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# The African Inheritance in The Black Church Worship

## PART I. FROM THE AFRICAN INHERITANCE TO THE BLACK CHURCH HERITAGE

### 1. *The African Inheritance*

The origin of the worship of the Black Church is in the ancient African cultural and religious traditions. African peoples are the original ancestors of Black people anywhere, if not indeed all peoples everywhere. For the most part, scientists support the most verifiable evidence that the cradle of civilization was first rocked, so to speak, in Africa. The African, consequently, is the prototype of the human species—the species extending back over 3½ million years.<sup>1</sup> African peoples, “burnt black with heat,”<sup>2</sup> created the first cultures and developed the first civilizations on earth. From the central region of East Africa in the Oduval Gorge of the Rift Valley, an area including Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia, even a part of Zaire, indeed, from Egypt on the north to the Nysa Rift in the south, the first locations of the original ancestors, the Anu peoples, have been identified. From this arena, peoplekind emerged and branched off in movements across the length and breadth of Africa. The people on the land now called Egypt, from “kermit” or “Black,”<sup>3</sup> originated in the interior of Africa. They had migrated northward along the Rift Valley of the Nile River to the sea. Another term which identifies a major branch of African peoples is *Bantu*, a word meaning *people*. The Bantu migrated southward along the Rift into southern Africa. By the year 10,000 B.C., the Bantu arrived on the West Coast of Africa. The ancient African cultural and religious traditions spread throughout

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<sup>1</sup> “Fossils in Ethiopia Said to Show Man Million Years Older Than Believed,” *New York Times*, 26 October 1974, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> D. R. Pedrals, *Archeologie De L’Afrique Noire* (Paris: Payot, 1950), p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Anta Cheikh Diop., *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (New York: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1974), p. 7.



the continent. African peoples are notoriously religious and carry their religion into every area and department of life.<sup>4</sup>

It must be said also that Bantu means "people of God," and that peoples of Africa, before the time of Judaism, Christianity or Islam, affirmed the spirituality of life and the God-Creator of all. Worship has been a "given" in the African life systems and worldview. An ancient West African expression, among the Akan-speaking peoples, is "No one has to teach a child God."<sup>5</sup> In both the terms Anu and Bantu, there is a common root, *Ntu*, meaning spiritual life force. This is essentially the nature of the worship-consciousness or relationship between the Creator-God and the *Imago Dei* in the creature. The spirituality of *Ntu* is the inherent moral and spiritual capacity of human nature, whether male or female, to be in fellowship with God. In the affirmation of the value of life in personal being as *Ntu* or *Mu*, there is the sense that the ultimate aspiration God has given in the spiritual nature of the mortal creature is the soul-inheritance of life, especially immortality.

African peoples have created the bases for the moral culture of the world through religious beliefs and practices, including the value and art of worship. In their research from the ancient traditions, scholars such as E.A. Wallis Budge (*The Egyptian Book of the Dead, Text of the Pyramids*), Janheinz Jahn (*Muntu*), John S. Mbiti (*African Religions and Philosophy* and *Concepts of God in Africa*), George James (*Stolen Legacy*), and Yoseph ben Yohannan (*African Origins of the Major Western Religions*), support the above statement, showing respect for the fundamental significance of the Black Worship heritage of Africa in the primordial development of the religious-centered cultural systems of the native and authentic African spirituality.

There is also the reminder from their research about the partial loss of the African religious heritage and religious legacy. For African and Black peoples, there has been the solemn caution, as found in the preface of Chancellor Willians' book, *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 BC to 2000 AD*, in the question posed from a Sumer Legend:

"What became of the Black People of Sumer?" the traveller asked the old man, "for ancient records show that the people of Sumer were Black. What happened to them?" "Ah," the old man sighed, "They lost their history, so they died . . ."<sup>6</sup>

The fall of Black civilizations and loss of the inheritance came from several sources: 1) the destructive invasions by Asians and Europeans; 2)

<sup>4</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13. This is an Akan expression, especially among the Ashanti peoples, from Traditional African Religion in West Africa.

<sup>6</sup> (Chicago: Third World Press, 1974), p. v.



the natural catastrophes of sand storms, floods, pestilences, earthquakes, etc; 3) the internal corruption by divisiveness and strife, or in a simple word, sin and wickedness; or 4) simply said, they "forgot their story" or "they lost their history and died."

Nevertheless, the fundamentals of the worship heritage have penetrated throughout Africa and emerged from Africa through various religious systems, notably through the Judeo-Christian tradition. The moral and even philosophical concepts which form the social and ideological expressions of the faith have been basically "given" in the Black Religious Heritage. The idea of one God and the moral truths as found in the Decalogue from Moses are clearly two such manifestations. Beginning in the Book of Genesis, the record of events concludes that the Garden of Eden was established in Africa, for the most part. It was sometimes called the land of Ethiopia, Cush, Egypt, Nubia, and others. The people who were in the forefront of the unfolding story in the drama of salvation were Black or Africans. From the African leadership role in the worship heritage, beginning with Abel and Cain in the Old Testament to the Christian era and the Ethiopian-Jew-eneuch being baptised in the New Testament, the text provides the connection.<sup>7</sup>

The development of the Black religious heritage of worship can be traced from Traditional African religion just as Christianity is traced from the Judeo-tradition. Mbiti states: "Traditional African Religion was preparation for and enrichment of Christianity and Christianity was the fulfillment of Traditional African Religion."<sup>8</sup>

The African peoples, who were transported to the New World first and foremost brought with them their religion and worship heritage. Even in America, the African Religious heritage prevailed for 150 years<sup>9</sup> before European-American Christianity significantly impacted the folk practices of Africans in this country. Their system of belief included: God-consciousness, the affirmation of a religious universe, prayer, corporate kinship in the vertical dimensions (of past, present and future) and in the horizontal dimensions (as the extended family-community relationship), spirit possession, immortality and the unity of reality, i.e., no separation between the sacred and secular. Therefore, worship enhanced the connectedness of the whole being as one in touch with feelings, in the harmony of experience, in all existence. These African inheritances were established in the Black religious heritage before, as stated above, European American Christianity significantly affected the religious folk prac-

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *The Holy Bible, Black Heritage Edition* (Nashville: World Press, 1976).

<sup>8</sup> John S. Mbiti, "Christianity and Traditional Religions in Africa," *International Review of Missions* LIX (1970): 430-440.

<sup>9</sup> George P. Rawick, *The American Slave* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972), p. 33.



tices of Africans in America.

## *2. The African Inheritance: In The Black Church Worship Heritage - Africanness*

The African inheritance in the Black Church Worship heritage is the organizing principle of this presentation. There has been much controversy on the matter of the natural and cultural identity of African or black people in America. This is clearly seen in a kind of cultural metamorphosis evident in the process of name-giving seen in various historical periods. Some of the major typological labels, indigenous or imposed, were "African," "nigger," "negra," "Negro," "Colored," "Black," "Afro," and then a return to "African." These were, of course, terms of humanity-qualification as well as terms of identity-qualification. Let us explore the origins of Africanness.

In the southern hemisphere, between the 35th degree parallel in latitudes above and below the equator is to be found Africa, the second largest continent in the world. Tunisia tips the northern point and Azania (or the Republic of South Africa) the southern. The Guinea Coast itself was the area colonized from the 16th century to the 19th century, a period of about 400 years. From the 20th degree parallel latitude south is Angola. This is the Guinea Coast, an area of 3,800 miles of the 5,200 miles longitude of West Africa and Africa respectively.

Some of the countries on the West Coast, erstwhile known as the Slave Coast, from north to south are: Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Benin, (Dahomey), Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Congo, Zaire and Angola. These sixteen countries constitute the Guinea Coast, identifying the political nation-states that we know today.

Millions of Africans were subjugated to slavery, having been captured in the countless raids. They were taken from parts of the Guinea Coast, as well as from deeper incursions into the interior. Lines of enslaved Africans, in chains, were driven over-land along trade routes to the coast and to the Slave Castles. The Slave Castles were storage centers for Black Cargoes, waiting for the arrivals of slave ships. They were gathered (captured), stored (packed) in castles (forts) or factories and then shipped and marketed in the lucrative commerce of human merchandise. The captains and lords of this industrial enterprise came from the Christian North Atlantic Catholic and Protestant countries of Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Britain and the United States. There were also some other minor imperial powers involved in this trade.

