Black power through merged black Methodist bodies

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SENIOR ESSAY

BLACK POWER THROUGH MERGED BLACK METHODIST BODIES

Submitted in Partial Requirement for the Master of Divinity degree

By

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I. INTRODUCTION

The motivation behind the writing on the subject in question is personal and existential. For, as a prospective minister in one of the three predominantly black Methodist denominations, I find myself raising questions about the very survival of that denomination, to which it now appears I will be giving my life's commitment.

Thus, as I began to raise questions about the survival of my own denomination, I became increasingly aware of this "survival question" relative to the future of two other black Methodist bodies. And, these kinds of questions began to emerge in my thinking = WHY MUST THESE THREE, SMALL, WEAK BODIES LIVE IN A "HAND TO MOUTH TYPE OF EXISTENCE" IN SEPARATION, WHEN IT IS POSSIBLE TO "THRIVE" AS ONE POWERFUL ORGANIZATION??? Are there some "irreconcilable differences" that make the "separation of these three bodies "necessary"??? ARE THE CONSTITUENTS OF THESE THREE BODIES AWARE OF THE FACT THAT WE ARE ABOUT TO "PERISH AS SEPARATED FOOLS," WHEN WE MIGHT "FIND LIFE IN UNIFIED STRENGTH"???

These are some of the personal, existential questions raised in this writer's being, as he moves closer to his
life's commitment in one of the three predominantly black Methodist denominations with an obvious "survival problem." And, even though this writer has indicated to some extent what his decision might be, since he has begun pastoring an AME Zion Church already, such still does not remove that haunting question about the "future health" of such decision.

Now, this question about black power through merged black Methodist bodies is raised primarily in connection with the AME Zion, AME, and CME Churches. However, such black merger for black power should not exclude another significant group of black Methodists -- namely, that black wing of the United Methodist Church which was recently known as the Central Jurisdiction.

It might be true that this black wing of the United Methodist Church does not face the same kind of "survival question" that the other three black Methodist bodies do -- namely, "sufficient fiscal substance" to carry out its programs and to survive on. But, that black wing of the United Methodist Church does face the "survival question" about whether they will be "swallowed up without having influence" in the new Methodist set-up. Thus, many thinking black members within the United Methodist Church are raising questions about whether their better future lies with the United Methodist Church, or with some kind of cooperative endeavor with other black Methodist
bodies.

Even though our primary concern here has to do with black power relative to merged or cooperative endeavors among black Methodists, our thinking is not confined to, nor limited by, what is being said from within these bodies alone. For, this writer is convinced that the larger context of the black power movement in America has much value for black churches.

Thus, insights in this essay will be drawn from some very "unorthodox" sources -- meanings from black radicals and black militants also being considered for the sake of relevance, since these radical, militant movements have arisen due to a "vacuum of relevance in black churches." However, the voice of the "orthodox" black church will not, and cannot, be "muted" by our concern to include this "unorthodox" concern. For, the "orthodox" black church must be the "stabilizing" source in the entire context of the black power struggle in America -- giving the movement a sense of meaning through its established organizational structure and through its power to give spiritual guidance.

In looking back over the ground covered thus far, this writer recognizes how confusing this variegated confluence of motivations might be to the reader. Therefore, let us endeavor to synthesize the essence of this writing in a more simplified way -- in terms of what should "not be expected, and what "should" be expected in a
thorough-going way in this writing.

On the one hand, the reader should "not" expect a detailed historical interpretation of the merger considerations between these Methodist bodies, nor of the black power movement. On the other hand, the reader "should" expect questions to be raised and suggestive answers to be given to the problems and implications involved in a merged reality of black Methodist bodies in a quest for genuine power for survival in a tough age such as the age in which we now live.

In Chapter II, we will endeavor to wrestle with the issue of the "incompatibility/[compatibility]" of black power and the black church -- the endeavor to see what kind of legitimate marriage can and must take place between these social and religious forces in the black community. In Chapter III, we will attempt to evaluate the Spiritual Power of the black Methodist bodies for divine relevance -- the attempt to see what kind of relevant witness black Methodism can and must make for a revitalized black community with power. In Chapter IV, we raise the basal question of concern in this essay -- namely, the question of the necessity of black Methodist bodies to merge inorder to solidify their resources for a united black effort with power.
II. BLACK POWER AND THE BLACK CHURCH

If we are to overcome one of the basic "hang-ups" of our concern here, then we need to raise the question of whether black power and black Christianity can be "legally" married. For, not only do segregationists advocate "miscegenation laws," but there are advocates both in the black power movement and in the black church who find no "legal" basis for the marriage of these social and religious forces in the black community. And, since we believe in the principle of "equal time" for opposing points of view, we will present the "cons" and "pros" for marriage between these two forces.

