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F Keith Slaughter

*Interdenominational Theological Center*

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THE IMPACT POTENTIAL OF LIBERATIVE BLACK PREACHING ON THE "BEINGNESS" OF AFRICAN DESCENT PERSONS IN THE BLACK CHURCH CONTEXT: THE THERAPEUTIC DIMENSIONS OF BLACK PREACHING

By

F. Keith Slaughter
Bachelor of Science, History, Tuskegee University, 1991
Master of Divinity, Pastoral Care/Psychology of Religion, Morehouse School of Religion-ITC, 2003

A Dissertation
submitted to the faculties of the schools of The Atlanta Theological Association
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Theology
at The Interdenominational Theological Center Atlanta, Georgia 2009
This dissertation presents liberative Black preaching (LBP) as an optimal homiletic model designed to function as a therapeutic intervention for African descent persons in the Black church context. Built upon the foundation of a Black theological anthropology, this dissertation addresses Black self-identity that is informed by a universal African worldview (UAW). The dissertation argues that there is a recognizable diversity of contextuality among White and non-White persons and that it is possible to qualitatively describe generalizable contours of experience among Black people in the United States based on the particularity of the culture and the Black encounter with racism/White supremacy. The thoughts and feelings that emerge from this cultural encounter are appropriate for Africentric theological reflection. Historical evidence of the unfolding of Black thought with reference to Black religiosity and spirituality is presented as a preamble to the construction of the liberative Black preaching model.

The dissertation employs a mixed research method. A qualitative methodological paradigm is primarily employed, while quantitative tools are used in the data gathering process of the study. Variables were established as constitutive elements necessary for the construction of sermons that have
therapeutic value for African descent persons through collection of data during “applied research experiences” in six different Black church settings over a two month period. Analysis of the data indicates a generally positive impact on the cognitive and affective processes of the hearers of LBP.

The operating thesis of the dissertation asserts that liberative Black preaching’s concentration on counterbalancing the affects of White supremac
y upon African descent persons can alleviate Black pain, ameliorate Black suffering and function therapeutically similarly to the way in which conventional pastoral counseling functions. The operating assumption reveals the significance of therapeutic intentionality with respect to sermon construction by Black preachers given the relative importance of the preaching moment in the Black church context. The opportunity for regular, systematic intervention in the form of LBP provided by the voluntary participation in weekly communal worship experiences proves critical in the process of attaining optimal health which is “the best possible [state of] emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual, and socio-economic aliveness” for African descent persons.¹

DEDICATION

To the Ancestors upon whose shoulders I stand—whose beautiful Black skin was ripped and torn; whose blood flowed like rivers and tears like raindrops fell—whose forced labor rendered lakes of sweat so that others might benefit thereof; to those who preached, prayed, sang and worshipped; who strategized, organized, resisted, marched, fought and died believing that God would one day rise up and defend the oppressed as promised;

To the memory of my father, the late Rev. Dr. James E. Slaughter who always believed in me;

To my late uncle J. W. Tennial who taught me to work hard and to “do something, even if it’s wrong”;

To my mother, Mrs. Velma Tennial Slaughter, whose love, intellect, humor and courage created whatever good there is in me;

To my wife, Arnetta, for her indefatigable spirit, uncompromising commitment, unquestionable loyalty, wise counsel and enduring love;

To my precious children, Maya Grace Tennial, Mariah Lottie Stinnett, F. Keith, II and Mahli Brooks Kuykendall, “we do great things”,

To the millions of voiceless sufferers of injustice and oppression the world over; we shall overcome, àshe ...
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To all the freedom fighters...

With special thanks to the participants in the “applied research experiences”: Rev. A. A. W. Motley and the Lindsey Street Baptist Church family; Dr. Lonnie Oliver and the New Life Presbyterian Church family; Rev. Lavonia McIntyre and the Greater Hopewell C. M. E. Church family; Rev. Debra Grant and the St. John A. M. E. Church; Rev. Carlton Hollins and the Flat Rock U. M. C. family.

I have discovered two truths while on the journey: 1) life is all about relationships, and 2) the dissertation is a community exercise. All of the aforementioned persons, and others, whom through my carelessness were overlooked, have contributed in one way or another to my life and this work. “Because we are, I am...”
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A Call for Liberative Black Preaching

The dissertation presents liberalive Black preaching (LBP) as a communicative medium capable of counterbalancing some of the effects of White supremacy/racism upon Black people. Given their unique reality as victims of White supremacy/racism, African descent persons, in the Black Church context in the United States, need to hear sermons that address issues pertaining to survival, liberation and empowerment. These are vital concerns that emerge from the African American experience of oppression.

Black preachers, by and large, are not preaching sermons that address those concerns. Black people generally hear sermons informed by White Christian theology, which tends to foster docility and “deconscioutization” in the oppressed. Such preaching focuses on “otherworldly” ideas as opposed to relevant engagement of existing challenges.3

In many instances, the building of sermons preached to Black people lack a Black theological hermeneutic; instead sermons function as a re-presentation of White theological reflection gleaned from immersion in popular religious culture. Interviews with pastors who participated in the study conducted for this dissertation reveal a lack of concentration upon Black theology in the building of their sermons. As one preacher stated, “most African American churches [preachers] do not preach Black theology—we just don’t talk about it, we just don’t think about it—the word is the word.”

The “word”, however, is not “the word” because the “word” is interpreted within a particular context. It filters through a hermeneutical apparatus that intimately connects to worldview. Contextuality must receive consideration because social location ought to inform the words that are preached by the preacher. I postulate that because of 1) the internalization of White supremacy within the consciousness of the Black church and the Black preacher, 2) a general distrust of the academy as evidenced by the extant gulf between Black theology and “African American folk religion” practiced in the Black church, 3) a lack of familiarity with theologies other than “White” theology, and 4) a cultural shift from interdependence to “American individualism,” many are unable to see the folly of presenting sermons positioned outside of Black theology when they are preaching to Black people.

The Black church as a community institution has historically preserved the sanctity of Black life. The words of the Black preacher have provided both practical and spiritual nurture and guidance for the whole of the Black community. Although members of a cultural group may share similar experiences, Black church folk do not think and feel as a monolith. Thus, the community needs a broadly educated clergy to speak to the wide range of

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5 Andrews, 7-9.


experiences that inform the Black perspective. The community/people need a preaching model capable of addressing the cognitive/affective spheres of Black “beingness.” The delineation of specific elements essential to the construction of the liberative Black sermon may give the preacher paradigmatic guidelines to observe, providing markers that will aid in avoidance of harming or hindering the hearer of their sermon(s).

_Liberative Black preaching_ (LBP) can serve as the facilitating medium to heal the fragmented psyches of Black people as well as the institutional and ideological fractures within the Black community. The data show the effectiveness of LBP across the community’s diverse demographic categories.

**An Afrocentric Focus**

This work is intentionally grounded in Africentric (Afrocentric) theory. Psychological, psycho-social, historical, theological, ethical, religious and homiletic thought inform the pastoral theological reflection (third order reflection), by which LBP presents as _first order language_. This first order language is informed by Black liberation theology as _second order language_. As a person of African descent who consciously centers himself in Black thought, I honor the perspective that may emerge out of my social location in order to maintain the integrity of the research that grounds this project. Molefi Kete Asante defines “Afrocentricity” as a way of thinking and acting that places African “interests, values, and perspectives” at the center of one’s consciousness. He writes:

In regards to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of any analysis of African phenomena. Thus, it is possible for any

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one to master the discipline of seeking the location of Africans in a given phenomenon. In terms of action and behavior, it is a devotion to the idea that what is in the best interest of African consciousness is at the heart of ethical behavior. Finally, Afrocentricity seeks to enshrine the idea that Blackness itself is a trope of ethics. Thus, to be Black is to be against all forms of oppression, racism, classism, homophobia, patriarchy, child abuse, pedophilia, and White racial domination.9

Asante presses the claim that Afrocentricity, as a way of meaning-making, may operate within the thoughts and actions of the person.

This work will address the thoughts and feelings of persons who hear Africentric preaching. Adlerian psychological theory supports the idea that a person’s feelings, or emotional and affective experience, determine their reality and subsequent response. The psychological base upon which the research rests is provided by Adlerian individual or subjectivistic theory. For the purpose of this work, the research will focus on the cognitive and affective realms of human experience.

Though challenged by convention to concentrate the focus of this work on the thoughts and feelings of African decent men in particular, my research shows no significant difference between the feeling responses that Black men and women have to liberative Black preaching. Thus, I make an assumption of universality in the experience of oppression among humankind. The Black community presents as an interconnected whole. An Africentric treatment of the subject matter requires consideration of the thoughts and feelings of Black women and men. This assumption is confirmed by my experience in the counseling room as counselor/therapist as well as in the sanctuary as the

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preacher with both sexes. I sat with Black women and men, respectively, in the individual, marriage/couples as well as family/group context. While honoring the particularity of the sexes and the limitations of perspective concomitant to my maleness, I prefer to avoid splitting the responses of the community according to sex because White supremacy/racism is equally injurious to all Black people regardless of gender. The data show that liberative Black preaching has therapeutic value across demographic strata within the Black community.

The Link between Preaching, Pastoral Care, and Counseling

The therapeutic value of liberative Black preaching arises in large part by facilitating healing, reconciliation, survival, liberation, and empowerment in the hearer. Thus, I argue that LBP constitutes a form of pastoral care because it performs these basic functions of pastoral care. A brief discussion of the nature of pastoral care and counseling will establish the link between these practices and liberative Black preaching.

Pastoral Care, as a contemporary discipline emerges out of the operation-centered area that Seward Hiltner calls “shepherding.” Many view Pastoral Care as a subdiscipline of Pastoral Theology which is “a formal branch of theology resulting from study of Christian shepherding” which is the concern of the local pastor as well as specialists of the field. Pastoral Counseling is a specialized type of pastoral care. Its metaphorical construct of “care,” reflects itself in the expectation that the shepherd feeds, tends to and protects the sheep according

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to the biblical precedent. For Hiltner, the terms pastoral and shepherding are synonymous. Pastoring and/or shepherding are functions of the pastor or shepherd which includes the provision of "tender solicitous care" for members of the faith community as an ordained Christian representative.  

The content of the shepherding perspective for Hiltner includes the functions of healing, sustaining and guiding. Healing defines the process of helping to restore "functional wholeness" of the careseeker. Sustaining denotes "standing by" or the ministry of presence, while guiding provides non-coercive direction tailored to the needs, goals and idiosyncrasies of the person-served. The pastor and the sheep should know each other, which allow the pastor to attend to the needs and ailments of the sheep out of genuine care and knowledge of the plight of the person served. The caregiver intentionally makes the careseeker aware of the idea that experiences of health and "dis-ease" are filled with spiritual significance. Caregivers intentionally seek to bring awareness of the spiritual significance of experiences of health and "dis-ease" to careseekers.  

It is important to note that the utility of the "sheep-shepherd" metaphor may be far spent because post-modern convention will not allow for the implications of imbalance in such a power arrangement. However, for the purposes of this work, the metaphor is not intended to be condescending to the careseeker or nurturing of the pedantic proclivities of the pastor. The metaphor is

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12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.
retained in acknowledgement of the care that the shepherd provides the sheep, not the patriarchic literary style of the biblical text from which the metaphor is drawn.

William Clebsch and Charles Jaekle provide a classical definition of pastoral care in *Pastoral Care in the Historical Perspective*. They define “pastoral care” as “the ministry of the cure of souls...which consists of helping acts, done by representative Christian persons, directed toward the healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns.” They build on Hiltner’s model of healing, guiding and sustaining by adding the concept of “reconciling.” Reconciling refers to the re-establishment of broken vertical and horizontal relationships, suggesting a rebuilding of relationships between human and human, as well as human and Deity (God). I would add that reconciliation may refer to the reintegration of intrapsychic fragmentation within the self, as well.

Edward P. Wimberly, the foremost scholar in the area of African American pastoral care, offers a more contextual and contemporary definition of pastoral care. Wimberley states that pastoral care is a communal concept that “exists whenever persons minister to one another in the name of God.” His definition narrows what pastoral care means within the Black church context of the African American community. He says: “pastoral care is defined as the bringing to bear

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upon persons and families in crisis the total caring resources of the church." Moreover, for Wimberly pastoral care in the Black perspective includes healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling, which are the same elements identified by Hiltner and Clebsch and Jaekle.

Wimberly’s definition of pastoral care tends to include rather than exclude with reference to the role of persons in the caring act(s). Wimberly makes space for not only the pastor but for members of the congregation as a whole to participate in the bringing to bear of the total ministry of the church upon persons and families in crisis. The Wimberlian model presupposes the reality of racial discrimination as an “intractable reality” in the lives of African descent persons and fashions the elements of pastoral care to accommodate the variables presented by this historical problematic.  

Wimberly addresses the link between the pastoral activities of preaching and pastoral care. He writes of the intimate relationship between the preaching and the pastoral counseling moment. Pastoral theologian Dale P. Andrews agrees with Wimberly’s assessment of the role of Black preaching and the Black preacher in the provision of care and counseling to persons in the Black church. He goes further however to suggest that the Black preachers role is not merely symbolic and that “the role of preaching in pastoral care is more

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16 Ibid,18.


than symbolic."\textsuperscript{19} He continues, "When preaching is properly weighed in response to the assault of racial oppression, it actually figures prominently in pastoral care, particularly in the healing and reconciling functions."\textsuperscript{20}

In addition to naming healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling concepts as paradigmatic for the provision of pastoral care, pastoral theologian Carol Watkins Ali expands the parameters of care to include the functions of nurturing, empowering, and liberating.\textsuperscript{21} Nurturing speaks to the commitment of the caregiver to provide presence over an extended period of time (if need be) until the careseeker can undertake the life/struggle again for themselves. Empowering involves reconnecting persons with their God-given agency (power) and \textit{kujichagulia} (self-determination) so that they may "claim their rights, resist oppression, and take control of their own lives."\textsuperscript{22} Liberating means to bring persons to the awareness of the appropriateness and necessity of action, personal and political, designed to eliminate oppression in their lives as well as in the lives of those persons living in their community.\textsuperscript{23}

Once the preacher discerns the "inner needs" of the congregation, preaching becomes pastoral counseling as the preacher can clearly see what it is that s/he believes and thus needs to say.\textsuperscript{24} Pastoral counseling happens when

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Andrews, 28.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Watkins Ali, 9.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 121.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Edmund H. Linn, \textit{Preaching as Counseling} (Valley Forge, PA: The Judson Press, 1966), 11.
\end{itemize}
the pain of living a particular sub-optimal reality is addressed, alleviated and ameliorated. The data will show that liberative Black preaching, as an act of pastoral care and counseling, concerns itself with addressing, alleviating and ameliorating Black pain and suffering.

Central Concepts

A set of conceptual ideas comprises the central argument presented here. The first of which serve as clarification with reference to terms used to describe the ethnicity of the persons with whom the study concerns itself. The next group of terms defines the preaching model as proposed in the dissertation. The final group of terms in this section name and define oppressive systems and possible responses to those systems.

For the purposes of this work, the terms "African American," "African descent," "African descended," "African(s) in America," "African," and "Black" are synonymous and may be used interchangeably. The terms mean to describe people who identify with the cultural group experience of "Blackness" in the US. Through consanguinity, these persons share lineage of at least one parent which may trace to the continent of Africa. These people may also be referred to as "Diasporan Africans" or "persons of the African diaspora." I will use the term "African" to describe persons born on the continent of Africa, though the author operates with an understanding that geography is less important than genetics, ontology, psychology and ethos in the expression of a person's "beingness." "European descent," "Euro descended," "White," and "persons who classify..."
themselves as White are terms/phrases that are employed to describe White/European Americans and Europeans generally.

I coin the term _liberative Black preaching_. _Liberative_ refers to that which promotes justice, humanity, creativity, agency and wholeness in every area of people activity to include the overarching categories of religion (ethical/moral situatedness), academics, politics, economics and society; it is that which frees. _Black preaching_, as used in this dissertation, refers to a unique form of Divinely-authorized communication that evolved out of African oral tradition as informed by the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Bible. It emerges out of critical reflection upon the personal and communal suffering of Black people under White supremacy as an oppressive psychosystemic reality. Black preaching constitutes an oral/optical presentation comprising a combination of scriptural exegetical work, Black theological discourse, social critique and commentary. In addition, it serves as sacred performance art designed to promote health, wholeness and communion between persons and Divinity, community and self. _Therapeutic_ refers to that which alleviates (lessens) the traumatic effects and ameliorates (makes better) the feelings of pain, abuse, diminishment, and helplessness that accompany the superimposition of White supremacy/racism on the “beingness” of Black people.

_Racism_ refers to the psychological assumption and the concomitant institutional, and systemic practices of diminishing the humanity of persons classified as non-White, by persons who classify themselves as White, and/or by those who identify with White supremist ideology. _White supremacy_ refers to
thoughts, feelings and actions that emerge out of the belief that persons who classify themselves as White possess more value than non-White persons. This idea of greater value circumscribes every area of people activity to the detriment of non-White persons in the form of injustice, inequity and hegemony. An insidious yet prevalent mode of thinking, White supremacy conceptualizes Euro-descended persons, thoughts, ideas and actions as superior and dominant while relegating African descent persons, thoughts, ideas and actions as somehow inherently inferior in all areas of people activity.

The affects of racism/White supremacy manifest in many Black people as “domination fatigue,” a negative response to racially offensive stimuli. I propose domination fatigue as a concept to describe the intrapsychic distortion and physical malady that manifest in African descent persons as a result of constant exposure to deception, confusing double messages, and psycho-social violence—hallmarks of White supremacy. “Equidynamic resistance” reflects one mode of positive response to racism. It refers to a conscious stance that presupposes the cancellation of negative energy generated from White supremacist ideology and actions (microaggressions or offensive mechanisms) through a matching of “justifying force” which neutralizes the effects of the perceived aggression.

**Informing Theories**

This interdisciplinary work draws on a number of primary informing theories to elaborate on the key concepts as noted below.
Racism and White Supremacy

African Americans suffer tremendously in our relationship with persons who classify themselves as White and who practice White supremacy, whether consciously or unconsciously as a part of systemic racism. The psychological impact of violence and forced subordination severely impacts Blacks. A number of authors have addressed this issue including Reginald L. Jones, A. Kathleen Hoard Burlew, W. Curtis Banks, Harriette Pipes McAdoo, Daudi Ajani ya Azibo, Asa Hilliard, Na'im Akbar, and Juwanzaa Kunjufu. Neely Fuller, Jr. states that “if you do not understand White Supremacy (Racism)—what it is, and how it works—everything else that you understand, will only confuse you.” This statement is helpful in explaining the madness that seems to grip African descent persons and provides a reference point from which this study may proceed. For Fuller, the presence of justice or the lack thereof in the world reflects the a priori issue.

Africentric psychiatrist Dr. Frances Cress Welsing writes the definitive set of deconstructive essays with reference to the systematic oppression of non-White peoples. In The Isis Papers, a culmination of 18 years of research and scholarship, Welsing named systems and classified pathologies according to an


African centered thought process. Though some scholars such as Akbar, K. K. K. Kambon, Jawanza Kunjufu, and Thomas Parham see her work as seminal, Michael Eric Dyson interprets her work as "contorted reasoning."\textsuperscript{27} I find her offering indispensable in coming to an understanding of White supremacy domination and its affects upon African descent persons.

Neely Fuller, Jr. greatly inspired Dr. Welsing's work. She credits Fuller as the "very first victim of racism to understand it [racism] as a global system of organized behavior (thought, speech and action) for White supremacy domination in all areas of people activity."\textsuperscript{28} A seminal text, Fuller's \textit{The United Independent Compensatory Code/System/Concept: A Textbook/Workbook for Thought, Speech and/or Action For Victims of Racism (White Supremacy)} painstakingly systematizes and identifies the nine areas of people activity as economics, education, entertainment, labor, law, politics, religion, sex and war. He contends that racism permeates each of the aforementioned. He produced the work to "promote thought, speech, and/or action specifically designed to help reveal truth, promote justice, and promote correctness."\textsuperscript{29} This text provided an anchoring place that kept me centered and focused on the research problem.

Welsing's initial essay, \textit{The Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation and Racism (White Supremacy): A Psychogenetic Theory and World Outlook}, which attempts to locate the source of White supremacy, is informed by Fuller's work.


\textsuperscript{28} Frances Cress Welsing, M.D., \textit{The Isis Papers} (Chicago: Third Word Press, 1991), ix.

\textsuperscript{29} Fuller, 2.
Welsing declares that racism exists as an ego defense mechanism rooted in reaction formation as the European’s response to their numerical inadequacy and genetic or color inferiority.30 Reaction formation is the psychological term for “conversion of something desired and envied but wholly unattainable, into something discredited and despised.”31 She theorizes that White people, consciously or unconsciously, began to view Blackness as vile, ugly, disgusting and non-human because they could not be Black. Racism, Welsing posits, is the response of persons who classifies her/himself as “White” to the inevitability of genetic annihilation by non-White people. At root, Dr. Welsing’s work attempts to make sense of why Black people are the victims of oppression. Her work informs my theory on how our collective conscious and unconscious develops and stores culture that stifles, limits, cripples and kills.

Worldview

It is clear to me that we engage in warfare as defined by Random House College Dictionary as “any conflict or competition suggesting active hostility.”32 If indeed “war is hell” (as Union Civil War general William Tecumseh Sherman has been credited with observing) Whites and Blacks are at war and have been in this conflictual state for centuries.33 Black people incessantly grapple with the problem of the “undeclared” state of the warfare in which we are involved.

30 Welsing, 4-5.

31 Ibid.

32 Random House College Dictionary, s.v. “Warfare.”

Indeed, the enslaved persons' "legal" status as property, not person, created
paradoxical space for the open furtiveness of undeclared war. The necessity of
this warfare may emerge out of the worldview that presupposes a "scarcity of
resources" for which groups must compete to ensure their survival.34

Linda James Myers, Marimba Ani, and Jacob Carruthers aided in the
clarification of the differences in worldview between African descent and
European descent persons. Lewis Gordon and Leonard Barrett have written
texts that aided in the understanding and development of my claims with
reference to "beingness" equating to Blackness.35

It seems that African descent people in America perceive the physicality of
war while ignoring the covert essence thereof. I find Stephanie Coontz' account
of how Euro descended persons perceive persons outside of the "family" to be
"external enemies" in The Way We Never Were as helpful in my understanding of
the dynamics of this struggle.36 She quotes a 1950's era husband who views the
family as "the one group that in spite of many disagreements internally always
will face its external enemies together."37 If allowed to extrapolate upon that
conception of social interrelation, it is plausible that persons who classify
themselves as White may perceive that preemptive aggression towards Blacks is

34 Linda James Myers, Understanding an Afrocentric World View: Introduction to an Optimal

York: Routledge, 1997); Leonard E. Barrett, Soul-Force: African Heritage in Afro-American


37 Ibid.

appropriate. Whites maintain this aggression as evidenced by their hostile insistence upon having an elevated and advantaged arrangement and attitude with reference to all things African.\textsuperscript{38}

Further, African descent persons have been deceived into a delusion of being at peace when merely experiencing an intermittent cessation of the physical violence inflicted upon them, which is an historical hallmark of our interaction with White persons. The psychological warfare through "crazy-making" seems to be the preferred way by which Whites currently engage Black people.\textsuperscript{39} Through "double-binding relationships," dominators communicate conflicting messages to their victims—fostering instability in the oppressed. Power imbalance between dominator and oppressed person produces anxieties within the oppressed. This anxiety manifests as intrapsychic disturbance ranging from domination fatigue to profound depression and death in Black people.

\textbf{Theological and Pastoral Theological Perspectives}

James Cone and Dwight Hopkins provide the foundation for the theological grounding of this dissertation.\textsuperscript{40} I also consulted the work of Black pastoral theologians such as Homer Ashby, Jr., Edward P. Wimberly, Carol Watkins Ali, Dwight Hopkins, Dale P. Andrews, Lee Butler, Jr., Kelley Brown


\textsuperscript{40} For more details on theological grounding, see James Cone, \textit{Black Theology and Black Power} (New York: Seabury Press, 1969) and Dwight Hopkins, \textit{Introducing Black Theology of Liberation} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).
Douglas, and Carolyn Akua McCrary who have contributed to the discourse on God’s activity in the midst of a White supremacist context.\(^{41}\)

For the discussion on the history of the Black church and its’ preachers, I consulted the work of Love Henry Whelchel, Jr., C.E. Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, Gayraud Wilmore, J. Deotis Roberts, and Albert J. Raboteau.\(^{42}\) Riggins Earl, Jr. and Lawrence Levin aided me in understanding the psycho-social disposition of the ancestral enslaved persons.\(^{43}\) They along with John Edgar Wideman and Milton Sernett’s edited volumes provided much needed primary source material that gave voice to the ancestors within the lines of this dissertation.\(^{44}\)


Methodology

I primarily employ a qualitative methodological framework in the presentation of this research project. However “mixed-methods” research tools are utilized in the data gathering process. Qualitative research is defined by Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln as such:

The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry.  

More specifically, I will use hermeneutic phenomenology as the qualitative lens that anchors the research project. Hermeneutic phenomenology as a qualitative method has to do with epistemological and ontological conceptualization of what people experience, how they make meaning out of their experience as well as providing insight to how the experience affects the “beingness” of the experiencing persons.  

Elements of critical race theory were used to allow presentation of the cultural nuances of the work space from an intentionally subjectivistic perspective. Critical Race Theory, a derivative of Critical Legal Study (CLS), advocates the authentication of voices that emerge from cultures other than the dominant culture. Critical race theory concerns itself with how race, racism and

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power affect persons within a perspective that includes “economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious.” [my emphasis]47

The dissertation will also employ quantitative research and data-gathering method. To determine if certain thoughts and feelings were had by persons who experienced liberative Black preaching (LBP) in the Black church setting, I utilized the “post-sermon survey.” Hence, this dissertation will commence by engaging the idea of “beingness” as the index of Blackness after establishing a theological bases for reflection.

Although I suggest the presence of particular variables in the liberative Black sermon; the variables exist and operate within the process of the preaching. Thus, this study does not emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, but rather emphasizes the process of liberative Black preaching. Its potential affect is predicated on what Black people know about themselves in relation to God as compared to what Black people can know about themselves in psychotherapeutic space that is mediated by an Africentric orientation.

My reason(s) for preferring to use the “post sermon survey” as a quantitative tool and part of my mixed method for of the hearers of the message, as opposed to a “pre-post test” method assessing the experience, has to do with my understanding of the socially-constructed nature of the reality of the Black church, its’ practices, order, and idiosyncrasies. This socially constructed reality

includes the quality of relationship between pastor and congregation, the quality of relationship between the visiting preacher/researcher and the pastor and congregation, and the limitations imposed upon each participant in the worship experience by the liturgy, tradition, order of worship or programmatic paradigm of the denomination of local church.

**Risks of Study**

The Black church has a tendency to evoke a sense of the “sacred” upon the worship experience and especially upon the preaching event. The worship experience is designed to create space for service to God through thanksgiving, praise, and the gathering of persons to be “spiritually fed by the word of God.” Scriptures like, Habakkuk 2:20 (...the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.) and First Corinthians 14:40 (...let all things be done decently and in order) are generally taken out of context by worship leaders to control the behavior of the worshipper. Such texts are used to set the parameters of decorum in the worship setting of the Black church to modalities of silence or strict adherence to the directives of the worship leader, e.g. stand up, sit down, shout, give money, “tell your neighbor,” etc. Pastors are given authority by the congregation to regulate the proceedings of the worship service.

Additionally, a presumed disconnect exists between the academic rendering of Black theology and the theology of the Black church. This disconnect casts suspicion within the Black church on the motives of the

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49 Andrews, 36.
academy and by extension the researcher.\textsuperscript{50} These factors, along with the tendency of persons in an institutional setting (such as the church) to feel as if they are under the Foucaultian “gaze” of possessors of power, serve to limit that which may be perceived to be appropriate behavior in the Black church context.\textsuperscript{51}

To a large degree, the quality of the relationship between the pastor and the people is determined by the pastor’s ability to represent the desires of the people. S/he has permission to lead as long as her/his leadership follows the direction which the congregation determines to be right. Thus, the introduction of experimental elements into the realm of worship could prove to be a risky undertaking that is ill-advised.

**Description of the Study**

Data were collected through the use of an anonymous post-sermon survey from September through October 2008 in Black church congregations in Atlanta, College Park, Lithonia, and Columbus, all in the state of Georgia. The survey included eleven (11) questions. The first four questions asked for basic demographic information. The next two asked for information with reference to worship affiliation and practice, followed by a question that inquired as to the educational level of the participant. The final four questions asked for information having to do with the thoughts and feelings of the persons experiencing the preaching moment.


\textsuperscript{51} Michael White and Daniel Epston, *Narrative Meanings to Therapeutic Ends* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 68-69.
After an initial call of introduction, I met with the pastors of the five different churches representing five different denominations providing a diverse representation of the Black church. The denominations selected were Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.), Christian [formerly "colored"] Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.); Presbyterian (PCUSA), and United Methodist (U.M.C.). Data were also collected in an ecumenical worship setting during the chapel hour on the campus of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

After an explanation of the research project, the pastors decided to allow me to preach an intentionally liberative Black sermon to the congregations for which they provide leadership. The pastor's introduction of this preacher included an explanation of the purpose of my attendance, their understanding of my research, a general endorsement of the work and an extending of opportunity to voluntarily participate in the research through completion of a "post-sermon survey." I wrote and delivered the sermon "I Recommend Jesus" (Luke 4:14-20) before each of the congregations during the eight o'clock or eleven o'clock worship service. After preaching the sermon, I explicated the research project to the congregation and provided the church ushers with the surveys for dissemination. After five to seven minutes, I received the surveys back from the ushers who had collected them.

The collected data from the surveys was then entered into the Epi-Info© database created for this project. The data was prepared for analysis and discussion after the final applied research preaching experience.
Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study is the difficulty of measuring how merely being the “hearer of the word” impacts, transforms, causes a person to become a better self. What determines whether or not the self is bettered? What intrapsychic indicators exist as proof of progress in areas of relationship community wholeness of African descent/Black persons? What of the general impact of external factors upon the intrapsychic processes and how might the external be internalized to effect menticide in the African descent persons? Another limitation may include the inability to exhaustively assign variables. Questions may arise around whether the findings may be generalized across the entirety of the Black church context because of the diversity of Black people and the limited sample size of the study.52 This study does not present inferential analysis.

Description of the Chapters

Chapter I, “Introduction”, provides the reader with a general overview of the dissertation. The methodological approach to the development of this document is discussed as well as evidence of reflection upon the pastoral care concern of the research. A cursory reflection of the references and resources used in the construction of the document are found in this chapter. The research issue and problem is stated in this section and one solution is offered in the form

52 Stephen Rasor and Christine Chapman cite six studies that surveyed Black church folk. The sample sizes of those studies ranged from 141 churches/3637 worshipers and pastors with the ICAM 1998 study to Members Voice Project (MVP) 2005 U.S. Black Congregational Study which surveyed 400 congregations and 13,000 pastors and worshipers. The largest study was the FACT 2001 study of congregations in the US with 14,301 responses. This study recorded the responses of 388 participants gathered from “applied research experiences” in six different worship venues. See Rasor and Chapman, Black Power from the Pew: Laity Connecting Congregations and Communities (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2007), 8-9.
of *liberative Black preaching* (LBP) as a homiletic model. Significant terms are defined in this chapter along with a brief discussion of the study's limitations.

Chapter II, entitled "Toward a Black Theological Anthropology," addresses the inadequacy of white theological anthropology to speak to the needs of Black people. The work of J. Deotis Roberts, Dwight Hopkins and Marimba Ani is primarily consulted in the deconstruction of White theological anthropology and its' perception of non-Whites. The pastoral theological work of Carol Watkins Ali, Homer Ashby, Jr. and Edward P. Wimberly frames a discussion of Black survival in a White supremacist context. The work of Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey and William H. Grier and Price M. Cobb is used to provide evidence of the psychological residuals of slavery and the affects of the internalization of White supremacy on Black people currently.

Chapter III, "On "Beingness": Black Self-Identity and the Universal African Worldview", begins with defining the concept "beingness" and describes "beingness" as Blackness. In this chapter, the claim is made that a *universal African worldview* is operative in the lives of most Black persons and that that worldview is optimal for them. Marimba Ani, Linda James Myers, Ira Carruthers and Albert Raboteau inform the critical discourse on the appropriateness of a Eurocentric worldview for Black persons. The intrapsychic injury suffered by Blacks as a result of the imposition of an alien worldview upon their "beingness" is discussed in terms of conditions and diagnoses that are prevalent among African descent persons in the United States. These injuries predispose them to hear LBP.
Chapter IV, "A Cursory Overview of the History of the Black Church, Black Preaching and Black Preachers," addresses the historical antecedents that inform the construction of liberative Black preaching. Beginning in the African context, this chapter traces the development of the Black church and the preachers that were called out of the once “invisible institution” into lives of sacrifice as representatives of God and heralds of the God’s divine proclamations. The centrality of the biblical text receives consideration as well as the significance of the “call” in preparation of the Black preacher. A treatment of the Black preacher as leader of the “civil rights movement” through the Black church is also undertaken. The chapter concludes with an examination of the “conjure” idea as addressed through engagement of the work of Homer Ashby, Jr. in *Our Home Is Over Jordan.*

Chapter V, “Liberative Black Preaching: The Analysis of an Optimal Homiletic Model" comprises several sections; the first of which deals with deconstruction as a homiletic method. The chapter contains a review of Pruyser’s variables for pastoral assessment, a theology of preaching and an exploration of the foundational tenets of Adlerian psychological theory—the neo-Freudian variety of psychological theory also known as “subjectivistic” or “individual” psychology.

Chapter VI includes the manuscript for the sermon that was preached during the “applied research experiences.” This chapter includes the preacher’s impression of each experience as well as a bulleted presentation of the results of

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the "post sermon surveys" and a brief analysis of the data gleaned from the surveys.