Since the African-Americans, for the most part, came from the Guinea Coast of West Africa, Southern European countries such as Por-



tugal and Spain controlled the slave systems that transported Africans and colonized them in South America, Central America and in the Caribbeans. France held a mediating position in Europe with alternating roles of working with or fighting against Southern and/or Northern Europeans in her ambition to establish hegemony in the colonial world. Africans, from the Cameroons to Senegal, were transported by the French to some of the islands such as Haiti, some small presence in Latin America as well as in North America including Louisiana in the United States and the Montreal region in Canada. Some of the North Europeans (the British, Dutch and other Europeans and European-Americans) conducted the commerce of slave trading to various ports of entry in the United States of America. Obviously, there were various other exchanges, some voluntary and some involuntary. There were also rebellions and African mutinies such as that by Cinque.<sup>10</sup> There were successful African competitors in the Palm Oil trading such as JaJa of Nigeria.<sup>11</sup> There was the ongoing contestations for the spoils in Africa, in the Middle Passage as well as the territories in the New World. There were emancipation movements and enforcements against slavery, e.g., when Britain turned against America on the slave trading issue.

This strange chapter of the history of the United States of America began with the introduction of the first cargo of 20 slaves brought by the Dutch.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps they were on the way to the territory we now know as Surinam, formerly Dutch Guiana in South America. Africans in the Americas, for the most part, were in the trade-triangle of America-Europe-Africa with exchanges of rum, other goods and slaves. By and large, the linguistic connections help us to identify and trace many of the linkages of peoples from French West and Central Africa—Senegal, Ivory Coast, Togo, Benin and Gabon of West Africa—being transported to Haiti and to Louisiana. This involved peoples such as the Wolof and Serer from Senegal, Mandingo from Gambia, Bambara from Mali, Fon and Twi from Benin and Dahomey, Lobi from the Ivory Coast. Some of the transit passages were through Guadeloupe and Martinique enroute to Haiti and New Orleans with further diffusions into Florida. The British at first controlled the lanes from Ghana and Nigeria, but later, emancipated Africans were repatriated to Sierra Leone; and, at first, the Americans, not having colonies of their own, linked with those nations active in slave trading until the emancipation in 1863. They later colonized a step-

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Rodney, *West African Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Africa Research Group, n.d.) pp. 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> Basil Davidson, *The African Slave Trade* (Boston: Atlantic, Little-Brown, 1961), p. vii.

<sup>12</sup> Lerone Bennett Jr., *Before the Mayflower* (Chicago: Penguin Books, Inc., 1966), p. 30. This included the first Black family of Anthony, Isabella and Pedro.



child-nation in West Africa, Liberia.

In general, the penetration into the Americas came through several ports such as New Orleans, Mobile, Savannah, Charleston or the Southeast coast-line—from Virginia to Florida, involving Africans from Senegal, Gambia, Ivory Coast, Ghana and Nigeria. From the Liberia area, there were the Kpelle, Vai and Kru peoples, from Ghana the Ga, Ewe, Twi, Fanti and Ashanti (Akan-speaking peoples) and from Nigeria, the Yoruba, the Songhay, Hausa, Ibibio, Igbo, Ibo. Most of these Africans entered North Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, South Carolina and Florida, and others were diffused into Alabama and Mississippi.

The African inheritance essentially and existentially involved the humanity in the personhood and peoplehood of those who were bonded, then demeaned under oppression and exploitations by the slave systems. There were those who survived and arrived to form the African presence of a disinherited and dispossessed people now scattered in what would be known as the Black Diaspora of the United States of America. Nevertheless, the inheritance of humanity remained the base of dignity, the reality and source of cultural identity and spiritual integrity; this, in spite of it all and through it all.

DuBois captured the sound and significance of the African inheritance in the soulful humanity of the Africans enroute to America in the ceremonial rites of the historical passage in this sermonette on the service of struggle.

Listen to Winds, O God the Reader, that wail across the whip cords stretched taut on broken human hearts; listen to the bones, the bare bleached bones of slaves, that line the lanes of the Seven Seas and beat eternal tom-toms in the forests of the laboring deep; listen to the Blood, the cold blood that spills its filth across the fields and flowers of the Free; listen, listen to the souls that wing and thrill and weep and scream and sob and sing above it all. What shall these things mean, O God the Reader, You know. You know.<sup>13</sup>

### *3. The African Inheritance: A Discussion of Its Validity*

The African spiritual inheritance is an authentic and integral part of the Black Religious Experience and the Black Church Heritage. For some, this has been or is a myth. For others, this has been and is the reality of a situation of experience. Eminent scholars have debated both sides of the issue—from the evidence or the lack of evidence.

Among those who rejected the reality or evidence of the African inheritance, (residuals, continuities, linkages, survivals or Africanisms), there were three most notable ones: E. Franklin Frazier, Stanley Elkins and Abram Kradner and Lionel Odyssey together. Frazier's *Negro Church in*

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<sup>13</sup> W. E. B. DuBois, *The Gift of Black Folk* (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett, 1903), p. 23.



America indicated that the African was stripped of his African culture in the "trama of separation" from land, language and kinship linkages becoming property on the plantations of America. He wrote: "In the New World the process by which the Negro was stripped of his social heritage and thereby, in a sense, dehumanized, was completed."<sup>14</sup>

Stanley Elkins' book, *Slavery*, depicted slavery as a systematic process that in the rites of transition (procurement and domestication), persons and people were transmigrated and transposed into slavery: Africans became niggers, reduced to a sort of cultural "tabula rasa" and then reprogrammed, as C. E. Lincoln would describe it, "made in America":

The thoroughness with which African Negroes coming to America were detached from prior cultural sanctions would thus be partly explainable by the very shock sequence inherent in the technique of procurement. But it took something more than this to produce "Sambo," [the niggerized African].<sup>15</sup>

Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey's, *The Mark of Oppression: Explorations in the Personality of the American Negro*, described the conditions of slavery in terms of utterly "smashing" all of the "vestigial remains" of Africanness in the descendants of Africa in America:

However, there is every reason to believe that the conditions of slavery were such that no aboriginal culture could survive the impact. This is the position of Frazier, and also our own. If there were survivals, they would have to be in areas that lie outside the main problems of human adaptation. *We can assume that art forms, musical idioms, and the like can long survive in the new environment. Even religion can do so—but only for a while . . .* The most conspicuous feature of the Negro in America is that his aboriginal culture was smashed, be it by design or accident.<sup>16</sup>

Frazier both left the door open and partially contradicted himself to some extent, even parallel to the qualification acknowledged in the last quotation: "If there were survivals . . ." Frazier recognized that the European Americans affected only a small percentage of the African-Americans in terms of their adaptation to religion and music of the Church traditions of long western standing. At the same time, he indicated that the masses, the people who were coming from a non-European-American cultural and religious heritage: "Those slaves who were largely isolated from whites engaged in religious practices that undoubtedly included African survivals."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> E. F. Frazier, *Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 102. St. Clair Drake, *Redemption of Africa and Black Religion*, notes that Orlando Patterson describes a similar personality type in Jamaica as Quarshie. Leronne Bennett, *Before the Mayflower*, discusses the name Sambo as given to the second son (Hausa) in Nigeria. Cf. p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> Abraham Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey, *The Mark of Oppression* (New York: The World Publishing Co., 1969), pp. 38, 39. Emphasis mine.

<sup>17</sup> Frazier, *Negro Church in America*, p. 10.



It would be from this culture that the "invisible institution," the Black Religion out of which the Black Church was born in the fields, wilderness, bush arbors and shanties, emerged from those people in slavery, the majority of whom were largely isolated from whites and engaged in aspects of worship preserving Traditional African religious practices. George P. Rawick, in his *The American Slave*, which is based upon research taken some fifty to fifty-five years ago and republished in 1972, made available evidence which the above scholars did not use. There were oral histories of slaves who were the living linkages between African religion and Black Religion.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, St. Clair Drake, *The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion*, makes a clear distinction between those descendants of Africa in North America and those in in the Caribbean, South and Central America by defining Afro-Americans as those in the United States of America and the African-Americans as those in the Caribbean, Central and South America.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, there were other scholars who clearly argued and established evidence to illustrate that the African inheritance continued to be manifested in a variety of ways in the Black Experience and especially in the Black Religious Heritage, scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois, *The Black Church*; Carter G. Woodson, *The African Background Outlined*; and Melvin Herskovits, *The Myths of the Negro Past*.

DuBois stated as far back as 1896:

The only social institution among Negroes which started in the African forest and survived slavery . . . under the leadership of the priest and medicine man, [was] the church [which] preserved the remnants of African tribal life.<sup>20</sup>

Carter G. Woodson stated,

The study of religious phenomena in the Negro Church of today will explain much observed among African tribes. Most writings on the Negro Church, however, are purely narrative or statistical and never touch these reactions which require scientific study.<sup>21</sup>

Melvin Herskovits cited a series of religious customs from the African, i.e., spirit possession, dancing with African movements, singing and swaying motions, intonations of sounds, wakes and elaborate manifestations during funeral ceremonies and others.<sup>22</sup>

Since this is the position of our investigation, this perspective will be

<sup>18</sup> Rawick, *The American Slave*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>19</sup> (Chicago: Third World Press, 1980). p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *The Negro Church* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Publication, No. 14, n.d.), p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> Carter G. Woodson, *The African Background Outlined* (Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press, 1936) pp. 171, 214-216.

