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The Mass Exodus of Black Millennials From the Black Church: In Search of Biblical Blackness

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE MASS EXODUS OF BLACK MILLENNIALS FROM THE BLACK CHURCH:
IN SEARCH OF BIBLICAL BLACKNESS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JACQUELINE A. TRIM

PORTLAND, OREGON

MARCH 2023



**PORTLAND
SEMINARY**

George Fox University



CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Jacqueline A. Trim

has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 28, 2023 for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry in Spirit-Filled Global Leadership in the African Diaspora.

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DEDICATION

To my precious husband, Paul Alfred, my two sons, Al and Tyson, and five grandchildren: Anthony, Janice, Kylon, Alpha. and Olivea. You all have been my help and strength throughout this journey. Thank you very much for the patience and comfort as I penned this project. In memory of my mother, Olga Doris Sparman, who instilled the importance of education in of her children and lived it by example after the birth of her eighth child. Your light still shines brightly. I love you always Mom.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

What a journey! A journey of much uncertainty, deep twists and turns, highs and deep lows! To be walking out into the sunlight has to be nothing but for the mercy and love of Almighty God who designed this plan. It was mid-September 2020 when I was admitted to this program at Jakes School of Divinity in collaboration with George Fox University. Two weeks prior, my husband was hospitalized for a simple treatment and antibiotics for wound care but I watched in horror and trepidation as a temporary situation turned into a long-term one resulting in him being an amputee.

Today I give God all the Glory for having given me the strength of mind and fortitude to silently stay the course despite the many compelling and seemingly justifiable calls to quit. My faith, family, and friends have been my anchor during this process. I am grateful to God for the many blessings in my life and for choosing to take this journey with me every step of the way. “To whom much is given, much is required,” and I will seek to honor God in all I say and do with every opportunity in my life to give him glory.

To my husband, Paul, thank you for finally understanding this was not just my call but *our* call to something greater and richer for our assignment ahead. You have endured so much over the years but today you stand proud of my perseverance and strength. Thank you!

To our two sons, Al and Tyson, who felt I was carrying too much and wanted to whisk me away into the sunset for some much-needed care. I love you and appreciate your love, concerns, hugs, and kisses.

To my five grandchildren who struggled to understand why granny was always on the laptop and no longer engaged in fun time. You are my strength and joy. Your constant

calls for your own survival and demands you come to my house because you couldn't spend another day in yours warmed my heart. Your pleas and reasons were hilarious when I said yes but heart wrenching when I had to say no. Throughout it all, I knew I was surrounded by love. We have much catching up to do.

In loving memory of my mom who instilled the importance of education and faith in God. I would not be who I am today without her fight for the equality of educating her male and female children against a system that would have preferred the girls to sit back and wait to be married and raise their own children. You believed that girls can pursue all levels of education, get married, and still raise their kids.

Thank you to the pastors who believed in me and supported my research study: Apostle Amos L. Howard, Pastor Mo Obayomi, Pastor Reverend Roy E. Carryl, and Pastor Darius G. Crayton. I am grateful to my dissertation advisor, Dr. William Valmyr and Doctor of Ministry Program Director Dr. Valarie Crumpton for their encouragement, understanding, support, and guidance in completing this research study. Thank you for caring! Thank you to Dr. Cynthia James, Dr. Solomon Waigwa, and Dr. Antipas Harris for setting the atmosphere for intellectual excellence. Thank you to Bishop T. D. Jakes who is a visionary of such intellectual dynasty and to Dr. Clifford Berger of George Fox University for supporting the vision.

A special thank you to my fellow cohorts! What a blessing to have been a part of such a special group. The memories of our journey together will forever be with me. We have been given an awesome opportunity to make an indelible mark in our broken world by going the distance and shining our lights! Lastly, thank you to the Millennials who

have not only participated in this study, but who have been crying in the wilderness to be heard. This study was for you and the Black church out of whose womb you evolved.

EPIGRAPH

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers;
as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen,
which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul” (Acts 13:1).

Table of Contents

DEDICATION	III
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	IV
EPIGRAPH	VII
ABSTRACT	X
CHAPTER 1 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM	1
Introduction	1
The Underpinning Story	5
The Three Dynamic Forces at Play	7
The Black Millennials of The Black African diaspora	7
The Black Church of The African Diaspora	11
The Black Preacher of the Black Church	16
The Culture of the Black Church	19
Conclusion	25
CHAPTER 2: BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS	28
Introduction	28
The Identity of Black People in the Bible	30
Why Is Black Presence a Mystical Find?	40
Conclusion	45
CHAPTER 3 THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF BLACK PRESENCE IN CHRISTIANITY	50
Introduction	50
The Literature Speaks	52
Why Do Millennials Find the Church Irrelevant?	62
A Case for Christianity Being Culturally Inclusive	70
Conclusion	76
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	78
Introduction	78
Crenshaw Christian Center Pastor Fred Price Jr.	79
Reverend Jamal Harrison Bryant of Baltimore, MD.	80
Data Gathering Method	81
Evaluation of Data	82
Respondents	84
The Professional Stakeholders	84
Respondents: The Non-Professional Stakeholders	92
Research Evaluation	97
Conclusion	98

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY OF THE BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONAL PREMISES	100
Introduction	100
The Richness of African American Spirituality.....	105
The Bible and Christianity are for All Peoples and Nations.....	107
Conclusion	111
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION	117
A Call to Action	117
A Call to Action - the Black Church.....	119
Taking a Seat at the Table.....	125
A Call to Action - the Black Millennials	130
Building A Bridge Forward	133
Recommendations	137
Use of Black Publishing Companies.....	137
Re-interpreting the Scriptures.	139
Restoring the Spirit of Black Worship.....	139
Establishing Black History Libraries within the Black church.....	144
Conclusion	145
APPENDIX A: TABLE OF NATIONS	152
APPENDIX B: BLACK CUSHITE WARRIORS	153
APPENDIX C: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE.....	154
APPENDIX D: PROFESSIONAL PARTICIPANTS RESPONSES	156
APPENDIX E: QUESTIONNAIRE OUTCOME	169
APPENDIX F: RESEARCH SCHEDULE.....	172
APPENDIX G: BLACK HISTORY.....	174
Digital Federal Resources	176
APPENDIX H: AFRICAN CULTURAL MUSIC	177
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	178

ABSTRACT

A mass exodus of Black millennials away from the Black churches of the African diaspora has taken place in recent years. There is a plethora of reasons for this given by the Black millennials, spiritual authors/researchers, and the spiritual leadership of the Black church. The most important of these reasons has been put forward by Black millennials that the Bible and Christianity are irrelevant to the social, economic, and political issues of their lives and they want no part of it. This research is undertaken to investigate the real cause(s) of this exodus and to determine where the responsibility lies to reverse the bleeding of a generation from the pews of our Black churches.

The goal of this research is to engage in a project with four professional stakeholders who represent the leadership of the Black church and four non-professional stakeholders who are Black millennials presently attending, and who had been attending, a Black church at some time. This writer will explore the relationship between the Black church and its Black people along with the role the Black church plans to play in the lives of its people by addressing the concerns of Black millennials and examining the legitimacy of their concerns through a biblical lens along with the literature pertaining to these phenomena. Finally, the aim of this work is to prove the Bible and Christianity are both culturally inclusive, by illustrating how the Bible has texts about the Black community and that Black people have always been in the central thoughts of God's plans and have never been an afterthought. Study shows millennials are still not particularly passionate about the Black church and the Black church has not been preparing herself for the return of the largest generation in U.S. history.

CHAPTER 1

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul” (Acts 13:1 KJV).

Introduction

The Apostles were in Antioch preparing to launch a new church. Deacon Stephen had just been killed and the disciples were feeling threatened and left Jerusalem for other cities where they felt safer to spread the gospel. It is significant that the text explicitly informs us of this new church at Antioch having five prophets and teachers who were racially, culturally, and socially diverse. Craig Keener points out their composition emphasizes the “cosmopolitan character of the church of God used at the foundation of the Gentile mission.”¹ This passage of scripture has significantly highlighted the interracial presence in leadership in early Christianity and yet this would not be sufficient to prove Blacks have been present in the plan of God all along.

According to Darrell Bock, God has gifted the church with ethnic distinctions.² Thomas Oden, on the other hand, counsels us to “ponder this as if with African eyes,

¹ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 2: *Acts 3:1-14:28* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2013), 1982.

² Darrell L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 439.

Mark, Lucius of Cyrene and Simon the Black were all together in Antioch, praying and fasting and participating in the spirit's mission to send chosen vessels for the first missionary journey.”

He further noted this “African core of missionaries preceded Paul in gospel witness and actually ordained Paul according to Acts 13:3.”³ This passage of scripture clearly debunks the myth that there are no Blacks in the Bible.

This passage of scripture is of particular importance to the problem under discussion in addressing the opinion of Black millennials that the Bible and Christianity are not only irrelevant, but are also not culturally inclusive and that Blacks are just an afterthought of God. The focus, therefore, of this research is to investigate the real reason(s) for the exodus of our Black youths from the Black churches of the African diaspora. Without question, the churches have recognized the continuous absence of this demographic, called the millennial, from their pews and are baffled as to how to resolve the issue.

In conversation with a pastor about participating in this research project, this researcher informed him of the topic and he vehemently replied, “Yes.” When visiting another pastor’s church for the same reason who had been pastoring for 25 years, he had only four young people in the service with no youth group. According to Danyelle Thomas who created an online forum where millennials can discuss their disagreements with the Black church and why they left, she said in her article, “Exodus: Why Black Millennials are leaving the Church,” that “Overwhelmingly, many Black millennials

³ Thomas C. Oden, *Early Libyan Christianity: Uncovering a North African Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 98.

simply don't feel a connection to the church."⁴ To her, they are the "Unfit Christians." "They often do not feel fulfilled by worship services, auxiliary ministries, and sermons that do not resonate with their spiritual needs."⁵ She further presents how dire the situation is as she explains, "It is no secret that Black folks are more religious than the U.S. population as a whole." She argues records indicate that 87% of Black folks describe themselves as a person of faith. Yet, the echo of the exiting footsteps of millennials from the Black church "has grown from a mumble into a roar."⁶ This is cause for grave concern for both the Black church and its Black millennials in the African diaspora.

This writer is perplexed at this dilemma for being in church was the place to be for young people when she was growing up. Clearly, the boomer's era is very different from the millennials. This problem, however, is not unique to Black millennials but also among the millennials of their White counterparts. The Barna Group "found that 59 percent of millennials (in general) who grew up attending church have now left."⁷ For the purpose of this research, however, the focus is on the attendance or the lack thereof of the Black millennials in the Black church of the African diaspora.

The challenge at hand is to investigate the underlying reason(s) for the exodus of the Black millennials from the Black church and to determine what strategies might contribute to a reversal of the outward trek. The opening text is only one minute reference

⁴ D. Danyelle Thomas, "Exodus: Why Black Millennials Are Leaving the Church," Unfit Christian Blog, <https://www.unfitchristian.com/black-millennials-church/> (accessed August 19, 2021).

⁵ Thomas, "Exodus."

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Sharon Cobbins, "Millennials: The Next Paradigm of the African American Church," (Ed.D. dissertation, Olivet Nazarene University, 2016), 15.

of the inclusion of colored people in the bible yet it would seem to be a conspiratorial hidden mystery. The young people classified as “millennials” are of the opinion the church has failed them in numerous ways and, more importantly, has no answers to their hard questions when it comes to their place in Christianity and the church’s functionality in the social structure of society.

This pervasive exodus of young Blacks away from the Black churches in the African diaspora has entrenched our society and Black spiritual leaders are perplexed. These young Black millennials have given a plethora of reasons such as the misconduct of people of faith; the rejection of homosexuals, and the church choosing whom they must love. They insist leaders cannot provoke a praise or shout from Black millennials with haughty judgement laden in sexism, classism, and homophobia. They need tools for survival in a world that seems to hate young Black people.⁸

In cultural terms, the members of an ethnic group strongly believe they are united by history, tradition, and customs. Over time, a consciousness emerges that all members of the group are one.⁹ The millennials are therefore baffled at the lack of historical consciousness and insensitivity of the Black church towards them amidst the numerous fundamental issues they face in society. In this research, it is important to look into the relationship between the Black church and their Black people to determine why millennials feel as though they have been callously abandoned and left all alone by the wayside to fend for themselves. With the decline of church attendance and participation among the millennials, the question arises, where does this leave the future of the African

⁸ Thomas, “Exodus.”

⁹ Toyin Falola, *The Power of African Cultures* (New York, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 129.

American church?¹⁰ There is a large segment of Black millennials absent from the Black church built for them and the Black community. They left the Black church in droves because they deemed Christianity and the church irrelevant and the Bible not culturally inclusive.¹¹ Now, more than ever, millennials are encountering widespread and unwarranted injustices that should provoke the church to resume its fight for social justice and basic human rights. There is, however, a cultural crisis that must be resolved first to restore their faith in the Bible and the relevancy of both Christianity and the church.

The Underpinning Story

Rodney English is a third-generation member of the Still Waters Holy Church in Manchester, Tennessee. He has been accepted into Tennessee State University to pursue a degree in psychology, and although he is only 45 miles away from home, he chose to stay on campus. Two months into college life, Rodney has not attended church and intentionally chose to visit his parents only on Thursdays to avoid Wednesday night's Bible study and Sunday morning services. One evening, Rodney and his college friends sat on the college grounds chatting. Malekia (Kia) decided to read a book.

Suddenly Rodney asked: What are you reading Kia?

Kia: "*The Black Church in the African American Experience* by Lincoln & Mamiya."

Rodney: "What does it say?"

¹⁰ Cobbins, "Millennials," 3.

¹¹ Thomas, "Exodus."

Kia: “Do you recall that discussion we had a while back of not understanding how the Black churches are silent about George Floyd’s murder?”

Rodney: “Yes, what about it?”

Kia: “Well Angela gave me this book and here it says one of the main purposes of the Black church out of slavery was to resist the racial inconsistencies meted out against Blacks.”

Rodney: “So why are the churches silent while the whites kill us?”

Nathan: “These leaders do not care if we suffer, live, or die. They are afraid.”

Kia: “Yea, this is why I do not want to hear any more of their preaching that makes absolutely no sense to my life.”

Rodney: “I cannot get my pastor to listen or talk about these things.”

Nathaniel: “My pastor told my father not to discuss it in church. It is really frustrating.”

Rodney: “Well, I want answers because this church thing is not working for me. Kia, where can I get a copy?”

Rodney purchased a copy and after reading it, he took it to church and gave it to his pastor who promised to read it. Three weeks later, he received a call from his pastor inviting him to the church to discuss the book. After understanding the concerns of Rodney and his friends, his pastor organized a meeting with the leaders of the Black churches in their city to discuss the Black church’s role in the community. Rodney and his friends were invited to attend that first meeting where they were permitted to voice their frustrations with the church. The meeting ended with the leaders promising to

continue the discussion with other leaders from other cities and then take it to organizational leadership. For Rodney, a door for change had opened.

The underpinning story is indicative of the anthropological problems Black churches refuse to address. If brought to the surface, these problems may bring a greater understanding of the inner struggles of their young people. This dissertation seeks to unearth the true reason(s) why millennials are leaving the Black church, how the Black church has failed them, and what can be done to reestablish a connectivity between the two. This is a sociological question pertaining to the African diaspora as a society. It is within this cultural anthropological context of African Christian heritage that millennials' expectations of the mode of worship within the Black church is to facilitate and accommodate cultural survival and to maintain a protective covering of the Black community.

The Three Dynamic Forces at Play

The Black Millennials of The Black African diaspora

The author Klaus Hock in his contribution to the book, *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora*, sets the premise upon which he brings clarity to the concept of the Black African diaspora. He asserts that when speaking of the African American diaspora, it brings to bear members of a migrated group, emphasizing aspects of (violent) dispersion, distress, and degradation as well as lack of self-esteem and confidence in an

emerging emancipation and salvation.¹² He explains there is a definite African diasporic consciousness with specific characteristics of the African experiences that are different than other migrant communities. Therefore, these characteristics are peculiar features of African historiography,¹³ that must not and cannot be overlooked in the discourse of Black millennials in the African American diaspora.

William Du Bois developed the concept of “double consciousness,” a vision of merging African roots and American experiences in order to make it possible for a man to be both Negro and American.¹⁴ In other words, the discourse seeks to validate being African as some kind of genetically coded ethnic identity marker, rooted in the idea of an African substance or essence being intrinsically inherent in people of African origin.¹⁵ The distinction of the African American diaspora is not like other major migration movements because of the traumatic experiences that have molded the collective memory of Africans with repercussions still reverberating today.¹⁶ It is therefore of great significance that emphasis is placed on the African factor for African migrants. Their African-ness is fundamental both to their identity and to their religion. Consequently, their Africanness and religion are closely inter-related, representing the two sides of the African American diaspora.¹⁷

¹² Afe Adogame, Roswith Gerloff, and Klaus Hock, *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Sacred Heritage* (London; New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 236.

¹³ Ibid., 239.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 240.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. 241.

We can safely say it is this discursive character of these fluid dimensions:

African, Christian, and diasporic, which makes up the specific features of the African Christian diaspora, within the American community.¹⁸ This is the religious construct of the Black millennials of the African American diaspora under scrutiny as they relate to the Black church and Christianity today. These Black millennials are the first generation that came of age in the new millennia, hence their name. They were all birthed between 1981-1996 and are currently 27-42 years of age. They are also called “Generation Y” or “Generation Me” and are stigmatized as being narcissistic and lazy but have substantive concerns and questions that are not addressed by the church.¹⁹

They are perceived at first glance anti-tradition, but on the contrary, they believe in respecting elders, but are not willing to follow them off a cliff; and they believe in learning but not simply by lecture but by guided experiences during discussions. It is probable that [they] are being called the prodigal child when they may have actually been exiled through neglect and misunderstanding, becoming the marginalized in ministry.²⁰

Millennials are linked by social media, burdened by debt, distrustful of people, in no rush to marry, and optimistic about the future. They are also said to be confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat, and open to change.²¹ Their beliefs and behavior convey they

¹⁸ Adogame, Geroff and Hock, *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora*, 243.

¹⁹ Besheer Mohamed, Kiana Cox, Jeff Diamant, and Claire Gecewicz, “Faith Among Black Americans,” Pew Research Center, February 16, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/02/16/faith-among-black-americans/>.

²⁰ Mohamed, Cox, Diamant, and Gecewicz, “Faith Among Black Americans.”

²¹ Joy K. Challenger, “Infused: Millennials and the Future of the Black Church,” (doctoral dissertation, Divinity School of Duke University, 2016), 40.

have not rejected their beliefs in Christ but have rejected the religious institutions that represent Christ.²²

Dr. Antipas Harris, in his book *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion? How The Bible Is Good News for People of Color*, reports on The Barna Group research conducted in 2014 among eighteen to thirty-year olds, and the resulting discovery is deeply concerning:

Only 32 percent of millennials read the Bible, including those who still claim to be Christians. Twenty-nine percent of millennials are happy to see other Christians reading their Bible in public. Only 10 percent of them engage in Bible study, while 21 percent say they are now atheists or agnostics. The study also reveals that 15 percent of millennials have decreased Bible usage in a year's time, and the number of young Bible skeptics is now more than double the amount of older adult students of the Bible. Thirty two percent of millennials skeptics say they feel the Bible is a dangerous and oppressive book.²³

This is a dire picture of our millennials when it comes to their spirituality. In the book, *You Lost Me*, David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins explain millennials' perception of churches, Christianity, and culture, and their text "gives voice to their concerns, hopes, delusions, frustrations and disappointments."²⁴ It is sad to learn there is a generation of young Christians who believe the churches where they were raised are not safe and hospitable places to express doubts, thus, the church has failed them.

At best, most leaders of African American churches are at a loss on how to reverse the chronic absence of millennials in their pews, and they are looking for ways to

²² Briana K. Parker, "Let Me Tell It: An Analytical Examination of the Responses and Reactions of Millennial to The Black Church," (doctoral dissertation, Virginia Union University, 2016), 6.

²³ Antipas L. Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion: How the Bible Is Good for People of Color* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 22.

²⁴ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 11.

engage them while others have simply classified millennials as rebellious and are awaiting their prodigal return to the fold.²⁵ Briana Parker shines a sympathetic image of millennials when she suggests that Black millennials, although they have been known as a generation who has abandoned the Black church, are, more accurately, exiled.²⁶

The Pew Research Center describes millennials as “relatively unattached to organized politics and religion.”²⁷ Millennials are a misunderstood and underserved group. If not urgently attended to, Boomers will die off and the church will face its demise. Millennials are a generation who cannot and must not be ignored by the Black church for their souls can be resourceful in the hand of God.

The Black Church of The African Diaspora

The term “the Black church,” is a sociological and theological shorthand reference to the pluralism of Black Christian churches in the United States. Since the late 1960s, “the Black church” has replaced the older reference, “the Negro church,” used by scholars of a previous generation.²⁸ Typically, any Black Christian person is included in “the Black church” if he or she is a member of a Black congregation. Presently, there are seven major Black denominations with a scattering of smaller communities that make up the body of the Black church.

It is estimated that more than 80 percent of all black Christians are in these seven denominations, with the smaller communions accounting for an additional 6 percent. These seven major denominations are the African Methodist Episcopal

²⁵ Mohamed, Cox, Diamant, and Gecewicz, “Faith Among Black Americans.”

²⁶ Parker, “Let Me Tell It,” 6.

²⁷ Mohamed, Cox, Diamant, and Gecewicz, “Faith Among Black Americans.”

²⁸ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (London: Duke University Press, 1990), 1.

(A.M.E.) church; the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (A.M.E.Z.) church; the Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church; the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Incorporated (NBC); the National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA); the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC).²⁹

Thabiti Anyabwile, in his book, *Reviving the Black Church*, explains that the Black church actually exists as multiple Black churches across denominational, theological, and regional lines. He cautions, however, that increasingly we must recognize that one part of “the Black church” exists as predominantly Black congregations in majority white denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention. There are also African American members of predominantly white churches. Still, other quarters of “the Black church” belong to nondenominational affinity groups like the many congregations involved in Word of Faith and “prosperity gospel” networks sponsored by leaders like Creflo A. Dollar Jr. and T. D. Jakes.³⁰

Clearly, the “Black church is multifaceted and cannot be confined to just one face. For the purpose of this paper, the definition will be confined to those Black churches with predominantly Black members and Black preachers, since this research focuses specifically on the purpose and people for which the original Black church was created.

In his book, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites? The Dispelling of an American Myth*, Dr. Anthony T. Evans said the historical Black church is the result of the fusion of the best of African culture and the Christian faith. Such a fusion gave rise to what was probably one of the clearest expressions of New Testament Christianity America has ever seen. This is due to the natural way the slave community adapted to

²⁹ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 1.

³⁰ Thabiti Anyabwile, *Reviving The Black Church: A Call to Reclaim a Sacred Institution* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), Introduction.

Christianity and is coupled with the similarities that existed between the experience of the Jews in both the Old and New Testaments and the Black's own social situation. It then becomes clear the church developed out of the strengths of the Black community, not out of its weaknesses.³¹

Dr. Evans further explains it was the experience of slavery that never allowed the Black church to get caught up in the theological and philosophical meaning of Jesus, because in Black religion, Jesus was a practical deliverer of the oppressed. They viewed God as the Liberator in history. Thus, the Black church was historical in its Christological perspective.³² In one of his sermons, *Don't Leave Like You Came*, Bishop T.D. Jakes declared "Christ is not a Binder. He is a Liberator. Christ is not a slave master; He is an Emancipator. He is a master of Deliverance."³³ If we can get our millennials to grasp this fact about God, and get the church to act as the defender God has called them to be, then it would ease the pain of rejection millennials feel not only from the church, but from the God of the Bible who is projected as the deliverer of those in bondage.

The dynamics that connected the slaves to the Bible was the similarity of their lives to that of the Israelites. Slaves held fast to the hope of deliverance from American slavery similar to how God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage through Moses. This story became the basis for the hope of the slaves and since there was no distinction or division between the Black church and the Black community, it served only

³¹ Anthony T. Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites? The Dispelling of an American Myth* (Wenonah, NJ: Renaissance Productions, Inc., 1992), 71.

³² Ibid., 77.

³³ T. D. Jakes, "Don't Leave Like You Came," Premiered March 27, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKkJYewvXyM>, 44:50-45:01.

to intensify the parallel between Israel and Black Americans as covenant communities. Israel's story was the Black community's story and the Black preacher's ability to articulate the link between Africa and America brought clarity to the community of hope.³⁴

The Black church created their own unique and distinctive forms of culture and worldviews as parallels rather than replications of the culture of which they were involuntary guests.³⁵ As such, they have their values and culture to guard and protect.³⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois has called the building of the Black churches, "the first form of economic cooperation" among Black people. As the only stable and coherent institution to emerge from slavery, Black churches were not only dominant in their communities but also became the womb of Black culture and a number of major social institutions.³⁷ It must be noted that, unlike most sectarian movements, the initial impetus for Black spiritual and ecclesiastical independence was not grounded in religious doctrine or polity, but in the offensiveness of racial segregation in the white churches and the alarming inconsistencies between the teachings and expressions of the faith.³⁸ The Black church started as the defender of all things: economic, political, spiritual, and cultural, and its continuance along that vein could have reaped a more stabilized generation deeply rooted in its tradition.

³⁴ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 99.

³⁵ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

However, between the economic and social disparity prevailing across the nation and the failure of the Black church to rise up as one voice in defense of the millennials, it brings the church's solidarity with these young adults into question. In Stacy Floyd-Thomas's collaborative work, *Black Church Studies*, the author points out that the Black church emerged from the religious, cultural, and social experience of Black people. For the Black people, the Black church was their school, their forum, their political arena, their social club, their art gallery, and their conservatory of music. It functioned as the center of Black life, culture, and heritage for much of the history of the African American experience in North America.³⁹ In her dissertation, *Let Me Tell It! An Analytical Examination of the Responses and Reactions of Millennials to The Black Church*, Parker asserts that "the strengths of the Black church experience are its inherent design for empowerment, familiarity for those who have previously experienced Black church, and its awareness of African-American history."⁴⁰ The question, therefore, is why are millennials not finding strength and empowerment within the Black church as boomers once seemingly did?

The focus of this research is threefold. First, it will show that irrespective of the reasons millennials have put forward for their exodus, there is a deeper impetus for their standoff against the church. Second, it aims to educate the clergies of the Black church of their responsibility to the salvation of our millennials. Third, that education of Black

³⁹ Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Juan M. Floyd-Thomas, Carol B. Duncan, Stephen G. Ray Jr., and Nancy Lynne Westfield, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Washington, DC: Abingdon Press, 2007), xxiii.

⁴⁰ Parker, "Let Me Tell It: An Analytical Examination of the Responses and Reactions of Millennials," 6.

presence in the Bible from its beginning will play a significant role in solving the identity crisis that plagues our Black millennials.

The Black Preacher of the Black Church

The church was birthed out of the slavery and oppression that helped to shape this primary institution of liberation and survival for the Black people. This was only possible through the emergence of the Black preacher who responded to the need from within himself for his Black congregation. The social realities of the Black people in slavery demanded that the Black church be a community of liberation and there was no one better to lead that liberation movement than the Black preacher.⁴¹ In the eyes of his people, the Black preacher emerged from among them not as a mere religious figurehead, but as an architect of freedom.

The marvel of this Black preacher is he could be deeply theological without having any formal theological training. His Christianity coupled with his African history worldview enabled him to aptly engineer the survival of his people as well as sketch the plan to overcome the laws, systems, and errant theology of the broader American culture. The presence of the Black preacher also demonstrated in visual fashion the biblical theme of justice. His presence as leader of the Black church forced a moral consciousness upon the broader society that it would not have had without his leadership.⁴² Could this then be the reason for the lack of empathy from the present-day Black preacher towards our Black millennials? Could it be that our present-day Black preachers have lost all sense of

⁴¹ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 93.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 98.

moral and social consciousness to the point where they do not feel compelled to give a voice to the distress of our young people?

