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THE BLACK CHURCH:
A PLACE OF REFUGE – A PLACE OF PRAYER

An Essay Submitted to the
Graduate School of
John Carroll University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
William F. Spencer
2022

If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightening . . . This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be both moral and physical; but there must be a struggle.

Frederick Douglass, 1857
“West India Emancipation” speech
Canandaigua, New York

Consistent with the scholarly literature and the societal norms of the day, the Black Church has actively and historically responded to the momentous challenges presented to and affecting the black communities throughout our nation. These challenges varied depending upon the geographic locations and the social climate of the communities in each of these regions.

Over time, the one consistent factor, among others, that remained the ally of the black community was the Black Church. It evolved over time flexing with the ever evolving society at large. Hence, it has always been a dynamic and vibrant vocal force espousing and embracing equality and equity among all people.

It needs to be said that references made about people of African descent within this essay (e.g., Phyllis Wheatley, a devout Christian and a distinguished member of the Black Church) or events (e.g., COVID 19, where the Black Church reached out to the black community to get vaccinated and provided their church buildings as venues for receiving their shots) throughout this essay are most relevant in as much as they typify the “Social Gospel” aspect of the Black Church specifically and the Church in general through its Christian people and their institution.

It is always amazing how “terms” - ideas propagated by obscure unknown minds seem to inch their way into the historical fabric of our culture and become lodged there, albeit, they are misnomers and far from being the reality that they appear to be.

“Black Church” is one such term. It’s as if all black houses of worship, all black denominations or non-denominations constitute the “Black Church.” Moreover, that they summarily hold to the same doctrine and agenda; have the same goals; express the same vision; serve the same community. In actuality, they do not. They differ greatly in vision, goals, agendas and doctrine. The so-called Black Church is a reflection of the communities and congregations that they serve.

The Black Church situated in urban city environments differ from those located in rural country locales. They serve different socioeconomic levels, divergent political ideologies and separate cultures. Furthermore, as strange as it may seem, there are also divisions within the Black Church that distinguish between color lines, educational attainments and economic status.

This essay will briefly discuss the history of the Black Church; the Great Awakening; the Social Gospel; the Black Theology; the Black Liberation Theology; the Invisible Church; and the Black Church’s impact on the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950’s and ‘60s. This is to demonstrate that the Black Church is not a static institution but rather a dynamic and ever evolving entity.

This discussion will remind the reader that these events and activities were not born in, but grew and matured from the 18th century to the mid - 20th century culture, atmosphere and mindset not so reflected or experienced here in the early years of the 21st century.

There is a chronological, logical and practical progression of historical events which constitute the growth and development of the Black Church. An example is the Social Gospel Movement that embraced solving social problems such as poverty, economic

inequality, child labor, crime, social justice and racism within the framework of applying Christian principles and social morals. Although this Movement gave credibility to the Black Church's position in helping to solve these issues, it was only one of a number of pieces necessary to forge a fabric of humanistic values necessary for the growth of a truly civilized and peaceful society.

HISTORY

The Black Church has its roots in the soil of 18th century America and that soil was a mineral mixture of slavery, racism, racial segregation, racial superiority and other deprivations. Being robbed of their God-given freedoms, black slaves had no choice but to become spiritual beings; believers in a Jesus God; a Savior and Redeemer; the One who would proclaim liberty to the captives and good news to the oppressed.¹ It was in this atmosphere that African slaves heard about the "good news" and that "Jesus" person, that they began to converge onto the Church, into the "White Church"; ever so slowly; ever so steadily; ever so faithfully! They were relegated to the inferior positions within the Church building – the back of the Church or to its overhead balcony. There were instances when slaves who were gathered together in prayer were whipped because it was believed that they were praying against their masters. Actually, they were praying for their most longed for prize: Freedom. They may have prayed, "O Lord, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of

¹ Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18.

trouble..."²

The significance of being the first Black Church is manifold. It constituted the initial institution founded, organized, operated and sustained by and for emancipated slaves as well as free born Africans. It was a place where black people could go for assistance in obtaining the necessities in life: food, clothing, shelter and solace not available for blacks. There are several claims of being the first Black Church in North America having been established and organized in 1773. Obviously, at this period in history, there was no United States of America. Located in Savannah, Georgia, the First African Baptist Church, although not organized until 1788, began as a church congregation in 1773. George Liele was the emancipated slave who became the founding pastor of the First African Baptist Church and the First Bryan Baptist Church both in Savannah, Georgia. Liele also became the first American missionary to Jamaica in 1782. The Silver Bluff Baptist Church of Aiken county, South Carolina³ was founded in 1750 at Beech Island, South Carolina and the First Baptist Church in Petersburg, Virginia officially organized in 1774.⁴

C. Eric Lincoln annunciated the "seven major historic black denominations: the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME); the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ); the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME); the National Baptist Convention, USA, Incorporated (NBC); The National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA); the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC)," as comprising "The Black Church."⁵

² Jeremiah 16:19.

³ Albert J. Raboteau (2004). *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. Oxford University Press. Pp. 139. Retrieved 28 May 2013.

⁴ Ibid. pp. 139, 141, 189.

⁵ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya (1990). *The Black Church in the African American Experience*.

Kevin P. Shanahan of the University of Toronto's Centre for the Study of Religion when reviewing *The Black Church in the African American Experience* in the journal *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* commented on the "dialectical model." Shanahan proposes that the dialectical model, while not original are very important theoretical continua, and may be described as central to many theorists. The six pairs of dialectical polarities named as polar opposites are "priestly versus prophetic," "other-worldly versus this-worldly," "universalism versus particularism," "communal versus privatistic," "charismatic versus bureaucratic" and "resistance versus accommodation."

