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## A Response to Dr. Wimberly's Paper

The paper begins with a discussion of three basic impulses behind black worship, namely, positive self image, wholeness and praise to God. He pinpoints the problem of an imbalance between ideological battles and a full understanding of the impulses behind black worship. Finally he offers an understanding of worship and takes a look at the place of small groups in community life. Although I agree with many of Dr. Wimberly's notions, the paper doesn't challenge me to explore new possibilities nor offer additional insights. It lacks originality. Some questions come to mind that would have been stimulating: Have the psychosocial needs of black people changed? What is the role of black worship in a world where blacks are being acculturated, or are attempting to assimilate into the mainstream of American life: What new needs are emerging for those who are achieving some success in the larger society? Is black worship responsive to the corresponding psychosocial and spiritual needs?

With a new language, a new homeland, a new religion (in addition to their own religious thoughts from their original homelands), the slaves took their new environment and shaped for themselves a worldview that included positive self image, wholeness and praise to God for being with them. This in itself was no small feat. They also took specific themes from Christian teachings that related to their life situation and found hope. Themes such as freedom, liberation, bondage, savior and deliverance found full expression in the black spirituals, sermons and consequently worship. These themes have always been an integral part of black worship. If I take Dr. Wimberly's thesis seriously, that worship reflects "the lived life," then black worship is a mixture of traditional worship themes—praise to God, adoration and reverence—plus what may be considered non-traditional themes such as freedom, deliverance, personal recognition, opportunities for organizational skill development and leadership training. These two dimensions are, in my judgment, inseparable. The slave worshippers created songs out of their life situation.

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The worship may have structurally resembled its white counterpart but the themes represented the slave's struggle to find meaning. Has the black church through worship lost its ability to be psycho-socially and spiritually creative in the face of new challenges? Or, is the black church holding on to the "old time religion" because there are underlying fears of the future?

Black worship as it is practiced today grew out of responses to oppression. In essence it has developed as a reaction which links the oppressed uniquely to the oppressor psychologically. Psychologically it seems to me that such a reaction has a paradoxical effect. A dependency may develop on the oppressor because it gives the oppressed a means of defining one's self—an object of definition. At some point in the past this process was unavoidable. The crucial question is whether or not the process has continued to the disadvantage of the race, and such strategy is no longer needed. This point is made in Howard Thurman's book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*. This is a crucial point in understanding black worship today and some of the underlying psychosocial themes that need to be assessed.

Another point of interest was Dr. Wimberly's contention that "Black Christian worship today has, in many churches, sought to respond to the self-image/wholeness needs of black people through ideological battles over cultural forms and expressions of black worship. The goal should be, rather, to investigate how worship can assist people to discover their self image and wholeness as children of God and how it can help people to praise God who is the source of our self image and wholeness." I feel Dr. Wimberly is on target here with a major imbalance in black worship; more attention needs to be given to the quality of life within the total worshipping community. If this point had been developed, the paper would have been more challenging.

Finally, I think a developmental approach to black worship would have stimulated some new thinking. Often I hear black clergy complaining that particular congregations are cold or unresponsive. The apparent assumption is that black worship is emotional and responsive, or it's not black worship. This assumption raises some serious questions about what constitutes genuine black worship. A developmental approach could lead to a realization that congregations progress through stages of development just as do individuals, couples and families. Rather than viewing a particular style of worship as black or non-black, especially when the worshippers are black, it could be an opportunity to assess psychosocial and spiritual need changes, consequently an opportunity to develop worship services to reflect these new "lived life" experiences.