

**PROPHECY DELIVERANCE!  
AT THE HOUSE OF THE LORD  
PENTECOSTAL CHURCH IN BROOKLYN**  
Albert G. Miller<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT**

*This essay delineates the context for Cornel West's *Prophecy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*.<sup>2</sup> This text erupted on the scene in 1982, and its effects reach far into the present. Professor West explored many of the ideas in this seminal project at the House of the Lord Pentecostal Church (hereafter cited as HOLC) in Brooklyn, New York, pastored by Bishop Herbert D. Daughtry, Sr. This article casts light on the model leadership at the HOLC, and how it abetted in social engagement efforts of the Black United Front (a mass-based protest movement), along with other community organizations. This paper concludes by reflecting on the significance of Pentecostalism for Black nationalist and pan-Africanist social/political activism. In doing so, this article too, analyzes the relationship*

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<sup>2</sup> Cornel West, *Prophecy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982).

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*between a Pentecostal bishop engaged in Black nationalist and pan-Africanist social/political activism and a Black and democratic socialist Baptist theological academic as they each attempted to live out the meaning of Black theology within their ministry contexts and among the masses as social protest.*

## **Introduction**

The relationship between Cornel West and my church, the HOLC has been described by Cornel in three different volumes. In each, Dr. West describes them in slightly different ways. In his first edition of *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* he states, “Major portions of this manuscript were presented during my year-long seminar at House of the Lord Church in Brooklyn, New York. I wish to thank Rev. Daughtry, Albert Miller, and the church ministers and missionaries for this rich opportunity – and for their

inspirational support.”<sup>3</sup> The second published acknowledgement from Dr. West about the relationship between *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* and the HOLC appeared in his Introduction to his *Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought*, where he says,

The same year I published *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Westminster Press), based in part on lectures I gave at Rev. Herbert Daughtry’s House of the Lord Pentecostal Church in Brooklyn, New York. Rev. Daughtry was the founder and then head of the National Black United Front—one of the few progressive organized responses to the conservative Reaganite policies of the early 1980s.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, 9.

<sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991), 26.

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The third reference by West regarding *Prophesy Deliverance!* and HOLC was in the “Forward” to *No Monopoly on Suffering: Blacks and Jews in Crown Heights (and Elsewhere)*, where West says:

By an act of sheer grace and providence, A. G. Miller a student at Union Theological Seminary (where I then taught) and now a professor at Oberlin College – approached me to give a series of lectures at his place of worship, Rev. Daughtry’s church. Little did I know that his invitation would lead to an exciting and enhancing period of nearly ten years of monthly lecture at the House of the Lord. In fact, major parts of my first book, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (1982), were first heard in Rev. Daughtry’s church in Brooklyn. Furthermore, it was the first time I faced the challenge of lecturing (with no notes) to an eager yet weary audience after a long day’s work – be it a raining, snowy or sunny day –

about Modernity and the problem of evil in America.<sup>5</sup>

This last description was Dr. West's most extended discussion about his experience. It points to some of the reasons that I approached Rev. Daughtry about inviting Dr. West to lecture at our church, which I will come back to later in this essay. Each of these descriptions is differently nuanced: with “presenting portions of the manuscript,” or “based on lecture given at the church,” or “first heard at the church.” Given the variously nuanced version of West’s explanations, let me set the context for my requesting Cornel West come to our church.

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<sup>5</sup> Herbert Daughtry, Sr., *No Monopoly on Suffering: Blacks and Jews in Crown Heights (and Elsewhere)*, with a forward by Cornel West (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, Inc., 1997), XV.

## **The Scenarios**

I first met Dr. Cornel West in 1980 at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York (before registering as a student in February 1981). He was lecturing in the evening, and my friend, Rev. Ronald C. Potter, invited me to hear him. My friendship with Ron went back to the Spring of 1975 when we were involved with a group of 20ish Black Christians, calling ourselves “The Radical Black Christian Forum,” who were seeking to understand our place in the world of Black theology, the Black power movement, and liberation theology. At the time, Ron served on the ministerial staff of the HOLC, assisting the Rev. Herbert Daughtry. Ron was the person that introduced me to Rev. Daughtry, my spiritual father in the ministry and my church of 44 years. I worshipped at the church for four years and finally joined the church

in the Summer of 1979. Soon after joining the church, in the Fall of 1979, I accepted a call to ministry under the leadership of Rev. Daughtry.

What drew me to this small Pentecostal church, with a large vision to serve the downtrodden and the oppressed, was Rev. Daughtry's commitment to living out a commitment to social justice and Black theology. Rev. Daughtry supported the New York Panther 21, who were jailed in 1969 and acquitted in 1971. His support of the Panther 21 led to a lifelong friendship with Panther 21 member, Afeni Shukar, and her son and Rapper, Tupac Shukar. They would both become members of the HOLC in the early 1980s.<sup>6</sup> In the 1970s, Rev. Daughtry would

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<sup>6</sup> Daughtry sermonized about Tupac's death the Sunday after his murder. See Herbert Daughtry, Sr. "Who Will Weep for Tupac?" *Sojourners Magazine*, March-April 1997.