As I ponder Shanahan's review and analysis of Lincoln's book, it is remarkable that he has reduced the Black Church in the African American Experience to six dialectical models. Why, the title alone, for anyone familiar with the history of relocated Africans from the continent to North America (particularly the United States) for the sole purpose of forced servitude (slavery), does not require an academic or scholarly approach to the subject. The Black Church was born out of the sheer necessity for the physical and mental survival of a people who were strangers in a strange land; whose language they did not know, but the language of the whip they well understood! The words of the Church were the words of hope, solace and the binding of the "other-worldly" to "this-worldly!" The binding of their former religion to that of a new one; hence, the "Hallelujahs" and the "Amens" during Church services, remnants of their distant past African religions that are with us today; and, misunderstood by many Christians who practice Christianity here in more than a few of our Christian denominations.

Heretofore, the Christian Church or the Church as an institution as we know it, was of European origin; essentially Caucasian, not Negroid. Hence, the Black Church was formed

as an institution by peoples from a land who practiced a religion unfamiliar with the practices of Christian religiosity as practiced in their new home. As a consequence, a new member of the body of Christ was born; an essential member; a called member; a “come and see” member; a prophesied member. “And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one Shepherd.”⁶

As the first institution created by and for African Americans, the Black Church has been considered ‘the social centre of Negro life in the United States’ and a ‘refuge in a hostile world.’ The role of the Black Church as understood by scholars has not been without contention. Some have denounced the Black Church for upholding the status quo of race, class, and gender oppression, while others have characterized the Black Church as liberatory and providing African Americans with the spiritual and social tools to challenge oppression.⁷

Here I must interject my personal experience having been brought up in a Black congregation which was not a member of the aforementioned “seven Black Church denominations.” That it was a Protestant Episcopal Church which is a member of the Anglican Communion, certainly of European English ancestry, did not then and does not now separate itself from the racial tensions experienced by the then Negroes and the now African Americans. There have been great strides in the social fabric of our nation but even with the greater strides that have gone before us, the Black Church has remained an integral source of that dynamic energy. The point is that this congregation as well as other black congregations not members of the ‘original’ Black Churches were in agreement on matters relating to social and political issues of the day as they effected African Americans.

The Black Church had its frail beginnings in the South during the slavery and reconstruction eras which was primarily Baptist in Christian denominational terms. The National Baptist Convention was organized by Blacks in 1886 and later by the uniting of

⁶ John 10;16.

⁷ Kendra Barber, *Whither Shall We Go? The Past and Present of Black Churches and the Public Sphere*, Religions, 6, 245-265, 2015.

various Baptist associations, the National Baptist Convention of America was formed constituting some 3 million African American members.⁸

The Black Church congregations joined together to form denominations in response to the racism experienced in the mostly White Church denominations that African Americans attended. Further, Black Churches formed denominations from congregations which had like beliefs in religious dogma and in socioeconomic goals, ideas and aspirations. This was a time (18th and 19th centuries) when the Free African Society was founded and established in 1787 under the leadership of Absalom Jones and Richard Allen who became friends for life. They organized the Free African Society as a social, political and humanitarian organization helping widows and orphans and assisted the sick and those left with the burden of funeral expenses. They were also lay preachers at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They were very successful in their preaching the gospel, increasing the Church's congregation ten-fold.⁹ The Free African Society fostered identity, unity and leadership for and among Blacks and became the prototype of the first African American churches in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia was a city that was a growing center for free Blacks attracted to its employment opportunities as well as other liberties not enjoyed by other Blacks in other geographical regions of the country.

In the early 19th century, Black Churches provided for the needs of the soul while also ministering to the more temporal nonreligious activities of African Americans in their everyday lives. As a consequence, the Black Church became the focal point of Black social life considering the limited accommodations and availability of meeting places being afforded to African Americans due to racial segregation. This racial segregation was not exclusively relegated to the South but was also the order of the day in many regions of the

⁸ African American Registry, (1758). *"The Black Church," a brief history*. The Center for African American Ministries And Black Church Studies, Chicago. Retrieved 24 Jun 2019.

⁹ The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas. aecst.org. <https://www.aecst.org/ajones.htm>.

North; hence, the Black Church filled the void by providing a religious as well as a social venue for Blacks to meet for various communal reasons. The Black clergy also provided for the social, economic, political and spiritual leadership so necessary for the well-being of the citizens in the Black community.

Absalom Jones, a former slave and lay preacher suffered expanding discrimination within the congregation of his home church, St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, Philadelphia. Among other discriminatory practices, he and other African Americans were consigned to the Church's balcony. The entire group of Black members decided to walk out never to return. This incident started the beginning of the separate and independent Black Church movement. As a direct outgrowth of the Free African Society, the African Church was planted, germinated and began to grow and expand. A new home was completed and the Church building was dedicated in July 1794. Members met to decide whether to affiliate themselves with the Methodist Church or the Church of England. Because of their treatment in the Methodist Church, the majority voted in favor of the Church of England.

Richard Allen, a former slave, lay preacher and friend of Absalom Jones also belonged to the majority White Methodist Church, St. George and suffered many racial injustices there as well. As a consequence, believing that Methodism was more appropriate for the Black congregation, members withdrew from the African Church and founded the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and Richard Allen became its first bishop.

The group of Blacks who decided to start their own congregation within the Episcopal Church had Absalom Jones, the first Black man to be ordained a priest (1802) in the Episcopal Church and to be that congregation's (St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, which still exists today) first priest. This is significant because the inclusion of a parish of black congregants suggests that the Protestant Episcopal Church was open to the ideas, needs and sensitivities of their newest members. This was an obvious shift in

theological perspective and the social application of that perspective with the inclusion of this newest parish. I sense that Absalom Jones felt a great sense of achievement in having the Anglican Church accept this 'would-be' parish of blacks to join the ranks of other parishes within the diocese and his ordination as their priest a most significant point of acceptance in the Church's polity. This action set an example for our society and other churches within that society to aspire and to follow.