<sup>22</sup> Melvin Herskovits, "On the Providence of New World Negroes," *Social Forces* 12, (December 1933): 247-262.



further documented and illustrated beginning from the African heritage to the Afro-American inheritance, which we will describe as the African inheritance, that became another heritage as the Black Church, the Christian or faith experience of Black people, especially in worship.

#### 4. *The African Inheritance: From Inheritance to Heritage - The Black Church.*

The indigenous Black Church, coming out of the Black Religious Experience and worship heritage transposed the Africanisms of spirituality into new forms of expressions in modes of worship, music and movement. During the early period of the Black Church, an independent and authentic Black religious consciousness prevailed. Later, of course, there were some accommodations to the organized styles of Euro-American Christianity. Nevertheless, the essential Black Church, developing from the existential Black religious experience, had enough African and Black religious characteristics and strengths to transform slave-Christianity.<sup>23</sup>

Following the motif of the "invisible link," a modification or complement to the "invisible institution," African Religion would be that "invisible link" to become expressed in time in the institutionalization of the "church visible" from the "invisible institution" or church. Behind the Black Church has been the Black Religious Heritage and Experience, but behind the Black Religious Experience and Heritage has been the reality of Traditional African Religion, relevantly affecting the spirituality of the Black Church Worship Experience. The effects of spirituality were transmitted through sentiments, temperaments and propensities of "given" God-consciousness and ways of feeling, thinking, believing, practicing, acting and living, especially worshiping out of the faith in the High God as well as "De Lawd." From the "High God" inheritance to the "De Lawd" heritage, the historical legacy of the Black Church is tracked, especially in the arena of worship.<sup>24</sup>

#### PART II. PROFILES OF LEADERSHIP FROM THE PULPIT AND PARTICIPATION OF THE PEOPLE FROM THE PEWS

There is a dynamic dialectic of spiritual interactions taking place in the event of worship in the Black Church. Gifts of leadership from the

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<sup>23</sup> George B. Thomas, *Relevance of African Religion to Christianity in America*, (Atlanta: RHBW, ITC Publication, 1972), pp. 34-35.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35. The idea is that the "High God" affirmation and concept from Traditional African Religion in West Africa was transposed into Jesus Christ, identified as De Lawd in the "invisible institution" (The Black Church during slavery), which in effect merged Traditional African Religious concepts with Biblical Christianity in terms of God-consciousness, beliefs and practices.



African Inheritance are exercised through the skills and functions of those pulpit profiles known as preacher, teacher, pastor, priest, prophet, directing facilitator. All are incorporated in the leadership styles of the pulpit. In the African religious heritage, they were called religious "specialists" in leadership: diviners, mediums, priests, griots, rainmakers, prophets, etc.

In the African inheritances, the lay congregational responsiveness in the worship experience is equally manifested through the various participatory skills and functions of the people. The worship readiness of the people for participation in "having church." is initiated in the challenge of the supernatural expectation and the response of human anticipation in the moment(s) of spiritual interaction between the leader and the people in the worship encounter, between the pulpit and the pew. In the Black Church Worship Experience, there is something unique, indeed something mysteriously "going on" between the pulpit and the pew, the worship leader (preacher, priest, prophet, diviner, medium or griot) and the people, (pews, assembly, congregation or laity).

This dynamic dialectic of spiritual interaction between the supernatural expectancy and the natural anticipation enhances the corporate nature and function of the Black Church in the worship experience. The worship activities progresses from the dialectical dynamics of spiritual interactions to some high point of complementary creativity, experienced by all as "having church." This process of interchange achieves a wholistic coalescence of spiritual integration or common-union. The activities in this dynamic interaction, interchange, interplay and integration include and illustrate functions such as: 1) Preaching: Questing for spirituality; 2) Teaching: Nurturing for faithfulness; 3) Pastoring: Shepherding for soul-care; 4) Ritualizing: Celebrating for experiencing rites of incorporation; 5) Prophesying: Advocating for transformation.

*1. From the Pulpit—The "Diviner-Inheritance" of the Black Preacher: Preaching and Questing for Spiritual Fulfillment.*

Black preachers have several prescribed leadership skills and functions, especially on Sunday morning at the traditional 11:00 A.M. worship service. They, in that space of time, "become" the peculiar, if not mysterious, reincarnation of those ancient African custodians of the worship legacy—from the *zamani* (the ancient past). These unique personalities, past and present, *zamani na sasa* (present and immediate past), exemplify a touch of charisma in the art and craft of facilitating the worship dynamics and direction of development. Black preachers presume the prerogative of some distinct anointment in the privileged status and roles of leadership in the worship experience in particular and sometimes other socio-religious activities in general.



John S. Mbiti has made a comprehensive description of the different profiles of leadership from the African inheritance in the category of religious "specialists." The religious specialists are the gifted custodians in the knowledge, practice and mystical roles of linking the natural and the supernatural worlds in the worship moment in particular and sometimes other socio-religious activities in general:

Specialists are in effect the repositories of knowledge, practice and, symbolically, of the religious life of their communities. They are the ones who make the history of African traditional societies both sacred and religious. Specialists are the symbolic points of contact between the historical and spiritual worlds. In them are the continuity and essence of African religious thought and life. These are the men, women and children whose sacred presence in society makes their life and that of their communities a profoundly religious experience. Every village is within reach of one or more such specialists. They are the concrete symbols and epitomy of man's participation in and experience of the religious universe. Without them, African societies would lose sight of and contact with this religious phenomenon. African religiosity demands and appreciates their presence in every community, and for that reason one specialist may be expected to function in more than one capacity.<sup>25</sup>

From *zamani* and *sasa*, these were and now are, a variety of ways by which the specialists assume leadership. For some, there were special rites such as the "rites of initiation" in which specific expectations of both spirit-possession and social approbation were realized. In Nigeria, among the Igbo peoples,

Union with the Spirit [God] and [a person] becomes spiritualized, deified, through prolonged mysterious and trying rites of initiation . . . after the initiation [one] becomes the leader of the democratic village, . . . he is not a pagan priest. He is *imago Dei*.<sup>26</sup>

In Ghana, among the Akan peoples, especially the Fanti tradition, the call to leadership is celebrated when priests experience possession,

The primary requisite to becoming a Fanti priest is possession by a diety [*absom*] or by the "little people" of the forest [*mboalsia*]. This state of possession or "call" is the supreme religious experience. It occurs when the "deity comes down on the head": and may occur at a public ceremony where drumming and singing are conducive to possession or it may come to the individual in private. Some priests maintained they were alone in the forest when first possessed.<sup>27</sup>

In the *zamani* times, these specialists were trained to be experts in spirituality, essentially, in the role and function of the worship experience and the religious encounters. Men were usually the "diviners." Someone in every community practiced divination. Sometimes this pro-

<sup>25</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 193.

<sup>26</sup> Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Spirituality* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1980), pp. 114-115.

<sup>27</sup> William R. Bascom and Melvin Herskovits, eds., *Continuity and Change in African Cultures* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 257.



cess took place through medical practices and sometimes through other priestly functions. The divination practices were performed to unveil or deal with the mysteries of life. Even though some persons were "under possession" during the ceremonies, nevertheless, they maintained common sense, control, intuitive know-knowledge or even the power of charisma to utilize hypnotic skills in leadership action during the worship experience.

The Black Preacher has continued the inheritance of the charismatic art in this ministry of leadership. That is, he has received the mantle of the ancient "diviner" as he promotes a variety of ministries in service. The basic functions of the African diviner and the Black preacher were essentially parallel in comforting, counseling, building confidence and strengthening assurance. Through the creative leadership activities, especially in worship, these specialists appropriately interchanged roles as pastors, priests, preachers whose ultimate role or highest function and challenge has been and is to facilitate in bringing the Divine powers into the human condition . . . in questing for spirituality.

In the *zamani* period of West Africa, the Yoruba system of divination was and is the most highly developed process or form. The "Ifa system" of divination connected the "*orunmila*," the divinity of divination, with the natural experience. Among the Fon peoples, as well as the Yoruba, the diviners, through ceremonies and various rites, mediated communion between or with the non-human powers among the living, the living dead and the spirits.

