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Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The Ethics of Social and Spiritual Hospitality in Black Church Worship

The preacher tells of days long ago and of a people whose sufferings were like ours. He preaches of the Hebrews and the fiery furnace, of Daniel, of Moses, of Solomon and of Christ. What we have not dared feel in the presence of the Lords of the Land, we now feel in church. Our hearts and bodies reciprocally acting upon each other, swing out into the meaning of the story the preacher is unfolding. Our eyes become absorbed in a vision. . . . The preacher's voice is sweet to us, caressing and lashing, conveying to us a heightening of consciousness that the Lords of the Land would rather keep from us, filling us with a sense of hope that is treasonable to the rule of Queen Cotton. As the sermon progresses, the preacher's voice increases in emotional intensity, and we, in tune and sympathy with his sweeping story stay in our seats until we have lost all notion of time and have begun to float on a tide of passion. The preacher begins to punctuate his words with sharp rhythms, and we are lifted far beyond the boundaries of our daily lives, and upward and outward, until drunk with our enchanted vision, our senses lifted to the burning skies, we do not know who we are, what we are, or where we are. . . . We go home pleasantly tired and sleep easily for we know that we hold somewhere within our hearts a possibility of inexhaustible happiness; we know that if we could but get our feet planted firmly upon this earth, we could laugh and live and build. We take this feeling with us each day and it drains the gall out of our years, sucks the sting from the rush of time, purges the pain from our memory of the past, and banishes the fear of loneliness and death. When the soil grows poorer, we cling to this feeling; when clanking tractors uproot and hurl us from the land, we cling to it; when our eyes behold a black body swinging from a tree in the wind, we cling to it. Some say that, because we possess this faculty of keeping alive this spark of happiness under adversity, we are children. No, it is courage and faith in simple living that enables us to maintain this reservoir of human feeling, for we know that there will come a day when we shall pour out our hearts over this land.

Richard Wright*

We thank Thee this morning for the opportunity extended toward us. Thank Thee that Thou hast saw fit to have us continue here in Thy vineyard to work out our soul's salvation. Thank Thee that Thou hast left a written record, guide, and assurance, that we have at Thy right-hand-side, a friend-in-deed; at Thy right-hand-side a scarred Savior; at Thy right-hand-side a mediator and redeemer—but standing to receive our souls. Thou have widen the way from us. We're knowed by our acts as did the disci-

* Richard Wright, *Native Son* (Harper & Brothers, 1940), p. 31.

ples. They knowed Him by the breaking of bread, giving livin' circumstances; to those we does meet, may we realize by our acts [by being born again] becoming living witness of Him.

William H. Pipes¹

Black church worship is both a spiritual and social drama that calls its worshippers to affirm their own self-worth and the worth of others, even unneighborly others, in the name of Jesus. Worshippers are called to practice the spiritual and social virtues (e.g. forgiveness, reconciliation and love) of hospitality. The belief that true Christian worship makes worshippers practioners of social and spiritual hospitality constitutes a markedly clear difference between the way the white church and black church have understood the ethical objectives of worship. The white church, too often regulated by the variables of race and class, has allowed an artificial split to occur between the practice of spiritual hospitality and social hospitality. The claim of the spiritual-hospitable is that they can love all persons generically. This is only a problem for those of this point of view when they are confronted with having to love particular persons of a different class or ethnic group. This in fact amounts to no more than spiritual brotherhood and sisterhood that is minus a social base of verification in the real world; it is fantasy. The thesis being posited here is that the black church, historically, has refused in practice to separate social hospitality from spiritual hospitality. The ethical objective of its worship practice has been to make the ideals of spiritual brotherhood/sisterhood, i.e., love, forgiveness, trust and reconciliation, inseparable from the practice of social brotherhood/sisterhood. The claim to love the generic other, i.e., love everybody, means little in black church worship, if the claimant cannot love the particular-other. Worshippers are required to love the universal in the particular and vice versa.

