When Marx Caught the Holy Ghost: Prophesy Deliverance and the Making of a Black Pentecostal Liberation Theology

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Abstract

This article discusses Cornels West's Prophesy Deliverance! against the backdrop of Black Pentecostal praxis and contemporary insurgent theologies.[2] A Black Pentecostal liberation theology enfleshes West's fifth stage, "Black Liberation Theology as Critique of Capitalist Civilization." I understand Black Pentecostalism as a classed resistance that takes shape on a particular political and existential terrain. Western thought (prophetic Christian and Marxist thought) helps us to locate Black Pentecostalism as specific praxis in the present historical moment, the struggle for liberation.

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[2] Cornel West. Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002).

To overcome the shortcomings of the first four stages of Black liberation theology, the present essay—toward a Black Pentecostal liberation theology—maps three sources: Black existentialist thought, contemporary insurgent theologies, and Black Pentecostalism. My cartography is not, in any way, complete—instead, it names a few guideposts on the journey. I am pointing to a few key works that a responding to the contemporary crisis forged by the insurgency. I conclude this treatment on Prophesy Deliverance! by identifying possible next steps in this conversation about the relationship between claims in Prophesy Deliverance! and Black Pentecostal social theorization and Marxism.

Introduction

In the shadow of the Occupy Wall Street and Arab Spring—punctuated by the murders of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and George Floyd—Black youth mobilized against police brutality and state-sanctioned violence by taking to the streets in mass protests. "Indict! Convict! Send that killer cop to jail! The whole damn system is guilty as hell," chanted young protestors.

Queer leadership, property destruction, and mass street protests challenged the very notion of a post-racial society and critiqued previously held assumptions about the very nature of American democracy. The Black Lives Matter insurgency offers a contemporary challenge to Black liberation theologies—a theology that has class, race, and gender as critical components.

While there have been significant advancements in identity-based theological discourses (Black, Womanist, and Queer), Cornel West's *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* remains one of the few dialogues between prophetic Black Christianity and Marxist theory. West sources his Black revolutionary Christianity from prophetic Christianity and American Pragmatism. The prophetic tradition that affirms the inherent dignity of all

people regardless of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation.

Though Pragmatism lacks a critical class consciousness, it demythologizes the myth of the given. West posits that self-image and self-determination are the fundamental challenges confronting Black folk. West's genealogy of Black theology emerges as a critique of four key features of the American narrative: (1) slavery (mid-1700s-1863), (2) institutional racism (1864-1969), (3) North American White theology (1969-77), and (4) US Capitalism (1977-1983). West does not locate the end of the fourth stage. I mark the end of that age with the publication of *Prophesy Deliverance!* because it is one of the few theological attempts to wrestle critically with Marxist theory.

In the first four stages of Black Theology, West observes three significant limitations: "an absence of systemic analysis" preventing an intersectional theology; a "lack of social vision, political program, and concrete praxis;" and a "tendency to downplay the existential." To this end, West delivers this prophecy for the fifth stage:

> The present challenge to black[sic] theologians is to put forth an understanding of the Christian Gospel in light of the present circumstances that takes into account the complex ways in which racism…and sexism…are integral to the class exploitative capital system of production as well as its repressive imperialist tentacles abroad; and to keep in view the crucial existential issues of death, disease, despair, dread, and disappointment that each and every individual must face within the context of these present circumstances…In short, black[sic] theological reflection and action must simultaneously become more familiar with and rooted in progressive Marxist tradition, with the staunch anticapitalist, anti-

> imperialist, antiracist, and antisexist stance, and its creative socialist outlook;[3]

Advances in anti-racist thought (Whiteness studies and anti-Black epistemologies), Womanist thought, Queer theology, and ecological interventions were present in the intervening years (1983-Present). Only some accounts have adequately wrestled with Marx. Equally, Black liberation theology heretofore, did not access Black Pentecostalism's intrinsic, though at times latent, revolutionary praxis. Without a treatment on Pentecostalism, a genealogy of Black Theology is incomplete. Ultimately, I am positing a Black Pentecostal liberation theology that wrestles with intersectionality.

I shall now begin my analysis of components of

[3] Ibid., 106

West's arguments in *Prophesy Deliverance*! by placing them in conversation with African American philosophies that critique domination and empowerment, contemporary insurgent theologies, and Black Pentecostal praxis.