The Black preacher served as the father figure to the Black people, seeing to their welfare in all aspects of life whether they were social, political, economic, or the traditionally recognized biblical revelation, which shadowed the pattern of the New Testament church leaders with a parent-child perspective. We see how the Apostle Paul called Timothy his son (2 Tim. 1:2 KJV) and Titus his child (Titus 1:4 KJV), etc. What is also of significant importance is the fact that Black preachers had a lot of contact with whites and, therefore, were in the unique position to learn, analyze, and interpret their ways. His knowledge then had to be communicated to the slave community in such a way as to simultaneously teach the slave about God, protect the slave against oppression, lead the community into a dualistic understanding of freedom (temporal and eternal), and stay within the framework of the social and religious boundaries of the slave master. This is why the cream of the crop rose to the position of Black preacher.⁴³

When the Black preacher opened the Bible, it was more for the interpretation of recent experience than for detailed exegetical analysis. He was not inferior in any way but rather exceptional with his ability to lead, communicate, memorize, interpret the times, and link the past with the present.⁴⁴

This picture of the original Black preacher and those of today is so diverse that it will be addressed in the final chapter in an attempt to identify the effectiveness or lack thereof with our present-day Black clergies. Evans superbly reasoned it was by through a

⁴³ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 97.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

miracle that Black preachers were able to function with little or no formal education, as opposition formed in the broader culture, and with little money. This fact, he says, in and of itself, should dispel any notion of Black inferiority and may, to the contrary, be an argument for the scholarship of Black preachers in the realm of applied theology.⁴⁵ This simply meant the early preachers applied themselves whole heartedly as opposed to being lazy to the task.

Because of the existence of oppression, racism, and other social maladies, there was a need for spiritual strength amid the social climate. The tie between the fight for social emancipation and the demand for divine justice were irreversibly intertwined. Thus, when it came to leadership in the Black community, the concern for social justice and spiritual fortitude warranted the place and role of the preacher. All the attributes required to wage war for justice resided in him.⁴⁶ These leaders were required to be both spiritual and political just as Moses and Joshua were spiritual, political, and militant. The African American society have included leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jesse Richard Allen to name a few.⁴⁷ The Black preacher has had the role of tying together the old with the new, but the larger question is whether the leadership role of the Black preacher has remained constant throughout the years from slavery to present. The answer will seem, from all counts, a resounding no. However, the Black preacher holds an office of high regard and respect. He is deemed the spiritual leader of his people and

⁴⁵ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 98.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 99.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

the one who will resist any injustice against them bringing about an atmosphere of peace and safety.

The Culture of the Black Church

J.N.K. Mugambi in his work, *Christianity and the African Cultural Heritage*, defines “Culture” as the totality of a people’s way of life. He further explains that culture is more than just the language, but it also includes art, architecture, music, dance, literature (oral and written), social customs, culinary tastes, fashion, and sporting interests. He was very careful to highlight that Christianity is definitely not a culture but the Christian faith can be expressed and communicated only through cultural media.⁴⁸ Within the independent African churches, an important factor was the need for cultural freedom and cultural identity. Mugambi argues that Christianity cannot be expressed or communicated without a cultural medium.⁴⁹ Dictionary.com offers an anthropological definition of cultural medium or cultural trait as “any trait of human activity acquired in social life and transmitted by communication.”⁵⁰ The National Geographic Resource Library defines “culture” as shared characteristics of a group of people, which encompasses place of birth, religion, language, cuisine, social behaviors, art, literature, and music.⁵¹

⁴⁸ J.N.K. Mugambi, “Christianity and the African Cultural Heritage,” <https://pdfmedia.net/book/0RcQAQAIAAJ/christianity-and-african-culture/j-n-kanyua-mugambi/unknown/218/2002/STANFORD:36105112865865/africa> (accessed September 4, 2021).

⁴⁹ “Cultural Trait,” <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/culture-trait> (accessed March 3, 2023).

⁵⁰ Mugambi, “Christianity and the African Cultural Heritage,” 517

⁵¹ “Cultural Identity,” National Geographic Society, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/resource-library-cultural-identity>.

Mugambi explains that each church portrays the culture in which it has developed and there is no church not culturally bound in this way. The culture of the Black African American church was steeped in the fight for social justice and basic human dignity.⁵² The Black preacher was selected because they identified with the community of those whom they are introducing to Jesus Christ and have the ability to articulate this understanding of the Christian faith into the cultural terms familiar and traditional to their congregation.⁵³ In his contribution to the book, *The Black church: This Is Our Story; This Is Our Song* by Henry Louis Gates, Darryl Pinckney said, it was the “hope against hope” of our ancestors that kept them fighting against all odds for a better future. He believed if a people cannot imagine a future, then its culture will die, and Black culture didn’t die.⁵⁴ Gates himself informs us that the signal aspects of African American culture were planted, watered, given light, and nurtured in the Black church, out of the reach and away from the watchful eyes of those who would choke the life out of it.⁵⁵

The church is the source of our ancestors’ unfathomable resiliency and perhaps the first formalized site for the collective fashioning and development of so many African American aesthetic forms.⁵⁶ The Black church was a cultural system, a system of symbols and signs.⁵⁷ It was the cultural cauldron Black people created to combat a system

⁵² Mugambi, “Christianity and the African Cultural Heritage,” 518.

⁵³ Ibid., 519.

⁵⁴ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Black Church: This Is Our Story; This Is Our Song* (New York: Penguin Press, 2021), xxi.

⁵⁵ Gates, *The Black Church*, xxi.

⁵⁶ Ibid.,

⁵⁷ Ibid., xxii.

designed in every way to crush their spirit. Gates argues the miracle of African American survival can be traced directly to the miraculous ways our ancestors, across a range of denominations and through the widest variety of worship, reinvented the religion their masters thought would keep them subservient. Conversely, that religion enabled them to bide their time to fight for their freedom and for us to continue to fight for ours.⁵⁸

Their faith gave them the moral authority to turn the mirror of religion back on their masters and to indict the action for its original sin of allowing their enslavement to build up that “city upon a hill.” In exposing that hypocrisy at the heart of their Christian country, they exhorted succeeding generations to close the yawning gap between America’s founding ideals and the reality they had been forced to endure.⁵⁹ Johnson and Carter in their article, “Black Cultural Strengths and Psychosocial Well-Being: An Empirical Analysis with Black American Adults,” shed light on the complex existence young Black people had to navigate: needing to be a part of mainstream society, coping with racial oppression in the United States, and maintaining their Black cultural traditions.⁶⁰ This has been the culture of Black African Americans: to live each day in that posture of resistance to oppression and the opposition to their survival.

⁵⁸ Gates, *The Black Church*, xxiii.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

⁶⁰ Veronica E. Johnson and Robert T. Carter, “Black Cultural Strengths and Psychosocial Well-Being: An Empirical Analysis with Black American Adults,” *SAGE: Journal of Black Psychology* 46, no.1 (January 2020), 56.

The Disconnect

The exodus of the millennials from the Black church is not a trivial one that can be ignored or put on hold for a more opportune time. The millennials avowed there is no relevance of God and the church in their lives. They are unable to relate to the fact the Black church has always been the major communal institution for the Black community since the massive Black migrations to urban areas after World War , through the late 1960s, and down into the 1980s.⁶¹ However, important challenges and problems emerged especially among young people and as one C.M.E pastor said, “This is the first time in Black history we are seeing an un-churched generation of young Black people growing up in urban areas. Today, there are teenagers and young people who have no knowledge of and no respect for the Black church and its traditions.”⁶⁰ According to Sandra Barnes in “The Least of These: Black church Children and Youth Outreach Efforts,” they are tired of the limited and hackneyed amusements the church offers, and the spiritual message of the church has been dulled by too indistinct and inopportune reiterations.⁶² This has created an environment of boredom and disinterestedness within the Black church, hence the problem under investigation.⁶³ There is the absence of that unity and communal experience of a safety net that comes with knowing you are valued within your own community.

This dulling of the Black church has led to the young people looking to have their interest piqued elsewhere. There seems to be an identity crisis among young Black youths

⁶¹ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black church in the African American Experience*, 309.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 310.

⁶³ Sandra L. Barnes, “The Least of These: Black Church Children and Youth Outreach Efforts,” *Journal of African American Studies* 12, no. 2 (June 2008), 100.

that challenges the status of the contemporary Black church. Youth's concerns for leaving Black churches may have some merit, but despite their claim of contentment, fulfillment, growth, and independence, Barnes discovered that growing numbers of these millennials are facing problems manifesting in drug usage, decreased educational success, suicide, homicide, obesity, poverty, teenage pregnancy, and lowered aspirations.⁶⁴ They are troubled by the murders of their millennial peers like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, just to mention a few of the hundreds of people murdered since George Floyd in 2020.⁶⁵ Instead of there being a strong presence of the Black church, millennials found solidarity among their peers and non-religious gatherings like Black Lives Matter for comfort and expression of their bleeding hearts. They do not see the connection between any fight for social emancipation and the kind of divine justice of which Evans speaks.

There is a deafening silence in the face of racial tragedy, pain, and the many forms of discrimination from the church in general and, in particular, the Black church. In The Jude 3 Project, what was central to most of the discussions was how the church responds to issues of importance important to them and their friends whom they love. Several concerns were cited such as:

- The misconduct of the people of faith
- The rejection of homosexuals and the church choosing whom to love
- Church expectation being too binding with too many rules

⁶⁴ Barnes, "The Least of These:" 100.

⁶⁵ Jude 3 Project, "What Made Them Leave the Church? | Why I Don't Go," episode 1, December 22, 2020, directed by Lisa Fields, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OqnWRcR4rU&t=26s>.

- The church did not meet the needs of its people during the pandemic
- The building is not important, it's not the church
- They do not believe that church should take over their entire lives
- The money put into beautiful church buildings surrounded by run down communities
- They are not anti-church but are anti-unhealthy church
- They have more time to follow their dreams.⁶⁶

Millennials have presented a plethora of reasons why they have left the Black church and applaud themselves for having more fulfilling lives. They believe they are having a greater impact in their communities with freedom of thought and ability to grow. They find themselves free from the rules and dislike how the church took over their lives. Some appreciated how they had more freedom of choice, were able to express their many doubts, and how they could ask questions outside of the church. It is worth noting that most of their discontent with the church is their inability to ask hard life questions and for the church to answer. Their opinion of church life is one of control and no one is allowed to grow and express themselves beyond the pastor.

Based on the voices of these young adults, the church is not listening to them, does not see them, and is not empathetic to their plight. How prepared are the churches in the quest to be honest and realistic in addressing millennial issues? How forthright are pastors prepared to be in answering the blushing questions that baby boomers would not have even thought to ask? One young lady spoke of a church friend with an eating disorder who was sent to the prayer line when she should have been sent to a therapist. A

⁶⁶ Jude 3 Project, "What Made Them Leave the Church."

young man explained how Pentecostalism came out of the LGBT movement and how he doesn't understand why the LGBT community is being rejected by the church.⁶⁷ To this writer's discovery he was gay, Black, and a pastor and had been under cover for some time before leaving the church. How does the preacher answer such hard questions the church does not embrace but are readily embraced by people in and out of the church and the wider world?

Conclusion

There is a disconnect between Black millennials and the Black church. The Black church has been deemed the bedrock of the Black community and although our youths are leaving, there is still that call within them to return but there is nothing to return to. There has been no change since they left. There is no light of hope beckoning them home for reconciliatory discourse. As a matter of fact, the church is presently still in the ridicule, defensive, and self-righteous posture that is not a resolution to the problem. There is disdain and impatience towards millennials and this will not bridge the gaps created over the years. There is a huge difference between the original Black preacher and those of the twenty-first century even though expectations remain the same.

Black millennials understand the assignment of the Black preacher to be engaged socially, economically, and politically, not just spiritually. The disconnect comes when the preacher chooses to only be a spiritual leader and closes both ears and eyes to the social, economic, racial, and political dilemma of the people. The disconnect comes when the Black preacher chooses the rules of dos and don'ts rather than being a defender of the

⁶⁷ Jude 3 Project, "What Made Them Leave the Church."

people against the social evils still prevalent in our society. These Black millennials see a disconnect, when in practicality, the Bible and Christianity do not intersect with every aspect of their lives.

There is much work to be done by the Black church to bring reconciliation between them and their Black young people who are out in the streets, cafes, and group settings with their peers where they listen to each other. This is what the millennials are looking for: someone to simply listen to their burning concerns and become engaged in creating solutions in the face of unnecessary deaths, denials, and injustices. Listening to the Jude Project 3 video of why young people do not go back to church would be a great starting point for the preacher to prepare for their numerous questions. Black millennials feel very much alone and abandoned as they fight the age old societal evils they have inherited from their ancestors with no leader at the helm.

Culture within a historical and spiritual context has a powerful shaping quality. For African Americans, this shaping centers on one foundational reality: the indelible effects of slavery. It is slavery that catalyzed two other resulting trajectories: the emergence of the Black church and the civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These three factors have distinctively shaped African American Christian spirituality and provided the needed context for this research.⁶⁸ The Black church must, therefore, understand why Black young millennials have no patience with having their problems and concerns whisked away with only prayer and anointing. Clearly, the Black church has much work to do to regain the trust of Black young people. It is hoped the church will pick itself up and be enlightened and equip itself for a twenty-first century generation.

⁶⁸ Chandler, "African American Spirituality," 161.

The strength of the Black church experience includes its inherent design for empowerment, familiarity, and its awareness of African American history.⁶⁹ As Mugambi rightly said, “Culture in its widest usage is the totality of a people’s way of life. Christianity is not a culture, but the Christian faith can be expressed and communicated only through cultural media. Conversion does not demand a wholesale denunciation or rejection of one’s cultural and religious heritage.”⁷⁰ Therefore, it is of utmost importance the Black preacher remembers his responsibility to the Black church and Black community by providing spiritual, social, and political solutions.

Vacating these roles is what has caused the disconnect and subsequent rift. The Black church should reflect on its Christian African culture out of which it was born, for culture is the sum of the options for creative survival.⁷¹ To underestimate the Africanity of African-American Christianity is to rob the slaves of their heritage and their fight for justice.⁷² Every time we neglect to teach our cultural spirituality, we have robbed our generation of their heritage.

⁶⁹ Parker, “Let Me Tell It,” 5.

⁷⁰ Mugambi, “Christianity and the African Cultural Heritage,” 148.

⁷¹ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black church in the African American Experience*, 3.

⁷² Paul E. Johnson, *African-American Christianity: Essay in History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 19.

CHAPTER 2:

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS¹

Introduction

The controversy among Black millennials with the Bible and Christianity is that there are no Black people in its pages and the text was written only for the white man. This myth was all orchestrated by white theologians and scholars who failed to investigate and understand Black people and their worth in the plan of God. Dr. Evans reminds us of the myth that has permeated American culture since its inception around the lesser spirituality of Black people and its resultant negative impact on Black culture.¹ He explains that myths are “traditions passed down over time in story form as a means of explaining or justifying events that are either lacking in scientific evidence or historical basis.”² One of the powerful evils of a myth is that it is believed. It, therefore, becomes the standard and the basis for the functioning of individuals, families, and society at large.³ Over time, Black millennials do not see the Bible as a multicultural book, the result being there is no relevance to their lives. This has caused a wide separation with the Black church and is compounded by the fact that white Christians used it to justify the enslavement of their ancestors.

¹ Anthony T. Evans, *Are Black Spirituality Inferior To Whites? The Dispelling of An American Myth*. (Wenonah, NJ: Renaissance Productions, Inc., 1992), 13.

² Ibid., 11.

³ Ibid., 12.

Evans points us to Dr. Charles Copher's argument that the studies of anthropology, ethnology, kindred studies, and critical historical-literacy Biblical studies have removed Negroes from the Biblical world, the Bible, and Biblical history. This was done with the exception of an occasional Negro individual who could only have been a slave,⁴ or appeared in a menial position.

This thought stems from the fact both the Black church and Black millennials have failed to identify their Blackness within the scrolls of the scriptures and therefore, have become ensnared by the myth Blacks are inferior to whites and that there is nothing Black in the scriptures. However, archeological, historical, and scriptural findings have proven the Bible to be multicultural and the purpose of this chapter is to present this evidence with specific emphasis on foundational scriptures.

In her book *Biblical History of Black Mankind*, C. McGhee Livers cites William McKissic, Sr. from his book, *Beyond Roots*, who theorizes that "a people ignorant of their history is like a tree without roots. If you do not know your history, you do not know your destiny."⁵ The issue of Black identity in the Bible and within Christianity must be resolved to inform our Black people they played a very integral role in God's plan for humanity and were not just an afterthought of their creator. This research becomes important since it seems unfortunate our millennials cannot conceptualize the message of John 3:16, which states, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (KJV).

⁴ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 12.

⁵ C. McGhee Livers, *Biblical History of Black Mankind* (Indianapolis, IN: Shahr Publishing Company, 1999), viii.

The introduction of Jesus into the world to the shepherds on the hillside reported by the apostle Luke in chapter 2:10-11, tells us clearly, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior” (KJV). There is an inclusivity of all the people of creation that is unmistakably present, yet seems hidden, and will be brought to light in this chapter.

The Identity of Black People in the Bible

Of significant importance to this dissertation is the fact that to fully understand and readily interpret the presence of the color of Gods people in the Bible, one must visit the original manuscripts that were written in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages. Livers cites Brown, Driver, and Briggs in their Hebrew Lexicon when they inform us that Adam (Adham) was of dark skin and out of him came every nation and people on the face of the earth.⁶ What does this say for the self-esteem of the dark skin or colored people of the African diaspora? Livers further explains the text is clear in indicating Adam was made from the “*aphar ha adhamah*,” or Black clay soil of the land. Therefore, the etymology of the word “adham” is made clear by the soil used to form the first man.

Therefore, rendering the word “Adham” means “dark or Black skinned,” and refers to the apha (Black clay soil) of the adhamah (land).⁷ He has taken a technical path in addressing the root formation of the creation of mankind.

⁶ Livers, *Biblical History of Black Mankind*, 5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

J. Daniel Hays in his book, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, on the other hand, posits a different position when he says,

The Bible does not begin with the creation of a special race of people. When the first human is introduced into the story, he is simply called *ādām*, which means “humankind.” He explains that Adam and Eve are not Hebrews or Egyptians or Canaanites. It is incorrect for the White Church to view them as White or for the Black church to view them as Black. Their “race” is not identifiable; they are neither Negroid nor Caucasian, nor even Semitic. They became the mother and father of all peoples.⁸

Hays take a more simplified approach to the issue but it could be argued that delving into the composition of the created, Livers would be more easily understood.

Hays argues the division of humankind into peoples and races is not even mentioned until Genesis 10. Adam and Eve, as well as Noah, are non-ethnic and non-national. They represent all people, not some people.⁹ This is the typical controversy that ensues once the question of Black presence in the Bible arises. Hays has done great work, but on a sensitive question that has been denied, it would be appreciated if a direct answer could be provided. What he is actually saying here sounds good at a glance, but the question is not who the parents of all people and races are, but rather, are there any Blacks present in the Bible? It would sound as if he wants to say no but opted for a blanket covering. There are many races and nations of Adam, but the question still remains, are there Blacks in the Bible? Hays did not answer the question and this is what Black readers are confronted with from white theologians and scholars.

Black skin is a symbol of wealth, prosperity, and fertility. In the scriptures, The Song of Solomon 1:5, the Shunamite woman describes herself in the Hebrew adjective

⁸ J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

shehorah meaning Black, Blackish, or swarthy. Speaking to the daughters of Jerusalem, this Black woman says, “I am Black and beautiful.” The Hebrew word *na`vah*; translated beautiful, means “suitable, becoming, comely, or beautiful.” The equivalent Greek word *ka`le* means “beautiful, fertile, rich, and profitable”¹⁰ The Black and colored people of God’s creation have been so demoralized and shamed into thinking that anything Black is ugly, worthless, and not valuable, that they must work and achieve two or three times as much as their white counterparts to qualify for anything worth having. However, nowhere in *The Song of Solomon* does the Shulamite woman speak negatively about her Blackness and one wonders where and when did the shame and negativity begin.

Rev. Walter Arthur McCray in his book, *The Black Presence in the Bible and the Table of Nations* (Vol. 2), references Tirhakah, the Cushite pharaoh of the 25th Dynasty who has been called in a scholarly writing one of those “nigger kings.”¹¹ He was the king of Cush who took part in Hezekiah’s revolt against Sennacherib.

The Scriptures tell us in 2 Kings 19:9, “When he (the king of Assyria) heard say of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, behold, he is come out to fight against thee: he (the king of Assyria) sent messengers again unto Hezekiah,” (KJV). “And he heard say concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, He is come forth to make war with you. And when he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah” (Isaiah 37:9 KJV).

These references to Tirhakah (690-664 BC), the fourth pharaoh of the Twenty-Fifth (Ethiopian) Dynasty and also king of Egypt, is by no means insignificant. He was a

¹⁰ F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2021), 13.

¹¹ Walter Arthur McCray, *The Black Presence in the Bible and The Table of Nations Genesis 10: 1-32* (Chicago, IL: Black Light Fellowship, 1995), 3.

great and mighty king whom God used to reinforce the army of Hezekiah against King Sennacherib of Assyria. In one of the first battles for Jerusalem, God intervenes and destroys the army of Assyria. The Lord causes a rumor to be circulated amongst the Assyrians that the powerful King Tirhakah, who ruled over Ethiopia, was advancing toward Assyria. God had high regard for this Black king and found him useful enough to be recorded in the biblical archaeological archives as a great and rich king.

Genesis 41:50-52 tells us clearly,

And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On bare unto him. And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction (KJV).

Joseph married an explicitly Black woman, Asenath, an Egyptian, out of which Ephraim and Manasseh were born and became a part of the twelve tribes bearing their names and their offspring inherited their ethnicity. It must be noted that Ephraim and Manasseh were counted in the twelve tribes of Israel. Another explicitly Black presence in the Bible is Moses' wife Zippora who was Ethiopian according to Numbers 12:1, "And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman." Could this have been one of the first signs of racism among the children of God? But we see God shut it down immediately. It doesn't seem to be that Aaron and Miriam were against Moses, but against the fact he married a woman of another race, and Black at that. They felt he lost his authority to speak on God's behalf, hence their question in verse 2, "And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it" (Numbers 12:2).

God was so angry with this ugly spirit that had infiltrated the spirit of Aaron the priest and Miriam, that He called them out apart from the ears of the congregation to address it. He lets them know he knew of their discussion behind Moses' back and that in no uncertain terms, Moses was His servant and his being married to a Black woman did not disqualify him from being his servant. For God said,

My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? (Numbers 12:7-8).

God insisted their behavior necessitated punishment so when Miriam became afflicted with leprosy, Moses interceded for her. "Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee" (Numbers 12:13). God firmly said, "If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again" (Numbers 12:14). Sadly, racism has permeated our predominantly white society against Blacks who have suffered and continue to do so in this present time. Surely, God is against it and always has been.

Jacob and his Hebrew family of seventy who entered Egypt intermarried with the Egyptians that implicitly resulted in a mixed-multitude classified as Black who then left Egypt (Exodus 12:37-38). The Bible says some 600,000 men alone came out of Egypt with Moses (Exod. 12:37 KJV). However, it was over two million including women and children from mixed marriages to Egyptian women much like that of Joseph and Eleazar, which would have produced offspring such as Phinehas (Evans, 36).¹² It is important to note, however, that Black presence remained in the Bible through the survival of Noah

¹² Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 36.

and his family, for the scriptures tell us according to Genesis 10: 31-32, “These are the sons of Shem, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations. These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood.”

Clearly, all humanity finds its origin in the three sons of Noah (Acts 17:26; Gen. 9:18,19), and, according to Dr. Tony Evans, this would be an appropriate starting point for gaining a proper biblical basis for Black identity in the Bible.¹³ He raises a valid point that since all humanity came out of the same tree, it is idiotic for any group to claim superiority. It was God’s intention to reestablish the human race through the three sons of Noah, therefore, it must be concluded that God legitimized all races over which each son stands as head and over which Noah presides as father with the blessings of God in Genesis 9:1KJV.¹⁴ Therefore, like all other races, Black people should take much pride in knowing that our very existence was the plan of Almighty God.

Ham, Noah’s son, had four sons: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan:

Cush was the progenitor of the Ethiopian people validated by the fact that the names Cush and Ethiopia are used interchangeably in the scriptures (Gen. 2:13; Gen. 10:6). Mizraim was the progenitor of the Egyptian people, who are understood in Scripture to have been a Hamitic people and thus African (Psalms 78:51; 105:23, 26,27; 106:21,22). Put was the progenitor of Libya, while Canaan (who by the way was the one cursed by his grandfather Noah and not Ham), was the progenitor of the Canaanites, one of the most idolatrous, problematic foes of God’s chosen people, the Israelites.¹⁵

In his book, *Can a Cushite Change His Skin? Cushites, Racial Othering and the Hebrew Bible*, Rodney S. Sadler, Jr., Associate Professor of Bible at Union Theological

¹³ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 37.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Charlotte, North Carolina, explains that “Cush” stands out from the other North African “sons of Ham” as a decidedly racially charged term. Cushites were known through Egyptian and Assyrian epigraphy as a dark-skinned people with features consistent with modern notions of “Negroes.” Whereas the “racial” identity of Egyptians, Libyans, and Canaanites is uncertain, contemporary scholars have generally viewed Cushites as “racially Black.”¹⁶

He has observed that modern exegetes often racialize the term Cush. In this regard, “Cushi,” the term used to describe people from Cush, has become a translational equivalent for the racial term “Negro” in Modern Hebrew. In the history of biblical translation, the term Cush found its way into Greek (LXX) as Ethiopian, a word whose denotation, “burnt face,” has potentially racist implications.

Hence, the people known to the Hebrew Bible’s authors as Cushites were known by those authors’ Greek speaking descendants, not by their place of origin (Cush), or ethnicity (Cushites), but by an essentialist assessment of their phenotypical presentation, “burnt face.”¹⁷ This begs the question, why would God create more than one color or race from the loins of one man, if it was not His divine intent for a culturally diverse people?

God knew he was going to flood the earth and Noah would then be the new generational father of mankind in the new world. And what does God do? He gave Noah a Negro son, the “other” that must be a brother to Shem and Japheth—a mixed family under the same roof who must then populate a world that later sought to segregate and

¹⁶ Rodney S. Sadler Jr., *Can a Cushite Change His Skin? Cushites, “Racial Othering” and the Hebrew Bible* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2009), 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

demoralize the “Other.” In his Table of Nations (Genesis 10:1-32) (See Appendix A), McCray cites Noah as the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham is interpreted as “hot” and by application, “Black.” He was the only son of Noah’s after whom a country/nation was named and he was the father of Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan (Genesis 10:6).¹⁸

Sadler passionately brings into context the issue of the curse of Ham in Genesis 9:18-27. He explains:

It is often overlooked that YHWH never uttered or authorized the curse against Ham; an inebriated Noah did. It is however surprising how much harm to African Americans and “race” relations has been caused by the attribution of theological significance to the recorded ramblings of a human being in the throes of intoxication. He thinks that although drunkenness and its subsequent effects serve as factors that mitigate mental clarity in other biblical narratives (e.g., Lot’s incest in Gen 19:30-38), supremacist interpreters of this pericope have assumed that Noah was justified in uttering this curse and have employed it to legitimize prejudice against “Others” in the biblical and contemporary worlds. It is also surprising that the racial implications of the curse are still taught in Sunday school classes, which suggests that future generations of Africans and African Americans will continue to suffer the ramifications of “the Curse of Ham.”¹⁹

What has been overlooked is Genesis 10:6, is a patronymic list of the superiority of the first party mentioned. Cush’s position as first among Ham’s sons when it says, “and the sons of Ham; Cush, and Mizraim, and Phut, and Canaan,” suggests the text was composed during or after the period when the Twenty-fifth Cushite Dynasty ruled Egypt (mid-eighth to mid-seventh centuries). During this period, biblical authors could well have viewed Cush, the most powerful nation mentioned in verse 6, as the eldest of Ham’s

¹⁸ McCray, *The Black Presence in the Bible*, Vol. 1, 54.

¹⁹ Sadler, *Can a Cushite Change His Skin*, 7.

sons. In this regard, political and historical factors seem to overshadow race as the reason for the arrangement of nations found in Genesis 10:6-20.²⁰

The Cushites were known to have been a tall, smooth (Isaiah 18), dark-skinned (Numbers 12; Jeremiah 13:23), people from the farthest extent of the known world. They were born in a riparian land of mythic renown (Isaiah 18), rich and arable, full of luxuriant commodities (Job 28). Their economy, which likely depended on trade with Egypt and the people to the north, was facilitated by papyrus-sailing vessels that traversed the Nile (Isaiah 18). In the land of Cush, they grew powerful, and from this land they came as warriors. The biblical authors knew the Cushites principally as soldiers participating in the Judean army (2 Samuel 18), in their own Cushite-led forces (2 Kings 19; Isaiah 37), or in larger Egyptian military coalitions (e.g., 2 Chronicles, Isaiah 20; 43; 45). Because they appear in Egyptian expeditionary forces in every biblical period, it is no wonder that whenever Judeans thought of Egypt's armies, they thought of Cushites.²¹

Nimrod, a powerful Old Testament figure is a descendent of Cush who ruled in the land of Shinar (Gen. 10:8-10; 11:2). He eventually became the father of two great empires in the Bible: the Assyrian and Babylonian empires. His significance lies in the fact he was the first great leader of a world civilization (Gen. 10:8, 9). The biographical date attributed to him stands head and shoulders above that given to anyone else, indicating how great he was among the descendants of Ham. Nimrod's presence in history confirms the unique and early leadership role Black people played on the stage of

²⁰ Ibid., 8.