The movement which precipitated a social consciousness that elevated the societal moral standards and expectations of the day was the Great Awakening. This Great Awakening presented itself in four phases: First Awakening (1730-1775); Second Awakening (1790-1840); Third Awakening (1855-930); Fourth Awakening (1960-1980). These Great Awakenings were the catalysts, in part, that brought about the Women's Movement, the Temperance Movement, the Abolitionist Movement and more importantly, fomented the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and '60's. It should be noted that it was the Second Great Awakening which was instrumental in making significant increases in the African-American participation in Christianity. Hence, this participation had a positive impact on the building and expansion of the Black Church.¹⁰

The Age of Reason or the Enlightenment (1715-1789) first occurred in Europe and eventually found its way across the Atlantic to our shores here in the United States. The ideas of the Enlightenment captured the thinking minds of educators, philosophers and scientists of the day. These thinkers, during this new Age of Reason, began to pay less attention to superstitions, religious ideals and unproven ideas; instead, they turned their attention and focus to more verifiable certitudes. This refocusing was the force that propelled evangelists, ministers and other zealous "social gospellers" into another age called the Great Awakening. This Great Awakening was a spiritual revival – a spiritual attention and focus to more verifiable certitudes. This refocusing was the force that

¹⁰ushistory.org/us/22c.asp

propelled evangelists, ministers and other zealous “social gospellers” into another age called the Great Awakening. This Great Awakening was a spiritual revival – a spiritual renewal that spread throughout the thirteen colonies. This revival which was heralded in by the Awakening allowed individuals to outwardly convey their sentiments, beckoning them to come and be closer to God. This closeness caused by the Awakening had a positive impact on the success, growth and acceptance of the Black Church in a White controlled society. So, during these revival meetings, Blacks and Whites praised and worshipped the Lord together. This certainly made sense since the working of the Holy Spirit breaks down all roadblocks, barricades and impediments of cultural and racial differences. But as we know, when economic factors enter into the landscape, a not so ‘blind-eye’ is turned away

from moral and ethical considerations such as occurred in the antebellum South with its economy based on agriculture and where cotton was “King.”

Enter George Whitefield, a Church of England minister, evangelist and, as described in the literature, “...a fiery and vibrant orator commanding the complete attention of crowds and audiences numbering in the thousands” who would come from many miles away to hear him preach.¹¹ Whitefield had a major impact on the Black population during these colonial times, so much so that a young 17 years old Black girl named Phyllis Wheatley, who would later become the first published Black poet, wrote a poem honoring George Whitefield after his death. Why mention Phyllis Wheatley? Because she was an inspiration to all members of the African-American community, especially Black women who were and remain the backbone of the Black family and the Black Church. Here is an excerpt of that poem.

¹¹ Eddie Hyatt. “The Surprising Link Between African-Americans and the Great Awakening.” *Charisma News*. February 6, 2018.

“Thou didst in strains of eloquence refined,
Inflame the heart and captivate the mind.
The greatest gift that even God can give,
He freely offered to the numerous throng.
Take him, ye Africans, he longs for you,
Impartial Savior is his title due.”¹²

The idea that George Whitefield and Phyllis Wheatley are out of place chronologically or otherwise in this essay is far from the truth. These two personages are integral precursors and necessary elements of what would become the Black Church. Here we have a 17 years old female slave who was afforded the extraordinary opportunity to be educated not only in the rudiments of reading and writing the English language but also acquired fluency in Latin and Greek so to study the classics as well. Phyllis was also an avid Bible reader and as such a forerunner member of the Black Church.

George Whitefield had an even greater impact on the social mores and the moral conduct of people living in the northern colonies in particular; consequently, there was far less institutional racism exhibited in the North versus the South; hence, one of the major reasons for the “The Great Migration.”¹³

THE BLACK SOCIAL GOSPEL

“The roots of the social gospel movement extend back to the years following the Civil War when the nation began to feel the first effects of industrialization, and progressive

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Preston H. Smith. “Exploring the Great Migration.” <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/media/exploring-great-migration>. Mount Holyoke College, February 13, 2019.

Protestants began challenging the conservative Christianity of the era. Theologians Horace Bushnell, Henry Ward Beecher, Washington Gladden, Walter Rauschenbusch and others ...were early proponents of the social gospel who promoted the brotherhood of man and the application of ethical standards of behavior to all social relationships and institutions.”¹⁴

The Social gospel and the Progressive Era are as linked together as the colors on a barber’s pole – inseparable! It was during the Progressive Era (1890’s – 1920’s) which ushered in social activism and political reform all across the United States. And, with all this reform and activism enters the Social Gospel Movement inaugurated by Protestantism that applied Christian ethics to the ever prevailing social problems of the day. A few of those problems included the non-existence of child labor laws, the long work week, a poor living wage; political, economic and racial inequality in housing, public education and at the public square.

Let’s remember that the United States experienced a great wave of European immigration between the 1880’s and the 1920’s. These immigrants came to America seeking a better way of life. This “better way of life” was made possible through the greater economic opportunities available due to the industrial revolution occurring during this period. The mines, mills, foundries, factories manufacturing plants were hungry for workers. It must be remembered that this influx of European workers had a negative impact on the African American workers’ wages (paid less) for those already employed and a possibility of not getting a job because of White applicants taking precedent over the then Negro applicants. So the derivatives of these mills and factories (restaurants, food markets, shops, laundries, clothing stores, to name just a few) were born and thrived in a rapidly growing American economy. Any factor which negatively impacts the economic growth and well-being of a community or a people will effectively retard the

¹⁴ Cornelius C. Bynum, “An Equal Chance in the Race for Life: Reverdy C. Ransom, Socialism, and Social Gospel Movement, 1890-1920.”, *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 93, No. 1 (2008): 1-20.

development of that community or people which includes the Black Church.

