Why Prophesying Deliverance Still Matters: Black Religion, Black Consciousness and the Pentecostal Social Imaginary

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Abstract

This paper is offered in recognition of the 40th anniversary of the publication of Prophesy Deliverance! by Cornel West and acknowledges the broad impact of his intellectual leadership. It begins with the important question of whether West has centered or marginalized Pentecostal thought and culture in the presentation of his basic argument regarding the evolution of Black critical thought and prophetic Christianity. Next is an exploration of how West's ideas about Black revolutionary Christianity find expression in recent studies of Black Pentecostalism, with particular attention to the Pentecostal social imaginary framed by Dale Coulter and by Keri Day. The conclusion includes suggestions for re-centering Pentecostal Black

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consciousness and Sanctified church culture in scholarly performances of prophesied deliverance.

A Word of Appreciation

At the outset I want to express my profound appreciation for Dr. Cornel West and acknowledge the broad impact of his intellectual leadership four decades after the publication of Prophesy Deliverance!. The title of his text signals the vocation of scholarship and social justice advocacy Dr. West has pursued with the vigor, passion, and grace of a Christian public intellectual. His prophetic discourses have granted him celebrity status and name recognition in diverse places, from the lecture halls of higher education to protest marches in the public square. His face and voice are familiar to all kinds of ecclesial, scholarly, and secular audiences, as he has appeared on television, radio, movies, and

social media, in chapels, churches, and conferences. His prophetic performances are a tour de force, whether written in books, rapped on recordings, or spoken with erudite eloquence. Throughout his career, Dr. West has brought a high standard of Christian witness and prophetic representation to the pulpit, the podium and the public square, both virtual and physical.

Over the years I have been deeply influenced and inspired by Dr. West's entire body of work, and I am especially grateful to participate in this gathering of papers in celebration of the 40-year anniversary of Prophesy Deliverance!. I will begin with the important question of whether West has centered or marginalized Pentecostal thought and culture in the presentation of his basic argument regarding the evolution of Black critical thought and

prophetic Christianity. Next, I will explore how West's ideas about Black revolutionary Christianity have found expression in some more recent studies of Black Pentecostalism, with particular attention to the Pentecostal social imaginary framed by Dale Coulter and by Keri Day. I will conclude with some suggestions for re-centering Pentecostal Black consciousness and Sanctified church culture in scholarly performances of prophesied deliverance.

Pentecostals and Pentecostalism in Prophesy Deliverance!

Pentecostal scholarship, religion and culture were briefly mentioned in a few places throughout the first edition of Prophesy Deliverance!. Pentecostalism, however, was not particularly prominent. Either West intentionally understated or

inadvertently miscalculated the extent to which Pentecostalism was foundational to his understanding of the Black church. While the train of thought and analysis articulated in Prophesy Deliverance! was not centered on Pentecostalism, the few Pentecostals mentioned in the Front matter, the Epilogue and the reference notes—most notably, Herbert Daughtry, William Seymour and James Tinney—may have been more indispensable to the framing of his argument and the illustration of his ideas than West ever allowed or explained.

In the acknowledgments, West thanked Reverend Daughtry (with a nod to his associates Albert Miller and Eugene Rivers) and the House of the Lord Church in Brooklyn for hosting the year-long seminar where West had presented major portions of the manuscript. Daughtry was also named

in Chapter 3 as one of several representatives of the humanist tradition who are engaged in political struggle and "share a certain common value: the necessity for the democratic control over institutions in the productive and political processes."[2] Near the end of his final chapter on praxis, West took note of the founding of the National Black United Front in June 1980 at the House of the Lord Church, and commended Daughtry and the NBUF as signs of hope for the revolutionary Christian perspective: "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

[2] Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 89.

liberation agenda. . . Rev. Daughtry's movement indeed is worth taking seriously—and supporting."[3] This endorsement is noteworthy because not one other living pastor or congregation was recognized by West in the book for their commitment to the ideals and praxis of Black liberation and prophetic Christianity.