**Conclusion**

This dissertation seeks to construct an intentionally therapeutic homiletic model for the Black church. The concentration on defining the parameters of what it means to be Black is a necessary component of the study. The necessity to focus upon the historical development of an oppressed people proves vital to establish the construction of the model. Deconstruction of preaching as well as the context in which preaching takes place must occur if the practice of preaching is to be therapeutic for the hearers.

This dissertation acknowledges the utility of traditional scholarship in pastoral counseling, psychology, theology and homiletics. The intent of this dissertation is to build upon that scholarship and the work of Black Africentric scholars to create opportunities for further reflection on how the betterment of Black people might be achieved through preaching in a suboptimal context. The reality of the disparate experiences of Christians according to racial lines should not be surprising to the reader. Thus, this work resists the tendency to push to the unconscious those unbearable realities; so that the discourse in pastoral counseling might intentionally expand to include communal ways of helping that are informed by African sensibilities.

The preaching moment on Sunday morning is the most anticipated time in the work week and indeed in the life of many African Americans. The layered complexity of the psycho-social context of Black people requires intense study
because it morphs at an incredible pace as the future becomes history with each passing day. Preachers must take care to insure that sacred time in the life of the Black church is not profaned because of ignorance, sloth, frozenness in dead tradition or inability to resist White supremacy. An intentional application of the tenets of liberative Black preaching could reveal that there is medicine in the preaching.
CHAPTER II

Toward a Black Theological Anthropology of Enfleshment

God is not a human being, that he should lie, or a mortal that he should change his mind… (Numbers 23:19a, NRSV)

Can Ethiopians change their skin or leopards their spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil. (Jeremiah 13:23, NRSV)

Introduction

Research and theological reflection about what it means to be human, which includes being connected with other humans and God, requires honesty about my personal reality and the reality of the humans to whom I am connected and disconnected. Such honesty also requires sober judgments about how I feel about and experience the outcomes of the interaction between God and the persons with whom God interacts. I have come to a subjectivistic, phenomenological, and existentialist theological perspective based on what I perceive as reality from my experience, that the possibility of people and their ideas about God being subject to change is unlikely. Implicit in this judgment are both theological and anthropological claims.

The above quoted scriptures speak to an understanding in the Pentateuch as well as in the Old Testament prophecy of Jeremiah that neither God nor people are apt to change. Possession of the belief that change can happen is faith; possession of a sense of proleptic optimism constitutes hope. Though I do not subscribe to a hopeless theological anthropology, my focus certainly leans toward the historic, what is and has been, more so than the futuristic, what might be. Liberative Black preaching is directed toward the present hopelessness in the
lives of many people in the "here and now." I join Black theologian, J. Deotis Roberts, in an expressed skepticism with reference to a theology of hope. He writes: "The so-called theology of hope has a good psychological ring for a hopeless people. It does not, however, ring true to the Black experience."¹ He continues, "Black theologians should be most concerned about their present. Unless something happens in the present, there will be little to hope for in the future..."²

I base, in large part, this pessimism about the possibility of change on my discernment of little, if any, substantial change in the treatment of Black people since our introduction to the Christian God through European Christians. Despite Christian affirmations that all human beings are created in the image of God, very little, if any, real power transferred from the former enslavers to the formerly enslaved. Christian ethicist Miguel De La Torre writes: "Regardless of the virtues expounded by the dominant culture, there still exist self-perpetuating mechanisms of oppression that continue to normalize and legitimize how subjugation manifests itself in the overall customs, language, traditions, values, and laws of the United States."³ He continues, "Our political systems, our policing authorities, our judicial institutions, and our military forces conspire to maintain a

² Ibid.
status quo designed to secure and protect the power and wealth of the privileged few.4

There is a consistent negativism associated with Black peoples’ interaction with White people that has rendered us crippled - religiously confused, psychologically hobbled, sociologically pathological, politically impotent, economically inept and culturally bereft. The historical and contemporary experience of Black people leaves me with only a vestigial hope to balance against a total lack of optimism about the possibility of White people and their idea of God changing. White theologies and theological anthropologies damage Black people and inadequately speak to the reality of Black people’s experience, since these theologies keep in place oppressive systems of power. As a consequence, a Black theological anthropology, which arises from and speaks to Black experience, is needed for the liberation of Black people.

In this space, I attempt to re-enflesh the bones of theological anthropology by initially taking an historical look at Black reality, probing the potential for Black survival given the cultural assault that we unceasingly suffer. Reviewing the psychological results of the enslavement of Black persons’ bodies, minds, and souls is a necessary task to envision a Black theological anthropology. Liberation theology is used to mediate this discourse. Through this exercise, it is hoped that a reformed theological anthropology, as an enfleshed Black theological anthropology, will emerge that may serve to empower sufferers of domination and oppression.

4 Ibid.
A Black Theo-Cultural Reality: The Implicit Sanctioning of Violence Against Blacks in White Theological Anthropologies

A basic assumption informing this work is that theological claims are a product of psycho-social cultural processes. This assumption is informed by the position of theologian Dwight Hopkins whose idea of culture is informed by Jesse N. Mugambi. Hopkins conceives of culture as being constituted metaphorically by "the seven pillars of God's house." The seven constituents are listed as follows: 1) politics, 2) economics, 3) aesthetics, 4) kinship, 5) recreation, 6) religion and, 7) ethics. For Hopkins, "...culture is not pristine, neutral, romantic or statically given. It operates in a flow that is animated by the spirit (for Christians, God's spirit) in contention with adverse spirits (those that harm life and systematize a monopolization of God's creation by one group)."

Though no particular pillar presents as preeminent, religion serves as the primary motivator of behavior operating in a dynamic relationship with the other pieces that form culture. My position is that all people activity is informed by a peoples' idea of who God is or is not (theological claims) and what is generally understood to be allowable with reference to relationality between people informed by separate and distinct cultures (anthropological claims).

Succinctly, what people claim God says about people determines how people treat others inside and outside of their particular culture. What is it that informs how persons of European descent interact with Africans, with each other,

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5 Dwight Hopkins, Being Human: Race, Culture and Religion (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 78.

6 Ibid.
and with God? A Euro-centric reading of the biblical text proposes that God has decided that “White folks” are to be “in charge;” and non-White peoples’ substantiate their existence only by their capacity to serve and obey people who refer to themselves as White. A theological anthropology established upon this paradigm is at least idolatrous and perhaps even demonic, as theologian Dwight Hopkins has suggested.7

Such an idolatrous theological anthropology leads persons who classify themselves as White to think of themselves as having “become” God for non-White people. Indeed, theologian J. Deotis Roberts, the venerable professor and author, states that people who refer to themselves as White “desire to be ‘as gods’ to (B)lacks” and that Whites are “angered” if African descent persons dare resist obsequiously responding to the delusion of White divinity.8 African descent person’s experience with Europeans/European Americans teaches them to avoid stirring “White folks” ire. White aggression and violence toward Blacks is widely documented. Writes Roberts:

It is the overt violence of Whites that has crippled Blacks emotionally as well as physically. The pain inflicted upon Blacks both on slave ships and in the dark ghettos makes one of the darkest chapters in the history of the human race. The lynching, beating, and maiming of Blacks have been “a popular sport” of respectable “God-fearing” White citizens of America, North and South, throughout the history of this republic.9

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7 Hopkins, 5.
8 Roberts, 57.
9 Ibid.,101.
Scholarship by White authors also addresses the tendency toward violence and aggression as a way of being for European descended persons. Prolific Canadian author Michael Bradley attempts to locate the source of European aggression in their prehistoric development. He admits limitations of his study that arise from the many "defense mechanisms designed to obscure the profile of our Caucasoid racial personality." He cites the tendency of European descended persons to reject being identified as racist while simultaneously practicing racist behaviors.

The words of Marimba Ani (formerly known as Dona Richards) echo this claim that persons of European descent profess one thing while acting in a contradictory manner. Ani describes this tendency toward incongruence as the embodiment of the "rhetorical ethic" which allows for deception to function as the normative mode of interaction for the White/Black encounter. Ani describes the "rhetorical ethic" and its cultural effect within Eurocentric theological anthropology in the following way:

The fact remains that the "Christian ethic" never informed or reflected characteristic European behavior. The behavior pattern it suggests never corresponded with the European cultural self-image. That is the ethnological point. It always represented an image that Europeans found to be politically expedient in terms of their expansionist and exploitative objectives with regard to other people. And this relationship to the nature of the culture is not a new one; to the contrary, it is an aspect of the cultural affinity between the developing archaic Western empire and the Christian formulation—a reason for the early cooptation of the latter.11


She continues to describe the consequences of the "rhetorical ethic":

Raw aggressiveness towards other people would have been resisted by them much more successfully without the use of the "rhetorical ethic". With it, Europeans could elicit the cooperation of those within the cultures they sought to conquer. To view European imperialism as beneficent "universalism" and "altruism" also helps to enlist the aid of those individuals within European culture who need to view themselves as "world saviors"; they can encourage the imperialistic pursuit in the form of European paternalism.  

Ani believes that the European imperialist policymakers who instituted it as the religion of state never embraced the core tenets of Christianity (e.g., love, respect, justice, faith, equality, etc.). She posits that the "rhetorical ethic" was employed to make unbridled aggression, which is characteristic of European cultural domination, more palatable for those Whites motivated by a sense of justice. However, the assuaging of White guilt was not the primary intent. She suggests that the Christian ideals packaged within the "rhetorical ethic" were designed from inception for imposition upon others who were not, as it were, "hip to the jive." This means that so-called Christian values served merely as necessary ideas for the creation of deceived, docile, deconscioutized creatures devoid of the consciousness necessary to desire self-determination.

Because Whites have internalized this "rhetorical ethic," Black people inherently possess a sense of awe and fear of Whites, which makes the business of critically analyzing the behaviors of White folk a tenuous undertaking for African descent scholars. Since the introduction of the Church to Blacks through

12 Ibid.

European missionaries, oppression has been, and, to a very real extent, continues to be, the hallmark of Black existence. Given this reality, any Black theological anthropology must have foundation upon the idea of resistance. Ideas associated with psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology and other cognate disciplines inform the construct of a theological anthropology. A variety of voices seem to aid in the diversification of the discussion, so making the reformation of a theological anthropology possible.

I resonate with the phrase borrowed from feminist theorist Carol Hanisch that: "the personal is political."14 I also suggest that the personal is religious, academic, political, and economic, as well as social. All people should recognize the personal and communal aspects/nature of culture as well as the interconnectedness of persons throughout history. Due to deep psychological scars and imbedded hermeneutics of error with reference to peoples’ notion of the Divine/human relationship, we are cast in molds of imperfection that can render, at best, fractured souls.

**Will African Descended People Survive?**

Any rational consideration of the enterprise known as theological anthropology would presuppose the viability of the persons presumed to have connection to Divinity. However, when one observes the nature of the relationship between God and African descent persons, one must wonder how it is that thought on this order might develop? Given the ideas about God and

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current Black religious, academic, political, economic and social conditions, Black cultural viability seems to be at risk. The survival of African descent persons is speculated upon by many. Black theologians actually wonder aloud if Black people will be able to escape the psycho-systemic vacuum in which we are lost. Can we be reintroduced to our true and real selves as we were prior to our enslavement by Europeans and Americans?

I refer to the recovery process as “reconscioutization”. Pastoral theologian Carroll Watkins Ali describes survival for African descended persons in terms of their ability to: (1)...resist systematic oppression and genocide and (2) to recover the self, which entails a psychological recovery from the abuse and dehumanization of political oppression and exploitation as well as recovery of African heritage, culture and values that were repressed during slavery.¹⁵

Another Black pastoral theologian, Homer Ashby, Jr., goes as far as to declare "...our survival as a people is at risk" due to what he calls "fragmentation."¹⁶ He borrows the term, “relational refugees”, from Edward Wimberly to describe the state of disconnectedness that is illustrative of the Black community at present.¹⁷ White theological anthropologies have contributed to “fragmentation” among Black people by de facto sanctioning of violence against Blacks. A proposition of this dissertation is that “White supremacy” as a


¹⁷ Ibid.
psycho-system is that which is primarily responsible for the intrapsychic and interpersonal fragmentation among Black people.

In an attempt to develop an authentic theological anthropology that would encourage resistance and reconscioutization one must deal with some seemingly obvious albeit tough questions. The first tough question is, "does God love Black people?" If so, "why do we suffer under the oppressive hand of dominators?" If not, "why is it necessary for Black people to pretend that God loves us, too?" The addendum "too" is used because the current existential reality points to God loving people who classify themselves as White and hating Black folks. In this context, God, the Sovereign One, has allowed the ongoing and continual destruction of Black humanity without exacting any retribution or taliation. God, the Responding One, appears to have refused to hear Black cries for salvific intervention, while granting seeming unlimited power to those for whom deception and abuse of power is normative.

A second tough question is “what is the purpose for our suffering?” “Why does there seem to be no way out of this oppression that we experience?”

A Black theological anthropology may ask the third and equally difficult question, “is there an alternative to unrequited Black suffering?” If so, what is it? K.K. Kalongi Kambon has made the suggestion that the only way out from under the suffering and oppression that African descent persons experience is through the “extermination of White people off the face of the planet”.18 At first blush, his

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18 From an internet article, “Professor: Exterminate White People,” found at http://www.worldnetdaily.com, posted October 22, 2005. Kambon made his comments at a Howard University Law School sponsored panel discussion entitled “Hurricane Katrina Media Coverage” which is archived on CSPAN, October 14, 2005.
idea seems to be preposterous; however, the concept is not outside of the realm of Divine intervention of a biblical ilk. Kambon, an author and professor of Africana Studies, claims the necessity of such action because "they [White people] are trying to kill us [Black people]." He proclaims White people "plan" to kill Black people and that if African descent people in America are to survive, the extermination of White people must occur. Hatred breeds contempt. The anger and anguish over the loss of one's right to self-determination can lead to some stark and anemic proposals for relief. Kambon recommends externalization and elimination of White people as a means for Black survival from a psycho-social perspective. I am unable to discern a definitive cure for this oppression, but believe that within the discourse around theological anthropology there must be an attempt made to address such query.

A task of Black theological anthropology is to offer a theologically reflected upon assessment of the context. Dwight Hopkins employs condemning words and names the American dominant White theological anthropology, "demonic individualism", and describes it as a triune idea made real by American "(1) historical amnesia, (2) instantaneous fulfillment of desire, and (3) "we're number one mythology." In a very real sense, more so than forget history, Americans distort and/or ignore it, allowing the contrivance and release of a revisionist version of history

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Dwight Hopkins, Being Human: Race, Culture and Religion (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 5.
as a poison upon the mind of society. I postulate that revising history mutes the
voice of God. Our societies have bought into consumerist fantasies of grandeur
and preeminence that cripple the culture of non-Whites while propping up and
perpetuating poisonous Eurocentric ideals and promoting the elimination of all
other cultures by superimposing White cultural values over non-White cultural
values.

While Kambon has lost faith in the idea of reconciliation, Hopkins seems to
believe that as people become more human, transformation can occur and
empires will concede power to the powerless and we all can live like sisters and
brothers. Says Hopkins:

...I claim that one becomes a human being by gearing all ultimate
issues toward compassion for and empowerment of people in
structural poverty, working-class folk, and the marginalized. And,
through the spiritual and material healed-being of these exploited
strata, all human communities, inclusive of oppressors,
perpetrators, and victimizers, become similar to those who were
formerly oppressed, perpetrated against, and victimized. Diminishing emotional demons and removing the structures of
practical control of one group over another birth true sisterhood and
brotherhood in harmony. 22

It seems quite unlikely that Kambon's "extermination" or Hopkins'
"reconciliation" will occur without the intervention of either the "sovereign" or the
"responding" Deity. One who would seek to reform and/or recreate an alternative
theological anthropology faces the challenge of discovering a way to introduce
justice into the enterprise. Again, that scenario seems unlikely because the idea
of justice threatens to undermine the status quo and forces us to wonder about

22 Hopkins, 7.
the attainment of this justice. It questions if justice can exist without disrupting social order through disengagement from the process on the order of an exodus from the pharoahic grip of dominating American culture.

Walter Brueggeman employs elements of the Mosaic narrative to suggest ways to reform the current American theological anthropology. He writes:

Moses dismantles the politics of oppression and exploitation by countering it with a politics of justice and compassion. The reality emerging out of the Exodus is not just a new religion or a new religious idea or a vision of freedom but the emergence of a new social community in history, a community that has a historical body, that had to devise laws, patterns of governance and order, norms of right and wrong, and sanctions of accountability. The participants in the Exodus found themselves, undoubtedly surprisingly to them, involved in the intentional formation of a new social community to match the vision of God’s freedom.23

This idea is reflects the “reconscioutization” concept which is based upon the understanding that God is a free God; and if African descent persons descend from this free God, then they too were born free. Through rejection of ideas of inherent inferiority and reconnection with the idea of Divinity through relatedness to Divinity, African descent persons may be led to embody a non-toxic theological anthropology that would accurately and authentically represent the God/human relationship with respect for the culture out of which it is formed. This survival is predicated upon a correction in the Black perception of our connection with God; and a resistance to any theological enterprise which denies the humanity of Black people.

The Psychological Residuals of A Peoples’ Enslavement

Many African descent persons encounter a sense of hopelessness when forced to honestly consider the implications of their state as a part of an oppressed people. Most Africans were introduced to the Christian God after enslavement. The slavers professed that their purpose as well as their power came from this Christian God. Consequently, many Black people see God as an agent of White supremacy, obliging the oppressor to unleash destruction upon persons of African descent. Christianity is a part of the cultural package which has embodiment in the American idea. It was, in a sense, “absorbed” as were “all other aspects of American culture.”24 In regards to God, people overcome by nihilistic feelings possess no special redeeming or life-affirming meaning in the Divine, as they are not moved affectively by discussion or engagement of things appertaining to Divinity. Cornell West has referred to the above-described feeling as “nihilism”. West writes: “Nihilism is to be understood here not as a philosophic doctrine that there are no rational grounds for legitimate standards or authority; it is, far more, the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness.”25 This profound feeling of disconnection finds voice in the interview of this New York City youth.

**Interviewer:** What happens to you after you die? Do you know?
**Larry:** Yeah, I know.
**Interviewer:** What?
**Larry:** After they put you in the ground, your body turns into—ah—

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Interviewer: What happens to your spirit?
Larry: Your spirit—soon as you die, your spirit leaves you.
Interviewer: And where does your spirit go?
Larry: Well, it all depends...
Interviewer: Why?
Larry: You know, like some people say if you're good an' shit, your spirit goin' t'heaven...'n' if you bad, your spirit goin' to hell. Well, bullshit! Your spirit goin' to hell anyway, good or bad.

Interviewer: Why? I'll tell you why. 'Cause, you see, doesn't nobody really know that it's a God, y'know, 'cause I mean I have seen Black gods, pink gods, White gods, all color gods, and don't nobody know it's really a God. An' when they be sayin' if you good, you goin' t'heaven, that's bullshit, 'cause you ain't goin' to no heaven, 'cause it ain't no heaven for you to go to.

Interviewer: Well, if there's no heaven, how could there be a hell?
Larry: I mean—ye-eah. Well, let me tell you, it ain't no hell, 'cause this is hell right here, y'know!

Interviewer: This is hell?
Larry: Yeah, this is hell right here!

Interviewer: ...But, just say that there is a God, what color is he? White or Black?
Larry: Well, if it is a God...I wouldn't know what color I couldn' say,— couldn' nobody say what color he is or really would be.

Interviewer: But now jus' suppose there was a God—
Larry: Unless'n they say...

Interviewer: No, I was jus' sayin' jus' suppose there is a God, would he be White or Black?
Larry: ...He'd be White, man.

Interviewer: Why?
Larry: Why? I'll tell you why. 'Cause the average Whitey out here got everything, you dig? And the nigger ain't got shit y'know? Y'understan'? So—um—for—in order for that to happen, you know it ain't no Black God that's doin' that bullshit.

Excerpt from William Labov, "The Logic of Nonstandard English" (1970), 12-18. ²⁶

The discussion above depicts a young, urban, African descended

American youth's understanding of an abstruse theological construct and an

explication which may be characterized by its raw honesty, logical flow of ideas, lack of guile, as well as its theo-anthropological, socio-economic, and political acuity. Succinctly, Larry's discourse lacks deception, and is indicative of a Euro-influenced [false] understanding of self in relation to the existential. Though some may characterize his expression as one of hopelessness alone, I perceive a sense of veracity in the words and feel the sentiments of one who is gripped by an awful awareness of the seeming ubiquitous parameters of White supremacy and the improbability of a change in the structure that perpetuates Black peoples' ["niggers": Larry's word] subordination. The dreadful reality is that even though this dialogue was captured more than thirty years ago, it is still reflective of current conditions as illustrated by a recent *NY Times* article which prophetically describes the deepening plight of Black men.27

In *Keeping Faith*, Cornell West calls upon a wide range of theo-psycho-social philosophic thought to "explain the historically specific ways in which "Whiteness" is a politically constructed category parasitic on "Blackness."28 His discourse on difference reveals his understanding of "Heideggerian destruction of the Western metaphysical tradition, Derridean deconstruction of the Western philosophical tradition, Rorridean demythologization of the Western intellectual tradition and Marxist, Foucaultian, feminist, antiracist or antihomophobic demystification of Western cultural and artistic conventions."29


29 Ibid, 21.
Respect for the esoteric nature of his philosophic pursuit notwithstanding, the rather crude terminology "deception" describes the whole of Western worldview and that of which it subsists as, for African descent persons, false. By invoking the term "false," he suggests that African descent persons have a natural way of being that qualitatively differs from that of Euro-descended persons.

The European worldview is alien—"false"—for most African descent persons. The unfortunate socio-historical reality of Black people encountering White supremacy has affected the development of Black group identity in the US. In *Black Psychology*, Professor K. K. Kambon writes,

> The group that we identify with is usually our own indigenous cultural group under normal-natural circumstances. In abnormal-unnatural circumstances, i.e., those in which we identify with a group that is not our indigenous cultural group (such as an alien group, or an acquired alien group identity), then the conception of reality out of which we operate is not naturally our own. This is so even though we may have adjusted to it so intimately that we do not experience it as alien to us.\(^{30}\)

Our enslavement created the unnatural or false state in which we find ourselves. As family therapist, Kenneth V. Hardy, suggests, the "psychological residuals of slavery" connects our past pain to our present plight.\(^ {31}\)

Yale psychology professor Edmund Gordon suggests that African Americans, like others outside the definition of so-called majority or dominating class, are "at risk" for "impairment" that results in underachievement according to

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the standards developed and embodied by the so-called majority.32 I concur with Gordon that being “at risk” does not solely stem from one’s inherent sense of inferiority, but rather by the context in which the person attempts to carry out people activity.

From a psychological perspective, the religious, academic, political, economic and social environment that African descent persons in America must negotiate currently is virtually identical (with limited exceptions) to the one that America began with. Nancy Boyd-Franklin presents the argument of Grier and Cobbs in her work concerning the “cultural and racial context” in which therapy is done with African descent families. She states, “…the mark of slavery has never fully disappeared for African Americans because the feelings and assumptions that formed the psychological underpinnings of the slaveholding structure have yet to be purged from the national psyche.”33 Boyd-Franklin allows that the children of the formerly enslaved and the enslaver alike have been “profoundly affected” in this current context. She goes on to quote Grier and Cobbs:

The culture of slavery was never undone for either master or slave. The civilization that tolerated slavery dropped its slaveholding cloak but its inner feelings remained. The “peculiar institution” continues to exert its evil influence over the nation. The practice of slavery stopped over a hundred years ago but the minds of our citizens have never been freed.34

We seem imprisoned by the fallacy of a White superiority/Black inferiority paradigm that creates an unyielding frame of reference out of which we


attempt to negotiate the context. The erroneous belief system of White supremacy, enshrined in the hallowed halls of American culture, has convincingly crippled Black people—rendering many unable to function optimally in this context of relentless aggression and incessant competition on an uneven field of play.

Enfleshment as Embodiment of the Liberation Ideal

Pastoral Theology, as a discipline informed by theological anthropology, seeks to shape the Christian response to the human condition and to make us aware of God's response and activity in the midst of all areas of people activity. The life and actions of the historical Jesus becomes the template/structure for pastoral theological observation to reveal a right, just and true theological anthropology. Though it is commonly stated that people are spirits, which have a soul and live in a body (suggesting the primacy of Spirit over the other constituent parts of what may be referred to as the self), reality shows that people live "in the flesh." What happens to the flesh that provides residence for spirit, mind, and soul, finds issue here. These constituents cannot be split apart one from the other. Through acknowledging, remembering, reflecting upon, grieving, crying, expressing anger, preaching about, celebrating and revisiting the pain over what has happened to the flesh; we experience an anointing of wounds to the soul, spirit, mind and body.

A Black pastoral theology must involve itself with the development of praxis which causes the liberation idea to become alive—in a word, "enfleshed." James Cone, the father of Black theology has suggested that such a Christian
theology is an exercise in the liberation of those who are rejected, humiliated, abused, and marginalized. Within the enfleshment process, there exists the opportunity for one to adopt the attitude of "resistance" modeled by Jesus in his ministry to poor, disfranchised, and oppressed persons and transpose the stuff of that attitude into the present context as exemplary of that which meets God's expectations for human interaction.

Further, I operate from an assumption that Jesus' theology-in-action aligned with Old Testament prophetic writing because of his familiarity with the legendary men of God endorsed by Jewish religion and culture. In the Christian Bible words ascribed to Isaiah read:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good new to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19, NRSV)

By publicly reading those words of prophetic speech before the persons present at his hometown synagogue and by proclaiming, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21), Jesus engaged the enfleshment process by choosing to announce his plan to respond to God's call for healing, liberation and empowerment for the poor through the voice of the prophet Isaiah. Interestingly, the Lukan text does not record Jesus' reading of the completion of Isaiah's thought in the verse borrowed from the pericope found at Isaiah 61:1-3. In Luke, Jesus reads text that comes from Isaiah 61:1 through the (a) clause of

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verse 2. The continuation from the (a) clause to the end of the pericope reads on
this wise:

"and the day of vengeance of our God; to all who mourn; to provide
for those who mourn in Zion - to give them a garland instead of
ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise
instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory." (Isaiah 61: 2(b)-3,
NRSV)

Where Luke’s Jesus appears to halt before pronouncing God’s
vengeance, a Black pastoral theology of enfleshment may view the comparably
few instances of oppressor’s suffering en masse as the work of God (in the flesh)
in defense of the oppressed. The concluding part of the pericope also makes
room for an experience of joy, the excitement of praise and the rare occurrence
of receiving esteem and high regard. A Black theological anthropology reserves
the opportunity to entertain the idea of not only the alleviation of Black pain, but
the idea of God’s vengeance upon our oppressors in satisfaction of the human
desire to see justice done on behalf of the oppressed.

Both traditional American and African philosophies affirm the reality of the
mind-body connection. Pulitzer-winning author and Harvard scientific sage
Edward O. Wilson has opined in the text Consilience: "because the senses are
located in the body and the body creates the mind to represent the governance
of all conscious actions" that the body and the self are “inseparable fused.”36

Michael Battle explains that African philosophy contains a personality
concept called “seriti” which recognizes the inextricable “psychophysical”

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connection between body and soul as normative. He cites the Sotho-Twansa as well as the Hebrew culture as believing the body, soul, culture and community to be intertwined in such a way that injury to a constituent body and/or soul constitutes damage to the culture and community that the person represents and ultimately the weakening of the society of which the person is a part.\(^\text{37}\)

A liberationist approach to a Black pastoral theology asserts that, at root, all creation acts out of an intrinsic orientation toward freedom - the ability to be, without obstruction (internal/external) from self, others, or systems that come against the liberation ideals of wholeness, kujichagulia (self-determination) and love. Pastoral counseling, as a concrete expression of pastoral theology, is a method of reintroducing people who experience pain, disturbance, or unbearable tension (psychic, affective and other) to their God-given freedom, power, and love which may be experienced as healing by the body (the flesh). Such healing may emerge out of a “liberating experience” as Jung suggests and presents an understanding that experiences are not “made” or manufactured but are rather entered into with one who would sojourn toward liberation.\(^\text{38}\) It is not clear if Jung thought the “liberating experience” to be accessible by the “lower races”, of which he included “Negroes”, though Wade Nobles, a leading Africentric psychologist, suggests that Jung considered Black people to be “inferior” even if their


“psychoses are the same of those of White men”. 39 The motivation behind the offering of healing is love. 40

A Black theology of enfleshment, expressed as a theological anthropology, is not limited to concern for the freedom of the oppressed majority of African, Asian, and other melanated people. This concept also refers to non-melanated peoples of European extraction, in that the love motivates us to shepherd them toward liberation from the need to oppress and to benefit from the oppression of others. Race, racism, White supremacy, classism, sexism and consumerism represent extant concepts that anchor, undergird and provide the rationale beneath people’s present actions and circumstance and thus must be a concern for one who might dare attempt to understand people.

For all intents and purposes, a pastoral theologian seeks to heal the soul. A healer of the soul must endeavor to address the source of sickness lest the symptoms thereof persist. The fostering of healing toward wholeness is an aspect of a Black pastoral theology that is addressed through naming the ideas, actions and outcomes within the grand matrix of oppression; the outworking of which all people may experience. A Black theological anthropology seeks to free people to embrace their humanity and the humanity of others, the sanctity and holiness of creation, as well as to affirm their right to expect intervention from the Divine.


A Black theological anthropology is needful, because Black people are sinned against the world over and need relief from the burden of the historical pain of slavery and the presently oppressive yoke of racism. The concept emerges out of Cone’s understanding of liberation theology which is couched in a symbolic rendering of Blackness as “an ontological symbol and a visible reality which best describes what oppression means in America.”

He opines that the horrors and atrocities committed, “in the name of God and country,” by Euro Americans against Native, Mexican, African Americans, and others “can be analyzed in terms of the White American inability to recognize humanity in persons of color.” It seems rational to assume that this inability renders Euro Americans unable to accurately appreciate the spiritual needs and interpret the psychological and intrapsychic disturbances that emerge out of Blackness. The term *maafa* envelopes the indescribable horrors to which African descended people have been exposed. Asa Hilliard explains the concept as follows:

“*Maafa* is a Kiswahilli term that means “disaster,” [he refers to (Ani,1989)]. It refers to the terroristic interruption of African civilization that was occasioned by European and Arab slavery and cultural aggression. The *maafa* we face is multifaceted and complete. It has produced obvious horrors like enslavement, colonization, murder, the stealing of land and property, and the systematic social, political and economic domination of Africans and African societies. It has also produced less obvious, but just as detrimental, horrors like cultural genocide, historical memory loss, and spiritual emptiness.”

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41 Cone, 7.

42 Ibid.

Cheryl Tawede Grills, in an essay found in the text *Black Psychology* further explains,

“It is a great disaster designed to dehumanize and/or destroy African people. It is not a single abhorrent event in history, but an ongoing sophisticated, continuous process of physical and psychological bondage that includes the holocaust of African enslavement, colonial rule in Africa, and the many forms of racism practiced against African people in the United States.”

Doubtless, the ubiquitous nature of the *maafa* makes African descended people likely candidates for a liberationist approach to pastoral counseling/psychotherapy.

*Liberative Black preaching* (LBP), as well as Black theological anthropology is needed, in that slavery (physical as well as psychological) is a principal feature of the Black experience, and that spiritual emptiness is an indicator of a possible need for care in response to injury to the body, mind, soul, and spirit.

**Slavery’s Affects upon the Slaver and the Enslaved**

Countless scholars and laypersons alike have identified slavery, and its vestigial remainders, as chief among the sources of present pain in the lives of African descended people. These realities have to be taken into account in the formation of a Black theological anthropology. Many have acknowledged the negative affects that the institution of slavery had on both Europeans and Africans. The text *Honoring the Ancestors* by African American religion scholar Donald H. Matthews informs us:

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Although the psychic cost of the suppression of the reality of African humanity was great for the European Community, it did provide many economic benefits. Of course, the cost to Africans was far greater, for Africans paid in the disruption of their civilization. Captivity, forced migration, and denigration were but some of the prices paid by Africans. The greatest price, however, would be paid by those of the African Diaspora to come, who would pay with the destruction of their way of life and their sense of communal identity.45

Clearly Matthews and Butterfield agree that all involved in the business of slavery were negatively impacted and imprinted with distorted impressions of self (and by implication, God). It is indeed plausible, then, that the passing on of these impressions, and the emotions associated therewith, would present as disturbance, if not pathology, in the lives all those who were part and parcel of the business. The idea that such pathology could be passed from one generation to the next is affirmed by the family systems concept of multigenerational transmission of patterns of behavior developed by Murray Bowen. Nichols and Schwartz state, “Bowen’s multigenerational transmission concept takes emotional illness not only beyond the individual to the family, but also beyond the nuclear family to several generations.”46 If Murray Bowen’s multigenerational transmission process theory were applied to this scenario, the suggestion would be that African Americans are open to emotional illness associated with the fear that comes out of being utterly terrorized in generations past. Likewise the


implication is that Euro Americans are yet gripped by the compulsion to be continually tyrannical.\textsuperscript{47} Much discussion occurs because of the seeming simplicity of such an argument; however, I would submit that much wisdom may be found in simplicity.

The concept of scapegoating is also helpful in understanding the dynamics and consequences of slavery. Wilfred Guerin, Earle G. Labor, Lee Morgan & John R. Willingham seem to suggest that scapegoating may serve as a source that has contributed to the sufferings of African descended people. This scapegoat [man or beast] had the sins of the tribe or community transferred upon it and was summarily killed as a gesture of “cleansing and atonement” for communal corruption; and so the sacrifice of the scapegoat brought about “natural and spiritual rebirth” in the midst of the community. It is hard to know if the psycho-social phenomenon known as “scapegoating” emerged in the collective Eurocentric unconscious as a remedy designed to assuage the discomfort of their inaction/action in light of the brutality that they witnessed and/or participated in, or as rationale for the brutality or neither.\textsuperscript{48} In the text, \textit{A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature}, they say, with reference to scapegoating:

“If such customs strike us as incredibly primitive, we need only to recognize their vestiges in our own civilized world - for example, the irrational satisfaction that some people gain by the persecution of such minority groups as Negroes and Jews as scapegoats,...it is perhaps unnecessary to point out that the central figure in the

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.