“Though the black social gospel grew out of the abolitionist tradition, it responded to new challenges in a new era of American history: the abandonment of Reconstruction, the evisceration of constitutional rights, an upsurge of racial lynching and Jim Crow abuse, struggles for mere survival in every part of the nation, and the excruciating question of what a new abolition would require. The black social gospel arose from churches where preaching about the cross was not optional, because black Americans experienced it every day as a persecuted, crucified people. Here, the belief in a divine ground of human selfhood powered struggles for black self-determination and campaigns of resistance to white oppression.”¹⁵

The Niagara Movement was the essential pillar which inaugurated and established the modern Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and '60's. W.E.B. DuBois initiated a “Call” of a selected group of twenty-nine men who were business owners, teachers, and clergy who met at the Erie Beach Hotel in Ontario, Canada in July 1905. The purpose of the meeting was to outline the future for the African American Negro; calling for an end to segregation, economic inequalities and the unfettered opportunity to vote as prescribed in the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution. Moreover, the Niagara Movement was for the benefit of all Americans guaranteeing them full political, civil and social rights. It should be noted that the Movement members attempted to obtain lodging accommodations on the American side of the Falls but were refused because of their color; consequently, the members migrated to the Canadian side of the Falls where they were welcomed and received lodging accommodations. The meeting lasted from July 11th through the 14th during which a constitution and a list of bylaws were written and a Declaration of Principles were laid out. The second conference of the Niagara Movement was held at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia during the summer of 1906. The Niagara Movement was the precursor of the establishment of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) which was founded in 1909 in New York. Among its founders

¹⁵ Bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/recovering-the-black-social-gospel/

were W.E.B. DuBois, Ida B. Wells and Mary White Ovington.¹⁶ Even though the Black Church was socially engaged to the extent possible during this period, it must be remembered that most movements by black organizations had the Black Church as its foundation. This turned out to be a symbiotic relationship. Each leaning on the other for spiritual, moral, physical and emotional support. This was certainly true of the Civil Rights Movement which heavily relied upon the auspices of the Black Church.¹⁷

A portion of the Declaration of Principles is as follows:

“The Church: Especially are we surprised and astonished at the recent attitude of the Church of Christ – of an increase of a desire to bow to racial prejudice, to narrow the bounds of human brotherhood, and to segregate Black men to some other sanctuary. This is wrong, unchristian and disgraceful to the twentieth century civilization.”¹⁸

In an address to the country issued at the second conference from Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia was the following blistering remark:

“Never before in the modern age has a great and civilized folk threatened to adopt so cowardly a creed in the treatment of its fellow – citizens born and bred on its soil. Stripped of verbiage and subterfuge and in its nastiness the new American creed says fear to let Black men even try to rise lest they become the equal of the White. And this is the land that pro-fesses to follow Jesus Christ. The blasphemy of such course is only matched by its coward-dice.”¹⁹

A development which occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century involving the Protestant churches linking the lively words of Jesus with the social issues of the day was the Social Gospel Movement. Economic inequalities, alcoholism, child labor, crime, danger of war, racial disparities, inadequate housing, poor schools, poverty and an unclean environment were just some of the major social problems. As a consequence, Protestant Christians decided to improve the dire state of affairs in which working class

¹⁶ www.history.com/topics/black-history/niagara-movement

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ www.math.buffalo.edu/sww/Ohistory/hwny-niagara-movement.html

¹⁹ Ibid.

Americans were mired by applying Christian principles to everyday social enigmas. It must be remembered and kept in mind that the plight of the African American during this period in American history was racially charged. So whatever inequalities being experienced by the White majority of the population was felt ‘times worse’ for the Negro of the day in all aspects of daily living! Therefore, it was during the first ten years of the twentieth century that the message of the Social Gospel began to be positively received by church goers. Industrialism which created dislocations and as such, industrial injuries, inequality and poverty were on the increase adding to the reasons why the Social Gospel message made logical sense to Christians and non-Christians as well.²⁰

In short, Rauschenbusch believed that religion’s main goal was to create the highest quality of life for all the people; equality and justice both necessary ingredients for the growth and development of the Black Church. He helped to provide the inspiration, the atmosphere and the platform as a backdrop for the Church generally and the Black Church specifically.

The Black Social Gospel Movement was founded in the Social Gospel Reform Movement in the United States from 1870 through the Progressive Era (1890 – 1920). The Black Social Gospel Movement took Christian principles and applied them to the social problems unique to African Americans of the day. Some of the more pronounced social problems included racial inequality in the criminal justice system, in affordable housing, in affordable healthcare, in public education, in the workplace, in the public square and at the ballot box. In short, the Black Social Gospel Movement emerged from among the Black Christian Churches to improve the moral, economic and social plights of African Americans living in the United States. These problems were well known to those citizens living within and without the Black communities. Moreover, these unacceptable social conditions were articulated by church and civic leadership to the civil and governmental authorities.

²⁰ [Brookings.edu/articles/not-by-bread-alone-the-role-of-the-african-american-church-in-inner-city-development/](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/not-by-bread-alone-the-role-of-the-african-american-church-in-inner-city-development/)

Leadership within many of the Black Churches fomented such an outcry of “foul” that more people both Black and White joined the chorus of unrelenting wailing voices producing the music of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the lyrics of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Even though not all Black Churches were the catalyst causing this outcry of wailing voices; nonetheless, all were beneficiaries of the outcry’s results!

So, it has been primarily the Black Church which was the impetus, the overwhelming driving force that provided the energy and momentum necessary for the wheels of social activism to advance; hence, the social gospel was of a great value to the Black community and to the community at large. It has been asked from various quarters, why social activism? The answer is simple. It is quite evident that Jesus wanted us – the people – to do something; that something was to be found in the ‘good news’ which He proclaimed. That something was the Church’s mandate to be actively involved to the social benefit of all humanity – both the temporal and the spiritual aspects of the body and the soul.²¹

“My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior; you save me from violence.”²²

Washington Gladden was a prominent American pastor of a Congregational Christian Church. He was an early leader in the Social Gospel Movement and a member of the Progressive Movement. William James, the philosopher saw progressives as pragmatic and therefore subject to Darwinian principles of natural selection and survival. Those designs that proved useful and could work survived and those that did not failed. So pragmatism concerned itself not whether “it was true” but rather “does it work?”²³ Therefore, Gladden became an advocate of the rights of African Americans and helped to bring about the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In spite of the fact that the Social Gospel Movement will be associated

²¹ St. Matthew 28:19-20.

²² 2 Samuel 22:3.

