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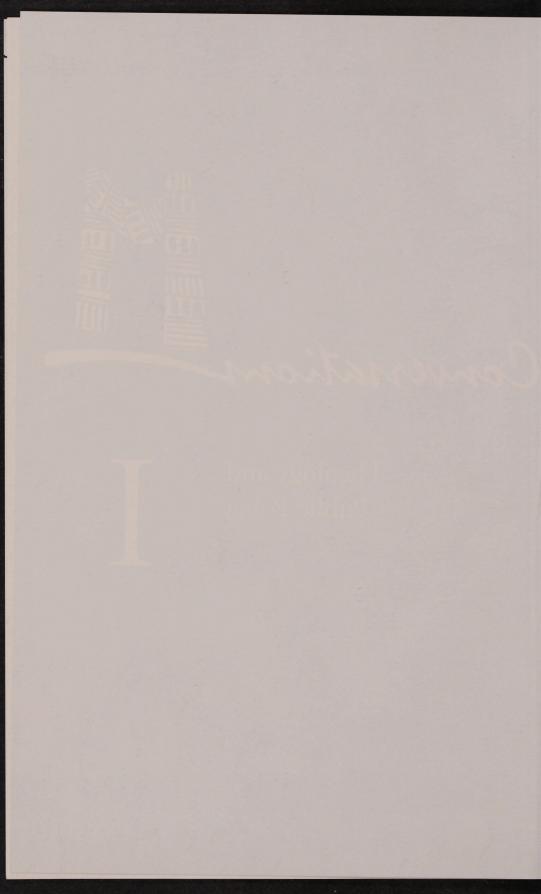
Theology and
Public Policy

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Walter Earl Fluker*

"JUST COME FROM THE FOUNTAIN": THE DEVELOPMENT OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP FROM BLACK-CHURCH TRADITIONS

I've just come from the fountain,
I've just come from the fountain, Lord,
I've just come from the fountain,
    his name's so sweet. O Lord,
I've just come from the fountain,
I've just come from the fountain, Lord,
I've just come from the fountain,
    his name's so sweet.

O brother, do you love Jesus?
Yes, yes, I do love my Jesus.
Brother, do you love Jesus?
His name's so sweet. O Lord ...
    (Refrain)
O sister, do you love Jesus?
Yes, yes, I do love my Jesus.
Sister, do you love Jesus?
His name's so sweet. O Lord ...
    (Refrain)

O sinner, do you love Jesus?
Yes, yes, I do love my Jesus.
Sinner do you love Jesus?

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His name's so sweet. O Lord ...
(Refrain)
—*African-American Spiritual*

Introduction

In 1984, a Peruvian theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez, wrote a powerful treatise, entitled, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*.[1] Following the lead of the twelfth-century mystic Bernard of Clairveaux, who commented that the place where our own spiritual nourishment comes is the place where we think, pray, and work, Gutiérrez was concerned that spirituality be located within the concrete lived situations of a people.[2] In the case of the people of Peru, their wells were located in the struggle for liberation and their reinterpretation of traditions of Catholicism and native Indian cultures. In respect to the argument for ethical leadership, I am also positing that the eventful language of spirituality, ethics, and leadership is best appropriated from where leaders find their own spiritual moorings. It would be hard to imagine Joseph Lowery, Mahatma Gandhi, or Mother Teresa without considering how their morally-anchored character, their transforming acts of civility, and their deep throbbing sense of community were related to the traditions of which they were a part. These are leaders who drank from their own fountains and reappropriated its substantive discourse into appropriate actions and strategies for personal and political transformation. These are the kind of leaders referred to as ethical leaders in this essay.

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[1]See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).

[2]Robert McAfee Brown, *Spirituality and Liberation: Overcoming the Great Fallacy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 118.

Definitions and Assumptions

My thoughts on ethics and leadership are outlined in an earlier publication, where *ethical leadership* is defined as the critical appropriation and embodiment of moral traditions that have historically shaped the character and shared meanings of a people (an ethos). Ethical leadership does not emerge from an historical vacuum but arises from the *lifeworlds* of particular traditions and speaks authoritatively and acts responsibly with the aim of serving the collective good. Ethical leaders are leaders whose characters have been shaped by the wisdom, habits, and practices of particular traditions, often more than one, yet they tend to be identified with a particular ethos and cultural narrative. Ethical leadership asks the question of values in reference to ultimate concern.[3]

Tradition refers to the customs and meanings around which a community unites as well as the transmission of these customs and ways of thinking to the next generation. African-American moral traditions have shaped ethical leaders who exhibit habits and practices that conspire against the unjust institutional practices, which promote an unhealthy and self-destructive existence. As these traditions have played a significant role in shaping the moral languages of this nation, an operative assumption presented here is that these historical struggles for freedom can serve both as strategic and instructive resources in the formation of ethical leaders for the twenty-first century.[4]

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[3]See Walter Earl Fluker, ed., *The Stones that the Builders Rejected: The Development of Ethical Leadership from the Black Church Tradition* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, International, 1998).