The second part of the thesis shows that black church worship generates a creative conflict in its worshippers between what I term free-self-expression-in-the-spirit and self-restraint-in-the-spirit. The former requires its worshippers "to be like Jesus in their hearts." Hence, black church worship was born out of its worshippers' moral struggle to adjudicate the conflict between the Christian ideal of "being love" and "doing love." From the hush-harbor church of slaves to the mass-meeting church of the Civil Rights Movement, blacks have struggled to make their confessional creeds of forgiveness and reconciliation compatible with their deeds of being both forgivers and reconcilers.

This study shows that at least three historical examples of black church worship illustrate our theoretical assumption. I. *Hush-harbor*

¹ William H. Pipes, *Say Amen Brother* (Westport, Connecticut: Negro Universities Press, 1951), p. 114.

Worship; II. *Black Independent Church Worship*; III. *Mass-Meeting Church Worship*. Each example generates in the consciousness of the worshippers a creative ethical tension between what I termed above as free-self-expression-in-the-spirit and self-restraint-in-the-spirit. Each example requires that worshippers present themselves before God as sinners in need of forgiveness and reconciliation; that they represent God before unneighborly others as God's agents of forgiveness and reconciliation.

I.

Hush-Harbor Worship: The Drama of Appearing and Speaking Together.

Democracy is predicated on the notion that freedom is possible only where people have the right to speak and act together. Hannah Arendt, in her book, *The Human Condition*, observes that the city for the Greeks was not the physical location, but ". . . the organization of people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be."² A communal bond is created where speech and action is permitted to take place among those who appear together. Arendt's further elaboration on this phenomenon is insightful:

It is the space of appearing in the the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly.³

The genesis of black Christian worship in America took place on plantations where slaves lived for the purpose of acting and speaking together in Jesus' name. Whenever or wherever slaves gathered to act and speak in Jesus' name they experienced Jesus' consciousness. The latter is what made true space for acting and speaking possible among slaves. The slave spiritual "Steal Away To Jesus" explicitly accents Jesus' pre-eminence in the consciousness of slaves. It is for Jesus that slaves riskfully violated their slave masters' codes of servile morality, ultimately, to risk their own lives. Stealing time and space for worship empowered slaves with a rare kind of self-respect and human dignity that submissiveness to their masters' servile morality codes could not give them. They chose to obey the one with the power to destroy body and soul at the risk of being caught by the one who could destroy the body. Jesus consciousness, as construed by the clandestine worshipping community, reminded each gatherer of how contingent his and her here-ness and now-ness were: "I

² 7th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 198.

³ Ibid.

ain't got long to stay here." The poetic singer of the black American religious community cautioned each stealer of worship time and space of who ultimately summons the true worshiper to worship:

My Lord, He calls me, He calls me
by the thunder, the trumpet sounds
within my soul, . . .

Could the phrase, "The Trumpet sounds within my soul," suggest that God initiates both externally and internally the worship response in the called? The singer speaks as though "the trumpet sounds within my soul" is an uninitiated act on his part. Perhaps this is an affirmation that the power of God governs all natural and human responses. Hear the singer's second attestation:

Green trees are bending
poor sinner stands a trembling⁴

1) *Appearing with Each Other at the "Hush-Harbors."*

Slaves commonly held worship services in secret from their masters. The places where such services were held were called the hush-harbor or brush-harbors; the former name grew out of the need to control the noise level.⁵ Worship at the "hush-harbors," contrary to worship in their masters' churches, provided a context where slaves could freely appear for acting and speaking together with God and each other.