At the beginning of his introductory overview of the sources and tasks of Afro-American critical thought, West insisted upon taking seriously the intellectual influence of "evangelical and pietistic Christianity" and the corresponding Black theological reflection that is "inseparable" from the Black church.[4] The accompanying reference note underscored the importance of the independent

[3] Ibid., 145.
[4] West, 15.

evolution of Black churches in the U.S., as opposed to the intellectual influence of the Catholic and Anglican churches Black Christians experienced in Latin America and Africa. Buried in the reference note was a statement about the global impact of Pentecostalism as a Black denomination with origins in the U.S.:

> It is no accident that Pentecostalism—the denomination that vigorously promotes the development of indigenous religious leadership free from the control of church bureaucracies—was founded by black Baptists, principally Rev. W. J. Seymour in Los Angeles, California, in 1906. Pentecostalism is the only denomination of the Christian faith founded by black people and is one of the fastest-growing denominations in the world, especially among oppressed peoples. See James S. Tinney, "Black Origins of the Pentecostal Movement," Christianity Today, Oct. 8, 1971, pp. 4-6 (140, n3)[5]

[5] Ibid., 149n3.

While one might contest the accuracy of West's understanding of the history and polity of Pentecostalism, notwithstanding such misgivings, he made a convincing claim of its global prominence as the offspring of the evolution of the Black church in the U.S. In this reference note he named W. J. Seymour as its founder and James S. Tinney, a pioneering Black Pentecostal intellectual, as one of his sources.

As I see it, Pentecostals and Pentecostalism took on a greater role and importance in the third chapter, "Four Traditions of Response." Here "response" refers to Black reactions to white supremacy, the Black counter discourse to modern European racist discourse, and the historical Black hermeneutic "focused on the diverse conceptions of self-image and self-determination during the

prolonged Afro-American entrance into the corridors of modernity."[6] West proposed a typology of Black intellectual traditions that rests on diverse depictions of Afro-American religion, drawing his examples from the ranks of notable 20th-century Black intellectuals and writers: (1) exceptionalists who laud the uniqueness of Afro-American culture; (2) assimilationists who consider Afro-American culture and personality to be pathological; (3) marginalists who see the culture as restrictive, constraining, and confining; and (4) humanists who extol the distinctiveness of the culture while affirming that Afro-Americans are not above or below the rest of the human race. Each of West's categories rests on a particular depiction or evaluation of Black religion. Several personalities and/or traditions were cited to

[6] West, 69.

illustrate each type. My analysis of West's typology proceeds with an expanded focus on one representative from each category whose work or whose life referenced the practices of Black Pentecostalism.[7]

The exceptionalist perspective was represented by the author of one of the most important documents of the Black consciousness era, Chancellor Williams. His book, The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D., published in 1976, was an ambitious attempt by a Howard University history professor to document the history of the African

[7] An earlier version of this analysis appears in my chapter on "Black Intellectuals and Storefront Religion in the Age of Black Consciousness." See Cheryl J. Sanders, *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (1996), 106-118.

people based on sixteen years of international research and field studies in a single volume, "so written that Black John Doe, cab driver or laborer, and Jane Doe, house maid or waitress, can read and understand the message from their forefathers and foremothers as well as college students and professors."[8] His purpose was to explain the oppressed condition of modern Blacks by describing how the ancient African civilization was systematically destroyed by whites. He surveyed 6,000 years of African history from the rise of Egyptian dynasties to the fall of the last indigenous empire in the southern part of Africa in 1902, briefly addressed the problematic relations between the

[8] Chancellor Williams, *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1976), 17.

races in the United States, and then concluded his study with a detailed "organization for unity" plan designed to foster Black progress. Williams's concern for making his scholarship accessible to working-class Blacks, although somewhat unusual for an academician, is less surprising in view of his own background and his familiarity with the plight and aspirations of the Black poor in the urban storefront churches. His 1949 doctoral dissertation was a study of the socioeconomic significance of the storefront church movement.[9] There he addressed the problem of class discrimination among Blacks in the major Christian denominations as a factor giving rise to storefront churches that are more willing to