²¹ Sadler, *Can a Cushite Change His Skin*, 146.

world history.²² Jethro who was Moses' father-in-law, is another significant figure who gave Moses the greatest single piece of advice regarding national leadership, ministry organization, political strategy, and personal planning (Exodus 18:13-27) that was ever recorded. He was an Ethiopian priest from the tribe of Median (Exodus 3:1).²³

There are other readily observable Black people in the Bible. In the Book of Acts 8:26-39, we see the special care God took to answer the spiritual hunger of an African, the Ethiopian eunuch. He was a man of great authority and God said to Philip "arise and go" (v. 26), then again "go near" (v. 29) to minister not to a crowd but to one African man to explain the scriptures, get him converted, and baptize him. After Philip completed his assignment, he was taken away by the Holy Ghost. Philip was evangelizing down in Samaria doing great work in ministry by healing the sick and casting out demons when the Spirit of the Lord redirected him from the mass evangelism to minister to this one man who was African. That is how important Africans are to God. That is how all races and ethnicities are to God. He will leave the ninety-nine (Matthew 18:12-13) to go find that one who may come into His goodness and mercy.

Matthew records the part of Jesus Christ's crucifixion after they had beaten Him and were heading to Golgotha's Hill. This was a public affair and the crowd must have been huge with people from far and near, yet when they were looking for someone to assist Jesus with the cross because of the terrible beating, the only person they could have chosen was an African man from Cyrene (Matt. 27: 32), a city of Libya in North Africa, on the Northeastern Mediterranean shore. To have carried the cross for Jesus

²² Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 38.

²³ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 39.

Christ, the Son of the Living God is a great honor. The soldiers did not realize how divine that offer was and it was to an African. Africa had a special place in the Bible and this reality should not be ignored.

Why Is Black Presence a Mystical Find?

It is difficult to see the Black presence in the Bible because you won't read the terms Black or African but you will read the terms Ethiopians, Cushites, Egyptians, Hebrews, or other tribal terms. McCray explains it best when he said there are three dimensions of the Bible's Black presence. For him, some people are explicitly Black, such as Moses' Cushite wife (Num. 12:1), implicitly Black like the mixed multitude which left slavery in Egypt (Ex. 12:37-38), and then there are those who are presumed Black.²⁴ These terms are repeatedly mentioned in the Bible and they actually lead us to the presence of Black people throughout the scriptures. It is helpful to note that the present day "Middle East" along with the Holy Land was connected to Africa until 1859 when the Suez Canal was completed and had been referred to as North East Africa for the majority of modern history.²⁵ This is what creates the difficulty because a researcher must be prepared to delve into the ancient scrolls to interpret and decipher the language used then to understand history and the locations referenced. Rarely do people read the Bible with a map in hand and so it is up to the researcher to help people understand.

²⁴ McCray, *The Black Presence in the Bible*, 3-4.

²⁵ Onleilove Alston, "The Black Presence in the Bible: Uncovering the Hidden Ones," Sojourners Faith in Action for Social Justice. February 19, 2014. <https://sojo.net/articles/faith-action/black-presence-bible-uncovering-hidden-ones>.

Alston admits in his article that even though there are numerous evidences in the Bible of Black presence, one must intentionally look for it. He argues that from Genesis to Revelation, there is a great deal of proof that Blacks are present throughout the text. Unlike Hays who posits that Adam and Eve's race was not identifiable, Alston agrees with Livers that Adam, in the Hebrew (*Ahdahm*) was Black or dark brown in color. The Garden of Eden was described in Genesis as having been near a four-river system in the region of the lands of Cush, Havilah, and Asshur, which today would be near the borders of Eastern Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea.

The birthplace of humanity was confirmed when the oldest human remains were found in Ethiopia in 1974. Science and the Bible are often at odds, but one thing both confirm is that the birthplace of humanity was in East Africa. He reminds us that many of the Hebrew patriarchs married or had children with women from African tribes. Abraham had children with Hagar and Keturah both from African (Hamitic) tribes. Moses married Zippora, who was Ethiopian. Jacob had children with two handmaidens from African tribes, Zilpah and Bilhah, and these children became the patriarchs of two of the tribes of Israel.²⁶

The foundational understanding of the origin of humanity and civilization will create a shift in the minds of biblical students and scholars alike as they realize that "the roots of civilization and humanity are Black whether in Asia or Africa." McCray explains that Black people are present in the Scriptures by virtue of their names which bespeak their identity, for example "Cush" or "Kedar." Therefore, on the basis of physical anthropological, archaeological, historical and cultural studies, it can be demonstrated

²⁶ Alston, "The Black Presence in the Bible: Uncovering the Hidden Ones."

there are biblical people who are Black.²⁷ Case in point, McCray argues it is well established that the ancient “Elamites,” ancient ancestors of Persia, were Black despite the fact they appear in the genealogical line of Shem according to Genesis 10:22 which explicitly states, “The children of Shem; Elam, and Asshur, and Arphaxad, and Lud, and Aram.” This should not be difficult to understand because in the United States, persons with traceable Black blood in their DNA are classified as legally and nationally, racially and ethnically Black irrespective of the tone of their Blackness, which can be quite varied.²⁸

McCray also argues that just as anthropology and ethnology removed Negroes from the biblical world, so did critical study of the Bible removed Negroes from the Bible and Biblical history, except for an occasional Negro individual who could only be a slave. McCray explains that even today in critical Biblical studies, as in anthropology and ethnology, the ancient Egyptians, Cushites, and all the Biblical Hamites, were seen as white. Negroes were not seen at all in biblical history, and interactions between Blacks and Jews were not possible, especially if by Blacks, they meant so-called Negroes.²⁹ It is dangerous to seek for truth and then misrepresent or distort it to suit one’s own ideology.

In his interpretation of Genesis 10, Sadler finds several of the eponymous ancestors of tribes and nations appearing on more than one genealogical list. For example, Cush is said to be the father of Havilah and the grandfather of Sheba through his son Raamah in verse 7. Both of these characters recur, however, in Shem's genealogy

²⁷ McCray, *The Black Presence in the Bible*, 3.

²⁸ McCray, *The Black Presence in the Bible*, 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

in verses 28-29, where Sheba and Havilah are said to be brothers, sons of Joktan, and great-, great-, great-grandsons of Shem. In like manner, Meshech appears in two genealogies. He is a son of Japheth in verse 2 and a grandson of Shem in verse 23. Similarly, in verse 13, Ludim (which sounds like a plural gentilic related to the name Lud), is a son of Mitzraim and a grandson of Ham. In verse 22, Lud is a son of Shem.³⁰ What are the implications of these critical issues in Gen 10?

The presence of eponymous ancestors representing the same peoples in different lineages emphasizes that the author did not intend to present the Table of Nations as genetically pure human “races.” The narrative gives evidence of ethnic mixing and diversity, not exclusivity. Whether due to conflicting data among sources or to a lack of certainty on the author’s behalf, the text implies genetic exchange between the lineages of Noah’s three sons.³¹ This researcher finds this to be fascinating given the fact we now live in a world where there is an emphasis on ethnic cleansing.

If these genetic exchanges suggested by the Table of Nations were graphically depicted, it would be inconsistent with the classic candelabra model (beyond the scope of this research) for human evolution espoused in racist circles. As this “human evolution” story goes, these nations began their migration from Africa hundreds of thousands of years ago, evolved independently into three distinct African, Asian, and European “sub-species,” and since have had little or no genetic exchange. These three sub-species, or “races,” form the three parallel branches of a candelabrum, distinct from an earlier moment of genetic division, never again overlapping. This human evolution

³⁰ Sadler, *Can a Cushite Change his Skin*, 30.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

most closely resembles the Table of Nations which is predicated on the implausibility of genetic purity in the human race.³² Even today with the widespread interracial marriages and unions, who can or will be able to say definitively that they are of a pure race?

One cannot help but wonder when and why did the quest for a pure race begin? Who among us are of a pure nationality or race? Case in point, this researcher is South American, African Caribbean mixed with East Indian and Black on their mother's side, and both white and Black on their father's side. Ancestry includes Black from Africa, Barbados, and Guyana; East Indian from India; and white from New Hampshire of the United States of America and probably more the researcher is not aware of, based on the origin of their white great grandfather.

As we examine the text of Genesis 10, it clearly shows there were no ideological barriers to ethnic mixing influencing these genealogical narratives. Genetically pure, "racially" distinct lineages were definitely not the author of Genesis' goal³³ and definitely not the goal of God who inspired the writings with the intent to build a people who would reciprocate His love and love each other. Race was not the center of every discourse and whenever it raised its ugly head, we see God tearing it down as in the case of Aaron and Miriam (Numbers 12), Peter and the vision on the house top (Acts 10: 9-16), Peter's encounter with the Holy Ghost in Cornelius' home (Acts 10:19-48), and the apostle Paul's passionate confrontation of his duplicitous attitude between the Jews and Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14).

³² Ibid., 9.

³³ Sadler, Can a Cushite Change His Skin, 10.

Conclusion

Studying the Black presence in the Bible can open the door to discussions about racial justice and dispel the myth the Bible is the “white man's book.” It is this myth that has kept many people of color from the gospel. By whitewashing the Bible, we prevent future generations from experiencing the beauty of the biblical text. Black people should know they have always played a central role in God’s plan for humanity and were not an afterthought of the creator. Why do people insist on this fight to eradicate and delete Blacks from the intentional workings of God? To remove Blacks from God’s creative process is to deny God’s image and likeness, hence dehumanizing Blacks. This lie, this evil, has killed Blacks for centuries. The godly creativity in Blacks has been stolen and relabeled white to keep Blacks poor, trodden down, and inconsequential.

Oden makes a heart-wrenching appeal for the exposition of the truth of Christianity to be told for out of a continent of suffering has come an understanding of suffering transformed by compassion. A story of death resurrected, of life rising from the grave, is the living story of anyone who has grasped the meaning of history from the point of view of the cross and resurrection. The story begs to be told in its factual truth so the heart of it can be grasped easily by anyone. This story is laden with mystery, full to overflowing with unanticipated providences, heavy with sacrifice and miracle, with unforeseen twists and turns, unrepeatable choices to be confronted, and learnings to be treasured. The story hopes to find, especially, that single hearer who has witnessed a good creation, who has radically fallen, and been radically redeemed, and yet is puzzled over the mystery of the continuing power of evil in that creation. This touches something deep in human wonder. It is powerfully dramatized in narratives of early African saints

and martyrs, who demonstrated the capacity to overcome. Their stories illumine personal struggles everywhere.³⁴ It is hoped that every white Christian and theologian who seeks the truth in the scriptures would engage the eyes and heart of Oden who disseminated truth in its purest form and let it spread where it may. Hopefully his work will lead others to heal the race relations in our biblical and secular world.

This story of Blacks in the Bible is not only for a Christian audience. It is not intended to be heard only by those already convinced. Nor is it a story whose audience primarily resides in academic settings. It is for seekers, skeptics, and for those convicted, but especially for the children of African villages.³⁵ This is the story Black millennials need to hear to significantly re-educate their minds as to the core foundation of Christianity and how it originated in the first millennium in the four billion square miles of Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, and possibly further south than we now know. This will undoubtedly make a tremendous impact on the minds and responses of our millennials when they understand the geography of the African continent and how African Christianity first appeared north of the Sahara in the first millennium. Then in the second millennium, there was exponential growth in the south. Both north and south have been blessed by an enduring heritage of centuries of classic Christianity.³⁶

Early Christianity tells a historical narrative that deeply involved Africa from the beginning, from Joseph, to Moses, to the exodus, to the flight of the holy family to Egypt,

³⁴ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 12.

³⁵ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 12.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

to the Ethiopian eunuch. These are African events that define the whole subsequent narrative of salvation history in the Christian view. Modern enlightenment taught some Africans to bitterly oppose their own heritage, and thus to ignore the early African influences on European Christianity. These influences were wrongly imagined to be alien to Africa.³⁷ The goal was to deny Africa as the birthplace of Christianity. This would dismantle the power and control of whites and reduce their influence on Blacks.

The Bible gives a clear picture of the inclusivity of all nations and tribes in both the Old and New Testaments. All of God's creation is expressly included in the plan of salvation as stated in Revelation 5:9-10 which states:

...and they sung a new song, saying, thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

The Apostle John is declaring God's redemptive power is for every kindred, tongue, people, and nation. No nationality, race, or culture is excluded. There has to be some reason why our millennials find it difficult to grasp this simple fact that even if the Bible does not expressly speak of Black people with the exception of the Shulamite woman who said she was Black, or the Ethiopian eunuch, it does speak of all the kindreds and tongues, nations and people, which include Blacks. Blacks can no longer believe that Blacks are not humans, they are inferior to any race, or they are not in the Bible.

Irrespective of your tongue, whether Spanish, French, Portuguese, English, Soweto, etc., the blood of Jesus has redeemed us unto God our Father and made us all kings and priests unto himself. It is time to dispel the myth of the past and for every

³⁷ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 97.

millennial, every individual, to realize that God is for us all and to embrace the love of God rather than the lies and hates of mankind. The Apostle Paul declares to Areopagus and a synagogue filled with strangers and Athenians that:

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands. Neither is He worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us (Acts 17:24-27 KJV).

This text, like many others, do not need a translation for our Black millennials to see that they are in all.

How much plainer must the Scripture be for its readers to understand that God loves us all and provided for us all? In the passage above, Paul speaks of our God having made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth which simply means every human being in every and any place you can find them on earth. Is this the identity crisis based on a myth that Lincoln & Mamiya identified as being unresolved among Blacks that is the critical issue here? Oden clearly said the pretense of studying church history while ignoring African church history is implausible yet this assumption has been common in the last five centuries in a way that would have seemed odd during the first five centuries when the African mind was highly honored and emulated.³⁸ Black people are the rule rather than the exception.³⁹ Black people are not an afterthought to

³⁸ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 10.

³⁹ McCray, *The Black Presence in the Bible*, 4.

God, in the Bible or Christianity, and our Black millennials need to know this and learn their ancestral Christian history.

Antipas Harris claims that “when Black and white Christian leaders do not work together to address such public concerns as racism, inequality and division, young people tend to make sweeping conclusions that Christianity remains part of the race problem”⁴⁰. There is a substantial amount of evidence of Black people being in the Bible to debunk all the lies and evil sayings of the whites and too long have they denied our people a seat at the table. The time has long since come for both the Black church and Black millennials to know their place in God and to walk in that knowledge with all confidence that they are loved by God as much as anyone else on the face of the earth.

⁴⁰ Antipas L. Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion: How the Bible Is Good for People of Color* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF BLACK PRESENCE IN CHRISTIANITY

Introduction

This research is in no way the first of its kind. Numerous theological and historical scholars have chronicled works on why millennials and, more so Black millennials, are leaving the Black church. This phenomenon has piqued the interest of many to find a cause and solution to the problem. It must be noted, however, that this problem does not exist only within the Black church. In his book, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, J. Daniel Hays, discovered that in 1900, over 80% of the Christians in the world were in Europe or North America. Today that percentage has dropped to 40%, highlighting the fact the majority of Christians in the world today are places other than Europe or North America. Furthermore, in many of these areas, especially Africa, Christianity is growing at a phenomenal rate, while in the West, growth has stagnated.¹

Hays further explains the perception conveyed to the Church, both through popular media and through serious scholarly work, that there was a significant Caucasian involvement in the biblical story but no Black African involvement. This perception is erroneous, and it has fostered disastrous theology within today's white church that has contributed to the continued, almost total, division of the North American church into

¹ J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 23.

Black and white.² This deception has been portrayed for centuries, in the arts as well as in other media, that the individuals in the Bible are Europeans or North Americans. Thus, not only does Michelangelo paint twelve Europeans sitting down at a European table for the Last Supper, but the fair-haired American Charlton Heston portrays Moses in *The Ten Commandments* and the blue-eyed Briton Richard Harris plays the title role in TNT's television movie, *Abraham*.³

Even though most scholars know that few, if any, characters in the Old Testament looked much like Charlton Heston or Richard Harris, the average church member, probably the average pastor, consciously or subconsciously assumes as much. Such images play powerful roles in shaping popular perceptions about the Bible, and these popular perceptions in turn have a serious negative impact on the theology of the church.⁴ It is, therefore, striking that European and North American churches who have deliberately “diminished ought from it,” it being the Word of God or the Scriptures (Deuteronomy. 4:2), are suffering grave losses within the church. Clear portrayals of Black Africans in the Bible are all but ignored or diminished and sadly, this marginalization of Black African presence is perpetrated, consciously or subconsciously, not only by the popularizers of Christianity, but also by serious scholars and theologians even though they piously claim to be historically objective.⁵

² Ibid., 7.

³ J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation*. 25.

⁴ Ibid.,

⁵ Ibid., 26.

The Literature Speaks

Thomas C. Oden's exposition on the Black identity crisis in *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity*, compelled this student to investigate who this author and scholar was and with what authority was he writing. His conviction and passion for the African history he unearthed is compelling. What makes it more impactful is the fact he is not of African descent but has discovered the origins of the scriptures and Christianity and has made it his lifelong mission to expose what was hidden and otherwise misrepresented.

In one of the obituaries written of him, Dan Reid, associate publisher of InterVarsity Press, wrote:

Tom Oden was unique among evangelical theologians. In his early days he was what he called "a movement theologian," always moving on to the next big thing. But the story he tells in *A Change of Heart: A Personal and Theological Memoir* is almost a reprise of the Apostle Paul's turnabout on the Damascus Road. Oden was awakened from his liberal theological slumber when he rediscovered the fathers of the early church. And the experience transformed his thinking and his faith.⁶

Simply put, he had an encounter with Jesus Christ.

Jim Hoover, former senior editor at InterVarsity Press wrote:

Tom's advocacy of early church teaching and tradition, however, was not a purely academic exercise. His concern was the church and parish pastors. When his research led him to discover the central role of African teaching in the first five centuries of the church, he became convinced that this was a story that every African child should become acquainted with. So, he wrote three books—*How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, *Early Libyan Christianity*, and *The African Memory of Mark*. With a group of over 30 scholars from across the African globe

⁶ Dan Reid, "Tribute from Friends and Colleagues," InterVarsity Press, <https://www.ivpress.com/thomas-c-oden>.

he formed the Center for Early African Christianity to discuss how to share these insights widely.⁷

Clearly, he was a man who could not let loose of a golden gem he had discovered and didn't hide it under a bushel, but rather shared it with his world and especially to those of whom it belonged. He opinions it is pretentious to even attempt to study Christianity and church history while ignoring African church history, and has therefore dedicated this work to the growing African Christian population of the future.⁸

The question then becomes why is a westerner writing about Africa and, more precisely, why Thomas Oden? He explains how he “remained reticent until now to bear this responsibility, despite years of study of Africa’s patristic texts, its archaeological remains, its art history and its current literature,” and that this was only an embryonic attempt to lure African scholars to take up the mantle and delve into their history.”⁹

What Oden has done is to “state the African seedbed hypothesis in a measured way and begin to sort out the facts that support it.”¹⁰ In doing so, he posits the identity crisis that has surrounded the origin of African Christianity throughout history. It has had to endure the erroneous idea that:

1. Christianity in Africa’s first millennium was primarily coastal when in fact it was deeply inland as evidenced by the two main languages Nilotic and Judaism that

⁷ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 36.

¹⁰ Ibid., 31.

were the main “linguistic vehicles for grassroots Christianity in the middle Nile Valley.”¹¹

2. The previous generation of European scholars refused to acknowledge evidence that revealed Christianity could have started as far back as in the forties.¹²
3. “It is sometimes wrongly assumed that African traditional religion largely lacks written texts,” and therefore has no merit.¹³ It is as the common saying goes: “If it is not written it doesn’t exist.” For example, Christianity was conveyed from north of the Sahara both orally and textually but that meant very little to Westerners.
4. There is the well-known falsehood, that Christianity began in Africa only a couple of centuries ago, strictly imported from “the West” or “the North.”¹⁴ As a native of South America with roots in Africa, this student did not have very high regard and esteem for Africa. The tribal images and demonic worship propagated did little to enhance the image. This researcher was shocked to learn that not only did Christianity not come from Europe to Africa but has been in existence for “two or three millennia;”¹⁵
5. There is the attack on Africa’s perception of themselves. They have been led to believe that in the “African traditional religion, Africa lacks intellectual subtlety

¹¹ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 21.

¹² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

and substance.”¹⁶ It is self-demeaning to be sitting on all a wealth of rich history when an outsider comes in saying you’re worth nothing and you believe it. As Oden puts it, “In Christian history, contrary to this common assumption, the flow of intellectual leadership demonstrably moved largely from Africa to Europe—south to north,” and not the reverse.¹⁷

6. “Even today many African-born scholars trained in the West seem all too ready to play the role of European chameleons.”¹⁸ It would seem there is a consorted effort by the West to illegitimize the existence of Christianity in Africa as early as two thousand years ago.”¹⁹
7. “They have ignored the earliest hints of Christian presence in the Maghreb, where, with the Martyrs of Scilli, [even though] there was firm written evidence of Christian occupation by 180 C.E.”²⁰ Oden argues, “It is implausible that the Madaura and Scilli martyrs would be ready to die for the faith if they had just appeared in North Africa immediately before 180 C.E.”²¹ This shows they had deep roots in the region.

The crisis endured by Christianity in Africa has undoubtedly placed a great responsibility on the scholars to answer this call to correct the erroneous conversation about the roots of Christian history. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, “...upon this rock, I

¹⁶ Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” and this researcher cannot help but conclude that this “rock” is “the truth,” for amidst all the lies and distortion of Christianity in Africa, it has survived and flourished.

It is anticipated that by 2025 there will be some 633 million Christians in Africa alone, all because as Oden explains, “Decisive intellectual achievements of Christianity were explored and understood first in Africa before they were recognized in Europe and a millennium before they found their way to North America.”²² And there is no reason to believe the investigation will cease, however delayed.

Oden states repeatedly, “The challenge that lies ahead for young Africans is to rediscover the textual riches of ancient African Christianity.”²³ These textual riches must be told now to the African children in the villages and cities.²⁴ “It is timely today for African mothers and daughters, fathers and sons. Its time has come.”²⁵

Dr. Antipas L. Harris in his book, *Is Christianity a White Man’s Religion? How The Bible Is Good News for People of Color*, embarked on this journey not because of his own curiosity, but that of one of his students while teaching ministry leadership. The question, “What do you say to your friends who are leaving the church and arguing that Christianity is the white man’s religion?” came from his twenty-two-year-old student.²⁶ Harris found it to be mind boggling and caught him by surprise. The question captivated

²² Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 9.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 11.

²⁵ Ibid., 12.

²⁶ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man’s Religion*, 3.

his attention and he was drawn to a pervasive dynamic within the Black church he had not noticed before.

Harris took it upon himself to investigate the answer to this question and he discovered “many young people of color across North America, all over Europe, and throughout Africa are often wary of Christianity because of current religious alignments with divisive politics, not to mention the global history of pain already associated with branches of Christianity.”²⁷ He was surprised that after all the changes covered over the years in terms of racial discrimination, “a new wave of religious skeptics arrived with serious questions about faith, identity, and the struggles of everyday life.” Pastors all over the Western world were concerned about the foothold the Black Hebrew and Black Israelites movement and other Black conscious religious groups were gaining in urban areas.

The study of Black presence in the Bible is in no way limited to the sphere of Black scholarship, but anthropologists of all races are grappling with the increasing plausibility that the roots of not only Blacks, but human civilization as a whole, are in Africa with Black people. Rev. Walter McCray writes about the preponderance of contemporary evidence being gathered by archaeologists and ancient historians that Africa (in Egypt’s Nile Valley) was the origination of humanity and civilization. It was from here that humanity, an indigenous “Black” humanity, had its beginnings. The preponderance of archaeological and historical facts say the roots of all people are in Africa. Egypt, Africa... they were Black in Egyptian Africa and they were Black in

²⁷ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man’s Religion*, 3.

Asia's lower Mesopotamia. Either way one cuts it, the originators of civilization were a Black people.²⁸

The church has confined Christianity to the building for so many years, it has not noticed there was a pivotal change where Christianity was no longer confined to four walls. It had moved to the street corners, coffee shops, homes, dormitories, libraries, and college campuses as in the Underpinning Story of Chapter 1. Once in the streets, the discussion is no longer between church goers only. It's a wide cross section of groups like the nation of Islam, the Black Israelites, etc. These are all groups who believe they have found their identity in their Blackness, taking them as far away as possible from the Bible and Christianity. These Black groups want absolutely nothing to do with a Bible that was used by whites to enslave and brutalize their ancestors which was seemingly endorsed by God himself.

Millennials of today identify with the message of these ancestors who put away the Bible and sang songs of redemption from their hearts of pain and suffering. The millennials who are more educated and curious in nature get their information from a myriad of places but especially the internet, however misinformed it may be. For Harris, this generation of millennials, he sees religion as touching the heart and not simply a list of mandated rules. Touching the heart goes beyond cozy emotions and speaks to practical dynamics of faith. Like him, millennials believe that genuine religion champions causes and advocates for justice. It helps people gain a moral compass, discover their identity, and develop gifts. He argues that in the spirituals, the slaves affirmed and reaffirmed their identity religiously as they suffered and celebrated their journey from slavery to

²⁸ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 29.

freedom.²⁹ The curious beauty of their African music was that it uplifted even as it told a sad story. Therefore, one must never dismiss cultural identity too quickly. African American spirituality was formed through the pressures of oppression and so Black human and Christian identities were shaped despite a society that rejected both.³⁰

Harris has confirmed in his research that our millennials are enthralled with spirituality more than ever but are rejecting the church. He shares how Dr. Dale Andrews, a professor of Boston University, once pointed out that Black urban youths and the Black middle class feel that church has become irrelevant to their daily struggles. At the core of their frustrations lie displaced faith identity conflicts.³¹ He reiterates Lincoln and Mamiya's argument that churches in Black communities are important symbols of faith and places where Black people congregate for events such as weddings, funerals, and so on, but the traditional cultural assumptions about the faith are no longer the hallmarks of Black church like they once were as recently as the 80s and 90s.³²

This is where the “rubber meets the road” as people in the Black church would say. The origin of the institutionality of the Black church for its Black people has been reduced to simply the spirituality of the people with little or no regard for their life's challenges. This researcher recalls when a member of a Black church who was a single mother of four was having difficulty with her paying her rent and was about to be evicted. A few of us helped her with a portion of the payment and she decided to ask the

²⁹ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion*, 9.

³⁰ Ibid. 9.

³¹ Ibid., 14.

³² Ibid.

church for help with the difference of her three months' arrears. After waiting for a response for one week, the secretary told her she had not given enough tithes to qualify for the seven hundred and fifty dollars she needed to save herself and her girls from eviction. It is shocking that this member, who would show up to support and help the church in any and all ventures at the drop of a hat, did not qualify for financial help in her time of distress while being a single mom with a low paying job and babysitting issues. Needless to say, she never returned to the church after serving the community for twelve years.

Dr. Harris is convinced there are challenges of faith among the Black and brown millennials, post-millennials, and Generation Z who are searching for identity and a sense of belonging.³³ In their search, however, their identity of self supersedes their identity with Christ and his all sufficiency for their lives. The common rhetoric among scholars, serious-minded Christian scholars, and church leaders both Black and white, is that color is not important in the Bible, otherwise it would have been explicitly and boldly mentioned. It is often said God is not concerned with color but rather the condition of our hearts and souls, forgetting that it was not God who started the disparity among races, but mankind, and more so the white man when he labeled us as "not humans."

There is a powerfully dramatic scene in Lorraine Hansberry's classic work, *A Raisin in the Sun*, where the relationship between the Black church and young people is displayed. "But like Beneatha, many young African Americans, teenagers and young adults, have increasingly questioned the need for God and the relevancy of the Black

³³ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion*, 17.

church to their own lives in the world as they have come to see it.”³⁴ The Black church has always been the “major communal institution for the Black communities way back during the massive Black migrations to urban areas since World War 1 until the 1980s.”³⁵ But then as time progressed within certain sectors of the Black community:

Fissures developed and important challenges and problems emerged especially among the young people and as one C.M.E pastor said, this is “the first time in Black history we are seeing an unchurched generation of young Black people growing up in urban areas. In previous generations, you could always assume some knowledge of Black church culture, like favorite hymns or prayers or some rituals. Today, there are teenagers out there in the streets who have no knowledge of and no respect for the Black church and its traditions.”³⁶

Despite the numerous programs churches have put in place to keep their young people in the church, churches have found it increasingly difficult to reach them. This demonstrates how “the younger generation of Negroes are tired of the limited and hackneyed amusements the church offers, and that the spiritual message of the church has been dulled by too indistinct and inopportune reiteration.”³⁷ Having failed in all of its efforts to retain young Blacks in the church, the researcher contends the missing link is the “problem of identity among young Black youths,” which is definitely a challenge facing the contemporary Black church,³⁸ hence the problem under investigation.