[4]See Walter Earl Fluker and Catherine Tumber, eds., *A Strange Freedom: Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).

Where Do We Begin?

Where do we begin in the development of leaders who are able to address the complex issues and challenges of the twenty-first century? We should return first to our own noble traditions of grass-roots activism and political mobilization that have been the hallmarks of our churches in the past—that indeed we relearn to *come from the fountains.* What are the critical resources and methodologies at our disposal to develop a new generation of emerging leaders who are *awake*—physically and emotionally whole, spiritually disciplined, intellectually astute, morally-anchored, and politically-engaged? Leadership studies abound with various approaches to this question. Among the most popular are theories of adaptive strategies, personal efficacy, character development, and more recently, a growing literature on emotional intelligence, connectivity, and resonance. Absent from many of these approaches is the question of spirituality and ethics and how these interrelated themes inform and transform human consciousness so that the leader is predisposed to make the fitting decision and carry out the appropriate ethical action among competing claims and a cacophony of voices and visions.

Even more glaring is the absence of the place and promise of African-American moral traditions from most discussions on the development of leadership. Central to the argument of this presentation is the belief that African-American moral life and practices have been neglected, at best ignored, in respect to their efficacy in preparing leaders for the new century—and not only by *others.* But one can understand neither the genius nor the tragedy of American moral life without taking into account the place and role of African-American moral traditions. In order to trace the moral practices of Americans, we must acknowledge the common tragedy of race in this culture.

As Toni Morrison writes,

> Race has become metaphorical—a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological "race" ever was. Expensively kept, economically unsound, a spurious and useless political asset in election campaigns, racism is as healthy today as it was during the Enlightenment. It seems that it has a utility far beyond economy, beyond the sequestering of classes from one another, and has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before.[5]

The error of many leadership theorists is that they have failed to acknowledge the presence of masses of disinherited and dispossessed groups within the power configurations of this culture; and in doing so, they have not only allowed ideology to predominate their understandings of national community, but their resultant analysis and recommendations are bereft. This is a strange statement given the spiritual and moral eclipse that has simultaneously occurred in the communities of the marginalized and poor in our nation. African-American leadership is not immune from the charges of the failure of ethical leadership. Recent titles like *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America*, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals*, *The Head Negro in Charge Syndrome: The Dead End of Black Politics*, *We Have No Leaders: African Americans in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, and

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[5]Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 51-54, 63.

Capitalist Nigger: The Road to Success[6] are reflective of the self-critique that abounds in respect to post-civil rights African-American leadership. The state of Black church leaders is even more damning.[7] Clearly, any reasonable assessment of the political, intellectual, and religious leadership of African Americans indicates that they are no better off than others.

The Development of Ethical Leadership
from the Black-Church Tradition

Nonetheless, my fundamental premise is that if a healing is to come to America and the world it will not come only from the children of the builders of the American Tower of Babel (the children of the fathers who ate sour grapes and whose teeth are decayed), rather it must include "the stones that the builders rejected." The significance of returning to our traditions as guides for the reappropriation of values and practices that can give new meaning and hope to the American democratic experiment is about more than the dramas that play out in the public lives of contemporary leaders—rather the issue at stake is how might we learn from traditions that have provided hope and a sense of community in the past in order to re-fashion and inspire a vision for the future. This is not the strict province of any tradition and certainly not just religious traditions, but *drinking from our own wells* provides an opportunity to recon-

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[6]See John H. McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (New York: Free Press, 2000); Norman Kelley, *The Head Negro in Charge Syndrome: The Dead End of Black Politics* (New York: Nation Books, 2004); Robert C. Smith, *We Have No Leaders: African Americans in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996); Chika Onyeani, *Capitalist Nigger: The Road to Success, a Spider Web Doctrine* (New York: Timbuktu Publishers, 2000); Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals* (New York: Rutledge, 1997).