²³ Francis J. Sicius. *The Progressive Era A Reference Guide*. ABC-CLIO, LLC. 2015.

with the answer to the quick rise of industrial growth in the waning years of the 19th century, it must be remembered that many supporters of the Social Gospel were also anxious about the rights of African Americans and the overall race relations in the United States; hence, it wasn't easy to preach about the tenets of the Social Gospel – justice, poverty, crime, racial tensions, economic inequality, substandard public schools, weak labor unions and child labor. Notice that I made no mention of health care! None of the aforementioned 'tenets' of the Social Gospel matter if one's healthcare is in peril! I can't help but to think of the racial disparity and the deleterious effect in healthcare has had on people of color and cultural differences during the Cov 19 pandemic! The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had this to say about health equity: "Many factors, such as poverty and healthcare access, are intertwined and have a significant influence on the people's health and quality-of- life. Racial and ethnic minority populations are disproportionately represented among essential workers and industries, which might be contributing to COVID-19 racial and ethnic health disparities. "Essential workers" are those who conduct a range of operations and services in industries that are essential to ensure the continuity of critical functions in the United States, from keeping us safe, to ensuring food is available at markets, to taking care of the sick. A majority of these workers belong to and live within communities disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Essential workers are inherently at higher risk of being exposed to COVID-19 due to the nature of their work, and they are disproportionately representative of racial and ethnic minority groups. Some of the many inequities in the social determinants of health that put racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19 include: discrimination; healthcare access and use; occupation; educational, income, and wealth gaps; housing. These factors and others are associated with more COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths in areas where racial and ethnic minority groups live, learn, work, play, and worship. They have also contributed to higher rates of some medical conditions that increase one's risk of severe illness from COVID-19. In addition, community

strategies to slow the spread of COVID-19 might cause unintentional harm, such as lost wages, reduced access to services, and increased stress, for some racial and ethnic minority groups. We have to work together to ensure that people have resources to maintain and manage their physical and mental health in ways that fit the communities where people live, learn, work, play, and worship.”²⁴ As there was no ‘righteous indignation’ nationally concerning the failure of Reconstruction after the Civil War, I have not witnessed any ‘righteous indignation’ nationally while we are in the midst of this horrid Delta wave of COVID-19 pandemic! All of the factors mentioned by the CDC and more were and are problems facing the Black Church of today. Then as now, White Americans were either unwilling or unable to cope with the new cultural terrain and social changes brought about at the end of slavery; id est, the Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863, the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution of the United States of America, 1865, 1868 and 1870, respectively. Moreover, the last thirty (30) years of the 19th century, the emergence of political science, economics and sociology was the order of the day in American universities brought on by the impact of the Social Gospel.²⁵ Hence, the Social Gospel Movement as well as the Black Church were compelled to address substandard human conditions then (18th century) as well as now (21st century).

BLACK LIBERATION THEOLOGY

There has been much debate between anthropologists, sociologists, and other members of the social sciences as to the nature and interpretation of African American

²⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. COVID-19. *Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups*. Updated Apr. 19, 2021.

²⁵ Bradley W. Bateman. “The Social Gospel and the Progressive Era.” Divining America, Teacher Serv©. National Humanities Center. Bateman, Bradley W. *The Social Gospel and the Progressive Era*. Divining America, TeacherServ©. National Humanities Center.

religion. There are those who have asserted that “peoples of African descent were naturally religious, meaning that their religion was a product of biology and nature rather than of the ‘supernatural.’” There were those White interpreters who suggested that since Blacks were naturally religious and, so being, were unable to contribute to the overall cultural vitality of the nation.²⁶ In response, Black interpreters claimed that Black religion changed in reply to the social, economic and political circumstances of the times. Among the distinctive characteristics of Black religion are cultural creativity and a religious meaning to living the life as an African American in the United States.

Black theology reflects on the study of the nature of God and religious truth in the context of the general Black American experience. One of the reasons Black theology developed in some form or another was racial discrimination and Black American’s reaction to it.

A tradition, and like any other, must be examined against Scripture. Slave owners who were hesitant to evangelize their slaves thought if slaves became saved, owners would have to set them free. Others didn’t want to spend the time it would take to instruct slaves in the faith which they believed was necessary for baptism. Further, others thought that Africans were too bestial and, therefore, incapable of instruction.²⁷

Slavery-era Christians in the North tended to be orthodox in their beliefs, influenced by the Puritans. Blacks in the South developed a distinct theological tradition. In the doctrines of general and special revelation, for example, slaves emphasized “subjective and immediate experience,” and believed God reveals Himself through visions, voices, and signs, as opposed to the orthodox view that God reveals Himself in nature, the conscience, and Scripture. Christianity among Blacks began to grow, thanks to the “unfettered zeal” of White Baptists and Methodists. Revival movements in the years after the Civil War

²⁶ Curtis J. Evans. “Urbanization and the End of Black Churches in the Modern World.” *American Society of Church History* Vol. 76, No. 4 (2007): 799-802.

²⁷ La Shawn Barbara. “What’s Wrong with Black Theology.” *Christian Research Journal* 33, No. 2 (2010). Accessed July 20, 2019.

resulted in the growth of Christianity among Blacks. Biblical justifications for slavery, segregated seating and second-class treatment in White Churches, and the desire for self-determination are several reasons Blacks began to form their own churches. Black Christians, enslaved or free, were in a unique position that in some senses paralleled that of Israelites enslaved in Egypt. Just as God freed His chosen people from Pharaoh, He would free Blacks in America from slavery and oppression. Christ was viewed not only as Savior, but also as Deliverer and Liberator. So, for the gospel to be relevant to Blacks, it must emphasize liberation of the poor and oppressed, as Christ was liberator of the oppressed. Black Christians in America were shaped by their experiences as slaves and subjects of legal segregation. The hypocrisy they perceived among White Christians, along with slow justice and feelings of powerlessness, took a physical and mental toll. Imagining a just God who looked like them and cared about their plight helped them make sense of the world.²⁸