A. War Between Black Power and the Black Church. Since chaos preceded creativity in the factual confrontation of black power and the black church, we begin with the negative side of the issue of marriage between these social and religious phenomena in the black community. And, we find three areas of conflict, which gave rise to the clamor for "miscegenation laws" relative to the marriage of black power and the black church.

1. Terminological War. "Black power" is a term

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which has been widely misunderstood and misinterpreted by both the white church and the black church. For example, many white churchmen think that all black power advocates are radicals who loot, burn, and rape white women. At the same time, far too many black churchmen interpret the ideology of black power as being detrimental to the existence of the black church. It fears that the black power advocates' real objective is to replace the black church with a new, black institution which would be "anti-Christ" and "anti-religion." Thus, the term itself is one which causes "shivers to run up and down the spinal chords" of both white and black churchmen, when the black powerites begin to shout, "Black Power."

2. Organizational War. Some of the "terminological fears" that black churchmen have toward the black power movement is justifiable, since the war between these social and religious forces goes beyond a mere "shouting match." For example, an organization which was located in the East called itself Revolution Action Movement (RAM) had as one of its ultimate purposes the assassination of black preachers for two basic reasons. One reason was that black preachers controlled the masses of black people -- the black church being one institution where there is a national community of black people. RAM, therefore, came to the conclusion that if black preachers were liquidated,
then they could replace the vacuum of leadership -- with RAM leading the black people in a totally new venture, not as a religious institution, but as a community power base to be used to liberate black people.

The second reason why RAM felt the need to assassinate black preachers was because they felt that black preachers have been too preoccupied with preaching about heaven. They contend that black preachers have given the people false hopes and dreams, while they should have been, and should be, liberating black people, according to the RAM critics and many other black militants and black radicals.

Thus, some "radical" black power groups have represented more than a mere "verbal threat" to the black church. For, some have felt the need to "destroy" the black church organizationally as a "necessary first stage" for black power in the black community.

3. Constituency War. Possibly, the most crucial area for a "Vietnam-type conflict" between some black powerites and black churchmen is the competition for the support of black people. It is a fact that the black church has control or some influence upon the masses of black people. It is the only institution in the black community where there is some degree of unity and control over black folks.

So, seeing this power base already there, some black
power advocates want to take advantage of the fact of this unity of black people, not for religious purposes but for a community power base to win total liberation for black people.

And, therein lies a "bitter seed for conflict" between the black social reformer and the black religious reformer -- both clamoring for the loyalty of the same group of black people for diverse purposes, and both feeling "envious" when one or the other wins that loyalty from time to time.

B. Peace Between Black Power and Black Church. Whereas the above factors are the seeds for "conflict" between these powerful forces in the black community, these same factors are also the bases for "harmony" between the black powerites and black churchmen. Thus, let us look at these same three factors in terms of what they "brood for marriage" between black power and black religion.

1. Terminological Peace. While it is true that some "phobias" still exist when the term black power is used, most of the "hysteria" has disappeared when the term is now heard -- in both white and black circles. For example, recently the white church has been in the process of reinterpreting the concept of black power. Once the concept was looked upon as being totally destructive. Now, many white churchmen see black power as being a creative means
for achieving liberation for black people, psychologically.

And, too, the black church has been reinterpreting the black power concept under a more hospitable atmosphere recently -- particularly due to the influence of the young, black student and the young, black preacher. The growing appearance of "afros" and "dashekis" in the black congregations indicate a growing acceptance in the black church that not only is "black beautiful," but also that "black is powerful." In fact, it would be hard to find a black churchman today, who would not speak kindly of the black power concept.