³⁴ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 309.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 310.

³⁷ Sandra L. Barnes, “The Least of These: Black Church Children and Youth Outreach Efforts,” *Journal of African American Studies* 12, no. 2 (June 2008), 100.

³⁸ Ibid.

Why Do Millennials Find the Church Irrelevant?

Harris states there are many reasons why millennials find the church irrelevant. He argues that among the many reasons are technological advancements with global influences and the influx of new ideas and shifts in family structure. The internet has replaced both the textbook and the library; far fewer parents are requiring their children to go to Sunday school or church at all. Fewer and fewer youth and middle-class people see places with steeples as spaces of self-discovery and spiritual formation. They take their questions to the bookstores, classrooms, and internet. Google is the new card catalog.

External opinions are the new source of knowledge and online video portals such as YouTube and Netflix are the new pulpit. Summarily, what millennials see in the media and online shapes their vision of the world, God, and themselves. It is no longer the church.³⁹

It is disheartening to know that their go-to place for comfort, solace, direction, and guidance is no longer the church but rather a growing number of them are opting for subcultural identity groups such as gangs and alternative religious groups such as science and consciousness groups, five percenters, the Nation of Islam, Black Israelites, Wiccans, and varying forms of witchcraft to guide them in self-discovery and their search for success.⁴⁰ Pew Research reports that millennials are reluctant about going to church and don't value scripture as a guide for living. Yet they are more spiritual than previous

³⁹ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion*, 14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

generations. For these millennials, spirituality is a search for a God who cares about their everyday lives and that they flourish.⁴¹ This entire reporting is so contradictory, this researcher cannot help but recognize why the millennials and their dilemma are misunderstood and there is no known remedy to turn them back to the church.

Millennials are of the view that Christianity must be taken to the streets and this could very well be one solution to this problem of them not going back to church. They may very well have a point and are more aware of the scriptures than the church who functions as if the world must go to the church when Jesus commanded the church to “go” into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15), and to “go” and teach all nations (Matthew 28:19). If the church is commanded to “go” and millennials outside of the church are demanding the church come out where they are, then the church needs to pay attention. Millennials can be located where Christ the Head of the Church called “the world.” The onus is then upon the church to bridge that gap by going out to meet them with the gospel where they are.

The church needs to rethink church. When we look at the ministry of Jesus Christ, even though he visited and taught in the synagogues, he more often taught on the streets, in the highways and byways, in homes and the seashores. As a matter of fact, as we revisit his teaching within the church, there were many arguments and conflicts. It was in the streets where miracles were rampant. It was out in the byways the miracle of feeding thousands took place from five loaves and two fishes. It was after teaching on the banks of the river that he told Peter to cast his net on the other side and he ended up breaking his net and having to call for help from neighboring fishermen. This culture of the church

⁴¹ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man’s Religion*, 15.

being stuck in beautiful and priceless buildings to do the ministry of Christ begs one to wonder how and when it all started. Why the deviation from how Christ and the apostles did ministry?

From his numerous discussions on the streets, Harris believes there is a gap between what the local churches sometimes care about and what the majority of people need.⁴² This can be a result of the fact the church is not in the streets to understand people's problems. Could it be we are too pious to get out there and get our hands dirty? Harris says that, for them, Christianity is the religion of the oppressors and the Bible does not affirm Blacks, other minorities, or women in their pain and suffering. It must be noted here that, given all the reasons millennials are screaming about as to why they are not going back to church, in formal interviews, they are expressing new reasons. This is why their belief, or the lack thereof, in the Bible is one of their ultimate problems. They do not feel connected to or seen in the Bible. Chapter 2 shows us clearly that Black people are everywhere in the Bible and if millennials are not aware of this, it means the church has failed to educate them.

In his article, "Is Christianity the White Man's Religion," Dr. H. C. Felder, a former atheist and NASA Software Engineer, has dedicated his life to answering this question after becoming a believer in Jesus Christ and Christianity. He recognized "there is a growing segment of the African American community that have rejected Christianity. They believe that it is not compatible with our heritage. They believe that its roots within the African American community is based on slavery and should be rejected." To substantiate his findings, he presented an excerpt of a letter written to his wife by her

⁴² Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion*, 16.

father which said, “I know you’re sincere. But honestly, the reason you’re a Christian is that Christians kidnapped your ancestors from Africa and brought them over to America as slaves, then indoctrinated them with the religion of the conquerors. They forced your ancestors to accept Christianity because it served the interests of those in power.”⁴³ With this mindset, millennials actually believe that somehow “the God of the bible Himself is racist and has nothing to offer people of color. Some would even say that He is the cause of racism and racism serves as a foundation of Christianity.” Clearly there is a serious misunderstanding and misconception of who God is and his love for people of color.

Felder fiercely refutes the myth that Christianity is a white man’s religion by setting forth five arguments:

1. Historically: Abraham, the founder of the nation, was from Ur, which is modern day Iraq. This area was the location of Babylon, which was originally settled by Nimrod, son of Cush, who was African. The area of Cush includes the present-day areas of Sudan, Ethiopia, and southern Egypt.

Later, Jews intermarried with the Egyptians during their 400 years of captivity. There was not yet any prohibition against marrying outside of their ethnic group.

After these 400 years, the Bible states Israel left Egypt with an ethnically diverse group of people. Exodus 12:38 says, “A mixed multitude also went up with them.” According to Charles Pfeiffer in the Wycliff Bible Commentary, this mixed multitude refers to “Egyptians and probably other nationalities who had

⁴³ Felder, “Is Christianity the White Man’s Religion.”

married Hebrews.”⁴⁴ J. Daniel Hays explains in his work, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, that “it is almost certain that a mixed multitude of foreigners in Egypt would include Cushites.”⁴⁵

Two of the twelve tribes of Israel were African. While in Egypt, Joseph married “Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On” (Genesis 41:50). Joseph had two sons by her, Manasseh and Ephraim (Genesis 41:51-52). They became two of the Twelve Tribes of Israel (Numbers 13:4-15).

2. By the numbers: Most Christians today are not white. According to Pew Research, there were an estimated 70 million Christians in China alone in 2011. In just ten combined African countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the population of Christians is over 377 million. Ten combined countries in the Asia-Pacific have a Christian population of 258 million. This statistic compares to the 246 million Christians in America according to global Christianity, a report on the size and distribution of the world’s Christian population. Therefore, the idea that Christianity is a white religion is statistically false. All cultures and nations find the Bible relevant to them and their culture.
3. Jesus was not white: This idea is also based on the false assumption that Jesus was white. We have already established the Jews were not white and since Jesus was a Jew, there is certainly no reason to believe that Jesus had blond hair and blue eyes, as many white Christians have depicted Him. The white Jesus we are

⁴⁴ Charles Pfeiffer and Everett Harrison, *Wycliff Bible Commentary*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962), #38, under Mixed multitude.

⁴⁵ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*.

familiar with is a European invention. The whitening of Jesus happened as a process to redefine the biblical Jesus in European terms.⁴⁶

Forrest G. Wood, in his work *The Arrogance of Faith: Christianity and Race in America from the Colonial Era to the Twentieth Century*, explains how Jesus was transformed into a European Jesus when he said, “Graphic portrayals of Christ had to be as far removed as possible from anything that could suggest darkness or Blackness. For him the result was Renaissance image of Christ that recorded his transmogrification from Semitic to Aryan, his dark hair and beard evolving into the color of Sunshine and his dark eyes magically taking on the color of the sky from which he descended and to which he returned.”⁴⁷

4. Blacks have always been a part of the church: Blacks were part of the church from the very beginning. Christianity did not initially come to Africa via the slave masters. Africa had a large Christian population going back to the very beginning of Christianity. In the book of Acts, we see how the first non-Jew convert was an Ethiopian eunuch who was the treasurer for Queen Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians (Acts 8). God even performed a miracle to allow Philip to share the gospel with him, after which he was converted and baptized.

Tradition has it this same eunuch brought back the gospel to his African nation, became a bishop in the church there, and preached the gospel until he was

⁴⁶ Felder, “Is Christianity the White Man’s Religion.”

⁴⁷ Forest G. Wood, *The Arrogance of Faith: Christianity and Race in America from the Colonial Era to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 51.

martyred for his faith.⁴⁸ Tradition also has it he shared the gospel with his queen who also converted to Christianity.

5. The Martyrdom of the African Christians: Christianity thrived in Africa during the early centuries of the faith. According to Carl Davis in *A Brief History of Christianity in Africa*, by the year 200 AD, there were many local churches in Egypt.⁴⁹ There are stories of African Christians being martyred as early as the year 180 AD from rural areas around Carthage (which is present day Tunis).

This demonstrates Christianity had not only spread all over the north coast of Africa but was also strong in rural areas. Many of these Christians were martyred for refusing to recognize the Roman emperor as god and it cost them their lives. At the end of the third century AD, northern African was one of perhaps only three places in the world where Christians were in the majority. To the south, Nubia and Ethiopia were two countries in the ancient world that converted to Christianity without Roman rule or influence.

In his research, Felder discovered from his readings of Elizabeth Isichei's work in *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present*, that the influence of Christianity in Africa is demonstrated by a discovery in 1961 when Polish archaeologists excavated Faras Cathedral. The cathedral was decorated with 169 magnificent paintings of dark-skinned Nubian kings, queens, bishops, biblical figures, and saints). According to

⁴⁸ Felder, "Is Christianity the White Man's Religion."

⁴⁹ Carl Davis, *A Brief History of Christianity in Africa* (Independently published, 2015), 92-93 Kindle ebook.

Isichei, there are written records from Christian Nubia containing religious text that include the Gospels, lives of the saints, and other liturgical documents.⁵⁰

Coptic and Ethiopian Christians today trace their origins back to the Apostle Mark who was the first apostle of Egypt and was martyred for his faith as recorded by the church historian Eusebius writing in 324 AD. This is also supported in the Acts of Mark written around 300 or 400 AD. Although vigorously persecuted for their faith, this did not stop the growth of Christianity among the early African church.⁵¹

In Egypt, as in North Africa, a mass turning away from the old religion towards Christianity seems to have begun in the middle of the third century and to have been virtually complete by 400 AD. Of note, Christians formed a majority in Egypt until the tenth century. The eventual decline of Christianity was a gradual process that occurred with the increased migration of Arabs into the area.⁵²

When researching millennials, this researcher discovered they are more educated and read more than any other generation but not the Bible. According to Dr. Harris, “The church is quickly becoming more of a symbol of conflict, oppression, and hypocrisy. Christian history is filled with supporting evidence to validate the suspicion.” Millennials, because of their reading acumen, are fully aware of “American slavery to the Holocaust in Germany to South African apartheid, the powerful have leveraged the Christian faith for their own greed and political interests. Christ’s message is often entangled with agendas that privilege some people and disadvantage others.” These are

⁵⁰ Felder, “Is Christianity the White Man’s Religion.”

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

the central issues this generation are struggling with and not so much the sins of the church leaders. Clearly, they have a problem with control and authority which stems from the dominance prevailing in the Christian history of faith.⁵³

Millennials find the church irrelevant because, according to Harris, they:

...are hesitant to admit that they are Christians because they felt ill-equipped to handle questions about Christian beliefs pertaining to human sexuality, female reproductive rights, and more. In fact, most Christians are not equipped to respond to the difficult questions without assigning political preferences more than responding with the language of God's love. Young people tend to view Christianity as small minded and focused more on its institutional base than on economic empowerment, human rights, women's rights, the environment, and other needs in the world.⁵⁴

A Case for Christianity Being Culturally Inclusive

Thomas Oden in his book, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity*, has determined Africa as a whole found its public voice within early Christianity through the Alexandrian Patriarchate, symbolically embracing both the Nile and the Maghreb rivers due to the latter's deference to the Marcan apostolate. The bishop of Alexandria, the see established by Mark, embraced not just one city but symbolically a whole continent, even if largely unknown (just as the bishop of Rome following Peter embraced far more than a single city). The see of Alexandria referred primarily to the Eastern churches of the continent that spoke in the inland Nilotic languages and wrote in the international literary and trade language of Greek. The see of Carthage referred to the western African churches where the Berber,

⁵³ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion*, 19.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

Punic and Capsian languages of the Maghreb were spoken, as well as the international political, literary, and trade language of Latin. These two African regions of ancient Christianity, east and west, joined together in being symbolically represented among the patriarchates by the earlier Marcan apostolate.⁵⁵

Early Christianity includes a historical narrative that deeply involved Africa from the very beginning, from Joseph and Moses, to the exodus and the flight of the holy family, to Egypt and the Ethiopian eunuch. These are African events that define the subsequent narrative of salvation history in the Christian view. The first Gospel narrative was written by Mark, who personally brought the first apostolic voice to the African continent, according to African tradition.⁵⁶ Unaware of the fact much of the substructure of European Christianity came out of Africa, much of the ancient ecumenical memory was demythologized to death.⁵⁷

In J. Daniel Hays book, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race the Cushites*, he takes us in another direction of identifying the presence of Black people in the Bible by pointing our attention to the ancient art of the Egyptians, and, later in history, that of the Greeks and Romans. He also claims there are numerous ancient literary texts referring directly and indirectly to the Black skin color and other ‘Negroid’ features of the Cushites. In terms of the art, W. Hayes writes how the art of Egypt clearly identified the Nubian/Cushite group as “Negro.”⁵⁸ It was this connection that put the

⁵⁵ Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 21-22.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 97.

⁵⁸ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 36.

Mediterranean world into contact with Black peoples, and Strouhal, in his work, *Life of the Ancient Egyptians*, used the term “Nubian” rather than “Cushite.”⁵⁹

Hays is convinced the most spectacular artwork on this subject of Black presence in the older world is a painting in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo depicting a battle between Pharaoh Tut-ankhamon (1352–1344) and the Cushites. The Cushite warriors are not merely dark-skinned or tanned, they are clearly Black (See Appendix B).⁶⁰

The color of the Cushites’ skin even became proverbial in Jerusalem for Jeremiah asks the question, “Can the Cushite change his skin?” (Jeremiah 13:23 KJV). This question implies there was an obvious difference in the skin of the Cushites and inferred it was not possible to change the tone of their skin since they were created in that color. The question connotes a call for the skin color of the Cushites to be accepted as a part of God’s creation and not to be questioned or frowned upon. The Greeks and Romans used a similar proverb “to wash an Ethiopian white” which became a common expression used to convey the futility of trying to change nature.⁶¹

All Christians on the continent of Africa have a birthright that awaits their discovery. But in subtle ways, they seem to have been barred access to it as a result of longstanding preconceived notions and biases. Thus, their heritage has remained sadly unnoticed, even in Africa.⁶² This explains why the African American of the African diaspora demonstrates little passion for their heritage here in a foreign land. Being far

⁵⁹ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 36.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 37.

⁶¹ Ibid., 39.

⁶² Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 11.

away for a long time has faded their minds and spirits from their culture and who they are as a people.⁵⁷

If the parents of baby boomers didn't live faith out and teach the history of that faith to the boomers, then the boomers had nothing much to teach their millennials. The Boomers don't seem to have questioned traditional interpretation but now there arises a generation who have developed a sense of the missing link in their lives and will seek to find it at all costs, even as it leads them in the opposite direction of finding it. Who they are, whose they are, and how they do fit into the scheme of all things in the Bible and Christianity is of paramount importance to them.

This millennial generation is a reading generation, more so than recent generations before them. They are privy to the history of how "the powerful have leveraged the Christian faith for their own greed and political interests and how the Christian message is often entangled with agendas that privilege some people and disadvantage others."⁶³

Harris argues that a solution for the social justice-minded millennials is to seek creative ways to bridge the gap between faith and problems, and to do so, they will have to distance themselves from mainstream Christianity.⁶⁴ What millennials see of the church is that it is small-minded and focused more on its instructional base than on economic empowerment, human rights, women's' rights, the environment, and other needs in the world.⁶⁵ He reminds us of the remarkable impressions the first and second

⁶³ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion*, 20.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 21.

Great Awakenings in the 1730s, 1740s and 1800 left on Christianity, along with the 1906 Azusa Street Revival. Harris firmly believes the time has come for a new revival to reframe religious life in the western world.⁶⁶ A revival of a spirituality that enlightens people's hearts and simultaneously leads in the path of love that transforms the social strata of injustice, a seemingly deep quest on the hearts of our Black millennials.⁶⁷

Professor Vince Bantu is, unquestionably, a defender of the authenticity of the origin of Christianity. He is determined to make it known that Christianity started in Africa and not in the west or by the west. In his videos, *Is Christianity a White Man's Religion, Part 2*, and *Six Little Known Facts About the Early African Church*, his argument is so compelling that one wonders what sources were used to determine the West took Christianity to Africa, and it all stems from the fact the white scholars couldn't read the writings and labels of the artifacts. He explains that in all the dominant African Christian kingdoms, there was not even the concept of Europe. The four dominant places of Christianity were Egypt, Carthage, Nubia, and Ethiopia, along with Northern Africa in general, and the absence of Christianity in any of those regions in no way negates the fact that Christianity actually started there.⁶⁸

Bantu reminds us that Christianity was hand in hand with Ethiopia, Nubia, and Egyptian identity. There were desert fathers and mothers in monastic communities who were Christians and who took their faith seriously, like Perpetua and Felicity, who were martyred for their faith. Several Kings, like Ezana, formalized Christianity into the

⁶⁶ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion*, 21.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Vince Bantu. "Is Christianity a White Man's Religion?" January 23, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMEVmEYHqJo>.

Ethiopian monotheistic church tradition following the God of Yahweh, and queens like the Queen of Sheba were Christian.⁶⁹

The Coptic and Syriac languages were all foreign to the West. Bantu argues the Hebrew-Middle Eastern-Israelite people took the gospel straight to the Syriac speaking neighbors, moving into India, China, and other countries without any western, European or Roman interference. However, we must admit that division will create dissension and depletion. The Roman churches were dominant and differed in their belief of Jesus and so began to excommunicate the leaders of the African and Asian churches calling them heretics. This conflict between them over theology blinded them from the invasion of the Muslims who were able to make inroads undetected.⁷⁰

Bantu asks the question, “Why are so many Blacks leaving Christianity?” then responds to his own question, saying it is because of “racialism and not theology.” Racialism can be a form of robbery, where whites have deliberately stolen the thunder of Africa’s Christian history as they have claimed everything else Blacks have created such as home security systems (co-invented by Mary Van Brittan Brown in 1966) and the three-light traffic signal (invented by Garrett Morgan in 1923), just to mention a few. He believes that as Blacks, we must be more prophetic about our role in the gospel and to eliminate the passive role we have adopted throughout time.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Bantu, “Is Christianity a White Man’s Religion?”

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Conclusion

The literature has revealed Black presence in the Bible and Christianity, and that the whitewashing of both no longer has any merit. We have learned how Christianity has been in existence since the first century in many forms and did not just start a few centuries ago in America. Africans have come to terms with the richness of their biblical heritage, hence the widespread growth in Christianity. White Christianity can no longer claim the faith is only theirs, especially in the face of an expected 633 million Christians in Africa alone in two years time. Without the archeological evidence, statistics show that in 2011, 70 million Christians were in China, 377 million Christians are in ten combined African countries, and 258 million Christians are in ten combined countries in the Asia-Pacific. These numbers overshadow the 246 million Christians in America, who are also not all white. Christianity is not the white man's religion and it never was since Jesus was a Jew and He was not white.

In the beginning, the Black preacher was elected to the office because of his extraordinary ability to articulate the experiences of his people and the scriptures without having attended seminary training. He answered the call as a response to the need within him to help his people combat the vicissitudes of their lives. The burning issue of millennials with the church is not only the church's silence on the racial struggles they are presently encountering but, more so, on their African historiography as it relates to the church and the Bible. Black millennials are aware the Bible was used to enslave their ancestors and are therefore concerned how and why is the Bible still being used as the rock and authentic resource of Christianity. The Black church has some explaining to do

to their millennials and fortunately, the literature has been procured and is available for them.

Ordinary African Christian believers deserve to have a more accessible way of understanding early African Christianity: its faith, courage, tenacity, and remarkable intellectual strength. That is why this story must be told, told now, and told accurately.⁷² This widespread belief in Europe and in America that Christianity did not come to Africa until the missionaries brought it in the fifteenth or nineteenth century, is erroneous. The facts, according to history, is Africans in the North and Northeast played a leading role in the development of the early church during the first four centuries of Christianity.

These facts of history around Christianity's development in Africa and the part played by people of African descent in the development and advancement of Christianity, has been neglected by Eurocentric scholars and educators.⁷³ They have focused on Greco-Roman effects on Christianity and ignored African contributions completely as if they never existed with the hope that Blacks will soon forget all about it as well.⁷⁴ The irony here, is the more the truth is buried, it resurfaces in a greater way to God's people all over the world. This is the fulfillment of God's promise that "ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32 KJV).

⁷² Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 11.

⁷³ Adeola, *Cultural & Religious Dilemma of Africans in the Diaspora*, 34.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4:

METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Introduction

The relationship between the Black church and millennials in the African diaspora is in a crisis of astronomical proportion. The spiritual condition of our millennials is at an all-time low, not without merit, but we are on the brink of cementing the wall now existing between them and the Black church. However, it is a wall that must be torn down at all cost to reconnect and re-establish these two pillars of the Black community within the African diaspora. The literature has informed us of the validity of the existing problem and this researcher has determined the Black church has abandoned their role in the lives of its people and is ill equipped to fill those needs—not only in keeping the millennials in the pews, but to also keep them enthusiastically engaged.

The purpose of this research is to determine if millennials are justifiably averse to the position of the Black church and whether there are remedial practices that can be employed to create a new path of reconciliation between the two going forward. Having read the literature on the purpose and function of why the Black church was created, this researcher is convinced the reasons millennials have given for leaving the Black church are inconsequential compared to the real issue at hand: an unresolved identity crisis the Black church refuses to acknowledge and resolve for itself and that of the people it is here to serve. The Black church buries its head in the sand and fails to acknowledge it is no longer operating in its original capacity, nor has it been a form of defense for millennials against the violence they face. History shows that spiritual leaders of the

church have been sinful, some even scandalously so, across both white and Black churches.

What we are discussing here is a mass exodus of the millennial generation from the Black church which has had scandals of misappropriation of all forms in the past but the members have held it together. Even when it caused division and a breakaway, in large part they moved to another church or formed another. Members may have left but many people would agree to forgive their leaders because they are not perfect human beings. What follows are two cases illustrating this point:

Crenshaw Christian Center Pastor Fred Price Jr.

It was reported that Pastor Fred Price Jr. returned to the helm of the church on Sunday, July 1, 2018, after stepping down in June 2017 over “serious personal misjudgments.” The congregation’s response was as follows:

We don’t [ask questions]. We go along with whatever they say until they tell us different, until we hear different. And if we don’t hear different we don’t speculate. We just go on and continue. Nothing that occurred with him stepping down affects this ministry... We have church service on Sunday, we have our Bible study within the week and we have our ministry that continues. We deal with facts and we deal with truth. So far what we have heard is what everybody else heard on Sunday and that’s what we’re going with,”¹

And they all stayed put until he returned.

¹ Leonardo Blair, “Black Calif. Megachurch Reacts To ‘Betrayal’ Of Pastor Fred Price Jr: We Don’t Speculate,” *The Christian Post*, June 28, 2017, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/calif-megachurch-reacts-to-betrayal-of-pastor-fred-price-jr-we-dont-speculate.html>.

Reverend Jamal Harrison Bryant of Baltimore, MD.

Reverend Jamal Harrison was the subject of ridicule two years ago after his wife Gizelle filed for divorce. She alleged her husband committed adultery, and that he displayed “excessively vicious conduct” that caused “reasonable apprehension of bodily suffering so as to render cohabitation unsafe.” The controversy, however, has not put a stronghold on his ministry and popularity. Rev. Bryant continues to pastor Empowerment Temple AME Church, which is the church he and his wife founded in 2000.² He has since moved on to pastor New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Georgia where he is received by over twenty-five thousand members.

The sins of the spiritual practitioners have been with the church for decades but the church has survived. In many cases, the erring pastor or leader will leave or is asked to leave, but this mass turn away from the church and the lack of trust in her is far deeper than spiritual sins. This mass turn away is rooted in the consciousness of a generation of people who are hungry, not so much for the piety or purity of pastors or leaders, but for the integrity of a body who would see them as a people worth fighting for not only spiritually but more so in the social issues of their lives. In so doing, this research has shown there is a more grievous reason for their departure that needs immediate attention.

Part of the research for this dissertation was a questionnaire and interviews of four professional stakeholders who are pastors of Black churches and four non-professional stakeholders who are millennials. Of the millennials, two currently attended Black

² Demetria Lucas D'Oyley, “Why Are We Making Excuses for Pastor Jamal Bryant? Enough is Enough!” *ESSENCE*, October 27, 2020, <https://www.essence.com/news/why-are-we-making-excuses-pastor-jamal-bryant/>.

churches and two no longer do. It is important to know if millennials in local communities are also leaving the Black churches, and if so, are the leaders addressing it? Surprisingly, in the selection of pastors, it was discovered only the pastors with a college education appreciated the background research while those without were not and were too busy in their ministry at churches without a significant millennial presence.

The literature informs us that millennials' problem with the Black church is they have not only become irrelevant, but also lost their ability to answer millennials' questions and see the importance of their social dilemmas. Could it be the lack of education is causing a poor response to their dilemma?

Each pastor was asked three preliminary questions and 11 proper survey questions. The stakeholders consisted of four college educated pastors and ministry leaders of Black churches: two from Middle Tennessee, one from New Jersey, and the other from Alabama. The purpose of the research was intended to determine the views of the Black pastors on the role of Black heritage in the Bible and how they deal with biblical Black presence in their preaching. Was it of importance to them their congregation is knowledgeable of their presence in history and their place in the Bible in the face of all the myth that has been circulating for centuries about their exclusion?

Data Gathering Method

The data-gathering research method was a qualitative approach that involved the interviewing of two African America pastors, one African pastor, and one African Caribbean pastor from various Christian denominations within the Middle Tennessee region, Alabama, and New Jersey. A survey was used to initiate discussion (see Appendix C), and upon completion and submission by email, zoom meetings were held

and recorded to fill in the gaps of any unanswered questions. In cases where Zoom meetings were not possible, answers were discussed over the telephone. The questions were designed to determine whether the pastors of the Black churches not only recognized the exodus of Black millennials but, more importantly, what was being done to stop this bleeding. In the gathering of data, the depth of knowledge, passion, interest, and positions each pastor had on preaching and teaching Black biblical presence in the Bible and as it relates to Christianity in the Black church of the African diaspora was recognizable (see Appendix D).

Evaluation of Data

Jeremy Bell, et al., in the book, *Conceptual Analyses of Curriculum Inquiry Methodologies*, advised when considering surveys as a potential methodology, the researcher must evaluate the purpose of the research and the appropriateness of the sample population. The size of the sample population, although important, must also be random to avoid research bias. Also, the most used method of data collection in survey designs are the questionnaire and interview,³ which has been applied in this research.

The outcome of the eleven questions for the professional stakeholders revealed one common factor: the millennials of their assembly have not been taught anything of the Black presence in the Bible and involvement in the history of Christianity by their pastors. There is general consensus it would be beneficial to do so but none have intentionally embarked on such teaching in their church. In the discussions, it would

³ Jeremy Bell, Sandy White Watson, and Stacie Austin, *Conceptual Analyses of Curriculum Inquiry Methodologies* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2021), 275.

appear there is a fear of being interpreted as teaching racialism in the church, especially when many of these Black preachers have not only white fellow pastors with whom they associate, but also white families and interracial families in their congregation. Three of the four pastors agreed it was important to have their young people identify with Christ through their cultural Christian history. It would remove the disconnect with the Bible and foster a feeling of being a part of something big and beautiful.

It must be remembered these young Black people have already learned that “much of the racism and racist policies Blacks have endured and continue to suffer from were based on erroneous misinterpretations of the Bible as it relates to Black people.”⁴ Surprisingly, the African pastor did not agree to pursue this direction but to focus on preaching and teaching the pure gospel of Jesus Christ and “decolorize” Christianity. This was disconcerting given the fact the Bible from which he teaches and was commissioned to teach, records the presence of Black people in its pages of history. For centuries white Christianity has shown every person as white with total exclusion of Blacks ever being present. The question is how much better can we be in the teaching of Blacks in the Bible who were created and used in the scriptures He co-authored.

⁴ Kenneth J. Ransfer Sr., “Black Presence in The Bible and The Black church Commissioned.” Doctor’s Diss. Bakke Graduate University, 149.