1. Black Existentialist Thought

Frantz Fanon theorizes: "There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born."[4] The Black existentialist thought I am referring to is a contemporary movement that discerns the diversity of ways that Black subjectivity is

[4] Frantz Fanon and Richard Philcox, Black Skin, White Masks (New York: Grove Press, 2007), XII.

undermined and reduced to 'nonbeing'. I begin with Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* draws an existential cartography of the tragicomic that the agent understands in the afterlife of slavery: "skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment."[5] Christina Sharpe's *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* builds upon the Hartman's afterlife of slavery. Sharpe writes:

> These are subjections, I argue, that are most readable and locatable still through the horrors enacted on the black[sic] body after slavery and the official periods of emancipation and through further colonialism, imperialism, and the relative freedoms of segregation, desegregation, and

[5] Saidiya Hartman, Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 6

> independence, whether that body is in the Caribbean, the Americas, England, or post-independence Africa. That is, while all modern subjects are post-slavery subjects fully constituted by the discursive codes of slavery and post- slavery, post-slavery subjectivity is largely borne by and readable on the (New World) black[sic] subject.[6]

Sharpe claims that the Event of slavery continues to shape Black subjectivity in contemporary life: "registered by conditions of violation, narrative, and other confinement, of produced and reproduced shame refused and/or transmitted from one generation to the next."[7] In *Ontological Terror*, Calvin Warren builds out a philosophy of beingness and Blackness that hinges upon the immutable condition of anti-black nothingness.

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[6] Christina Sharpe, Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

[7] Ibid., 3.

> Ontological terror is not a phenomenon we can relegate to an unenlightened past; it remains with us. What I have argued throughout this book is that black [sic] being constitutes the nothing in an antiblack world, which is continually degraded, dominated, and violated. It is precisely this nothing that ontological terror targets, and black[sic] existence is precisely the condition of unending nothing- destruction.[8]

Warren theorizes that Black folks are caught up in an unbreakable status of ontological violence. Through *Ontological Terror*, he strikes out the being (i.e., ~~being~~). This maker indicates: No matter the quality of resistance, Black beingness is forever sentenced to the zone of non-being. Achille Mbeme's work takes up the notion of biopower and delineates how state institutions

[8] Calvin L. Warren, "CODA: ADIEU TO THE HUMAN." Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation, Duke University Press, 2018, pp. 169–72. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11316xh.9. Accessed 7 Jun. 2022.

choose how the oppressed/colonized/othered live and die. "To kill or to let live thus constitutes sovereignty limits, its principal attributes. To be sovereign is to exert control over morality and define life as the deployment and manifestation of power."[9] Mbeme answers in part the soul-denying implications of hegemony building upon Fanon's zone of non-being.

To one degree, Hartman, Sharpe, Mbeme, and Warren all imagine negation as transcendence. Postmodernity/post-slavery/after-life of slavery/neoliberalism/ontological terror imposes upon material conditions and beingness in the American Empire. It, in turn, began a theological work that would buttress their quest for physical and existential freedom. Escaping the imperial zone of nonbeing requires

[9] Achille Mbembe, Necropolitics (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

theological dexterity.

2. Contemporary Insurgent Theologies

Kelley Brown Douglas' *Stand Your Ground* unpacks the theological meaning of the death of a young Black boy that launched the Black Lives Matter hashtag.[10] Before the death of Michael Brown—the impetus for this work—a 17-year-old Black boy named Trayvon Martin was profiled and killed by a white vigilante attempting to make a citizen's arrest in Sanford, Florida. Martin's crime was wearing a hoodie and walking in what was believed by his assailant in the wrong neighborhood. Martin's father lived there.

[10] Kelly Brown Douglas, Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God (Maryknoll: Orbis Books. 2015), 4.

The "Stand Your Ground" law(s) was perceived as the defense that George Zimmerman would use to justify his killing of Trayvon Martin. Historically, "Stand Your Ground" laws justified deadly force to protect property and persons from assault. Though Zimmerman's defense team did not invoke the "Stand Your Ground" law of Florida, Douglas argues that a "stand your ground culture" was planted even before the founding of the United States. "The seeds produced a myth of racial superiority that determined America's founding and defined its identity.[9] Douglas identifies the seed that germinated into the exceptional myth to the Roman historian's Tacitus work *Germania* (98 C.E.). Citing the blue-eyed people free from the "shame of intermarriages as the reason for success against would-be conquerors, Tacitus' observation provided Anglo-Saxon colonists with

the philosophical underpinnings of slavery and its afterlives in the United States.[11] Such logic concludes that Blackness and, thus, Black people are sin worthy of criminalization, chattel, and carcerality—even death. Thus, the death of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown are teleological outcomes.

Douglas gives an epistemic privilege to the detailed and heartbreaking experience of being a Black mother of a Black son in the United States. The sheer fear—that I know all too well—that your sons will not come home alive. A jaunt for junk food (Trayvon Martin), playing in the park (Tamir Rice), and an encounter with a police officer a few feet from home (Michael Brown) has proved to be deadly for young Black men.