2. Organizational Peace. Likewise, from an organizational standpoint, the "black powerites" have become increasingly aware of the relevance of the black church in black history as well as in the present, historically speaking. The justification for the type of black religion carried on is now being vindicated more and more. The wise vindication behind a past as well as in the present black gospel of jubilation and future hope is found in the fact that it kept black people sane, while they were going through all types of unbearable hardships and ruthless oppression.

If it were not for the black preacher and church, black people today would perhaps be in the same condition that the American Indians are. Since the American Indians
didn't have an institution that gave them hope or jubilation, they are now a dying race of people. The black preacher has had a valid point which should be, and is being noted, by the more and more black power advocates.

Speaking in the present, the black church has as little to be ashamed about today in terms of being relevant than it did in the past. For, it would be impossible to think of the contemporary movement of blacks, without the part that the black church has played in that movement in a variety of ways -- from "spiritual inspiration" from the pulpit to "material support" in the use of its buildings. There could not have been a civil rights movement, as we know it, without the "black church." And, increasingly most "black powerites" have come to this recognition.

3. Constituency Peace. Possibly, the crucial thing "holding up the wedding ceremony" between black power and the black church has to do with their diverse appeals to the same constituency. Even though both are concerned with liberating black people, the meaning of such liberation is conceived of in the light of radically different strategies for accomplishing such black liberation.

For instance, the tactic of the black church for liberating black people is that it must be done in the "spirit of Christ or non-violence." And, even though it might appear that this "non-violent conviction" of the
black church is irrelevant at times, the black church could not give up such "non-violent conviction," without being disloyal to its Lords and to its basic nature as a religious institution.

However, the black power movement is not wedded to "Christ or non-violence" for accomplishing black liberation. The tactic of many black power advocates calls for any means necessary. If liberation for black people can be achieved through the "spirit of Christ," then let that means be used. And, if armed revolt is the only means whereby black people can be liberated, then let that means be used. This is the stance which the black power movement could not give up, without being disloyal to its basic reason for being born.

The way things look now, it does appear the black church is on the defensive, while the black power advocates are on the offensive. It appears that the black church is losing its grip upon many of its constituency, particularly the young college student. Many of these young people are becoming black power advocates as can be seen all across the country on college campuses. These are the young people who would have been, or still might be, the future church.

At the same time, the black power movement cannot claim the full support of the black community for "doing its thing." Nor does it have organizational structure to
deal with the issues of racism and liberation effectively. It has the Black Panther Party, but the panthers are not strong enough to fight the war of liberation alone and do not appeal to the vast majority of blacks.

Thus, we find both the strengths and the weaknesses of this couple, signifying the desperate need for marriage for the survival of each. The black church is like a dying man who needs a blood transfusion. And, the black power movement is like a blood bank that is not being used. The black church will die without the transfusion, while the blood bank of black power may lose its power, because it has been sitting around too long unused. The church needs to accept black power, with modifications, for its survival. And, the black power movement needs to accept the "spiritual wisdom" of the black church for its survival, also. For, black people in the community need them both.

C. A Necessary Black Power Concession. While it is evident that the black church and the black power movement have much in common, that alone will not guarantee a "successful" marriage between the two. To be sure, the ingredients for marriage between the two black factors are both "natural" and "necessary" for power in the black community. But, to say that this "natural, necessitated potential" for marriage will automatically produce a "viable, creative marriage in fact" is to underestimate what it takes to live

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happily in marriage "until death do us part."

Thus, there must be "concessions" by each party in formulating a permanent marriage contract -- with both sides "giving up something" for the sake of living together creatively. In the following chapter, attention will be given to "concessions" that the black church must make for creative marriage. Here, we present "concessions" that the black power movement must make for "harmonious power" in the black community.

If there is a successful wedding "between the religious and social forces in the black community, then it is quite evident that each party involved must recognize the strengths and weaknesses of each other. And, in the case of the black power movement, it must concede that the black church is its superior in "wisdom."

To be sure, the black power movement brings "dynamic" to the black "get-together" -- with its emphasis on "Black is Beautiful" giving inspiration and resurrecting power in the black community. And, that is the great asset that must be respected and accepted as the contribution of the black power movement -- a "black dynamic."

However, "dynamic" without "creative wisdom" can be dangerous and self-destructive to the black community. For, even though such black power emphasis aids oppressed black people to have a sense of "power," it still must be recognized that oppressed blacks are a "minority" group --
meaning that it is "Not All-Powerful" in its endeavors to "overcome" against an oppressive "majority."