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annually invite Dr. James Cone to give lectures on Black Theology at the HOLC. Rev. Dr. Karen Daughtry, his wife, would ask Womanist theologian, Katie Cannon, to provide an annual Women's Day sermon for several years in the 1970s. In the mid-1970s, Daughtry and the church reached out to support various Southern African liberation and other liberationist movements. Daughtry writes:

As early as 1977, our Church formed the Commission on African Solidarity to focus public attention on the issue of Southern Africa in general, and apartheid in particular, long before it became a popular issue. At that time, we raised several thousand dollars to assist the anti-apartheid forces in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and South Africa. We have hosted numerous international dignitaries, including Palestinian West Bank mayor, Joshua Nkomo (Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union), The Honorable Omarou Youssoufou (Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity), Princess Zenani Mandela Dlamini (daughter of Nelson & Winnie Mandela), Madame Maria Eugenia Neto

(First Lady of Angola), and exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide of Haiti.<sup>7</sup>

This was almost unheard of, in those times, for a Black church, especially from a Pentecostal minister and his congregation to involved themselves in acts of public protest and direct sociopolitical engagement.

Traditional sociological and historical scholarship on Pentecostalism has contended the movement has, at best, been apolitical and, at worst, actively so otherworldly that it had no interest in the social and political issues that plagued the poor and working-class persons, black, white, namely the demographic that comprises the

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<sup>7</sup> Herbert D. Daughtry. Sr. et. al, "The History Of The House Of The Lord & Church On The Mount," in *Membership Lessons* (Brooklyn, NY: The House of the Lord Pentecostal Church, 2008), 8.

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bulk of its membership.<sup>8</sup> Robert Mapes Anderson and other scholars argued that Pentecostals were overly impacted by sociological, psychological, and theological theories of deprivation arguing that the movement "could best be understood both from the perspective of social disorganization, . . . and from its twin, the personal deprivation theory argument."<sup>9</sup> Further,

Most studies focused on nontraditional religious practices, i.e., sects, as reacting to their perceived, relative social deprivational status within the society. Those who study sects have seen them as a force for maintenance of the status quo and the mental sanity of its participants. They have seen

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<sup>8</sup> There is much scholarship of this type, but the best representative of this theoretical perspectives is Robert Mapes (Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Carol Stream, IL: Hendrickson Publishing Group, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Albert G. Miller, "Pentecostalism as a Social Movement: Beyond the Theory of Deprivation," in *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 9 (Fall 1996): 111.

religion, in general, and sects, in particular, as a product of and reaction to deprivation.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, these scholars have dismissed Pentecostals, mainly Black Pentecostals, as asocial and apolitical, only looking to heaven to appease them as they are complacent with their oppressive situation. In effect, these scholars argued that Pentecostals lack any agency, social, psychological, political, or otherwise.

In contrast to Anderson and other deprivation theorists, other scholars viewed a strain of Black Pentecostalism in a more positive light. Drawing upon the research of James Forbes, Donald Miller, and Tetsunao Yamamori, Pentecostal scholar Estrelida Alexander, for example, argued for the existence of a stream of

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<sup>10</sup> Albert G. Miller, "Pentecostalism as a Social Movement," p. 102.

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“progressive Pentecostal renewalists” among the Black Pentecostal movement. She argued that Daughtry and the HOLC, among others, represent this stream. She describes this renewalist movement as “those believers who embrace “renewal spirituality” while working for social change within their communities.<sup>11</sup> Alexander further argued that these renewalist Pentecostals have “provided progressive practical approaches for the communities they serve, involving themselves in social action and benevolence. Innovative programs combine preaching the gospel and ministry with advocacy, education, and social empowerment.

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<sup>11</sup> Alexander, *The Spirit of the Lord: Renewal Spirituality, Biblical Justice and the Prophetic Witness of the Church*. Kindle Edition, 2022, p. 95.

Daughtry emerged from prison in 1958. He served a combined total of federal and New Jersey prison time of five and a half years after pleading guilty to “armed robbery, assault, and weapons possession by the state of New Jersey. The Federal government added charges for the possession of stolen checks and cashing stolen checks.”<sup>12</sup> Daughtry eventually returned to the Brooklyn church. His deceased father, Alonzo A. Daughtry, Sr., founded and served under Alonzo's successor, Mother Inez Conry. In 1960, she retired from the local church's pastorate and as the small denomination's second bishop and handed the leadership to Herbert Daughtry, Sr.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Albert G. Miller, “From Prison To the White House: Herbert D. Daughtry And the Making Of a Black Nationalist Pentecostal Leader,” Paper presented at the Society For Pentecostal Studies, March 3, 2013, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Estrela Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 198-199, and 311.

