wisdom yet that I need. Being a servant opens us up to being a learner, which challenges the idea of superiority. And all of this leads me to believe we need to call ourselves—not preachers—but pastors. I think it is the pastoral witness that might be missing for us as a people. So no matter what your ministry is, you need to offer a pastoral presence to the person who is before you; a pastoral presence to the human need; a pastoral presence to the human condition, and you must serve that person not only with a body discipline and witness, but you must serve them pastorally."

\textsuperscript{61} African Methodist Episcopal Church
My response is that I agree with you. And there’s one step to push it. What we are called to do is a lot less significant than how we demonstrate service. We have to demonstrate the pastoral spirit. I would also push it just a little bit. There probably are students at Payne Theological Seminary who are not AME. That being the case, your immediate obligation is to the AME Church. But so close to that immediate obligation, as almost to be indistinguishable from that immediate obligation, is your obligation to the whole of the Church regardless of denomination.

There was another comment from the floor: “It bothers me that we refer to our students as ‘products.’ The minute we talk about selling students and market rates, we define a condition that I think we need to be careful of. Instead of selling students, we should be equipping the saints for ministry. I realize it’s a question of semantics, but it really bothers me to be talking about selling students rather than equipping the saints for ministry. Insofar as we are witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, there will be times when seminaries need to call the Church to do right. Not because we are superior; but because we, too, are the Church. We, too, are called in a vocation of the ministry of the Word of Salvation.”

My response: But the way we call the Church to do right is the same way the Church—when it is faithful—calls us to do right. And it’s a scenario that when anyone has sinned, the one who deems herself or himself to be right or righteous should restore that one in a spirit of meekness. So, the fact of the pain experienced by the Church heightens our responsibility to initiate the discussion about healing and wellness.

What happens, however, sometimes—certainly not at ITC or at any of the seminaries here—is that we spend time in the seminary talking about the sins of the Church so much that the people we are educating to equip the saints go out to equip the saints with an antagonistic attitude about the saints. So, while we
talk about all the stuff that the Church is still doing wrong, we have to instill in our students that urgency to work with the Church to make the Church better. Because, with all of its error, the institutional Church remains—particularly for African American people—the most stable bridge we have ever had and probably will ever have.

After Katrina, Dr. Willie Goodman and Dr. Carolyn McCrary, both professors of Pastoral Care and Counseling at ITC, wrote a pastoral letter and emailed it to everybody at ITC: to students, faculty, staff and administration. In that pastoral letter they talked about how we become healed in the process of being healers. That is the attitude and disposition we should take with the Church. How do we help the Church heal, while at the same time we are also being healed by the Church? When that happens, I think it will be a wonderful thing. But we always have to initiate the discussion about the healing. The Church has done a lot of horrible, horrible, horrible, horrible things, like justifying slavery and, recently, defending the atrocity in Iraq. The Church played a role in sanctifying the war in Iraq, and the prophets of the Church need to rise up and say that this nation does not have the cleanness of heart to be the instrument of God’s judgment against any other nation. And those who claim that God is using us to judge, we ought to look at our own hands. If anything, the Iraq situation just might become the instrument of God’s judgment of us, because we went in with dirty hands. You can’t wash my hands if your hands are filthy. So, if you’re going to wash my hands, wash them with clean hands.

Comment: “There is a good deal of discussion about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and then believing that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins. Those terms are language that I, in my personal spirituality, do not use or am not appreciative of.”
Response: As I am speaking now and making this presentation, I am not suggesting to you that what I am saying is the philosophical position that ITC takes as an institution. These are certainly my ideas. This is the foundation from which I preach. Living holy simply means living the way you and your denomination feel God calls you to live, whether you use the term “live holy” or not. For me, I am very comfortable with the notion of living holy because in the back of my mind I know both the lexical definition and the stipulative definition that I give to the term; so I’m okay with it. And if a “personal relationship with Jesus” and “Jesus died for your sins” is not language that you use, don’t use it because then you’re not being authentic. But for those for whom it is authentic, keep using this language with power and conviction and keep on rolling.