Respondents

The Professional Stakeholders

The answers to the questions were quite revealing for the pastors (see Appendix D). In questions 1 and 2, the pastors were asked:

1. What is the percentage of youths in your church?
2. What is the composition of youths in your community? What percentage is represented in your church?

Their answers indicated Black millennials attending their churches represented an average of 0.005% of the community's young Black people. This number became very humbling during our interview, when it was indicated the average population of Black youths within local counties were 182, 023 and the 10 and 12 young people they indicated were approximately 0.000066%. During the Zoom discussions, the pastors explained the young people moved a lot because of college, work, or loss of interest. By the time they have completed college, they have been caught up in other ideologies as to their place in society and God and they see no reason to return to their church that played no part in educating them on their history.

One pastor said one of his former members even reprimanded him for not telling him what was fully in the Bible, and then they proceeded to ask him about the Cushites, and asked if he knew they were Black. He admits it was quite humbling for him and he realized then that Black people needed to know more than Jesus loved them and died for them. They needed to know that in His love, Jesus included them in the journey of the Biblical human race.

The third question was, “Have you ever been asked by the youths if Christianity is for the Black Man? If so, what has been your answer?” Two of the pastors admitted they have been asked if Christianity was for the Black man while the other two shared they had never been asked the question. Of the two who have been asked, they admitted they knew very little about their African Christian culture and have never studied the presence of Black people in the Bible, and do not believe that they were equipped to teach their church. They all believed that such teaching would give the young men and women a sense of identity and purpose in Christianity and would appreciate the Bible more. The Nigerian pastor, however, fears it would be perceived as racism. He actually said, “In order to relinquish the mentality of Christianity being a white man’s religion, it would be helpful to “discolor” Christianity and point to the centrality of Christ and His relevance to every tongue and every nation.”

This was a troubling statement. Blacks discoloring Christianity sounds like the whites saying they do not see color when they look at Blacks. To suggest we preach a colorless Christianity that is full of color to a people of color is very offensive, particularly so in the face of a western Christianity that projects a whitewashed Christianity to the exclusion of Blacks. This African pastor is actually saying we ought to ignore the fact our white brothers and sisters omit Blacks from the Christian narrative as though we did not exist from the time of creation. Ignoring the fact that although we are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28), there are multiple cultures in Jesus Christ (1Corin. 1:24). Does one’s faith cancel the culture? Why must the church of the African diaspora abandon their culture for another’s? Didn’t the apostles retract the requirement of Jewish circumcision upon the Gentiles to be saved? (Acts 15). Mugambi reminds us

that “Culture in its widest usage is the totality of a people's way of life... Christianity is not a culture, but the Christian faith can be expressed and communicated only through cultural media.”⁵ And “conversion does not demand a wholesale denunciation or rejection of one’s cultural and religious heritage.”⁶

The fourth, fifth and sixth questions were:

4. What do you know of Christianity beginning in Africa?
5. Do you think educating the youths of their Black Christian heritage is relevant to our Black youths in the church?
6. Have you educated your youths of their Black heritage in the Bible, and if so, what has been their response?

None of the participating pastors have been engaged in this area of study, even though two have pursued seminary education.

This finding can be disconcerting for Christians who have never heard that Christianity first started in Africa. The question begging to be asked is when did true history stop being told? Why this continued silence? God’s instructions to the prophet Jeremiah were, “Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them” (Jeremiah 1:17 KJV). What happened to fearlessly teaching the unadulterated Word of God in all of its authenticity?

The seventh question of the pastoral survey was, “Do you realize that there is a large exodus of Black youths out of the church today? In your view what is the reason for

⁵ Mugambi, “Christianity and the African Cultural Heritage,” 87.

⁶ Ibid., 521.

the lack of interest in the church?” All the pastors agreed there is a large exodus of Black millennials out of the Black church but they differed in their reasons for this being so. These four pastors believe that technology and the media are the dominant forces keeping their young people away. Some shared they also blamed the lack of parental guidance and oversight along with the music of the world. In our Zoom discussions, this researcher asked about the spiritual morality of the leadership that millennials have identified as one of the reasons for their departure and they all confirmed it was not the reason in their case. They claimed they have always walked upright before their congregants but did agree they do have difficulty communicating and addressing the same-sex relationships in their church. One of the pastors reported he was told by some of his young people that the church should not tell them who to love and who is not worthy to attend church. Two of them admitted their sermons do make the gays uncomfortable when they share their viewpoints on the matter.

The question of LGBT acceptance in the Black church brings unease into the church because the parents and relatives of these young people who grew up in the church and then came out become offended, taking the sides of their loved ones instead of the church. They all agreed the relational dynamics surrounding the Black church’s interpretation of the Word of God often becomes tenuous at best and they lose both parents and young adults over this, and, sometimes, they lose entire families. The pastors also noted the mass turn away results in people seeking to identify with other groups in and around their community and on school campuses.

The eighth survey question was, “Do you know where the Black youths are?” All the pastors but one said they knew where the young people are. The young people were

either in college, somewhere in the community, or looking at social media on their phones. In speaking with two of the pastors, this researcher asked why the church isn't a part of millennials' go-to places, why the total cut off? The pastors had no answer for that follow up inquiry. Could it be is no longer interested in these young people? Does the Black church believe they can continue church without these young adults? What happens when the baby boomers have gone? What happens to this generation gap? These young people are not in the church and no one seem to know exactly where they are or makes any effort to go find them and bring them home.

Authors Lincoln and Mamiya claim one of the most important functions Black churches once performed for young people was providing a place where they could meet older adult women and men who served as role models. Much of the socialization for children and youth occurs through the process of role modeling: observing, evaluating, emulating, and filing away the behavior, examples, and values of others for later use. They affirm that studies have shown Black pastors and laity have been important role models for Black youth in the past.⁷

According to studies held by John Scanzoni, in 1971 the position of the pastor began to slip to second place behind the school teacher among adult role figures who showed an interest in Black youth. Not surprisingly, the Sunday school teacher ranked third.⁸ Based on the answers of the participating pastors, it would seem the influence of pastors upon youths have slipped off the scale and are no longer ranking after being pushed out by the media, other social groups, and the compelling issues of their lives.

⁷ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 312-313.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 313.

The ninth survey question asked, “What more could you have done to create the awareness and consciousness needed to retain them within the church?” In response, the pastors suggested spending more time with their young people, having open discussions, and conducting more programs to interest them. One pastor admitted he hired a youth pastor who specialized in young people but he lasted only six months. The Black church has been noted for their programs in the church but these programs seem to have failed in holding the attention of Black youths.

Lincoln and Mamiya see that a major problem for many contemporary Black churches is the disproportionate focus on their programs and efforts for adults. They claim that Black youth, especially young children, are an afterthought in the church’s schedule of significant ministry. Sunday schools continue as a traditional part of the typical Black church, but many perform functions more akin to babysitting than education and socialization. They insist that too many Black pastors do not concern themselves with this aspect of ministry but tend to delegate the religious education of their youth to someone else.⁹ It would seem Black pastors have much work to do in the leadership of the church as a whole and not in part. If the church is predominantly comprised of senior members, prompt attention is needed.

The tenth and eleventh questions included, “Do you consider it important to have the youths of your community identify with Christ through their culture?” and “What more can we do as spiritual leaders to inform and engage our Black youths in Christianity that it is not a white man’s religion but a culturally inclusive religion?” These two questions are discussed together because their answers seem to interrelate and add

⁹ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 316.

substance to each other. All the pastors agreed it is important to have our youths identify with Christ. The only problem is the young people are now outside the gates of the church and in the wider community.

So, what can the Black church do to gain the interest and attention of these young people? Two of the pastors said they would have to go out to meet these young people where they are because many have avowed they have no interest in the church. Examples of programs the churches could initiate include community-based rallies, seminars, and social educational programs these young people might go to. One pastor suggested such cultural programs within the church can pique their interest as they hear of it through the grapevine.

The discussions and questionnaires were an eye opener for the pastors. They understood, as one pastor said, that it was time for him to allocate more time to the young people of his community and not his church because they were a missing population. He said he “now understood in literal terms what Jesus meant when he commissioned the church to GO.” The problem of racial identity among Black young people suggests more attention needs to be paid to the education and socialization of Black youths and the Black churches can begin with the religious educations within their control, especially with Sunday School education and literature.¹⁰ It has been recognized that the time has come for the Black church to create literature projecting the Blackness of the Bible.

The time is long overdue for the Black church to roll out their own biblical literature on the Black presence in the Bible so our children will learn from an early age

¹⁰ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 317.

that God created them in their Blackness and loved and used them in it. The stakeholders agreed there is much more to be done for the millennials.

Paul E. Johnson in his book, *African American Christianity: Essays in History*, explains that to underestimate the Africanity of African American Christianity is to rob the slaves of their heritage. But to overestimate the Africanity of African American Christianity is to rob the slaves of their creativity. Africans were creative in Africa; they did not cease to be creative as involuntary settlers in America. He argues that the story of the emergence of African American Christianity is a story of an emergent African American culture as well as residual African cultures. It's a story of innovation as well as tradition, a story of change as well as continuity.¹¹ Every time we neglect to teach our cultural spirituality, we have robbed ourselves of our heritage.

The African pastor who is a millennial had never been asked if Christianity is a white man's religion. He admitted he is quite aware of the cultural question among African Americans and believes there are other factors contributing to the exodus of our Black young people. He argues that "The evangelical church turning largely political with a strong right wing leaning, makes many African Americans feel the church is not compassionate towards their wounds; the church is ill-equipped to answer very fundamental cultural questions that are pertinent in the hearts of the people such as homosexuality, racism etc., among other factors." There is validity in his argument for the world has watched the church and particularly the Black church do absolutely nothing in response to the numerous senseless murders of millennials.

¹¹ Johnson, *African-American Christianity*, 19

Respondents: The Non-Professional Stakeholders

The four non-professional stakeholders were asked four questions to better understand their position in the discourse. Elizabeth is a young minister of her church that happily boasts a strong Black millennial presence. She proudly claims her pastor teaches on the presence of Black people in the Bible and the important roles they played in Christianity. She informed this researcher he conducts several rallies each year to promote Black awareness and their historical contributions to society and in the Bible. She believes this is one of the main reasons they have a large millennial and youth presence in their church. Elizabeth explains that her pastor is an educated millennial who is passionate about his Blackness and his African heritage, so much so that he feels compelled to educate his entire congregation and community.

This researcher decided to attend a service one Sunday morning and was pleasantly surprised to experience the joy resonating in the service. The worship, the preached Word, and the fellowship were uplifting. Out of all the congregation, 80 percent were indeed millennials happily engaged in worship, greeting, music, and altar ministry. The Sunday school and youths were in another building. Clearly, he not only recognized the dilemma of millennials but has found a way to connect with them and he is reaping the fruits of his labor in addressing their issues. This pastor is working towards a reconciliation between his church and community and he engages all parties to better understand the struggle they came out of and to ensure they never walk that road again.

Maresa attends church but claims she has watched her friends come and go and does not understand why her peers are leaving but she feels lost among so many adults in her church. She has been the Sunday school teacher for the past six years and is also

involved in other areas of her church when her job allows her. She loves her church and its rich history and speaks highly of her pastor and his family. She enjoys the high spirituality of her church in the worship and the preached word but often feels lonely because most of her friends are no longer attending church. She claims her friends call her “square” because they do not understand why she still follows “that church.” They don’t understand what the church does for her. One of her friends who died in 2021 from a motor vehicle accident was very angry with their church and churches as a whole because he came to believe that all the church wanted was millennials’ money but does absolutely nothing for them.

Maresa mentioned that after a seventeen-year-old teen had been shot and killed in his Knoxville school bathroom a few months prior by police, a group of young people wanted to travel to Knoxville to protest the fatal shooting and they asked their pastor to join them in the rally. The pastor declined and forbade them from going themselves, claiming they had other pressing engagements in the church. The pastor’s advice was to leave the situation to the authorities. The young people were furious because it was the authorities who killed the teenager in a school bathroom and lied that he shot at a cop when he never did. Her friend, who was one of these young people, felt that church was a waste of time.

When asked, “What are your views of the Black church and Christianity?” she asked what was meant by the question. The question was then clarified to, “What are your thoughts concerning the Black church and its place in the lives of Black people and Christianity as a whole.?” Maresa simply replied she knows nothing about the Black church, only that this is where she grew up and she believes in Jesus Christ and would not

want to be anything else or live for anyone else but Jesus. She had absolutely no opinion on the matter. This topic of Jesus Christ is what Black clergy continues to emphasize when preaching and they see charismatic preaching as their primary task. Falola argues, “In Africa and elsewhere, culture shapes the perception of self...”¹² If we abandon our culture, what is shaping our youths? Clearly, this problem necessitates further debate in the Black church of the African diaspora.

Norvil is a young man who grew up in a Black church where his parents are deacons. He explained while growing up, he enjoyed Sunday school as a young boy but at the age of sixteen, he wasn't interested in learning the same things over and over again. His friends started to leave as they became seriously involved in sports at school. The football and basketball practices and other events increased with each tournament taking place further and further away from his hometown. Because of his parents' position in the church, he stayed as long as they could stop him from leaving. When the research was explained to him, Norvil found it interesting. He is now thirty-five years old and claims he cannot recall any of his friends who are still in the church. He explained he heard about Christianity coming out of Africa from his friends whenever they discussed religion. He agreed with the general idea and belief that the white man taught Christianity to suit their purpose and that Black people just accepted it without investigating it for themselves. He and his pals are not interested in church because, according to him, he doesn't have to go to church to talk to God and have him in his life.

¹² Toyin Falola, *The Power of African Culture*. (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 50.

When reminded of John 3:16 which says that God so loved the whole world that He sent His only begotten son to die for the entire world including him and every other person irrespective of nationality, Norvil candidly said, “That is all good but I am sure that God is not pleased with what is going on in the church.” He doesn’t believe that love is in the church when there is so much dislike for his race. He pointedly said he had no problem with Jesus and didn’t care if He is Black or white, he just doesn’t like how He is represented in the church. His love is not there. There is too much going on that has nothing to do with God. What he said vividly reminded this researcher of the sentiments of millennials in the literature. His church which he and his friends grew up in failed to lay an impression on these young men in all the first sixteen to seventeen years they had the opportunity to shape these young people to know themselves and their place in the plan of God as a people of color. There is no sense of sweat in the ground as one would say, no connectivity to compel them to stay because they are not an important part of the equation of Christianity. They are not missed for the church continues as if they were never there.

Samantha is a young lady who currently attends her church. She claims she grew up in a Christian home and loves the Lord as her Savior. She loves her church and her pastor but admits she only attends Sunday morning worship services. Upon inquiring why, she admits her work during the week does not permit her to be in attendance more often, but also that she is not interested in the other activities and would much rather spend her free time watching movies or reading a book. She didn’t believe she needed more to be a good Christian even though she admits she finds the time to socialize with her friends. When asked why at thirty-six years of age she is not married, she said she

was not interested in marriage but would love to have a child on her own. She explained she was quite capable of raising a child by herself. She was, however, happy to participate in the research project. She believes that Christianity is the white man's religion still trying to control Blacks.

Samantha admits that after much discussion with her friends, she had asked her dad about white verses Black Christianity and he explained that Christianity was not so much the white man's religion but they used it to enslave people, making them believe they were following God's instructions from the Bible. She asked for an explanation of Ephesians 6:5-8, which says:

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; Not with eye service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

In response, we read the next verse which says, "And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing (forgiving and patient) threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him" (Ephesians 6:9). It was then discussed how the text did not say "slaves" but rather, "servants," referring to the help hired in the homes or fields. The servant had to be obedient to their master. God did not order the slave institution but rather mankind did. God expects the same behavior from the masters toward the servants as he did the servants toward their masters, and there is no evidence in the Bible where God authorized the enslavement of Blacks and the subsequent horrible treatment meted out to them as slaves.

For Samantha, there is a quiet simmering of unanswered questions she wants answered but she stays silent about them as she lives her life. These are questions she seemed afraid to discuss in her church. The environment there does not foster such discussion, so these young people keep such questions locked down within them and move on with their lives as they see fit.

Research Evaluation

The research questionnaires were intended to ignite a thought flow among the pastors in the direction of the millennials, causing them to rethink the implications of their exodus. They were all fully aware of the exodus but it didn't seem as if they thought it that important to give it their undivided attention. There have always been backsliders leaving the church and some may return after a while and some won't, but it has never happened in this volume and magnitude. This is not a case of the church waiting for a prodigal son or daughter to come home but, rather, the church is waiting for a prodigal generation to return home. This will require strategic planning and mobilization among the leaders of the Black churches to bring it to fruition.

This study is of particular significance for the Black church that is bleeding millennials who are now the largest generation in the United States and are the next paradigm of the African American church. The tradition of church attendance and church participation will continue to decline for the African American church if the church does not engage the millennial generation.¹³

¹³ Sharon Cobbs, "Millennials: The Next Paradigm of the African American Church" (master's thesis, Olivet Nazarene University, 2016).

Conclusion

The survey research allowed the researcher to obtain information about one or more groups of individuals pertaining to their characteristics, attitudes, and opinions using questions and interviews rated by tabulating responses. Qualitative data was gathered and analyzed from open-ended questions given to the small sample of the population using an interview format with the guiding thought, “the key behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem from the participants.”¹⁴ The sample population used, although small, was random in that two pastors were from the Middle Tennessee region, one from Alabama, and the other from New Jersey. Also, two were African Americans, one African, and one African Caribbean, all pastoring Black churches in the United States.

Allowing participants an opportunity to voice their opinions provided a better understanding regarding their perceptions and beliefs as they related to the decline of church attendance and church participation for the millennial generation. It also gave insight as to what the Black church is doing to remedy the situation. So far, they are actually doing nothing to regain the trust they have lost from their millennials.

Much research and study has already been done concerning the exodus of Black millennials from the Black church. The reasons why millennials have left and are still leaving has been masterfully researched and documented by numerous researchers and scholars and so this study was actually hoping to discover the measures that have been taken to stop the bleeding only to discover that nothing has been initiated as of yet in a

¹⁴ J. W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publication, Inc., 2013), 47.

significant enough way to effect change. What then is the purpose for all this research and documentation if it is not going to be used to effect change in the problems that initiated the research?

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF THE BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONAL PREMISES

Introduction

In conversation with one of his colleagues, Dr. Isaac Mwase, a Black professor and pastor of a local Black congregation, J. Daniels Hays agreed emphatically the race problem was the most important issue for the Church today. What exacerbates the problem is the fact that “Black scholars identify the racial division in the Church as one of the most central problems for contemporary Christianity, while many White scholars are saying, ‘What problem?’”¹ Dr. Tony Evans presents a thorough discussion of the birth and development of the inferiority myth, as well as its theological, psychological, and sociological effects on the Black church. He pays special attention to how this myth was used to legitimize the slavery of Blacks, particularly since so many of its promulgators were Christians.

In his introductory paragraph, Evans explains, “One of the most damaging myths perpetuated throughout American history is the supposed spiritual inferiority of Black people to white people. The destructive nature of accepting this myth as reality has had catastrophic consequences for the psyche of Black people, the world view of white people, and harmony among the races.”²

¹ Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 47.

² Ibid.

Worst of all, the racial issue has hindered the church from being salt and light in the social landscape of America.³ The Oxford dictionary defines “myth” as “(a) A traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining some natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events, and (b) A widely held but false belief or idea;” while Evans defines “myth” as “traditions passed down over time in story form as a means of explaining or justifying events that are either lacking in scientific evidence or historical basis.”⁴ This is exactly what our well-read Black millennials are battling with, a mythical ideology coined by white Christianity that they are inferior, are the lesser of God’s creation, and after centuries of this lie, the church has not been successful in erasing it from society.

The literature clearly shows us that God in His great creative work placed Black people in the mix from the beginning, but as usual, white Christians have turned God’s beautiful work of artistry into something unworthy. They rationalized it was God’s will to bring Black heathens into contact with Christianity, even if it meant a lifetime of enforced servitude. They firmly believed Christianized slaves were better off than free heathen.⁵ One can only ponder on the presence of the Holy Spirit in all this. He was thrown out of the church but was He not speaking? Was there no one in the milieu of all this heeding His call of injustice to His people? Whites methodically and strategically set the stage for the “curse of Ham” doctrine from the Bible to authenticate the slave industry.

³ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 7.

⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁵ Ibid., 13.

White Christianity argued that since Ham, the father of Black people, he and following generations were cursed to be slaves (Genesis 9:25-27), and that Africans and their descendants were destined to be servants and should accept their status as slaves. In this fulfillment of biblical prophecy, although this was first orchestrated by the Portuguese and Spaniards, it became a major theological basis for American slavery.⁶ One can only wonder at the audacity to determine they were the chosen to execute the punishment of the curse on Ham's generation millions of years later. This myth of inferiority with apparent biblical validation provided the raw material necessary to convince the captured that to resist their status of servitude was to resist God.

But has anyone checked to see that if it was not Ham, the father of Black people that was cursed, but rather his son Canaan (Genesis 9:25-27)? Even so, the Bible placed limitations on curses for up to three or four generations (Exodus 20:5) and the curse of Canaan and his descendants found its most obvious fulfillment in the ongoing defeat and subjugation of Canaan by Israel (Joshua 9:23; 1 Kings 9:20,21). So, this myth that was developed on a lie was able to permeate every aspect of American society and embedded its roots that after more than a century after the end of slavery, Black people can still smell the stench and taste the unsavory flavor of inferiority. Secondly, has anyone noticed that in acknowledging Black people were the descendants of Ham and therefore deserving of said punishment of the curse, whites inadvertently admitted that Blacks were present early in the history of the Bible? There was no fluidity to their erroneous tales in whitewashing the Bible and Christianity.

⁶ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 15.

Dr. Anthony Evans is of the view that since myths tend to pervade all of society, there is no way to get away from them. They authenticate themselves because everybody believes them and nothing short of a catastrophic upheaval can change or reverse the stories we tell ourselves.⁷ The possibility of a catastrophic upheaval is what will be addressed in Chapter 6 given the stand Black millennials have taken against the Black church.

Millennials massive march away from the church is a bold protest against the church for their silence and inactivity against the insidious myth of the past. Black millennials are doing what no other generation has done: boldly and calmly walking away from a system that has subjugated their people with no end in sight. If the church as a whole will not correct this evil, then it is the responsibility of the Black church to do so to save the millennial generation and those who follow.

Toyin Falola explains in *The Power of African Cultures*, that Africa has established a presence on other continents, due in part to the extensive forced migrations associated with the transatlantic slave trade that occurred between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The scattering of Blacks to the Americas and Europe created an African diaspora whose relevance remains today. According to the author, for Blacks in the diaspora, Africa remains the “homeland” which has facilitated the construction of the identity of Blackness. He highlights the importance of culture to unite and keep alive the notion of “Africaness,”⁸ which raises the question as to why African Christianity was abandoned throughout the African diaspora?

⁷ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 12.

⁸ Toyin Falola, *The Power of African Cultures* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 274.

What is fascinating is that every other ethnic group, whether Asian, Spanish, Italian, or Russian etc., holds fast to their culture. Even those born in America cook their native cuisine, speak their language, and uphold their Christianity based on their culture. They've created time when generations converge to practice and engage in their cultural heritage to keep their homeland alive in their hearts. even though they are living in a different country now called home, this is how the following generations in the diaspora learn their heritage. They are not allowed to forget the motherland they call home.

It is understood, however, that the history of Blacks is different. Blacks did not choose to come to America or the Caribbean. They were forced to come here, and so their coming to America was tragically different from these other ethnic groups. For the Africans, their languages were many and those of the same language were separated. Their family names were taken away from them and replaced with their white master's name to mark ownership. Returning to their homeland would be quite confusing because who can they go back to and call their family? They have no name or language for reference. Their family structure was dismantled. However, despite the disruption and all that has been stolen from African Americans, there is one truth they can hold fast to and that is that Africa is their motherland. They may not know their tribe, country or language, but every African American in the diaspora knows they are from the continent of Africa, the seedbed of Christianity and for this reason and this reason only, they must embrace their rich heritage where the footprints of Blacks can be found in Biblical history.

The Richness of African American Spirituality

There is a richness of African American spirituality through the shaping quality of history, as history that cannot be bifurcated from culture as each informs the other.⁹ Black religion, like every other, has a cultural context. It is set in human history, and while its critical reference is to God, Black religion reflects the peculiar experience, concerns, and exigencies of the human condition.”¹⁰

In her introductory chapter, Hayes quotes historian Lawrence W. Levine as saying, “Upon the hard rock of racial, social and economic exploitation and injustice Black Americans forged and nurtured a culture: they formed and maintained kinship networks, made love, raised and socialized children, built a religion, and created a rich expressive culture in which they articulated their feelings and hopes and dreams.”¹¹ But despite the oppressive and ungodly forces applied against them, they forged a spirituality that encouraged hope and sustained faith, which enabled them to build communities of love and trust and to persevere in their persistent efforts to be the free men and women they had been created to be. African American spirituality is a result of the encounter of a particular people with their God.¹² The spirituality of African Americans expresses a hand-on, down-to-earth belief that God saw them as human beings created in His own image and likeness and intended them to be a free people.

⁹ Diane J. Chandler, “African American Spirituality: Through Another Lens. *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care*,” *Institute for Spiritual Formation* 10, no. 2 (2017), 161.

¹⁰ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black church in the African American Experience*, xxiii.

¹¹ Diana L. Hayes, *Forged in the Fiery Furnace: African American Spirituality* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2012), 1.

¹² Hayes, *Forged in the Fiery Furnace*, 2.

Black religion is a spirituality often seen as typical of the Old Testament in its emphasis on justice, but it is also seen in the New Testament in its emphasis on community and liberation.¹³ African American spirituality is expressed in song, dance, prayer, preaching, and most importantly, in living each day as best they can in solidarity with one another and their God while against the principalities and powers of their time.

This is the spirituality of the African American people, a people with deeply sunk African roots and strong, sturdy American branches.¹⁴ The Black Christian church enabled them to develop a religious faith that was authentically Black and rooted in their African worldview and in their experiences in the Americas. It served as a source of comfort, refuge, and challenge for them and their descendants while enabling them to interpret what God was doing to redress the wrongs against Blacks which was necessary for their survival. It gave them the license to speak authoritatively about daily life, about oppression and liberation. Going to church was a necessity. It was the one impregnable corner of the world where consolation, unity, and mutual assistance could be found. The Black church believed the gospel of Jesus Christ had something very important to do with the freedom and well-being of Blacks in keeping with the African understanding that there is no separation between religious life and secular life, a belief which is deeply held and intimately intertwined.¹⁵ It would now appear the Black church has forgotten its mandate to be holistically involved in the life of its Black community which seems to be in disarray.

¹³ Hayes, *Forged in the Fiery Furnace*, 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

The Bible and Christianity are for All Peoples and Nations

When God wanted his people to remember his statutes and to ensure that they were passed down to generations, he instructed his people saying:

Therefore, shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates” (Deuteronomy 11:18-20 KJV).

In like manner, African Americans should hold fast to their history and culture to ensure it is passed down to every generation and not forgotten.

Culture is powerfully shaped by historical and spiritual contexts. For African Americans, this shaping history predicates on one foundational reality: the indelible effects of slavery. For it is slavery that catalyzed two other resulting trajectories: the emergence of the Black church and the civil rights movement as led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These three factors have distinctively shaped African American Christian spirituality and it is only as the Black church engages feverishly and diligently in the civil rights movement that the agony of slavery can fade into oblivion and bring peace to its people.¹⁶ There has to be a merging of history, spirituality and social justice to bring resolution to the ongoing inequalities of their lives.

For African Americans, going to church was a necessity. This is where they developed a religious faith and hope against hope in their God who demanded justice for the downtrodden in the Old Testament and liberation and community in the New Testament. They knew that despite the erroneous inferiority tales spun about them and

¹⁶ Chandler, “African American Spirituality,” 161.

the grievous oppression meted out to them in every moment of their lives, their God loved them and would someday remove the barriers thrown in their way. This is why our Black millennials cannot reject the Bible as not being culturally inclusive.

The literature has proven that Blacks have been everywhere in Biblical history in both the Old and New Testament, but there are so many references of the Word of God speaking in no uncertain terms directly to all of creation and for quick here is a list of a few of these. They are here to remind our millennials and all Blacks that the scriptures speak to us too.

- Psalms 49:1 KJV: The Psalmist says, “hear this, all ye people, give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world: both low and high, rich and poor, together.” He is calling on all the inhabitants of the world, irrespective of who they are, high or low, rich or poor, to listen to what God has to say. Blacks are inhabitants of the world.
- Genesis 18:18 KJV: In the book of Genesis, God is deliberating whether he must tell Moses that He was about to burn Sodom and Gomorrah down where his nephew Lot lived. “And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?” God is decreeing all nations of the earth, including Africa, the United States of America, the Caribbean, you name the nation, it will be blessed because of Abraham.
- Joel 2:28 KJV: Through the prophet Joel, God promises to “pour out his Spirit upon all flesh...”, and we are a part of that ‘all flesh.’
- Isaiah 45:22 KJV: In Isaiah, God says, “look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.”