[9] Chancellor Williams, "The Socio-Economic Significance of the Store-Front Church Movement in the United States since 1920," Ph.D. dissertation, American University, 1949 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1970).

welcome and minister to the disinherited. Although the dissertation and the book differ greatly in scope, content, and style, the book's conclusion uncannily echoes the perspective of the dissertation with regard to the problem of race and class discrimination among Blacks in the United States: "Now it is just here within the race where integration is not only needed, but it is mandatory. We shall remain a weak people until we begin the drive for integration of Blacks first of all, instead of battling to integrate with other peoples."[10] Williams's insightful application of the concept of integration to intragroup relations exposes the moral dilemma faced by Blacks who press for acceptance by whites while at the same time distancing themselves from other Blacks. The fact that he would raise the same question in 1976 that he

[10] Williams, 333.

first posed in 1949 indicates that the Black consciousness movement had had limited impact on the persistent patterns of discrimination operating within Black institutions, including the Christian churches.

The assimilationist perspective is represented by another Howard University professor, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, as evidenced in his influential book The Negro Church in America, published posthumously in 1964. Frazier was genuinely committed to integration and assimilation as appropriate goals of Black progress, yet he focused much of his scholarly attention on the study of Black institutions and spent most of his teaching career as a professor at the historically Black Howard University. The content of Frazier's book is based on an interpretation of Black religious and social life as

originally offered to a European audience; it is the revised text of his 1953 Frazer Lecture in Social Anthropology given at the University of Liverpool. Frazier saw Black communal life as culturally deviant, the result of imperfect assimilation of American social norms because of poverty, ignorance, oppression, and the heritage of slavery.[11] Frazier appeared to be somewhat inconsistent in his social analysis of the Negro church against a backdrop of African influences. On the ground of his theory of Negro social and cultural deviance, he claimed that it is "impossible to establish any continuity between African religious practices and the Negro church in the United States." Yet, he

[11] Wilson Jeremiah Moses, "Inventing a Happier Past: National Myth and the Realities of Slavery," in *The Wings of Ethiopia: Studies in African-American Life and Letters* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 51.

admitted that the "shout songs" and "holy dance" performed in the storefront churches "most likely reveal a connection with the African background."[12] Frazier concluded his study with an indictment of the Negro church because of its intimidation of intellectuals and its responsibility for the "backwardness" of American Negroes. The key to Black intellectual development was seen as integration into American institutions and "escape" from the "stifling domination" of the Negro church.[13]

The marginalist tradition is represented by James Baldwin, one of the leading writers of the Black consciousness era. Although Baldwin's most important essays on Black life were published in the 1960s, he remained a significant force in African

[12] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 9.
[13] Frazier, 90.

American letters until his death in 1987. His special relevance to this discussion is his deep rootedness in and rejection of the Sanctified church. Moreover, he exemplifies an extreme posture in Black intellectual exilic consciousness because he eventually left America to live in self-imposed exile in Europe. Baldwin was literally a child of the Black church; his father was a Baptist preacher. However, the young Baldwin despised his father, whom he experienced as a strict and abusive parent struggling to raise his children in the abject poverty and crowded conditions of crime-ridden Harlem. West heard the rhythm, syncopation, and appeal of Black preaching in Baldwin's moralistic essays on the problem of race in America. Baldwin had spent a brief period during his adolescent years as a Pentecostal preacher, and the salient values of his subsequent homiletical

discourse are the familiar Christian ones: love, mercy, grace, and inner freedom. His "candid acceptance of personal marginality to both Afro-American culture and American society" and his "moral sermonizing to all Americans" echo Frazier's contempt for Black folk religion and desire for integration and acceptance.[14] Like Frazier, Baldwin "overlooks the possibility of cultural vitality and poverty-ridden conditions existing simultaneously in Afro-American life."[15] Instead, the most negative and culturally stifling aspects of Black culture seemed for him to be embodied in the materially impoverished urban storefronts of the Sanctified church tradition. Despite his efforts to distance himself from the Sanctified church, Baldwin