Divination links together in its own way, the physical and spiritual worlds, making it a religious activity. The Diviner fulfills an intermediary function between the physical and the psychical, between the human and spiritual, for the sake of his own community.<sup>28</sup>

In the art and craft of preaching, the Black preacher, in the quest for gifts of spirituality in the worship experience, is the Diviner—one who facilitates the challenge of linking the supernatural world with the natural world. His demeanor in manner, mood, message and method open up the tuning and timing of harmony of the ordinary moment with the extraordinary moment in the Divine or Supernatural presence.

## *2. From the Pew—the "Medium-inheritance"—the Unique Aunt Jane: Questing for Spiritual Fulfillment.*

There are certain persons who register the degree or quality of spirituality in the worship service. Aunt Jane in the Black Church worship has been like the thermometer or the thermostat, not so much as intending to measure or cut off the spirituality of worship as to be a conduit through

<sup>28</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 179.



whom the Holy Spirit would be manifested. In the traditional Black Church worship experience, there were always certain specialists who served as the intermediaries through whom "the power" would be released into the communal experience.

In ancient time, *zamani*, these specialists were called Mediums. In the traditional African worship, women have been the Mediums through whom the special dispensations of powers have erupted and flowed. Mediums functioned to facilitate the communication with the spirit world. When under possession, they sang, chanted, and alternated speaking with changing voice patterns. As the spirit deepened, possession came; they were "caught up" in the spirit and became unself-conscious, and the characteristics of behavior could change—trembling, clapping, rattling gourds—in another dimension of spiritual powers in control of the worship service.

In the *zamani* of West Africa, the Medium personalities were in close working relationships with the "Diviners" or the priests in the temples and shrines. Among the Ashanti (Ewe, Fon and Yoruba and others), the Mediums were the ones who were "the professionals"—gifted in the speciality of spirit-possession. Under possession, during the most intense phase of worship, there were psychic vibrations that incited physical vibrations of bodies—shaking, jerking, rolling in agitations of perpetual movements. They danced under spells of dynamic and dramatic rhythms and cried out estatic and sometimes piercing, spirit-filled utterances. From *zamani* these professionals were trained and set aside as specialists of the spirit-Mediums, in executing or exhibiting trance skills. Among the Dahomean priests,

Many Dahomean priests are never subject to possession themselves, but have mediums attached to their temples who enter into trance at will. [When someone, during a service, shows special sensitivity and responsiveness to the spirit], . . . the presiding priests interprets this as a divine call and persuades the inspired one to begin training for the service of God.<sup>29</sup>

During the worship service in the contemporary Black Church, some Black women and men, for whatever reason, have been most demonstrative in being spirit-possessed. How often on Sunday morning, when that special dialectic is in motion in the drama of worship, when the prophet-priest-preacher has been preaching under the holy unction of power, there are certain mothers or sisters in the church who time a complement of response to that rhythm of vibrations in the spirit to make appropriate antiphonal responses under the power of the Holy Spirit. In the Black Church worship, this was and is the function of the classical "Aunt Jane." These devout Black women were and are the "movers and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 173. This is the calling to the vocation as a medium, i.e., a specialist.



shakers" in the worship service and they are the guardians of the spirituality in the experience of "having church." Mediums were and are in spiritual readiness and temperament for the appropriate response in the spirit, authentically intended to embellish the quality of emotional tone in the worship experience.

3. *From the Pulpit—The "High Office"—Inheritance of the Black Minister: Administrating Authority and Sharing Power.*

Spiritual leaders, whether as diviners, mediums, priests, prophets or preachers, assume leadership in the office of ministry. The office is a holy calling and those who are so elevated are endowed with certain gifts of powers. Religious specialists frequently presume a royal-like status that permits the cult of personality sometimes to eclipse the mystical authority of the office. This high office, when necessary, links the political and religious agenda, and sometimes links the sacred and secular in either negative or positive ways. The most important linkage is that which was symbolized between the Divine and humankind in the natural or mortal connections.

From the modest, small rural situation or in the urban church or storefront, to the largest sanctuaries in the cathedrals and temples; from the local preacher, deacon or elder to the Presiding Elder, District Superintendent, Moderator or Bishop, it is "the office," combining place of position and person to the royal character of leadership with certain rights, privileges and functions. The religious specialists in the African and African-American tradition are elevated to special leadership positions. They are given honorific titles. This tradition came out of Africa:

Rulers are therefore not ordinary men and women: They occupy a special office and symbolize the link between God and man . . . . Where these rulers are found, they are not simply political heads: They are mystical and religious heads, the Divine symbols of their peoples and spiritual government. They are therefore Divine and sacred rulers, the shadow or reflection of God's rule in the universe . . . Highly elevated positions and titles, such as Saviour, Protector, Child of God, Chief of the Divinities, Lord of Earth and Life . . . . They regard their office as having been instituted by God in the zamani period.<sup>30</sup>

The gifts of power associated with the "high office" are evidences of the anointment with the holy calling. The spirituality of this is actualized in the rituals of formal ceremonies as inaugurations, installations, coronations, ordinations or consecrations. The spiritual authority of these custodians of the high office tradition is enhanced in the pageantry of the initiation ceremony or the incorporation events. There are special robes and accessories worn, anointing with water or oil, laying on of hands, or

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 182.



spreading of incense. The power of the Spirit is mysteriously transferred or transposed into the charisma of personages elected, appointed or called into leadership. The "high office" is also the empowerment of the chair or "golden stool," the altar, the pulpit or the particular seat of spiritual authority from which one presides or rules as *ex cathedra*, i.e., as connectional traditions in the Western Christian styles of governance. Some sect and cultic groups or Church movements merged positions and titles as Daddy Grace, Father Divine, Prophet Jones, etc. The same sense of reverence has been given by the people in saying pastor, preacher, Reverend or even brother or elder. Leadership in the life of the Church and certainly in the worship experience receives a certain kind of veneration and the pulpit has become the "holy ground."

In this charismatic inheritance of power by the African-American preacher—prophet-priest—and in his or her role in the pulpit during the worship experience or service, these religious doctors, some called "doctors of soulology," function from the inheritance of traditions of the African specialists as priests, mediums, or medicine men. They continue the inheritance of vast power by the adaptation of the ancient rites of Obe worship or modifications of Voodooism. W.E.B. DuBois made note of that continuity in the life of the Black Church—from the ancient African tradition. Slavery did not destroy this inheritance of religious leadership wedded to the "high office" as a form of continuing Africanism in the Black Church worship:

At first sight it would seem that slavery completely destroyed every vestige of spontaneous movement among Negroes. This is not strictly true. The vast power of the priest in the African is well known: his realm alone was the province of religion and medicine remained largely unaffected by the plantation system. The Negro priest, therefore, early became an important figure on the plantation and found his function as the interpreter of the supernatural, the comforter of the sorrowing, and as the one who expressed, rudely but picturesquely the longing and disappointment and resentment of a stolen people. From such beginnings arose and spread with marvelous rapidity the Negro Church, the first distinctively Negro American social institution. It was not at first by any means a Christian Church, but a mere adaptation of those rites of fetish which in America is termed Obe worship or Voodooism. Association and missionary effort soon gave the rites a veneer of Christianity and gradually after two centuries, the Church became Christian, with a simple Calvinistic creed, but with many of the old customs still clinging to the services. It is this historic fact, that the Negro Church of today bases itself upon the sole surviving social institution of the African Fatherland, that accounts for its extraordinary growth and vitality.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. *From the Pew: "People-Participation-inheritance" in the "High Office": Authority and Sharing Power.*

The Black preachers today are the specialists in the *sasa* who continue

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<sup>31</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *The Negro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 113-114.



the art and craft of spiritually binding the congregation of his or her community or village as the Diviners from *zamani*. The Black preacher is the artist who inspires the participation of the audience so that everyone participates or is involved in the worship experience. Either he, the music director, or Aunt Jane would provide the leadership that generated the spirituality of the worship experience. This has been accomplished through music in the contemporary Black Church, although other means are being employed. Music has always been a vital catalytic agent in the worship experience. Music enables the preacher to set the tone or have the tone to set by the lay-audience, under the leadership of lay specialists. The spiritual dynamics of the worship service are especially inspired to enable the worshiping community to experience or sublimate in the experience or charisma of the high office.

From the *zamani* African traditional worship context, music brought everybody into the worship experience as participants. No one was to be separated as a spectator or stranger, an observer or on-looker. Everyone was invited to be or become a part of the free flow of Spirit-empowered feelings, enhancing supernatural energies. All were in worship harmony with that spiritual energy generating from the conduit of the high office. The dynamisms of spirituality generated the worship experience and transformed the people. The music inspired the unity and enthusiasm. Worship is to be enjoyed by all. It would enable the worshiper to be able to employ "the force" in the daily life activities. Everyone experiences charisma from the spirituality of the high office of the pulpit, thereby providing the leadership that bonded communal celebrations through incantations, chantings, preaching, singing, humming, moaning, dancing, playing instruments, all in the spirit of incorporation of the pulpit and pew, leadership and people in the high moment of "having church."