Thus, "Wisdom" must be added to the new sense of "Black Dynamic," if the black community is to "Overcome In Fact," without bringing upon itself a "Black Massacre" through deceiving itself about the "Quality and Quantity of Its Power." In a word, the black community must not jeopardize "losing its very life" through an "unwise vision" about its new sense of "Black Power" -- as is now the case of the "Indian community," which is now almost extinct through an "unwise estimate" of its sense of "Red Power" in confronting an "Oppressive Majority of White Invaders."

Now, what specifically is this "Vision of Wisdom" to which the black power movement must "concede" for the sake of "Black Survival" in order to be "Alive to Overcome?" What specifically is the strength of the black church, which must be respected and accepted in the black community as a "Living Option?"

Well, whether the black church is considered to be outdated or not in the current black struggle, the obvious fact is that it was primarily through the "Wisdom" of the black church that black people have survived through three and one-half centuries of oppression. Granted that the "methods" for surviving under oppression in the past are outdated, and cannot be tolerated in the present struggle. But, the fact that blacks did survive under the most deplo-
rable conditions must be attributed to the "Wisdom" of the black church. And, even though the "methods" of black survival and progress must be changed in the present and in the future, it cannot be denied that there is a "Great Trust Fund of Wisdom" in the black church which must be an "Endowment" which the black community appropriated for present and future progress.

Let us be more specific about the desperate need for "Wisdom" in the black community by relating this issue to politics. For instance, we must realize that it takes at least 51% of the people involved in a political issue to get the desired effects. And, being a minority group of only 10% to 11% means that we blacks always need 41% to 40% help from other sources to get desired political results.

So, politically, it would be completely stupid to assume that we blacks "alone" have sufficient "Black Power" to obtain political benefits, without assistance from other people of good will. To be sure, we must consolidate and strengthen the "Political Power" of the black community for political benefit. We must "rally" all the black forces we can get through "Black Power Dynamics."

But, to become self-deceived into believing that such "Black Political Power" can gain benefit for the black community "all by itself" is not "Black Wisdom" but sheer "Black Folly."

As we review some political gains of the black communi-
ty in the past decade, we find that such gains were based upon black power collaborating with other power groups to make a "51% Majority." Granted that we have not gained as much as we blacks need and desire. But, whatever "token political gains" we blacks have accomplished has been brought about through a "51% Power Base" rather than through a "10% Black Power Base" alone -- all gains based upon a "Majority Political Effort," from the 1954 desegregation decision to the 1969 decision to reject Judge Haynesworth for Supreme Court consideration. And, those political gains were based upon "Wisdom" -- "51% Political Wisdom" rather than "10% Black Folly."

Now, since this "51% Majority Power Base" for black progress is difficult to achieve, and very slow in coming, some blacks have begun thinking about "another kind of revolution" for black progress -- namely, the "violent kind." And, one can understand the reason for such "violent kind of option" emerging, since black progress has been so slow and frustrating. And, the current wave of "burnings and shoot-outs and bombings and lootings" by black radicals indicate that such "violent option" is more than a mere idea in the black community. And, it must be admitted that "some gains" have come from such "violent tactics."

However, it must also be admitted that "much more damage" has resulted from such "violent tactics," politi-
cally speaking. For, now it is even more difficult and much more frustrating to put together that "51% Majority" needed for black progress. And, it is obvious that a "conservative trend" in the country is now on the rise -- with the "George Wallaces" getting more of a hearing, with law and order becoming a central issue in the body politics, with conservative Supreme Court nominees being the new fad, and with a Republican president seeing the "Southern Strategy" as the "Emerging Silent Majority" in future politics.

To be sure, we blacks have "won a few battles" through a "violent tactic." But, it appears that we blacks are now "losing the war" on the basis of "violent folly."

Let us be unmistakably clear about our position here regarding this issue of "Political Wisdom" for black progress. For, our position is not that of compromising the principle of black power in the black community. Blacks must organize themselves to have a "Black Political Power Base," since no group of people can be respected, or respect themselves, without it. Blacks must have an "Exclusive Dynamic."