[14] West, 85.
[15] Ibid., 80.

describes with great eloquence its permanent stamp and imprint upon his being:

> The church was very exciting. It took a long time for me to disengage myself from this excitement, and on the blindest, most visceral level, I never really have, and never will. There is no music like that music, no drama like the drama of the Saints rejoicing, the sinners moaning, the tambourines racing, and all those voices coming together and crying holy unto the Lord.[16]

Baldwin's biographer and secretary, David Leeming, revealed that "Crying Holy" was the original working title of Baldwin's best-selling autobiographical novel, Go Tell It on the Mountain. Although "crying holy" is one of the characteristic expressions of the Sanctified worship vernacular, the title finally given to the book was appropriated,

[16] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dial Press, 1963), 47.

somewhat arbitrarily, from one of the Negro spirituals.[17]

The fourth category of Black intellectual response that emerged during the 1970s as an alternative to the exceptionalism of Williams, the assimilation espoused by Frazier, and the idiosyncratic marginalization of Baldwin was the humanist tradition. In West's view, this tradition is best exemplified by African American music. Gospel music is listed as a genre of Black music that signifies the humanist tradition, with an obvious allusion to the exuberance and praises of the Sanctified church:

> The rich pathos of sorrow and joy which are simultaneously present in spirituals, the exuberant exhortations and divine praises of the gospels, the soaring lament and lyrical tragicomedy of the blues, and

[17] David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 78.

> the improvisational character of jazz affirm Afro-American humanity. These distinct art forms, which stem from the deeply entrenched oral and musical traditions of African culture and evolve out of the Afro-American experience, express what it is like to be human under black skin in America.[18]

Black intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s sorted out derivative and indigenous cultural forms, both African and American, in a rather complex dialectical process, rejecting selected aspects of American identity and culture, on the one hand, and embracing selected aspects of African identity and culture on the other. West's typology has provided a useful frame for delineating the major options within this process, with the exceptionalist generally valuing the African elements of identity and culture more highly than the American, the assimilationist

[18] West, 85-86.

favoring the American elements over the African, the marginalist employing highly individualistic or idiosyncratic criteria in evaluating the worth of either culture's offerings, and the humanist adopting some scheme of universal values in order to rank and appropriate elements from either culture.[19]

Pentecostal Approaches to Prophesying Deliverance: A Pentecostal Theology of Black Consciousness and the Pentecostal Social Imaginary

It is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt to address all the contributions Pentecostal scholars have made to the evolution of Black prophetic thought during the four decades that have passed since the publication of Prophesy Deliverance!. However, I will take note of two theologians whose

[19] Sanders, 118.

proposals have deepened our understanding of the impact of Pentecostalism on the history of prophesied deliverance in the U.S., Dale Coulter and Keri Day. Coulter's project is a Pentecostal theology of Black consciousness. Day "reimagines" the Pentecostal social imaginary that characterized the pastoral practices, prophetic preaching and protest politics of William J. Seymour and the Black women leaders of the Azusa Street Revival.

Dr. Dale M. Coulter is professor of historical theology at Pentecostal Theological Seminary and past president of the Society for Pentecostal Studies. He is also an ordained bishop in the Church of God (Cleveland, TN). His 2016 article "Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Black Consciousness" argues that a cultural program among the Sanctified churches in the first half of the 20th century

cultivated a distinct form of Black consciousness around three elements: 1) a rehabilitation of slave religion; 2) an embrace of Ethiopianism as a global vision of pan-Africanism; and 3) an effort at Black uplift through education. This Pentecostal Black consciousness, associated with leaders such as Charles H. Mason, Charles Price Jones, and Mother Rosa Horn, is posted alongside alternative visions offered by W. E. B. Du Bois, James Cone and others who sought to advance a theology addressing the concerns of the Black churches. Its distinctive feature is a Pentecostal imaginary grounded in the fusion of Pentecostal ecstasy and Wesleyan holiness.[20]

[20] Dale M. Coulter, "Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Black Consciousness," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 25 (2016), 74-76.