The separation of the 'artist' from the 'audience' is not an African pattern, although specialists are always present, music is participative. Almost everyone can and does sing; many people play instruments, most people are competent in at least one type of musical expression. African music is functional on two levels—the music itself is integrated into daily life, and it is performed and enjoyed by large numbers of people within the society.<sup>32</sup>

Let the Church say "Amen"; "Amen." Let the Church say "Praise the Lord;" "Praise the Lord" Let the Church say "Hallelujah;" "Hallelujah." Let the Church "stomp the Devil," and the congregation, in one movement, stomps the floor or ground simultaneously. All are one in this charismatic moment, at one with the high office in the Black Church worship.

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<sup>32</sup> Bascom, *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, p. 56.



5. *From the Pulpit—The Griot (Story-Teller)—Inheritance of the Teaching Ministry: Teaching and Nurturing for Wholistic Growth.*

Teaching has always been an integral part of the Black preacher's responsibility—especially from the pulpit during the worship experience. In the Traditional African Religious experience, more emphasis was placed on teaching and very little, indeed, if any, on preaching as seen today. Mbiti reminds us of this, as he writes:

There is too much preaching and too little teaching in our churches all over the continent. In *traditional* Africa there was plenty of teaching and no preaching . . . . Preaching alone will not deepen the Faith in Africa.<sup>33</sup>

Teaching was the way whereby all social obligations and relationships were informed and all personal relationships were shaped and all interpersonal relationships were nurtured. Unfortunately, among both African and African-Americans, this ministry became disconnected and much preaching, or a certain type of preaching, either in content or style, or both, eclipsed an important aspect of the religious leader's primary function in this leadership role—that of teaching from the pulpit.

There has been, nevertheless, some continuities of the teaching tradition in certain significant parts of the traditional Black church worship experience. It was accomplished more in the way that the early Black preachers strongly maximized the function of the Oral Tradition. The teacher was a master in illustrating the content of beliefs by telling stories or "The Story." Even the so-called unlettered preachers were Master Teachers in the art of presenting the Word that would teach the truths of the faith from the Bible. Sometimes story telling through Biblical illustrations was done word for word, line for line or sometimes in setting forth the contextual background as laying the foundation for the subsequent message and ultimately the mood. Instant transposition and interpretations for empirical applications augmented preaching-readiness to assure preaching-relevance. The Black preacher in America had become the new Griot of the Oral Tradition. As the Master-Communicator, he continued the African tradition by "telling" and "teaching" the Story. Many Folk stories were presented in the way in which it was done in the *zamani* African tradition:

*Folk stories are popular in every group of African societies. Story telling is perhaps the most widely used method of communicating tribal or national wisdom, ideas, historical events, morals, etc. Almost everyone knows and can narrate several stories. Both story telling and the drama from biblical episodes would readily appeal to our illiterate population. African people often use names which convey particular mean-*

<sup>33</sup> John S. Mbiti, "The Ways and Means of Communicating the Gospel" in *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, ed., C.G. Baeta (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 329.



ings and ideas.<sup>34</sup>

In the African and African-American worship tradition, story telling, either from Traditional African Religion or from the Biblical experiences, perpetuated this vital, traditional function in the Sunday morning worship service. Communication of the story would be presented in teaching or in preaching. However, storytelling put to music is most popular as another aspect of the African inheritance. In the Traditional rites, music was an integral part of the most significant occasions as for example—in the rites of passage, the use of rhythmic drums, the recitations of the folk historians, all in the rhythmic cadence—especially those soul-stirring drums in syncopated, alternating, heart throbbing, breath-taking, nerve tingling and feeling-thumping sounds:

There are tribal rites of passage connected with the life of the individual and with which are focal moments in community life as well. Often such rites are performed at critical points like birth, initiation, marriage and death . . . Africans are extremely fond of singing. Music is one method of communication and can serve many purposes . . . Only the rhythmic beat of the drum can fully awaken the emotions of the African people: the piano or organ is too weak for that—through language that is meaningful and familiar.<sup>35</sup>

From the memory banks of the Griots, the Oral Historians, the human encyclopedias, the perpetuation of the laws, customs, values and accomplishments of the people were continued, linking events of the living with the living dead and passed on in preparation for the community of the unborn. From the rich inheritance of the African life, the artist, through the messages of the story in the oral tradition, accentuated the communication being effective, indelibly stamped on the memory banks of the nervous system. Music was significant in this process. Specific accounts depict this among the Nazima tribe on the West Coast of Africa:

Laws, customs and history were handed down by these folk historians and musicians by word of mouth . . . These 'living encyclopedias,' these mimes, poets, dancers and montebanks were trained in secret meetings . . . Important facts of history, the origins of tribes, the details and beliefs have been preserved in the memory of man . . . take the place of libraries by supporting amongst themselves successive generations of living books, each one of which adds to the heritage it has received from the precedent.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 333. Emphasis mine.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 334-335.

<sup>36</sup> Miles Mark Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), p. 2.



6. *From the Pew—Diverse Gifts—Inheritance of the Corporate Faith—Teaching: Nurturing for Wholistic Growth.*

In the African inheritance, music reinforced the teaching discipline in pursuing those values which enhanced the strengths and resources of the community life. Some of the objectives in the corporate faith intended to establish discipline, maintain social control, clarify cultural knowledge about society and social life, solidify the spiritual values, condition the psychological as well as the social patterns of behavior and enable each person to internalize the social value by the enculturating process as in the rites of passage.

In the wholistic response of people to leadership, the collective experience in the partnership of worship, the corporate faith, is manifested through sharing-teaching, sharing-shouting, sharing-healing and sharing-dancing. All experiences are communal and the democratic principle is social more than individual. In sharing-teaching, as corporate narrators

It is more a functional social symbolism only, but it continues to be a viable instrument for teaching discipline and for asserting social control. There are many other religious practices and varieties of sacrifices carried out for the spirits of the people.<sup>37</sup>

In sharing-shouting, as the dialogue between the diviner and medium or as between the Black preacher and Aunt Jane, teaching is still going on,

Shouting may, at times, be 'put on' or manipulated. But at its best, it teaches. Aunt Jane and all the rest [witness] that the presence of God is sheer ecstasy—that before God we can be absolutely free and uninhibited—and that God freely accepts and loves the real person that we have to hide almost everywhere else. The ecstasy of being somebody to the hilt for even five minutes, teaches enough faith to keep an oppressed and despised Black man courageous and creative for another week. Ecstasy teaches and reinforces teaching. It does not always express itself in shouting in Black tradition, but it does always involve deep feelings.<sup>38</sup>

In sharing-healing, faith-healing and the teaching-faith come together in a functional way. Teaching is realized also in healing experiences. Healing is realized in the teaching experience. The African specialists engaged the wholistic approach to healing and teaching in order to: cure some afflictions and maladies, eliminate ignorance and fear about some conditions, overcome superstition and distortions about reality—especially about sickness. Teaching and healing were empirically symbiotic in certain functions of the worship experience, meeting various needs or dealing with various conditions.

African priests and educators need to have a systematic knowledge of the local cul-

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<sup>37</sup> Nya Kwawon Taryor, Sr., *Impact of the African Tradition on African Christianity* (Chicago: The Strugglers' Community Press, 1984), pp. 83-101.