Christian religion played out the gruesome role of the god-king as scapegoat, so that man might achieve spiritual rebirth.\textsuperscript{49}

The authors introduce a notion that intertwines the motivating factors behind the oppression of African descent persons by Europeans as a psycho-religious phenomenon, in that "irrational satisfaction" [terminology that refers to the psychological] and "spiritual rebirth" [religious reference] are benefits that are realized by the one who would oppress. Brutality seems to emerge as a prevailing theme of commonality as we consider the possible sources of internal unrest in Black folks. The process of discerning ways in which one may respond to brutality and dehumanization (past and present) may be considered necessary for the psycho-social survival of African descent persons. A Black theological anthropology may serve the purpose of undermining the prevailing psycho-religious consciousness and provide an alternative to the unconscious psycho-pathological notions of those who oppress and experience oppression.

Na'ím Akbar asserts that slavery was so brutal and unnatural that it produced a "severe psychological and social shock in the minds of African Americans."\textsuperscript{50} Further he suggests that those who practice the healing arts have neglected to "attend to the persistence of problems" in the psychic and social realms of the African descended mind, soul and community.\textsuperscript{51} Akbar addresses the unique attitudes that many African descent persons have toward work, community, family, property, personal carriage and constitution, and other bio-

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{50} Na'ím Akbar, \textit{Breaking the Chains of Psychological Slavery} (Tallahassee, FL: Mind Productions, 1996), 3.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
psycho-socio-politico-economic indicators that manifest under the rubric of the psychological legacy of slavery. His view of slavery’s effect in the area of “personal inferiority” acquires importance for the purposes of this paper, in that, he believes “self-hatred or low self-esteem” and erasure of self-respect are emergent and yet present out of the humiliating and dehumanizing features of enslavement.  

*Mentacide*, a concept introduced into the lexicon of Black psychology by Dr. Bobby Wright, is defined as “the systematic deliberate destruction of an individual’s or group’s collective mind with the aim of group termination.” *Mentacide* is further explained by Olomenji as “the silent rape of a people’s collective mind by the penetration and perpetuation of alien culture, values, belief systems, or ideas for the purpose of group destruction or for political use of the victim group.” This discourse includes *mentacide* among the sources of psychic disturbance for Black people in light of its quality of being “precipitative and predisposing” of other disorders.

Professor Akbar contends that a systematic process of creating a sense of inferiority was accomplished through the enslavement of Africans and their descendants. I do not discount his theory, but would present for consideration the possibility that African descended people merely *pretended* to be inferior in an

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52 Ibid.


54 Ibid.

55 Ibid, 71.
attempt to avoid violence, brutality and other negative consequences for assertions of woman and manhood and have begun to wear a mask of inferiority as we feign worship of the dominator through a post-modern version of idolatry.

Elaine Pinderhughes relates that African descent persons were labeled as "lazy, dumb, evil, sexual, dirty, and so on", and that in their attempt to adapt to racism/white supremacy they "simply adopted these behaviors in the course of playing a role (to "trick" or placate the slave owners), others internalized these definitions."\(^56\)

Whether derived from an actual or pretended perspective, a sense of inferiority as a residual problem emerging from enslavement is a reality for many African people of the diaspora. The enfleshment idea presumes a transformation of identity through the embodiment of God's love for the troubled, the deceived, and for the outcast; pretense is confronted in both the oppressed and the oppressor and a hermeneutic of authority is proposed as a way of seeing and being seen.

**Conclusion**

This work has been grounded in an attempt to forge a theological anthropology of enfleshment, based on a subjectivistic understanding of resistance as the core of Black reality. I believe resistance is a necessity for life. It distinguishes living as a person of faith from existing as a victim of circumstance. Kristen A. Culp asserts "without resistance as a testimony of faith

and religious calling, Protestant theology cannot be properly “protestant” and
Reformed theology cannot be rightly reformed."57 I agree with her and would add
that any theological anthropology that would honor the just and loving nature of
God and the radically subversive personality of the historical Jesus, will, by
necessity, seek to upset the status quo, produce change and empower people
who have been powerless, restoring dignity in all creation.

_Liberative Black preaching_ is, by necessity, rooted within a Black
theological anthropology. Theological reflection vis-à-vis the Black experience of
God in an oppressive context must inform the preaching that Black people hear.
_Liberative Black preaching_ gives public voice to reformed theological
anthropology and systematizes the protestations of Black people of faith.

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57 Kristen A. Culp, "Always Reforming, Always Resisting" in _Feminist and Womanist Essays in
Reformed Dogmatics_, eds. Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serene Jones (Louisville, KY: Westminster
Chapter III
On “Beingness”: Black Self-identity and the Universal African Worldview

Introduction

This chapter primarily deals with healthy Black self-identity, which I define as “beingness” and secondarily about the negative impact of White supremacy on this “beingness.” A significant part of this chapter will address oppressive and liberative worldviews. Some worldviews support “beingness” while others destroy it. *Liberative Black preaching* (LBP) is a method through which cognitive and affective linkages are made, particularly in persons oriented toward the varieties of spirituality most associated with Blackness. This chapter will examine Black self-identity and some of the conditions that arise out of the embrace of Blackness. This analysis avoids the pathologization of Blackness and stresses optimal healthy intrapsychic and communal functioning.

On “Beingness”

Since *liberative Black preaching* (LBP) seeks to address (heal) the beingness of African descent persons, it is a category crucial to the development of a theory of LBP. “Beingness,” for the purposes of this research project, is a theo-psycho-social manifestation of an ontological construct. That is to say, theological reflection informs the psychological inferences made as a result of analysis of the social behaviors of persons and the cultural groups with which they identify. “Beingness” refers to the essential composition of the self as divine creation and the understanding of the self in relation to the context in which one involves her/himself in people activity. “Beingness” is subjectivistic and
phenomenological. It concerns itself with the reality of the self, and the family/community to whom the self attaches, and the interpretation of the lived experience of the self and the family/community, physical, social and natural environment to which the self connects. It is that which makes one aware of their awareness, conscious of their consciousness and allows them the freedom to "be."¹

"Beingness" as a concept is important to the study of homiletic effectiveness in general. It is particularly important in *liberative Black preaching* (LBP) because the effective preacher connects with people on a cognitive as well as affective level. "Beingness" as we shall suggest is a concept that may be expressed as "wholeness." The person constitutes a whole being inclusive of thoughts and feelings which interconnects with persons who think and feel similarly. These interconnected persons along with the environment make up the whole person.

**Black Self-identity**

Defining "beingness" proves difficult because of its complexity and esotericism. Many authors offer varied identifications of the notion. Noted preacher/teacher/scholar/lecturer, Carlyle Fielding Stewart, III, engaged a progression of thinking with reference to beingness from "Black spirituality"² to what he calls "Black soul culture."³ The late Asa Hilliard, Africentric educator and

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psychologist speaks of the "African mind" and invokes the Kemetic term "Maat" as that which encapsulates the "beingness" idea.\textsuperscript{4} Black psychologist Wade Nobles refers to the concept as "psyche" which is derived from the ancient African "sakhu" meaning "soul."\textsuperscript{5} Na’im Akbar uses the terminology "community of the self."\textsuperscript{6} Political scientist and scholar Jacob Carruthers’ notion of "liberation" is akin to "beingness," while pastoral theologian Lee Butler, Jr. writes of "African spirituality."\textsuperscript{7} Religion professor Leonard E. Barrett describes "soul force" in similar terms.\textsuperscript{8} Cultural scientist Marimba Ani prefers "African-Diasporic spirituality."\textsuperscript{9} Theologians Dwight Hopkins and Thomas Moore call it "the soul" or "soul," respectively; clinical psychologist Linda James Myers refers to it as "energy, Spirit, consciousness."\textsuperscript{10} Others such as James Cone, the father of Black/Liberation theology, and Carmichael and Hamilton seem to describe


"beingness" in terms of "Black Power." 11 James Brown referred to "beingness" as "Soul Power" in the lyrics and performance of the song by the same name decrying its needfulness. 12 Medical doctor John Chissell writes of "optimal health." 13 Essentially, they all mean the same thing, and for the purposes of this work may all be used interchangeably.

Perhaps an even more accurate description of beingness is located in the Yoruba term/concept ăshe. 14 According to Robert Farris Thompson ăshe means "so be it" and is described as the "power-to-make-things-happen," "spiritual command" or spiritual energy. It is "light", force—it is divinity in that it comes from God and "All have ăshe". 15 It is "untranslatable" and yet is revealed as "divine force incarnate." 16 It is that force behind spirit possession. 17 It is the truth of creativity and the ontological fount from which flows all that we are and are able to imagine. It is the amen.

Each of these authors use words to describe what I call "beingness" from a theological, metaphysical, psychological, sociological or political perspective;


15 Ibid., 7.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 9.
as I reflect upon their definitions and the totality of their expressions, I arrive at the conclusion that 1) "beingness" is Blackness, 2) Blackness is informed by a universal African worldview and, 3) there is an extant construct (White supremacy, European worldview) that seeks to undermine, devalue and ultimately annihilate persons and culture informed by Blackness as a concept/context mediated by the universal African worldview. The communal aspect of relationality inherent in African descent persons' understanding of self is part and parcel of the African perspective—the universal African worldview.

White supremacy as a psychosystem is injurious to the Black psyche, by either deceptively or violently superimposing itself upon the natural consciousness ("beingness") of persons forcing them into a dominator/subordinate mode of relationality.\(^{18}\) This is the problematic because all humankind was created to be free by a "free God."\(^{19}\) Domination is psychologically and spiritually untenable for Black people. The psyche (soul, spirit, being, consciousness) of the Black person cannot be separated from the Black body. The conceptualization of the "wholeness" of the human entity will not allow for such dichotomization possibly inferred from a Western interpretation of reality.

I am not suggesting that Blackness is the only way to "be," thus "essentializing" Blackness as a generalizable paradigm for being. I suggest that

\(^{18}\) Larry Kent Graham, *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds: A Psychosystems Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 17.

\(^{19}\) Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2\(^{nd}\) ed. (Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 23.
Blackness is the "optimal" way of being for Black people. The universal African worldview which stresses the principles of Maat (truth, justice, order, harmony, righteousness, balance, reciprocity) is more appropriate for the achievement of optimal health for all people.\textsuperscript{20} White supremacy as a psychosystem has not and cannot aid in the achievement of optimal health for any person.\textsuperscript{21}

**Blackness as "Beingness"**

Barrett writes that the "symbol of power that emerged in the consciousness of the African in "diaspora" is Blackness."\textsuperscript{22} He continues, "[t]his symbol has become sacred—for...it connotes the synthesis of experience of a people under oppression."\textsuperscript{23} Barrett declares that Blackness as a descriptive was introduced by non-Blacks. He notes that throughout history, non-Black people have been identified with reference to the geographical location from whence they come; however, non-Blacks have consistently referred to Blacks by description of skin color, e.g. Romans are from Italy, Greeks from Greece, Germans from Germany, etc. The non-Black persons however have assigned Africans names that mean "Black." For example, Barrett has written, "Thus we have the Greek Aithiopes for the Ethiopians, which means "burnt or Black"; and Melas, a Greek word for the Melanesians; in Latin, Niger, which means Black;
and from the Arabs, Sudan, which also means Black." He continues, "Blackness then became the unique designation of that segment of the human race that was not White."24 Blackness became an "ontological symbol" representative of those who are not White and therefore susceptible to deception and violence as the objects of White supremacy based upon the phenotypic expression of melanination.

The Black body is the locus through which Blackness ("beingness") is expressed or "enfleshed." However, Lewis Gordon, a professor of Afro-American studies and the Philosophy of Religion at Brown University, broadens the conversation on Blackness by suggesting that Black skin color (in and of itself) does not constitute the only indicator of Blackness. In Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy, he argues,

"But consciousness of the inferior Other takes broader significance than visual perception. One can, it is true, see a Black before an African American or Afro-Caribbean. Thus the morphological feature of color distortion—transforming brown into Black—offers an accessible locus of disdain beyond the various nationalities of Blackness that may stand before us. Since Blackness transcends Africanness, the aetiological significance of Blackness unfolds in the drama of purgation."25

It may be noted that many persons who represent themselves as Black, have the appearance of being White. In fact, some of the most vocal critics of White supremacy in recent history have been Black preachers that have White physical features. Most notably is Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, best known as

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24 Ibid.

President Barack Obama’s denounced pastor. Others include the late Albert Cleage, Jr. (also known as Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman), Black nationalist, civil rights leader and founder of the Shrine of the Black Madonna, and pastor/US congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Each man’s skin color appears lighter than many Whites. Gordon suggests a certain contagious quality intrinsic to Blackness which speaks to awareness. Gordon continues,

The morphologically White man standing next to us may be “polluted” by an etiology of Blackness. He may have, for instance, “a drop of Black blood” (a dreaded element of an antiBlack world). Such “knowledge” has an impact on who or what he is perceived to be in his totality. His flesh becomes “Black flesh”; his thoughts, “Black thoughts;” his “presence” a form of absence—White absence.

Oppression and Blackness, then, are closely connected within a White supremacist context. Blackness is that quality of “beingness” that is normative for those who would fully embrace the idea of humanity. Those who refuse to honor Blackness as the normative expression of “beingness” are engaged in varying degrees or stages of denial of their own humanity. Blackness (“beingness”) realizes expression through embrace of the universal African worldview.

I propose to describe Blackness and “beingness” as the same quality of existence. I draw, in part, on suggestions that all people are Africans, because


27 Gordon, 71.

the geographical origin of humanity irrefutably traces to Africa. Edward Bruce Bynum explains in a lengthy, yet comprehensive historico-bio-psychosocial statement how repression of awareness of the foundational contributions of Black people to all life and civilization is the key to understanding the source of Black oppression and the denial of Blackness as a paradigmatic expression of humanity. As the Director of Behavioral Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Bynum presents a “consciousness” model that includes the unconscious as a source of “beingness.” He writes,

The indigenous African was erased from the teaching of history and the unfoldment of human civilization. This subtle psychological process continues to this day on a large scale. With a few notable exceptions, in the Eurocentric tradition it was simply inconceivable that a highly evolved civilization that gave light to the mind could have its genesis in a dark and mysterious world and then move in an African migration down toward the Mediterranean.

He continues his argument by setting a chrono-historical framework of other ancient peoples, writing,

This is despite the fact that the Romans did not come until Caesar, around 30 B.C.E., that Greeks did not come in mass numbers before Alexander in 333 B.C.E., that the Jews did not come to be known before Abraham and Joseph, the Assyrians, Phoenicians, and many others did not come until very late in the day.

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29 Linda James Myers in *Understanding an Afrocentric World View: introduction to an Optimal Psychology* cites a *Newsweek* article dated January 11, 1988 as a source for the claim of the original Africanness of all humanity. According to the article entitled, “The Search for Adam and Eve,” a Black “sub-Saharan African” woman is the biological progenitor and the “common ancestor” of all humankind; though she lived approximately 200,000 years ago, geneticists have located her DNA in samples from persons from across the globe. She is called “Eve.”


31 Ibid.
Bynum then compares the aforementioned groups (and by inference their accomplishments as cultural groups) to the Africans, writing,

By that time the Kemetic lens of the human mind had already developed several written scripts, astronomy, medicine, mathematics, mummification, a form of biological psychiatry, a precise calendar, the pyramids, and by the 8th century B.C.E. in the 25th Dynasty, had made contact with peoples from southern India to the Americas.32

His thoughts crescendo in a critique of European violence and self-deception:

Such awareness must be repressed if you are to hold people in bondage and justify the belief that they are an inferior race. Otherwise, a deep disquiet disturbs the peace and the order of society is merely based on pure power, aggression, and savagery. This is incongruous with a self-perception of being a person or people of reason, enlightened and committed to the spiritual equality of all human souls in the community of God.33

He concludes:

Yes, all this must be repressed and replaced with a perception that is more soothing and justifying of one's actions and the "mission" of one's culture. And yet this deep memory does not stay dead. It is alive and gives rise to our deeper experiences and perhaps our earliest, most noble aspirations. It is within all of us and all of us are within it.34

Bynum, a medical doctor, argues and supports with copious citation that all humankind emerged out of Black African people and that "All variations and ethnic groups are but interesting and creative multicultural and ethnic diversifications within a common species."35 He, along with Charles Finch in his text entitled *Echoes of the Old Darkland*, identifies the substance "melanin" as

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
the leading candidate for the foundational "building block" of embryogenesis, which for Bynum speaks to the development and evolving of humankind as homo sapiens sapiens, and "to explain certain internal luminous phenomena observed in spiritual practices [my emphasis] across the Earth from ancient times."36 Melanin, then, is the source of Blackness as well as deep spirituality ("beingness"). Melanin (or the lack thereof) is also that substance that sets off destructive tendencies in persons who classify themselves as White because of psychological feelings of inadequacy due to the biological inability to naturally produce it in quantities large enough to allow for phenotypic expression. These feelings of inadequacy are expressed as White supremacy. White supremacy interferes with the development of social, psychological and spiritual well-being among African descent persons.

Many Black people respond by desiring Whiteness and to alter their patterns of thought, speech, actions and physical appearance to effectuate the repression of Blackness.37 This is symptomatic of the internalization of oppression in the form of White supremacy. This repression negates the natural human goal of free agency as a perfect and divinely created being and elevates being "White" to the preferred mode of being.

Beingness must emerge from an internal locus and free the person to "be" without undue regard for external sources. Many African descent persons see

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36 Ibid., xxiv.

37 Article written by Paul Bracchi entitled “Dying to be Whiter: The Black Women Who Risk Their Lives for Lighter Skin” posted January 12, 2007 at www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-428541/Dying-whiter-The-black-women-risk-lives-lighter-skin.html (accessed April 15, 2009) provides further discussion of the use of dangerous chemicals by melanated persons because of the social and psychological ideas that "light skin is beautiful and equates to success."
themselves as connected with Divinity. This connection allows them to embody a sense of liberation. Stewart (1999) sees “beingness” ultimately as “human freedom.” He writes:

...while social and political freedoms are highly valued by African people, spiritual freedom, or freedom of the soul to “be” and create life and culture beyond and within larger culture, and freedom to fashion a “hermeneutics of existence” that uniquely preserve their identity and culture is the quintessential freedom for African peoples. 38

He looks to the perspective of Ghana’s Akan people to inform his understanding of “beingness.” They believe that “humankind is endowed at creation with certain irreducible faculties that cannot be altered by external conditions.” 39 God (Divinity) is the source of these “irreducible faculties” and no matter the circumstances, the freedom to “be” (“beingness”) predicates the validity of the person’s existence.

He describes freedom in the following way:

Freedom to create and to preserve the inner spiritual self, to cultivate imagination and creativity as idioms of survival, is an important dimension of African ideas of freedom. Freedom, then, is not predicated on external conditions or milieu alone, but on the capacity of individuals to create and to respond to life on sovereign terms according to the spirit of God the creator. It is this premise that is the key to Black wholeness, vitality, and well-being and may be the key to human freedom in general. 40

38 Stewart III, Black Spirituality & Black Consciousness, 11.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.
Stewart broadens the spatial context of "beingness" and makes space for inclusion of other synonymous concepts that further describe, rather than define, "beingness" as Blackness.

Another concept that, when Africentrically defined, illustrates the "beingness" idea is "self." Maxine Clark, informed by the work of Wade Nobles (1973) and G. H. Mead (1934), offers an explication of the term "self" as a psycho-social process comprised of three distinct constituents: 1) the "I", which actualizes "self-perceptions"; 2) the "Me", which understands the "self as object"; and 3) the "We" which constructs the self's internalized understanding of itself with reference to the cultural group. Clark's idea of the self differs from that of most European psychological theorists who invariably see the self as "ego." H. Gregory Hamilton represents the European object relations school of thought which views the self as a conscious or unconscious mental representation—an idea, feeling, or fantasy that is perceived as a loved or hated person or thing in bodily form. However, "...the ability to see objects as different from one another precedes the ability to appreciate self as a separate entity." The self recognition succeeds object recognition. Self defies definition. The self is private, not communal. From an object relations perspective, the self does not

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43 Ibid., 9-10.

44 Ibid.
evolve until it can distinguish the difference between itself and the object; the object is then “otherized.”

Carolyn McCrary, while reflecting on Descartes’ dictum of Western philosophy “I think therefore I am,” seems to sense the danger for “others” inherent in that kind of individualistic thought process. She writes:

This mind-set is a direct antecedent to the behavior of discriminating between plundering, and raping people and nature, both of which are considered outside of or not belonging to one’s realm of being, and, therefore, outside the scope of one’s ultimate care and concern.45

The sense of family/community within the African was such that while in transport to foreign shores in the alien environs of the slave ship, the newly-enslaved persons created “fictive” extended kinship alliances in substitution for the relationships from which they were torn in their homeland. They referred to each other as “shipmate;” a term which, for them, was equivalent in relationality to being brother and/or sister.46 Marcus Rediker seems to misinterpret the caring behavior of the Africans as being in response to the crisis of their enslavement. Even in the mist of tragedy, the context in which they carried out activity did not mediate their communal understanding of who “they” were. Myers writes: “External factors can neither add nor detract from the essence of our being.”47 African descent persons even now refer to each other as “brothers” and “sisters” when they experience considerably less terrorism than when enslaved and no

47 Myers, 48.
apparent (genotypic) consanguinity. However, for Myers, “consubstantiation (a sharing of the substance of the whole with each of its parts) is assumed.”

Thomas Moore, a non-African of the aforementioned group, understands the soul as a complex idea. Moore writes: “Soul is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves.” Though European, the monastic life has revealed to him the rich mystery of “beingness” that is transcendent yet knowable. This idea of “beingness” is wrapped up in the ability to embrace or to be embraced by the universal African worldview.

Pastoral theologian, Carolyn McCrary cites Janheinz Jahn who explains Ntu as the essence of “beingness”: “Ntu is Being itself, the cosmic universal force, which only modern rationalizing thought can abstract from its manifestations. Ntu is that force in which Being and beings coalesce...” McCrary lifts two aspects of Ntu that may prove helpful for this discourse. She suggests that 1) Ntu is a “unifying force” that is the essential connective material of all that exists, and 2) everything exists as “interdependent” and “interconnected.” Black people seem to intrinsically sense this connection and to embody such under the rubric of “beingness.”

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48 Ibid., 12.
49 Moore, 5.
50 McCrary, 162-164.
Oppressive Epistemology

Members of differing cultural groups tend to experience different ways of knowing and experiencing reality. Non-white academicians lead the academy in the production of scholarship that challenges traditional [white] epistemologies. In the article entitled "Racialized Discourses and Ethnic Epistemologies," Gloria Ladson-Billings presents an argument on the divergence of worldview between Europeans/European Americans (Whites) and non-Europeans (non-Whites) and how that diversity of perspective affects what people know and how we come into this knowledge.51 She begins her discussion with a quote from Rene Descartes (1637) expressing what may be described as a referential understanding of self which reflects a Eurocentric worldview—"I think, therefore I am."52

In contrast to this individualistic Eurocentric worldview, the African worldview or epistemology is expressed in the undated African saying representative of ubuntu (community)—"I am because we are."53 Ubuntu refers to the indexical understanding of self. This concept of the indexical self includes the idea that people connect to others and to the environment, as well, and exist in an interdependent relational experience within their context which includes nature/environment. This connectivity is central to the "beingness" idea. When one considers the "beingness" idea, s/he must consider how it is that one knows him/herself. This knowledge informs who the person is (or "be").

52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
Epistemology can be defined as "a "system of knowing" that has both an internal logic and external validity." I consider the definition particularly salient, and in my estimation, accurate. Fundamentalist "Christian" notions with reference to religious ideology inform African descent people, particularly those of us from the southern region of the US. The idea (Genesis 9:18-27) that Ham (the son of Noah from Hebraic myth whose son Canaan was cursed because of Ham's alleged irreverence toward his drunken father) is Black people's progenitor "logically" explains the "curse" of slavery, menticide and maafa that African descent persons experience and the dehumanization that has been internalized by Black people. Black people's experience of oppression in all areas of people activity in the "real world," validates their logical understanding of their subordination.

Conversely, people who classify themselves as White benefit from the Eurocentric interpretation of the Bible, which forms the basis upon which atrocity, hegemony, violence and deception, as a way of being (ontology), is manifest upon the world. The "rational" logic of the European mind led to the process of dichotomizing, ""splitting" or polarizing as necessary for meaning to be assigned to phenomena. This perspective is expressed by George Washington Williams, 19th century historian/journalist, preacher/pastor, and politician. Williams has written the following:

Driven from unscriptural and untenable ground on the unity of the races of mankind, the enemies of the Negro, falling back in confusion, intrench [sic] themselves in the curse of Canaan. This

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54 Ladson-Billings, 399.
passage was the leading theme of the defenders of slavery in the pulpit for many years.\textsuperscript{55}

This racist interpretation of Biblical myth has made space for the acceptance of dichotomizing and otherizing of persons because of their Blackness—because of their "beingness." This notion will receive further discussion in the section of this work that deals specifically with the Black church.

By the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, policymakers had established "science" as the new epistemological foundation of truth. As a consequence, the academy was thus imbued with the power to determine "truth." The power to declare truth previously resided in the hands of the Christian church for deciphering under the rubric of "religion."\textsuperscript{56} Within the development of a scientific epistemology, laws and the experimental method were used to determine truth. Informed by the concept of "reason," the "Enlightenment" era made space for the "heroic science" model. The heroic science model assigned hero status to scientists because of the proposition that science was a pure, objective, generalizable discipline that was "true" and irrefutable. Thusly, scientific geniuses became "cultural heroes."\textsuperscript{57}

This perspective gave way to "social constructivism" as a means to create the pseudo-scientific idea of race. Racial formation is the process by which racial meanings are contrived. Epistemologies rooted in "enlightenment" era ideas created the atmosphere for hierarchical racial constructs. See diagram below.


\textsuperscript{56} Ladson-Billings, 401.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
"This discourse of Enlightenment science allowed the dominant culture to define, distance, and objectify the other."

Oppressive Epistemology and the Academy

Blacks and other non-White scholars offer much rigorous scholarship to the whole of academic discourse. Billings-Ladson writes “Scheurich and Young identify epistemological racism that exists in the research paradigms that dominate academic and scholarly products. The epistemological challenge that is being mounted by some scholars of color is not solely about racism, however; it is also about the nature of truth and reality.” Furthermore, the work of persons I named “academic insurgents” is obfuscated by the virtual invisibility of African descent scholars on the radar screen of the academy. It seems that Black scholars are forced to tailor their work so that it fits the predetermined pattern of

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58 Ibid., 402.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 403.
the dominant culture or it is buried under a veil of academic inconsequentiality. Similarly Black preachers tend to preach “White” theology as they observe the obscurity of Black liberation preachers and the exaltation of Black preachers who have mastered preaching words that avoid critique of the dominant culture.

It appears that non-White persons have been “racialized” by the institutionalization of policy developed by people who classify themselves as White that unfolded out of a religious and then academic (scientific) understanding of the nature of truth and reality which was superimposed upon them (non-White persons). The way in which people come to an understanding of the nature of truth and reality shapes their views of who they are as a self and others. The Western theo-philosophical medieval metaphor of the self is the so-called True Christian.61 According to Billings-Ladson, “Alterity, then refers to the alter ego category of otherness that is specific to each culture’s “metaphor of the self.”62 Billings-Ladson observes that “perspective advantage”—“wide-angle vision”—a “transcendent viewpoint” are seen by J. E. King as “advantages” that “result [from] the dialectical nature of constructed otherness that prescribes the liminal status of people of color as beyond the normative boundary of the conception of Self/Other.”63

Billings-Ladson continues, “Those occupying the liminal position do not seek to move from the margins to the mainstream because they understand the

61 Ibid., 407.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
corrupting influences of the mainstream..."\(^{64}\) Hence, the better or preferred worldview in an intercultural context may be Blackness, because it engages people from the margins who have and continue to suffer marginalization. The experience of liminality compels the non-White person to expose the inconsistency and incongruence consistent with having another worldview superimposed over and valued above one’s own. Writes Ladson-Billings: "...the work of the liminal perspective is to reveal the ways that dominant perspectives distort the realities of the other in an effort to maintain power relations that continue to disadvantage those who are locked out of the mainstream."\(^{65}\)

**The Universal African Worldview (UAW) in Contrast to A European Worldview**

According to Billings-Ladson, epistemology is connected to worldview. She states "...how one views the world is influenced by what knowledge one possesses, and what knowledge one is capable of possessing is influenced deeply by one’s worldview."\(^{66}\) Hence when sources of knowledge are regulated by institutions and individuals whose conscious and/or unconscious motivation is to maintain the current imbalanced religious, educational, political, economic and social power arrangements, the knowledge sources to which a knower is exposed is limited to those sources which will aid in the realization of said motivation.

\(^{64}\) Ibid.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 408.

\(^{66}\) Ibid., 399.
There is a distinct *universal African worldview*.

Marimba Ani presents a comprehensive descriptive of the idea under the rubric *Utaratibu Wa Kutizama*, Kiswahili for “the way of the world.”

She conceptualizes the African universe or “cosmos” as a “unified spiritual totality” which is derived from spirit. This differs from the case with western thought which conceives of a rational understanding of a materialized universe wherein spirit distinctly identifies as separate from matter.

According to the *universal African worldview* (UAW), an interdependent relationship exists between spirit and matter. Ani writes: “Both spiritual and material being are necessary in order for there to be a meaningful reality. While spiritual being gives force and energy to matter, material being gives form to spirit.”

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68 Ani, 6.

69 Ibid., 5.

70 Ibid.
In contrast, the European worldview envisages a dichotomization between rationality and emotionality. The western axiological hierarchy of reality separates reason from emotion and gives it preferred status. This tendency to “split off” stems from the “determining structure of the western world view” which is encapsulated in the triumvirate of “power, control and destruction.”[71] Ani clearly asserts that splitting concepts, people, and phenomenon into opposing pairs for the purpose of valuation is the defining mode of operation in the western worldview. This results in pairs of reality possibly seen as twins or “complimentary pairs” within the UAW are seen as conflicting realities in the western perspective. The most obviously destructive of these “splits” is that White is “good” while Black is “bad.” For meaning to be discerned under the western worldview, construction of oppositional pairs is necessary, e.g., “knowledge/opinion,” “objective/subjective,” “science/religion,” “mind/body,” “male/female,” “man/boy,” and “White/Black.”[72] In the creation of oppositional pairs, the split allows assignment of value to one above the other to derive meaning according to “reason” or “logic.” This mode of thinking devalues spirit, which is the determining structure of the UAW.

Theologian Kelley Brown Douglas locates an understanding of this tendency towards splitting in foundational Eurocentric literature. Her reading of Plato’s Republic informs her view. Douglas wrestles with how “platonized

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 6.
Christianity gave way to religious racism" and locates an association in what she calls "the ideology of White culture and the prevailing narrative of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment." She writes:

"...the Platonic idea...certainly informed the Enlightenment spirit concerning the supremacy of reason. For platonic thought, especially as expressed in Plato's Republic, requires that in an orderly society "body" people must be ruled by "mind" people. Thus, in Plato's republic, the philosopher, the embodiment of one governed by reason, was to be the king, the ruling force in society. In a world where White people are considered the paragons of reason and Black people the models of passion, according to the Enlightenment spirit it follows that White people should rule over Black people—mind over body / reason over passion."74

The dichotomization of reality is an essential component of the European worldview that the "Enlightenment era" embellished to a point of religiosity. Divinity is divided from humanity and only the miraculous can accomplish the reconnection of the two. This dichotomized European worldview is also reflected in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, which has presented as foundational the idea that even within the self the ego (the executive) must subdue the id (passion). This is not so for those who accept the UAW as normative.

"Religion" means "that which concerns itself with spirit" as defined by Ani. Therefore, the UAW is "religious."75 The divine and the human do not exist as oppositional pairs, but as interconnected realities. The sacred and the profane may be conceived as closely related, even unified. Paradox is not untenable, but merely a part of the multi-layered, richly-created mystery of the cosmos. Ani

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74 Ibid., 117-118.
75 Ani, 6.
refers to the work of Leonard Barrett who has written that the "supreme value" as it relates to the UAW is "to live life robustly" which relates closely to Chissell's definition of "optimal health" as the greatest state of "aliveness."\(^{76}\) Religious ritual nurtures "aliveness" ("beingness")—as the spirit is fed through sacrifice.

Sacrifice, for many persons of West African descent, was central to worship, and worship happened in every area of people activity. The sacrifice mediated the relationship of the person with the gods and spirits who "...effectively present in the lives of men, for good or ill, on every level—environmental, individual, social, national, and cosmic."\(^{77}\) Black church historian and theologian Albert J. Raboteau assesses African psycho-social and religious development and struggle to "be" human in an inhumane setting while tracing the journey of slaves to the colonies. He writes: "The gods and men related to one another through the mediation of sacrifice, through the mechanism of divination, and through the phenomenon of spirit possession."\(^{78}\) Raboteau notes the commonality of that which the slaves "remembered" about the beliefs that undergirded their "beingness" as follows:

1) Belief in a good God, the creator and sustainer of humankind;
2) Belief in other little gods to whom sacrifice were made insured favor and well-being;
3) Belief in the power of animating spirits to cause things in nature to have a positive impact on their lives;
4) Belief in priests, spiritualists others within the community who identified as "expert in practical knowledge of the gods and spirits";

\(^{76}\) Ibid., 7; Chissell, xxii.


\(^{78}\) Ibid.
5) Belief in “spirit possession.”

E. Franklin Frazier proposed a radical “amnesiatic” affect associated with the traumatic impact of the enslavement process on the enslaved. He wrote, “Although the area in West Africa from which the majority of the slaves were drawn exhibits a high degree of cultural homogeneity, the capture of many of the slaves in intertribal wars and their selection for the slave markets tended to reduce to a minimum the possibility of the retention and the transmission of African culture.” Raboteau acknowledges the cultural loss, but also makes space to consider the obvious evidences of Africanness maintained by Black people. Writes Raboteau: “The gods of Africa were carried in the memories of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic...African liturgical seasons, prescribed rituals, traditional myths, and languages of worship were attenuated, replaced, and altered, or lost...Still, much remained.” The act of sacrifice could occur in a variety of ways; from the offering of a simple morsel of food or drink to elaborate ceremonial rites, e.g., “adae” practiced by the Ashanti peoples.