[7]Walter Earl Fluker, ed., *The Stones That the Builders Rejected: The Development of Ethical Leadership from the Black Church Tradition* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 8-9; also Fluker, *A Strange Freedom*, 8-11.

nect with a community of memory which has the power to re-tool our moral vision and perspectives. Jacob Needleman's recent work, entitled, *The American Soul: Rediscovering the Wisdom of the Founders* is an example of what is at stake in this kind of endeavor. He suggests that

> [g]reat ideas, ideas that meaningfully reflect something of the world's ancient tradition of wisdom, have the power to bind people together and to bring unity under a goal and vision that are stronger and deeper than all personal, short-term gain. This is the mark of great ideas: they *unify the disparate parts of the human being;* they speak of a social order that is possible *on the basis of an ordering within the individual self.* The idea of America once had something of this power of unification.[8]

African-American Moral Traditions

The Black-Church Tradition is one of the candidates for this unifying task of retrieving, reappropriating, and reconstructing the future of America and the world.[9] The Black Church is not the only repository of moral and social practices of African Americans. Historically, Black Colleges and universities have long-standing traditions of excellence dating back to early post-bellum American cultures. The contemporary issue at stake in African-American moral traditions, as in the larger society, is the role of systems (institutions, traditions, practices) and their impact on moral development of individuals. Simply stated, individuals are socially constructed, yet by

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[8]Jacob Needleman, *The American Soul: Rediscovering the Wisdom of the Founders* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam), 2002),10.
[9]See Fluker, *The Stones That Builders Rejected,* 10-11, for a definition of "The Black-Church Tradition."

definition, are responsible and accountable for moral choices within the context of their social histories and stories. Hence the pertinent questions for the ethical and moral development of leaders in this respect are: What story or stories is the individual a part and how the story or stories inform moral practices and habits? What is the role of institutions in this narrative perspective and how might the moral agent develop habits and practices that conspire against unjust institutional practices that promote unhealthy and self-destructive existence?

The operative assumption here is that African-American Moral Traditions have played a significant role in shaping the moral languages of this nation, and consequently, can serve as a strategic resource in the formation of ethical leadership in the national community. Our point of departure is the inquiry into African-American Moral Traditions complemented by an interdisciplinary approach that identifies critical resources and methodologies for the retrieval and appropriation of discourse that shapes character, civility, and community.

Throughout African-American history, the Black Church has provided the pool of leadership, which led to the creation of social institutions and organizations, that, in turn, have prophetically challenged the world to move toward a "beloved community." Because of the Black Church's distinctive sociocultural location and long history of producing quality leadership, despite inadequate material and social resources, it is a prime candidate for offering direction for the development of leaders for our national and global communities. Moreover, the Black Church has played a significant role in shaping the moral languages of this nation and, consequently, can serve as a strategic resource in the formation of transforming ethical leadership for national and international communities. At the center of discussion among ethicists involved in research and writing on the

Black-Church Tradition is the development of critical concepts and methods for a social ethic that takes seriously the indigenous sources and experiences of African-American peoples. All claim that historically the Black-Church Tradition has been the chief social locus for the ethical foundations of leadership in the African-American community. The majority of African-American leadership has been influenced by its distinctive ethos.

The Hand of the Gardner: A Methodological Approach

The return to tradition, of course, as a repository of meaning and direction for present and future leadership, has its inherent dangers. Any causal observation of the national and global conflicts surrounding religion, race, and ethnicity should sound a warning to unreflective attachment to tradition. What is in my mind is more closely akin to what the great sociologist, Edward Shils, had in mind when he referred to tradition. He suggests:

> Traditions are beliefs, standards and rules, of varying but never exhaustive explicitness, which have been received from the preceding generation through a process of continuous transmission from generation to generation. They recommend themselves by their appropriateness to the present situation confronted by their recipients and especially by their provenience [the source and ownership history of a work of art or literature, or of an archeological find] to the past.[10]

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[10]Edward Shils, "Tradition and Liberty: Antinomy and Interdependence," in *The Virtue of Civility: Selected Essays on Liberalism, Tradition, and Civil Society,* ed. Steven Grosby (Indianapolis: The Liberty Road Fund, 1997), 106-107.