Slaves hosted each other's raw and bruised feelings as they worshipped in the hush-harbors. Here they encouraged each other to express their feelings of joy and sorrow; they learned to practice the spirit of Christian neighborliness toward each other. A former slave's testimony illustrates this claim:

Us Niggers used to have a prayin' ground down in the hollow an sometimes we come out of the field, between eleven and twelve at night, scorchin' and burn' up with nothin' to eat, and we wants to ask the good lawd to have mercy. We put grease in a snuff pan or bottle and make a lamp. We take a pine torch too, and goes down to the hollow to pray. Some gits so joys they starts to holler loud and we had to stop up their mouths. I see niggers git so full of the lawd and so happy they draps unconscious.⁶

Worship as the drama of appearing together for the purpose of acting and speaking in Jesus' name created a notion of mutual trust between those who had been taught to be distrustful of each other.

⁴ James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*, vol. 1 (New York: Viking Compass Edition, 1969), pp. 114-117.

⁵ Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 41.

⁶ George P. Rawick, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, Vol. 4 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Company 1972), pp. 198-199.

Hospitality, being there for each other in Jesus' name, became the primary meaning structure for understanding the peculiarity of the drama of worship in the slave community. George Gusdorf's words about hospitality are helpful: "Each could give the other essential hospitality in his better self; each recognized the other and received from him that same recognition."⁷ Being there for the other and being recognized by the other in Jesus' name became the means of collective and individual empowerment. It provided the space for unlimited growth. Again, the words of Gusdorf are insightful:

For reduced [to] himself, man is much less than himself; whereas in the light of openness to the other, the possibility of an unlimited growth is offered to him.⁸

The account of a former slave of Virginia illustrates how they understood "hush-harbor" worship as an act of appearing for each other:

The respect that slaves had for their owners might have been from fear but the real character of a slave was brought out by the respect they had for each other. Most of the time there was no force back of the respect the slaves had for each other, and yet they were for the most part truthful, loving and respectful to one another.⁹

2. Listening for God, "The Wholly-Other," in the "Hush Harbor"

Listening, a prerequisite for being spoken to by the "Wholly Other" in the hush-harbor, was the worshippers' way of being host to the call of the "Wholly Other." The spiritual, "Hush! Somebody Calling Mah Name," denotes the degree to which each worshipper remained personally sensitive to God's activity in the worship drama. The worshipper was told that the caller "sounded like Jesus, somebody's calling my name." Another spiritual, "Listen to De Lams," cautioned worshippers to listen to each other. God calls both directly and indirectly: "Listen to de lams, all a cryin'/I wan'ta go to heaben when I die." "De lams" are innocent brothers and sisters of the slave community, who are admonished to persevere:

Come on sister wid yo' ups and downs . . .
De angles' waitin' for to give you a
crown . . . Come on mourner an'-a don't
be shame, . . . De angel's waitin for
a write-a yo' name, . . .¹⁰

Again, the community cautions those who wrecklessly disregard the call

⁷ George Gusdorf, *Speaking*, trans. by Paul T. Brockelman (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1965), pp. 67-68.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, eds., *Weevils in the Wheat* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 235.

¹⁰ Johnson and Johnson, *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*, Vol. I, pp. 78-79.

of God:

Mind out brother how you walk de cross, . . .
Yo' foot might slip and yo' soul get los, . . .¹¹

Gusdorf's insightful contribution about the value of spiritual hospitality is instructive at this point:

The distinctive sign of man in dialogue is that he listens as well as he speaks, if not better. That is the effect of an attentive presence, a spiritual hospitality, as it were that excludes the desire to dazzle or to conquer as well as to claim sovereignty.¹²

Slaves undoubtedly understood the difference between spiritual hospitality, which was the consequence of being born again in Jesus, and social hospitality, which was the by-product of socialization in the gentility of southern manners and custom. Spiritual hospitality meant more than social actors sharing common social graces; it meant the tacit consent on the part of transformed worshippers to share the gift of God's revealed grace with even their enemies. A former slave's account of the impact of conversion on his mother's behavior toward friends and foes is a case in point:

When I got to a big boy, my ma got religion at de camp meeting at El-Bethel. She shouted and song for three day, going all over the plantation and de neighboring one, inviting her friends to come to see her baptized and shouting and praying fer dem. She went around all de people dat she had done wrong and begged dare forgiveness. She sent for dem dat had wronged her, and told dem dat she was born again and a new woman, and dat she would forgive dem. She wanted everybody dat was not saved to go up wid her. My ma took me wid her to see her baptized and I was so happy dat I sung and shouted wid her. All de niggers joined in singing.¹³

Spiritual hospitality, contrary to social hospitality, is the consequence of God's revealed gift of love and forgiveness to those deemed social outcasts by the socially acceptable. This fact explains why the recipients of God's spiritual hospitality" expressed an insatiable urge to publicize the news about what they had received: "I had to tell somebody because I just couldn't keep it to myself what the Lord had done for me." In the words of Gusdorf, the recipients' life becomes ". . . a pledge and a commitment, the signature of a contract which may appear to be a loss of freedom, but which in fact guarantees [her] a new freedom through the power of obedience."¹⁴

The spiritually hospitable, through the act of repentance, avail themselves for Jesus' visit. Jesus does not have to knock at the door of their

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Gusdorf, *Speaking*, p. 103.

¹³ James McBride Dabbs, *Haunted by God* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1972), p. 32.

¹⁴ Gusdorf, *Speaking*, p. 123.

hearts, they "set the door open" and wait for his arrival.

The following quote is pregnant with rich, metaphorical expressions reflecting slaves' yearnings to be Jesus' host in the worship drama:

Dear Massa Jesus, we all uns beg Ooner [you] come make us a call dis yere day. We nutting but poor Ethiopian women and people ain't tink much 'bout we. We ain't trust any of dem great high people for come to we church, but do 'you is de one great Massa, great too much dan Massa Linkum, you ain't shame to care for we African people. Come to we, dear Massa Jesus. De sun, he hot too much, de road am dat long and boggy [sandy] and we ain't got no buggy for to send and fetch Doner [you]. But Massa, you 'member how you walked dat hard walk up Calvary and ain't weary but tink about we all dat way. We know you ain't weary for to come to we. We pick out de torns, de prickles, de brier, de back-slidin' and de quarrel and de sin out of your path so dey shan't hurt Ooner [your] pierce feet no more.

Come to we dear Massa Jesus. We al uns ain't got no good cool water for give you when you thirsty. You know, Massa, de drought so long, and the well so long, ain't nothing but mud to drink. But we gwine to take de 'munnion cup and fill it wid de tear of repentance, and love clean out of we heart. Dat all we hab to gib you, good Massa.

An' Massa Jesus, you say you gwine stand to de door and knock. But you ain't gwine stand at we door, Massa and knock. We set de door plum open for you and watch up de road for see you.

Sisters, turning to them, 'what for you all ain't open de door so Massa know he welcome.' One woman rose quickly from her knees and set the church door wide open. Come, Massa Jesus, come! We know you is near, we heart is all just tremble, tremble, we so glad for hab you here. And Massa, we church ain't good enough for you to sit down in, but stop by de door just one minute, dear Massa Jesus and whisper one word to we heart-one good word-we do listen Massa.¹⁵

The clenching phrase in the above quote is "but stop by de door just one minute, dear Massa Jesus, and whisper one word to we heart one good word we do listen-Massa." It is the willingness to listen to the "one word" that none but Jesus can speak that qualifies the worshippers to be the Lord's host. All the tears of repentance and the confessions of humility are of no avail if Jesus' spoken word goes unheeded by the worshippers.