Ani states “Through sacrifice we honor, and therefore strengthen the spirits, and the ancestors. We keep them strong so that they will continue to be able to keep us strong.” Spiritual interconnectivity and interdependence calls for the acknowledgment of relationality between the dead, the living, and the yet

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79 Ibid.
81 Raboteau, 16.
82 Ibid., 13.
83 Ani, 7.
unborn who comprise the family/community in the *UAW*. According to Ani, "The spirits "need" us, just as we "need" them..." Central to the articulation of the *universal African worldview*, the spirit meditates the "wholeness" of being represented through the understanding of the relatedness of Divinity, the ancestral family/community (inclusive of the yet unborn) and the person.

Ritual proves vital to the expression or "enfleshment" of the *UAW*. Enfleshment has to do with the embodying of a divine idea. Ani describes ritual as "the modality within which the unity of the human and divine is expressed, in which the unity of the spirit and matter is perceived, and in which the Eternal Moment is achieved." Ritual provides a way for Black people to express their "beingness." Ritual allows for narrative (story/storytelling), preaching, prayer, music, dance and other dramatic expressions of the sacred to emerge and allow for the reframing of reality according to the *UAW*. Rhythm mediates the expression and uses the body as the tool of creative life force to communicate spirit to those whose spiritual receptors are yet sensitized and responsive.

Ani argues for a clear distinction between Black people and people who classify themselves as White. She writes:

...traditional African society is a microcosm of the natural cosmic environment, in which people are actively and closely involved and with which they identify; whereas western society is an unnatural technically efficient order, set within an artificially materialized universe, in which people experience painful alienation, both from the modes in which they are forced to function (institutions) and each other.

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84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., 8.
86 Ibid., 10.
Ani clearly asserts that "The Diasporic African, in his or her being, represents the embodiment of the confrontation of two divergent worldviews: a spiritual ethos inheriting a sacred, cosmic world-view forced to adjust to a materialistic society in inhuman circumstance."\(^87\)

Jacob Carruthers receives credit for coining the terminology "universal African worldview" in a section of his book, *Intellectual Warfare*.\(^88\) In that text, Carruthers claims that the distinction between the African and the European ways of being are rooted in antiquity. He qualifies the term "universal" based upon the fact that the distinctions between people are referenced across time and space. He writes: "...the distinction is made in terms of the contrast of the nature of cultural orientation between African societies and Eurasian societies." He continues,

"Through time and space African people are found to have created peaceful, cooperative societies, stressing the moral obligations among fellow [human]; Eurasian societies are depicted as nomadic, violent, aggressive, and egocentric. This truth is repeated again and again in the documents and studies of African intellectuals."\(^89\)

Carruthers offers his views with the caveat "The African worldview is distinct and universal among African people who have been uncorrupted by foreign influence"[my emphasis].\(^90\) He discusses the dissimilarity between the European worldview and the *universal African worldview* based in part upon a

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\(^{87}\) Ibid., 11.

\(^{88}\) Carruthers, 22.

\(^{89}\) Ibid.

\(^{90}\) Ibid.
document allegedly written by Pharaoh Merikare to his son in the Ninth Dynasty of ancient Egypt dated in the twenty-first B.C. His reading of the document (see appendix) rendered four evidences of the universality of the African worldview. The evidences are:

1) Right compels the individual (other texts require the same conduct of all citizens) to assume as a primary responsibility for the welfare of all other citizens, especially those who are in distress, 2) Peace is the basis of social order, 3) Justice must be based upon the supremacy of the law..., and 4) The Asiatics (Europeans as a distinct group had not yet arrived in the Egyptian world) were nomadic, violent, and basically savage.91

Linda James Myers perceives the difference in worldview in terms of “optimal” and “sub-optimal” conceptual systems.92 She describes both concepts purposely beginning with the “sub-optimal”. She believes the sub-optimal to be a distortion of the optimal.93 Dr. Myers, a clinical psychologist and professor, locates the foundational ontological perception of Europeans in material and the acquisition thereof. The sub-optimal worldview draws on the belief that the world contains a scarcity of “limited” and “finite” resources.94 This belief breeds a sense of aggression that many consider necessary for the survival of the pseudo sub-species. She writes,

Starting with the basic ontological assumption that the nature of reality is principally material, we are set up for a world view in which the resources necessary for survival exist in only a finite and limited amount (e.g., the pie is only so big). The process of life is such that

91 Ibid., 23.
92 Myers, 10.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
to survive we must (aggress) for the limited resources. Highest value is placed on their acquisition.

She continues,

If we accept the materialist perspective, even our worth as human beings becomes fragile and diminished: our worth is equal to what we own, how we look, and what kind of car, house, education we have...Because of its nature this system does not work even for the dominant group, and it will most certainly not work for the racially and sexually oppressed.\(^95\)

Meyers cites the dichotomous nature of perception germane to the European worldview calling it the “epistemological perspective” which stresses knowledge as being quantifiable and technology as the most valued process.\(^96\)

While Myers does not condemn all people of any racial or ethnic group to adherence to the sub-optimal worldview, she emphasizes the crucial role that cultural socialization plays in governing the thoughts, feelings and behaviors exhibited by people in cultural groups.

The Injurious Nature of the European Worldview

The European worldview renders a different perspective than the one natural for African descent (Black) people. As such, the superimposition of the European worldview upon Black people is injurious in many ways. The argument presented thus far asserts how and why the European worldview is unhealthy (sub-optimal) for Black people. In this space, I will relate specific manifestations of the injurious nature of the European worldview as expressed in various forms

\(^{95}\) Ibid.

\(^{96}\) Ibid., 11.
of White supremacist thought, actions and patterns of being as interpreted by persons exposed to racist (White supremacist) behavior.

The delusion of White superiority is that which causes White supremacy as an expression of European worldview to cohere. Chester Pierce has written a seminal piece of discourse on injurious aspects of White supremacy. In an article entitled “Offensive Mechanisms,” Pierce writes, “…it is from feelings of superiority that one group of people proceeds to brutalize, degrade, abuse, and humiliate another group of individuals.” He identifies lynching (murder accomplished through hanging from a rope until dead) as a “macro-aggression” that is “gross, dramatic and obvious.” Historically, Whites in the United States reserved this form of terror and murder for Black men (although some Black women and Whites were lynched) and usually included castration and the hacking away of other body parts for souvenirs and burning during the desecration of the Black person. Generally conducted as a public spectacle, lynching sometimes included White men, women and children posing for pictures before the charred Black carcass. Pierce goes on to present the concept of “offensive mechanisms” as expressed through the use of “microaggression” as a way of understanding relationality between African descent persons and persons of European descent. He defines microaggressions as seemingly small, almost imperceptible instances of offence that tend to have a morbid cumulative affect on Black people. 

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98 Ibid., 266.

99 Ibid., 266-267.
prefer to use microaggressions as a tool to maintain a dominator/subordinate arrangement which grant them the position of superiority at all times under all circumstances in their relating to Black people. This is operationalized racism (White supremacy).

Pierce sees racism (White supremacy) as a “public health and mental health illness.”¹⁰⁰ He describes this illness in the following manner:

It is a mental disease because it is delusional. That is, it is a false belief, born of morbidity, refractory to change when contrary evidence is presented concerning the innate inferiority of any person with dark skin color. Thus everyone in this country is inculcated with a barrage of sanctions which permit and encourage any White to have attitudes and behavior indicative of superiority over any Black.¹⁰¹

Pierce is clear that the affects of White supremacy are consistent with public health definitions of disease, in that they 1) affect large numbers of people, 2) defy one-to-one therapy, 3) cause “chronic, sustained disability,” and 4) all will be costly to eradicate. For Pierce, “racism is a lethal disease” which provides the answer to the puzzling concern of many Black caregivers as it relates to the medical/public health phenomenon known as “excess deaths.” He suggests that microaggressions amount to early deaths among Black people and explains the disparity between morbidity and mortality rates between Whites and Blacks in the US.¹⁰² If, as Pierce suggests, racism (White supremacy) functions as a disease

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¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
¹⁰¹ Barbour, 266.
¹⁰² Ibid., 268.
and microaggressions exacerbate the illness, the query follows as, “other than in the finality of “excess deaths,” how does the disease manifest itself?”

Martin Seligman answers this question by building on psychological learning theory presented in Skinnerian “operant conditioning” to advance the concept that he calls “helplessness.” “Operant” or “voluntary responses” are actions that people take that increase or decrease in proportion to the reward or punishment they experience as a result of their action. When the person determines that no operant response that he or she makes can better their situation or alleviate their suffering the person perceives that they have no control over the outcome. Seligman hypothesizes that helplessness is caused by the perceived loss of or lack of “controllability” that a person has over their circumstances (outcomes). Persons that see themselves as having no control experience uncontrollability as “traumatic.” Seligman’s extensive research leads him to conclude that people can learn when outcomes are uncontrollable, and cause them to lose their competitive spirit. He writes: “There is a wide variety of disruption to behavior, cognition, and emotion that is a consequence of uncontrollability: dogs, rats, and men [humankind] become passive in the face of trauma, they cannot solve easy discrimination problems, and they form stomach ulcers…” He states,

103 Ibid.


105 Ibid.

106 Ibid., 20.
When an organism has experienced trauma it cannot control, its motivation to respond in the face of later trauma wanes...even if it does respond, and the response succeeds in producing relief, it has trouble learning, perceiving, and believing that the response worked.107

Many Black people, exposed to much trauma and innumerable microaggressions without justice or benefit of recourse or redress, learn that they have no control. What they learn may or may not prove false; none-the-less, they learn it through their experience. Black people function as subordinated persons sharing space in the world with persons who classify themselves as White and who function in the role of dominators (superiors) under White supremacy as the operationalization of the European worldview. Many Black people, regardless of academic, political, economic or social attainment, experience confusion, sickness and death as a direct result of negotiating racism (White supremacy).

It is difficult to perceive the extent of debilitation caused by White supremacy without understanding the African/Black understanding of time and the interconnectivity of events. The past continually impinges upon the present as the present rapidly and unconsciously or slowly and imperceptibly becomes the past.108 I posit that psychodynamic theory agrees, in principle, with that ancient African conceptualization of time and reality. The UAW recognizes the transcendental and ubiquitous nature of spirit as at once historical and current.

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107 Ibid, 22-23.
History, then, becomes an important resource for understanding how Black people have come to be presently.

Although the United States abolished slavery in 1865, some would argue that the practices of terrorism, injustice and attempted genocide associated with the peculiar institution still exist in the United States. Many African descent (Black) authors have invoked the designation post-traumatic slave syndrome or disorder to describe the injury associated with Black people’s oppression under the White supremacy system that may have occurred during slavery and continues to impact the “beingness” of Black people presently. Joy DeGruy-Leary writes, “We rarely look to our history to understand how African Americans adapted their behavior over centuries in order to survive the stifling effects of chattel slavery, effects which are evident today.” She categorizes much of the seemingly pathological and defeatists behaviors observed among Black people as “trans-generational adaptations...associated with the past traumas of slavery and on-going oppression.” She defines post traumatic slavery syndrome in terms of response to trauma. She writes,

Trauma is an injury caused by an outside, usually violent, force, event or experience. We can experience this injury physically, emotionally, psychologically, and/or spiritually. Traumas can upset our equilibrium and sense of well-being. If a trauma is severe enough it can distort our attitudes and beliefs. Such distortions often result in dysfunctional behaviors, which can in turn


produce unwanted consequences. If one traumatic experience can result in distorted attitudes, dysfunctional behaviors and unwanted consequences, this pattern is magnified exponentially when a person repeatedly experiences severe trauma, and it is much worse when the traumas are caused by human beings.

The slave experience was one of continual, violent attacks on the slave's body, mind and spirit. Slave men, women and children were traumatized throughout their lives and the violent attacks during slavery persisted long after emancipation. In the face of these injuries, those traumatized adapted their attitudes and behaviors to simply survive, and these adaptations continue to manifest today.\(^{111}\)

A seminal and comprehensive study of the injurious impact of slavery upon the "beingness" of Black people is presented by Abram Kadiner, M.D. and Lionel Ovesey, M.D. in *The Mark of Oppression: Explorations in the Personality of the American Negro*. In this study, they employ psychodynamic analysis as a "technique for demonstrating the effects of cultural pressures on human beings."\(^{112}\) After psychoanalyzing over 150 Black persons they list what they refer to as "a few" of Black peoples adaptations to their enslavement that I infer from their research, namely:

2. Destruction of cultural forms and forced adoption of foreign culture traits.
3. Destruction of the family unit, with particular disparagement of the male.
4. Relative enhancement of the female status, thus making her the central figure in the culture, by virtue of her value to the White male for sexual ends and as mammy to the White children.
5. The destruction of social cohesion among Negroes by the inability to have their own culture. And,
6. The idealization of the White master; but with this ideal was incorporated an object which was at once revered and

\(^{111}\) Ibid., 14.

hated. These became incompatible constituents of the Negro personality.113

To be sure, African descent persons have sustained deep-structure injury caused by past and continued oppression. Lee Butler, Jr. while acknowledging the history of Black oppression even suggests that post traumatic slavery syndrome is inadequate to describe that which Black people experience because “we are...traumatized daily.”114 He writes, “...African Americans do not live post-traumatic stress lives, but we live “protracted-traumatic stress” lives, whereby we are continually affected by racism, sexism and classism.”115 He continues, “Our historical self is being distorted by the projection and introjection of false images that encourage individual and communal disconnection and ultimately result in relational dissociation.”116

I postulate that Black people by-and-large suffer from “domination fatigue.” A quote attributed to civil rights activist/freedom fighter, Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977), encapsulates the concept. This Black woman was called “the spirit of the civil rights movement.” She was nearly beaten to death by White men while jailed as a result of fighting for Black voting rights and coordinating desegregation efforts in Mississippi. She was known to have said, “I’m sick and

113 Ibid., 47.
114 Lee H. Butler, Jr., Liberating Our Dignity, Saving Our Soul (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 123.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
Black people are sick and tired. The burden of being split into the category of being eternally in error unless in agreement with a White person (e.g., Black folks always wrong, White folks always right), collective scapegoating (universal bearers of blame), usual suspect (Whites inherently understand if accused of wrongdoing, implicate a Black person) is overwhelming for them. The sense of being overwhelmed has caused and still causes injury to the "beingness" of Blacks. White supremacist practices foster the internalization of double bind messages which are spiritually and psychologically toxic and, in turn, somaticize and present as sickness, confusion, instability, helplessness, depression and death in many African Americans (Black people).

Conclusion

Blackness refers to a quality of being guided by Spirit, consciousness, life force, energy or awareness that defies rationality or geographical situatedness. It is metaphysical. It is biologically influenced by the embryogenetic chemical melanin; it is expressed as “beingness.” It is informed by the universal African worldview. That people are different and view the world or reality differently is not a bad thing. That people leverage the difference into “otherizing” and domination is the problematic. We must assert the UAW, because it helps us understand why Black people should hear liberative Black preaching. Liberative Black preaching is informed by the UAW which is the optimal modality for counterbalancing oppression associated with White supremacy as a

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psychosystem that is superimposed upon the "beingness" of African descent (Black) people.

Understanding "beingness" is crucial for the task of explicating the need for liberative Black preaching in the Black church context. The preacher must be clear with reference to whom they preach. The practitioner of (LBP) can best attend to the spiritual needs of persons to whom they preach when he or she realizes that a need for specific attention to the experiences and worldview of the hearers is necessary.
Chapter IV

A Cursory Overview of the History of
the Black Church, Black Preachers and Black Preaching

Introduction

To answer the question, “What is liberative Black preaching (LBP)?” it is needful to consider the historical context out of which it (LBP) evolved. One approach to knowing the historical unfoldment requires performance of a meta-analysis, a technique employed in this portion of the dissertation. From a historical perspective, the assertion that Black people have a long, deep connection with Christianity would represent the epitome of understatement. Africans founded the three major “western” religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.¹ Non-Africans have sense co-opted each those religions. Within the last approximately four hundred years, Blacks who were enslaved by Europeans were exposed primarily to the Christian religion. This European/North American variety of the Christian religion has had a profound effect upon African Americans. Humans employ religion as a system to make order out of chaos.² Paradoxically, the profaned variety of religion to which Africans were exposed contributed to the chaotic horror of their enslavement.

Christianity is promulgated primarily through preaching. Preaching generally takes place in “sacred space” that is intentionally created for worship of a deity (God). In the North American context, that sacred space is, for many,


² Lee H. Butler, Jr., Liberating Our Dignity, Saving Our Souls (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 3.
known as the church. For most Black people, that space is the Black church. Many Black people's relationship with God is mediated by the preacher. The preacher is the connective between Divine and human, and the one whose words and actions create thoughts and feelings in the persons to whom they speak and provide care. Those words (preaching) are sacred words and are spoken in the sanctuary of the church, the sacred space. The belief holds that what happens in that space is holy—somehow enveloped in God's presence and power. Clearly, so profound a process warrants Africentric theological pastoral reflection that takes into consideration the historical antecedents which bring Black people to this perspective.

When and how did Africans come into contact with Christianity? What psycho-social indicators made space for Christianity's predominance in African American life? What role did (does) the Bible play in Black acceptance of Christianity? How has the Black church and her preachers functioned in the Black community? These questions will be reflected upon as the chapter unfolds. This chapter will also consider the motivation behind liberative Black preaching and make space for reflection upon the idea of LBP as a variety of "conjure" discussed by Homer Ashby, Jr.

The purpose of the chapter is to set a historical backdrop against which LBP may be viewed. To accomplish that, this chapter will include a brief historical overview of the Black encounter with European-styled Christianity and North American-styled Christianity, the emergent Black church that formed as a result

of, in protest of, in resistance to and in accordance with the Euro-American Christian church and the role of the Black preacher as overseer of the dialogical journey.

Introduction to European/North American Christianity

The presumption holds that enslaved African descent persons lacked awareness of Christianity and required “conversion” from their “heathen” state of godlessness. In many cases Europeans sought to make Africans aware of the God of the Bible and to offer them salvation through acceptance of Jesus Christ as they did native persons (Indians) whose land they “discovered” and whom they intended to rape, pillage and destroy.

It was a practice of Europeans to offer those who they would attack an ultimatum before undertaking immersing them in their variety of Christianity. “The Requirement” was read to persons who did not understand what they were hearing, to “satisfy the conscience” of the conquistadors before they overwhelmed them with a patently European style of violence. James Loewen includes a translated version of a document that was read (in Spanish) to native persons. It reads:

I implore you to recognize the Church as a lady and in the name of the Pope take the King as lord of this land and obey his mandates. If you do not do it, I tell you that with the help of God I will enter powerfully against you all. I will make war everywhere and every way that I can. I will subject you to the yoke and obedience to the Church and to his majesty. I will take your women and children and make them slaves....The deaths and injuries that you will receive

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from here on will be your own fault and not that of his majesty nor of the gentlemen that accompany me.\(^6\)

We can assume that this ultimatum, or some form of it, was communicated to Africans as they encountered the European. It appears that the intentions of Europeans were militaristic, cloaked by a thin veneer of religiosity. The statement reflects an awareness of the intimate relationship between the church, the state and their intent to use rape, violence and death as expressions of their power to subjugate and affect conquest. Accomplished with the collusion and endorsement of God, the perpetrators bear no responsibility for their actions and the victims bear the blame. This is the context in which enslaved Africans in America were introduced to Christianity.

**Original African Encounters with Christianity**

Africans had encountered Christianity centuries before European usurpation of it and its implementation as a weapon of the state. Noted Black theologian Gayraud Wilmore has written what James Cone calls “the most important textbook on the history of the Black church and Black religion ever written.”\(^7\) Wilmore writes: “…by 580 Christianity had become the official religion of the three Nubian kingdoms...”\(^8\) Nubia is modern Sudan. This was representative of the first “visitation” of Christianity on the continent of Africa. He records three “visits” of Christianity on the continent. Wilmore classifies

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\(^8\) Ibid., 6.
Christianity as the third of the major religions to arise in Africa after African Traditional Religions and Judaism. Christianity was first rooted in Egypt (the Coptic Church of Egypt) as early as 42 C.E., as a movement among the "lower levels of society." By the fourth century, it was "the state religion of a Black kingdom, Ethiopia (Ethiopian Orthodox Church)..." By the time the Portuguese encroached upon the Ethiopians in 1520 with the intent of making the Ethiopian church subject to papal authority, the Ethiopian church had been in existence over a thousand years. The church, encountered by the Europeans in Ethiopia, was radically different from that which they knew in Europe. The African church was alive with dancing, clapping, drumming and leaping. Ancient African expressions of spirituality seemed to have endured over centuries.

The second "visit" came at the end of the fifteenth and into the sixteenth century as the Portuguese "planted" churches in West Africa as a by-product of their commercial aspirations. However, no real traction was created with reference to establishing Christianity as the religion of West Africans. Wilmore writes:

"The commercial interests of Portugal and the political machinations of the kings, vying with each other for ascendancy, the demand of the missionaries for monogamy which threatened traditional marriage, the paltry instruction the people received before mass baptisms and the subsequent lack of pastoral

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 8.
11 Ibid., 9.
12 Ibid., 9-10.
13 Ibid., 16.
attention, and—most of all—the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade, conspired to undermine the evangelizing effort.14

Even though the Congo had become "the first Christian state in West Africa", by the end of the sixteenth century the influence of the Portuguese and their variety of Christianity had waned and only vestigial reminders of their once-prominent presence remained there.15

The third African "visit" of Christianity came with the return of Christianized, formerly-enslaved Africans to Sierra Leone, a British colony for the repatriated on African soil in 1787.16 Liberia was established and populated by formerly-enslaved African Americans who established Christian churches there. These historical events coincided with the emergence of the Black preacher and the Black church in the United States.

**Psycho-social Contextuality**

The "conversion" experience, from existing practices and philosophies of African traditional religion and spirituality and Islam to the North American variety of Christianity, happened within a milieu characterized by abject violence toward and domination, dehumanization and commoditization of Black people. Logic adds that this African holocaust (maafa) mediated the conversion experience for the enslaved Africans. In *Hell without Fire: Conversion in Slave Religion*, theologian Love Henry Whelchel, Jr. suggests that conversion served merely as a pretext for instituting the Atlantic slave trade. He writes: "It is ironic that the

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14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 16-17.

16 Ibid., 17.
hope of converting enslaved Africans provided European Christian nations with a defense for the Atlantic slave trade." He continues, "The countries involved in the slave trade—Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, France, and England—defended slavery on the grounds that Africans must be converted from paganism and barbarism to Christianity and that the enslavement of Africans would be the best chance to convert them." Whelchel describes the enslavement process from capture through the "middle passage":

After the Africans had been captured, they were held in a baracoon, a makeshift prison on the beach. This structure served as a holding pen in which the captives were treated like pigs...until European slave traders bought the human cargo for slave markets in the New World. In the baracoon, Africans were shaved clean and soaked in palm oil to disguise their ages and physical conditions. Often, European slave traders summoned their personal physicians to inspect prospective property, and those Africans who passed the physical were branded with a hot iron and packed in small cubicles on ships for the middle passage across the Atlantic. Most ships were overcrowded with Africans stacked into holes no deeper than eighteen inches and no longer and wider than a coffin, maximizing the profits. The atrocity of the six to ten week voyage across the Atlantic caused some Africans to go insane. Other Africans suffocated. In desperation, some killed fellow passengers for more living space.

Suicide served as a means of resistance to the dehumanizing process of enslavement. An account exists of one man killing himself by tearing a hole in the side of his neck. The author writes: "The man's decision to use his own fingernails to rip open his throat was an entirely rational response to landing on a slave ship." The long-term psychological destruction of this experience

17 Whelchel, Jr., 25.
18 Ibid., 27-28.
notwithstanding, the immediate traumatizing effects of the Africans enslavement can neither be overstated nor underestimated. Given the fact that over one hundred (100) million African souls were “lost” through murder or enslavement at the hands of Europeans from 1518 to 1880, the widespread psychotraumatic effects of European/European American barbarity upon African/African descent persons is incalculable.20

The Bible as “Centering Object” for Black Christian Identity

in the United States

The slavers in the thirteen British colonies of North America assigned the status of “heathen” or “barbarian” to the enslaved person and deemed Christianity the necessary antidote to their supposed barbarism. Because the European assigned the status of “heathen” to enslaved persons, that justified, according to European logic or rationale, the dehumanization of the African. E. Franklin Frazier writes: “In the New World the process by which the Negro was stripped of his social heritage and thereby, in a sense, dehumanized was completed.”21 The enslaved persons experienced a type of “social death” as evidenced by the cultural cutoff which included loss of homeland, language, family/community ties, and identity. The Bible became the hatchet used to chop open the souls (psyches) of Black people to make room for North American Christianity. “The Bible was the single most important centering object for social


identity and orientation among European dominants. So it should not occasion
surprise that the Bible would come to be seen by enslaved and otherwise
dominated Africans in this setting as an important object.22 The Bible gained
importance to Black people, because it was obviously important to White people
and White people had God-like power over Black people.

Most slavers typically forbade enslaved persons from engaging the Bible
autonomously, preferring they encounter the Biblical text as interpreted by White
missionaries or preachers. Still other "religious and civil authorities" endorsed the
conversion and religious training of enslaved persons.23 Missionaries promoted
the religious education of enslaved persons as part of the Christianization
process. They assured the slavers, whose greed far outweighed any moral
apprehensions they may have mustered, that Christianity would make the
enslaved persons "better slaves" citing the doctrinal passage: "The Scripture far
from making any Alteration in Civil Rights expressly directs that every Man abide
in the Condition wherein he is called, with great Indifference of Mind concerning
outward circumstances."24

Lifted directly from the Pauline corpus, the following biblical scriptures
served as "proof texts" to validate the Christian pro-slavery stance, to assuage
the misgivings of the slavers with reference to conversion and religious education

22 Vincent L. Wimbush, *The Bible and African Americans: A Brief History* (Minneapolis: Fortress
Press, 2003), 5-6.

23 Whelchel, 46.

24 Raboteau, 103.
of the enslaved, and to indoctrinate the enslaved person into a non-liberative hermeneutic informed by racist White theological doctrine:

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ. (Ephesians 6:5)
Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God. (Colossians 3:22)
Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God be not blasphemed. (First Timothy 6:1)\textsuperscript{25}

Extra Biblical sources were also created to reinforce the skewed Biblical argument. “Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries both the Puritans and the Anglicans, the two predominant Christian communions in British North America, made modest attempts to introduce slaves to Christianity,” writes author Allen Dwight Callahan. He continues: “In 1704 Elias Neau...published a catechism for “instructing” slaves in the ways of the Bible.

[Question] Who gave you a master and a mistress?
[Answer] God gave them to me.
[Question] Who says that you must obey them?
[Answer] God says that I must.
[Question] What book tells you these things?
[Answer] The Bible.”\textsuperscript{26}

The combination of violence, the threat of violence, “otherization” (the condition of being categorized as unworthy of justice, equality or humanity), psychological terrorization and indoctrination, created some Blacks who believed their enslavement to be justified by God. Their belief in the Bible as the word of


\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 31-32.
God provided all the substantiation needed for acquiescence to their wretched state. One such person was known as Jupiter Hammon. Trained as a clerk, he was an eighteenth century poet and essayist who was the first African American to be published in the colonies. He cited the aforementioned Ephesians passage (Eph. 6:5) in his “Address to the Negroes of the State of New York” (1786). In an excerpt of the address, Hammon writes: “Here is a plain command of God for us to obey our masters. It may seem hard for us, if we think our masters wrong in holding us slaves, to obey in all things, but who of us dare dispute with God!” He continues: “This should be done by us, not only because God commands, but because our own peace and comfort depend upon it.”

Hammon’s words reflect a deep sense of indoctrination and recruitment into White supremacist theology. In an attempt to maintain superiority over the enslaved person, the Biblical text underwent transmogrification from a testament of hope and justice to an implement of destruction and domination.

Though some used the Bible as a tool to appropriate injustice, oppression and control over the enslaved persons, others used the Bible as a tool to promote literacy among enslaved persons. Carter G. Woodson, the father of Black history, wrote one of the first historical accounts of the educational experience of African descent persons during the antebellum era. His concern with the attainment of education by Blacks led him to research where the

27 Ibid., 30-31.

foundational elements were located. His research led him to the church. He writes:

The first real educators to take up the work of enlightening American Negroes were clergymen interested in the propagation of the gospel among the heathen of the new world. Addressing themselves to this task, the missionaries easily discovered that their first duty was to educate these crude elements to enable them not only to read the truth for themselves, but to appreciate the supremacy of the Christian religion. After some opposition slaves were given the opportunity to take over the Christian civilization largely because of the adverse criticism which the apostles to the lowly heaped upon the planters who neglected the improvement of their Negroes. Made then a device for bringing Blacks into the Church, their education was at first too much dominated by the teaching of religion.\footnote{Carter G. Woodson, The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861: A History of the Education of the Colored People of the United States from the Beginning of Slavery to the Civil War (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 1919), 11.} 

African descent persons were in a sense saturated with religious teachings, the by-product of which included the attainment of literacy by those fortunate enough to gain exposure to learning with letters. As literacy took root, so did the organizational capacity of the people; the sense of self-determination and the will of the enslaved persons to publicly own a sense of human dignity among each other. The inherent sense of community began to seek public space for expression. Informed by the Biblical message, the Black church strained at the gate of the matrix, pushed into existence by the people’s natural desire for freedom.

Black people in the South largely had been recruited into Christianity through the efforts of evangelicals during the first “Great Awakening” (1720-
They learned evangelical principals, such as 1) the Bible is the interpreter of the faith of the believer, and 2) each believer may interpret the Biblical text for themselves. It seems that the conversion experience, coupled with excursions into literacy through exposure to the Bible and the accompanying experience of hermeneutical freedom did “ruin their slaves by making them ‘saucy,’ since they would [began] to think themselves equal to White folks.”

After the Civil War, the formerly enslaved wandered looking for new earth in which they could sink their roots. In the Old Testament, the defining feature of the historical development of the Biblical Hebrews is that of their enslavement. The slavery event becomes that upon which the unfoldment of their lives is hinged. It becomes the principal episode out of which their culture evolved. Their enslavement gave way to their emancipation which segued way into a time of wandering and looking for a place to call their own. These experiential similarities were not lost on the Black people who were exposed to the Bible story. The Jesus narrative anchors the New Testament. His birth into poverty, his marginalized existence, his love for family and friends, his shameful death upon a tree all endeared the enslaved believer to this Christ figure. The proleptic imagination of a victorious eschatological denouement in the hearts of the oppressed paralleled the revivification proclamations of the resurrection event in the Biblical text. The Biblical story became the story of the enslaved. As emancipation peaked from behind the place of the sunrise, the enslaved hoped

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30 Whelchel, 53.
31 Wimbush, 23.
32 Raboteau, 102.
for a future freedom just over the horizon. God's promise of liberty for the bruised
was in quite concrete terms reified in the dissolution of the Confederacy and the
fall of the "peculiar institution." No longer prohibited from public worship, the
Black church became the most important institution in the fledging communities
of freed women and men. Surely space would be made to worship the God of
freedom.

The Black Church

The 1700's were the historical time period in which what Vincent Wimbush
calls an "African American folk religious ethos" came into formation.33 At this
time, the European's preaching, piety and emphasis on the conversion
experience elicited a response from many of the enslaved African American
community. This resulted in "the often spontaneous formation of communities of
the converted for fellowship and mutual affirmation."34

The "invisible institution" was thus birthed as Black people began to
express their agency as interconnected, self-determining spirits capable of
organizing themselves for worship and interpreting both the Biblical text as well
as their context for carrying out people activity. It is important to note that at no
time in the history of the enslaved Africans or African Americans did they
"willingly or completely submit to the control of their masters."35 The "invisible

33 Wimbush. 21.

34 Ibid., 22.

35 Sandy D. Maclin, "Historical Foundation: Black Church and Health" (research project
conducted for the Institute for Faith/Health Leadership, The Interdenominational Theological
Center, Atlanta, GA, November 2008), 14.
institution" emerged in defiance of slave codes that forbade the assembling of African Americans for any cause. Subsequently, the Black church surfaced as a protest organization. This protest organization provided space for development of the resistance culture known as Black culture.

The invisible institution first manifested as the "hush harbor," the "brush harbor," "bush arbor" or other variations of the term which referred to a secret place of worship generally demarcated by rags flung across limbs and branches of trees arranged in a way as to mask or to conceal the noise of the "praise" of enslaved persons. In the chapter entitled "The Sacred World of Black Slaves" in Black Culture and Black Consciousness, Lawrence W. Levine records words of enslaved persons from primary sources in an attempt to contextualize the worship experience of Blacks before the institutionalization of the Black church. He writes:

...slaves would steal away into the cane thickets and pray in a prostrate position with their faces close to the ground so that no sound would escape. Kalvin Woods, a slave preacher, described how slave women would take old quilts and rags and soak them before hanging them up in the shape of a small room "and the slaves who were interested about it would huddle up behind these quilts to do their praying, preaching and singing. These wet rags were used to keep the sound of their voices from penetrating the air." On a Louisiana plantation the slaves would gather in the woods at night, form a circle on their knees, and pray over a vessel of water to drown the sound.

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37 Butler, Jr., 18-20.

38 Lawrence W. Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 42.
Before the formal emergence of the Black church, many enslaved persons had occasion to worship in the White church context. They noted the difference that spoke to a sense of religious inauthenticity. Levine writes that “Slaves simply refused to be uncritical recipients of a religion defined and controlled by White intermediaries and interpreters. No matter how well they might sing the traditional hymns, it was their own preachers and their own songs that stirred them the most.” The enslaved persons understood what constituted “real” preaching and “sangin” for Black people. They could not locate what they searched for in the White worship context. I contend that it does not exist there presently.

African descent persons have historically, and do presently, have a need for liberation. White people do not long for freedom, because they already live free. The liberation that Black people need is spoken of, prayed for, sung and preached about in the Black church setting. The need is inextinguishable. I speak of liberation located in a metaphorical place called “freedom,” and that freedom is a gift from God. Writes Lincoln and Mamiya:

A major aspect of Black Christian belief is found in the symbolic importance given to the word “freedom.” Throughout Black history the term “freedom” has found a deep religious resonance in the lives and hopes of African Americans. Depending upon the time and the context, the implications of freedom were derived from the nature of the exigency. During slavery it meant release from bondage; after emancipation it meant the right to be educated, to be employed, and to move about freely from place to place. In the twentieth century freedom means social, political, and economic justice.