In a chapter entitled "Jesus and Trayvon," Douglas

[11] Ibid., 5.

counts the cost of the cross and resurrection of Jesus as analogous to the life and death of Trayvon Martin. Douglas fuses the Black body and the body of Christ as subjects of subjugation. Jesus's life in Palestine carries all the hallmarks of Black existence and the historical other. David Walker's God—who is a Negro—is the father of Cone's and Douglas' Black Jesus.

Though published before the advent of the Black Lives Matter movement, M. Shawn Copeland's *Enfleshing Freedom* considers Black bodies marked with meaning, sharing in Douglas' concern for a young Black male's body and extending to Black women's bodies universally.[12] Prescribing a theological anthropology, *Enfleshing Freedom*

[12] M. Shawn. Copeland, Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

"accords hermeneutical privilege to *black-embodied-being-in-the-world* [sic], specifically that of Black women."[13] This ideology is counter to the *somatophobia* that haunts western Christianity. Though Black bodies are marked with the lash of the whip, it is not the sum-total of the African American experience.

Black folks are agents in their subjectivity—"the enfleshing of created spirit through the struggle to achieve and exercise freedom in history and society." Quoting historians Deborah Gray White's *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Copeland agrees that the intersection of race and sex substantively raises issues on what it means to be human in Christian reflection. Black women's determination to

[13] Ibid., 25.

claim their bodies and those that they love helps to "appreciate their love and struggle for freedom." [14] Copeland dictates a Christology as an enfleshed freedom.

Douglas' Jesus and Trayvon interpretation is in concert with Copeland's Christology. The Trayvon Martin murder, and Jesus' crucifixion, tell us about God's justice. Their marginal status gives theologians a descriptor of Jesus Christ in the past, present, and future. Copeland goes beyond the gender binary to mark the body of Christ as queer. The way James Cones' Black Christ redeems Black bodies from White supremacy's improvised anthropology, a queer Christ does the same work of undermining heteronormative anthropology that demonizes queerness the way Jesus's body was marked.

[14] Ibid.

Copeland is in conversation with Rev. Dr. Pamela Lightsey's *Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology*.[15] Lightsey, with a womanist hermeneutic, centers her body and being. Written in the bellowing smoke of the Ferguson Uprising—reflecting upon her lived experience as an out Black queer womanist theologian—Lightsey begins her critique with the problem of the Enlightenment. The alternative to the Enlightenment claims about Black folks and human possibility is the transformative work of the cross in pursuit of the Kingdom of God—a queer hermeneutic. *A Queering of Black Theology: James Baldwin's Blues Project and Gospel Prose*, Kornegay uses

[15] Pamela Lightsey, Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology (Nyack: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

Baldwin's work to probe the question of "how we reconcile sexualities with faith." *A Queering of Black Theology* unpacks Black toxic masculinity through Baldwin's work and life. Baldwin, for Kornegay, toxic masculinity is inherent to Black Liberation Theology.[16]

The Right Reverend Edward Donalson—a same-gender loving Black Pentecostal— picks up Eddie Kornegay's *A Queering of Black Theology* and moves forward an intersectional theology. Donalson exegesis contemporary social movement inspired by the death of Trayvon Martin and the birthed in the shadow of Michael Brown's killing. *The #BlackLivesMatter Movement: Toward Intersectional Theology* mines the stated tenets of

[16] Eddie Kornegay, A Queering of Black Theology: James Baldwin's Blues Project and Gospel Prose (Camden: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

the BLM organization. Motivated by the need for theological reflection on Michael Brown's death, Donalson builds upon the previous generations of Black liberation and Womanist theology. His work, too, challenges racism, sexism, queerphobia, and the theo-logic and praxis of the black church.[17]

> Through a survey of black theologians, Donalson articulates "the intersections of womanist, Black liberation, and queer theologies with the #Blacklivesmatter movement in the United States". Donalson's research yields the distance between black clergy, theologians, and activist. He urges all three to engage the BLM state principles which are intersectional with an intersectional theology.

[17] Edward Donalson, The #BlackLivesMatter Movement: Toward an Intersectional Theology (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021), 13.

Donalson and Lightsey use queer theory to broaden the claims of black liberation theology. In the end, Donaldson and Lightsey call for an intersectional theology that takes aim at what feminist writer calls—white cis-hetero patriarchal capitalism. They use the protest in the aftermath of Michael Brown's murder as their Kairos moment. Donalson and Lightsey transcended the *weltanschauung*. Their Black intersectional theology builds upon the previous generations of the Black liberation theology. They see through a pastoral and experiential lens, cumulatively they are an enfleshed theology that pours out its spirit on the unloved flesh.