Coulter's analysis of Black Pentecostalism is focused on the populist impulse that promoted Black cultural identity and "remained grounded in the spiritual encounters that fueled a way of faith at the personal and social levels, giving rise to the social imaginary of the early movement."[21] Both Jones and Mason sought to construct the higher culture upon the foundation of the dignity of ancient Africa. Ethiopianism as a transatlantic movement entailed a form of resistance to the high-culture movement that embraced western civilization as part of the educational enterprise.[22] They rejected Du Bois' view of the 'talented tenth' "Du Bois' capitulation to the high-culture notion of the scholar as heroic figure and the claim that culture must seep from the top

[21] Ibid., 76.
[22] Coulter, 82-83.

down to the bottom."[23] Their contrasting view of education was a form of populism that sought to mobilize the laity, inculcate Christian character, and preserve the ecstatic element in Black religion. Not surprisingly, Jones and Mason looked more favorably upon Booker T. Washington's model of self-help and industrial education without adopting his politics of acquiescence. This Pentecostal Black consciousness "recovered the ancient heritage of Africa and fused this heritage with Wesleyan holiness and Pentecostal ecstasy in the service of an educational program that gave rise to a generation of persons who could protest, and did."[24]

Coulter measures the broad scope and profound cultural impact of this program by recalling

[23] Ibid., 86.
[24] Ibid., 88.

Louis Armstrong's statement about jazz that "it all came from the old Sanctified Churches," and Mahalia Jackson's assertion, "I believe the blues and jazz and even the rock and roll stuff got their beat from the Sanctified Church."[25]

Dr. Keri Day is associate professor of constructive theology and African American religion at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, NJ. Two of her works merit mention here with respect to themes and approaches addressed in Prophesy Deliverance! that are relevant to understanding Black Pentecostalism, first, her 2022 book Azusa Reimagined: A Radical Vision of Religious and Democratic Belonging and secondly, her contribution to the 40th anniversary edition of

[25] Ibid., 89.

Prophesy Deliverance! "A Response to Chapter 2: Reflecting on Modern Racism."

Azusa Reimagined configures a social imaginary based on a comprehensive account of the social and political significance of Pentecostalism as it first emerged as a distinctive religious movement led by African Americans during the first decade of the 20th century. Day's project reframes and reimagines the social vision of Seymour and company by comparing it with competing visions of Pentecost as viewed through the bifocal lenses of political theology and critical social theory. Her primary claim is that the Azusa Street Revival was a protest movement that resisted and refuted racial capitalism. She begins her argument with a portrayal of the early Pentecostal movement led by Seymour as a rejection of competing notions of Pentecost

offered by the 19th-century world expositions in Chicago and Philadelphia, and the white evangelicalism of Dwight L. Moody. She describes Azusa's affinity for slave religious practices and the leadership roles of Black female domestic workers as evidence of a radically alternative approach to interracial worship. Day then introduces, in her own words, a "complex range of ways to understand the relationship between ecclesial and political life that exceeds the horizon of the state and American capitalism."[26] The complexity of her line of thought engages biblical scholarship, historical theology, decolonial aesthetics and many other academic disciplines. Her book concludes with an overarching

[26] Keri Day, *Azusa Reimagined: A Radical Vision of Religious and Democratic Belonging* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022), 15.

assessment of the ongoing implications of the practices and politics of Azusa, which she offers as a guide for 21st century religious communities seeking to cultivate democratic practices of belonging against the backdrop of late capitalism's deep racial divisions and material inequalities.