They continue:

From the very beginning of the Black experience in America, one critical denotation of freedom has remained constant: freedom has

39 Ibid., 44.
always meant the absence of any restraint which might compromise one's responsibility to God. The notion has persisted that if God calls you to discipleship, God calls you to freedom. And that God wants you free because God made you for [God's self] and in [God's] image. Although generations of White preachers and exhorters developed an amazing complex of arguments aimed at avoiding so obvious a conclusion, it was a dictum securely anchored in the Black man's faith and indelibly engraved on his psyche.40

The Black church served as a haven for the enslaved and the formerly enslaved. There they found the psychological salve for their souls, safe space for the work of identity formation among each other, an anchor for their developing community and a voice to enunciate their longing for freedom and liberation.

The Civil Rights Movement and the Black Baptist Church

A cursory glance at the history of the Baptist church in the United States readily reveals a disconnect between certain expressions of the Baptist faith along the color line. The civil rights movement is the most significant development in the history of the Black church. Although other denominations took part in this historic movement, overwhelmingly the leaders and foot soldiers of the movement were Baptist. Ironically, the leading denomination against the movement was Baptist as well.

This reality causes me to grapple with a question that again leads me to the doorstep of the domination paradigm of our historical epoch: White supremacy. I do contend that the first great schism of the church universal evolved as a direct result of the church succumbing to this phenomenon known as White supremacy. The many divisions that yet exist within the Baptist

denomination result from White supremacy. This approach is adopted by those who wish to dominate others as well as internalized White supremacy which manifests in those who experience a cessation of struggle against said domination.

In a consideration of the intimate connection between the Baptist Church, (the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc., and Southern Baptist Convention, specifically) and the Civil Rights Movement, which may be described as the paradigmatic and quintessential model of successful struggle against White supremacy as it is experienced in the United States, we notice a diversity and divergence of the attitudes and trends with regard to the struggle. Any treatment of such fluid subject matter occurs with risk, and I am inclined to concentrate on the National Baptist Convention, Inc. alone, but I am a member of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. as well. And even though the Southern Baptist Convention is rightly characterized as staunchly fundamentalist [read: racist, sexist, homophobic, generally intolerant], I have been associated through vocation with that body. The interconnectedness between the different branches of the denomination prohibits me from dissecting it for the purpose of this dissertation.

Forty-five years ago marks a time when the civil rights movement was surging and I will begin my account there. The movement cannot be considered without facing the memory of the martyred icon of the era, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a Baptist preacher whose sermons were exemplary of *liberative Black*
preaching. In this section of the dissertation, I will address at least three divisions of the Baptist denomination and their respective roles in the movement, as well as, this shift toward a neo-Pentecostal focus and away from the traditional civil rights agenda espoused by Black Baptists.

A Church in the Genesis of a Movement

The great Black church historian and theologian, Gayraud Wilmore, suggests that the Black church and Black Baptists, in particular, were mere "spectators", lending only tacit approval to the civil rights movement. He portrays the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., in particular, as refusing to be identified with the recognized leader of the movement. As for the Black church in general, he says, "...it must be conceded the Black church in its national institutional form—almost as much as the White church—was more of a sympathetic spectator than a responsible participant in the events that marked the progress of the movement."41 This statement puzzles me as I find it preposterous to attempt to imagine the civil rights movement occurring without the leadership and participation of the Black church.

The United Methodist News Service, the official news agency of the United Methodist Church produced a feature on the venerable Reverend Dr. Joseph E. Lowery, a noted civil rights activist and clergyman. I lift the following statement from said article: "In a movement spawned and nurtured by the Black church and led by its clergy, Lowery's name has been the most nationally known among United Methodist clergy. Most of the civil rights leaders, he said, were

41 Wilmore, 209.
from Black Baptist denominations."42 Lowery is quoted, referring to the itinerancy of Methodist pastors due to their ecclesiastical system for pastoral appointment, "Baptists stayed in (the) communities and could build followings, credibly. Methodists moved, and had to deal with a White ecclesiastical power structure."43 Men like Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rev. Dr. Ralph David Abernathy, Rev. Dr. Fred Shuttlesworth, Rev. C. L. Franklin, Rev. Dr. Clay Evans, Rev. Dr. Billy Kyles, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Rev. N. Q. Reynolds, Rev. Dr. James E. Slaughter and countless other Black Baptist preachers and pastors led the movement from the national to the grass roots level. And the people, who they served as pastor, followed them into the streets waging non-violent social protests that changed the course of history. Clearly, the Black Baptist church was the leading entity in the inception and the mobilization of the civil rights movement, its 6.8 million people in twenty-six thousand different local congregations providing much of the presence and power needed to convince the "powers-that-be" to "let the people go." And if the Black Baptist church did not represent the civil rights movement, why, then, was the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church chosen to be blown up resulting in the murder of four precious little Black Baptist girls?44

42 This information is available at http://umns.umc.org/News97/sep/tlowery.htm and speaks to veracity of the claim that the civil rights movement was a movement of the Black Baptist church (accessed December 12, 2008).

43 Ibid.

Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Martyred Saint of the Movement

Many valiant men and women sacrificed their lives in the midst of the civil rights movement. However, a Baptist preacher from Atlanta, Georgia receives singularly identification as the icon and martyred saint of the movement. A Nobel Prize winner, an intellectual and the personification of Christian virtue, Martin Luther King, Jr. was sacrificed on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. His murder was arguably the most significant event to transpire with reference to the movement, save the Montgomery bus boycott, and the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 that he, too, greatly inspired and advocated.

While Wilmore admits that the civil rights organization that King founded and presided over until his assassination in April 1968, SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), the planning and strategizing arm of the movement, was “dominated by Baptist preachers” he cited the “courage, discipline, and determination of the poor Blacks” as the catalytic presence behind the movement. And while leaders are nothing without “the people,” the people without leadership can make no organized movement toward anything other than chaos. The Baptist preachers led “their” people in to protest against White supremacy, and the broader historical record does bear that reality as truth. Their people heard their words and responded by sacrificing their health, the jobs, their relationships, their lives to the fight for freedom. Liberative Black messages urged the people into action and the words of those Black preachers

45 Wilmore, 207.
sparked their faith, inspired their dignity and gave the people hope that a change could come.

**Divisions of the Denomination and their Role in the Movement**

Like a tree, the Baptist denomination has many branches. Though each sect has different nuances, Baptists across racial and economic lines connect through basic commonalities. The traditional Baptist basics are congregational rule, "individual conversion, the centrality of the Bible as the source of truth, a definition of morality that emphasized individual acts rather than the state of society, and the notion that all people had direct access to God."\(^{46}\) Black theology turns this formula on its metaphorical ear; for Black theology presupposes liberation as the predominant theme through which right Christian behavior is interpreted. In fact, James Cone, the father of Black theology has written, "The Church is that people called into being by the power and love of God to share in [God’s] revolutionary activity for the liberation of [humankind]."\(^{47}\)

The Southern Baptists are the largest and most reactionary branch of the denomination. They split away from the American Baptists in 1845 because they accepted slavery based on the doctrine of "separation of Church and state."\(^{48}\) After the Civil War, some Southern Baptists founded the Ku Klux Klan and intense hatred against Black people remained their trademark even through the


civil rights era. In the 1960's they supported segregation laws and generally opposed the civil rights movement. The White Southern Baptists were not alone in their disdain for "the movement."

The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., under the presidency of Rev. Joseph H. Jackson, witnessed an exodus of over five hundred thousand of the estimated five million NBC members to the newly-formed Progressive National Baptist Convention in 1961. A traditional and conservative race man, Jackson had patriotic leanings that made him wary of militancy of any kind. He opposed Dr. King, and he did much to thwart his efforts. And so, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. emerged as the branch of the denomination that most espoused the tenets of the civil rights movement. It must be noted that Baptists indeed operated across the spectrum with regard to attitudes concerning the movement, leaving no Baptist without an opinion concerning it.

**Neo-Pentecostalism as an Evolving Trend and Alternative to the Traditional Black Church**

The so-called Neo-Pentecostal movement emerges as an alternative to focusing on the civil rights movement in the Baptist denomination. An internet article, on the Religion News Blog website, described neo-Pentecostalism as "a powerful mix of spirit-filled worship and philosophy of Black empowerment." The movement is described as being "increasingly embraced by the elite Black churches of Baptists and Methodists" and is credited with "reviving" congregations. An estimated one third of Black churches, representative of

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approximately 5 million people, have embraced the movement. Empowerment Temple African Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore, Maryland led by Dr. Jamal Bryant and Traveler's Rest Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, pastored by Rev. E. Dewey Smith are exemplary of the neo-Pentecostal Black church.

Black empowerment was one of the major tenets of the civil rights movement and it appears that vestiges of this historic movement still remain in the phenomenon known as neo-Pentecostalism. The implications with reference to Christian witness are obvious to anyone who has ever witnessed or participated in a worship experience of this ilk. A sense of freedom accompanies this movement. It has the attractiveness to draw the willing into it in a way that the traditional approach to worship simply ignores. Additionally, the empowerment aspects of the movement connect it with the justice motif of Black theology, while affirming the African sensibilities that connect us through an expressed spirituality to our pre-American history.

The civil rights movement was not only the most significant development in the history of the Baptist church, but I argue that this movement is the most significant American historical development in the past 50 years which set the stage for the election of the forty-fourth president of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama. God has left fingerprints of freedom on the evidence of history. For Black people, the Biblical text is nothing less than the definitive manual for struggle against the oppressive forces of this present world and the spiritual

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world, as well. Black Baptist preachers ushered this country into an era whereby the struggle against White supremacy was transported from the underground of our consciousness to the foreground of our American reality. *Liberative Black preaching* provided the spiritual energy needed to embolden the people to stand up, sit-in, boycott, and to freedom ride for justice.

**Black Preaching and the Black Preacher**

Black preaching is a unique form of communication delivered through a unique conduit: the Black preacher. On the pages of the African American literary classic, *The Souls of Black Folk*, while musing upon his first worship experience in the midst of a Southern Negro revival, W. E. B. DuBois stated that “the Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil.”

DuBois commits to the record a beautiful description of the power in the person of the Black preacher to evoke emotion, facilitate release and orchestrate controlled cathartic pandemonium within the Black church context. He says:

> “The Black and massive form of the preacher swayed and quivered as the words crowded to his lips and flew at us in singular eloquence. The people moaned and fluttered, and then the gaunt-cheeked brown woman beside me suddenly leaped straight into the air and shrieked like a lost soul, while round about came wail and groan and outcry, and a scene of human passion such as I had never conceived before.”

DuBois experiences this interaction between preacher and pew and expressed an appreciation for the preacher as a multifaceted personality in the life of a faith community and called him “A leader, a politician, an orator, a “boss,”

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52 Ibid.
an intriguer, an idealist..."\(^{53}\) He understood the adaptation, transformation and intensification of African sensibilities into the religious milieu of formerly enslaved African Americans and, as a scholar studying the social and psychological development of Black people in North America, he expressed an appreciation of communal and emotional space that was administered by the Black preacher in the Black church context. He saw the Black preacher as being situated in the Black church, which he considered, at the turn of the 20\(^{th}\) century, to be "the social centre of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character."\(^{54}\)

Ever rooted in a sociological perspective, Du Bois located the roots of the Black church within the "social history" of an African social construct which operated "under the headship of the chief and the potent influence of the priest."\(^{55}\) The maafa, the African holocaust, interrupted the traditional African religions or African spirituality system of worship. The enslaved person experienced multiple, successive, arduously dehumanizing life transitions which rendered her/him disconnected from many of the expressions of life and living before the enslavement experience. Says Du Bois:

"It was a terrific social revolution, and yet some traces were retained of the former group life, and the chief remaining institution was the Priest or Medicine-man. He early appeared on the plantation and found his function as the healer of the sick, the interpreter of the Unknown, the comforter of the sorrowing, the supernatural avenger of wrong, and the one who rudely but

\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 213.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 215.
picturesquely expressed the longing, disappointment, and resentment of a stolen and oppressed people. Thus, as bard, physician, judge, and priest, within the narrow limits allowed by the slave system, rose the Negro preacher, and under him the first church was not at first by any means Christian nor definitely organized; rather it was an adaptation and mingling of heathen [my emphasis] rites among the members of each plantation...”

Though initially heavily influenced by African spirituality, a gradual Christianizing of the “brush harbor” gatherings of the “invisible institution” occurred over time. Missionaries, masters (enslavers), and “motives of expediency” smothered many of the elements of African spirituality that were practiced by the enslaved persons under a blanket of primarily Baptist and Methodist doctrine. These transitory realities transpired with the Black preacher being at once at the center and yet upon the margins of each transaction. This unique personality was the enfleshment of the freedom of God as spoken through words of Divinity.

The Call

The Black preacher considers preaching a necessitous act. The Black preacher claims that s/he preaches in response to “the call” of God. The Black preacher emerges out of the Black community as a respondent to this divine call and ostensibly asserts his/her state of being connected to God and thereby authorized to speak for God. Though tempted to dismiss as folly the call stories

56 Ibid., 216.

57 Dr. Melva Costen in African American Christian Worship (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993) asserts that another “visible” institution that preceded the Black church existed, particularly in coastal Georgia and South Carolina, called the “praise house.” The praise house liturgy consisted of singing, prayer, “ring shouting,” and preaching.


of Black preachers, I am arrested by the reality of my own call and the seriousness with which I regard the experience.

Rev. C. L. Franklin, father of "the Queen of Soul" Aretha Franklin, is arguably the most important and influential Black preacher in the history of the United States, save Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. With a discography comprised of nearly one hundred (100) recorded sermons, his homiletic styling continues to be heard and emulated by many.\(^6^0\) Indeed, Amos Jones contends "C. L. Franklin’s style of preaching is probably the most imitated of any preacher who has ever lived in modernity."\(^6^1\) Franklin’s description of his call is documented in his own words as follows:

One night I was in my room, lying on my bed, and I had a dream, or a vision. I wasn’t awake at the time. The walls of the room were made of planks, and it seemed that one plank only was on fire, but it didn’t consume the house. A voice spoke to me from behind the plank and said something like, “Go and preach the gospel to all the nations.” I went and told my mother what I had seen and heard. She was very pleased, and she gave me encouragement.\(^6^2\)

The call is believed to have Biblical precedence in the Black church tradition. Pastor and Black Baptist historian, Dr. Amos Jones, wrote an important text describing the Black Baptist preacher’s function and mission as proclaimer and interpreter of the Biblical text. He wrote the following with reference to the Bible as the source that informs the Black preacher’s understanding of the call: “There is no question that the Bible emphasizes the “call” of the prophet, disciple, or


\(^{6^1}\) Jones, 10.

apostle. From Abraham to Malachi, from Matthew to Revelation, the “call” of God precedes proclamation.\textsuperscript{63} He concludes: “None of the prophets, disciples, or apostles chose of themselves to launch out on their mission to represent God and be bearers of His Word. They were called of God.”\textsuperscript{64}

Because the Black preacher connected the congregation to education, enslaved persons saw literacy as a prerequisite for ministry. For many, literacy was evidence of the call in that the Biblical text required engagement before the preacher could "rightly divide the word of truth."\textsuperscript{65} The preacher shared the ability to read and write with those who yearned for knowledge in Sunday or church school. There exists presently a need for an educated clergy capable of providing accurate analysis of not only the Biblical text, but also able to exegete the religious, academic, political, economic, and social texts within the global context so that optimal physical, mental and spiritual health might be enjoyed by those to whom ministerial service is offered. Jones quoted legendary Howard University theologian Kelly Miller who in 1914 describes why the Black church needs thoughtful and intelligent Black preachers. He writes:

\begin{quote}
Let none imagine that because people are ignorant and lowly, their moral and spiritual leaders do not require all discipline, learning, culture, and practical wisdom that the completest education can afford. The more ignorant the led, the more skillful and sagacious should the leader be...No one can be too learned or too profound to whose direction has been committed the temporal and eternal destiny of a human being.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{63} Jones, 12.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{65} 2 Timothy 2:15 (King James Version).

\textsuperscript{66} Jones, 66.
Callahan writes that "...literate preachers illuminated the path to literacy for many African Americans before and after Emancipation..." With Black people yet under the yoke of racism/White supremacy and still lagging behind Whites in all areas of achievement in the United States, the need for educationally competent preachers in the Black pulpit is ever the more dire.

The Preacher's Task

For many Black preachers, the Bible mandates the "call" and requires it for vocational life as a Christian minister. The call is not to minister alone however; the call is to "preach"—to weave together a patchwork quilt of pain and victory, suffering and salvation, freedom and justice, Biblical soundness and musicality with an orientation toward that which is "natural" for Black people. Amos Jones quotes John W. Work, from which this excerpt is lifted:

[The] sermon...is often a strange blending of imagery, poetry, and oratory, glowing with religious fire. The peroration of this sermon is intoned or 'moaned.' In other words, it is sung, and effect upon the audience is visible. This moaning, singing or as the Negroes themselves call it, 'giving gravey,' [sic] is quite natural to the Negro. His proneness to sing shows itself in his every activity. Nothing is more to be expected that that when his activity is religious, in which above all activities he is interested, he should throw away all restraint and conventionalities and be his natural self, which is a musical self.

To further engage Work's metaphor, it may be said that there can be no "gravy" without "meat." Meat refers to sermonic words informed by exegetical

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67 Callahan, 17.


69 Jones, 32.
method. A thorough “cooking” of the meat renders oils and juices that provide the base ingredients for the “gravy.” In other words, there is an expectation in the Black Baptist church that the preacher be well acquainted with the Biblical text, be theologically grounded, be insightful and reflect an “awareness of contemporary issues” in the sermon.  

However, s/he must conjure the Spirit, possess enough passion and artistry to stir the passions of the congregation and elicit a response that affirms the “beingness” of Black people. The message must empower their ability to overcome the continual assault of the European aesthetic which is fundamentally different from the African aesthetic. Kariamu Welsh-Asante is clear that “Spirit, rhythm and creativity are the key criteria in discussing any aesthetic for African [Black] people.” The aforementioned elements are inherent in LBP which combines chanted sermon and freedom talk, Black folk theological ethos, and exegetical thoroughness, driven by academic rigor and common sense mother-wit coupled with artistic creativity and hermeneutic liberty.

The liberation presents not only in the words of freedom, but in the homiletic style of construction and delivery. The style liberates as it embodies the meaning of soul or “beingness.” The freedom manifests as the ability to publicly resist the European aesthetic, and to embody, what is for Europeans and African descent persons who have internalized White supremist aesthetical norms, the

70 Ibid.


72 Ibid.
improper, undignified, African artistic sacred performance model. The Black preacher bears that African cultural relic which causes the congregation to hearken back to the eternal voice of the ancestors whose shouts, grunts and moans echo across the Atlantic and reverberate on the shores of America. If the preacher's call is sure "the Black preacher must preach. [The preacher] must preach with all there is in him [or her]. He [or she] must "say it." He [or she] must "whoop" in some fashion, whether it be audible, inaudible, gestures or the like. He [or she] must do this, or he [or she] will not have an audience to listen to him [or her]." 73

To practice *liberative* Black preaching, a liberating educational experience must buttress the call of the Black preacher. Writes Jones: "The "call" of God has inclusive in it a "call" to pursue a theological education." 74 Though Jones does not specify the necessity of a "liberating" Africentric theological education *per se*, he does however acknowledge the import of the Black preacher possessing a "thorough knowledge of the Negro in American Slavery" as well as "command [of] knowledge of the history of the Negro church in America." 75 He suggests texts written by African descent authors as the source of such knowledge.

C. L. Franklin's recited "life history" records how his educational experience at Lemoyne College [now Lemoyne-Owen College], an historically Black college (HBCU) in Memphis, Tennessee expanded his intellectual horizons

73 Jones, 33.
74 Ibid., 16.
75 Ibid., 68.
and transformed his preaching from merely "spiritual" to a more liberative variety.

With regard to Franklin's homiletic shift from an emotional to a cognitive/affective orientation the following is written:

And my views and interpretations and understanding began to evolve. Of course this aroused within me some concern about my former views, but I regarded it more or less as a deepening. At that time my sermons may have begun to become more historically minded and less evangelical.

He continues:

Evangelism to me is simply stirring people up, to make them feel some spontaneous thing that may not be lasting, while if you preach to them in terms of the historical meaning it's altogether different. It has a more lasting effect because you're reaching their minds as well as their emotions.\(^76\)

The thought life of the Black preacher must be developed and intellectual strength anchored in academic rigor must be reestablished as imperative. Anti-intellectualism is prevalent in the many Black churches. It is evidenced in the disconnect between Black theological academy and the Black church.\(^77\) If Black people are to advance toward wholeness, the fragmentation between knowledge and spirit must be bridged. *Liberative Black preaching* is that bridge.

**Love as Motivation for Therapeutic Relationship and Liberative Black Preaching**

While presenting a pastoral counseling client's case during our weekly clinical case conference session, a colleague of mine invoked the word "love" as she described her countertransference with reference to her client. This was a strange occurrence, and I do not ever recall the use of that word during these

\(^76\) Franklin, 16.

generally “sterile” sessions of training in psychoanalytic theory from the object-relations perspective of White authorities in the field. I noticed that many in the room showed signs of discomfort after this highly competent and clinically-astute professional (who happened to be a Black woman) said she “loved” her client, but not one person breathed a word of objection.

This moment was powerful for me as I had spent nearly two years in clinical training attempting to hide the fact that I “love” the Black people to whom I offer service. For some reason, in the clinical setting, I thought it unprofessional to acknowledge the feeling of love for one’s clients. After reflection, I recall no author or text suggested for my training that contained the word love or that even broached the concept. The question for me became “can I truly help my client if I don’t love her/him?” In other words, “how can my relationship with a client be therapeutic if it is not motivated by love?” For the purposes of this dissertation, the question becomes “can liberative Black preaching have a therapeutic impact upon those who hear it if the preacher does not love the persons to whom the preaching is directed?”

Liberative Black preaching is therapeutic, because love is the primary motivator behind its presentation. For the purposes of this discussion, love is that feeling that causes one to look at another with honest eyes and to judge them with compassion—to want and to work toward justice, healing and wholeness for them. Pastoral theologian Emmanuel Lartey introduced the idea of interculturality into pastoral care and counseling discourse and posited that the pastoral caregiver functions as an “agent or conduit” of God’s agape love. For him, this
love motivates the formation of the pastoral relationship while recognizing and affirming the diversity of God’s creation. He writes that “Love is a thoroughly social phenomenon. Not only does it impel us into relationship with others, it also enables us to recognize injustice and to desire to do something about it.”

Though I disagree with the basic premise of interculturality on the grounds of divergent worldviews hindering transference/countertransference experience and thus the development of a therapeutic alliance, I agree that love motivates the offering of pastoral service (ministry) to others.

There is a sense in which the Creator’s transcendent love for that which was created is translated and reflected by the creature back onto and into creation. The love of which I speak is not blind, apt to distortion or a hindrance to the lover’s ability to exercise sound judgment. The lover is clear that a true, deep concern and a genuine vested interest in the optimal health of the loved one’s whole self drives the relationship. The lover commits to build, defend and inspire the loved one to become her/his best self. This achievement may be facilitated within therapeutic relationships formed in the counseling room, in the community or by way of liberative Black preaching in the Black church context.

The word therapeutic comes from the Greek word “therapeuo” which means “one who serves the gods or heals.” Therapy in some instances may be viewed as that which a specific person does in service to the gods toward the

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benefit of another person, or healing performed by a healer. Healing is "the process of being restored to bodily wholeness, emotional well-being, mental functioning and spiritual aliveness." The healer then facilitates the process of restoration to one's greatest state of aliveness which, in the Black church context, manifests through emotive praise or communal participation in the celebration of worship. Pastoral theologian Larry Kent Graham writes about the idea of healing in the "spiritual-charismatic-sacramental" environment. His description applies to this discussion.

Healing in this context "is usually performed by a recognized healer and carried out in a communal context involving a variety of religious practices." For the oppressed, healing is liberation. One religious practice through which liberation may occur is liberative Black preaching. The Black preacher through engagement of the biblical text, informed by liberative elements of the Black faith tradition, a sense of historical correctness and a critical understanding of the social environment, employs "spiritual discernment" to know what to say, and then verbally "washes and anoints" and metaphorically "lays hands" upon the wounded souls of the people in the therapeutic process of the preachment.

In the Black church, the preacher is the conjurer, the healer—s/he engages Spirit and appropriates and embodies truth and power in a context awash in ambiguity and hopelessness. Somehow, "latent faith and the desire for wholeness on the part of the ill person are awakened by the healer in the healing

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81 Ibid.
context," says Graham.82 I agree with Graham who believes that "persons with special gifts" are used by God for therapeutic purposes. I contend that chief among the special gifts possessed by the preacher, conjurer, healer or therapist is that of love.

William Grier and Price Cobbs are famous among students of Black psychology for their bold declaration that "all Blacks are angry."83 These highly-trained and astute Black psychiatrists located the anger of Blacks in the internalization of White supremacist ideas which burden us all; some to the point of pathology and debilitation. They also believe that change (both intrapsychic and within the social context) is imperative for Black life. They write: "A Black man's soul can live only if it is oriented toward a change of the social order. A good therapist helps a man change his inner life so that he can more effectively change his outer world."84 Given their clear understanding of the souls of Black folk, it is likely that Grier and Cobbs words with reference to what it is that is therapeutic for Black people would warrant credence. They write:

...psychotherapy itself is an indifferent instrument, profoundly effective in the hands of an artist, and worse than a waste of time in the hands of an incompetent. The interpretations and constructions are important, but a lot of patients have been made well with inexact interpretations. The essential ingredient is the capacity of the therapist to love his patient—to say to him that here is a second chance to organize his inner life, to say that you have a listener and companion who wants you to make it. If you must weep, I'll wipe your tears. If you must hit someone, hit me, I can

82 Ibid.


84 Ibid., 180.
take it. I will, in fact, do anything to help you be what you can be—my love for you is of such an order.85

As medical doctors and psychiatrists, they indicate a respect for traditional theoretical psychotherapeutic constructs; they do acknowledge, chiefly, the power of human love and passion for people that is embodied in the Black preacher as what Chester Pierce calls the “street therapist.”86 For Pierce, the street therapist is one who would operate as a “doctor” or “teacher,” who works with community leaders, organizers and community members to provide “support-relationship treatment” for them. Ostensibly, the Black preacher/pastor under the LBP paradigm, functions in this role. Liberative Black preaching not only happens in the sanctuary of the church but in conversations in the community. Black people are a communal people, many of whom prefer to engage the theological in informal gatherings in public places, e.g., on street corners, in front of neighborhood stores, restaurants, liquor stores, beauty and barber shops.87 Some of these people resist communing in the church setting, but could benefit from hearing a liberative word to assuage the pain of their experience of oppression. The practitioner of liberative Black preaching, being motivated by love, will recognize the need for his or her presence among the churched as well as the unchurchèd in their community.

85 Ibid.


87 Wilmore, 279.
The "conjure" is a culturally specific intervention that has historically been employed by African descent persons in an attempt to change the contours of the landscape of their experience. It is a form of resistance that summons the mysterious power of "the spirit." This spirit power is stirred by the conjurer on behalf of persons who need relief from suffering, clarity with regard to their circumstance, and the creation of sacred space for change to take place.

The preacher "conjures" or "stirs up" the spirit to aid the hearer in re-authoring their experience. The practitioner of LBP ought be intentional about "conjuring" the spirit in the midst of the preaching moment by tapping into the spiritual energy of the hearer and orchestrating a power exchange between those who are open to transformative modalities of "beingness" in the worship setting. Thus, the work of Homer Ashby, Jr. is critical for informing the discussion of the historical imposition of words as devices of inspiration, change and empowerment among African descent persons.

The "conjure" bridges the "otherworldly with the "here-and-now." The conjure blurs the line between material and spiritual through summoning and bringing to bear the transcendent power of the imagination upon one's present reality. The practitioner of LBP seeks to generate a sense of creative resistance to injustice and inequality within the hearer's environment, and to address the incongruence within the interiority of the hearer.
Homer Ashby, Jr., Black pastoral theologian, has created an adequate amount of resistance to status quo pastoral theological musings with, *Our Home is over Jordan: a Black Pastoral Theology* (2003). In the text he seems to wrestle, as it were, with demons of resistance and accommodation within the complexity of his contextuality. Possibilities for transformation and hope have been revealed within the context of pastoral theology through his re-introduction of the idea of the “conjure” into the discursive cauldron of theoretics prevalent within the discipline. His “Black” pastoral theology utilizes the adjectival idea to plot a course for healing while acknowledging the sources of the woundedness that cripples African descent persons and communities in North America.

It is refreshing to relinquish one’s imagination to a power that has never been “seen” (but that has been active in the playing out of the liberation motif in the metanarrative of events since Black folk’s encounters with the European circa the 15th century) and to envisage “flying” to a place of freedom; no matter how unemirical the notion. Ashby, Jr. seems to invite the reader along for a surrealistic odyssey into a world where Black people regain a sense of cultural identity and connectedness necessary for the creation and coherence of a communal vision for a transformed future of justice and equality. He sees Black people’s survival at stake in North America and understands that we are constantly under attack from within and without. Conjuring the Joshua church answers the ageless question, *what must Black people do to mitigate the power of White supremacy and its' negative effects upon our collective lives which has placed at risk our very survival?*
It is with solemn respect for the inherent insanity of the spiritual that I encounter Ashby, Jr. The embrace of the Biblical myth of the exploits of Joshua, the archetypal savior, as explicative of how a present people might experience change represents a deft display of faith and hope which indeed undergirds his pastoral theology. He clings to the metaphor of power flowing into persons through words—through “the conjure” of the conjurer. I acknowledge and affirm the power of the liberative Black preaching as a type of conjure. However, while reflecting on this work I experienced an empty feeling associated with the notion that the plight of African descent persons is at a point whereby the theological response is to look toward magical fantasies of wish fulfillment rather than call for a unification of forces for the work of reestablishment of Black personhood and nationhood. Though the power of spiritual connection is not to be underestimated, the efficacy of unified religious, academic, political, economic and social resistance, protestation and demonstration should neither be underestimated. Perhaps our lack of action has to do with our fear and fragmentation, our isolation and aloneness.

In my experience that feeling of brokenness and of being alone is exacerbated when one dares engage in the active challenge of White supremacy, especially when it is displayed in its’ more subtle, liberal variety. It may be Professor Ashby’s internal fear of academic quarantine that disallows him the freedom to entertain more confrontational ways of addressing multifarious ills that plague Black people in North America and the world over. Or maybe it is Ashby, Jr.’s understanding of the Pauline idea that “we wrestle not
against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12) and only the power of “the conjure” can bring about transformation in the midst of such embedded and systemic evil.

A theological analysis of Ashby, Jr.’s work reveals elements of at least two of the methods covered in the Graham, et. al. text entitled, Theological Reflection: Methods (2005). The methods to which I refer are: 1) correlation and, 2) theology-in-action: praxis. Ashby, Jr. situates his Black pastoral theology firmly within the Christian tradition and, while acknowledging the historical and cultural realities of a dominated people, locates it (his theology) in the post-modern present with a vision toward the future. The apologetic and dialectical elements are evident in his attempt to find answers to Black people’s problems that are in part informed by Judeo-Christian reason while enfleshing the theological bones of his argument with bio-psycho-social, economic and political discourse. His embrace of Lincoln and Mamiya’s (1990) first dialectic, “the dialectic between the priestly and the prophetic,” leads him to grapple with the Watkins Ali (1999) idiom of survival versus liberation, though he views the priestly/survival concept as “complementary” to the prophetic/liberation idea unlike Lincoln and Mamiya. He understands that to deny history is to mute the voice of the God that may speak through people who would involve themselves

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89 Homer U. Ashby, Jr., Over Home Is Over Jordan: A Black Pastoral Theology (St. Louis: Chalice, 2003), 36-37.
in active, open, honest—authentic conversation. This aligns his method with the correlation idea.

Ashby, Jr., not unlike the *Methods* authors, understands salvation as a universal phenomenon, inclusive of but not limited to “material, historical and political liberation.”\(^9^0\) His work reflects a vision of social transformation as basic with reference to the orthopraxis of the church and indeed sees the church as well-able to effect said transformation through the conjure of the Joshua church. Says Ashby: “the Black church promotes Black identity through its protest against any efforts to diminish the dignity of Black people...”\(^9^1\) He sees the destiny of the African descent people being inextricably connected to the church’s praxis.

There is a sense of biblical groundedness based on the prophetic tradition of resistance, recouping and maintenance of the group’s cultural identity and a visualization of a future that is different from what one experiences presently. I would have preferred that Ashby include more elements that speak to the disruptive, disturbing and deconstructionist aspects of the Christian message which are highlighted in the LBP model. Though his “theology-in-action” does introduce the reparations invective as a practical means of enfleshment of that biblical concept, he stops short of stipulating any real radical “by any means necessary”-styled injunctions, in the prophetic sense, against our oppressors and those who benefit from our on-going oppression as the dominated underclass of a so-called democratic American society.

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\(^9^0\) Graham, Walton, and Ward, 171.

\(^9^1\) Ashby, Jr., 67.
By and large, Ashby’s reflection upon the theological response as it regards the unfolding conversation around God’s activity in the midst of Black people in America is an adequate conjure to call the Black church to consider our own response to our unique condition. He is careful not to blame African descent persons for our own victimization as he masterfully allows the voice of Spirit to inform his every word. He is quite pastoral (in a shepherding way) in his approach to the subject matter. He is thorough and informed in his psycho-social assessment, his historiography is more accurate than most while his cultural analysis is balanced. His words do not cause offence which may invite others (who may classify themselves as White or other) into conversation around Black people’s present condition.

