

Reflections on “*Prophesy Deliverance!*
An American Revolutionary Christianity”
from Black Pentecostal Perspectives

A Word from the Editor

1982, who could forget it? On the national scene, Harold Washington became the first African American mayor of Chicago. The birthday of Martin L. King, Jr. became a National Holiday. Audre Lorde delivers her provocative speech at Harvard University during the festivities for the Malcolm X weekend. Michael Jackson released “Thriller.” Ronald Regan extended the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Satchel Paige died. Alice Walker published *The Color Purple*. The United States held a groundbreaking ceremony in Washington, D.C., for a monument to our men and women who served in Vietnam. A first-class stamp costs twenty cents. On the international scene, Margaret Thatcher was the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom as Great Brittan found herself in armed combat with Argentina over possession of the Falkland Islands. Tensions

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were high between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Mount Cameroon erupted. Ghana and Nigeria were experiencing economic crises. Apartheid was still in play in regard to Black South Africans. Sites in Soweto were the site of several bombings and massive civil unrest. And, Cornel West publishes *Prophesy Deliverance! An American Revolutionary Christianity*.

While West's *Prophesy Deliverance!* is consequential for policy in the public square on the world stage, it speaks directly to how issues of intersectionality, race, religion, philosophy, and economics play out in the African American story. In his account, West devotes attention to existential situations and experiences of African diasporic peoples in America. He ensures that his readers understand and acquaint themselves with how race, the formulation of law and economic policies, the creation of educational systems, and the social ethics in religious denominations have been significant

factors in structuring society and sociopolitical engagement in America.

One cannot help but spend countless hours re-reading *Prophesy Deliverance!*. West's account of White supremacy, modern racism, and those intellectual, scientific, social, political, and economic developments that account for the psychological and emotional tensions that comprise the consciousness of many Blacks in American society reach into the present. It is noteworthy that West does not leave the reader wondering about how African Americans responded to racism because he identifies four lines of attack that Black utilized to counter the larger narrative that Black people are in some way inferior to Europeans. Many of the counterarguments West identifies, especially the exceptionalist and humanistic traditions, are of profound importance for understanding leadership strategies and intellectual trajectories amongst Black people during the first fifty years of the twentieth century

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in America. One of the most thought-provoking components of *Prophesy Deliverance* is West's juxtaposition of Christianity and Marxism. While he seeks to balance his treatment of these two ideologies, he invites the reader to ponder the economic and political possibilities of "social atheism." This option is a brave alternative considering notions about causation and the role that the "Spirit" and the "Radical Other" play in the lore, worldviews, and intellectual traditions of people from sub-Saharan West Africa. In *Prophesy Deliverance*, West makes a case for socialism and goes as far as to invite the reader to quarrel with him about how this economic philosophy could assist the agent in thinking differently about the possibilities of the human condition and re-envisioning Christianity for peoples of African descent in America.

Noteworthy is it that Professor West delivered the core lectures and talks for *Prophesy Deliverance!* at a

Holiness-Pentecostal church. In traditional “West fashion,” and with customary “West diplomacy,” he threw down the gauntlet. In short, Professor West invited African American Pentecostals to reassess critical components of their social philosophy. Black Pentecostals thinkers accepted the challenge to celebrate and even quarrel with Dr. West about his ideas and approaches to moral theorization and social ethics he advances in *Prophesy Deliverance*. In this edition of the Journal of the ITC (JITC), a group of Black Pentecostal respondents elucidates and evaluate the groundbreaking work of Dr. West against the backdrop of Black Pentecostalism, the Christian tradition that overtook America through the human agency of William J. Seymour in Los Angeles in 1906 at the Azusa Street Revival. These interlocutors are A. G. Miller, Cheryl

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Sanders, Osagyefo Sekou, Dara Coleby Delgado, and Marlon Milner. While each contributor reads *Prophesy Deliverance from a different lens*, each thinker appreciates and shows how this monumental work has a home in Pentecostalism, the most authentic African American Christian expression in the West and perhaps the fastest-growing Christian religious tradition in the world.

Prophesy Deliverance! is a monumental publication. This book appeared forty years ago, and conversations about many of the concepts and arguments that appear in it still warrant investigation. The JITC joins the larger theological community, academic publishers, and seminaries across the country in recognizing the fortieth anniversary of *Prophesy Deliverance!* by making African American Pentecostalism the framework for

appreciating the arguments in this book.¹ This is our gift to this ongoing adventure in Black Pentecostal studies.

In the words of the young brothers and sisters on the streets: *mad respect to you*, Dr. West, and congratulations on such an influential book. Now, let us join Miller, Sanders, Sekou, Delgado, and Milner as they cast light on *Prophesy Deliverance!* from a Black Pentecostal lens.

Ashe.

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¹ Professor Keri Day and other scholars, who explore points West makes in *Prophesy Deliverance!*, receive treatment in several articles in this edition of the JITC.