But he adds that the authority of tradition is not registered for its own sake or "because it's always been this way." "Tradition is not the dead hand of the past, rather the hand of the gardener, which nourishes and elicits tendencies of judgement which would otherwise not be strong enough to emerge on their own."[11]

In respect to the development of ethical leadership, tradition as *the hand of the gardener* suggests a methodological approach that is pragmatic in respect to the retrieval of the substantive discourse of tradition and its reconfiguration and appropriation for the perceived needs of the present. Here Jeffrey Stout's recommendation of a process of moral *bricolage* informs our basic methodological approach. Key to this approach is the perspective that reflection on and retrieval of tradition constitutes a return to a community of memory, defined in part by its past and its memory of its past.[12] Implicit in the accentuation of *memory* is that emerging and existing leaders must remember their stories and the ways in which these stories are formed and informed by countless other stories, marking their place in existence and define in large part the context of their understanding of values and leadership. To become aware of the power of tradition to restore the ethical center through a process of narration that is open to the present and the future frees leaders to explore new options and strategies while still being anchored to values that guide, inform, and project.

An important feature of the work of returning to tradition as a source of memory is to identify habits and practices that inform one's ethical center. William James referred to this idea of habit and practice as "plasticity." "Plasticity, in the wide sense of the word, means that possession of a structure weak

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[11]Ibid.

[12]See Jeffrey R. Stout, *Ethics after Babel: The Language of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once."[13] Plasticity is analogous to resilience, the inner strength and fortitude of character that allows the individual to withstand the external forces that threatens existence without yielding that inner core, which is sustained by life-affirming *virtues, values*, and what we shall call *virtuosities* (moral excellencies). Plasticity, however, does not function without a community of discourse and practice, which is involved in a time/space continuum of memory (remembering the story); vision (retelling and reframing the story); and mission (reliving the story).

The assumption here is that leaders are a part of living vibrant traditions that are part of ongoing narratives that are at once personal and communal. The identification of particular traditions and institutions that are bearers of memory and perpetuators of habits and practice provides leaders with opportunities to look at the role that certain values have played in the formation of leaders in communities; and how leaders within those traditions have dealt with complex issues and challenges over time. The significance of this approach of returning to memory and retrieving substantive discourse also creates space for the "reframing" of beliefs and assumptions; and learning from these experiences so that there is a continuous creative cycle of remembering, reframing, and learning. In this process, values that have been the long stay of a said tradition find resonance in new contexts of meaning and are enabled because their "plasticity" to inform and guide the leader in discerning, deliberating and deciding on the appropriate course of action. A sterling example of this process is seen in the leadership styles of great African-American leaders. Such leadership has

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[13]William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, chap. 5, "Habit" (New York: Dover Publications, 1890; reprint 1950), 105.

a certain improvisational artistry, which yields without breaking and holds its central values without losing its integrity. Ella Baker's "group centered leadership" and Martin Luther King's "dialectical appropriation of knowledge and faith" are examples of what is at stake in this perspective of ethical leadership.

Perseverance and Perseveration

Such a perspective of ethical leadership prevents the spurious and often aggravating outcomes of *perseveration.* There is a paradox in human experience of *perseverance* and *perseveration. To persevere* means to continue working at something, to persist, to keep on trying despite the odds. Most would admit that this is a good thing. Who would deny that perseverance is an attribute that we want to see not only in ourselves, our children, and in men and women in general? Hearty character, we say is a virtue—the relentless logic of the focused mind, the committed will, and the courageous soul. But to persevere in activity that does not yield desired outcomes is a problem. Nueropsychologists call this malady *perseveration. To perseverate* means to continue to perform an action even when it no longer produces the desired result. For instance, some laboratory animals are trained to press certain levers in order to get food as a reward for their behavior. When lab animals persist in the same behavioral pattern even though the food is taken away, the scientists call this behavior *perseveration.* Stuck in old behavioral patterns, they cannot adjust to a new situation. Leaders are often victims of this paradox. Stuck in old behavioral patterns, leaders are often unwilling to look beyond the golden age of the past and to see that they are locked in traditions that no longer produce desired outcomes.