More likely, however, is the possibility that Our Home is over Jordan… will give African descent individuals, families, churches and communities a template by which they may reflect and act upon the exigent “challenges related to identity, connectedness, and a vision for the future” in a land that has shown us much hostility and minimal grace. More importantly, for the purposes of this dissertation, the invoking of the conjure idea makes space for reflection upon liberative Black preaching (LBP) as a type of conjure that may prove therapeutic for those who experience the pain of oppression as a result of engaging life in a White supremist context.

Conclusion

White Supremacy is the over-arching concept that informs relationality among people in the United States. It is the preferred mode of “beingness”

92 Ibid., 71.
employed by people who classify themselves as White to maintain the preferred cultural equation of “White over non-White.” Thus resistance is the most important expression of Black culture because oppression is the most distinctive feature of White supremacy. Survival and liberation present as the logical concerns for African descent persons in the US. Survival of the violence against Black bodies, psyches and culture, and liberation from hegemony associated with White supremacy become primary concerns for African descent persons who wish to exist with their souls intact. The Black church is where they come for healing and the healing is found in the Black worship experience through the sermonic words of the Black preacher.

Liberative Black preaching has been practiced, albeit without the appellation that I have coined, since Black preachers began to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with other African descent persons in the Black church context. I postulate that when appropriately engaged, the preacher using this preaching method may “conjure” a positive response that is therapeutic for many Black people. This chapter provided an historical backdrop indicating the fecundity of this sacred performance art form as it evolved in the US in resistance to the denial of Black humanity.
Chapter V

Liberative Black Preaching: Analysis of an Optimal Homiletic Model

Introduction

Substantive preaching is the proclaiming of words that may be attributed to God that are delivered in a public forum as a result of diligent, private immersion in a sacred text through prayer, exegesis, reflection, enlightenment and unction. Generally, Black preaching "describes a rich and varied tradition, covering a broad configuration of motivations, theological points of view, art forms, structures, and styles of delivery" that are tied together by a "distinctive Biblical hermeneutic". Liberative Black preaching (LBP) is substantive preaching that focuses on the liberation of the hearers through the use of Black theological reflection as a starting point for the prophetic discourse that characterizes this variety of sermonic endeavor. There are variables that may be identified as constituents of the LBP sermon. This following chapter of the dissertation (Chapter VI) will present a list of variables that is not intended to be exhaustive but rather descriptive of the compositional elements of LBP.

Language is the medium through which the prophetic proclamation is asserted; therefore intimate acquaintance with words and the power thereof aid in the development of an appropriate and effective sermon. The preacher is responsible for assuming stewardship over words and for configuring the words in a manner that gives voice to God and articulates God's commands, suggestions, desires and will for humankind. A Black liberationist reading of the

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words about God and God’s action(s) on behalf of humanity found in the Biblical text makes space for the assumption that the chief concern of a free and just God is that liberation and justice be reified and actualized in the lives of the people. Hence, a working assumption is that words about God ought be rooted in a correct assessment of the context of the people. “Are the people free?”—(unencumbered by systemic, interpersonal and/or intrapsychic oppression), “Are they treated fairly (using the Christian edict “do unto others...” as a moral measure), and “are the people who need the most help getting the most help?” are questions with which the practitioner of LBP must constantly grapple. The LBP practitioner must invite the community to grapple with those queries as well.

The intention of LBP is not to prove that a certain theology is “right.” The aim is to cause the hearer to think thoughts and feel feelings that alleviate the suffering and ameliorate the pain associated with the extant realities of injustice which is a derivative of White supremacy. Another objective which is mentioned above is to instigate the asking of questions—to arouse the curiosity of the hearer so that she or he might be inspired to be creative in their faith responses to the exigencies of their life struggle. The preacher seeks to help the hearer resist the tendency to participate in the diminishment of themselves or their community.

LBP is therapeutic, generative and constructive. LBP is therapeutic because it portends to ameliorate feelings associated with Black suffering and alleviate Black pain. LBP is generative because if approached with an adequate amount of scholarly discipline the practitioner of LBP creates a body of texts that
contribute to the Black theological literary corpus. LBP is constructive in that it builds psycho-social structures which enable the Black church and community to reinterpret their experience through a perspectival frame of love, justice, respect, self-affirmation and self-determination.

The LBP preacher may have occasion to “borrow” from many other disciplines in the development of the sermon. The concept of “painting the picture” is a principle means of reification of the LBP sermon for the hearer. Homiletics professor, Mark Ogunwale Lomax, coined the term “painting the picture” in response to his reading of Henry Mitchell’s *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*. Mitchell writes that preachers ought be “homiletical artists, using all our exegesis and hermeneutics to form images in consciousness...”² The practitioner of LBP is to take seriously their own experience, senses, knowledge base, culture and worldview as an African diasporan to “draw out” imagery that shapes the consciousness of the hearer.

Lomax invokes the figure of a radio announcer in the pre-television era that deftly used words to create images in the minds of the hearers.³ As such, the imagination becomes the primary tool of the preacher as she or he attempts to “jump start” the imagination of the hearer in an attempt to lead the hearer to a place where they are able to see things (existential reality) as being different from the way they are presently. Psycho-social hegemony is descriptive of the

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³ Information about “painting the picture” was gleaned from a conversational interview on March 17, 2009 with Dr. Mark O. Lomax, Professor of Homiletics, Dean of Johnson C. Smith Seminary, Interdenominational Theological Center for the purposes of this dissertation.
overarching structure in which people activity is undertaken in the present African American context. Hence, the LBP practitioner’s messages must be crafted with broken implements—our ‘selves’; for we have these treasures in earthen vessels. (2 Corinthians 4:7)

The Link between Preaching and Pastoral Care

I argue that there is a definitive connection between preaching, pastoral care and pastoral counseling. Arthur L. Teikmanis and Edward H. Linn acknowledge the possibility of preaching to have an impact similar to that of the psychotherapeutic disciplines. This claim creates space for construction of a model of preaching which optimally attends to the thoughts and feelings of persons whose experience has been dominated by oppression. Preaching has historically been and is currently the “most valued” event to be experienced in the Black church. The primacy of preaching in the Black church suggests the presence of a setting wherein the words of the Black preacher are valued. If the preacher’s words are highly-valued initially, how much more valuable could those words be if they were intentionally crafted to create therapeutic space where liberation and wholeness through optimal physical, psychological, spiritual, economic, educational, social and interrelational health can be realized?

The Afro-American Jeremiad as Original LBP

Liberative Black preaching is not a new homiletic category. I propose that in the Afro-American jeremiad is the formational constructive matter for liberative

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Black preaching. From Nat Turner to Harriet Tubman, Henry Highland Garnet to Sojourner Truth, Jarena Lee to Denmark Vesey, Adam Clayton Powell to Martin Luther King, Jr., Albert Cleage to Jeremiah A. Wright, from Malcolm X to Louis Farrakhan, Al Sharpton and Jesse Louis Jackson, African descent preachers have preached liberating messages that assume justice and freedom to be states which are ordained by God to be enjoyed by all people. These and other Black preachers have employed what David Howard-Pitney has called the Afro-American jeremiad to appeal to the thoughts and feelings of those who heard them. The jeremiad, named for Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, originally was "a sermon that predicted woes because of the hearers' moral failures and that was designed to induce anxiety leading to repentance."6 Howard-Pitney has defined the Afro-American jeremiad as a variant of "a rhetoric of social prophesy and criticism" that is informed by the Black experience in the United States.7 It is preaching on this wise that informs LBP.

The Black church has historically, as well as today, been an institution whose mission has included social justice because western culture, including the religious sector, has dehumanized and demonized African Americans.8 In fact, western psychological theory has historically advanced the idea of the pathology

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of persons of African descent from the Middle Passage, to slavery, on to Jim Crow and until present. Nosological designations such as "dрапетомания" (escape attempts by enslaved Africans during the 19th century) and "dysaesthesia Aethiopica" (resistance of African descent persons to the enslavement process) were classified as diseases by White physicians to explain the responses of Africans to enslavement. Yet again the Black church, visible and invisible, has, through the Black preacher as storyteller, constructed the sermon to depathologize, provide hope, and engender faith and expectation for change in the plight of Black people. Black preachers have historically used words and styles of communication that provide empowerment and relief for those who hear them. Each word of resistance gave the people inspiration to creatively and imaginatively confront the psycho-social onslaught of racism/White supremacy.

**The Preaching/Pastoral Care Overlap**

Preaching is a multifaceted undertaking that functions similarly to counseling. Both preaching and counseling are best done when informed by diverse streams of knowledge. While acknowledging the profound nature of C.H. Dodd’s analysis of apostolic preaching, Teikmanis disagreed with Dodd’s view that preaching can be either being *kerygma*, which means “proclamation”,

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didache or “teaching”, homilia which refers to “discussion” or paraklesis referring to “exhortation.” He writes, “No preacher can ever proclaim the good news of God without some interpretation, some discussion, some teaching, and some exhortation. In preaching, kerygma, didache, homilia, and paraklesis always belong together.”

The suggestion is that preaching is an eclectic experience, combining various styles, methods and disciplines in the construction of sermons that are therapeutic. Edward Wimberly, in *Moving from Shame to Self-Worth: Preaching and Pastoral Care*, has written of the intimate relationship between the preaching and the pastoral counseling moment. He writes “...there is some overlap of the functions of preaching and counseling. Though the settings are different, both preaching and pastoral counseling function to help people bring meaning to their experience.”

Much of what has happened to Black people in the United States defies human logic or rationale. The abject brutality to which Black people have been exposed is voluminously documented. Experiences of dehumanization and pathologization rest in the racial memory of Black people and predispose them to hear sermons concerned with liberation and justice; their Africanness opens them to the artistic, passionate interpretation of the Biblical story because African

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13 Ibid.
Americans tend to hold Biblically-based beliefs about the nature of life and reality.\textsuperscript{15}

Sermons delivered by Black preachers can have enduring therapeutic impact on the thoughts and feelings of the hearers by helping them to contextualize, understand and create meaning out of absurdity. Doubtless, in the current context Black people believe that the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States is a crowning achievement in the ongoing work of the God of the Bible. Deconstruction of this belief and other attributions of Divine influence upon the affairs of humankind is within the purview of

\textit{Deconstruction and the Socio-Political Relevance of Liberative Black Preaching}

Black Christians in the United States have a tendency to judge existential phenomenon as being reflective of God in action based on their interpretation of the Biblical text. The God of the Bible is perceived to be active in the here and now, manipulating the affairs of humankind for the good of those who profess a love for God. (Romans 8:28) \textit{Deconstruction} is a “method of analysis” that stresses the arbitrary, manipulative and/or biased nature in which texts are composed and by which modes of thought, speech and action are constructed.\textsuperscript{16} Deconstruction is crucial for the purpose of clarifying reality and reorienting African descent persons from an “other-worldly” understanding of the transpiring


\textsuperscript{16} McKim, 72.
of current events to a perspective that relies more on reason and an exegesis of their own experience. A clear and systematic understanding of human nature as well as the science behind phenomenological happenings is helpful in the deconstruction process. The following terms are defined to help the reader see the logical progression from theological presumption to phenomenological eventuality with reference to the relevance of LBP in the current national socio-political context.

*Preaching* is “the act of proclaiming” according to the *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms.*\(^\text{17}\) *Theology of preaching* is “The understanding that there is a theological basis for the proclamation which occurs in preaching and that preaching is a means God uses to convey a knowledge of God and to communicate with people.”\(^\text{18}\) *Theology* is “Language or discourse about God”; liberation theologies understand discourse to be either oppressive or liberating.\(^\text{19}\) *Praxis,* from the Greek for “action” or “practice” is “A term used in liberation theologies for a combination of action and reflection which seeks the transformation of oppressive situations and the social order...mark[ing] the beginning place for theological reflection and focuses on the dialectic of theory and practice.”\(^\text{20}\) *Theory* is “A particular attitude or way of approaching the world and, by extension, a statement of principles involved rather than the practice of a science” and further “The relation of “theory” and “practice” is an ongoing

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 216.
\(^{18}\) Ibid.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 279.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 216.
question of theological method."²¹ Theological method is "The way by which theology is done."²²

Practice is informed by theory. Preaching as a practice is informed by theory. The practice of preaching is informed in part by theology as a theoretical construct. Theology is contextual and subjectively done out of the social location of the theologian. In the United States context, "theology" minus an adjectival qualifier is best described as "White" theology because the assumption of normativity in the academy is located with the White male. Therefore, White theology is foundational for the construction of sermons in the United States.

Black preachers often refer to White theology as the theoretical grounding place for the construction of their sermons. Preaching informed by White theology is not liberative nor is it Black, even if the preacher delivering the sermon is Black. Certain variables must be observed in order for the preachment to fit into the liberative Black preaching model. I will discuss those variables forward in the dissertation. Deconstruction of past and current sermonic practices among Black preachers is a sensitive issue and must be carefully and thoughtfully undertaken. "Although deconstruction can have destructive consequences" deconstruction of the Black preacher's tendency to preach messages informed by White theology is needful in order to maintain the integrity of the act of proclaiming words attributed to God in the Black church context.²³

²¹ Ibid., 282.
²² Ibid., 279.
Homiletic deconstruction is an activity that stresses analysis of the formation of the sermon. In the first chapter of the book Other-Wise Preaching... homiletics professor John McClure engages the work of phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas as he constructs a theory of homiletic deconstruction. The questioning of the authority of the Bible, tradition, experience and reason in the formulation of sermons is basic to the homiletic deconstructive act. For McClure, deconstruction is not necessarily a negative undertaking. It is used as a “final or extreme critique that is designed to expose two things that can help preaching.” He writes “deconstruction exposes the potentially dangerous binary operations that can exist at the heart of ontologies as well as non-foundational systems of thought.” He continues, “Unless they are critiqued and pried open, these binary operations can turn in on themselves and engender social closure, oppression, or suffering.” McClure expresses an awareness of the vulnerability of preaching to succumb to “structural or systemic closure” which can silence and suffocate the voice of dissent. He also posits that “deconstruction exposes subtle dialectical or therapeutic forms of thought that can be used to mask true critique.” He seems to acknowledge the pressure to conform to a non-critical homiletic paradigm that is exerted in “well-educated, middle-class, North American contexts.” Ultimately, for McClure, what homiletic deconstruction accomplishes is the “showing forth for what they are those things that make

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
preaching what it is." Liberative Black preaching seeks to expose and critique preaching informed by White theological precepts as harmful to the Black church and injurious to Black people.

Cornell West’s latest powerful little book speaks to the need for courageous persons to “think critically, look at the basic assumptions of public discourse, and critique the way our history is told.” He assesses the Black church to be historically comprised of a “prophetic wing” and a “priestly wing.” He writes,

The priestly Black church tended to be a highly niggerized Black Church where the Black pastor, although often eloquent, was so scared and intimidated by the White supremacist power structure that he was subordinate to it” while the prophetic Black church “...said, No, we’re going to fight this thing. We want to de-niggerize Negros. We’re going to shake the nigger out of them. Quit being scared. Walk. Quit being intimidated. Stand up. Quit walking around laughing when it ain’t funny and scratchin’ when it don’t itch. Be a human being.”

West, who is generally considered a moderate voice in the American marketplace of ideas, is quite animated in his deconstruction of the Black church. He is aware of the necessity of critique in maintaining the health of the institution. As a part of the Black church his words are actually an exercise in the Black church deconstructing itself. For West, in order for democracy to exist, critics of empire can not be silenced; for “democracy is about voice lifting, and lack of

28 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 74.
31 Ibid., 74-75.
democracy is about lack of voice." Liberative Black preaching is the voice of democracy, keeping preacher and people, politician and government honest and under intense ethical surveillance.

The Blurring of Rhetorical Speech within the Public Discourse of Black Preachers and Politicians

An example of how African American Christians tend to "biblicize", or attribute Biblical precedent to, current events may be found through analysis of many of their responses to the recent presidential election. The president has emerged out of this historic event as a deified persona. Paraphernalia bearing his image are sacrosanct for some; however, others such as LBP practitioner Jeremiah A. Wright have been quoted as saying "[Obama] is like any other president. He's a politician and he's got to do what politicians do." Deconstruction of the tendency of African Americans to deify a politician may be accomplished through engagement of LBP.

The reason his election as president of the United States is potentially devastating is because his presence as holder of the highest office in the world can be used to project the illusion of justice for all, when poor Black people rarely if ever receive justice in this country or the world. The recent video-taped public murder of Oscar Grant, a young African American man from Oakland, CA, is illustrative of how police dispense justice to poor Black

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32 Ibid., 120.

33 Quote found in internet news article entitled "Jeremiah Wright says Obama Is like Any Other President" at http://yourblackpolitics.wordpress.com/2009/03/08/jeremiah-wright-says-obama-is-like-any-other-president/ (accessed March 8, 2009).
people. While it is true that a Black man was elected president, that truth does not alter the reality of White supremacy and its impact on the bodies, souls and psyche’s, the health and wholeness ("beingness") of Black people. It is clear that Black people can not trust politicians to do what God has called the prophet to do.

Both politicians and preachers, however, use rhetoric in their public discourse to persuade their hearers toward or away from certain thoughts, feelings and actions. Though many Black politicians preach about liberation, only the prophet can embody the liberation ideal and engage *liberative Black preaching* as a style of life. The two are not to be confused though the line between preacher and politician is often blurred through collision of contexts. Ultimately, the preacher is accountable to God for the words that she or he releases; the politician is answerable to empire. While discussing Michael Foucault’s theory on power and discourse, Edward Wimberly reminds us that we should be realistic in our expectations of politicians. He writes: “...we should never base our feelings of being worthwhile and valuable on who is in office or on political processes themselves. To do so would be practicing idolatry—that is, making political parties the ultimate grantor of human worth and value.”

The national climate is currently one of hope and expectancy for Black people. I feel sad and afraid for Black people because our sense of resistance

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34 The 2009 New Year’s day murder of Oscar Grant, III has caused outrage throughout the Black community in Oakland. The shooter, who resigned the day after the shooting, was not charged with a crime. Videotaped accounts of his murder show a BART policeman shooting Grant in the back while he laid face-down. http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/29026856/ (accessed on February 7, 2009).

and our fight for freedom seems to be compromised by the elevation of one Black person while others are mashed and ground into a system designed to destroy any possibility of Black unity and communal progression. Best-selling American author/historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. has written that “The curse of racism was the great failure of the American experiment, the glaring contradiction of American ideals and the still crippling disease of American life.”\(^{36}\) Though I do not, as right-wing talk show host Rush Limbaugh has expressed, want the President to “fail;” I believe it imperative however that US governmental policy be firmly and unceasingly critiqued.\(^{37}\)

The election of the first Black president has caused many citizens of the United States to believe that racism/White supremacy no longer exists. The zeitgeist is one in which people seem to wish to ignore the present reality of suffering that many experience in favor of some proleptic eschatological denouement fantasy wherein the newly elected/appointed leader of the empire makes everything alright for everybody. It is not uncommon for African American politicians to use the passionate style of communication most associated with Black preachers as a rhetorical vehicle to make their way into the hearts and minds of voters. For example, Adam Clayton Powell, John Lewis, Jesse Louis Jackson, J. C. Watts are politicians who demonstrate the eloquence and inspirational speech that has been often associated with Black preaching. Many


\(^{37}\) The transcript of his declaration can be found of "The Rush Limbaugh Show" website. [http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/home/daily/site_011609/content/01125113.quest.html](http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/home/daily/site_011609/content/01125113.quest.html) (accessed February 4, 2009).
charismatic African American politicians who have emerged out of the Black church have avoided the engagement of specific issues unique to poor Black people’s experience. A highly developed sense of compartmentalization must be employed to carry out this avoidance technique. The rhetoric of hope and change tend to obscure the current reality of racism (White supremacy), sexism, classism as intractable realities in American and world society.

The ideology of the current President suggests that there is a “trickle down” expectation for poor people as it was with former US President Ronald Reagan’s economic plan. The inference is that speaking, in the rhetorical style most associated with Black preachers, to the needs of the middle class will allow for the poor to be a class closer to the trickle, in contrast with the rich allowing crumbs to fall to the floor a la Reagan and Reaganomics. It does not matter the distance of the fall, whether from the high or the middle, the direction is top, down. This attitude would not be significant if the current President were not Black/African and intimately aware of the plight of Black people. Black people need for those who have access to power to model resistance to injustice; it is not clear as of yet if the current President has the courage, the soul (“beingness”) the passion to stand for justice for poor and Black people. His recent refusal to send a delegation to the United Nations World Conference Against Racism could be a telling indicator of his stance.38

I am not inclined to join many of my mentors and colleagues in mania associated with elevation of one Black person to the king/priest of the empire and

38 USA Today, “U.S. to Boycott U.N. Racism Meeting.”
pretend that White supremacy as a psycho-social construct has dissolved and
that peace, love and justice reigns throughout the land. In refutation of the
myopic musings of the worshippers of empire sage theologian Walter
Brueggeman has written “Only in the empire are we pressed and urged and
invited to pretend that things are all right...And as long as the empire can keep
the pretense alive that things are all right, there will be no real grieving and no
serious criticism.”\(^39\) In times like these the prophetic voice can be lulled into a
negligent state wherein the reality of history’s impingement upon the present is
obscured. The relevance of liberative Black preaching becomes an issue when
people are cajoled into a state of complacency while waiting in queue for real
change to occur.

In a White supremist context, Black theology is representative of “alternative
consciousness.”\(^40\) Alternative consciousness is shaped in the hearer by liberative
Black preaching as the thoughts and feelings of the preacher are projected upon
or introjected into the congregation. Liberative Black preaching seeks to criticize
and energize the context in which we live out our faith tradition.\(^41\) In this state of
euphoria brought on by the monumental election of a Black president many
African Americans tend to forget the reality of the suffering and disconnection of
the masses of Black people. Blacks who are part of the middle class, particularly
in the academy, tend to forget that liberation is not only for the fortunate and
educated to enjoy, it is God’s freedom that all and specifically the poor are to


\(^40\) Brueggermann, 3-4.

\(^41\) Ibid., 4.
experience. Dwight Hopkins writes the following with reference to "historical amnesia" among Black people in general and second-generation Black religious scholars, with specificity:

Those who have dropped "liberation of the poor" from Black theology or dispensed with the usage of "Black theology" altogether are nearsighted. The current state of structural poverty means that the second generation (and all progressive people) are still engaged in a major effort and that there is still a positive vision that they try to help bring about on earth. But some are suffering from historical amnesia. Most African Americans who are in graduate education and other related positions of authority in the broader society are there because of those who preceded them—from West Africa, through slavery, legal and illegal segregation, antiBlack racism, and through the civil rights and Black power movements. In response to that prophetic tradition of creative resistance founded on love and justice, Black theology answered the question of Jesus' relation to the movement of freedom of the Black least in our midst. The failure to acknowledge, build on, or simply retell this tradition—without grasping the tradition's implications for the survival and service of Black theology today—leads to negative consequences.42

Indeed, Black theology and LBP are relevant as long as Black people yearn for justice and equality. As long as people are poor and hungry and homeless and distraught, a preaching informed by Black liberation theology must be engaged and promulgated. Liberative Black preaching does not allow for the convenient failure to recall the sacrifice of the ancestors or the current struggle of the poor. Poverty is injustice. Racism, sexism and classism are indicators of injustice. Liberative Black preaching is careful to address injustice in all its forms.

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Deconstruction of Classism in the Black Church

Classism among African Americans is a phenomenon that crept into the culture as Black people made strides toward freedom in the wake of the civil rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's. The Black church is negatively affected by classism. Cone identifies "integration" as the culprit that has brought about this anomaly among an otherwise communal people. Stratification according to income level and occupation is one of many behaviors that middle-class professional Blacks borrowed from the Whites that they imitate. Historically the Black church had been the place where all stood on equal footing as subjects of White domination. The elevation of some educated Blacks has allowed for them to separate from the masses and to integrate Eurocentric mannerisms, speech patterns and attitudes into their cultural expression of self. Just as dangerous to the health of the Black church and Black people is the "otherworldly" orientation that focuses on an eternal afterlife in heaven while neglecting to continue the fight for justice, equality and liberation in the here and now. Cone records Martin Luther King, Jr.'s concern over classism and otherworldly orientation in the church but also points out that the integration for which King fought tended to erode the "beingness" of Black people which is a problematic by-product of the process. Cone writes of King, "He often communicated the idea that unless Negroes are in the same schools with whites and socialize with them, they cannot be free or equal to whites. But by becoming integrated with Whites, a few (and only a few) blacks acquired middle-income,

status, and values which separated them from the black masses, especially their religion."\(^{44}\) Cone continues, "For integration, by its very definition, alienated blacks from their cultural history and thereby from those religious values that empowered them to fight for freedom."\(^{45}\) He adds clarity to his critique writing, "To be "free" meant to become white, and to be white in America has always meant the opposite of being black."\(^{46}\) Further, "King's American dream had to be "universal", that is white, before it could capture the imagination of the majority of white people in the United States." He concludes, "In fact, the success of black persons in the mainstream of America is primarily dependent upon their willingness to deny their African identity and become just an American."\(^{47}\) Cone's understanding of King's dream reads with an eerie similarity to the rhetoric of Barack Obama. Obama, like King, is aware of Black people's plight but as the walking enfleshment of the integration ideal he is unwilling to critique White supremacy. He cannot be an African American because he is just an American. Thus his influence among Black people who comprise the Black church could prove to be a deterrent to the masses realizing God's gift of freedom as expressed by Blackness in diversity, not integration.

In *The Prophetic Imagination*, Brueggemann releases a classic critique with reference to the current state of the church and the people who comprise her, writing, "The contemporary American church is so largely enculturated to the

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 149.

\(^{45}\) Ibid.

\(^{46}\) Ibid.

\(^{47}\) Ibid.
American ethos of consumerism that it has little power to believe or act.\textsuperscript{48} He expresses belief that the church has lost its memory but sees the prophet as being equipped to critique the milieu based on an understanding of the prophetic tradition. He writes,

...the prophet is called to be a child of the tradition, one who has taken it seriously in the shaping of his or her own field of perception and system of language who is so at home in that memory that the points of contact and incongruity with the situation of the church in culture can be discerned and articulated with proper urgency.\textsuperscript{49}

The sermonic vehicle for the prophet in this current context is \textit{liberative Black preaching}. Through \textit{liberative Black preaching} an "alternative consciousness" is introduced to the church. The preacher's task is to reshape the consciousness of the hearer using LBP to "criticize in dismantling the dominant consciousness" and "to energize persons and communities" to look toward a truly just and correct rendering of God's promise of real freedom. In sum, Brueggemann hypothesizes that "The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us."\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Liberative Black preaching} is a form of prophetic ministry that seeks to continually critique the context, to comfort those who are troubled and to trouble those who are at ease in empire.

\textsuperscript{48} Brueggemann, 3.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 3.
Pruyser's Seven Variables for Pastoral Assessment

Variables are needed to serve as guidelines and structural elements that render a blueprint for sermon construction. This dissertation presents variables that are foundational for the formation of LBP in a succeeding chapter. The variables for the LBP model are derived from traditional and liberative homiletic theorem as well as my reflection upon my own preaching and observation of preachers in the act of preaching. An example of traditional homiletic variables may be found in the text The Minister As Diagnostician where Paul W. Pruysre makes that claim that "pastors...possess a body of theoretical and practical knowledge that is uniquely their own, evolved over years of practice by themselves and their forebears." He continues, "Adding different bits of knowledge and techniques by borrowing from other disciplines, such as psychiatry and psychology, does not undo the integrity and usefulness of their own basic and applied sciences."51 He caps his thesis by concluding that "Adding clinical insights and skill to their pastoral work does not—should not—shake the authenticity of their pastoral outlook and performance."52 He suggests that pastoral participation in the realm of the healing arts is valid regardless of the consilience, with reference to cognate disciplines, that has occurred in the developmental process of current pastoral practice.

Pruysre offers a set of variables for pastoral assessment. He suggests that any variables employed in pastoral diagnosis ought emerge from a psycho-social

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52 Ibid.
as well as a theological perspective. He states that the variables should 1) "produce empirical differentiations, both to the helper and the helped, 2) be amenable to interview situations, 3) span conscious and unconscious levels of organization wherever possible, 4) have phenomenological aptness, richness and diversity to capture the personal idiosyncrasies, 5) yield a picture of the person...from which pastoral strategies for intervention can be developed."53

The variables are as follows:

- Awareness of the Holy
- Providence
- Faith
- Grace or gratefulness
- Repentance
- Communion
- Sense of vocation

I contend in this project that the African descent preacher/pastor has a separate and unique skill set that is influenced by the reality of her or his "Blackness" which is the essential element of the "beingness" of the African descent person. The Black preacher's unique perspective into the experience of "Blackness" makes her/him uniquely predisposed to the work of facilitating a sense of wholeness in the lives of African descent persons of faith given the historical precedent of the healer/priest/medicine man that existed within the continental pre-European African context.54 This healer/priest/medicine man evolved into the Black preacher on the plantations occupied by enslaved Africans in the Americas and yet exists to a large degree in the person of the Black

\[53\] Ibid., 61.

preacher today. Further this unique skill set, though contaminated by the impurity of White supremacy extant in public theological discourse, is yet not diluted to a point whereby it is inefficacious toward the facilitation of wholeness in broken African descent persons of faith.

The Import of Relationship in Preaching and Pastoral Counseling

Both preachers and pastoral counselors depend on the quality of the relationships created with the persons they serve. With reference to the import of relationship in caring for persons, Elaine Pinderhughes writes: “Because many cultural groups emphasize collateral and affiliative values, many clients who belong to these groups may expect practitioners to be open, friendly, and relaxed, and to function with mutuality and reciprocity.” Here Pinderhughes, as clinician, expresses the characteristics for which many non-White persons look in a counselor. These characteristics correspond to the idea that Paul Wilson promulgates in The Practice of Preaching under the rubric ethos. Wilson writes:

Classical rhetoricians would claim that ethos is of such importance that it is the main element that determines listener response. Today’s rhetoricians call this identity: When listeners make a positive judgment about the ethos of a speaker, they identify with the speaker and what the speaker is saying and give that person authority.

Relationship grows out of the person-served’s experience of the minister who counsels in a one-on-one individual counseling session as well as the one who preaches counsel to many simultaneously. The quality of the relationship hinges upon how the minister is perceived.

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A Theology of Preaching

One understanding with reference to how human action comes to happen is that human action proceeds from an experience that initiates a thought or thoughts; the thought is accompanied by a feeling, and the feeling evokes an action. The cognitive and affective processes precede the action—inform the action, determine the action. Preaching is an experience that ought initiate a thought that is accompanied by a feeling that evokes an action. Dwight Stevenson and Charles Diehl have posited that the sermon is more than mere spoken words, it is “the communication of a whole person—body as well as mind, sensual precepts as well as mental concepts.” They assert that the preacher employs thoughts and feelings in an attempt to impact the cognitive and affective processes of those who experience the preaching moment. They refer to those “mental concepts” and “sensual precepts” as language in the “intellectual mode” and the “emotional mode” respectively. This study of LBP will concentrate on the cognitive and affective realms of communication based on the subjectivistic understanding that what is thought and felt registers as “reality” for people.

Thomas G. Long, in the text *The Witness of Preaching*, quotes a passage from Linn’s *Preaching as Counseling* which describes Harry Emerson Fosdick’s understanding of the aim of his [Fosdick’s] preaching: “The supreme purpose of a sermon, [Fosdick] decided, is to create in the listener no less than the thing which is being spoken. A sermon on joy must rise above a mere dissertation on the

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58 Ibid.
subject of joy by producing a congregation which goes out with deeper joy than it
had before...The preacher's task is to create in the listener whatever he is
preaching about."^59 Though the sermon may concern itself with various Biblical,
thepological or social subject matter, liberative Black preaching (LBP) forever has
for its subject ultimate concern for the liberation of the hearers. Likewise the goal
of counseling is to free persons to own their God given right to be free. The
practitioner of LBP is clear that what the people need is to experience the
liberation promised by the free God and echoed by Jesus of Nazareth as
enfleshment of the concept. Paul Wilson expresses an understanding of the
possibility that there may be a disconnect between what people say they need to
hear, what they really need to hear and what the preacher needs to say. He
categorizes the "expressed need" as that which the congregation has identified
and verbalized as being needful, the "actual need" as the scripturally and
theologically-discerned need as stated using Christian vernacular, and the
"preacher's need" which may or may not coincide with what the people desire or
need.^60 LBP presupposes that no matter what the people want to hear or what
the preacher wants to say, the message is freedom for the oppressed.


^60 Wilson, 31-32.
Adlerian Psychological Theory as Foundational to the Development of a Psychology of Liberative Black Preaching

Blackness has been equated to sinfulness in the perception of the "American psyche."61 The Black mother is seen as the progenitor of Black inferiority who passes down biologically deficient traits to her offspring.62 This perception has caused many Blacks to internalize the idea of the devalued self as identity descriptive and have thus acquiesced to the notion of their color inferiority so much so that "Skin bleaching—using chemical or natural products to lighten skin color—is common practice [my emphasis] in the Americas, Africa, across Asia, and increasingly in Europe." African descent and other non-White persons use products to lighten their skin63 because they feel that Black or brown skin is inferior to White skin. Indeed "Psychologists say consumer demand can be traced to perceptions that lighter skinned or White people are more successful, intelligent and sexually desirable."64 This sense of inferiority is rooted in the psycho-social assault on Black "beingness".

Alfred Adler has posited that intrapsychic disturbance in persons may in some cases be caused by "organ inferiority".65 Organ inferiority is a condition or

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64 Ibid.

state that is characterized by thoughts or feelings of being “less than” caused by inherited “external signs of degeneration” which make a child feel diminished in relation to their context.\textsuperscript{66} For example, a child with gapped and buck teeth, a frail, un-athletic body, flat-feet or knocked knees may be overtaken by feelings of inferiority that persist throughout adulthood.\textsuperscript{67} If one feels inferior based upon the diminishment of their body value within their environment, how much greater is the possibility for psychical disturbance based upon perceived organ inferiority of the largest, most visible body part: the skin.\textsuperscript{68}

Theory “is religious at its core”, in that it “tends to reflect the most deeply held values of the theorist and the theorizing community.”\textsuperscript{69} Alfred Adler was a Jewish person theorizing during and in post-World War One Europe where Jews were discriminated against because of their heritage. Their body parts were devalued while the Aryan variety of human was being propped up as normative. Doubtless this context affected the development of his personality theory. Adler’s experience as a member of a cultural group against whom indiscriminate prejudice was directed makes his theory important in understanding how it is that Black people understand their sufferings based upon their rejection by Whites because of the phenotypic and cultural expression of Blackness. Further, the

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 79.


exaggerated feelings of inferiority that proceed from the presumption of organ inferiority translate to a felt need of a theology that places suffering at the highest level of value.