II

Black Independent Churches: Worship As The Affirmation of Sacred Space

The birth of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, under the leadership of Richard Allen, symbolized a historical attempt on the part of black Americans to acquire their own institutional worship space. Allen and his followers, launched a formal protest against black and whites being segregated in the white Methodist church. Even under the segre-

¹⁵ John Firth, *Experience and God: Labors of the Reverend Benjamin Abbot* (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1801), p. 130.

gated arrangements, whether at church or in the big house, blacks still experienced the spirit of God: "At the time of family worship, abundance of black people assembled in the kitchen, and the door was set open that they might hear without coming into the parlor."¹⁶ Firth observed: "The power of the Lord came down in a wonderful manner among the black people; some cried aloud; others fell to the floor, some praising God and some crying for mercy: . . ."¹⁷

It is when Black's affirm collectively their right to speak from the same sacred space, the church altar, from which their white counterparts speak to God that disorder occurs. When Allen, and his fellow blacks, chose this alternative in the St. George Church of Philadelphia, a scuffle broke out as one of the white trustees sought to force Mr. Jones from his knees. Mr. Absalom Jones' (Allen's colleague) plea to be left alone until he had finished his prayer was to no avail:

Mr. Jones said, "Wait until prayer is over, and I will get up and trouble you no more." With that he [Mr. H] beckoned to one of the other trustees, Mr. L____ S____, to come to his assistance. He came with William White to pull him up. By this time prayer was over, and all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued by us in the church.¹⁸

In the protest act of affirming the basic American freedom of the right to worship, Allen invited all lovers of truth to join him in procuring a place where equal acceptance would be the regulating principle of public worship. He said:

. . . we have thought it best to procure for ourselves a separate place in which to assemble, therefore we invite all our Methodist brethern who think as we do, to worship with us.¹⁹

Allen's belief that Christian public worship was free to all was predicated on his theological presupposition that "heaven is free for all who worship in spirit and truth."²⁰

This belief led Allen's successor, Daniel A. Payne, to assert that such affirmation qualified members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church to be God's universal hosts of humankind:

Holding up to our Christian brethern, regardless of color, the importance of union among us, not only as Methodists, but as worshippers before the same Lamb, in whose blood we are washed; the extension of the Redeemer's Kingdom among our

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Richard Allen, *The Life Experiences and Gospel Labors* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 125.

¹⁹ Charles H. Wesley, *Richard Allen: Apostle of Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, 1969), p. 130.

²⁰ Allen, *The Life Experiences and Gospel Labors*, p. 27.

brethern of color in this country . . . the importance of turning the attention of our brethern to the land of our fathers . . . that the prayers of our brethern may ascend to the ear of the Lord. That he may in mercy raise up some of our young men and prepare them to carry to Africa's shore the glad tidings of Salvation.²¹

III.

Mass-Meeting Worship: The Montgomery Bus Boycott

The independent black church historically, existing as a society within a society²² has been the assembling place for social protest groups.²³ It, under the leadership of Martin L. King, Jr., during the mid-nineteen fifties came to symbolize the southern black community's beachhead from which social and political protest was organized and launched. Worship service became synonymous with social protest, constituting a great spiritual and social awakening in the life of black America. This worship phenomenon would eventually impact, as well as transform, the social and political ethos of America. King led worshippers in the daring adventure of questioning theologically and ethically the foundational presuppositions of the racist society. A pre-eminent ethical concern was: How could white Christians claim to love God whom they had never seen while hating their black sisters and brothers whom they saw daily? Mass-meeting worship created the contexts for blacks, and whites of good will, to test the validity of the white community's claim of Christian brotherhood/sisterhood.

King, as senior pastor of the Dexter Avenue Church, presupposed theologically that a christian church must create a worship context free of class barriers in the black community:

. . . worship at its best is a social experience with people of all levels of life coming together to realize their oneness and unity under God. Whenever the church consciously or unconsciously caters to one class it loses the spiritual force of whosoever will, let him come, and is in danger of becoming little more than a social club with a thin veneer of religiosity.²⁴

King preached that the Christian church's ultimate objective was to integrate persons with God and each other.²⁵ At a Sunday morning worship service, December 4, 1955, King led the black church of Montgomery in making a public resolution to no longer ride the buses as second class

²¹ Daniel A. Payne, *History of the A.M.E. Church* (Nashville: Publishing House of the A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1891), p. 95.