Living Traditions and Traditionalism

There is a difference between living, vibrant *traditions* and *traditionalism*. A good, lively tradition will seek better ways to address new issues and challenges that arise—and if necessary will change organizational structure and behavior in order to accommodate the new; but *traditionalism* will stand its ground and fight to the death over old formulae and practices that are dead on arrival. A good tradition is really a living argument about the goods and practices that constitute that tradition— it will gladly reflect, readjust, adapt, and move on to higher ground when confronted with new information and new realities; but traditionalism will puff up like blowfish and explode before it concedes to changing one iota of its old tired ways. A good tradition, a tradition that produces good practices and good people, will actually seek new ways to improve its lot— it will inquire of creative exchanges within organizations, institutions outside of its sphere; but traditionalism will mount sentries at every post to stand guard over any sign or indication that will conspire against the old order. There are some dangerous signs in our culture, churches, faith-based organizations, political and religious institutions, and in our own lives that suggest that we are wedded to a dying civilization, dying ideologies, and a bankrupt moral and spiritual philosophy that threatens our corporate futures. And it's not at all the case that we do not work hard or that we are not persistent—oh, no! Ours is a subtler and more sinister adversary—it is the leader's inability to see that values like all human experience possess "plasticity," the ability to stretch, bend, and reconfigure in ways that are creative and positive.

Where Are We Now? Areas of Exploration, Challenges, and Opportunities

Let me hasten to say that this task is fraught with challenges and provocations. In 2002, The Leadership Center at Morehouse College (LCMC) released its first report on the Public Influences of African-American Churches (PIAA). This was part of a larger research initiative headed by R. Drew Smith, Scholar-in-Residence at LCMC. The report was later published as part of a three-volume series, *A New Day Begun, Long Road Ahead,* and *Black Churches and Local Politics,* which were edited by Smith. The PIAAC Project's research found the following:

- Contemporary black church activism has centered around electoral activity, and only infrequently around direct public policy advocacy;
- The potential influence of black churches among broader publics has been significantly impaired by a lack of black church-related infrastructure devoted to policy advocacy and intergenerational civic interaction; and
- Recommended actions include civic capacity building among church leaders through the facilitation of inter-disciplinary, intergenerational, and inter-ethnic dialogues about churches and public life.[14]

PIAAC made general recommendations in three areas under the title, *Toward Broader Engagement by African American Churches: Challenges and Recommendations:* training and curricu-

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[14]See R. Drew Smith, *The Public Influences of African American Churches: Contexts and Capacities,* a report submitted to The Pew Charitable Trusts by The Public Influences of African American Churches Project (Atlanta: The Leadership Center, Morehouse College, 2002).

lum, policy research and analysis, and facilitation of youth development programs (shared civic institutional space and emerging leaders programs and dialogues).

Training and Curriculum Components:

The training needs of Black clergy tend to outpace relevant and accessible training opportunities—especially as it relates to training for civic leadership. For example, given the fact that quite a few Black denominations and communions do not have formal education requirements for their clergy, the numbers of clergy who take advantage of broad-based, liberal arts curricula offered by colleges and universities may be somewhat low compared to professionals in other sectors. On the one hand, these types of curricula can provide insights into the culture and mechanics of civic and political life, seldom emphasized in many of the Bible Schools and theological institutions where many Black clergy receive their training. On the other hand, a factor that sometimes discourages matriculation by Black clergy in liberal arts educational contexts is that theological and ministerial imperatives do not receive sufficient attention within these contexts. What could prove helpful are more contexts where Black clergy and lay leaders can reflect theologically, and from the standpoint of social-science disciplines, on the church's role within society. Bible schools and theological seminaries are two important contexts where a stronger emphasis on public affairs issues and social-science analysis could contribute to the civic leadership of church leaders. Helpful, as well, would be special programs and conference events facilitated by ecclesiastical and educational institutions that focus on the church's public mission and that are offered to as many Black clergy as possible.

Policy Research and Analysis:

Church-related policy advocacy and civic leadership training will need to be supported by a strong research and analytical component if it is to be effective. Currently, theological and social-science assessments of the public roles of Black churches are in short supply and, in any case, require constant updating and contextualizing. Moreover, available research on these topics needs to more systematically inform the relationship between Black churches and the public sphere. The task of both research production and research dissemination would benefit greatly from the creation of at least one Black church-related, political think tank that focuses on national politics, and additional think tanks that focus on regional or local concerns.