The African American religious folk ethos is steeped in a theology of suffering. Na’im Akbar locates a problematic in the embellishment of the suffering motif. He writes: “In the morbid story (or allegory) of how Prophet Jesus was supposed to have suffered is an unconscious suggestion. That unconscious suggestion is repeated in every image of the cross or crucifix! The suggestion is one which says to the unconscious mind: **IN ORDER TO BE GOOD, YOU MUST SUFFER.**” [Akbar’s emphasis] He continues: “This motto of the suffering martyr Jesus has led to a fatalism about mental anguish and unhappiness which has overrun the minds of Western people. Many of us actually believe that to experience peace of mind and happiness in this world is equal to sin.”⁷⁰ The suggestion is that Black peoples’ religious orientation is so otherworldly as to invite suffering toward self and one’s community in the here and now in lieu of a promise of peace and happiness in a world yet to come.

Adler’s stressing of the idea of “overcoming” speaks to an internal desire to gain some degree of victory over systems that continually ordain and insure the sufferers defeat. His individual psychology begins at a place where the feeling of inferiority—of being a sufferer—is acknowledged as real. Adler’s psychological theory suggests that the primary indicator of mental healthiness is “a unitary, goal-directed, creative self which is in a positive, i.e., ethical,

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relationship to his fellow men." His concern for human wholeness and agency with a principal emphasis on ethical relations between humankind makes his theory suitable for the theoretical anchoring of a psychology of *liberative Black preaching*.

From the shared ancestors chronicled in the Genesis account in the Hebrew Bible to "march[ing] hand in hand" in the civil rights struggles of the 1950's and 1960's Blacks and Jews share a history of relatedness. Historian John Hope Franklin makes reference of to a document issued by the National Council of Colored People in 1853. The document was signed by Frederick Douglas and others. It acknowledged that the persecution experienced by Black people in the US can only be judged against the history of "persecution and prejudice" historically experienced by the Jews. The theological and psychological implications with reference to Adler's experience and the subsequent out-working of his "individual psychology" are doubtless informed by the historically-recognized sufferings of Jewish people.

Adler wrote during the late nineteenth to early-mid-twentieth century. Born in 1870 his youth was spent in Austria in the late 19th century. Jewish people experienced being blatantly abused and dehumanized during this era in Eastern

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Europe. Irving Howe has quoted Alexander Herzen’s stereotypical description of Jewish boys who were conscripted to labor in mid-to-late nineteenth century Russia writing, “A Jew boy, you know, is such a frail, weakly creature”. It is unlikely that Adler could have escaped being affected by this characterization. Jewish people, like Blacks, were compelled to cohere to each other. As objects of European hatred the Jews cultural commonalities strengthened them. This time period for Jews in Eastern Europe is addressed by Howe who writes:

For several hundred years this culture had flourished in Europe. Bound together by firm spiritual ties, by a common language, and by a sense of destiny that often meant sharing martyrdom, the Jews of eastern Europe were a kind of nation yet without recognized nationhood. Theirs was both a community and a society: internally a community, a ragged kingdom of the spirit, and externally a society, impoverished and imperiled.

The sense of being martyred, of being “killed all the day long” was a shared historical reality for Blacks and Jews. It is because of this shared experience that I chose Adler’s subjectivistic psychological theory to inform my psychology of liberative Black preaching.

As an African descent pastoral counselor, I am concerned about Adler’s lack of attention to environmental and sociological antecedents and how they impinge of the person’s ability to overcome and to strive for superiority by diverting one’s attention to the business of survival and thus making “striving for superiority” a non-issue. The dehumanization of persons in the society is overlooked by Adler. He does not seem to understand that dehumanized persons

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75 Ibid., 7-8.
tend to suffer from “exaggerated” feelings of inferiority that stifles their sense of creativity as well as their access to the courage needed to accept “reeducation.”

Adlerian theory has one of the larger ranges of any of the commonly used therapeutic interventions. Though used in individual settings, it may be more commonly used in group and educational settings because of its tendency to value the individual and his/her perspective on reality. From a theological perspective, individual psychology may however serve the “communal” perspective of church through it’s concentration upon the social interest. The foundational principle of the inherent feelings of inferiority because of the child’s subordination by his/her parents or by nature may not serve the African American population well. The problematic is within the possibility that the uncritical acceptance of the idea of “inherent inferiority” may absolve from responsibility the perpetrators of actions, the producers of policies and the beneficiaries of systems of oppression that are hurtful to African American victims of White supremacy, and may place the responsibility for external interference in an internal location which could result in further pathologization of the victims.

Much may be gleaned by paying attention to Adler’s non-traditional approach to the therapeutic, in that, his style is indicative of a freer, less authoritarian way of doing therapy which may be more acceptable for African descended men who feel oppressed and bound by external authorities.

There is no doubt that Adler’s sense of freedom influenced the way he developed his theory of Individual Psychology. J. Hansen, R. Warner, and Elsie Smith report that Adler’s subjectivistic sensibilities did not totally obscure him to
the fact that “objective reality factors” must be taken into account when analyzing
the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of persons, but that “(o)objective reality, then,
was significant only insofar as it was an indirect determinant of behavior and
provided insight to fictions people developed.”

According to Hansen et al., Adler theorizes that people develop “fictions”
or “distorted views of reality” to support their subjective perceptions of reality.
For Adler, people’s thoughts controlled their actions and very little weight was
given to the influence of “powers and principalities” in the lives of subjected
people. This view may prove problematic for some African descended men,
particularly the ones that participate in the group that I facilitate, in that many of
them are, to a certain extent, under the control of the courts, controlled by drugs
or under the control of other systems of oppression that they, with their present
thoughts, skills and abilities, find themselves unable to overcome.

The suggestion that people are social beings is a foundational tenet of
Adlerian group theory that is palatable; however, his assertion that people are
essentially “good” and inherently desirous of contributing to society is, for me,
questionable. How can one who receives the verbal and non-verbal message
that they are “bad” by virtue of their skin color conceive of themselves as “good”
and further, how is it that one can develop a willingness to contribute to a society
that rejects their humanity, equality and right to justice? Adler, the “social activist”

(Chicago: Rand McNally, 1980), 60.

77 Ibid.
seems to have been unable to process the objective reality of racial discrimination into his theorem.

Feelings of inferiority, for Adler, are inherent to the human condition and theoretically unavoidable.\(^{78}\) Adlerian theory suggests that inferiority feelings are not necessarily negative, in that, those feelings have the power to propel us forward in an effort to overcome that which oppresses or subordinates us. I wonder how Adler would suggest people respond to deception, criminality, domination, intentional “double binds” and power imbalances of this ilk. How can social perversions be accounted for in this theoretical approach to doing group work?

Another foundational Adlerian tenet is that people’s behavior is “goal-directed and purposeful.”\(^{79}\) It is asserted here that if a client is to be understood, the therapist must understand the immediate and long range goals constructed in the psyche of the individual during childhood. By listening to peoples’ recapitulations and memories of their childhood and how they perceived their interactions with family members, the therapist may gain insight into how people understand life in adulthood.\(^{80}\) It may be helpful for those who attempt to understand others to know that “individuals’ awareness or consciousness of their goals is self-determined” and that “people choose to be aware or unaware of their goals or intentions.”\(^{81}\) Adler believed that guilt emerged in people who

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 61.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 61-62.

\(^{80}\) Ibid., 62.

\(^{81}\) Ibid., 63.
pretend to have good intentions but actually have no such good intentions at all, which would seem to contradict his assertion that people are generally good. Is Adler suggesting that “White folks” choose to dominate, subjugate and exterminate people of color and pretend to have no such intention? Indeed, Adlerian perspectives have the potential to engender a sense of awareness of self and of the motivations of others that may inform the preacher in the preparation of LBP sermons.

Conclusion

*Liberative Black preaching* is subjectivistic. LBP theory is informed by the lived experience of persons who have historically been exposed to extreme episodes of complex and confusing phenomena. Such complexity and confusion demands deconstructive reflection so that sense can be made of these experiences. The practitioner of LBP helps the hearer locate God in the midst of the suffering and insanity that is the Black experience in the United States. The LBP sermon is the product that is continually refashioned and re-presented to the diverse variety of humankind that self-identify as Black. The theory that informs LBP is borrowed from different disciplines, all of which contribute to the creation of “a word in due season.” The following chapter contains an example of LBP and an analysis of its effectiveness.
Chapter VI

The Findings of the Applied Research Experience

The Sermon

The following manuscript is the sermon that I preached for the six different “applied research experiences.” The sermon is a treatment of the Luke 4:14-20 text. It is presented as a model of liberative Black preaching and is entitled, I Recommend Jesus.

Mariah and I were riding just the other day. The sky was overcast, grey like an old tin bucket and I slowed down as we passed by the gas station with its sign threatening to siphon the few pennies that I had right out of my pocket. The radio was on and the news lady wondered aloud why the presidential campaign seemed to be about race and gender. Mariah is quite the scholar and she has learned from her mother how to be critical and reflective in her approach to understanding cultural phenomenon. I said to her, “Mariah, why do you think people wish to ignore the concepts of race and gender.” She said, “I don’t know, but it seems to me to be about race because there has never been an African American president and it’s about gender because a woman has never been president before. (In that moment I was gushing with pride over my child’s ability to think so clearly and critically—but at the same time I wondered why it is so hard for people to see that which seems so obvious).

And so we continued our intellectual exercise in politics by examining why race and gender are so significant but nobody wants to talk about it. Please understand, these categorical designations of persons would not be important at all if Blacks and women had not historically been systematically prohibited from participation and denied leadership opportunities in America. And so when Barack Obama’s pastor, Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, that truth-preaching preacher from Trinity UCC in Chicago said “Jesus was a Black man living in a country that was controlled by rich, White people...and, Barack knows what it is like to be a Black man living in a country and a culture that is controlled by rich, White people...and Hillary doesn’t…” Barack is forced to denounce the words of his pastor. Why? Did he lie? Were his words blasphemous or somehow incorrect? Why do people want to avoid discussing race when race is the primary issue in every area of people activity? Why are people inclined to defend the immorality of our oppressors? And to whom do we go to find out how to respond to the oppression that we experience in the form of poverty, disease, incarceration and discrimination. My sistren and my brethren, I don’t know about you, but I got to roll with the Canton Spirituals on this one and say “I Recommend Jesus...
I don't think I need to tell you that the economy is in a recession—and when the master catches a cold the slaves catch the cancer. The price of gas and grocery is steadily increasing while people are losing their jobs and are earning less and less and guess what, the government does not calculate the cost of gas and groceries when they announce inflation rates (can you believe that?) Needless to say, the buying power of the dollar is now lower than the Euro and the yen. Unemployment is up and income is down, the present rate is close to 6% for Whites and estimated at 12.9% for Black people while African Americans earn on average 30% less than White men for doing the same jobs (but race ain't got nothing to do with it).

Foreclosures are up 60% from last year and Georgia has the highest foreclosure rates in the nation. People are losing their homes due to foreclosure in DeKalb and Fulton and Clayton, Henry, Cobb and Gwinnett counties at an alarming rate and because of the propensity for Blacks to have sub-prime loans we are losing our homes at a rate well above that of Whites. (But race is irrelevant) Credit card debt is out of control, homelessness among our people is on the rise and our people are killing each other at record rates. (And you know times are tough when Black people go to killing White people). Addictive behaviors are at an all time high because stress in people’s lives is at an all time high. One in three Black men in Georgia has either been to jail, is in jail or on his way to jail. Racial profiling is law enforcement policy so you ain’t got to be riding dirty to get lit up by the “po-po”; all you got to do is be DWB (driving while Black) (but race ain’t got nothing to do with it).

The jails and prisons are bursting at the seams with young Black men, like slave ships going nowhere and all the government can seem to do is give us more crack, 3-strikes-and-you-out legislation, and build more prisons. The zip code in which this church sits has the highest rate of AIDS infections in the state of Georgia and the 3rd highest in the country and Black girls age 19 and under have the highest rate of new infection. This zip code also has the highest rate of middle and high school dropouts. (I know, I know, race ain’t got nothing to do with it) Fifteen million Americans, a full 1-in-every-18 persons, are diagnosed as clinically depressed and who ever is more stressed ends up being more depressed, and you know that whenever the upper class get a cold the middle and lower class get the cancer. The question becomes who can save us from this hell on earth that we are now experiencing...O my sistren and my brethren I am convinced that the Spirit of Christ is that which can give us the ability to make it through if we pay attention to his life, his words and his actions...brothers and sisters I recommend Jesus.

The Lukan text reveals that Jesus had been a disciple of John the Baptizer. John was Jesus’ cousin who had established a ministry in the Jordan River basin baptizing people for the repentance of sins, as a symbolic public sign of cleansing indicating one’s desire to be forgiven by God. Indeed, it was John who
baptized Jesus one blue-bright Galilean day when God's favor shone down upon a still dripping-wet Jesus and Luke declares that "the heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, sound like it said, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'". Yes, John was indeed an interesting character—he would have been considered a radical resister of political oppression and domestic social terrorism during these days and times. His words were sharp and indicting as he charged governmental officials with snake-like behaviors. He dressed in a way that was strange—pimped-out in a camel hair maxi with a fat leather belt snatched together around his waist. He was straight stylin' on them, wasn't he? (Like Shawty Lo say, "dey know", "dey know", "dey know") John was a prophet whose words were informed by the prophet Isaiah, he said, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' The Baptizer taught the people how to live, how to give, how to share and how to care; he taught them how to be fair and just in their dealings and exemplary in their deportment. And when the power of his words and the courage of his character caused the people to inquire as to whether he was the Messiah, the One, he said, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." John was simply saying to the people, you might think that I'm the one but listen here ya'll, "I Recommend Jesus". (Tell your neighbor, I recommend Jesus!)

John was soon imprisoned and later beheaded by Herod Antipas because John "busted him out" for marrying his sister-in-law and Jesus was then thrust into leadership of a group of baptized believers in the kingdom of God at the age of 30, and immediately he was transported to Jerusalem to be tried, tempted and tested by the prince of the power of the air. O my sistren and my brethren, isn't it just like the devil to attempt to trip you up with tricknological traps in the midst of your life transitions. The devil wanted to turn Jesus out—but Jesus was not going out like that...how many of you know that you can't turn Jesus out (and God knows his enemies continued to try him), and listen at this, the power of the Spirit of Christ is such that if you open yourself to his power that nobody and nothing will be able to turn you out either. (Tell your neighbor, "I've come too far to be turned out or turned around") When we tap in to Jesus' example of strength and courage, his mercy and his love we are given power to resist temptations that could tear down the relationships and the buildings that we work so hard to construct. When we are able to align ourselves with Jesus' personality and characteristics, we are then able to embrace his theology, his politics and his social concern for the least of them. Listen ya'll, when we get to the place in our lives that we have been so sick, so tired, so broke, so hopeless that we took the chance to "try" him, we then become empowered to stand before any man, woman, boy or girl and proclaim, "I Recommend Jesus", because you can't recommend him unless you have tried him. (Anybody here tried him?)
And so here we are (Luke 4:14), having arrived at the text of concentration to find Jesus has survived the temptation of the devil in Jerusalem, having made the trek 70 miles north back up into the Galilee region of Israel to the breezy shores of the Sea of Genessaret. Everyone is aware that the man is filled with preaching power. People understood that the Holy Ghost was all over him as he made his way through the towns and hamlets that surrounded the Sea of Galilee. And so, the time came for him to go back home. I imagine that he was nervous and his rough brown hands were damp as he grasped the scroll from the priest of the synagogue. Memories of his childhood, perhaps running barefoot and carefree through the cobblestone streets of Nazareth, flashed through his mind as he stood before community members and contemplated the familiarity of their faces. But he was a man now and things were different.

He could see their pain, he could feel their anguish, he could sense their frustrations and disappointment with being treated as second-class citizens by the Roman occupying forces. He realized the zeitgeist (the spirit of the times) and he recognized that somebody had to stand up because the people were in pain. The Romans were taxing them unfairly, they were disrespectful of the darker colored inhabitants of the land, they ridiculed their elders and took advantage of their women; they destroyed their way of life, taught their children lies and treated them as if they were children of a lesser god. The people were growing more and more tired of this treatment and Jesus seized the moment at a pivotal point in the history of the world and read the words of Isaiah that outlined and encapsulated the mission of a prophet. He said, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Jesus tells the hometown crowd, listen here ya’ll, it’s all over me. The word anointed here means “smeared”. Jesus is saying the spirit of the Lord God has been smeared all over me...it’s on me and I can’t get it off...every since I went down in that water my life has not been the same—I have tasted freedom and I want you to experience liberation and empowerment in your life as well—it’s on me ya’ll. (Tell somebody, ‘it’s on me’)

Well, someone may be wondering, ‘what is good news to the poor?’ Good news to the poor is you don’t have to be po’ no mo’. Good news to the poor and oppressed is justice and equality will soon be a reality. Good news to the poor is you don’t have to feel ashamed of your situation no more. God wants to elevate you to a place of respectability where “the last shall be first and the first shall be last”; saying however you treat the least of them is how you have treated me...Good news to the poor is “it’s been a long time coming but a change (say ‘a change’ is gonna come, o yes it is)...
Jesus said, Jesus said, the spirit is on me and I have been sent to bind up the brokenhearted. He suggests that he understands intrapsychic disturbance, he knows what depression, and breakdown is all about. In Mark 3:21 he will even be accused of being out of his mind, not by people in the streets, but by own his kin folks. And he will eventually say that “a prophet receives no honor in his own hometown.” Jesus knew what it was like to be brokenhearted and he came to make a difference in the life of those whose hearts have been crushed to powder by the paradoxes and inconsistencies of life. O my sistren and my brethren, if your heart has been broken and you can’t seem to pull it all together, I Recommend Jesus.

(Begin the whoop) Jesus said, the Spirit is on me because I have been sent to bring sight to the blind, to open not just eyes, but hearts—Jesus came to change people’s perspective and to free us to look at life from a different angle. Yes, times are hard; being broke, not having a job, being exposed to HIV, being young and pregnant, sprung on rocks, dropped out of school and being locked up is really real for some of us, but Jesus comes to invite us to “reframe” our way of looking at our lives. Jesus comes to help us see another outcome, a unique outcome that is not informed by our problem-saturated descriptions. Jesus allows us to re-write our stories so that we conclude with a narrative of victory and not defeat, of unexpected miracles instead of being overcome by the enemy…I Recommend Jesus.

Jesus wants to set us free from our oppression and to make us aware that this is the year of God’s favor; this is the day that God smiles on you, this is the moment that your life can change, (unreserved celebration)

“Well, I recommend Jesus
   For all need
   If your in sin
   He’ll set you free
Listen, whenever you’re feeling down
down as can be
I recommend…Jesus
For all your needs”¹

The Experience at New Life Presbyterian Church

The day was windy and warm as vestigial blowback from Hurricane Ike swirled lightly through Atlanta's atmosphere. The sun peeked through the wispy clouds like a child stealing looks from behind his mother's skirt tail and I felt a sense of apprehension and opportunity as I readied myself to preach to persons who were a part of a denomination before whom I had never spoken sermonically. The church is located on a major thoroughfare which knifes its way through the southern suburban expanse of metropolitan Atlanta. The church is situated in a firmly middle class area that is populated with a growing African American working and middle class constituency. My middle son, Keidyman, and I entered the sanctuary of New Life through side doors and sat on the second row of pews nearest the pulpit. Though I was scheduled to preach the eleven o'clock message, I attended the early service, in part to familiarize myself with the liturgy and tone in a service that was foreign to me, and to hear my homiletics professor, Rev. Dr. Mark A. Lomax deliver what was one of the most masterfully articulated displays of liberative Black preaching that I have ever experienced.

The pastor greeted me warmly after the eight a. m. worship service and escorted me to an office where he briefed me on pertinent liturgical practices of the church and what was expected of me while in the pulpit. From the beginning of the service until the preaching moment I felt accepted. The pastor was dealing with the illness of his wife and members of the congregation were particularly sensitive to his need for care. I was aware of that need as well.
The pastor introduced me as a preacher and a doctoral student at the ITC. He explained that I was working to complete the doctorate and encouraged the congregation to be kind to me. I wore a traditional African mudcloth garment emblazoned with the Adinkra symbol “Gye Nyame” atop my shirt and tie. The pastor and others in the congregation were arrayed in African attire as well. I preached the sermon as prepared; however, I was not moved to celebration in the traditional Black “Baptist” sense. This may be attributed to presuppositions that I had as I unconsciously considered my understanding of the Calvinistic theological influence on the Presbyterian denomination as well as the words of one of my Presbyterian professors who referred to them as “the frozen chosen.” I did not “whoop” because the “back-talk” or congregational conversation in which I was involved did not seem to elicit such. I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit but did not impose my tendency toward homiletic musicality into the milieu.

As I concluded the sermon I was made aware of the expectation that I pray an impromptu pastoral prayer. I was led to call the congregation to encircle and lay hands upon their pastor as I prayed for the health, wholeness, freedom and faith of their church and community. Many in the congregation were moved to tears as the African tendency toward “call and response” surfaced among us; the pastor and I included. I realized that the cathartic moment that celebration elicits in the traditional Baptist context was realized in corporate prayer among this Presbyterian congregation. The words of care and concern as prayed penetrated both my denominational presuppositions and the Presbyterian reputation for refrain from outward expression of emotion.
The pastor informed the congregation as to the opportunity to complete a "post sermon survey" that would allow them to share their thoughts and feelings with reference to the sermon. He completed his survey while standing at the lectern. An overwhelming amount of the congregation responded.

The Experience at Lindsay Street Baptist Church

I was scheduled to preach the morning worship service of September 21, 2008 at Lindsay Street Baptist Church where Rev. A.A.W. Motley has been pastor for the past 28 years. A few days earlier, the pastor had communicated with me, through his secretary, that the worship service began at 7:45 am and that I should be there by 8:00 am. I had interviewed the pastor three weeks prior to the preaching engagement. He impressed me as youthful man in his mid-fifties—very deliberate and thoughtful. Doubtless my experience of meeting him and hearing him preach in revival 22 years ago helps to shape my current impression.² After two or three missed, cancelled or postponed appointments we met, again, in the cafeteria area of the church. The church building is less than five years old—a magnificent structure which anchors the northwestern margin of the impoverished Atlanta community referred to by the pastor as the "English Avenue Community." Common folk in the neighborhood call the area "the bluff." The community is known throughout the city for its reputation for "open-air" drug

² I was once an associate minister under the tutelage of Dr. Grady Butler (former dean of students at Morehouse College and current school board trustee in Greenville, SC) at the Historic Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Tuskegee, Alabama (the home church of Booker T. Washington—constructed of bricks that were comprised out of red clay of Tuskegee, formed by the hands of 19th century students at Tuskegee Institute and transported by mule-drawn wagon to the church site). Dr. Butler was pastor at Mt. Olive when Rev. A.A.W. Motley came in 1987 and shared a week of revival messages. As a newly licensed Baptist preacher, I had moved to Tuskegee the previous year to complete work on my bachelor degree. His preaching impacted my "beingness" and left an indelible mark upon my life as a preacher.
dealing, prostitution and violence. The church serves as a beacon of hope rising out of the otherwise blighted and forgotten area known as “the bluff.”

The sun, on this Sunday morning, was blocked by a layer of clouds casting a shadow of depressive gloom over the churches parking lot. While sitting there, I wondered to myself if the preaching/worship experience inside the sanctuary would mirror the weather outside. After the elevator ride from the ground floor up to the sanctuary I was ushered to a seat next to a young female preacher who serves as youth pastor at the church. Four old deacons surrounded a single microphone as they sang, prayed and read scripture as part of the devotional service. The octagon-shaped sanctuary was opulent and expansive, pristine White framed by golden oak and rich brown walnut accent. Two massive brown beams were suspended above and spanned the parallels of the ceiling above balcony level like giant railway tracks. The public address system transformed their voices into rich sonic presentations of auditory perfection. My arrival increased the number of souls present to approximately twelve.

The organist filled the air with tones from the Hammond B3 organ in the absence of a choir. We joined our voices and made music as a congregation. Soon others began to trickle in; the pastor was in that number, along with two other preachers—one that I knew from past encounters and another man with whom I was unfamiliar. We all mounted the pulpit and as Rev. Byrd began to pray a pastoral prayer of thanksgiving, I began to “feel” what I have come to experience as the Holy Ghost flutter in my chest, course through my being and
release the water dammed behind my tear ducts. I looked up to notice that a sizable contingent of brothers and sisters had entered the sanctuary who sat to my left near the rear of the sanctuary. They all possessed varying degrees of pain, hurt, fear, disappointment that was discernable in their appearance. They were unkempt, disheveled, some appeared to be diseased and/or addicted—all were homeless. After more intentional observation, I saw that the crowd had thickened and there appeared before me a rich diversity of African descent persons, members and non-members, middle class, working class and homeless all engaged in worship together.

After a generous introduction from the pastor, I approached the sacred desk wearing a dark blue business suit and tie and sang a verse from a song on the Kirk Franklin and God's Property compact disc (Gospocentric, 1997) entitled "More than I Can Bear":

I've gone through the fire
And I've been through the flood
I've been broken into pieces
Seen lightnin' flashin' from above
But through it all I remember
That [God] loves me
And [God] cares
[God will] never put more on me
Than I can bear.

I prayed an extemporaneous prayer of preparation and read the text Luke 4: 14-20 from the New Revised Standard Version of the bible. I preached the sermon entitled "I Recommend Jesus" to a very enthusiastic congregation of approximately 85 persons in about 27 minutes and returned to my seat in the center chair of the pulpit. The pastor's words of summation were “that negro
preached, didn’t he?” The congregation responded with resounding affirmation, “yeees!”

After the preaching moment, and words of encouragement and explanation by Pastor Motley, I gave sixty-five (65) “post-sermon surveys” to the ushers to distribute among the congregation to those who expressed a desire to complete the survey. Of the 65 surveys I received 59 back, three of which were left completely blank. The pastor commented on the “comprehensiveness” of the sermon and expressed appreciation for my work and promised an invitation for me to return at a later date to preach to the eleven o’clock congregation.

**The Experience at Greater Hopewell C.M.E. Church**

I preached the eleven o’ clock service at the C.M.E. church after having preached the eight o’ clock service at the Baptist church. By the time I arrived, it was a bright, sun-shiny Sunday as I pulled into the back lot of the church. The church is located three blocks from the major league baseball stadium in an area of high crime and poverty known as Pittsburg. In existence for 135 years, it is the oldest C. M. E. church in Atlanta. The pastor is a colleague who has been at the church only a few months, but appears to have earned the respect of the congregation. She is affable, frank, very serious but with a sharp wit about her. My interview with her had gone extremely well the preceding Friday and I was excited about preaching to the small group that had assembled for worship. Many were poor, unemployed, retired or otherwise marginalized.

The choir was comprised of eight or nine souls of harmony—ranging in age from teenager to seasoned elder. The pianist accompanied them and filled
the small church with beautiful spirit-filled rhythms. The liturgy of the church was orderly, serious but yet engaging. After a humbling and thoughtful introduction by the pastor, my song of preparation (see above) and prayer, I engaged the preaching of the sermon with vigor. The congregation was actively involved with the preacher from the beginning of the sermon all the way through the celebration and denouement.

After preaching the sermon, a deacon stood with tears in his eyes and proclaimed, "This is what we need, thank you for feeding us the word." I was embraced by each member of the congregation. I was told before hand not to expect an honorarium because the congregation is small and poor. I was pleasantly surprised to receive gifts from the people despite their state of being less resourced than the other congregations that allowed me to preach.

The Experience at St. John AME Church

I arrived early for the applied research experience with an African Methodist Episcopal church in a small west central Georgia city. The day was cold and drizzly. The reception I received was similar to the weather. I had met with the pastor, a middle-aged African American woman, two months prior to my engaging the liberative Black preaching experience at her church. During that first two-hour meeting, at her home in Atlanta, she was quite relaxed, engaging and personable as she answered the queries that were a part of the Pastoral Questionnaire Form created for the purposes of the dissertation project. (See Appendix) However, our interaction felt distant and uncomfortable in the church setting.
The church would be considered large by architectural standards. The congregation consists of well over 500 members which is large by Black church standards as well. The building is a modern beige brick with enormous White columns that were reminiscent of Greek revivalist or antebellum architecture. I sat in the solitude of her outer office and read Henri Nouwen while waiting for the worship service to start. The pastor seemed to be preoccupied with many other tasks, none of which related to this guest minister. She asked if I had a biographical sketch with me. I did not; but quickly retrieved a copy through electronic mail which I gave to her. She disappeared from the office after having me to know that someone would come for me at the appropriate time. After a while, an usher came to escort me to the sanctuary and I sat at a side pew until I was invited into the pulpit by the pastor. Dressed in a traditional African garment of mudcloth, I engaged the liturgy of the church.

A choir of about fifty women, men and teens sang traditional Black church songs from the choir loft in a less than fervent and somewhat unrehearsed manner. Apologies were made for the absence of the "regular musician" which created the need for an older, presumably more "traditional" pianist to accompany the choir as a substitute. A prayer was offered by a male member of the ministerial staff, while a female member made the "stewardship appeal" and the congregants walked from the pews to the altar bringing their offerings as gifts to God received by the church.

The pastor introduced me as "a student from ITC" who "needed" to preach at a church "pastored by a woman" as part of my research for the doctoral
degree. She did not afford me the usual appellations or eulogiums reserved for members of the clergy by fellow clergy persons. I mounted the pulpit and sang a verse of Kirk Franklin’s “More Than I Can Bear” and began to preach the sermon “I Recommend Jesus” for this African Methodist Episcopal congregation. The work of delivering the homily was made more difficult by the seeming lack of endorsement by the pastor. I struggled to conceal that I felt unwelcome and called on my experience as a journeyman preacher to aid in the accomplishment of the preaching task.

The call and response immediate feedback that I am accustomed to experiencing in the Black church was not evident in this setting. That which is usually the greatest joy felt more like a dreaded chore. The “amen’s” were sparse—few and far between. I consciously decided to “conjure” the spirit by including the “celebration” portion of the sermon, even though it seemed as if there was nothing to celebrate.

After the sermon, the pastor made some important announcements concerning a program that the church was sponsoring later that evening. She made no comment about the sermon. She allowed me to give the benediction which concluded the worship service. Many of the members greeted me after the service and expressed appreciation for the sermon. I was surprised given how the experience unfolded. After the worship service was concluded the pastor was involved in counseling a family and was not able to speak with me, but promised to give me an honorarium on the following day. The honorarium that she promised was never received.
The most interesting part of this applied research experience was a discussion that I had with a brother immediately after the service on the church parking lot. The man was of Afro-Caribbean descent and was the husband of one of the persons on the ministerial staff of the church. He verbalized the disappointment that I was feeling and shared with me his understanding of what had taken place. He reviewed the history of the city and the Black people who lived there noting that their quiet response, in his opinion, had to do with the liberation aspect of the sermon being untenable for them. He commented that the city was occupied by Black people who were connected to the United States government because of the military base located nearby. He also made me aware that during the Civil War, the enslaved persons sought refuge from slavery on the army base. This heritage endeared them to White people who they saw as part of the governmental structure making critique of any representative of authority anathema. Further, he had me to know that Rev. Jeremiah Wright, whose name I invoked during the message, had been scheduled to preach at the church a few months prior but fear of angering Whites and concern over death threats caused his annual revival time at the church to be cancelled.

As we stood outside the church the mist turned to drizzle and my thoughts turned to the long road back to Atlanta which awaited me. I was however thankful for the gentleman who availed himself to commiserate me; his words helped me make sense of the matter.
The Experience at Flat Rock UMC

This was the last of the applied research experiences. The brisk autumn air caused people to lean against it as they entered the church. I sat outside and collected myself for longer than the usual time. I am not clear as to the source of my hesitation. I had a preexisting relationship with the pastor of the church and I was either friends or acquainted with each of the associate ministers. The modest but modern sanctuary felt warm, comfortable and inviting. After participation in a particularly engaging and spirit-filled order of worship and enjoying an abundantly gracious introduction from a colleague and member of the ministerial staff, I mounted the pulpit to deliver the message. Again, I wore the African garment over my European clothing. Once more I sang and prayed in preparation before preaching. I preached the same message but with a much more relaxed pacing and rhythm. The congregation responded to every word, every line of the sermon. The call and response dynamic was experienced at its' height. The sermon was prolonged by preacher and people to over forty-five minutes. The “whoop” felt natural and welcomed. The people had heard what they needed to hear. They poured their emotions out in a communal exhale and release of energy. Afterwards a rich period of fellowship, shaking of hands, embracing and well-wishing took place. The pastor showed appreciation for the message and provided me with an honorarium. I left the church grounds feeling alive and appreciated—as if I had co-labored with God and the ancestors to set the captives free.
Establishing the Variables

- Independent variables answer the question "What do I change?"
- Dependent variables answer the question "What do I observe?"

For the purposes of this research the variables that constitute *liberative Black preaching* are divided into two domains: 1) cognitive themes/concepts, and 2) aesthetic factors. The themes are *faith, hope, change, salvation, love* and *liberation*. These theological constructs are appropriate subject matter upon which the hearer may reflect within the context of the Christian sermon. The cognitive themes are dependent variables. The concepts *racism, sexism, classism, Blackness and justice* are critical to construction of the LBP sermon, but are also essential criteria through which deconstruction of the preachment is accomplished. The cognitive concepts are independent variables.