²² Cf. Peter Paris, *The Social Teaching of Black Churches* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

²³ Cf. Howard Bell, *Negro Convention Movements: 1830-1861* (New York: Arno Press, 1969).

²⁴ Martin L. King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

citizens. He appealed to a human dignity in the consciousness of the black church community that had its genesis in the "hush-harbor" church of the slave community. He warned "that if they accepted such injustices without protesting, they would betray their own sense of dignity and the edicts of God himself."²⁶

King advocated that worship obligated the worshipping community to assume a caring role for each other as well as for the keepers of an evil system--the segregationists. He summoned the Montgomery church community to become the living embodiment of God's love for those who opposed it. He mandated that it "meet the forces of hate with the power of love; . . . to meet physical force with the soul force."²⁷ The ultimate aim of its action was "never to defeat or humiliate the white man, but to win his friendship and understanding."²⁸ Such love would have to prove itself in the black community of Montgomery "by cutting across all class and religious barriers" at mass-meeting services. These services symbolized the ecumenical spirit where representatives of every denominational body "joined hands in a bond of Christian love."²⁹ King sensed the realization of his ideal when, "men and women who had been separated from each other by false standards of class were now singing and praying together in a common struggle for freedom and human dignity."³⁰

At least two episodes in the Montgomery protest movement dramatize the way in which the mass-meeting worship context informed the community's sense of moral responsibility:

1) *The bombing of King's home.* During a mass-meeting service on January 30, 1956, the news reached the church that King's home had been bombed while his wife and baby were in the house. At the news of the bombing, King took control of the panic stricken crowd:

I urged each person to go straight home after the meeting and adhere strictly to our philosophy of nonviolence Let us keep moving, with the faith that what we are doing is right, and with the even greater faith that God is with us in the struggle.³¹

King, upon arriving home, discovered that his wife and daughter were safe. However, a crowd of angry blacks, many armed and prepared for confrontation with the white policemen, had congregated around King's house. Neither the city's mayor nor its commissioner was able to calm the angry mob. King preached the same message of forgiveness to the angry mob that he had preached in the churches at the mass-meeting services:

²⁶ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 87.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 85.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 86.

³¹ Ibid., p. 138.

Now let us not become panicky. If you have weapons, take them home, if you do not have them, please, do not seek to get them. We cannot solve this problem through retaliatory violence but with nonviolence. Remember the words of Jesus: He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword . . . We must love our white brothers . . . no matter what they do to us. We must make them know that we love them. Jesus still cries out in words that echo across the centuries: "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; pray for them that spitefully use you." This is what we must live by. We must meet hate with love. Remember . . . , if I am stopped, this movement will not stop, because God is with the movement. Go home with this glowing faith and this radiant assurance.³²

Kings's account of the audience's response typifies the "call and response" dynamics that take place in the drama of black church worship: 'Amen' and 'God bless you.' We are with you all the way, Reverend . . . tears on many faces.³³

In this dramatic moment King becomes God's forgiving host who leads a potentially hostile black mob to forgive the guardians of an evil system. In this radical moment of transformation, the community becomes God's love offering for the assaulters of its human dignity. It is an illustrative case of the weak embarrassing those thought to be strong. In the process, the angry community is freed to become the true neighbor for the unneighborly others. The locus of this transformational freedom is discovered in the courage to forgive unconditionally.

Forgiveness of this nature frees the forgiver because his or her act to forgive is not predetermined by the enemies' behavior. This illustrates Hannah Arendt's theoretical postulation that "forgiving . . . is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts a new and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven."³⁴ In a word, such unconditional forgiveness creates the moral space for the violated and the violator to start a new.