However, our position is that of adding to this "Black Dynamic" other sources of power, so that blacks will always be in a "Creative Alliance" with others of similar interests in order to be working with a "51% Political Power Base" to effectuate political progress. Blacks must create
"Political Alliances" with others for "Majority Resources."
Blacks must have an "Inclusive Wisdom."

And, we are convinced that the black church -- with its established principle of an "Inclusive Ethic of Love" -- must be heeded in any legitimate marriage of the religious and social forces in the black community. And, we are also convinced that the black power movement must "concede" to this "Inclusivistic Principle" of the black church, or be responsible for much "self-destruction" in the black community.

To be sure, the black church must "concede" to the "Dynamic Principle" of the current black power movement. But, the concern here has to do with what the black power movement must "give up" to make itself fit for marriage with the black church for progress in the black community -- namely, an "unwise" tendency toward "violence as a tactic," which in the long run is not "Black Wisdom" but sheer "Black Folly."
III. RELEVANT POWER FOR BLACK METHODISM

The "great concession" suggested for the black power movement in the preceding chapter is a "bitter pill to swallow" — and particularly so, if the black church is not being called upon to "humble itself and give up something also" for the sake of a creative alliance in the black community. Thus, we recommend here two "great adjustments" that black Methodist bodies must make if they are to come to the wedding ceremony "properly dressed" — one having to do with the relation of these bodies to the "white church," and the other with their relation to "God."

A. Black Methodism and the Racist White Church. The "White Institutional Church," said Dr. Gay Wilmore in a class lecture in Black Theology, "is the kernal of racism in America." And, he went on to conclude that such seed of racism in the white church has been "perpetuated from its beginning to the present day." Further, this "racist program" was carried out abroad as well as at home in America.

For example, it is a historical fact that the white
missionaries who went to Africa paved the way for the exploitation of Africa. They went to Africa, persuaded the natives to look up and trust, while white mercenaries were stealing the riches of the African continent. In fact, it is well to note that the name of one of the ships that first brought black slaves to America was called "Jesus." Many of the missionaries thought the best way to convert a slave was to send him to the plantation fields in America.

When the slaves finally reached America they were brought to church on Sunday, so that their masters could keep an eye on them. But, they had to sit in the balconies of the churches; and, many times there were only peepholes in the walls, so that they could see the worship service.

Even when they had services of their own, they often couldn't have their own black preacher. The preacher had to be white; and, most of the time his text would be on something like "Slaves be obedient to your masters." Even some of the hymns that were sung in the church were written by "racists." For instance, the hymns "How Sweet The Name of Jesus" and "Amazing Grace How Sweet the Sound" were written by Sir John Newton who was a slave holder and who owned several ships that brought slaves from Africa.

Racism in the white church was not only present in the past; but, it still exists in it today. Many white denominations still own stock in firms that not only
exploit black people in America, but also in Africa where the natives of Africa receive only one-tenth of the salary that white workers receive for doing the same type work. And, there are many other instances of "white exploitation" of Africans, both sponsored and sanctioned by the white church.

In America there is no greater symbol of "racism" sponsored and sanctioned by the white church than the close relationship between Billy Graham and Richard Nixon -- with Billy Graham supposedly representing the "purest" in American religion and President Nixon known to represent the least concern for the poor and the black, being "palsy-walsies." And, the "racism" of white Christianity in America is most obvious as white churches all across the country are building education buildings for private school in order to defy the federal court order to desegregate all public schools.

It has been said by many black power advocates that Christianity is a whiteman's religion and that black folks don't have any business associated with it. Now, it should be made clear to the black power advocates that there is a great deal of difference between "Christianity" and Whiteness. For, the Spirit of God is not confined to a racist institution. But, it is clear that the white church has a very sick soul, and therefore, cannot perform the will of God in the world until it develops a healthy soul.
Many black Methodists realized hundreds of years ago that the white church had a sick soul and that they could not worship God as long as they were bound by the white Methodist church. So, many of them left -- with the AME Zion Church leaving the Methodist Church in New York in 1796; the AME Church leaving the white church in Philadelphia in 1787; and the CME Church leaving the white church about twenty years later. Thus, it is clear that the early black Methodists were people of protest; it was a church of revolt against a "racist religion."