There is no Black or White gospel, but as it is written in Saint Paul's epistle to the Galatians 3:26-29: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abrahams's seed, and heirs according to the promise."²⁹

James Cone, the outspoken radical Black theologian, strongly urged African American college students not to abandon Christianity believing it to be the White man's religion and the opiate of the people. As a consequence, unusual heavy demands were placed on the Black Church by Black leaders to address the special problems affecting Black society in America. "The rediscovery of the end of Black religion by reinterpreting its function and meaning for the contemporary generation was a progressive product of acculturation and

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Galatians 3:26-29.

assimilation.”³⁰

W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in his book titled The Souls of Black Folk the following paradoxical statement:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness,
this sense of always looking at one’s self through the
eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of
a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.
One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro: two
warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength
alone keeps it from being torn asunder.³¹

The root of Black religious thought is found in five (5) topic areas: justice, liberation, hope, love and suffering. No topic stands out alone as much as does the topic of justice – the justice of God’s righteous almighty hand! God’s justice is all pervasive and omnipresent. And, the African slaves readily rose to believe that their understanding of God’s word of justice was meant for them and others in the same plight of distress.³²

The major reason for the differences between Black and White reflections on God is found at the point of the great differences in life. As White theology is largely defined by its response to modern and post – modern societies of Europe and America, usually ignoring the contradictions of slavery and oppression in Black life, Black religious thought is the thinking of slaves and of marginalized Blacks whose understanding of God was shaped by the contradictions that White theologians ignored and regarded as unworthy of serious theological reflection.³³

It is clearly evident that viewing the justice of God through two different sets of lenses

³⁰ Curtis J. Evans. “Urbanization and the End of Black Churches in the Modern World.” *Church History*, 76, No. 4(2007):802-803.

³¹ W.E.B. DuBois. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Premier Book, 1968.

³² James H. Cone. “Black Theology in American Religion.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.” Vol. 53, No. 4 (December 1985). 755-71.

³³ Ibid.

provide two distinct portraits of what that justice looks like. Same God but two theological renditions when viewed through the eyes of two separate racial groups; or, through two separate social strata – slave and master!

Black liberation theology has the African American poor, disenfranchised, those who remain in bondage, unjustly treated in the criminal justice system, economic system, political system, healthcare system and the religious institutions as its focal point. So again, it is the Black Church that was and is now available to assist and relieve those weary Black souls who wander through its gates for refuge and succor; for relief from the "System of systems" all designed with the goal to keep those Black souls down, back and decisively irrelevant! However, we see today that it is more than just the Black souls that are of concern, major concern! It's those "Brown souls" wandering through other gates, not forcibly brought in bound with chains, but in as a mighty tempest which no man can stop seeking refuge and peace! The whole idea is for Black liberation theology to make Christianity an actual reality for African Americans and others, not just a philosophical ideology! It attempts to focus Christianity in the present and not in the hopeful life of the hereafter.

Now the Rev. Dr. James Cone, founder of Black Liberation Theology explained that this theology has its roots in the Civil Rights Movement of the 60's inspired by Malcolm X and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. He stated that this Black liberation as a theology that visualizes God as being concerned with the poor and the weak. "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble."³⁴ He further stated that, "The core of Black liberation theology is an effort – in a White – dominated society, in which Black has been defined as evil – to make the gospel relevant to the life and struggles of American Blacks and to help Black people learn to love themselves. It's an attempt to teach people how to be both unapologetically Black and Christian at the same time."³⁵

³⁴ Psalm 9:9.

³⁵ <https://www.npr.org/templates/story.php?storyId+89236116>

THE INVISIBLE CHURCH

“In the season of slavery, historians defined the Black Church as the ‘invisible institution.’ The name was given because Blacks assembled to worship under a shroud of secrecy because such gatherings were outlawed by those who had the mind to know if a slave had a filled spirit, it would be a matter of time before he/she came into a sense of self. To clear their conscience of reducing African Americans to three-fifth of a human being, our enslavers had to claim we didn’t have a soul. But, the unquenchable passion of our fore parents to feel close to God sparked an innovative flame that produced sanctuaries in swamps, chapels in cotton fields and temples under trees far beyond earshot of their oppressors.”³⁶

The trauma of being officially defined by the U. S. Constitution as ‘three-fifths’ human and treated in terms of that understanding, the struggle of the African American people to affirm and establish their humanity and their worth as persons has a long history. The Black Christians who formed the historic Black Churches also knew implicitly that their understanding of Christianity, which was premised on the rock of antiracial discrimination was more authentic than the Christianity practiced in White Churches.

Depending upon the time and the context, the implications of freedom were derived from the nature of the exigency. During slavery it meant release from bondage; after emancipation it meant the right to be educated, to be employed earning a living wage, and to move about freely from place to place. In the twenty-first century freedom means social, political and economic justice. “For African Americans, freedom has always been communal in nature. In Africa, the destiny of the individual was linked to that of the tribe

³⁶ Jamal Bryant. The Black Media Authority. *The Invisible Institution*. April 5, 2011. <https://www.afro.com/the-invisible-institution/>

Note: The Rev. Jamal Bryant is pastor of Baltimore, Maryland’s Empowerment Temple.

of the community in an intensely interconnected security. But Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's jubilant cry of, "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last", echoed the understanding Black folk always had with the Almighty God whose impatience with un-freedom matched their own. In song, word and deed, freedom has always been the superlative value of Black sacred cosmos. The message of the Invisible Church, however articulated, was God wants you free.³⁷ The Lordship of Jesus is the key to membership in that Invisible Church."