Day's "Reflecting on Modern Racism" underscores the significance of West's genealogical analysis of the discursive structure of modern racism in chapter 2 of Prophesy Deliverance! Based on the thought of Michel Foucault, Day defines genealogy as a "historical technique that questions the commonly understood emergence of various social or philosophical beliefs by attempting to account for their scope and breadth to understand the conditions

of their possibility."[27] Day's adoption of this genealogical approach in her book Azusa Reimagined leads to a focus on the erotic life of racism. She devotes an entire chapter to explain how the prevailing erotic life of racism, whose cultural norms required separation by gender and race, was temporarily suspended by the erotic life of Azusa, wherein Black men and women performed such worship practices as ecstatic praise, laying on of hands and tarrying.[28] In her response to West, Day gently takes West and other Black male theologians (J. Kameron Carter and Willie James Jennings) to task for failing to incorporate womanist perspectives

[27] Keri Day, "A Response to Chapter 2: Reflecting on Modern Racism," in Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!* 40th Anniversary Expanded Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2022), 138.

[28] Day, *Azusa Reimagined,* 116-126.

into their genealogical analyses of racism. She calls for rejection of white heteronormative ideals with the understanding that "part of our salvation involves articulating alternative religious/theological ideals and ideas that promote our flourishing and thriving as Black communities."[29]

Day concludes her response by declaring that West's exploration of the discursive elements of racism is a gift to theological education and religious studies. She sees West's genealogical retrieval of modern racism as prophetic speech that demystifies the ideals that marginalize and oppress Black communities and helps us discern how the afterlives of racism continue to shape our institutional arrangements and the ideals we hold sacred. She invites us to "linger in this complexity as we seek to

[29] Day, "Response," 141.

grasp the unfolding of modern racism within ever new historical and cultural conditions . . . so we might better understand the experiences of the marginalized, vulnerable, and oppressed."[30]

Day's high regard for West's contribution to Black theology and religion is admirable. But her enthusiasm for West's genealogical approach to her project of reformulating the Pentecostal social imaginary overshadows her attentiveness to the impact of the 20th-century Pentecostal Black consciousness movement whose protests and practices represented a populist alternative to the religious and cultural sensibilities of the Du Bois and his talented tenth. Given her expertise in the history of Black Pentecostalism, it would seem that Day has either disregarded, devalued or denied that Mason,

[30] Day, "Response," 142.

Jones, Horn, Lawson and other Black Pentecostal leaders, at least by Coulter's account, performed their own genealogical analysis of white racism and promoted cultural ideals, religious practices and educational philosophies designed to sustain an alternative social imaginary and support the flourishing of Black communities. In other words, the "reimagining" of what was envisioned and enacted at Azusa would have been greatly enriched by a more precise and comprehensive retrieval of the cultural and ethical contributions of the Black Pentecostal leaders who are centered in Coulter's analysis. My further reflection on these matters is illuminated by remarks made by Brandon Terry at the 2021 Wake Forest University Lecture and Symposium honoring Dr. West and Prophesy Deliverance!, especially his warning against

scholarly preoccupation with politics and protest and his endorsement of the importance of the ethics of cultural practices: "Culture is more fundamental to the ethics of the oppressed than politics, narrowly construed. . . What practices do you have at your disposal which are truly purposive, meaningful or life-affirming, in response to the scale and substance of the challenges and crises you confront in your shared forms of life?"[31]

Conclusion: Re-Centering a Black Holiness Populism in Black Religion and Theology

In 1982 Cornel West invited an entire generation of theologians and religious scholars to

[31] Remarks by Brandon Terry, "Symposium on the 40th Anniversary of Prophesy Deliverance! by Dr. Cornel West," Wake Forest University, November 5, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtFJ40DQNGM

employ the ideals and methodologies of critical theory to craft prophecies of deliverance, at least in writing. I have tried to argue here for reconsideration and retrieval of this heritage in the populist vernacular of the Sanctified church as we continue West's work with a refreshed appreciation for Pentecostal Black consciousness and its impact on music, religion, politics, and culture. West's project has undervalued the Black consciousness of the Saints who were not ashamed of their ancestral religious beliefs and practices and whose human identity was validated by the equalizing evidence and doctrines of Holy Spirit-possession—the spiritually gifted but intellectually "Untalented Ninetieth," as designated by West, who resisted elitism in religion, education, and culture.[32] I have called them "Saints

[32] West, 76.