Although many black Methodists left the white church, they still borrowed greatly from their white mother church. They borrowed its ritual, theology, and administrative system. But, they also brought into their newly formed black Methodist Churches black culture, something that was denied them while in the white Methodist Church.

Not all of the black Methodists left the white Methodist Church. The black Methodists that remained in the white mother church were segregated in the Central Jurisdiction. They were not considered as equals with their white Methodist brothers. They could not, in many cases, worship with whites. And, if they tried, they could very well have been forced out of the church by gunpoint.

The General Conference in 1968 outlawed the Central Jurisdiction "on paper." What will really take place between the whites and blacks in the United Methodist
Church in the future remains to be seen. But, one thing is clear. Most of the white Methodists that didn't want the black Methodists before 1968 still don't want them now. They still have the same prejudice and fear of black people. They still feel superior to them -- as is evident by the fact that the South Georgia Conference of the United Methodists is still fighting for a segregated church. They still don't want a black bishop; and, they still don't want a black preacher. All that most whites want in the United Methodist Church is a black janitor.

But, as ironic as it might sound, the worse thing that probably could have happened to the black Methodists of the United Methodist Church was the outlawing of the Central Jurisdiction. For now, they are defused among the whites that are only half way accepting them, if that much. And, it is highly possible that defused black Methodists can lose the little power that they have had through their token bishops and few administrators. For, the power in the white Methodist Church is not being shared with the black Methodists except with great reluctance. They give them just enough power to create the illusion that they are part of the system.

Jesus told his disciples that if they went to a country that did not want to hear them, to turn around and go. And, it is clear that the black Methodists are not wanted in the United Methodist Church and need to turn around and
They need to divorce themselves from that racist institution and start their "own black thing." Walking out of the General Conference during Holy Communion is not enough. They need to walk out of the white United Methodist Church!

To be sure, many black Methodists of the United Methodist Church are honestly trying to change the structure of the United Methodist Church from within. The black Methodists for Church Renewal organization is evidence of that. But, the twenty-million dollars which they receive for their budget will not be enough to effect change in the soul of the United Methodist Church. They will need much more than that. They will first have to come to the realization that they are an "unwelcomed baby;" and, as a child now fully grown they must leave the house in order to save the home from which they leave.

The story is told about a black man who attempted to worship in a white Methodist Church. When he entered the church, he was forced out. The next Sunday he returned, only to be put out again. He tried again and again; but, all his efforts were in vain. So, he prayed to the Lord. He said, "Lord, why don't they let me worship with them?" The reply of the Lord was, "Son, don't worry about worshipping with them, because I have been trying to get in that church for the last 350 years myself."

Black United Methodists! Don't worry about worship-
ping God in the United Methodist Church, because He is not there. Thus, you must look elsewhere to find Him, and then bring Him back to the white church. This is not only your task but the task of all black Christians -- including black Methodist bodies in particular.

Now, let it be clear that all white Methodists are not racists; neither are they void of the Spirit of God. But, the system in its totality is a racist one, and is therefore void of the Spirit of God. Thus, if black Methodist bodies are to come to the wedding ceremony with black power, they must first get a "divorce" from their old marriage partner -- namely, the "White Racist Church."

For, without this divorce, a marriage with black power for black community progress would be "illegal." And, further, all of the things born from such "illegal" marriage could only be "bastard children."

B. Black Methodism and Self-Renewal. To suggest a needed "divorce" by black Methodist bodies from the white Methodist group is merely an "organizational" consideration. And, thus, we now come to suggest a further consideration that is "spiritual" in nature -- namely, the need for "divorced" black Methodist bodies to "cleanse their own souls from every vestige of the racist stain" in a positive program of "Self-Renewal."

To say that "all" black Methodists need to find God
themselves first, in order to bring it to the white church is to imply that black Methodists have not found God, or that black churchmen have lost the Spirit of God. Again, this is not true for "all" black Methodists. For, many of them do have the Spirit of God.

But, just as the white church, the black church also in the totality of its spirit has lost the Spirit of God. To be sure, the first step is to get out of the white Methodist organization. But, the second step is to get white Methodism out of the bloodstream of black Methodism -- including the independent black Methodist bodies. In theory, they are not part of the white Methodist Church; but, in actuality, too many of the members of the AME, AME Zion, and CME Church try to be white Methodists "spiritually." We like their approval of us. We want them to pat us on our backs.