One of the few stable institutions to appear from slavery was the Black Church. Even though slaves worshipped with their masters and under their master's control, these slaves also held their own secret separate worship services in the backwoods and bayous of plantations and sometimes in their own slave quarters, a phenomenon which the African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier called the "invisible institution."³⁸

"Through racial uplift programs the Black assimilating elite reached out to economically oppressed Blacks with resources while enforcing mainstream white Victorian values on them. To the progressive Black elite, assimilation was the answer to racism. They believed that assimilation would prove their humanity and worth to the mainstream society. Thus, many in the once invisible institution came out into the American mainstream to prove Black humanity to a larger society that had historically refused to acknowledge even this basic reality. In this context, the term progressive refers to those in Black communities who ascribed to the ideas of assimilation into the mainstream White Victorian model of culture and spiritually as a means of racial uplift. Racial uplift projects offered material support such as food and shelter for poor Black immigrants while demanding adherence to strict religious rules of conduct. These rules of conduct reflected the Victorian values of White Protestant America that many progressive Blacks wished to

³⁷ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1990.

³⁸ E. Franklin Frazier. 1894-1962, *The Negro Church in America*. New York: Schocken Books, 1964.

emulate.”³⁹

THE BLACK CHURCH AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The Black Church had a significant role to play in the Civil Rights Movement of the 50's and 60's. Segregation was a major thread woven into the national fabric of both the North and the South. As a consequence, the social acceptance and social mobility of African Americans was sorely limited when it came to having a place to meet or to assemble for any number of reasons. Even though the United States Supreme Court decreed that the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution concerning equal protection was not violated but was guaranteed as long as accommodations and services provided both to the White and Black races were equal. The Supreme Court overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine of the Plessy v. Ferguson court case of 1896 and supplanted it with the Brown v. Board of Education court case of 1954 which in part said that it was unconstitutional for any State to make any law establishing racial segregation.

The idea that all Black Churches were involved in social activism was an untrue notion propagated by the news media. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, the Reverends Ralph Abernathy and Adam Clayton Powell were made to be the national leaders and heroes from the Black Church to be involved with the Civil Rights Movement. In fact, not all Black Church denominations actively participated even though they, for the most part, agreed with the tenets of the Movement and were recipients of the Movement's positive outcomes. Therefore, the Black Church became the focal point for African Americans to congregate for conducting business whether it be for economic, educational, political, or religious endeavors.

³⁹ Sakina Hughes. “In the shadows of the invisible institution: Southern Black folk religion and the Great Migrations” (2005). *Senior Honors Theses & Projects*. 101.
<https://commons.emich.edu/honors/101>

Dr. Manning Marabel, Columbia University, professor of political science, history, public affairs and African American studies had this to say about the Civil Rights Movement of the 50's, in part.

“To understand the role of the Black Church during the Civil Rights Movement in the 50's, you need to go back about a century. During slavery the only institution that the White racists, the slaveholders, would permit people of African descent to have as their own was the Church because the Church was the only place where Blacks could congregate together in prayer, but they also used that site of faith as a place of gathering resistance, of plotting rebellion and after the Civil War was over, the Church became the only institution where you had a leadership caste, usually of Black men, who could authentically represent the interests of the Black community because their salaries were paid for by Black folk. Thus, the Black Church in the 1940's and 50's was an institution that had resources, it had a leadership elite of Black ministers, and it had the institutional ability to help fund long-term protests that were being waged by working class and low-income people. The Black Church provided the institutional means for carrying out the campaigns that were waged in the small towns, but at the same time, as a historian it must be noted, that the majority of Black Churches in major cities did not engage in civil disobedience or in the campaigns led by Dr. King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Congress of Racial Equality. Most Black ministers stood on the sidelines.”⁴⁰

“The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) served as the decentralized political arm of the Black Church. The SCLC's mandate was to coordinate nonviolent direct action activities through churches in various locations and its initial leadership was made up of ministers who led many of the largest nonviolent actions in Montgomery, Tallahassee, New Orleans, Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Birmingham and Nashville.

Black Churches have worked with student dominated groups like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) to organize demonstrations like the 1960 Nashville sit-in which produced very accomplished mass- movement organizers who would go on to become leaders of those organizations.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ “The role of the African American Church in the Civil Rights Movement” *NBC Learn*, New York, NY: NBC Universal, 02/04/2008. Accessed Sat Jul 18, 2015 from NBC Learn: <https://archives.nbclearn.com/portal/site/k-12/browse/?cuecard=5041>

⁴¹ Allison Calhoun-Brown. *Upon This Rock: The Black Church, Nonviolence, and the Civil Rights Movement.*” P.S. Political Science and Politics, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2000): 169-74.

Religious culture is one of the most powerful systems of ritual and symbolic meaning in the Black community and actively engaging in the activities of the Church was very important to the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Black religious culture provided a strong collective action frame because the Black Church had been a “free space” in the Black community for centuries. As a “free space”, the Church was an environment in which people were able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills and values of cooperation and civic virtue. This was particularly vital in a thoroughly racist society that tried to deny to Blacks all of these things. It was the Church, and not simply Black Christianity that helped to shape these attitudes. Although internal religiosity can certainly have independent effects, attitudes and understandings about religious matters are significantly affected by the Church to which one belongs. Whether other-worldly or this-worldly, the Black Church communicated the revolutionary message of equality before God. Its song, prayers, rituals and doctrines all reinforced this simple truth.⁴²

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE BLACK CHURCH

The word in vogue today when executing hiring guidelines in organizations, companies, non-profits and corporate America is “diversity”. Diversity in race, color, religion, sexuality, disability, national origin and age. Diversity is also the watch word used when colleges and universities make admission decisions. In other words, one role that the Black Church exercised during the Civil Rights era was to advocate for the deprived, among others – the Negro. This advocacy has not diminished but has been joined by other voices that champion equality and equity. Yes, the Black Church is very much alive and vibrant in today’s society; and, one such proof is the Rev. Raphael Warnock, United States

⁴² Ibid.

Senator from the state of Georgia. The first African American senator ever elected from that state and the Pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was Pastor.