<sup>38</sup> Henry H. Mitchell, *The Recovery of Preaching* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), p. 56.



ture in order to form correct judgments about African beliefs and practices and determine their value for worship. The priests of the African churches cure illness by teaching the afflicted and by inducing states of possession in which the evil spirit is thought to leave the body. And by similar means they [intend] to ward off witchcraft or sorcery.<sup>39</sup>

In sharing-dancing, every situation of experience is illustrated and socialized in the meanings and moods appropriate to that moment in experience: dancing has been the universal rhythmic accompaniment to singing. Africans danced for joy. They danced for grief. They danced for love. They danced for hate. They danced in the time of trouble. They danced to bring prosperity. They danced for the joy of dancing. They danced to pass the time. Above all, they danced for religion. In Dahomey (Benin), this was practiced:

In Dahomey . . . each diety was worshiped with special dances. This dancing and singing or shouting, as Capuchin monks described it in the 17th century, 'might be heard half a league off . . . .' Dancing was a special branch of African education and was always performed to the sound of drums.<sup>40</sup>

There was something about rhythm that facilitated the educational moment by unifying and integrating the mood or sense of readiness for learning. Learning takes place both consciously and unconsciously. As the mood prepares for the reception of the message, it is the atmosphere that unconsciously conditions the attitude for openness—receiving, understanding and giving. All the connections are put "on go" when the harmony establishes "one accord." The pews continue to play a co-equal part or role in the intention of community wherein corporate learning presumes a learning-content-dialectic undergirding the rhythmic action,

Rhythmic action was arranged to accompany songs. Rhythm was so deeply a part of African life that the singer would click the fingernail of his thumbs, and onlookers would pat their feet and clap their hands while bodies swayed to syncopated time.<sup>41</sup>

From the collective skills and faith of the Black Church, the lay leadership rose to the challenge of providing leadership in relating the insights and inspiration from the worship service by providing various social ministries. Whether in various levels of education—from preschool to universities, more in name at first—in business, including burial societies to funeral homes, savings societies to banks, from burial and savings societies to insurance companies—the Black Church worship experience provided the inspiration and the determination to meet needs of the Black community. This teaching-ministry was accomplished in partnership with the pew in utilizing the diverse gifts of the people.

<sup>39</sup> Taryor, *Impact of the African Tradition on African Christianity*, p. 208.

<sup>40</sup> Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs In the United States*, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.



7. *From the Pulpit—The Priest-as-Medicine Man-Inheritance in the Black Church: Pastoring and Shepherding for the Care of Souls.*

In the African religious heritage, especially from West Africa, priests were associated with temples, shrines and other sacred places. Priests were specialists, called to perform specific rites on behalf of certain groups—the family, clan, tribe or nation. “The tradition of priests is stronger in West Africa than in other parts of the continent.”<sup>42</sup> The concept of the “priesthood of all believers” and its practice did not originate solely in Europe. There had been an extensive practice among African peoples from *zamani*, especially West Africa. Some priestly functions were conducted by elders or recognized leaders who would take charge in the communal events including performing weddings, settling disputes, participating in the initiation acts, festivals, rites of passage, cleansing ceremonies, etc.

Priests are religious servants associated with temples, but in the African situation the word is used to cover everyone who performs religious duties whether in the temples, shrines, sacred groves or elsewhere.<sup>43</sup>

There were, however, special priests who were set aside and designated to carry out the highest task of linking the natural world with the supernatural world—as intermediaries on earth. They coordinated or facilitated the communications between the people and the Divinities. Priests served God and the Divinities on behalf of the people.

In training and preparation for the functions of the priesthood, the priests were strictly directed in matters of spiritual preparation and readiness. They were expected to exemplify a high level of spiritual and moral leadership. In fact, the society had prescribed conditions and expectations which governed priestly functions as regulations:

There are regulations governing the moral and spiritual state of priests before, during and immediately after officiating at formal ceremonies; for example, they may not be allowed to have sexual intercourse, to eat certain foods, to mix with people or wear certain clothes.<sup>44</sup>

In that heritage of those who have been specifically called and trained as priests—as the High Priest in Nigeria, the Babalowa—the leadership for worship skills is provided through the training sessions. The same is true for the Ewe in Ghana. There were some special training sessions for priests in certain cultures. Following the training, there was an initiation process whereby the priests learned all the functions for their role in society.

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<sup>42</sup> Mbiti, *The Ways and Means of Communicating The Gospel*, p. 187.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, p. 189.



Among the Ewe, for example, the priests are 'called' by God, then trained, initiated and finally cleansed or ordained. Their duties include the performing of daily and weekly rites, making libation and offering prayers for blessings for the barren and other needy people.<sup>45</sup>

#### Among the Ashanti and Yoruba,

when people go to make offerings and intercede with God or the Divinities, it is the priests that receive them, take and use offerings and make intercessions on behalf of the needy. They are the living representatives of their cult.<sup>46</sup>

In general, some of the functions of the priests in African culture were: 1) to be a religious symbol among the people; 2) to give instruction in the laws; 3) to be under the possession of the divinity; 4) to take seclusion from the world when necessary; 5) to perform rites; 6) to make libations; 7) to exercise intercessory prayers; 8) to counsel and offer blessings; 9) to be the spiritual and ritual pastor for the community; and 10) to officiate at sacrifices, offerings and ceremonies.

In the Black Church worship, from this inheritance, the pastor as shepherd-priest provides general and specific leadership-direction in all of those religious functions—in essence, interceding with the supernatural on behalf of the people/congregation. The priest has sometimes been referred to as the "Doctor of Souls," in the finest spiritual sense. The Black Church in worship, under the leadership of the pastor, is continuing those ritualistic practices. Whether the spiritual leader is functioning in the life of the extended family of the African clan or tribal nation or the extended family of the African-American Black Church, the caring systems are essentially the same. DuBois noted this function of inheritance:

[The pastor or priest-preacher] is the interpreter of the supernatural, the comforter of the sorrowing, . . . the longing and disappointment and resentment of a stolen people.<sup>47</sup>

From the African inheritance in the pastoral ministry of shepherding—as care of souls—pastors in the Black Church worship experience and continue the ancient tradition of the specialists known as "medicine men." The medicine men represented the African heritage of the pastoral leadership function in the care of souls, persons and people in the villages and wider community in *zamani*. The medicine men of *zamani* were concerned with afflictions as sickness, disease and misfortune. With special gifts and skills, they used herbs when appropriate with spiritual applications, inducing strength and they *did* heal the sick in many cases. Incantations and music recreated attitudes and the atmosphere to enable

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>47</sup> DuBois, *The Negro*, pp. 113-114.



proper moods, moments and methods in the healing process. They served as doctors and pastors in the healing-worship activities. "The medicine man is in effect both doctor and pastor to the sick person."<sup>48</sup>

It must be clearly stated that medicine men were not quacks or practitioners of witchcraft such as was the so-called witchdoctor. These specialists were healers of all kinds of afflictions, sanctioned by the community to employ traditional practices. One of the most significant specialties was to lead the events of worship whereby the ritualistic mood, moment and method of cleansing took place to absolve impurities and resolve harmful effects from the negative forces in sickness, disease or misfortune.

Medicine men are regarded as harmless and serve the needs of people. They are the friends, pastors, psychiatrists and doctors of traditional African villages and communities . . . The medicine man is one of the specialists whose profession is likely to continue in Africa for sometime—especially since people's needs continue to increase through modern change, and he is moving his practice into the urban centers where these needs are more concentrated.<sup>49</sup>

The care systems and spiritual techniques, functional through the priests and through the kinship systems of networking in the extended healing care, was provided for any and all, then and now, by the African or the African-American priest-doctor as pastor.

People have faith in their religious leaders. As dedicated and caring specialists, they conduct themselves, for the most part as trustworthy, upright and morally upstanding persons.

The African priest-doctors, indeed even the rituals and incantations were often designed, consciously to be more curative of persons than manipulative of dieties. In any case, the traditional West African still brings all serious matters to the priest-doctor for the appropriate ritual, the necessary advice for a cure, whichever applies.<sup>50</sup>

The priest-as-medicine-man-inheritance in the Black Church provided a holistic leadership. As a group they were keenly sensitive in discerning peoples' needs. They were accomplished in training and became masters in the knowledge of herbology and the role of nature in promoting healing for the body as well as the mind and spirit. Under the leadership of the priest-shepherd as the Black pastor, the worship experience was a therapeutic ministry.

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<sup>48</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, p. 169.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>50</sup> Carroll M. Felton, Jr., *The Care of Souls in the Black Church* (New York: M.L. King Fellows Press, 1980), p. 21.



8. *From the Pew—the Healing-Inheritance of the People in Worship: for the Care of Souls.*

Although worship is an intrinsic value, the instrumental function of Black worship provides the spiritual reinforcement whereby the people or congregation would be able to internalize the healing values in the worship experience. Transformation is taking place as: ideals are being affirmed; compassion is being nurtured; cooperation is being inspired; devotion is being enhanced and fellowship is being generated in the Spirit. Music in the worship service undergirds these values in the moods that inspire: adoration and praise, confession and forgiveness, assurance and dedication, consecration and service. In all of these ways the healing-inheritance is alive and in motion for persons/people in the communal-family-worship experience. Worship is healing of the people in communion.

The African care patterns extend far beyond the ministries of the priest-doctors. The whole extended family based society is an instrument of care. No illness or tragedy is conceived of as befalling an isolated person or nuclear family.<sup>51</sup>

From the traditional African experience during the worship moments, there were certain dynamics in the dialogue between the pulpit and pew, artist and audience, leader and people in call and response. The people freely participate, experience and share in the supernatural energy that flows.