For example, in the CME Church up until very recently, all of the bishops were very "light-skinned." Why?? Does this not suggest that there is a "carry-over of white values" in these black Methodist bodies?

Just like the white church, the black church frequently is found being only interested in "playing church," as if it were a "game" or were just "going through the motions" of being a church. Often, black church leaders are too concerned with personalities, conferences, kicks, big cars, and two-hundred dollar suits. This is not to
say that anything is wrong with those things per se; but whatever happened to the "Spirit" that they had during slavery and during the civil rights movements? Why are so many young people leaving the black church?

It might not be such a bad idea if white folks put us back in slavery; because one thing about it we know. We might find God back in the cotton fields in the South a little more easily. Maybe, that is better than having the "nominal freedom" that we have now.

But, of course, that is evasive. For, God is not only found in the cotton fields of the South but He can also be found wherever there are people who earnestly seek Him. He can be found in the ghetto. He can be found in the hippie movement. He can be found in the student movements all across the country. He can be found in the black power movement. For, in all of these movements there is a dynamic force concerned about working for change for the betterment of all God's children.

But, these movements are like sheep without a shepherd. And, the black church needs to be the shepherd of these lost sheep. It needs to give them direction and light for the pathway to be followed rightly, since all of these movements are moving, though far too often they stray from the pathway. Thus, it follows that the black church should become the institution in this nation that can give leadership to all of the liberation movements that
are going on in this nation today, and even throughout the world.

The white church cannot perform this mission, because it sanctions the very system that exploits people. The white church is too much a part of the status quo. And, because of that, it has become static and a part of the sick soul of America.

The white church's soul in America needs to be saved. Whom will God send to save them? The black church must respond, "Here am I, Lord. Send me." But, before the black church can be sent, the black church itself must be "purged and refined and cleansed" through a divine process of self-renewal.
IV. THE NECESSITY OF MERGER FOR BLACK METHODISM

We now turn to the crucial issue of this essay — namely, the need for merger by all black Methodist bodies. For, it is our conviction that before the black church can perform this mission of salvation of the white Methodist Church and the entire white church, it must be united. The AME, AME Zion, CME, and the black Methodists of the United Methodist Churches need to merge together to make one United Black Methodist Church. For, only by doing this can they have a power base strong enough to save the white church and America from racism.

To illustrate this point, a story is told of several Indian chiefs meeting together to discuss a common problem. The whites were making their way west, and were uprooting the Indians with great success. One of the Indian chiefs began to walk around the camp fire where they were all sitting. As this chief walked around the camp fire, he would pick up twigs and would break them one by one. He said, "We are like these twigs. The white man comes, and he fights us one by one, and he takes us one by one."

Then, this chief began to walk around the fire once
again picking up twigs. Only this time, he held many of them together and tried to break them. He couldn't; because once they were all banded together, they had unbreakable power. And, for this same reason, all Black Methodists should band together. For, together they could stand; but, divided they will surely fall -- just like those divided Indians.

Now, some Black Methodists could deceive themselves and argue that such banding together is being tried through COCU. But, it is "cuckoo" for black Methodists to be part of that movement, when black Methodists can't get together themselves. The AME Zion and AME Church have been talking about getting together since 1796; and, they have not done it yet. All the talks of merger between the AME Zion, AME, and CME Churches have been only "nominal." They have not really been serious about getting together. It has been only something to "talk about" at connectional meetings.

In fact, they are not seriously considering the merger that COCU is "talking about," which is something that they shouldn't be serious about anyway. But, it does prove that black Methodists "love to talk merger," even though they never seem to get beyond the "talking stage."

But, now is the time for black Methodists to begin getting down to the business of "merger in fact." And, such factual merger should not be only between the CME, AME, and AME Zion Churches but should include the black
Methodists of the United Methodist Church as well because that is not their true church; and, the fifty-million dollars they spend on mission is not their true money. It's the white man's money in the United Methodist Church.

Why is it so difficult for black Methodists to merge, when their organizational structures and their theologies are almost identical? There is no reason why they shouldn't band together other than the age old problem of "traditionalism." And, it is tragic that these "weak" black churches would rather live in the past than be a church of the present and future with "merged power."