- Acts 17:26 KJV: In Acts, the Apostle Paul was taken to Areopagus in Athens to speak of Jesus whom they said brought strange things to their ears. In entering the city, he sees a sign which said 'To the Unknown God,' so when asked to speak, he stood up and told them much about Jesus, including the fact that "He hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." That blood was made available for every African and African American who dwells on the face of the earth.
- John 3:16 KJV: God is no respecter of division. For He so 'loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."
- Revelation 7:9 KJV: What better text to end these references than where John on the Isle of Patmos declares, "I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." This text is reminiscent of God's promise to Abraham, when He said, "and I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered" (Genesis 13:16 KJV). The numbers John saw could not be numbered. Every African American is included in all nations, kindreds, people, and tongues. Not one tribe is excluded so that anyone can say it is the African tribe or nation, or it

is the African American nation. All Black millennials need to grasp this truth and hold fast to the Word of God for it is culturally inclusive of all nations.

According to Moses O. Adeola, the legacy of the slavery era has created a quest for identity, a situation compounded by a dossier of misinformation regarding African American heritage. Millennials have been shouting on the mountain tops for many years of the many reasons why they no longer trust and believe in the tenancy of the Black church. But their very words contradict their actions and way of life as they pursue their identity in those groups that promotes it. They are attracted to the Nation of Islam and the Hebrew and Israelite groups even as there is no check and balance on the quality of their lives. They have wittingly abandoned their religious faith, notably Christian faith, in preference for African traditional religion or Islamic faith.¹⁷

It is crucial African Americans prioritize the discovery of their biblical heritage. It will require a change in the sources they are pursuing for information and affirmation. The time has come for Black Americans to study their Biblical Blackness and their historical and archeological presence and contribution to history. For years, Europeans and European American historians have postulated Africa has no history worth writing about, and others have argued Africa has no recorded history. As such, what we have seen is several years of acculturation of Africans in the diaspora, especially in Europe and Continental America, resulting in the dilemma of identity and a loss of experience resulting from the distortion of African culture and historical heritage.¹⁸ Both the Bible and literature has shown that Africans of dark skin have been present since the beginning

¹⁷ Adeola, *Culture & Religious Dilemma of Africans in the Diaspora*, 18.

¹⁸ Ibid., 104-105.

of time and there are historical and biblical evidences presented in this project that makes it absolutely impossible for Black millennials to be doubtful or confused as to their history, their inclusivity in the Bible, and the relevance of the Bible and Christianity to their lives.

Conclusion

While race and culture play a major role in linking any people with their past so they can proceed knowledgeably into the future, the history of one's race and culture cannot by itself serve as a sufficient starting point for authenticating one's self.¹⁹ The Bible must be brought to bear on ethnicity if people are to relate properly to their roots, and millennials not trusting the authenticity of the Bible is not the solution to their problem. The Bible is the best source for racial identity and clarification. One must understand that to proceed into the future, one must have a clear understanding of their past and their history out of which the identity crisis is resolved.

According to the literature, Africa and Africans have been important to the Biblical witness in both the Old and New Testaments from Abraham through the spread of Christianity. Africa has been a part of the crusade. As is seen in the book of Acts 13:1, the early church fathers included Africans. If, therefore, according to Odeola, we accept the fact Christianity is a religion of faith established by the creator God through His chosen ones, those called by God starting with Abraham to the prophets and unto the apostles, and that all along the people of Africa played prominent roles, then it is without

¹⁹ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 31.

doubt we all must reject the claim that Christianity is a “white man’s religion,” and that is, in fact, a myth that needs to die.²⁰

Christianity is for all. John records, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16 KJV). This is an all-inclusive God, here for His entire creation. In Galatians He says, “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26, 28 KJV). In the book of Isaiah, we are told, “Look on me and be ye saved, all to the end of the earth. For I am God, and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:22 KJV). The Bible and the liberation have clearly shown God is no respecter of persons and has created and used all kindred and nations to accomplish His work on earth in every dispensation. And Blacks have been front and center of it all.

To say the relevance of the Black church is in question is an understatement. The Black church, through whom the story must be accurately told, was once the spiritual, social, cultural, and political sanctuary of the Black community. It is unrivalled in its historical influence in Black culture and among Black people, but today, in many ways, the Black church has distanced itself from the norms and mores of the African American struggle. Its agenda is disconnected. Its programs are irrelevant. Its social engagement is faint and distant. Its influence in the community is extraneous. As a result, Black millennials, who represent the largest cohort of African Americans alive today, have waned in their attendance and commitment due to theological and ideological dissonance. Research regarding Black millennial beliefs and behaviors reveal they have not rejected

²⁰ Adeola, *Culture & Religious Dilemma of Africans in the Diaspora*, 102.

their faith in God, but they no longer see the church's relevance amid the challenges of everyday life.

The resurgence of the Black church depends on its willingness to engage Black millennials in a discourse on reconciliation. This is not reconciliation between Black and white, although that is important, but rather, reconciliation between the church itself, Black millennials, and the Black community as a whole.²¹ It must correct the fractures within before it can mend external fences.

In moving away from their original purpose and focus, the Black church has a limited view of the African diaspora. With time they have developed amnesia to the history of African Americans that has taken centuries to end and yet decades to be recognized as unlawful. They have failed to recognize the fight for equality, equal opportunities, and racial and gender discrimination that has not ended. The Black church has given up the fight of love for its people before the fight is actually over. Adeola says that in spite of the trauma of enslavement, of oppression, and centuries of dehumanizing conditions, African Americans have evolved as agents of liberation of their own humanity, their own spiritual upliftment, their own history, and their own culture and political future. Blacks have evolved with new identities of their own.²² But this can never be the reason why the Black church has taken their hands off the wheel of social justice and development of her people. Yes, there is growth and development among Black people but it is not commensurate with the development of social change towards them.

²¹ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion*, 60.

²² Adeola, *Culture & Religious Dilemma of Africans in the Diaspora*, 20.

Millennials have watched as Colin Kaepernick struggled to re-enter the NFL after upsetting social structures with his kneeling protest. Historically, people of color are supposed to keep their heads low and do as they are told, otherwise they pay a steep price. The contemporary social crisis raises questions about human worth and purpose. He has money and unparalleled talent on the football field, but regardless of his noble cause, he led a protest that was received as an insult to American patriotism. And even some Bible-toting evangelicals dismissed a good cause for Blacks and dropped the mic at several opportune moments.²³

Theses crowds of feet hurrying out the doors of the Black church are because learned millennials have retained an instinctive intelligence about their past. Above all, they have retained the concept of the Supreme Being who is involved in their destiny, whom they no longer believe exists in the church. Otherwise, if he did, He would say or do something about their pain. Adeola credits it to the peoples of African Caribbean and African American descent who have forged a new culture in the Western Hemisphere while striving to connect with their heritage in the Motherland, and this is what demonstrates the strength and resilience of their cultural roots.²⁴ This researcher believes there is misinformation about culture in the Black church. Could it be the Black church is wary of engaging in the discourse of culture because they misunderstand the culture of a people is not necessarily the religion of the people, and that culture and religion are two separate entities although interwoven and interdependent?²⁵ African Americans must

²³ Adeola, *Culture & Religious Dilemma of Africans in the Diaspora*, 20.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

never fear their culture because it is unique and vibrant, and must be fully embraced and owned.

Adeola explains it beautifully that religion can be pervasive within culture. For the devout believer, religion manifests itself in all aspects of their social, cultural, and political life.²⁶ Isn't this enlightening for the Black church? Does the Black church understand that when they walked away from this, their core value, they left a vacuum in the hearts and lives of a generation who were encountering deep and painful social trauma? What did the Black church think would happen to their people? Did they expect this generation of people to simply accept and continue to support the church in their new irrelevant role? No wonder the church was left amazed as they watched millennials walk away into the streets, leaving leading positions within the church to go and join groups of engagement to assuage their hurts and lick their wounds.

Adeola also presents a compelling scenario of Africans in the diaspora, especially in the Americas, who tend to confuse African culture with African traditional religion. There is a line of demarcation between the two not only from a cultural point of view, but also from a theological point of view.²⁷ Given the prominent role the Black church was created to play in the lives of the Black community, it is important for the deep divide between them to be closed and for there to be a reconciliation (which will be discussed in Chapter 6) of the two where the church reclaims its position not only as a guide to spiritual enlightenment but also of guardian and defender of social injustice. The Black

²⁶ Adeola, *Culture & Religious Dilemma of Africans in the Diaspora*, 24.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

church can no longer be silent and un-involved, but can take the opportunity to step forward and lead.

CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSION

A Call to Action

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest (Ezekiel 37:1-3 KJV).

In the writing of his book, *Reviving the Black Church*, a discussion ensued among the contributing pastors, one of whom was Pastor Raphael G. Warnock, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. He writes:

If the Black church is dead, concern over its prospects for resuscitation and role as an instrument of liberation is very much alive. For all her problems, it is believed that the Black church can live again. There are significant signs of illness, weakness, lack of empathy, immorality among pastors and leaders, false gospels preached and taught, materialism, unclear direction and mission drift, an overemphasis on entertainment and the sensational, confusion about gender roles and the widespread absence of African American men. The Black church like all other churches has their problems. But hope also abounds. If the Black church is dead, it occasions an opportunity to breathe new life into what it means to be Black and Christian.¹

A glimpse into the dramatic biblical scene in Ezekiel 37 cited above, when YHWH addressed the prophet, Ezekiel, is quite profound when related to the condition of the Black church. As he cast his eyes over a destroyed and abandoned Israel, the prophet Ezekiel saw bones lying lifeless on the valley floor, gleaming white from the burning sun. A once great people in utter ruin. Then came the urgent question, “Son of man, can these

¹Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, Introduction.

bones live?” In his confusion and amazement, he answered, “Oh Lord you know.” In like manner, many are asking, “Is the Black church dead?” God’s answer is interesting as He commands Ezekiel to prophesy over the dry bones and promises to breathe upon them that they may live again.

God promises to lay sinews upon the skeletons and cause flesh to come upon them, cover them with skin, put breath in them, and cause them to live. And as Ezekiel obeys and prophesies, he sees life return to the bones (Ezekiel 37:7-10 KJV). As the prophetic Word went out, life came out, and God’s people rose to a new life. Ezekiel’s dream shines light into how life can be breathed into the Black church again and how the church can be restored to a better version of itself.² These verses shine light on how the millennial generation can be restored and live again as the Body of Christ and no longer be a wandering flock.

There is now a need for a call to life, a call to action for the Black church and Black millennials so there can be a cohesive union and cooperation between them. This is needed for the Black church so they can become not only relevant, but also effective. Life comes from God to the church through his Word and Spirit by faith in Jesus Christ.

Anyabwile is of the view the Black church’s demise is construed in terms of the church’s loss of its prophetic energy.³ The Black church has become desensitized to its functionality and call to the Black community which has led to the mistrust and love lost between them.

² Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, Introduction.

³ Ibid.

The Black church and Black millennials are interrelated having both evolved from the same womb, but, tragically, they are presently at a stalemate. They have both been holding a posture of “I can get along very well without you,” not realizing this is not the perpetual call of God for either of them. We are not going to point fingers here as to who is wrong or right but we are definitely going to acknowledge both institutions need a complete makeover in their spiritual call and their response to it. The church has been called by God to reach and teach its generations and the millennials have been called by God to respond to that call so they can be the recipients of His promises of priesthood and blessings. There is a call for action from both the Black church and Black millennials and the time is now. If neither of them is walking in their respective calling, they are both out of place.

A Call to Action - the Black Church

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.³ Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.⁴ Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.⁵ He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.⁶ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (Rev. 3:1-6. KJV).

The belief the African American Black church is the one necessary institution in the African American community is no longer the case and this came about as a result of the conservatism of some Black congregations, a conservatism at odds with the traditional narrative describing the Black church as a progressive force in African

American and American life. As pointed out by Anyabwile, the true narrative is more complex than traditionally believed, and the continuance of conservative Black churches means the death of the venerable, though mythic, “Black church.” Secondly, the differentiation and diversity of today’s African American communities means there is no “center” of Black life at which the church can stand. Professor Eddie Glaude, Jr. says it best when he said, “The idea of a Black church standing at the center of all that takes place in a community has long since passed away. Instead, different areas of Black life have become more distinct and specialized, flourishing outside of the bounds and the gaze of the Black churches.”⁴

Glaude identifies competition with nondenominational and evangelical megachurches as another factor leading to the comatose state of the Black church, as well as many alternative worship communities attracting more African Americans.⁵ There has been a shift in and away from the original definition of the Black church. The composition of today’s Black church cannot, therefore, be confined to simply the seven churches originally identified as the Black church. Its face has changed drastically and even if we want to retain this faded image of the Black church being where all the Black people go as one of the church’s characteristics, it can no longer be held up. A few things have happened since that faded image was first established:

1. Black millennials are the largest hungry generation needing to be fed.
- 2 They are free spirited thinkers and will not walk off a cliff in obedience to the church, irrespective of their love for it;

⁴ Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, Introduction.

⁵ Ibid.

3. The church can no longer hold its congregation hostage to do “as I say and not as I do.”
4. There is no longer just the seven Black churches. God has and is still raising up churches with pastors after his own heart and they are springing up everywhere in the most unlikely of places.

As the Black churches were birthed out of the pressure of oppression, likewise are new Black churches springing up out of the pressure of neglect from the old vanguards. The Black community is so hungry for God in His purest form, they are no longer compelled to go to a Black church as we know it. Black millennials no longer feel compelled to be loyal to the Black church, for they know authenticity or the lack thereof when they see it.

A case in point is Pastor Larry Steven Furtick, a Caucasian millennial, a pastor, Grammy-award winning songwriter, producer, and New York Times best-selling author. He came out of the American Baptist Evangelicals and founded the Elevation Church where he pastors thousands of Black millennials who are much engaged in the ministry.⁶

This is only one example of what God has been doing in the American community. In responding to Pastor Glaude’s contribution to the discussion of the dying Black church, pastor Bryon Williams, a syndicated columnist, author, and pastor of Resurrection Community Church in Oakland, California, claims the myth of the Black church being the storehouse of the nation’s moral compass was created largely during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. But it is a far cry from the individuals who

⁶ “Leadership: Pastor Steven and Holly Furtick,” Elevation Church, <http://elevationchurch.org/leadership/>.

were products of the historical Black church and who were on the cutting edge of justice and equality issues. As time passed, though, the church couldn't live up to the ideal to which it committed itself in 1776.⁷ This was vividly demonstrated after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. died. No one has taken up the mantle as tenaciously as he did to resist oppression and pursue the changes he fought for and won.

Williams reminds us that out of the five hundred Black churches in Birmingham, less than twenty actively marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Many of Birmingham's Black pastors opposed Dr. King by using the same "outside agitator" language white segregationist once used to describe the civil rights leader. It is, however, inspiring to note that King was never deterred. Williams argues the real difficulty lies with the inability of the Black church's proponents to "embrace the high and the low moments of the institution with equal authenticity. He insists the mythic Black church is dead, or perhaps needs to die.⁸ The Black church failed as a body at an opportune time when out of five hundred pastors in the one state of Alabama, less than twenty supported Pastor Martin Luther King Jr.

In the civil rights movement, King stepped out to fight nonviolently for the rights of Black people by organizing statewide marches and speeches. From 1955 to 1968, he was able to lead the Montgomery bus boycott in response to Rosa Parks being discriminately arrested for not giving up her seat in a bus to a white man. This resulted in the U. S. Supreme Court ruling that segregation on buses was unconstitutional in 1956.⁹

⁷ Anyabwile, *Reviving The Black Church*, Introduction.

⁸ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Martin Luther King Jr." Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/summary/martin-luther-king-jr-timeline> (accessed December 18, 2022).

⁹ Ibid.

Blacks were now able to sit in any part of the bus or train they chose, without the fear of being thrown out or asked to give up that seat. It was not that a man must give up his seat to a woman, but a woman to the man. It was doubly wrong that a Black woman was not deserving of chivalry.

With Dr. King's organized team, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the civil rights movement, Dr. King marched to end segregation at lunch counters and in hiring practices. The march influenced the subsequent passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and equal opportunity to all citizens came into law and this can be seen on the walls and documentation of all places of employment, even if in paper only. The fact it is no longer legal to deny employment because of one's race was a great accomplishment. At that march near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech that has given hope to millions around the world. In 1964, he achieved the Nobel Prize for Peace award.¹⁰ He was fearless and he was impactful.

Dr. King Jr. was effective in bringing attention to the injustices in the African American and American society, and around the world. The historic Selma March, also called the Selma to Montgomery March, was a political march from Selma, Alabama, to the state's capital: Montgomery. King led the march as part of an effort to register Black voters in the state. Demonstrators had twice attempted the march in the preceding weeks. On Sunday, March 7 (known as "Bloody Sunday"), they had been violently turned back by local police officers. Two weeks after Bloody Sunday, as many as 25,000 people

¹⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Martin Luther King Jr."

participated in the roughly 50-mile march over five days. The Selma March and the events surrounding it became a symbol of the civil rights movement and was where he gave his “How Long, Not Long” speech. The march led directly to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. He organized marches for economic justice and spoke against poverty and war.¹¹ He stood up valiantly for the injustices of Blacks across state lines despite being called an outsider.

King was the pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, a prominent Black church as late as 1955, and accomplished so much before he was assassinated in the spring of 1968. Irrespective of the composition and new structure of the Black church at this present time, the tenets that formed it should have stayed even if modified. The marginalization, oppression, and racialism towards Blacks have not been eradicated from American society. Yes, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated but the cause and fight should have continued and even intensified. King and his team of civil rights activists put in place the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957 “to coordinate and assist local organizations working for the full equality of African Americans in all aspects of American life.”¹² He had to have suspected the enemies of justice would someday make an attempt on his life but his intent was that the fight must go on until there was full equality for all African Americans.

Fifty-four years after Dr. King died (1968-2022), Blacks are still encountering discrimination, millennials are dying on the streets (modern day lynching), without any call for justice by the body of the Black church. The majority of Blacks still have to work

¹¹ Encyclopedia Britannica, “Martin Luther King Jr.”.

¹² Encyclopedia Britannica, “The Southern Christian Leadership Conference,” Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rosa-Parks> (accessed December 17, 2022).

twice as hard to get equal pay in comparison to their white counterparts. What we do know is that they “ceased to mount giant demonstrations and confined itself to smaller campaigns, predominantly in the South. It has been reported that the organization was further weakened by several schisms, including the departure in 1971 of the Reverend Jesse L. Jackson and his followers who had staffed Operation Breadbasket in Chicago, which was directed toward economic goals.”¹³

Anyabwile is correct when he said the Black church has lost its prophetic energy. There has not been that prophetic voice making the confrontational call to the perpetrators of injustice and segregation of God’s people since Dr. King. No one from any of these churches have risen to the challenge. Here we are with a comatose institution that did not feel compelled to take the baton left by Dr. King to complete the work with the passion for the salvation of a generation in distress. Could it be the clergies are afraid of dying for a cause? We have lost a few like Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X who paid the price with their lives as Dr. King did. The commonality of these men is they were prepared to die for their people. They were not afraid of death, because of the disturbance of deep-seated racial structures they were confronting. They knew that at any time they would die and that didn’t stop them. Someone has to step out and answer the call.

Taking a Seat at the Table

It is this author’s recommendation, first of all, that the Black church engage in reconciliatory engagement with Black millennials. Millennials must be invited to the table as part of an inclusive discourse for both to become better acquainted and

¹³ Encyclopedia Britannica, “The Southern Christian Leadership Conference.”

understanding of each other. In his work, *Trends and Issues in Africa Philosophy*, F. Ochieng Odhiambo addresses the unfortunate description of Blacks by the Belgian missionary Placide Tempels, who wrote, “The Black man continues to be the very opposite of an interlocutor; he remains a topic, a voiceless face under private investigation, an object to be defined and not the subject of a possible discourse.”¹⁴ This statement has generated a foray of controversy and applies to Black millennials. Just as Blacks must not be deemed as a voiceless face, an object to be defined and not the subject of a possible discourse, in no way should Black millennials be so treated by the Black church.

The “Black man” here is in reference to Africans as a whole, and not to the Black male. This is particularly true in light of Hountondji’s criticism of Bantu’s rhetoric that “Africans are, as usual...excluded from the discussion...” This quote made by Tempels, a Belgian missionary, in his book, *Bantu Philosophy*, clearly saw Africans as having a “primitive mentality...insensitive to contradiction, indifferent to the elementary laws of logic,”¹⁵ and basically stupid, illiterate, and primitive. In other words, Africans are of such low IQ that they were incapable of comprehending criticisms against them.

This is a missionary who left Belgium to go to Africa under the guise of introducing the gospel of Jesus Christ, when in fact, he informed his fellow Europeans who were colonials and missionaries, his intent was to “civilize” the Africans. What is

¹⁴ F. Ochieng Odhiambo, *Trends and Issues in African Philosophy* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010), 82.

¹⁵ Adeshina Afolayan, Alajumoke Yacob-Haliso, and Toyin Falola, *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 7.

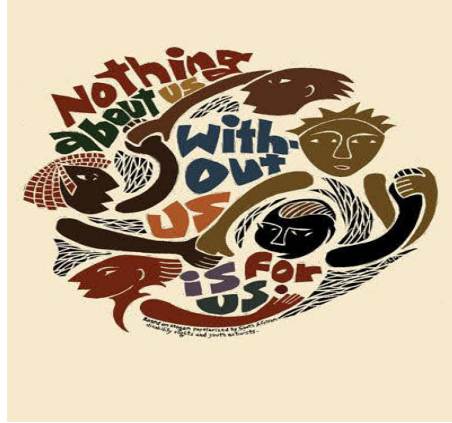
intriguing about this farce of a plan is that as Bantu really got to know the Africans and understood their language, to his amazement, he wrote:

We have had the idea that we stood before them like adults before the newly born. In our mission to educate and to civilize, we believed that we started with a “tabula rasa,” though we also believed that we had to clear the ground of some worthless notions, to lay foundations in a bare soil. We were quite sure that we should give short shrift to stupid customs, vain beliefs, as being quite ridiculous and devoid of all sound sense. We thought that we had children, “great children,” to educate; and that seemed easy enough. Then all at once we discovered that we were concerned with a sample of humanity, adult, aware of its own brand of wisdom and molded by its own philosophy of life. That is why we feel the soil slipping under our feet, that we are losing track of thing; and why we are asking ourselves “what to do now to lead our colored people?”¹⁶

His newfound education of the Africans led him to name his book *Bantu Philosophy* instead of *Savage Philosophy*. And so, Bantu’s error must be avoided at all cost in a reconciliatory effort with Black millennials. The Black church must make the effort to get to know their millennials, not to underestimate them as a group of uneducated misfits but to rather see them as the intellectuals and forward-thinking people they are and to invite them to the table for open discussions.

This will require the Black church inviting them to the table for discussions to hear and listen to what has caused millennials to leave and what are their expectations of the Black church to recapture trust and loyalty.

¹⁶ Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, trans. Colin King (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959), 110-111.



Hazel Edwards coined the slogan “Nothing About Us Without Us Is for Us!” (Latin: “Nihil de nobis, sine nobis”) used to communicate the idea that no policy should be decided by any representative without the full and direct participation of members of

the group(s) affected by that policy.¹⁷ It has served as a social justice call to action in mobilizing future generations.¹⁸ This is a call for every incidence of segregation and exclusion in every group setting.

Just as Africans must not only be the subject of the discourse about them but also a contributing interlocutor making representation for his or her people in an informed manner, so must Black millennials be a contributing factor of the discourse about their spiritual, social justice, economic, and cultural lives for the sustainability of their generation’s future and those to follow.

A good message to the clergy of the Black churches of the African diaspora and the African American community are the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who said them best:

- “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”
- “In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”

¹⁷ Maya Lindberg, “Nothing About Us Without Us Is for Us,” Learning for Justice, <http://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/fall-2017/nothing-about-us-without-us-is-for-us> (accessed December 15, 2022).

¹⁸ Eli A. Wolff and Mary Hums, “‘Nothing About Us Without Us’-- Mantra for a Movement,” HuffPost Contributor, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/nothing-about-us-without-us-mantra-for-a-movement_b_59aea450e4b0c50640cd61cf (accessed December 15, 2022).

- “Faith is taking the first step even when you can't see the whole staircase.”
- “There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right.”
- “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”
- “No one really knows why they are alive until they know what they'd die for.”
- “We must come to see that the end we seek is a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience.”
- “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”
- “A man who won't die for something is not fit to live.”
- “There comes a time when silence is betrayal.”
- “Never forget that everything Hitler did in Germany was legal.”
- “The time is always right to do the right thing”¹⁹

It is hoped these quotes from Dr. King will remind the Black church that the work they set out to do has not been completed. It is so great a task that it will take many people together and in different seasons of time before our world becomes a place of true equal opportunity and justice for all, a place where Black people feel safe in their homes and in the streets and Black parents won't have to hold their hearts in their hands until their Black sons and daughters come home. The Black church must wake up from its slumber for there is much work to be done and the time has come when Black America sees their silence as a betrayal. There is still that earnest expectation of Black millennials waiting for the manifestation of the Sons of God (Romans 8:19 KJV).

¹⁹ Martin Luther King Jr., “Martin Luther King, Jr.,” Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/23924.Martin_Luther_King_Jr_?page=2 (accessed December 17, 2022).

A Call to Action - the Black Millennials

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you (Ezekiel 36: 25-29 KJV).

African American millennials in the diaspora who allow themselves to be distracted from the Christian faith base their arguments, in most cases, on the premise that Christianity is a white man's religion and the African traditional religion is considered the religion of their heritage. Amazingly, the majority of people who succumb to this fallacy and attempt to convert to other faiths or religious beliefs like Islam or African traditional religion for this reason, seem to be mostly educated and who are from Christian homes. To recapture an authentic African faith, the temptation is to go back to what they regard as the religion of their ancestors.²⁰

Black millennials have their responsibility is this discourse. Running away from the scriptures which "is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17 KJV), is not the answer. They should search for whatever it is they are looking for in the Bible, for therein lies eternal life. McCray insists the student who searches the Scriptures will find that explicit Black people were genuine and pertinent members of the Biblical community of

²⁰ Adeola, *Culture & Religious Dilemma of Africans in the Diaspora*, 33.

faith. The Old Testament community of faith was Black in its roots. Black people lived under the Old and New Covenant and God's hands were upon these African people of dark color.²¹ But you won't find it unless you search for it. Our millennials are well read, curious, and great thinkers. Why then the aversion to studying the Bible for themselves even if the church failed to teach them?

The silence of the church is indeed deafening and the absence of the civil rights movement has been disappointing, but this in no way absolves Black millennials from their personal responsibility to know and understand what they mean to their God. It is not enough to say you love God, but you want no part of His Word or His church. According to the text above, God wants to put his spirit within his people and have them walk in His statutes. This is the will of God concerning Black millennials and all people.

From a Christian point of view, it is important for Black people to understand their Biblical history. Understanding the Black presence within the Bible nurtures among Black people an affection for the scriptures and the things of the Lord. Far too many Blacks reject the Bible because they don't understand that it speaks responsibly about them and to their experiences.²² We have to understand God is concerned about Black people and we can only find his concern for our salvation and liberation as we search the scriptures, not abandon them and label them irrelevant.

First and foremost, Black millennials must know the white man did not write the Bible, they only interpreted it for their benefit. It is time for Black Christians to return to the Word by reading, studying, and drawing lessons for themselves from those things

²¹ Walter Arthur McCray, *The Black Presence in the Bible*, Vol. 1, 30.

²² Adeola, *Culture & Religious Dilemma of Africans in the Diaspora*, 31.

which God has ordained to be written about Black people. It is important our millennials learn to appreciate those words of God which are specifically addressed to them and about them as a people. In her abstract, Chandler recognized four areas of the lived experiences of African Americans from which the global church can glean: (1) persevering in pain and suffering, (2) turning to God for strength, (3) experiencing a living and passionate faith, and (4) affirming God's intention for freedom and justice to be afforded to every individual.²³

Like the children of Israel, God has seen the affliction and heard the cry of the millennials (Exodus 3:7 KJV), but this is not the time to run from God but rather run to Him. It is time to enquire whom He shall send. The millennials in their defense, insists they love God and believe in Jesus Christ, but they do not believe in the Bible. The two do not go together. It is contradictory. You cannot love God and reject His Word. To love God is to love His Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1 KJV). God is the word. God speaks to us through His Word and this is where the millennials must start: by picking up their Bibles and intentionally studying them to find out what God is saying in this hour. It is not inconceivable for God to call out and send out millennials, but He must be able to find them in their rightful places.