The African style [of] call and response is effected throughout the service by the minister making the initial call and by the congregation, either in unison or by individual members saying Amen . . . The worshiper draws on the Creator's energy through prayer, praise and adoration.<sup>52</sup>

The people in the worship service become a social network as a caring community enabling the healing experience in sharing as comforting and counseling each other in acts of fellowship. The ministry of the worship service provides personal and social counseling: problems are being diagnosed; needs are being dealt with; instant prescriptions-cures are being filled. The techniques for inducing healing by physical and psychical modes in the worship experience, i.e., by catharsis, substitution, sublimation, release, uplift and inspiration, meditation and reflection, movement and participation, are a part of the healing-inheritance in the Black church worship.

Worship in the Black experience is fundamentally people participation in the dialectical process. Leadership and fellowship complement each

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>52</sup> Ulysses Duke Jenkins, *Ancient African Religion and the African-American Church* (Jackson, N.C.: Flame International, 1978), pp. 116-117.



other. Followship is essential in carrying out the service as well as the total program of the church, even in terms of the opportunities for healing to take place in the corporate experience of worship. This is important for the preparation of the people to practice caring-healing in the outreach of the experience beyond the walls, i.e., outside the formal act of worship. Worship, at best, does provide the reinforcement whereby the congregations are prepared to be partners with the pastoral leaders in the responsibilities of all the activities as another essential purpose of the worship experience being fulfilled for other purposes. Enter to worship, depart to serve. As the programmatic opportunities of the church engage the healing-ministry in the outreach, the pew shares in ownership of the leadership role, essentially as followship-participation:

The programmatic burden must not be left to the Black preacher alone. It must be shared as a corporate responsibility. Just as the pastor/preacher has a responsibility to the congregation, so the congregation has a responsibility toward the preacher. The strength of pastoral leadership will be in proportion to the people's followship.<sup>53</sup>

*9. From the Pulpit-The "Rites of Passage"-Inheritance of the Black Pastor-Priest: Ritualizing and Celebrating in Rite of Incorporation.*

The pastor as priest in the worship service ritualizes the incorporation—events as the rites of passage mediates a connecting linkage between the African inheritance and the Black Church Worship Heritage.<sup>54</sup> Three ways of approaching the Africanism-connection in the worship experience, under the leadership from the pulpit, are:

1) The inheritance of practices in continuities, that is, the carryover of "invisible linkages from Africa to the New World [America]."<sup>55</sup> These practices are viewed as continuities. Some of these practices are: baptismal rites after birth; initiation rites after puberty; marriage rites after adulthood; funeral rites after death; and memorial rites after zamani (time).

The pastor continues the African religious traditions which are natural as they follow the life rhythms of nature. Taryor and Mbiti make the observation:

Human life follows a rhythm of nature which nothing can destroy: birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death and eventually into the company of the saints.<sup>56</sup>

2) The inheritance of practices in the New World which are modified

<sup>53</sup> H. Beecher Hicks, Jr. *Images of the Black Preacher* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1977), p. 112.

<sup>54</sup> Taryor, *Impact of the African Tradition on African Christianity*, p. 186.

<sup>55</sup> Mitchell, *The Recovery of Preaching*, pp. 15-19.

<sup>56</sup> Taryor, *Impact of the African Tradition on African Christianity*, p. 186.



and emerge from some residuals mixed with creative innovations for the new situation as the "invisible institution" (Black Church) during slavery and beyond: these practices emerge from residuals. Some of them come out of the secret meetings and are expressed in the testimonial services, celebrated in the home-coming services and events and recreated in new creations as *Kwanza*.

Nat Turner was a spirit-touched freedom-fighter who exemplified the double meaning in certain practices, such as the secret meetings. On the one hand, they represented occasions for getting away and getting back to the mystique of the African cult. On the other hand, the secret meeting was adapted to the need to struggle for freedom in the context of oppression (slavery). Miles Mark Fisher notes:

Secret meetings were convened by songs. Negroes stole away from numerous plantations to African cult meetings just as Nat Turner of insurrectionary notoriety convened his companions by the ironical singing of 'Steal Away.'<sup>57</sup>

3) Tracing the roots of contemporary practices, that is, the Africanisms in beliefs and practices of the Black worship experience. These practices are manifested, sublimated or transposed into several different forms. There are Africanisms in prayer meetings, in Bible study, in Church meetings, in Special Day recognitions and especially in the Sunday morning worship service:

Ulysses Duke Jenkins states:

I am amazed at the resiliency of the African ontology as exemplified by my ancestors in Africa and those of us in America . . . The Sunday service held in the African-American church gives thanks to the Creator for all that He has given throughout the week, and for the beginning of a new week. The Sunday service is also a continuation of a variety of African ceremonies in a compressed [experience].<sup>58</sup>

He gives an example of the Ogboni Festival and the Founders Day to lift up the fact that the roots of many of the contemporary practices come out of the Black Church heritage but further back indeed into the African inheritances.

One of the Nigerian ceremonies of ancestral worship is called the Ogboni Festival, which is held mostly for dignitaries, and would be comparable to Founder's Day in the African-American church. Ancestral worship is usually a private affair involving just the family, but if the person made a particular contribution to the community as a whole, that person is usually deified, and the ceremony is carried out annually in the community to honor those contributions. This would coincide with Founder's Day in any African-American church.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States*, p. 66.

<sup>58</sup> Ulysses Duke Jenkins, *Ancient African Religion and the African-American Church*, p. 17.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.



The rites-of-passage-inheritance and ministry then encompasses the function of the leadership from the pulpit in serving the needs of whole persons, congregations and the whole community.

*10. From the Pew—The Kinship-Inheritance of the Black Church  
Extending Family: In Rites of Incorporation.*

The objectives of the congregation in worship are the same as from the pulpit—strengthening spiritual kinship ties in the connecting relationships of church, family and community life. Kinship as the extending family is the nexus of the corporate experience. In traditional African society, each African has a corporate sense of identity, a collective social consciousness. The Black Church in general and the worship experience in particular also develop those activities which provide the socialization and enculturation of persons into the wider social environment: 1) Name-giving ceremonies with community participation to establish new connections of interrelationships of communal parenting as “our children” and for the childrens’ relationships with all adults in the community as “our parents.” One would see young and old participating in all acts of worship together: “Kinship plays an important role here, so that a child cannot be exclusively ‘my child’ but our child.”<sup>60</sup> “And the child receives its name—the symbol of personality.”<sup>61</sup> 2) The initiation ceremony to produce the new adults, male and female, who are being placed in positions to accept the responsibilities for participating in the adult life of the community; 3) The marriage drama for the assurance of procreation of life and the continuation of immortality of the human spirit in peoplekind; 4) The incorporation of the recently passed persons, now saints, into the new communal relationships as the living-dead to be revered for five generations.

Kinship in community as the extending family is seen as vertical as well as horizontal. The process of incorporation, whether in the rites of passage in Africa or the worship sacraments, traditional Christian or African, solidifies the communal-kinship system: “The African concept of the family also includes the unborn members who are still in the loins of the living.”<sup>62</sup>

Each African or Black person is connected in the vertical and horizontal kinship-inheritance in the African and Black Church extending family, a family celebrated in the worship experience. Mbiti states: “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am complete.”

In the Black Diaspora, kinship has an African social heritage which

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<sup>60</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.



the Black Church reconnected or restored or continued in the extending family-community consciousness and relationships. Even through the rites of separation and transition during the time of slavery, new relationships were formed and were developed where two or three gathered together in their African humanity and awareness of the High God as hearing prayers. The African community-kinship emerged wherever relationships based on mutual interdependence and trust or even suffering took place. From the informal few to the struggling small bands and on to the organized large movements, new extending family-societies were growing. The Black Church worship experience continues the African inheritance of binding community relationships in the worship experience. The familial terms warmly and affectionately used from time to time are brother, sister, mother, father. In the rural areas there was also "cuttin" (cousin), which was used to include and embrace attenuated and augmented persons into the extended family-community of the Church family.

The African inheritance in the Black Church worship heritage provides order, unity, progression and balance. There is *order* in the deliberate organization of activities to provide ministry to all in appropriate times and places. There is *unity* in the coordinated practices which includes all ages, sexes or groups in sharing some common activities or functions. There is *progression* in the processes of incorporation in the formation of peer group experience moving from one stage or level to another stage or level of the life-cycles. There is *balance* in an effort to assure that some spiritual nurture is appropriately provided to meet all needs. There are specific ministries designed to serve persons in different stages of the life cycle of development. For the most part, the worship services are organized around particular events. Certainly music plays a strategic role in undergirding the spiritual tone in all of the worship activities, as the worship experience involves all participants regardless of age, sex, roles and functions of the participants interrelating as one organic extended family.