2) *The black minister who turned betrayer.* During the bus boycott the Reverend Fields, recording secretary of the Montgomery Improvement Association that King headed, resigned. In a press interview, Fields charged that the leaders, King included, had become "too egotistical and interested in perpetuating themselves."³⁵ He claimed, in addition, that the leadership had misused organization funds.³⁶ These charges were leveled against the organization while King was on vacation. Contrary to Field's expectation, such charges merely ignited the scorn of the black community against him. Field's sought amends by privately apologizing

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 241.

³⁵ King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 157.

³⁶ Ibid.

to King and other leaders for what he admitted were spurious charges. King accepted the apology on the grounds that Field's would make the same confession before a mass-meeting audience. This episode would test the black community's capacity to apply the principle of unconditional forgiveness that it had used so well with the white community. Field's would have to appear before a black worshipping community that saw him as a "devil" and a "Judas." In a priestly, manner King called upon the community at worship to forgive unconditionally one of its own:

Now in the spirit of our nonviolent movement I call upon you to forgive Reverend Fields. [Despite the few heads shaking in refusal . . .]. We are all aware of the weaknesses of human nature. We have all made mistakes along the way of life, and we have all had moments when our emotions overpowered us. Now some of us are here this evening to stone our brother because he has made a mistake. 'Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.' Will we be like the unforgiving elder brother, or will we, in the spirit of Christ, follow the example of the loving and forgiving father?³⁷

Field's confessional response:

Lord, help us to live in such a way this day, that even when we kneel to pray our prayers will be for others.³⁸

Congregation's response: "Amen."³⁹

Conclusion

These historical examples of black church worship clearly demonstrate that reconciliation and forgiveness have been foundational to black Americans' understanding of the christian faith. No other church group in America, under such incredible conditions of oppression, has dared practice God's unconditional love toward its enemies in such a way. Since slavery the christian segment of black Americans have believed that the practice of God's unconditional love was an incarnational possibility in the lived community of faith. Because they have dared practice such radical ideal, black peoples' churches became the centers of spiritual and social hospitality. Such phenomenon can only be accounted for by understanding how the black church community has understood Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Every worship service accents the deeds and teachings of the historical Jesus. What Jesus said and did as well as how his hearers responded to his sayings and deeds constitute an unbroken scenario of his life. The black American's response to this unbroken scenario is what constitutes its Jesus consciousness. It sees Jesus' virtue in his willingness to be freely self-expressive in God's spirit while being totally restrained by God's spirit. In God's spirit Jesus is free to be

³⁷ Ibid., p. 158.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

God's perfectly forgiving host for his enemies: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do," (Luke 23:34).

God's spirit constrains him to be his father's perfectly obedient son: "Father not my will but thine be done"; it is meet that I do the will of the father that sent me," (Matt. 26:42; John 4:34).

This understanding of Jesus has been the black church's normative source of moral empowerment. Its worshippers, because they have dared practice it, have always been willing to make room "under their own vine and fig tree" for those different from themselves. In so doing, they have maintained the vital, creative tension between spiritual and social hospitality. The former, without the latter, makes church worship a ritualistic exercise in spiritual escapism; the latter without the former, makes it a ritualistic exercise in comraderie. Whenever either is sacrificed for the other, the church becomes an impotent witness for Christ.

The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the profession in the United States. It is noted that the number of physicians has increased steadily since 1900, and that the distribution of physicians is still uneven, with a concentration in the large cities and a shortage in the rural areas. The report also discusses the various organizations of the profession, including the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians, and the American College of Surgeons. It is pointed out that these organizations have been successful in securing recognition for the medical profession as a learned profession, and in securing the right to practice medicine without restriction. The report also discusses the various reforms which have been proposed for the medical profession, including the establishment of a national board of medical education, the establishment of a national board of medical licensure, and the establishment of a national board of medical ethics. It is pointed out that these reforms are necessary in order to secure the highest quality of medical education and the highest standards of medical practice.

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