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Daughtry was converted to Christianity in the Jersey City jail on President's weekend 1953. Daughtry set himself on a task to reeducate himself. In 1957 at the federal prison in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, Daughtry outlined his path of ministry in a written document that would define his ministry for his life. The first three section titles of this 1957 Lewisburg Prison document would set the course of his personal and professional life: "To Convert the World for Jesus Christ," "To Advance and Enlighten The Colored Races," and "To Eradicate Crime among Youth."<sup>14</sup> He would further articulate an Afrocentric Christology by declaring "That Jesus was essentially African. While Abraham, the father, was located in Asia, after hundreds of years in Egypt, northern Africa — and

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<sup>14</sup> Herbert Daughtry, "Unnamed 1957 Lewisburg Prison Document," manuscript in the hands of Herbert Daughtry, Brooklyn, New York.

Canaan — during which obvious assimilation of religion, philosophy, medicine, art, architecture, engineering, etc., occurred, this experience passed on Africanness to Jesus.”<sup>15</sup>

As Daughtry broadened his ministry in the 1960s through the 1970s, he built collaborative relations with the Rev. Jesse Jackson and Operation Breadbasket, serving as the Chair of the Brooklyn branch.<sup>16</sup> Daughtry worked ecumenically serving on the World Council of Churches’ Faith and Orders Commission.<sup>17</sup> From 1968 forward, Daughtry supported the Black and Puerto Rican parents’ and Black teachers’ efforts, led by the Afro-American Teachers Association, to gain community control of the

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<sup>15</sup> House of the Lord Churches, “Our Creed,” <https://www.holc.org/our-faith/our-creed/>.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, “From Prison To the White House,” 14.

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

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Ocean Hill-Brownsville Community School board and district, who “fired White union teachers they determined were under-performing.”<sup>18</sup> The United Federation of Teachers led by Albert Shanker, boycotted the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community school district board for these firings. This direct social engagement set up a battle between the primarily White and Jew teacher’s union and the predominately Black and Latino school district.

By the mid 1970, with a series of deaths of Black youth and adults at the hand of the New York City Police department,<sup>19</sup> Daughtry joined with three other Brooklyn community leaders to establish the Concerned Leaders and Citizens to Save Our Youth (Concerned

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<sup>18</sup> May 9, 1968: Ocean Hill-Brownsville Teachers’ Strike of 1968” in *Zinn Education Project: Teaching People’s History*, <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tidh/ocean-hill-brownsville/>

<sup>19</sup> Daughtry, Sr. *No Monopoly on Suffering*, 25-36

Leaders and Citizens); Sam Penn, Chairman of Brooklyn Congress of Racial Equality (CORE); Albert Vann, Brooklyn State Assemblyman in the 56<sup>th</sup> AD, and Jitu Weusi, founder and leader of The East, an African centered cultural and educational organization. “Vann and Weusi taught in the New York public schools; both having played prominent roles in the struggle for community controls in Ocean Hill-Brownsville.”<sup>20</sup>

Tensions were rising in the early and mid-1970s with continued heinous killings of young Black youth by the New York Police Department. Brooklyn hit a boiling point with the unprovoked death of 15-year-old Randolph Evans on Thanksgiving Day, 1976, by the hand of police officer Robert Torsney in Cyprus Houses, a public

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

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housing project in East New York, Brooklyn. Torsney pleaded “not guilty because of temporary insanity (he claimed that he suffered a ‘psychomotor epileptic seizure’ but was nevertheless able to shoot young Randy Evans in the head at point blank-range).” November 1977, the jury “sentenced Torsney to psychiatric treatment.”<sup>21</sup> This miscarriage of justice outraged the Black community in Brooklyn and throughout New York City. Daughtry, Vann, Weusi, and Penn and the Concerned Leaders and Citizens launched a boycott of downtown Brooklyn businesses in an effort to pressure “the business community to join us in demanding punishment for Torsney.”<sup>22</sup> With the continuing violence against and death of Black citizens in Brooklyn, especially in 1978 by

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<sup>21</sup> Daughtry, Sr. *No Monopoly on Suffering*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

police and White gangs in predominately White communities, and with tensions with some in the Hasidic Jewish community, these four leaders broadened their coalition to create the Black United Front (hereafter cited as BUF), a city-wide mass-based organization, that attracted a range of political and ideological viewpoints: traditional civil rights organizations, Black and African nationalists, and socialist and Marxist organizations. Daughtry, Vann, Weusi, and Penn organized protests against the NYC Police Department, City Hall, and its mayor, Edward Koch