To illustrate the problem of traditionalism in the black Methodist Church, we cite this example. In the South Georgia Conference of the AME Zion Church, there are seven churches within a ten to fifteen mile radius of each other. All of the churches are pitifully small, with an average membership of about twenty souls. Very often they have worship services together, and support each other financially. Most of them meet only once a month. But, all of them struggle each year to survive.

Now, the reason why so many small black churches are located so near each other is that during slavery and post-slavery the people didn't have adequate transportation, and had to either ride a second-class buggy to church, or walk. So, each small community developed its own church solely for that reason. But, slavery time is
over; and, it is only a fifteen minute drive from all of
the churches to each other today. Then, why don't these
churches who are of the same denomination merge together?

A typical answer is this: "Rev., see that graveyard
out there. That's where my parents are buried; and, that
is where I'm going to be buried when I die. They wor-
shipped here in this church all of their lives; and I'm
going to worship in this church till I die."

Now, this is what is commonly called "graveyard
religion." For, as long as the people feel that way, their
churches will never really live. They could have one large
church with a full-time minister and be much more instru-
mental in their community. But they prefer to "die" with
the past.

Now, this same kind of "dying traditionalism" exists
in other areas of black church concern. For instance,
the AME Church finds it impossible to merge two of its weak
seminaries because of tradition. There is Payne Theologi-
cal Seminary in Ohio where most of the northern preachers
went to school; and, there is Turner Theological Seminary
which is part of ITC in Atlanta, Georgia, where most
southern preachers went to school. And, the AME Church
loses thousands of dollars each year, and does a poor job
of ministerial education, because they want to hold on to
"old tradition."

And, it is also because of tradition that Hood Theo-
logical Seminary never became part of the Interdenominational Theological Center. The AME Zion Church, too, would rather throw away thousands of dollars each year to hold on to an unaccredited seminary, with most of the students not having finished college and working on inferior Bachelors of Theology degrees.

Now, to have a Bachelor of Theology program is wise, since many black preachers cannot afford to come to school for seven years; especially the older ones. But, it is unfair for a student that is working towards a Masters of Divinity degree to attend classes with someone who has just completed high school. But, again, we would rather live in the past; even if it means that money is being lost and theological students are being cheated.

And, we could illustrate again and again how black Methodist bodies have permitted themselves to become "weakened to the point of death, though clinging to a decayed traditionalism." But, most blacks know this decaying story so well that it would be an insult to black intelligence to cite further evidences of "irrelevant traditionalism" in black Methodism hindering the fact of "merger for Black Power."

However, I would like to cite a model of "merged Black Power" that could be an inspiration for black Methodist bodies in future merger considerations. And, that exemplary model is the Interdenominational Theologi-
cal Center in Atlanta, Georgia. For, ITC is a major step forward in the quest for "Relevant Black Power" in theological education.

Four black denominations have pooled their meager resources to develop the best black theological seminary in the world -- with other black churches seeing this advantage and beginning to seek to join this merged venture in theological education. To be sure, ITC is not "perfect". But, it is still the "best" thing that has happened in the black church in many generations.

And, too, it can be said further that ITC is headed in the right direction to gain "Relevant Black Power."

For, it has publicly made known its intention to be a "Black Seminary," as its statement of purpose in the 1970-71 catalogue indicates.

Thus, it can be concluded that if a "Black Seminary" can be formed and prosper through pooling black resources in theological education, just imagine how prosperous a "black church" could be through merged enterprise. And, we would say further that it is high time that black Methodists quit merely "talking about merger" and get on with the business of black Methodist Church union, or face death in the future as "Separated Fools."

The issue, then, is clear. The black church is desperately needed, not only for saving the soul of white America, but also for saving the souls and bodies of the
depressed poor and the black in these critical times. For, the rumblings of war and violence and upheavals in our land will not cease, unless a redeeming force comes to the fore in these times.

And, it is this writer's conviction that such redeeming force must be initiated by the black church -- but, only if it can divorce itself from "White Racism" and renew itself under the "Spirit of God." If these two things can be done, and if black Methodism can put together a "Strong Black Merger," then it is possible that there can be a turning point in the history of this nation and the world. And, for that redeeming purpose -- and, for that redeeming purpose alone -- this black writer will work and pray for the merger of black Methodist bodies for genuine black power in the black community.