At this point, millennials should know what they need and what they are looking for. Is it possible God will call a Moses or a King from among them to continue the work Dr. King started? However, they will have to be in place to hear and receive that prophetic call and readily answer it. Jesus himself said, "I will build my church and the

²³ Chandler, "African American Spirituality," 159.

gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18 KJV), and in this promise we must find hope for the church.

Building A Bridge Forward

Harris wonders if the church’s interpretation of scripture has not kept up with the questions of this generation. He advises that the church needs to revisit the roots of Christianity, reckon with its decorated history, and advance a renewed vision of the faith, in order to restore the integrity of scriptures and unveil the necessity of the church such that this generation and future generations will better connect with the church. However true that may be, it must be remembered millennials are said to be more spiritual than previous generations and for them, spirituality is a search for a God who cares about their everyday life and to see it flourish and not torn down.²⁴

The problem could very well be, not about the church re-interpreting the scripture, but rather being fully aware of the needs of millennials and how they can find the answers within the scriptures. There is a need for a new revival to reframe religious life in the western world. It is more important to listen and learn what people feel they need. Also, the gift of listening is crucial when discipling others. Listening will help the church develop better strategies to re-envision the faith altogether. Top-down approaches will strangle the future of faith. Listening draws in perspectives that are often overlooked and aids in the development of more compassionate ministries. According to Harris, bridging

²⁴ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man’s Religion*, 15.

the gap between faith and problems would require millennials distancing themselves from mainstream Christianity.²⁵

According to Dr. Evans, when we examine the New Testament definition of the church and juxtapose it next to the functioning of the historical Black church, it becomes clear the two institutions were very similar. As such, these two institutions are in a unique position to teach both the Black and white churches of today what true biblical Christianity looks like when it operates in a church that truly makes God the center of its existence.²⁶

Dr. Harris shares the testimony of a young African American woman who attended the 2017 Global Think Tank on the African Presence in the Bible at Bishop T.D. Jakes' International Pastors and Leadership Conference in Dallas, Texas. The woman had been very concerned about several of her close friends who abandoned their belief in Jesus. They became convinced that Christians are following the "white man's religion and the white man's Bible." In attending the conference, she was able to glean information on the positive Black presence in the Bible and in early Christian history. This was eye opening for her since much of the information on the urban streets was that the "white man's Bible" presented Blacks as a cursed people.²⁷

There is a need for a new way of looking at theology that would emerge out of the dialectic of Black history and culture, a theology addressing the question, "What has the

²⁵ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion*, 15.

²⁶ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 72.

²⁷ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion*, 24.

gospel to do with the Black struggle for liberation?”²⁸ It was this question that gave birth to the Black theology and carved out a recipe for the Black church. James H. Cone informs us that in 1966, the “Black Power Statement” of the National Conference of Black churchmen (NCBC), initiated the development of a theological consciousness that separated radical Black Christianity from the religion of white churches. It set in motion a series of events that led seminary professors and other members of the Black clergy to create what has since been called Black theology.²⁹ It sought to take a second look at the scriptures outside of the whitewashed Christianity that had been taught to Blacks. Cone claims:

In the process of rereading the Bible in the light of black history, black clergy radicals concluded that both biblical and black histories revealed God’s unqualified solidarity with the poor in their fight against injustice. This revelation disclosed God’s salvation as being identical with human liberation. In the United States, black theologians were the first to identify liberation with salvation, and thus with the core of the Christian gospel. It was in this context that they began to refer to God as the liberator of the oppressed Hebrew slaves in Egypt and to Jesus as the new liberator whom God has anointed “to preach the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and set at liberty those who are oppressed (Luke 4:18, 19 RSV).³⁰

This is where the Black church seems to have vacated their office in the interpretation of the scriptures and must once more revisit it for its relevancy and impact on the lives of its Black people within the church and community. According to Cone, those involved in Black theology were also deeply involved in the civil rights movement, including the protest demonstrations led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These early

²⁸ Harris, *Is Christianity the White Man’s Religion*, 132.

²⁹ James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

interpreters of the scriptures initiated Black theology in the context of the struggle of Black persons for racial justice, which was initiated in the Black churches, but they chiefly identified with civil rights organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership conference (SCLC), the National Conference of Black Churchmen (NCBC), the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO), and many Black caucuses in white churches.³¹

The great question is, “Where are these organizations now? Why the silence?” So many of our millennial Black men and women are being killed daily and these organizations are silent and voiceless. What and who has stolen their voice? Dr. Anthony Evans alludes to the fact Black evangelicals found themselves caught between two worlds. On the one hand, they held tenaciously to a conservative approach to theology which gave them linkage to the white evangelical world, yet they also had to respond to the call for Black liberation which brought them into conflict with their white mentors. On the other hand, Black evangelicals supported the clarion call for justice, yet disagreed with many of Black theology’s conclusions that were undergirding that call.³²

Justice and liberation were sacrificed for a harmonious relationship with the enemy of freedom for Blacks. The white church has always been against Black resistance to their injustices towards Blacks in the name of God and peace. Black custodians under the trust of Black people have been hoodwinked and sold. No wonder Black millennials have left in droves, stampeding out of the doors of Black churches in the face of the betrayal. To forge a reconciliation between the two, the Black church must make a bold

³¹ Cone. *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*, 6.

³² Evans, *Are Black Spiritually Inferior To Whites*, 125.

clarion call for the justice and liberation of its people, irrespective of the approval or not of the white church. The Black church must extricate itself from the hold the white church has placed on them and take a stand for the liberation of its people for whom it was created to serve. Only then will Black millennials ever trust them again.

Recommendations

Use of Black Publishing Companies.

The governing body of the Black church are the ones to lead the change and the first of these changes is to place primary emphasis on the Bible. Since programs have failed to capture the attention of millennials, there is a need to deliver the Word in its entirety and in truth. Publications and literature must reflect the Word of God so that from the nursery to the adults, everyone is made aware of their inclusion in the Bible. How can we have a Black church and not a Black Christian publishing company? There are numerous Black publishing companies but where are the Black Christian publishing companies that will reliably publish biblical literature for the Black church? The Black church must cease funding the white publishing companies for literature that do not cater to Black people. A whitewashed Bible cannot work for Blacks since it omits their biblical presence and involvement. Bibles, commentaries, and literature explicitly teaching the Bible in its cultural entirety will not only embolden our Black millennials to listen, but reeducate the white church and force them to take a second look at the scriptures for themselves.

It has been proven that seeing themselves in the Bible gives Black people a sense of identity with the scriptures and strengthens their belief that God included them in

biblical history. The millennials need their faith restored in the Word of God. They need to see the relevancy of its text in their lives. According to Anyabwile, as the African slaves acquired the ability to read, they not only turned their attention to the Bible's content, but sought to master its content as a means to both spiritual and social understanding and empowerment, even in the midst of wickedness and oppression perpetrated against them by white professing Christians.³³

What is critical here is for Black millennials to understand their distrust of the Bible and Christianity is not unique. Not all slaves and freed slaves trusted the Bible. Historical literature teaches us that African American Christians trusted the Bible while they suspected the self-serving motives and scripture-twisting actions of white preachers and slave owners. It is fascinating to consider that a highly oral people, who could not read, revered the scriptures they could not read even while they rejected the oracles of co-opted preachers they could hear. One could say that African American Christianity began with an unread Bible placed on the center of the church's ecclesial coffee table. Our millennials have no excuse for not embracing the Bible, especially as they talk about their love for Jesus Christ. To not love the church is one thing, but to not love the Word which is Christ is problematic.

This brings into question how the Bible and teaching literature is presented within the Black church for Black people. If we believe Black people have been present and functioning in the plan of God from the beginning, then it must be presented in that manner so that from an early age, Black children and youths can identify with Christianity. This is the responsibility of the Black church: to urge Black owned

³³ Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*.

publishing companies to present the scriptures in their purest and authentic form. This will ignite a hunger to study and identify with the Bible.

Re-interpreting the Scriptures.

Dr. Anthony Evans suggests the Black preacher cannot be a mere religious figurehead but his extended role is that of a community liberator, and the architect of freedom for his people.³⁴ However, prior to 1830, African American calls for slavery's abolition and the emancipation of Africans depended upon rich biblical texts and themes, but following the 1830s, those appeals were increasingly based on social and political arguments. The scriptures were used but with time, it began to lose its central role as African Americans scramble to first gain their freedom and then to redefine life in Reconstruction, Jim Crow segregation, and the civil rights movements. Preachers preached the Bible less and less, opting for political and social commentary instead. Unwittingly, there arose an imbalance of consciousness where social action took precedence over the Bible as preachers preached from the text less and less.³⁵

Restoring the Spirit of Black Worship

The Black church boasts dynamic worship which is an indication of the church's vitality according to one Joel Gregory. However, Pastor Anthony J. Carter is quoted as saying that the problem with the music and praise of the Black church is the Bible is nothing more than a prop or an institutional icon. It is present, but we rarely read it, we

³⁴ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 94.

³⁵ Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*.

sporadically preach it, we hardly pray it, we sparingly sing it, and we reluctantly see it. He further argues that recovering biblical worship in our churches will begin with the recovery of the Bible as the guide for worship.³⁶ Evans reminds us the role of music has always had a significant place in the worship of Africans and their descendants.

Black music resembled the Psalms and the Old Testament and took the form of the Word of God as it is sung. This is why the Negro spirituals became such a significant part of Black American life and has had a profound impact on the American culture at large.³⁷ It now becomes necessary for the music and worship of the church to return to its scriptural roots.

Black worship was once significant to the worshippers. There was much shouting and singing, swaying, dancing, and crying because as they came before God, it was a celebration of God's goodness. They were grateful for life and the fact God counted them worthy to come into His presence and He into theirs that brought about an exuberance the white worshippers could not understand and appreciate. Worship for Blacks came from the deep recesses of their hearts and souls. Evans cautions that sacredness does not necessarily imply we must be solemn and silent, even though there are occasions when silence is appropriate. When the African American considers the care and protection God supplies, especially considering his socio-economic plight, it is difficult not to be expressive.³⁸

³⁶ Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*.

³⁷ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*, 109-110.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

What has happened over time is that a more contemporary form of song and worship has replaced the old even though the social stresses of the Black community are still present. The conflict here is as the church and its millennials seek a new way of worship, they also reach back for the old music that cries for redemption and freedom from a life of pain. According to Lincoln and Mamiya, Black music is unity music. It unites the joy and the sorrow, the love and the hate, the hope and the despair of Black people. It shapes and defines the Black being and creates cultural structures for Black expression. Black music is unifying because it affirms being Black is possible only in a communal context.³⁹ Once the centrality of worship that expresses social hurts is lost, then the unity is lost. Worship is where we sing, cry, dance, and laugh together. You look for it and you wait for it, because it creates a bonding of a people with the same history and this worship style should be preserved.

Ingrid Monson in her book, *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective*, posits that musical centrism is a cultural characteristic among every African diaspora community. Music, more than any other cultural discourse, has been taken as the ultimate embodiment of African and African American diasporic cultural values and as prima facie evidence of deep cultural connections among all peoples of African descent. One reason for this perception of the centrality of music surely lies in its ability to coordinate several culturally valued modes of expression, including song, verbal recitation, dance, religious worship, drama, and visual display.⁴⁰

³⁹ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 347.

⁴⁰ Ingrid Monson, *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000).

In contemporary African diasporic cultural sensibilities, music is often a place where Black trumps white, it provides a sweet sense of cultural triumph, and a vision of Black power in its cultural, moral, ethical, and embodied dimension. Music holds a special place in the cultural definition of the African diaspora.⁴¹ Irrespective of the language or dialect or the misunderstanding of it, the music connects the people and brings them into that oneness that holds no barrier and transcends many barriers within the African community.

Evans assures us that although slavery has ended, the theme of freedom remains. Where there is hope for freedom, there is much joy and exuberance. In other words, hope fuels worship. He contends that a natural application of the principle of Black freedom is to be found in the music of Black worship, which is biblical, as can be seen in Psalm 92: “A Song for the Sabbath day.”⁴²

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Thy name,
O Most High; To declare Thy loving-kindness in the morning,
And thy faithfulness by night, with the ten-stringed lute, and with the harp;
With resounding music upon the lyre. For Thou, O Lord, hast made me glad
By what Thou hast done (Psalm 92:1-4 RSV).

Exuberance and glee should not be banned from the worship of God.⁴³ But even so, it must be noted Black worshippers have evolved from those during slavery. These Black millennials are more diversified and stratified in knowledge and experiences.⁴⁴ The failure to utilize these skills within the church has deemed the Black church irrelevant

⁴¹ Ingrid Monson, *The African Diaspora*.

⁴² Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*. 110.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

and left millennials disillusioned.⁴⁵ These young people are not only skilled in vocals, but in the drums, percussions, and stringed instruments (see Appendix H). They are well-acquainted with social media, digital engineering, and the synchronization of these element, yet they sit in frustration hearing diminished music. Even if Black preachers and clergy are not knowledgeable in these areas because their focus on preaching the Word, they must become appreciative and accommodating of the musical skills within their midst and engage them in musical worship.

Diana Hayes reminds us that African American spirituality is a result of the encounter of a particular people with their God.⁴⁶ This encounter compels us to come before our God with such exuberance and gratitude that we have survived all the perils in our journeys. We rejoice because we have overcome insurmountable obstacles, oppression, and injustices, and are still pressing and breaking through barriers denied us in the face of opposition. When we come before our God in worship, we come as instructed: “men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts (Ecclesiastes 2:8 KJV). “Like David we play[ed] before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals (2 Samuel 6:5 KJV). “We unapologetically praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs” (Psalm 150:4 KJV). “We praise his name in the dance ...sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp” (Psalm 149:3). (See Appendix H). As we utilize our gifted and talented musical millennials, they will find a home of peace and joy

⁴⁵ Evans, *Are Blacks Spiritually Inferior to Whites*. 113.

⁴⁶ Hayes, *Forged in the Fiery Furnace*, 2.

in the church. God has given them to the church and they must be acknowledged and utilized to eliminate frustration and boredom.

Establishing Black History Libraries within the Black church

Even if Black history was taught in our public schools, the onus is upon the Black church to teach it in its entirety and authentically. It is out of the struggle of Blacks the church was formed and it is the Black church's responsibility to acquire all literature and information to educate our Black people who walk through the doors of the church, whether for church services, Sunday school, or extracurricular and community services. From the cradle to seniors, they must be taught their history (see Appendix G).

For too long the church library is located in the clergy's office for his or her use for sermon preparation. The library should be made available to the entire church. When our youths recognize the church acknowledges the struggle of our history as a people and is making significant efforts to teach and engage its people in the contributions and presences of Blacks in all of American society, millennials will walk away with a self-confidence they are a part of the true fabric of both American and Black history. They are not an add on or an afterthought. They have contributions to make if the Black church, and not social media or the Black Israelite organizations, will teach them and make the relevant information available. Black history must be a regular discussion within the church and not just during Black History Month (February).

Black history should be upheld every month of the year by highlighting Black contributions, inventions, and redemption journeys within the programs of the Black church, so our youths are proud and self-confident in a world that spews the myth they are inferior to their white counterparts. A library with teachers willing to teach and learn

with their students will bring that connectivity currently lost between the Black church and Black millennials.

Conclusion

Elliott P. Skinner, in his contribution to Ingrid Monson's book, *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective*, spoke of the restoration of African identity for a new millennium. He said the determination of African peoples to end the feeling of self-alienation and to restore our civilization is an imperative for the twenty-first century. For over four centuries, those of us whose ancestors were torn away from Africa's shores by the slave trade have been victims of what has been termed an "exilic" agony.⁴⁷

Gates argue that despite the Black church's share of bad actors and practitioners of bad faith, its undeniable and inexcusably long history of sexism, homophobia, and antisemitism; its unforgivable occasions of child abuse; the sheer greed of scandalous, shameful manipulators of what's become known as the prosperity gospel, are all voluminously documented and rightly so. The importance of the role of the Black church at its best cannot be gainsaid in the history of the African American people, nor can it be underestimated.⁴⁸ The fortitude that sustained our ancestors under the nightmare of enslavement to build families despite what they went through to acquire skills, create a wide variety of complex cultural forms, withstand torture, debasement, etc., helped them never give up the hope of liberty. And as one enslaved poet, George Moses Horton, said,

⁴⁷ Monson, *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective*.

⁴⁸ Gates, *The Black Church*, xvii.

“If not for themselves, then for their children and grandchildren when slavery had no end in sight, so that we can occupy today.”⁴⁹

The history of the church and Christianity played a role both in Black rebellion and in the preparation of Black people for leadership roles. As far back as the late 1800s, after escaping from slavery and being ordained at the AME Zion Church, Frederick Douglass ran for political office and served his Harlem constituent in the U.S. House of Representatives.⁵⁰ He effectively led the civil rights movement in the North until Montgomery, Alabama, emerged as the epicenter of the movement and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. became its most recognizable face and voice. There are many others, for the Black church has a long and noble history of Black political action, dating back to at least the late eighteenth century.⁵¹

Even though the church could not overthrow slavery because an insurrection would have been racial suicide, since Blacks were outnumbered and outgunned, they held fast to their Christian tradition in the power of prayer through men like Bull Connor and George Wallace. Without the role of the Black church, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that were signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson would not have happened. Dr. King was by his side at both signings, along with congressman John Lewis, who was also an ordained Baptist minister in 1965. The Black church is one of the parents of the civil rights movement.⁵²

⁴⁹ Gates, *The Black Church*. xvii.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, xviii.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, xix.

⁵² *Ibid.*

John Lewis once said the civil rights movement was based on faith and it was this faith that has been the source of courage for those who toiled on the front lines for change. This has been the deep historical reality of the Black church. Mugambi argues that a church becomes a cult when Christians isolate and insulate themselves from the challenges of the society in which their church exists and to avoid this fate, the church has to make a practical impact in order to be faithful to the demands of the Christian mission.⁵³

Karl Marx, who was not a fan of religion, clearly stated that “Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, and the soul of the soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.” What Marx understood when he said “religious suffering is, at one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering,” is what has been sadly forgotten of the church.⁵⁴

It has been established the Black church has deviated from its spiritual, political, and social roles within the Black community. This has caused the mass exodus of Black millennials. The Black preacher is chosen and appointed because he has the ability and capacity to administer these functions and, over time, has resorted to just the spiritual aspect of the people despite the fact their social issues and challenges have not disappeared. It is at the point where Black millennials perceive it as a betrayal. The silence of the Black church is deafening and cold to the call for help as these millennials

⁵³ Mugambi, “Christianity and the African Cultural Heritage,” 521.

⁵⁴ Gates, *The Black Church*, xvi.

watch their peers like George Floyd being killed unarmed by a white police officer on the street, who felt compelled to press his knee into his neck until he lost his breath while crying out for his mother. Daunte Wright, unarmed, was shot and killed during a traffic stop and was among the hundreds who have died on the streets since George Floyd. There is a profound silence to the persistent profiling and racial discrimination made against these millennials.

In their book, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, John and Steve de Gruchy shares how the church in South Africa dealt with their struggle for equality, recognition, and ownership during the Apartheid era. The church debated issues of segregation and integration in their churches earlier than they did in their legislature.⁵⁵ This is where the Black church in America has failed the Black millennials of the African diaspora. Instead of sitting in deafening silence in the face of prejudice, discrimination, inequality, and the public lynching of Black millennials, they should take a page out of the church of South Africa's book and resist the injustices Blacks are still facing in America. There is absolutely no resistance from the Black church against modern day atrocities on Blacks in America and this is absolutely why the millennials believe the Black church is irrelevant and has no place in their lives. In the first fifteen days of 2023, too many of our millennials have already died from police's abuse of power and there is no resistance from the church.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ John de Gruchy and Steve de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), ix-x.

⁵⁶ Catherine Baseman, *Transforming Cape Town* (Los Angeles, CA: The University of California Press, 2008), 5.

In South Africa, it was the church that helped to bring down the apartheid regime and acted as midwife in the transition to democracy. The de Gruchys claims that even today the church is still engaged in the fight with the hope that one day their land “will be transfigured with justice, peace and love where now we have injustice, conflict and bitterness.”⁵⁷ The fight never stops in the presence of discrimination and oppression as we read in Proverbs 31: 8-9 KJV, “Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

The de Gruchys remind us that “God’s reign in Jesus Christ is always on behalf of those who suffer and are oppressed, and therefore critically transcends our efforts to shape the world in which we live.”⁵⁸ To opt out of political decision and action, to try to be neutral in the face of injustice and violence, is irresponsible and unchristian. There is a politics of the kingdom that requires engagement, not withdrawal; one that requires identification with the victims of oppression and with their struggle for justice.⁵⁹ We are instructed in this by the prophet: “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause” (Isaiah 1:17 KJV).

The church has a special responsibility to pursue non-violent strategies for change. According to the de Gruchys:

The confession that “Jesus Christ is Lord” remains at the center of my theological understanding. It is a confession shared by all Christians, though many fail to discern its social and political implications. I remain convinced that the task of the

⁵⁷ de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, x.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, xiv.

church in South Africa today is to be a church that is faithful to this confession, therein lies its identity and its relevance.⁶⁰

In this sense, theology is a radical project; it is always seeking to relate the church of today and the issues and conflicts facing it to its biblical and apostolic roots. An example of this is the theological basis upon which the call was made on June 16, 1985, to pray for the end to unjust rule in South Africa⁶¹ and nine years later in 1994, that prayer was answered and came to fruition.

The current status of the Black church is either dead or comatose. But as God told the prophet Ezekiel to prophesy to the dead bones of a once strong and vibrant nation, after which God restored the flesh and sinew and then breathed life into them and they rose to life, the Black church can be restored to life in a greater way than before. After he was given the command to prophesy, Ezekiel said, “So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army” (Ezekiel 37:10 KJV). According to Anyabwile, the Black church has lost its prophetic energy and it must be restored.⁶² God promised the nation saying, “I shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD” (Ezekiel 37:14 KJV).

God shows us he can bring dead things to life for He opened the graves of spiritually dry, hopeless, and dead people and put His Spirit into them and caused them to

⁶⁰ de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, xxvi.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, Introduction.

live. Reviving and strengthening the Black church will require great wisdom and courage.⁶³ The church belongs to God and He knows how to fix it. It would seem this is a spiritual problem for we see God using the tool of prophecy to turn around the hopeless and spiritually dead condition of a dead nation to life.⁶⁴ There is hope for the Black church. Because life comes from God to his church, through the Word and Holy Spirit, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, this is where the Black church must begin. Jesus promised His church saying, “I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” and that is a promise worth reaching for.

⁶³ Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, Introduction.

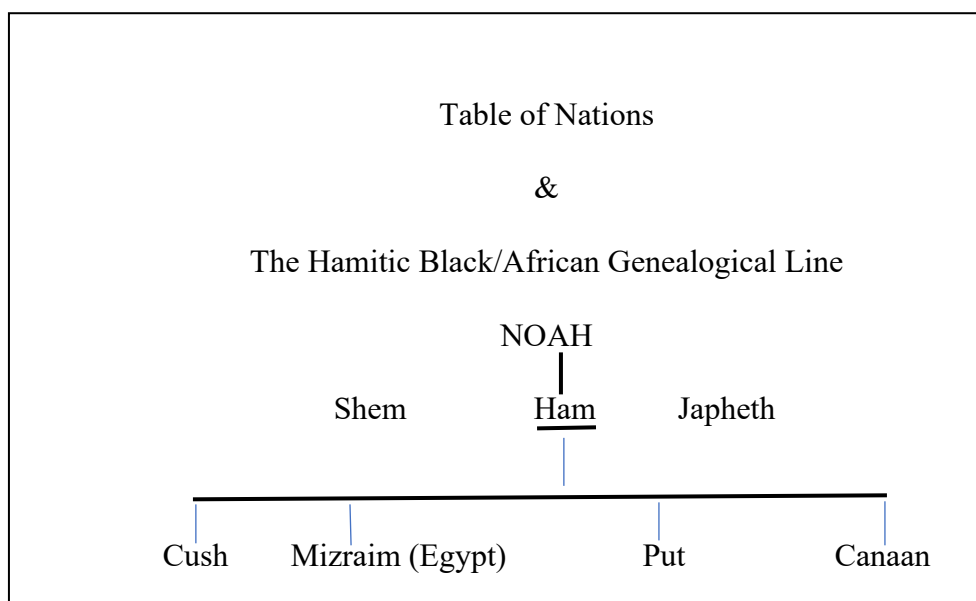
⁶⁴ Ibid.

APPENDIX A:

TABLE OF NATIONS

The Hamitic Black/African Genealogical Line¹

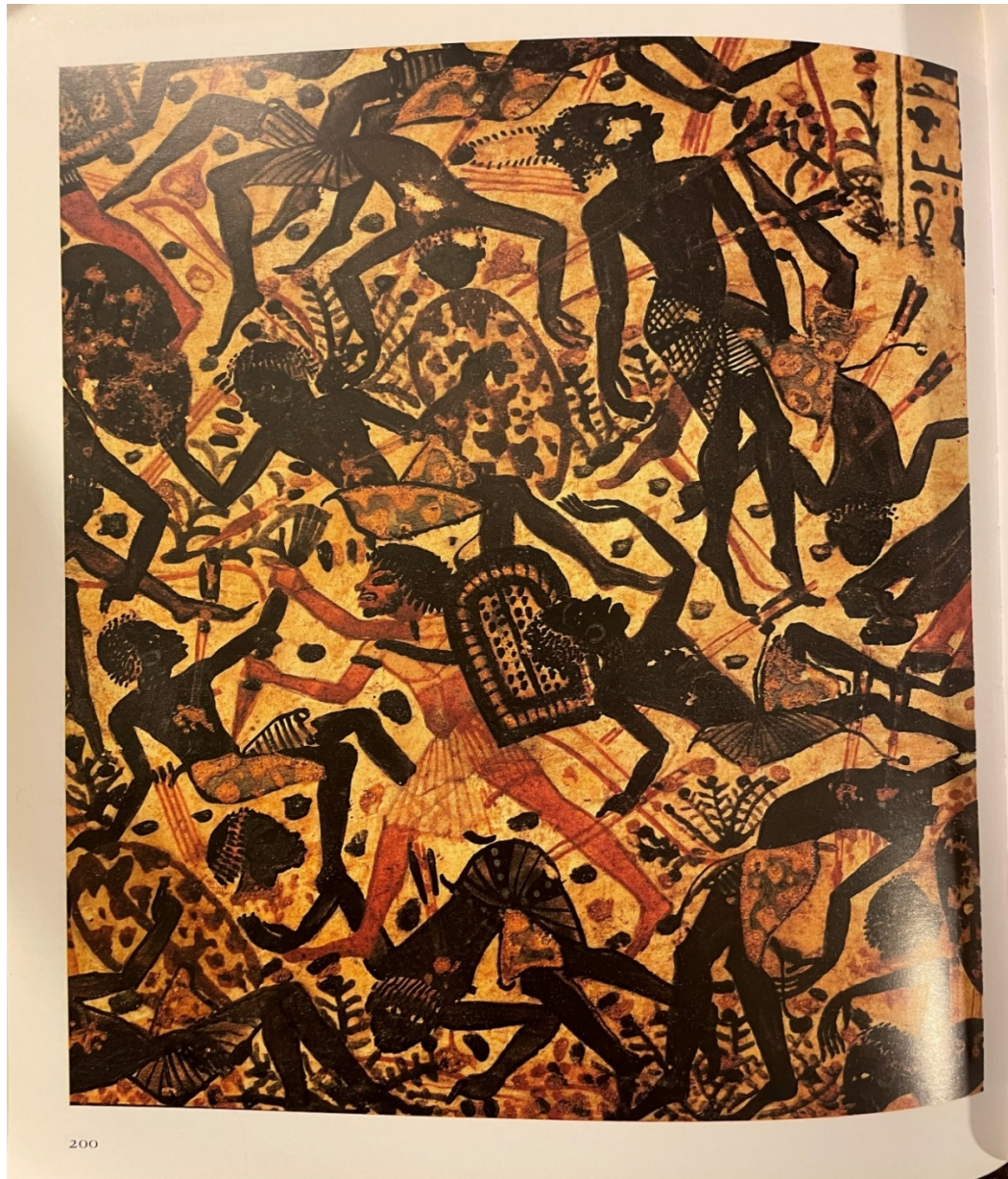
Following is a chart of the Hamitic Black/African genealogical line based on Genesis 10. It is traced through the names presented in the passage, all of which indicate males.



The Hamites had more contact with the Israelites than the Japhethites (from whom white people are descendants). Ham and his descendants settled (for the most part) in Northern Africa and Western Asia.

¹ Walter Arthur McCray, *The Black Presence in the Bible and the Table of Nations Genesis 10:1-32* (Chicago, IL: Black Light Fellowship, 1990), 76.