*11. From the Pulpit—The "Prophetic-inheritance" in the Black Church: Prophecy and Advocating for Transformation.*

There is a long tradition on the role of the prophet in the African and Black Church experience. This specialist was active in the West African context before contact with the Europeans or with Christianity from other quarters of Africa or Europe.

The Black religious leaders who emerged during the period of slavery continued the ancient tradition. However, the function of the prophet changed and he or she operated as the revolutionary leaders in the freedom struggle.



In more recent times, the term prophet has, in some cases, combined the ancient Biblical tradition with the leadership of new movements, especially in the urban areas in Africa and America.<sup>63</sup>

Prophets are usually known as charismatic leaders who are called out from the world, both to hear a special message and to give a special word from the Lord. They carry out a variety of functions based on the needs of the people. They also exemplify a variety of attributes which serve the people in their worship needs. This is especially significant since people in oppressed conditions need a militant if not radical voice to be spoken or action to be engaged. Nevertheless, the prophets from the African inheritance integrated the mystique of leadership of the spirit applied to the contemporary predicament. "The prophets belong to the category of diviners, seers and mediums, and may have other religious or political functions in their societies."<sup>64</sup>

In all of the instances of the prophetic authority or unique sense of presence and impact, there is an "air," or demeanor of one in this high or special office, who exemplifies special gifts. Some make pronouncements with forthrightness as special proclaimers of the words of power under the spirit and authority of the supernatural. In the African inheritance,

A prophet is a person who is possessed by a spirit of the "air." Evans Pritchard describes Nuer prophets as a recent development, and having charismatic powers whose virtue resides in themselves rather than in their office. When they speak as prophets it is the spirit which speaks by their lips, theopneustic speech. The prophet in making his declarations say, "I am such and such, naming the spirit."<sup>65</sup>

The prophetic leaders from the African-American community came out of the religious context from the beginning. The secret meetings might have been merely occasions for Black people to release their pent up frustrations and anger or seek some uplift and dignity by fellowshiping together or to continue some of the traditions of the ancestors in paying homage to the Creator. Nevertheless, the secret meetings were influenced by those prophetic personalities who would use their spiritual powers and charisma to struggle against oppression and for liberation. This is especially the case with the following three "generals" in the Lord's Army:

The secret meetings of Negroes reached a climax under the militant leadership of Nat Turner. Nineteenth century assemblies of the African cult in the United States had begun with the ambitious plans of Gabriel Prosser to take and fortify Richmond, Virginia. Slave plots continued through the daring scheme of Denmark Vesey to anni-

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



hilate the white population of Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>66</sup>

In all periods of time, from Africa to the present period in America, Black peoples have accepted the unique role of certain leaders as prophets. Sometimes they were viewed as mediators, sometimes as messengers, sometimes as missionaries and, when necessary, as militant Men of God with a messianic style of ministry.

Preachers emerged as the mediators between the slaves and the God that was to deliver them. A Messiah would come to deliver them but they had to obey the messengers, the preachers [prophets].<sup>67</sup>

It must be said also that Martin Luther King, Jr., was one of the forerunners of the militant Black church movements. Prophet King had led the Civil Rights struggle of the 50's and 60's. He had been moving in the direction of solidifying the base of unity among Black people [to relate to all people], to whom he had given 13 years of decisive dynamic leadership. His leadership of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference created a 'passing through' of the Christian liberalism phase providing a transition from Negro Christianity into the militant Black [prophetic] church.<sup>68</sup>

### 12. *From the Pew—"Prophecy: Deliverance—"Inheritance" in the Collective Struggle Against Underdevelopment.*

The prophets' function is a synthesis of the "diviner" and the "medium"; therefore, it has a male and female leadership heritage respectively and a role exercised by the leaders and the people in sharing leadership. On the one hand, the prophet mediates between the natural world and the spiritual world and on the other hand, the prophet is possessed with supernatuial powers. Under the power of the spirit which comes by revelation, induced by chanting, dancing, drumming, clapping, stamping or other means, the prophet speaks:

They tell out the will of the realm of spirit by various means, perhaps by divination, perhaps by observation of omens, or even by deep careful thought and consideration after very matter-of-fact discussion.<sup>69</sup>

In Ghana, West Africa, Kofi Opoku, Director of the Martin Luther King Black Church Studies program, arranged for our study group to travel in parts of Nigeria and Ghana to study at the prominent Universities with distinguished professors and then to visit the villages to experience the reality of Traditional African religion and life. On several visits, we had occasion to be with prophets and prophetesses. Their function was to prophesy deliverance from misfortune, maladjustment and exploitation. These religious specialists advocated for enabling or empower-

<sup>66</sup> Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States*, p. 87.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas, *Relevance of African Religion to Christianity*, p. 33.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas, pp. 46-47.

<sup>69</sup> Noel Q. King, *Religions of Africa* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 51.



ing persons and people to understand the existing predicament and take appropriate actions.

In the passage to the New World, the leader who would be prophet had to emerge out of the most difficult and contradictory circumstances. Planning between smaller or larger groups led to various movements in the Black Diaspora. Some of these movements were called "redemption movements." They could emerge with or without a clear-cut leader: "The role of the leader is of less definitional importance. Redemption movements can emerge without a leader; however, such movements are generally not prone to aggressive social action."<sup>70</sup>

On the other hand, whether with an identifiable leader or a tentative leader from the people, the "collective" movements address an aspect of the social predicament. The prophet is critical in the role of the charismatic leader in social movements. The prophets of the group without social consciousness become "redemptive cults" often with other worldly objectives or passive accommodations to this world's social problems. But for a sustained social movement, a singular charismatic figure is in order: "The emergence of a singular charismatic figure appears to be necessary for sustained social action."<sup>71</sup> In radical social action in America, there was the Angolan prophet with Gabriel Prosser; there was Boukman, giving incantations and powers to the forces of Touissant L'Ouverture to defeat LeClerk and Napoleon's army.

Our desire is to point out the dynamics of African religion that persist in the various religious and social movements in the New World and give these movements their particular flavor. This will enable us to understand the many different ways in which the African *force-vitale* manifests itself in Black survival.<sup>72</sup>

Although the pulpit has provided a long and splendid line of prophetic Black preachers in the history and story of the Black Church, especially in the context of the worship service, there is a special mass movement in the life of the Black Church. Whereas the Black preachers as prophets and the scholars have attempted to frame an ideology of struggle from the themes of justice as in the Old Testament and from the Messianic ministry of Jesus in the New Testament, as Gayraud Wilmore noted:

In recognizing the meaning of Jesus and the Kingdom in relation to the great prophets of justice in the Old Testament, Turner's [Henry M. Turner] reading of Scripture adumbrated the Black theology of preachers from Henry Highland Garnet and Henry McNeal Turner to Martin Luther King Jr., who understood Jesus as a protagonist of radical social change.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Leonard E. Barrett, *Soul Force* (New York: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1974), p. 98.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>73</sup> Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (New York: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1972), p. 92.



Nevertheless, it is essential to focus on the leadership and reality from the people in motion. W. J. Walls, in the subtitle of the history of the AME Zion Church, does this in the expression, "Reality of the Black Church." There is a prophetic reality in the very being, nature and process of the people living the reality. Worship is a prophetic force when the people are pushing the preacher to be the prophet and leader in the situation. In a sense, the title of the book and the historical presentation by Vincent Harding accomplishes this in the work, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*. The people are the "river" of prophesy, flowing in the power of deliverance. The people say; "Come on up"; "Stay right there"; "Tell it like it is!" "Go on . . . go on . . . go on."

Martin Luther King, Jr., one of the greatest prophets in history, recognized the way that the prophetic movement of the people can push one in leadership and take over leadership. In a foreword to the book by Daniel C. Thompson, *The Negro Leadership Class*, King quoted another of the greatest prophets in history, Mohandas K. Gandhi:

Patterns of leadership are changing, and will continue to change in an attempt to keep up with mass demands. Gandhi's oft-quoted statement is so applicable today, "There go my people, I must catch them, for I am their leader."<sup>74</sup>

### *Concluding Statement*

These are some African inheritances in the Black Church Worship. There are, of course, more inheritances, many more; however, neither time nor space permits me here to develop these themes further. What has been written above may be enough to substantiate the idea that the Black Church worship experience is the ultimate resource and strength for meeting the survival needs and liberating purposes of Black person and peoplehood, making them a part of the transformation of this or any other segment of the global village. It is the wholistic ministry whereby the Pulpit and the Pew understand their co-equal partnership, whereby the leaders and the people experience the whole Gospel in worship and carry this experience into their total reality.

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<sup>74</sup> (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1963).