Facilitation of Youth Leadership Development:

Shared Civic Institutional Space:

Few of the national African-American advocacy organizations or ecclesiastical groups have welcomed youth and young adult voices onto their organizational center stage. These groups are often subjects of discussion, and function within the organization in an auxiliary capacity, but rarely are they positioned so that their concerns or voices inform the organization's central agenda. If national Black advocacy and ecclesiastical structures are not places where genuine intergenerational dialogue and leadership can take place, younger generation Blacks will continue to seek alternative venues where their issues and leadership will be taken seriously. All too often, however, younger Blacks find no viable alternatives and become lost to the civic and community building process altogether. Black civic and ecclesiastical organizations can take steps to ensure that younger Blacks who are well prepared to

make valuable contributions are given ample opportunity to do so. These organizations can also take steps to facilitate leadership preparation among many other youth and young adults through internship and mentorship programs. Given the existence of more than 8,000 Black elected officials, dozens of Black civic and lobby groups, and numerous offices and divisions within Black ecclesiastical structures—there can be at least that many internships devoted to leadership development and civic exposure for Black youth and young adults.

Emerging Leaders Programs and Dialogues:

There is also a need for younger church leaders to dialogue systematically with leaders from across governmental, non-governmental, and business sectors about the church's theological and social mission. Very few opportunities for this kind of dialogue are built into existing university or seminary curricula, the leadership training, or teaching components within ecclesiastical organization; many of the younger leaders who would benefit most from this kind of dialogue may not have immediate access to these institutions with which to begin. A way to respond to this would be through Emerging Leaders Programs that convene two-three day dialogues between twenty or so younger faith-based leaders and a smaller number of leaders from other sectors. Not only should dialogue between younger church leaders and leaders from other sectors be encouraged, but also dialogue between younger church leaders that cuts across racial-ethnic lines, especially between various racial-ethnic minorities. Coalitions and collaborations between these populations will become increasingly important given the anticipated demographic shifts in the coming years, and emerging leaders within these various communities will need as many creative opportunities as possible to grapple with issues and to search for common ground.

Where Do We Go From Here? The Call for Emerging Leaders from the Black-Church Tradition

Clearly, the pressing social and political problems that beset the African-American community demand that a new kind of moral leadership come on the scene. This new leadership, however, will not come only from the Black Church, but whatever its form and direction, it will take as its cue the historical moorings and struggles of this great institution of Black life and culture. Cornel West has analyzed the contemporary moral straitjacket that has stymied the potential for creative national leadership and its deleterious effects on African-American leadership in particular. He cites the foibles of structuralist and behaviorist interpretations and recommendations for those at the bottom of the American social ladder. He argues that this debate "conceals the most basic issue now facing Black America: "*the nihilistic threat to its very existence.*" Beyond political and economic remedies, while significant, the threat of personal meaningless, despair, and worthlessness, brought about in large part by unbridled market forces and political chicanery, is the real challenge that confronts African Americans and the national community. He calls for a new kind of moral leadership which moves beyond the "pitfalls of racial reasoning" and the lack of courage to address the market moralities of Black life and the crisis of Black leadership. He recommends *a politics of conversion* fueled by a love ethic, which has historically sustained the African-American community. Important for our purposes is his identification of memory and hope as key resources in the politics of conversion: "Self-love and love of others," he writes, "are both modes toward increasing self-valuation and encouraging political resistance in one's community. These modes of valuation and resistance are rooted in *sub-*

versive memory—the best of one's past without romantic nos-
talgia—and guided by a universal ethic of love."[15]

West's call for a new kind of moral leadership emanating
from the grassroots is not new, but what is refreshing and
potentially creative is his sensitivity to the interrelated necessi-
ties of personal and social transformation. A significant ele-
ment of this new kind of moral leadership will be *emerging
leaders.* The issues of violence, drugs, crime, and hopelessness
that plague our beleaguered communities are disproportion-
ately represented among our youth. If serious change is to
occur in our communities and the nation it will emanate from
the "bottom-up," not from the "top-down." This new leader-
ship that West and others are speaking about is *youth-centered*
and will draw upon the best in our traditions. At the core of
this new leadership will be three operative concepts gleaned
from the powerful Black-Church Tradition: *character, civility,
and community.*[16] Moreover, these new leaders will learn afresh
the power of returning and coming back from living fountains
of traditions that continue to inspire and guide visionary lead-
ership. This direction must critically engage the complex
political and cultural behemoths that stand guard over our
entrance into the twenty-first century.

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[15]Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 8-20, "Nihilism
in Black America."

[16]For further reading on these matters, see Walter Earl Fluker, "Recognition,
Respectability, and Loyalty: Black Churches and the Quest for Civility," in *New
Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights
America,* ed. R. Drew Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003),
113-114, where the quest for civility among Black churches is examined
with the aim of identifying key practices that have historically sustained
the moral life of African Americans through two pivotal institutions: the
church and higher education.