in exile." The worship and music of the Sanctified churches embody a host of ethical responses to the exilic existence imposed on African Americans because of white racism, both in the church and outside it. The genius of this embodied ethics is that it promotes racial reconciliation without obliterating racial identity. Moreover, the witness of those Saints may have helped to save Black folk culture from total oblivion in the 20th century because they stood against Black middle-class assimilationism without apology and because they saw the blues not as a threat to Black piety but as a cathartic vehicle for giving theodicy full liturgical voice.[33]

Zora Neale Hurston valued the Black consciousness of the Saints—the Black cultural

[33] Sanders, 150.

aesthetic, the ethics of Holiness, and the populist configurations of religion, education and culture, spiritual and intellectual formation that constituted Black exilic ecclesiology. She defined the Sanctified church as a protest movement "against the high-brow tendency in Negro Protestant congregations as the Negroes gain more education and wealth" while also taking note of the "strong sympathy between the white "Saints" and the Negro ones."[34]

Du Bois disavowed the Black consciousness of the Saints, and their ecstatic religion, their radically egalitarian Holiness identity, their educational aspirations, and their politics. Worship practices that Seymour and Mason valued as deeply humanizing ecstasy were seen by Du Bois as frenzy.

[34] Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church* (Turtle Island: Berkeley, 1981), 103-107.

Persons whose Holy Spirit baptism validated their identity as children of God found little connection with Du Bois' discourses of double consciousness. Leaders who advocated populist pedagogies in normal schools were more likely to admonish students to "get the learning without losing the burning" instead of emulating the top-down elitism of a talented tenth. After Du Bois prophesied in 1903 that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line,” Seymour championed the doctrine that “that there must be no color line or any other division in the Church of Jesus Christ because God is no respecter of persons.”[35]

[35] Quoted by Cheryl J. Sanders in "Social Justice: Theology as Social Transformation," *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, Wolfgang Vondey, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2022), 435.

In my opinion, West identified with Du Bois' elitism and with Hurston's humanism in Prophesy Deliverance!. However, he missed a valuable opportunity to enhance his theory of Black religion and culture by not devoting more specific attention to what Pentecostals had to offer in terms of thought (Tinney, et. al.), cultural influence (gospel, blues and jazz), and political praxis (Daughtry). Yet, what little of the tradition he captured in footnotes and front matter can be reconsidered and re-centered by others who are willing to build on the intellectual foundations he has established and enrich their scholarly perspectives with the history of Black Pentecostal thought and praxis.

Forty years after the publication of Prophesy Deliverance! we remain indebted to Cornel West for

fostering a robust analysis of Black religion and culture that has been foundational for the promotion of at least three concepts that should be of ongoing concern for Pentecostal scholars: (1) a Spirit-breathed humanism that is authentically Black, culturally aware and politically engaged; (2) a Black theology that promotes and preserves Black consciousness while remaining conversant with populist discourses of protest, reparation and reconciliation; and (3) a social imaginary with a focused vision of human flourishing that is mindful of sustainable strategies for keeping cultural practices thoroughly intertwined with prophecies of deliverance. West's intellectual legacy will be enhanced by rigorous engagement of the witness of Pentecostal pastors and activists who participated in Black responses to white racism.

It is my expectation that future generations of theologians, philosophers, historians, and ethicists will bring further fulfillment to West's quest for a unified theory of Black religion and culture. The contributions of West, Day, Coulter and others will hopefully encourage serious reconsideration of the thought and practices of the Sanctified church when reimagining a Black prophetic discourse that deconstructs racism, sexism and cultural elitism, centers egalitarian ethics, and legitimates Black consciousness and culture. Finally, if Black theology can be enhanced and revitalized with Black aesthetics, ecstatic ecclesiology and the ethos of radical holiness, perhaps it will not be such a hard sell in the faith communities and intellectual centers of our North American Babylon, especially among those inhabitants who can vocalize and dance the

Lord's song in a strange land, but are still longing for the fresh impartations of spirit and intellect they need to perform new prophecies of deliverance, while it still matters.

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