The BUF vision caught on in cities and communities nationwide. Notably, a 1980 conference in Brooklyn hosted by The East and The House of the Lord Pentecostal Church gave birth to the National Black United Front (hereafter cited as NBUF). The HOLC

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hosted the final plenary and framed it as a worship service. At this session, Herbert Daughtry was named the National Chair of the newly formed NBUF. By the summer of 1980, I declared my call into the ministry under the leadership of Rev. Daughtry. I began assisting Rev. Daughtry with daily church ministry activities as he focused on his new role as National Chair of NBUF. Our church became the central hub for organizing activities. At any time, a wide range of individuals and organizations might come through our church: Rev. Jesse Jackson; Kwame Touré; Betty (wife of Malcolm X) and, and her daughter, Attallah Shabazz; Haki R. Madhubuti; Amiri and Amina Baraka; Queen Mother Moore; Elombe Brath; Viola Plummer; various leaders from the Nation of Islam; representatives from various Hebrew Israelites; John Hendrick Clarke, Gayraud Wilmore, Robert "Sonny"

Carson, and any number of socialist and Marxist representative and organizations. The ideological diversity was dizzying at times, from ultra-back to Africa types to radical religious nationalist, to Marxist and various socialist representatives. Our church was committed to building principled alliances with individual and organizations around common concerns that had an impact on the Black community, Black diaspora, and humanity in general.

I was in a cohort of 20 people during my ministerial training. We were a wide range of old and young, with various educational experiences from perhaps high school education, some with a college education and a master's degree. We were native-born New Yorkers, immigrants from the southern US and the Caribbean. We all worked full-time in various jobs and

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professions and were committed to our ministry work in the church or our political activism with NBUF. Some of us interacted with various people of political and religious ideologies with which we were unfamiliar and uncomfortable. It became clear to me that if we were to represent faithfully the gospel of Jesus Christ (that is, as St. Paul argued in 1 Pet 3:25 NIV, “Always be ready to give a [logical] defense to anyone who asks you to account for the hope and confident assurance [elicited by faith] that is within you) that we needed to have a critical understanding of these various ideologies and theologies.

I proposed to Rev. Daughtry that we organize a series of trainings that would acquaint us and prepare us to be in dialogue with all the people we were in coalition, collaboration, and allyship. I had just heard Dr. Cornel West’s lectures and thought of him as a person to begin

our training. Daughtry agreed! I reached out to Dr. West, and he decided to come once a month for 10-12 months on a Tuesday evening to lecture and discuss issues with us. I asked him if there were any readings that we could do in preparation for each session, and he indicated that he would provide me with documents that we could copy and distribute. I would travel to Union Seminary each month to pick up a copy of the documents. After reading several of these typed documents with handwritten editing marks, I realized that maybe we were privy to a book manuscript in progress.

### **Conclusion**

The initial invitation to Dr. West began a continued friendship between and our church, especially

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with Rev. Daughtry, and Dr. West. After the publication of *Prophesy Deliverance!*, it was a pleasant surprise to see a sign of “hope.” We realized that a revolutionary Christian perspective and praxis could pave the middle pathway between hard-left Black Marxist and other African American socialist movements, e.g., the Black Panther Party and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, on the one hand, and Black political campaigns (NAACP, PUSH, Urban League, and SCLC) on the other hand. This social theorization goes back to Rev. Daughtry, HOLC, and NBUF. Dr. West indicates the “dilemma of the Afro-American liberal movement is to find its way between the Scylla of bourgeois liberalism and the Charybdis of right-wing Marxism. In doing so, Dr. West introduced *Prophesy Deliverance!* into the discourse about the ideological basis for direct social

engagement among Pentecostal social ethics and theology.”<sup>23</sup>

Dr. West drew as one of his examples of this navigation between these two mythical monsters was Rev. Daughtry, HOLC and NBUF. West stated:

The Afro-American community for institutional expressions of revolutionary Christian perspective and practice. The June 1980 founding of the National Black United Front (NBUF) in the house of the Lord Church, a vibrant Pentecostal Church in Brooklyn, New York, pastored by the dynamic Rev. Herbert Daughtry, is a major case in point. Rev. Daughtry . . . is a prophetic black Christian leader, reflective writer and the talented national chairman of the NBUF. His charismatic leadership and dedicated organization represents a significant attempt to displace black bourgeois leadership and put a version of revolutionary Christianity on the Afro-American liberation agenda. With over

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<sup>23</sup> West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, 145.

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twenty NBUF branches throughout the country, Rev. Daughtry's movement indeed is worth taking seriously – and supporting.<sup>24</sup>

History will judge how well NBUF, the church, and Daughtry navigated these dangerous waters. Undoubtedly, *Prophecy Deliverance!* has far-reaching tentacles and provokes us to explore the strengths and limits of an Afro-American Revolutionary Pentecostal Christianity.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

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