APPENDIX B:
BLACK CUSHITE WARRIORS²



² Eugen Strouhal, *Life of the Ancient Egyptians* (London, UK: Liverpool University Press, 1992), 200.

APPENDIX C:

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Preliminary Questions:

- 1) How long has your church been established for?
- 2) How many years have you been pastoring your church?
- 3) Describe how you have been doing discipleship in your church. Do you have a structure for raising up leaders? How do you disciple your members/leaders in the knowledge of the Word/ their relationship with God/ spiritual disciplines (e.g. prayer, fasting, reading the Word, service/ personal life?

Survey Proper:

Please be as detailed as possible in answering the survey questionnaire

- 1) What is the percentage of youths in your church?
- 2) What is the composition of youths in your community? What percentage is represented in your church?
- 3) Have you ever been asked by the youths if Christianity is for the Black Man? If so what has been your answer?
- 4) What do you know of Christianity beginning in Africa
- 5) Do you think educating the youths of their black Christian heritage is relevant to our black youths in the church?
- 6) Have you educated your youths of their black heritage in the bible, and if so what has been their response?
- 7) Do you realize that there is a large exodus of black youths out of the church today? In your view what is the reason for the lack of interest in the church?
- 8) Do you know where the black youths are?
- 9) What more could you have done to create the awareness and consciousness needed to retain them within the church?
- 10) Do you consider it important to have the youths of your community identify with Christ through their ancestors?
- 11) What more can we do as spiritual leaders to inform and engage our black youths in Christianity that is not a white man's religion but a culturally inclusive religion?

Research Study Questionnaire for Non-Professional Participants

Church Name: _____

Address of church: _____

Research Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

The Objective of this survey: To determine the benefits you have seen in the lives of your members and leaders whom you have taught their black history of Christianity as part of your discipleship process.

Please be as detailed as possible in answering this survey questionnaire. However, you may leave any question that you are uncomfortable with unanswered. You may also choose to withdraw from this survey at any time with no need for explanation.

After you have answered the questionnaire, please put it in a sealed envelope and return it to me. As mentioned in my letter to you, only my research assistants, Dr. William Valmyr and Dr. Valarie Crumpton and myself will be reading the surveys.

I may request an oral interview with you at a later date to clarify your reflections if necessary. You may choose not to agree to have an oral interview if you are not comfortable with it.

Preliminary Questions:

1. Do you attend church regularly? _____
2. Does your church have a strong millennial presence?
3. Why are your peers leaving?
4. What are your views on the Black church and Christianity?

Thank you for participating in my study research. I would appreciate if you could indicate below whether you are giving me approval to use your name and church name when referring to your written survey in writing my Dissertation Research and Paper. I will use only pseudo names for you and your church, as mentioned in my invitation/consent letter unless you give approval to use your name and church name.

- Yes, you have my permission to use my name and my church name.
- No, you cannot use my name or my church name. Please use pseudo names for my church and I.

Signature of Participant _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D:

PROFESSIONAL PARTICIPANTS RESPONSES

Participant 1: Pastor Mo Omayomi

The Preliminary Questions:

1) How long has your church been established for?

His Holy Hill was inaugurated November 1st 2014. Hence, the church has been established for 7 years.

2) How many years have you been pastoring your church?

I have been the pastor for the entire duration of 7 years.

3) Describe how you have been doing discipleship in your church. Do you have a structure for raising up leaders? How do you disciple your members/leaders in the knowledge of the Word/ their relationship with God/ spiritual disciplines (e.g. prayer, fasting, reading the Word, service/ personal life?

The Spiritual Formation of our Church community sits at the center of all that we do. In fact, our mandate at His Holy Hill Church is to cultivate vessels which means raising leaders through discipleship. Over the years, our disciple making strategy has encompassed one-on-one, which provides a life-on-life interaction, Home Church which gives us opportunity to do life together since discipleship thrives within the context of a community, Our Mid-Week Trainings and Sunday gatherings. In these contexts, we make allocation for prayers, teaching the word and exposure of life to one another.

Survey Proper:

Please be as detailed as possible in answering the survey questionnaire

1) What is the percentage of youths in your church?

According to the national Youth Policy, Youth are those within the age category of 15 to 29, hence about 30 % of our congregation fit into this demographics.

2) What is the composition of youths in your community? What percentage is represented in your church?

About 25% of the population of our city fall into this category, hence our Church seems to reflect the community.

3) Have you ever been asked by the youths if Christianity is for the Black Man? If so what has been your answer?

Honestly, none is yet to ask me that question though I am aware it is a prevalent question culturally among African Americans.

4) What do you know of Christianity beginning in Africa?

Though there is paucity education about the evolution of Christianity from Africa, however there is an increasing awareness that the center of gravity of Christianity has moved way from the West of the world to the churches in the Global South. Africa is definitely part of the dominant continents with growing churches.

5) Do you think educating the youths of their black Christian heritage is relevant to our black youths in the church?

In order to relinquish the mentality of Christianity being a white man's religion, it would be helpful to discolor Christianity and point to the Centrality of Christ and His relevance to every tongue and every nation. It will be helpful to presently truthfully from the scriptures the heterogeneity of color in contrast to the false racial homogeneity that has been presented for many years, which has tilted the faith to one pigmentation of the skin than the other.

6) Have you educated your youths of their black heritage in the bible, and if so what has been their response?

I am yet to educate our black youths in this direction.

7) Do you realize that there is a large exodus of black youths out of the church today? In your view what is the reason for the lack of interest in the church?

Yes. I am very aware of this. There are few issues that have warranted this:

- a. The evangelical Church turning largely political with a strong right wing leaning, making a lot of African Americans feel the Church is not compassionate towards their wounds.
- b. The Church is ill-equipped in answering very fundamental cultural questions that are pertinent in the hearts of the people such as Homosexuality, racism etc.
- c. The Christian Faith also seem not to be empowering to solve the economic inequity confronting the African American community hence making it increasingly irrelevant.
- d. Church has historically been a part of the African American culture. As an example, negro spirituals were songs that helped African Americans endure during the times of slavery however there is a generation that is questioning whether the Christian Faith is simply cultural but truly Spiritual?

8) Do you know where the black youths are?

Yes. In my context in our college campuses and in some designated zip codes in my region.

9) What more could you have done to create the awareness and consciousness needed to retain them within the church?

Create opportunity for engagement with other people that look like them and create avenue for economic empowerment. In addition, give room for dialogue and permission for them to entertain their doubts. God is not intimidated by their confusions and as leaders, we have to embrace these difficult conversations with grace, grit and Godly counsel.

10) Do you consider it important to have the youths of your community identify with Christ through their ancestors?

Not necessarily, I am convinced if we are able to present Christ without any discoloration, Present Jesus in His purity, they will be able to receive Him. We might be in the danger of creating another multi-generational error, similar to that we have inherited if Christ is not presented as He is but rather associated primarily with a definite race.

11) What more can we do as spiritual leaders to inform and engage our black youths in Christianity that is not a white man's religion but a culturally inclusive religion?
To stay faithful to the gospel truthfully and present Jesus without bias or prejudice.

Participant 2: Pastor Amos L. Howard

Research Study Questionnaire for Pastors

Church name: Living Truth Christian Center_____

Address of church: __102 Ridley Street, Smyrna, TN 37167_____

Pastor's/Sectional Leader's Name: Apostle Amos L. Howard, Sr. __ Date: __11/16/21

The Objective of this survey: To determine the benefits you have seen in the lives of your members and leaders whom you have taught their black history of Christianity as part of your discipleship process.

Please be as detailed as possible in answering this survey questionnaire. However, you may leave any question that you are uncomfortable with unanswered. You may also choose to withdraw from this survey at any time with no need for explanation.

After you have answered the questionnaire, please put it in a sealed envelope and return it to me.

As mentioned in my letter to you, only my research assistants, Dr. William Valmyr and Dr. Valarie Crumpton and myself will be reading the surveys.

I may request an oral interview with you at a later date to clarify your reflections if necessary. You may choose not to agree to have an oral interview if you are not comfortable with it.

Preliminary Questions:

1) How long has your church been established for?

- 155 years

2) How many years have you been pastoring your church?

- 28 years

3) Describe how you have been doing discipleship in your church. Do you have a structure for raising up leaders? How do you discipline your members/leaders in the knowledge of the

Word/ their relationship with God/ spiritual disciplines (e.g. prayer, fasting, reading the Word, service/ personal life?

- Our discipleship program is designed for every partner/member disciple of at least one other person. We send everyone through nine weeks of foundation/discipleship classes. Our Structure for raising up our leader is a year long program where we take each person

through a very intense leadership training. Our preaching/teaching style is done with the intent of developing strong leaders. I teach our members biblical practice yields biblical power, so we have developed a culture where the word is our authority. I believe the best way to help develop people spiritually is to live out before the people what we teach. Our culture leads itself to a life of prayer, fasting, reading, the word service above self and a personal life committed to The Kingdom of God. We are currently doing what we call a seven day a week church, where we connect with members everyday via conference calls and in service worship.

Survey Proper:

Please be as detailed as possible in answering the survey questionnaire

1) What is the percentage of youths in your church?

- less than 10%

2) What is the composition of youths in your community? What percentage is represented in your church?

- This is a thought-provoking question that has challenged us to research the composition of youth in our community.

Based on our current percentage, it is safe to say this percentage is less than 1%.

3) Have you ever been asked by the youths if Christianity is for the Black Man? If so, what has been your answer?

- Yes, Christianity/A Relationship with God is needed and should be by everyone.

4) What do you know of Christianity beginning in Africa?

- Very little

5) Do you think educating the youths of their black Christian heritage is relevant to our black youths in the church?

- Yes

6) Have you educated your youths of their black heritage in the bible, and if so what has been their response?

- Yes, they were very interested and excited to know that people of color were in the bible.

7) Do you realize that there is a large exodus of black youths out of the church today? In your view, what is the reason for the lack of interest in the church?

- Yes, there is a large exodus of youth in today's church. I believe it is because of the abundance of information to technology. It has caused a lot of youth to question what they've been taught.

8) Do you know where the black youths are?

- No

9) What more could you have done to create the awareness and consciousness needed to retain them within the church?

- At one point we had a very strong children and youth ministry. I think hiring a youth minister who could identify with the current trends and challenges youth are having certainly would've made the difference.

10) Do you consider it important to have the youths of your community identify with Christ through their ancestors?

- Yes

11) What more can we do as spiritual leaders to inform and engage our black youths in Christianity that is not a white man's religion but a culturally inclusive religion?

- I believe we can engage the youth by bringing them to the table having conversations that include them while provoking them to think and understand their views. It's important to educate our youth through giving them the correct information while empowering them to know where they come from and why they're so powerful as an African American believer.

Thank you for participating in my study research. I would appreciate if you could indicate below whether you are giving me approval to use your name and church name when referring to your written survey in writing my Dissertation Research and Paper. I will use only pseudo names for you and your church, as mentioned in my invitation/consent letter unless you give approval to use your name and church name.

- Yes, you have my permission to use my name and my church name.
- No, you cannot use my name or my church name. Please use pseudo names for my church and I

__Apostle Amos Howard_____

Signature of Pastor

Name: Apostle Amos Howard_____

Date: ____11/27/2021_____

Participant 3: Pastor Roy Carryl

Church Name: LIVING HOPE OUTREACH CENTER

Address of church: 201 WHITTIER AVE, DUNELLEN, NJ 08812

Pastor's/Sectional Leader's Name: PASTOR ROY E. CARRYL Date: 11/23/2021

The Objective of this survey: To determine the benefits you have seen in the lives of your members and leaders whom you have taught their black history of Christianity as part of your discipleship process.

Please be as detailed as possible in answering this survey questionnaire. However, you may leave any question that you are uncomfortable with unanswered. You may also choose to withdraw from this survey at any time with no need for explanation.

After you have answered the questionnaire, please put it in a sealed envelope and return it to me.

As mentioned in my letter to you, only my research assistants, Dr. William Valmyr and Dr. Valarie

Crumption and myself will be reading the surveys.

I may request an oral interview with you at a later date to clarify your reflections if necessary. You may choose not to agree to have an oral interview if you are not comfortable with it.

Preliminary Questions:

1) How long has your church been established for?

Our Church has been established for 19 years

2) How many years have you been pastoring your church?

I have been Pastoring this Church for 19 years

3) Describe how you have been doing discipleship in your church. Do you have a structure for raising up leaders? How do you disciple your members/leaders in the knowledge of the Word/ their relationship with God/ spiritual disciplines (e.g. prayer, fasting, reading the Word, service/ personal life?

As a Church we have a discipleship program that takes an individual from salvation to being a strong and vibrant Christian. This is an eight weeks program that teaches the fundamentals of the Christian beliefs and way of life, helping them to develop and strong and vibrant life in Christ and helping others to do the same.

Survey Proper:

Please be as detailed as possible in answering the survey questionnaire

1) What is the percentage of youths in your church?

We have 17 youth in our Church

2) What is the composition of youths in your community? What percentage is represented in your church?

Our youths make up of different Cultural and ethnic background.

3) Have you ever been asked by the youths if Christianity is for the Black Man? If so what has been your answer?

I have never been asked

4) What do you know of Christianity beginning in Africa I know from Bible History that some of the Biblical/Christian activities originated in African Countries.

5) Do you think educating the youths of their black Christian heritage is relevant to our black youths in the church?

Yes, I think that educating our Black youth about their Christian heritage is extremely beneficial to them because it gives them a sense of belonging and identity.

6) Have you educated your youths of their black heritage in the bible, and if so what has been their response?

Yes we have done a little educating of our youths about their black heritage and it is something they love and show great interest in.

7) Do you realize that there is a large exodus of black youths out of the church today? In your view what is the reason for the lack of interest in the church?

The present music and internet culture has had a strong pull on our youths and have caused them to lose interest in attending and being involved in the Church.

8) Do you know where the black youths are?

Yes, I do. They are in our communities and surrounding communities.

9) What more could you have done to create the awareness and consciousness needed to retain them within the church?

- a. More Biblical Programs
- b. More Life Skills Programs
- c. More Programs that boost their self-esteem
- d. More Programs that help them to feel more confident in handling life

10) Do you consider it important to have the youths of your community identify with Christ through their ancestors?

Yes I do believe that youths should be identify with their ancestors because it gives them a sense of belonging.

11) What more can we do as spiritual leaders to inform and engage our black youths in Christianity that is not a white man's religion but a culturally inclusive religion?

- a. We can continue to teach them the truths of God's Word
- b. We can educate them off the historical origin of Christianity
- c. We can teach them that Christianity is a racially inclusive religion

Thank you for participating in my study research. I would appreciate if you could indicate below whether you are giving me approval to use your name and church name when referring to your written survey in writing my Dissertation Research and Paper. I will use only pseudo names for you and your church, as mentioned in my invitation/consent letter unless you give approval to use your name and church name.

☐ Yes, you have my permission to use my name and my church name. (YES)

☐ No, you cannot use my name or my church name. Please use pseudo names for my church and I

Roy E Carryl

Signature of Pastor

Participant 4: Pastor Darius Crayton

Research Study Questionnaire for Pastors

Church Name: Bridge Builders Church International_____

Address of church: __1801 Beltline Rd. SW. Decatur, AL 35601_____

Pastor's/Sectional Leader's Name: Pastor Darius Crayton__ Date: __11/16/21_____

The Objective of this survey: To determine the benefits you have seen in the lives of your members and leaders whom you have taught their black history of Christianity as part of your discipleship process.

Please be as detailed as possible in answering this survey questionnaire. However, you may leave any question that you are uncomfortable with unanswered. You may also choose to withdraw from this survey at any time with no need for explanation.

After you have answered the questionnaire, please put it in a sealed envelope and return it to me.

As mentioned in my letter to you, only my research assistants, Dr. William Valmyr and Dr. Valarie Crumpton and myself will be reading the surveys.

I may request an oral interview with you at a later date to clarify your reflections if necessary. You may choose not to agree to have an oral interview if you are not comfortable with it.

Preliminary Questions:

1) How long has your church been established for? 19 Years

2) How many years have you been pastoring your church? 19 Years

- 4) Describe how you have been doing discipleship in your church. Do you have a structure for raising up leaders? How do you disciple your members/leaders in the knowledge of the Word/ their relationship with God/ spiritual disciplines (e.g. prayer, fasting, reading the Word, service/ personal life? We provide discipleship and training programs for new members as well as those that want to grow and develop as leaders in ministry.

LINKS is our six-week new member orientation class that allows new comers to gain an understanding of who we are and why we do what we do as a ministry organization.

Spiritual Foundations is a ten-week class that allows committed members to move into leadership positions and

SUMMIT is a two-year ministry training program that prepares those who believe they are called of God for ministry or desire to gain more understanding of ministry related subjects.

Survey Proper:

Please be as detailed as possible in answering the survey questionnaire

1) What is the percentage of youths in your church? 20%

2) What is the composition of youths in your community? What percentage is represented in your church?

5%

3) Have you ever been asked by the youths if Christianity is for the Black Man? If so what has been your answer?

No, not directly, but the answer is that Christianity is neither black or white, but about the red blood of Jesus that was shed for the remission of our sins. Its about having and developing a personal relationship with God and living a life to know, pursue and fulfill His will for our lives.

4) What do you know of Christianity beginning in Africa? Not much

5) Do you think educating the youths of their black Christian heritage is relevant to our black youths in the church?

Yes

6) Have you educated your youths of their black heritage in the bible, and if so what has been their response?

We have tried to stay more natural by keeping the focus on Jesus, but we have mentioned the impact of their black heritage from a biblical perspective. I think it was well received and provided necessary insight for future growth.

7) Do you realize that there is a large exodus of black youths out of the church today? In your view what is the reason for the lack of interest in the church?

Yes. The impact of social media and the lack of parental guidance as to the importance of the local church and its relevance in their lives.

8) Do you know where the black youths are?

On their phones and social media sites.

9) What more could you have done to create the awareness and consciousness needed to retain them within the church?

Creating programs of interest and taking opportunities to spend more personal time with them to share life experiences.

10) Do you consider it important to have the youths of your community identify with Christ through their ancestors?

Yes

11) What more can we do as spiritual leaders to inform and engage our black youths in Christianity that is not a white man's religion but a culturally inclusive religion?

Take the time to share the Gospel with them in ways that would interest them and in areas where they may tend to hang out.

Thank you for participating in my study research. I would appreciate if you could indicate below whether you are giving me approval to use your name and church name when referring to your written survey in writing my Dissertation Research and Paper. I will use only pseudo names for you and your church, as mentioned in my invitation/consent letter unless you give approval to use your name and church name.

- ☐ Yes, you have my permission to use my name and my church name.
- ☐ No, you cannot use my name or my church name. Please use pseudo names for my church and I

Signature of Pastor

Name: Darius G. Crayton

Date: 12-01-2021

APPENDIX E:
QUESTIONNAIRE OUTCOME

Professional Stakeholders Questionnaire Outcome:

Participants	Pastor Mo Obayomi	Apostle Amos L. Howard	Pastor Roy E. Carryl	Pastor Darius Crayton	
1. What is the percentage of youths in your church?	% 10	% 10	% 5	% 20	
2. What is the composition of youths to your community? What percentage is represented in your church?	1	1	1	5	
3. Have you ever been asked by the youths if Christianity is the Black Man's Religion? If so, what has been your answer?	No	Yes/ Christ died for all Jn. 3:16	No	No	
4. What do you know of Christianity beginning in Africa	n/a	Very little	n/a	n/a	
5. Do you think educating the youths of their black Christian heritage is relevant to our black youths in the church?	Much	Very little	Little	Not much	
6. Have you educated your youths of their black heritage in the	Controversial	Yes	Yes /very important	Yes	

bible, and if so what has been their response?					
7. Do you realize that there is a large exodus of black youths out of the church today? In your view what is the reason for the lack of interest in the church?	No	Yes /excited	Yes /interested	No /interested	
8. Do you know where the black youths are?	Yes /controversial	Yes /technical	Yes /music, internet	Yes /media, lack of parental oversight	
9. What more could you have done to create the awareness and consciousness needed to retain them within the church?	Yes / college	No	Yes / community	Yes / phone & media	
10. Do you consider it important to have the youths of your community identify with Christ through their ancestors?	Open discussions /opportunities	Hired young adult pastor (lasted 6 months)	Programs	Programs /spend more time	
11. What more can we do as spiritual leaders to inform and engage our black youths in Christianity that is not a white man's religion but a culturally inclusive religion?	No / Decolorize Christianity	Yes	Yes	Yes	

Non-professional's Questionnaire Outcome

Questions	Elizabeth Grayson	Maresa Bullocks	Nigel Zealous	Saretha Anderson
1.Do you attend church regularly?	Yes	Yes	No	No
2.Does your church have a strong millennial presence?	Yes	No	No	No
3.Why are your peers leaving?	They are not leaving	They are bored and do not like church any more	They have more important things to do. The job	I have no idea. They just left one by one
4.What are your views of the Black church and Christianity?	It is exciting especially when your pastor teaches you about being a part of the Christian faith and you can see it	It is ok. Something is missing for many are leaving	The Black church used to be nice but not anymore	I do not know but I guess it is ok

APPENDIX F:
RESEARCH SCHEDULE

Question	Pastor Mo Abayomi	Apostle Amos L. Howard	Pastor Roy E. Howard	Pastor Darius Crayson	Elizabeth Grayson	Nigel Zealous	Maresa Bullows	Saretha Anderson
Call to Discuss Questions Email Doc	10/24/21 10:38 mins	10/24/21 45mins With Secretary 3x	10/24/21 25mins	11/20/21 .35min With Secretary	11/15/21 20mins	11/15/21 25 mins	11/16/21 35mins	11/15/21 20mins
Attended Church after no response	9am-11:40am 2:40 hrs	11/4/21 9-12:30 hrs Veteran Celebration	---	----	----	----	----	----
Received questions	11/19/21	11/7/21	11/23/21	11/27/21	11/25/21	11/26/21	11/23/21	11/25/21
Scheduled Zoom	11/24/21 3:00-4:15pm 1:15 hrs	11/30/21 1:15-1:45pm .30mins	11/27/21 5:30-6:35PM 1:05hrs	11/30/21 4:30-5:38pm 1:08hrs	11/30/21 Telephone 6:30-7:37pm 1:07hrs	11/28/21 Telephone 5-6:40pm	11/26/21 Telephone 7:8pm 1hr	11/28/21 6:30-7:45pm 1:15hrs

						1:4 0hrs		
Video recommended	22 mins	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Text reminders	2	n/a	4	---	---	---	2	---
Phone Calls	---	---	---	---	---	4 1hr	---	---
Total Time	4:5 5hrs	4:4 5hrs	1:30h rs	1:43h rs	1:27hr s	3:0 5hrs	1:15 hrs	1:35h rs

APPENDIX G:

BLACK HISTORY LIBRARY WITHIN THE CHURCH LIBRARY

BLACK HISTORY CORNER



Be Engaged!

Group Leaders
Kindly Schedule
your meetings:
Tue - Fri
4PM-7PM
Sat-Sun
9AM-10AM

New Library Learning Space

COMING SOON!

Renewed Baptist Church Library

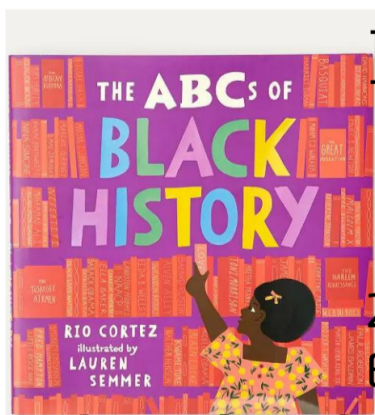
Knowing Your History

CHURCH

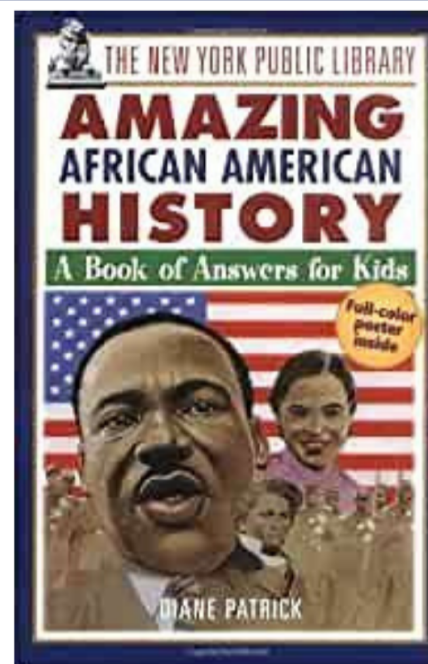
LIBRARY

LIBRARY

Teaching
Our Kids
Their
History

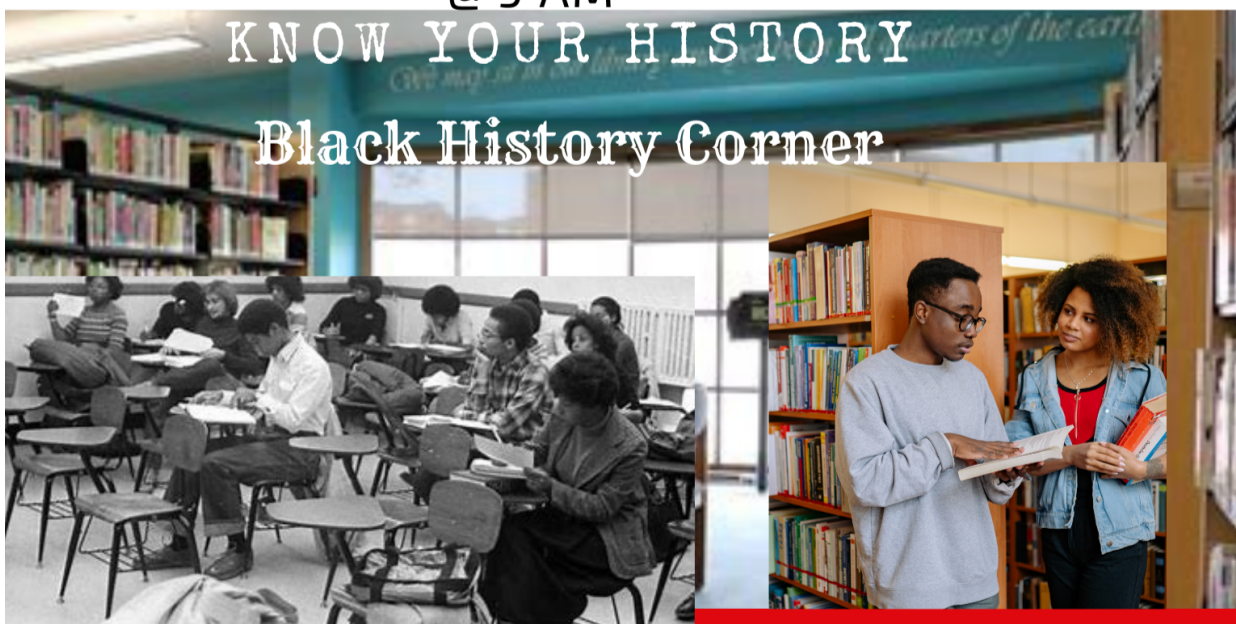


Meeting Time:
2nd Sunday
Each Month
@ 9 AM



KNOW YOUR HISTORY

Black History Corner



Digital Federal Resources

[African American Heritage](#)

This National Park Service site provides links to information about people, places, stories, museum collections, travel and lesson plans.

[The African-American Mosaic](#)

This is a Library of Congress resource guide for the study of black history and culture.

[African American Odyssey](#)

According to *Choice* magazine, this Library of Congress virtual exhibition was designed to "give a comprehensive, rich picture of more than 200 years of African American struggle and achievement."

[Afro-American Genealogical Research](#)

Instructions from the Library of Congress on how to begin Afro-American genealogical research.

[The Daniel A.P. Murray Pamphlet Collection](#)

Full-text manuscripts documenting African American history and culture from the early 19th through the 20th centuries. Includes the Timeline of African American History, 1852-1925. From the Library of Congress.

[NAACP: A Century in the Fight for Freedom](#)

The Library of Congress presents "a retrospective of the major personalities, events, and achievements that shaped the NAACP's TMs history during its first 100 years." Of special interest is the [NAACP Interactive Timeline](#).

[National Museum of African American History](#)

This is the site of the future National Museum of African American History, which is scheduled to be completed in 2015.

[Sources for Images on African American History](#)

A bibliographic reference aid from the Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs Division

APPENDIX H:

AFRICAN CULTURAL MUSIC



There are the instruments, the dance and
the exuberant worship that is culturally Africa.
This is what creates that sense of unity.

African Music

[Benjamin Dube - Yiwo Lawa Amandla - Bing video](#)

[Benjamin Dube feat. Xolani Mdlalose - Uvumile Gospel Praise & Worship Song - Bing video](#)

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