The aesthetic factors are variables that may be measured as well. *Rhythm or cadence* employed by the preacher, his/her sense of *passion, movement and mannerisms*, adeptness in the area of *musicality*, their *appearance* as well as the *environment* that the preacher co-creates with the congregation comprise the "aesthetic factors" that are crucial in the creation of feelings of being *healed, sustained, guided, nurtured, reconciled, liberated, empowered* or not in the hearer. Healing, sustaining, guiding, nurturing, reconciling, liberating and empowering are functions of the therapeutic process in pastoral care and counseling. I postulate that the same variables are present in LBP. The aesthetic factors mentioned are indicators that people observe as a part of the preacher's presentation of self. These variables refer to the preacher, not the sermon.
Who the people perceive the preacher to be may be understood under the rubric *ethos* which speaks to the identity of the speaker.\(^3\) Paul Scott Wilson does an extensive treatment on the influence that the preacher wields as a result of ethos. Adrian Blow, Douglas Sprenkle, and Sean Davis consider the work of several researchers who categorized variables that measure therapist's effects in the therapeutic process. The four categories are: 1) observable traits, 2) observable states, 3) inferred traits and, 4) inferred states. *Observable traits* are “fixed characteristics” that exist outside of the personality or role the person assumes; such as, skin color, hair texture, age, weight, and sex. *Observable states* have to do with the role of the person as therapist, their experience, training, and other characteristics that are subject to change. *Inferred traits* are characteristics that may be seen as somewhat static which are revealed by the therapist, e.g. “personality, well-being, values”; and *inferred states* correspond to “changeable therapist variables” like how the therapist perceives the therapeutic relationship to be.\(^4\) For the purpose of this analysis, the data reflect an awareness of the differing traits and states that influence the cognitive and affective state of those who experience *liberative Black preaching*.


\(^4\) Adrian J. Blow, Douglas H. Sprenkle, and Sean D. Davis, "Is Who Delivers the Treatment More Important than the Treatment Itself?: The Role of the Therapist in Common Factors," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 33, no. 3 (July 2007): 303.
Validity and Reliability of the Variables

Another question to be asked and answered is "are the variables valid?" According to J. McVicker Hunt, "Validity is commonly defined as the capacity of a test to measure what it purports to measure."\(^5\) The "post-sermon survey" as an instrument was designed to measure the impact of LBP on the thoughts (cognitive) and feelings (affect) of those who hear it. The data gleaned from the surveys are measures of those thoughts and feelings that the instrument purposed to gather and suffice for the purposes of passing clinical judgment.\(^6\)

Are the variables reliable? Reliability has to do with whether or not those who judge are in agreement with others who judge the same phenomenon. It is "the clear recognition of the notion that the information we must use for research...should be reproducible across clinical judges."\(^7\) The question behind determining reliability in a clinical setting is, did the persons making judgments come to same conclusions after observing the same event? The judgments made are not objective, but rather reflect "intersubjectivity" among the judges.

The Data (Results)

The "applied research experiences" at the different sites yield data that speak to the demographic situatedness of the participants in addition to the information concerning the participants cognitive and affective processing of the experience reflected in the "post-sermon survey." There are six different sample

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\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Ibid.
groups: Presbyterian—Sample Group One, Baptist—Sample Group Two, C.M.E.—Sample Group Three, A.M.E.—Sample Group Four, U.M.C.—Sample Group Five and, Ecumenical Worship—Sample Group Six. They are separated for the purpose of identification, not comparison; thus the descriptive nature of this analysis. This portion of the study will address the demographic information.
Sample Group One (Presbyterian)

**Demographics**

- 98.9% place of worship located in the Atlanta metropolitan area.
- 42.7% male
- 57.3% female
- 97.9% African American or Black
- 48% of the churches population was between the ages of 50 and 64
- 12.5% were 65 years of age or older
- 22% between the ages 35 and 49
- 10.4% between the ages 20 and 34
- 6.3% of the participants were under the age of 20
- 51% of those surveyed report over 40 years of "practicing" Christianity
- 10% have practiced Christianity for ten years or less
- 45.3% of had been a church member for between 11 and 20 years
- 30.5% ten or fewer years of church membership
- 20% were not "official" members on the church roll
- 24% graduate/post-graduates/doctors or professionally-degreesed
- 34.4% bachelors degree
- 8.3% associates
- 13.5% had some college
- 14.6% high school graduates
- 5.2% that had not completed high school

**Cognitive Themes (dependent)**

- 26% faith
- 20% hope
- 12% change
- 10% salvation
- 9.4% love
- 15% liberation
- 61.5% all of the aforementioned themes
- Other themes: "determination", "direction of the world/our community", "peace and joy", "redemption", "sleep", "trust"
Cognitive Concepts (independent)

- 27.1% racism
- 15.6% sexism
- 12.5% classism
- 27.1% Blackness
- 28.1% justice
- 61.5% all of the above mentioned concepts
- 2.1% none of the concepts mentioned above

Other concepts:

- “believing”
- “Socialism”
- “thoughts/views of a child (education)”

The following portion reports the impact of “aesthetic factors” that were observed in/on the preacher in the midst of the preaching event which invoked an affective response within the hearers.

- 49% rhythm or cadence
- 84.4% passion
- 31.3% environment
- 47.9% movement and mannerisms
- 44.8% musicality
- 15.6% appearance or style of dress
- 6.3% none of the aforementioned

With reference to feelings consistent with the function of pastoral care and counseling specifically,

- 45.8% reported feeling healed
- 38% reported feeling reconciled
- 71.9% felt empowered
- 43.8% felt sustained
- 42.7% of the hearers felt nurtured
- 54.2% felt guided
- 37% felt liberated
- 1% felt discouraged as a result of hearing the message.
One person each reported feeling either "blessed", "educated", "hopeful", "hopefull" [sic], or "impressed", and one reported feeling "sleepy."
Sample Group Two (Baptist)

Demographics

- 98.2% place of worship located in the Atlanta metropolitan area
- 66.1% male
- 33.9% female
- 94.6% African American/Black
- 5.4% Native American
- 50% between the ages 50 and 64
- 32.1% 39 to 49
- 5.4% less than 34 years of age
- 12.5% over 65
- 35.7% reported being a "practicing Christian" for over 40 years
- 12.5% 31 to 40 years
- 10.7% between 21 and 30 years
- 16.1% 11 to 20 years
- 19.6% claim 10 or less years as a practicing Christian
- 5.4% indicated not being a practicing Christian.
- 30.4% a member of the Baptist church for 10 years or less
- 12.5% between 11 and 20 years
- 3.6% were members from 21 to 30 years
- 7.1% members for between 31 and 40 years
- 7.1% over 40 years
- 39.3% did not claim church membership
- 10.7% bachelors degree
- 10.7% masters degree
- 1.8% doctorate
- 1.8% associates degree
- 19.6% some college
- 44.6% were high school graduates
- 10.7% less than a high school education.

Cognitive Themes (dependent)

- 21.4% faith
- 17.9% hope
- 14.3% change
- 5.4% salvation
• 16.1% love
• 3.6% liberation
• 50% all of the above themes
• One person responded by writing “honored to be there to hear a very powerful and empowering sermon.”

**Cognitive Concepts (independent)**

• 26.8% racism
• 1.8% sexism
• 10.7% Blackness
• 23.2% justice
• 51.8% all of the aforementioned concepts
• 1.8% reported not hearing any of the concepts.

**Aesthetic Factors**

• 25% rhythm or cadence
• 58.9% passion
• 21.4% environment
• 23.2% movement and mannerisms
• 16.1% musicality
• 12.5% appearance or style of dress
• 7.1% were affected by none of the aesthetic factors.

Three other responses were “child of God”, “non-specified” and “the total delivery of the message”, each attributed to one person per response.

**Pastoral Care and Counseling Functions**

• 37.5% felt healed
• 30.4% felt reconciled
• 48.2% felt empowered
• 14.3% felt sustained
• 21.4% felt nurtured
• 35.7% felt guided
• 23.2% felt liberated
• 0% felt discouraged after hearing the message.
Other feeling responses reported by participants at a rate of one per were "born again", "encouraged", "loved", "one of the greatest sermons I'll hear this year, "other", "other, non-specified" and "strongly connected."
Sample Group Three (C.M.E.)

Demographics

- 100% of worship located in the Atlanta metropolitan area
- 28.6% male
- 71.4% female
- 100% African American
- 10.7% under 20 years of age
- 14.3% between 20 and 34
- 25% between 35 and 49
- 39% 50-64 years
- 10.7% 65 and over
- 21.4% 1 to 10 years as “practicing Christian”
- 3.6% 11 to 20 years
- 17.9% 21 to 30 years
- 14.3% 31 to 40 years
- 35.7% over 40 years
- 7.1% not a “practicing Christian”
- 25% 1 to 10 years as member of the C.M.E. church
- 21.4% 21 to 30 years
- 3.6% 31 to 40 years
- 14.3% over 40 years
- 35.7% not a member of the church
- 14.3% had less than a high school education
- 21.4% high school graduate
- 17.9% some college, no degree
- 10.7% associate degree
- 17.9% bachelors
- 10.7% masters
- 7.1% doctorate

Cognitive Themes (dependent)

- 14.3% faith
- 14.3% hope
- 25% change
- 100% salvation
- 10.7% love
• 7.1% liberation
• 71.4% all of the above
• Other: “thank you Jesus!”

**Cognitive Concepts (independent)**

• 17.9% racism
• 3.6% sexism
• 100% Blackness
• 7.1% classism
• 14.3% justice
• 82.1% all of the above

**Aesthetic Factors**

• 32.1% rhythm or cadence
• 75% passion
• 32.1% environment
• 35.7% movement and mannerisms
• 39.3% musicality
• 17.9% appearance
• 3.6% none of the above
• 50% all of the above

**Pastoral Care and Counseling Functions**

• 32.1% felt healed
• 14.3% felt reconciled
• 75% felt empowered
• 32.1% felt sustained
• 39.3% felt nurtured
• 42.9% felt guided
• 46.4% felt liberated
• 0% felt discouraged
• Other feelings: “relaxed/encouraged”
Sample Group Four (A.M.E.)

Demographics

- 94.7% reported Columbus as the city in which their place of worship is located
- 28.7% male
- 71.3% female
- 92.8% African American/Black
- 2.2% Other or Mixed
- 2.1% under 20 years of age
- 19.1% 20 to 34
- 34% 35 to 49
- 24.5% 50 to 64
- 20.2% 65 and over
- 13.8% 1 to 10 years as “practicing Christian”
- 13.8% 11 to 20
- 13.8% 21 to 30
- 13.8% 31 to 40
- 41.5% over 40 years
- 3.2% not a “practicing Christian”
- 40.4% 1 to 10 years as member of the A.M.E. church
- 16% 11 to 20 years
- 4.3% 21 to 30 years
- 4.3% 31 to 40 years
- 11.7% over 40 years of church membership
- 23.4% not a member of the church
- 6.4% less than high school education
- 9.6% high school graduate
- 30.9% some college, no degree
- 10.6% associate degree
- 13.8% baccalaureate degree
- 21.3% master’s degree
- 2.1% doctorate degree
- 5.3% other professional degrees
Cognitive Themes (dependent)

- 20.2% faith
- 23.4% hope
- 29.8% change
- 7.4% salvation
- 11.7% love
- 7.4% liberation
- 48.9% all of the above
- Other themes: 2 persons reported “?”, 1 reported “guidance”

Cognitive Concepts (independent)

- 22.3% racism
- 9.6% sexism
- 12.8% Blackness
- 5.3% classism
- 18.1% justice
- 63.8% all of the above
- 1.1% none of the above
- Other concepts: 1 “magnanimity sermon very good”, 1 “showing love to everyone”

Aesthetic Factors

- 30.9% rhythm or cadence
- 70.2% passion
- 26.6% environment
- 30.9% movement and mannerisms
- 30.9% musicality
- 13.8 appearance (Style of dress)
- 11.7% none of the above
- Other feelings: “all of the above plus clarity in the message”

Pastoral Care and Counseling Functions

- 26.6% felt healed
- 22.3% felt reconciled
- 64.9% felt empowered
- 18.1% felt sustained
- 27.7% felt nurtured
- 45.7% felt guided
- 31.9% felt liberated
- 6.4% felt discouraged
• Other feelings: "?", "all of the above", "encouraged", "God bless you much", "inspired", "lost/did not get right to the point; did not get right to the theme of sermon", "love", "something"
Sample Group Five (U.M.C.)

Demographics

- 100% reported Atlanta/Lithonia as the city in which their place of worship is located
- 21.3% male
- 78.7% female
- 93.6% African American/Black
- 6.4% “Black, White, Chinese, Indian”, “Black/Latina”
- 14.9% under 20 years of age
- 17% 20 to 34
- 29.8% 35 to 49
- 25.5% 50 to 64
- 12.8% 65 and over
- 10.6% 1 to 10 years as a “practicing Christian”
- 19.1% 11 to 20
- 23.4% 21 to 30
- 14.9% 31 to 40
- 29.8% over 40
- 2.1% not a “practicing Christian”
- 34% 1 to 10 years as a “member” of the U.M. Church
- 8.5% 11 to 20 years
- 10.6% 21 to 30
- 4.3% 31 to 40
- 10.6% over 40 years
- 31.9% not a member
- 19.1% less than high school education
- 27.7% high school graduate
- 27.7% some college, no degree
- 10.6% associate degree
- 8.5% baccalaureate
- 4.3% masters degree
- 2.1% Other professional degree

Cognitive Themes (dependent)

- 6.4% faith
- 14.9% change
- 0% salvation
• 4.3% love
• 4.3% liberation
• 68.1% all of the above

_Cognitive Concepts (independent)_

• 25.5% racism
• 6.4% sexism
• 23.4% Blackness
• 19.1% classism
• 12.8% justice
• 68.1% all of the above

_Aesthetic Factors_

• 29.8% rhythm or cadence
• 80.9% passion
• 38.3% environment
• 38.3% movement and mannerisms
• 27.7% musicality
• 12.8% appearance
• 6.4% none of the above
• Other feelings: “all of the above”

_Pastoral Care and Counseling Functions_

• 40.4% felt healed
• 25.5% felt reconciled
• 76.6% felt empowered
• 17% felt sustained
• 42.6% felt nurtured
• 57.4% felt guided
• 31.9% felt liberated
• Other feelings: “all of the above”
Sample Group Six (Ecumenical)

Demographics

- N/A*
- 50.7% male
- 49.3% female
- 95% African American/Black
- 1.5% Asian/Pacific Islander
- 3% Other or mixed "African American/Native American"
- 31.3% between 20 and 34 years of age
- 44.8% between 35 and 49
- 22.4% between 50 and 64
- 1.5% 65 years and older
- 11.9% 1 to 10 years as a "practicing Christian"
  - 23.9% 11 to 20
  - 25.4% 21 to 30
  - 20.9% 31 to 40
  - 14.9% over 40 years
  - 3% not a "practicing Christian"
- N/A*
- 1.5% high school graduate
- 3% some college, no degree
- 49.3% baccalaureate
- 37.3% masters degree
- 9% doctorate degree

Cognitive Themes (dependent)

- 17.9% faith
- 28.9% hope
- 14.9% change
- 7.5% salvation
- 11.9% love
- 28.4% liberation
- 55.2% all of the above
- Other themes: "choice", "Christ", "justice"
Cognitive Concepts (independent)

- 22.4% racism
- 11.9% sexism
- 16.4% Blackness
- 10.4% classism
- 20.9% justice
- 71.6% all of the above
- 1.5% none of the above
- Other concepts: “education”, “liberation”, “empowerment”

Aesthetic Factors

- 64.2% Rhythm or cadence
- 89.6% Passion
- 38.8% Environment (people/setting)
- 55.2% Movement and mannerisms
- 53.7% Musicality
- 41.8% Appearance (Style of dress)
- 3% none of the above
- Other feelings: “connection to truth”, “homiletic content”, “knowledge”, “word knowledge”

Pastoral Care and Counseling Function

- 37.3% felt healed
- 34.3% felt reconciled
- 89.6% felt empowered
- 43.3% felt sustained
- 53.7% felt nurtured
- 41.8% felt guided
- 74.6% felt liberated
- Other feelings: “encouraged”, “inspired & motivated”, “peaceful”, “[the preacher] was outstanding!”, “safe in the power and loving arms of Jesus”, “the best sermon I have ever witnessed; the absolute best”

*This applied research experience took place at the ITC during the Urban Theological Institute’s (UTI) chapel service. It was an ecumenical service comprised of worshippers from many different churches and denominations; therefore no useable data were collected in those demographic areas that reflected church membership and location.
Analysis of the Data

The overwhelming majority those who completed the survey lived in the Atlanta metropolitan area save those from the A.M.E. sample group who were residents of Columbus, GA and the surrounding area. Nearly all of the persons who participated in the survey were African American and were a part of what constitutes the Black church. Even the one Asian participant is a member of a Black Baptist church. With exception of the Baptist church, the majority of the participants were Black women. This is consistent with the make-up of the typical Black church. In that the study is oriented toward the understanding of communal phenomenon as opposed to individual responses, the data are judged accordingly. The operating presupposition is that white supremacy as a phenomenological experience of Black people is such that predisposes them for therapeutic intervention that affects them similarly across demographic strata. The intervention is liberative Black preaching (LBP). Thus the fact that the overwhelming majority of respondents were Black speaks to the validity of the instrument.

The 35-49 and the 50-64 year-old demographic constituted the majority of the participants across denominations. Adults within this age range tend to have had similar experiences in their engagement of white supremacy in the social and occupational environment. Many of those in the 50-64 and older range may

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8 Sample Group Two (Baptist) has a feeding program for the “transitional population” which I observed to be comprised of an overwhelming number of African American men. The meal is served directly after the eight a.m. worship service. Doubtless the demographic data with reference to “gender” were skewed by this reality.

have experienced blatant racism in the form of violence or abject subordination consistent with Jim and Jane Crow life in the southern United States and carry vivid memory of that which they witnessed or lived through. Over half the participants from Sample Group One (Presbyterian) reported being “practicing Christians” for over 40 years; indeed every sample group except Sample Group Six (Ecumenical) reflected the majority of worshippers reporting over 40 years of experience as “practicing Christians.” The majority of participants in Sample Group One had been members of the church for 20 years or less. This may be attributed to the fact that the church was established less than 30 years ago. In Sample Group Two (Baptist), the data (almost 40% non-members) are as such because the majority of persons present were actually “visitors” as a result of the feeding ministry as opposed to “members” of the church. Sample Group Four (A.M.E.) reported over 40% with a membership tenure of less than 10 years with another 23% visitors, while Sample Group Three (C.M.E.) had a quarter (25%) of the participants reporting membership of under 10 years with visitors reporting at 35.7%. Both these congregations are historically Black Methodist denominations and both happen to be led by a Black woman. By far the most “educated” sample group was assembled at the UTI chapel service as most respondents were seminarians or somehow connected with the academy; Sample Groups One (Presbyterian) and Four (A.M.E.) had majority respondents with college experience. Sample Groups Two (Baptist), Three (C.M.E.) and Five (U.M.C.) had a majority reporting less than baccalaureate educational achievement.
Variables that fall under the designation "dependent cognitive themes" may be observed (heard) to be present in preaching. Between fifty and seventy percent (50-70%) of the participants heard all of the dependent cognitive themes addressed in the message that was preached in the applied research experiences. These themes are basic foundational rudiments of the faith. The "independent cognitive concepts" are variables that define the context in which the preachment is developed that beg to be addressed and changed. Most participants across sample groups report fifty to seventy percent (50-70%) acknowledgment of all of the variables in that group. Sample Group Three (C.M.E.) however had a greater rate of response with 82% of participants reporting hearing all of the variables identified as independent cognitive concepts.

Among the "aesthetic factors" by far the most powerful response across all sample groups was to the variable passion. Passion has to do with power; the preaching power comes from God.¹⁰ Stephen Farris writes: "The "marrow" of preaching is always something beyond our control. The life-giving power in preaching comes not from the preacher's skill or eloquence and most certainly not from her or his mastery of homiletical method. It comes from God." He clarifies, "That is to say, not only the subject matter of Christian preaching is God's; the power of preaching is also God's."¹¹ The overwhelming response to the variable passion speaks to the desire of the Black congregant to "feel

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¹¹ Ibid.
something” in the midst of the preaching; while a high value is placed on emotionality, cogitation is equally needful if preaching is to be truly liberative. In the church setting, the majority of respondents report not being affected by the appearance of the preacher; however, nearly 42% of those who responded in the ecumenical setting (Sample Group Six) felt affected by the preacher’s appearance.

The persons who completed the post sermon survey responded strongly in affirming feelings of being empowered in the wake of the preaching. Across the board, it was the pastoral care and counseling function to which the majority of participants responded. Forty-eight (48%) of respondents from Sample Group Two (Baptist) reported feeling empowered while almost ninety percent (90%) of those experiencing the ecumenical service had the same response. Sample Groups One, Three and Five each reported over 70% response to the same variable. Feelings of being guided and liberated followed in close proximity to each other as the next most affirmed feelings reported by participants.

Discussion

The data show that the participants were mainly between the ages of 35 and 64 years. This suggests that the Black church is primarily populated by the most mobile and independent segment of the population who have a prolonged relationship with the church and who have been practicing the Christian faith for the majority of their lives. Interestingly, educational level had no significant impact upon how people responded affectively to the sermon, although those

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12 James H. Harris, Liberation Preaching (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 41.
with graduate theological education (Sample Group Six) seemed more able and willing to identify and express their responses to the query as posed.

Of the 388 participants in the survey, only 1.8% of the persons reported feeling discouraged as a result of hearing the sermon. The virtual absence of negative feedback reflects the therapeutic nature of liberative Black preaching in that an overwhelming majority of those who hear it report feelings that correspond to the pastoral care and counseling functions or variables which are indicators of well being.

**Conclusion**

From a quantitative perspective, it may be concluded that LBP is therapeutic given the responses to query in the post sermon survey. It appears to this researcher that congregants appreciate the opportunity for their thoughts and feelings to be heard. The church tends to be authoritative leaving little space for expression of the authentic thoughts and feelings of the congregation. The survey became part of the liturgy in each of the worship settings as the instrument allowed the customary call and response of the Black church to be expressed in literary form.

As the responses by those who participated in the survey suggest, there are countless other variables that could be employed to describe the thoughts and feelings experienced during the preaching moment. The instrument used to extract the data was not without flaw. More questions could have been raised to get at the complexity of the demographic make-up of the participants. Other mainline Black denominations, e.g., the Church of God in Christ, could have
been included in the study. "Pre" and "post" sermon surveys may have provided more useable information in terms of the actual impact of the sermon from a "before and after" comparative perspective.

The deficiencies of the study not-with-standing, the study made space for the different congregation's thoughts and feelings to be expressed which creates opportunity for pastoral reflection and self-evaluative pursuits by Black preachers who currently resist the scientific method as a means of informing how they approach their craft. Careful consideration of the data may help Black preachers to begin to consider anew the voices of the members of their congregations as another valid source to inform their messages.
Chapter VII

Conclusion

This dissertation includes the previous chapters that presented an introduction, a Black theological anthropology, research with reference to the "beingness" idea, a history of the Black church, Black preachers and Black preaching, the presentation of *liberative Black preaching* as a homiletic model and, the findings of the applied research experiences that rendered the data for the research project. This chapter briefly revisits the aforementioned and provides reflection on the utility of *liberative Black preaching* as psychotherapeutic tool capable of aiding in the counterbalancing of the affects of White supremacy in the lives of African descent persons.

Thesis

The thesis of this dissertation is pastoral care/counselling/psychotherapy may be done *en masse* through *liberative Black preaching* (LBP) as a unique form of communication characterized by its ability to help in the alleviation of Black pain and the amelioration of Black suffering among African descent persons in the Black church context.

Problem Statement

Much of the preaching in the Black church reflects neither liberative nor Blackness, because it is informed by White theological reflection which generally oppresses hearers informed by the *universal African worldview*. White supremacy as a ubiquitous system of governance impacts the thoughts, feelings
and actions of persons and organizes the structures of people activity in the United States.

**Problem Solution**

*Liberative Black preaching* (LBP) is a homiletic model that is comprised of variables suitable for reproduction in the construction of sermons delivered by Black preachers. The initial chapter introduces the reader to the Africentric paradigm that is used for the purposes of interpretation throughout the research project. Chapter I includes the informing theories and the methodology that guides the research and acknowledges some of the limitations of the study. A description of the chapters is provided in Chapter I to aid the reader in following the progression of the dissertation's argument.

Chapter II, "Toward a Black Theological Anthropology," seeks to provide theological perspective for the dissertation. A discussion concerning a protocol capable of transformative impact upon the "beingness" of African descent persons necessarily presupposes discourse in the area of theological anthropology. Theological anthropology deals with the human as a part of creation, humankind as sinners and humankind as the objects of redemption. Within the parameters of the discourse is space to consider how being sinned against affects the victims of the sinful actions of others? Discussion of what redemption for the sinner and the sinned against looks like is considered as well. In the chapter "Toward a Black Theological Anthropology," I wrestle with questions that challenge existing paradigms for reflection upon the humanness of

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Black people and the expectations that Black humans may have of the God of justice.

In Chapter III, "On "Beingness": Black Self-Identity and the Universal African Worldview" a discussion of what it means to "be" and be "Black", as well as general observations about the view that a lens of Blackness provides is undertaken. A psycho-social analysis of Black people's context is expressed based upon Black epistemological evaluation. This chapter is important in framing the rest of the dissertation in a way that made space for the clear articulation of how Black people are injured by thoughts, actions and policies that do not take into consideration the "difference" between how African descent and European descent populations experience reality.

Chapter IV provides the much needed historical background that is the foundation upon which the LBP model rests. LBP is informed by the sociology of the Black church and the psychology of the Black preacher as expressed from the 16th and 17th century to present. Thus "A Cursory Historical Overview of the Black Church, Black Preachers and Black Preaching" is necessary to ground the LBP model in the reality of Black suffering, resistance and resilience, and to expose the historical record that bears witness to the courage of our African American ancestors.

Chapter V, "Liberative Black Preaching: The Constructive Analysis of an Optimal Homiletic Model", is the constructive chapter of the dissertation. This chapter presents LBP as a solution to the problem of poorly-focused sermons delivered in the Black church setting. Evidence of the link between preaching and
pastoral counseling is introduced in this chapter. The introduction of the idea of deconstruction as being essential to the analytical enterprise is presented, as well. The theology and the psychology of LBP is established, giving LBP viability and validity as a theory of preaching that is intentionally therapeutic.

In Chapter VI, the data reflect that this variety of preaching is therapeutic for African descent persons who are exposed to it. Liberative Black preaching contains elements that persons who hear it describe in terms of its beneficial impact upon their lives.

**Evaluation of the Model**

Provenance of the utility of the LBP model is realized through the quantitative method of surveying 388 congregants in six separate and distinct worship settings. Variables are identified and persons are surveyed to test whether those variables measured what they purported to measure. After variables are divided into dependent and independent cognitive themes/concepts and aesthetic factors, the participants in the post sermon survey determines if the traditional pastoral care and counseling functions are satisfied during their processing of the preaching. Participants overwhelming respond that traditionally recognized therapeutic indicators are applicable to describe their feelings across denominational and demographic strata.

**Delimitations**

This study is created for the Black church, in the Black church, by a part of the Black church. The dissertation is a community exercise and the masses of
Black people are felt to be involved with and dependent upon its effectiveness in communicating a solution for the stated research problem.

The mixed methods approach to the research for this dissertation allows for adequate discussion of the research problem while creating space for quantifiable results to be gleaned in the process. Doubtless the research suffers from some bias given the researchers intimate interconnection with the subject matter.

This dissertation presents a rationale and a model to enhance homiletic efficacy in the Black church setting. There is great value in furthering the conversation between pastoral counseling and Black preaching through a means of meta-analysis and deconstruction of both disciplines. The intersection between disciplines within the purview of pastoral theology is representative of the holistic and connected nature of ministries of the church.

**Conclusion**

An important contribution of this dissertation to the discipline of pastoral counseling is the presentation of an intentionally therapeutic homiletic model that impacts the cognitive and affective processes of the hearer. The active integration of specific material in the text of the sermon and the power to make the words live can potentially have great impact upon the well being of the hearer. Understanding the depth of the cultural imprint on the person is critical to the preaching task. The preacher invites the hearer to be well through attunement with the hearer's authentic self and passionate release of a prophetic word of liberation and empowerment.
Endeavors for future study are in the following areas:

1. Studies related to the impact of non-traditional Black music and musicality as being intentionally psychotherapeutic in the worship setting of the Black church.

2. Studies in the use of Black comedy as a psychotherapeutic medium for preaching in the Black church setting and the experimentation with culturally distinct communal nuances for pastoral theological reflection.

3. Studies in the homiletic efficacy of “whooping” or intonation as a vocal technique in Black preaching; is the vibratory frequency created in the whoop therapeutic for Black people?
APPENDIX
Be skillful in speech that you may be strong,
Words are more powerful than fighting...
Comfort the weeper
do not oppress the widow
do not take a man's inheritance away
do not degrade your subordinates
do not punish wrongfully
do not kill

Lo the miserable Asiatic
He is wretched because of the place he's in
Short of water, bare of wood,
It's paths are many and painful because of
mountains.
He does not dwell in one place,
Food propels his ego,
He fights since the time of Horus.

(Lichtheim, 1975, p. 104)¹

"More Than I Can Bear"

(chorus)
I've gone through the fire
And I've been through the flood
I've been broken into pieces
Seen lightnin' flashin' from above
But through it all I remember
That He loves me
And He cares
And He'll never put more on me
Than I can bear

I said
Never put more on me
No no
Never put more on me
Unh unh
Never put more on me
Never
His word said He won't
I believe it
I receive it
I claim it
It's mine(x4's)
No he'll never
Put more on me
Than I can bear
Can bear ²

Glossary of Terms

“Beingness” refers to the state and the process of self/group-identity, self-awareness, self-understanding, and kujichagulia (self-determination) as a human agent of Divine creation. “Beingness” is embodied in the concept of freedom and is expressed as the person’s “natural” way of being human.

The Black Church is the oldest Biblically-based Christian organization of African descent persons on United States soil; it owns its “Blackness” and its connection to the historical church as established by Jesus of Nazareth; it is the sustainer and nurturer of the faith and the training ground of African American survival.

Change refers to a person, place, or thing being different as compared to a previous time of observation.

Classism is the psychological assumption and concomitant institutional practice of diminishing the humanity of persons classified as being academically, politically and/or socio-economically beneath the class-conscious person assessing hierarchical positionality.

Deconscioutization refers to the disconnection of African descent persons from the authentic indexical self.

Faith is the ability and inclination to believe that positive change can occur. It refers to a sense of trust in God or others in cooperation with God to be trustworthy and to act in ways that promote the greatest good for Black people.

Freedom refers to the ontological construct of being unencumbered by internal or external obstacles to embody the greatest state of wholeness, health, and aliveness conceivable and attainable by the person and the group with whom they identify; a state wherein one’s humanity and positive association with Divinity are affirmed and respected; the state of being able to make decisions with regard to one’s own destiny with the agency to express self-determination.

Healing is derived from the word “health”; refers to moving toward a state of optimal positive functioning—physically, cognitively, emotionally, environmentally, politically, personally, economically, and socially.

Hope is the active expectation of change.
Indexical self refers to the idea of the self that is ascribed to by most non-European persons whereby “the self is perceived or indexed by the contextual features of social interaction in diverse situations.”³

Liberation refers to the state of being free or the process of becoming free.

Psychosystemic refers to “The reciprocal interplay between the psyche of individuals and the social, cultural, and natural order.”⁴

Reconsolitization refers to the reconnection of African descent persons with the authentic indexical self.

Referential self is the model of self-realization generally ascribed to by European descended persons whereby the self is seen to be “a separate, encapsulated self that is presumed to be the originator, creator, and controller of behavior.”⁵

Sexism is the psychological assumption and concomitant institutional practice of diminishing the humanity of persons based on gender identification.

To be sustained is to be held in a state whereby nothing worth saving is lost; one is stabilized in a homeostatic state of being.

A variable is a distinguishing factor that may change during the course of observation.

Wholeness means complete; possessing awareness of the reality that one is missing nothing, interconnected with everything and that one has unlimited potentiality.


⁴ Larry Kent Graham, Care of Persons, Care of Worlds: A Psychosystemic Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 262.

⁵ Ibid.
Bibliography

Books


**Journals, Proceedings and Periodicals**


**Audio and Video Recordings**


result often in early life. 1 When the disorder has resulted from conditions of the lens, the retina, or when glaucoma is involved, blindness is likely to come more frequently in later life.

Prevention

There are a variety of methods in the prevention of blindness. A program of prevention would involve the controlling of accidents, a good public health program, and efficient prenatal care. Such an effort would depend largely upon the cooperative planning of many agencies and professional groups. Some of the measures that are now being undertaken are the control of communicable diseases, and the development of a program for safety education to prevent injuries to the eyes. Safety engineers in industry and elsewhere are primarily interested in this type of program.

In the past this was quite prevalent among school children. The movement for the prevention of blindness may be said to have been centered around this disease. 2 Initial action was taken by the New York Medical Society in 1887. A committee was appointed to investigate the question of blindness due to ophthalmia neonatorum and to make a report of the findings. This organization led the way for other organizations in the prevention of blindness.

Syphilis is the cause of practically all congenital blindness. Since the disease presents a social problem as well as a medical one, its prevention is a job for the social worker as well as the physician. The social worker may be instrumental in the education and rehabilitation phase

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1 Harry Best, op. cit., p. 32.
2 Ibid., p. 156
# CASE HISTORY CARD

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- ATTENDED SCHOOL FOR SEEING
- ATTENDED SCHOOL FOR BLIND

| CAN READ | YES | BRAILLE |
| RAISED TYPE | NO | GRADE 1 | GR. 1.5 | GR. 2 |
| MOON | N. Y. | AMERICAN | HAS TALKING BOOK |

- FROM OTHER SOURCES
- AMT RELATIVES
- AMT SUPPORTED
- BY OWN
- BY EARNINGS

| OCCUPATION | PRINCIPAL OCCUPATION |
| PRESENT | BEFORE BLINDNESS |

| KIND OF WORK OR TRAINING | WOULD LIKE TO PURSUE |
| NAME OF PHYSICIAN | (Eye or Medical) |
| AFFILIATIONS: | RELIGIOUS | FRATERNAL |
| HOW MANY DEPENDENTS |

| REMARKS | (Date of First Interview) | (Subsequent Interview) | (Other Information) |
| REPORTED BY | Name | ADDRESS | PHONE |


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