Subsequent to the triple assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy, our nation's cultural environment has moved to a greater acceptance and accommodatingly agreeable society as it relates to race, thereby lessening the need (certainly not eliminating the necessity) for such a vigorous voice of the Church in the public square. These voices have been sounding out in great harmony from many sectors of our society who fill the prism's array of colors to the wide political spectrum and assortment seen in our Congress. The choir has crescendoed into a chorus of voices crying out "We the people...a more perfect Union!" It is not possible to utter the word church – Black or otherwise – and not invoke Scripture. In the Time article "To Understand America, You Need to Understand the Black Church" (February 17, 2021) there is a reference to the pillar of the African American community, the Black Church. Holy Scripture (Proverbs 9:1 KJV) refers to Wisdom's seven pillars; the first of which is "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom..." That is the central pillar of the Black Church and the Church, in toto!

To quote a recent Christianity Today research article "Survey: Black Churches Become a Greater Refuge Amid Political Powerlessness" (January 18, 2021). "Despite changes in society and politics, the black church holds steady as a refuge. While African American leaders say the black church plays a different role in today's racial justice movement than it did when Martin Luther King, Jr. led the change during the civil rights era of the 1960s, black Americans increasingly see the church as a source of comfort as their sense of political disempowerment grows." The researchers also wrote, "Given the coinciding increase in a broader sense of powerlessness, present attendees in Black churches may see their congregations as autonomous spaces to reclaim agency and be a part of worship communities influenced by the vision and hopes of Black people."

The Harvard Gazette published an article March 9, 2021 titled “How the Black Church saved Black America.” This article featured professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s book “The Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our Song” which traces the institution of the Black Church’s role in history, politics and culture. The Harvard article goes on to state that “There is no question that the Black Church is a parent of the civil rights movement, and today’s Black Lives Matter movement is one of its heirs.” Harvard Professor Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham addressing the notion that the Black Church is dead declared with no uncertainty that the Black Church is not dead, but rather a constantly shifting American institution that continues to inform the nation’s collective and competing understanding of religious role in addressing social justice. Moreover, Associate Professor Terrence L. Johnson of Georgetown University’s Department of Government proclaimed that the Black Church’s role in the Black Lives Matter movement stems from a curious assumption within our society that the Black Church is dead disagrees. He states that the Black Church is not a monolithic tradition for two reasons. First, the argument assumes the physical erasure of black churches from urban neighborhoods has wiped out the church’s lingering moral vocabulary and political influence within the memory of millennials. Second, the death of the Black Church argument ignores the role of non-Christian religious traditions among African-American and even within the Black Church. In other words, the Black Church has always been a complicated religious institution within the context of American Protestantism. From its conception, clergy weaved together religion and politics to create thick and thin versions of liberation theology that many white clergy found objectionable or theologically unsound. It, too, was a place, especially during the Civil Rights Movement, where African-American Muslims, Quakers, Universalists, and Humanists found a public space a religious refuge, to reflect on the religious and political concerns of ordinary black folk, Christian and non-Christian alike. Malcolm X and Minister Louis Farrakhan are two examples of non-Christians who were welcomed into many black churches and invited to deliver major speeches standing behind Christian pulpits. The Black Church as a cultural

site plays an important role in shaping the moral vocabulary and cultural signs and symbols many African-Americans retrieve as they imagine and pursue social justice, but the Black Church as an institution is clearly waning. To that end, the absence of the African-American clergy from the Black Lives Matter movement does not translate into the death of the Black Church. Instead, the Black Church remains a counterpublic, a reference point in and through which many people define justice and what it means to be human. The Black Lives Matter movement is a natural extension of the Black Church's historical commitment to social transformation, liberation and justice.

SYNOPSIS

In my opening quote from a speech given by Frederick Douglass in Canandaigua, New York in 1857, one hundred sixty-four (164) years ago, Douglass said, "...there must be a Struggle." In this essay on the Black Church: A Place of Refuge – A Place of Prayer, I attempted to show that this struggle continues today; sometimes subtle, at other times blatant! The Black Church continues in this struggle because the prevailing winds of systemic racism found in our public schools, healthcare accessibility, housing affordability, employment living wage sustainability; and yes, even at the ballot box as can be seen by the gerrymander redistricting in many parts of our country today restricting the right to vote. Not solely in African American communities but in other communities of color.

I did not intend to rewrite the history of the Black Church nor did I discover anything new that has not already been revealed. I did, however, attempt to connect the dots as to whether the Black Church is a stagnant static institution. To the contrary, the Black Church is a living, breathing organism that ebbs and flows along with the dynamic fervor of our present day society. Many of the shortfalls have been brought to the fore and to the forefront of our many news programs thanks to COVID 19 and the news media reporting

this dilemma. “Approximately 97.9 out of every 100, 000 African Americans have died from COVID 19, a mortality rate that is a third higher than that for Latinos (64.7 per 100,000), and more than double than that for Whites (46.6 per 100, 000) and Asians (40.4 per 100, 000).”⁴³

The Black Church has been actively involved in advocating getting vaccinated with any of the authorized vaccines available to the Black community, especially to those who would be fearful and suspicious of our healthcare system. For not lost from the recent past is the memory of the horrible Tuskegee Syphilis Study – in actuality it certainly was an experiment on 600 African American men in 1932.

Even though there have been great strides and, in some cases, gigantic leaps forward, in civil rights legislation – one cannot legislate racial disparities out of our society. It has been the Black Church that initiated and advocated education for the Black population. It was the Black clergy who were relied upon for advice by the Black community in all areas of living – both physical and spiritual.

The common threads constituting the fabric of the Church and our nation are equality, freedom, justice, liberty, truth, love and God Almighty. These common threads were conspicuously absent when the subject of African slaves, freed Black slaves or the Negro was mentioned. A new racist attitude and a new set of racist standards were applied to those people of colored skins and revealed for the whole world to witness. A racist culture which denied humanity to each of its citizens in the “...land of the free and the home of the brave.” So it was the revivalists of the Great Awakenings that attempted to make good of the promises declared in our revered documents of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States of America. These revivalists were the catalyst that stirred the moral pot of social consciousness of the general population to exercise the virtues of equality, humanity and morality – the hallmark of any civilized

⁴³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7762908>

society – all akin to the cardinal virtues of antiquity and all the Church. Hence, the Black Church had an ally and unity with the Church universal to this day!

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