The evolution of Black theologies necessitates an intersectional theology. Keri Day's *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism: Womanist and Black*

Feminist Perspectives approaches the theological crisis generated by the global market. The text opens with a story of Kenya's womanist struggle in the face of poverty and climate injustice. Day applies the Womanist hermeneutic to the conditions of neoliberalism and how Black women in the Black diaspora-make meaning and resist.[18]

This brief cartography of contemporary insurgent theologies reveals two glaring omissions—a lack of substantial engagement with Marxist theory and a critical engagement with Pentecostalism as a model for radical Christian praxis. Donalson just towards a critique of capitalism without undoing its linkages to gender and sexual oppression. Keri Day's work on black women's response to neoliberalism and Pentecostalism takes

[18] Keri Day, Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism: Womanist and Black Feminist Perspectives (Camden: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

direct aim at capitalism. Most other theologians fail to utilize Marxist theory. In like manner, Pentecostalism—the largest Christian tendency of black people in the world—remains mostly an untapped resource.

3. Black Pentecostalism

After the Civil War, finally free of their unrequited toil, African American achievement flourished, albeit briefly. A backlash came to fruition in many Southern state legislatures. The United States reneged upon its promise to four million formerly enslaved Black folk. The Comprise of 1877 awarded the Presidential victory to Rutherford B. Hayes, who in exchange for being given the White House, agreed to withdraw troops and resources from many of the former slaveholding States in the South. This lack of federal protection curtailed African American rights and safety.

During the nadir of Black life (1877-1955), 16 lynchings—the public hanging and mutualization of Black folks often by self-appointed mobs—reaffirmed the Black zone of non-being. "Between 1882 and 1885, 227 black people were lynched. Between 1889 and 1899, that figure rose to 1,240. In 1898 alone, White mobs seized and murdered 104 Black people."[19] The public display of Black bodies served as a warning to the racially wayward. Moreover, as the Southern economy collapsed, the unrepentant violence of the nadir forced Black folks to migrate to cities all over the United States. Hardy casts light on this predicament when he writes: "Migrants, whatever their religious identity, did not find the

[19] Rayford Whittingham Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901 (New York: Dial Press, 1954).

Promised Land they had hoped for in the North (or West). What they found instead was a broader space to further interrogate old concepts of racial identity they had already begun to question as Reconstruction's promise faded."

Though migration carried the air of Exodus to metropoles, rural Black migrants encountered the harsh realities of inner-city poverty, racial violence, and discrimination. It is in the firmament of post-Reconstruction blues—Nadir—Black Pentecostalism is born. "They moved beyond the exodus narrative and toward stories of exile, diaspora, and Babylon as they set the stage for a new architecture in their language of the religious community and their descriptions of God."[20] Black Pentecostalism recaptures the ecstatic

[20] Clarence E. Hardy, "From Exodus to Exile: Black Pentecostals, Migrating Pilgrims, and Imagined Internationalism." American

worship of slave religious practices with an understanding of the United States as Babylon at its adherents as exiles. A rural poor religious discourse emerged in the Southern and Northern metropolitan milieu, which insisted on the jettison of most aspects of Black folk religion. Black Pentecostalism origins go back to the late 19th-century Holiness movement.

> Although critics had questioned the expansion of black sacred culture in the Delta throughout the 1870s and 1880s, their numbers began to swell in the 1890s as a series of conditions came into being that made possible large-scale dissent…This volatile mix of social despair, religious unrest, dramatic improvement in travel and communication, and the coming of age of a new generation of ministers made the Delta ripe for the birth of a religious revival, in this

Quarterly, vol. 59, no. 3, 2007, 740. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40068448. Accessed 16 November 2022.

> case the African American Holiness movement.[21]

While the Holiness movement's origins are found in John Wesley's proselytizing in the 1740s, the Holiness movement did not break through among Black folk until the post-Reconstruction period. The burgeoning Black Holiness movement is situated in the vicissitudes and contradictions of the late 1890s.

> In searching for a reason for their current plight, many Delta blacks openly wondered if they were at least partly guilty for the deplorable state of civic affairs by having unknowingly displeased God in some way. Others were more direct in assigning blame and fingered the contemporary culture of their

[21] John M. Giggie. "The Making of the African American Holiness Movement" After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915 (New York: OUP, 2007), 168.

> spiritual life as a key source of their problems.[22]

Black Holiness preachers such as Charles H. Mason (1866-1961) believed that the Christian confession in Jesus was an initial act of grace. Sanctification was the second blessing—the spiritual power and discipline to live Holy in a sinful world. Mason and his contemporaries spread their Holiness message through camp meetings that resembled enslaved religious services. Holiness revivals broke out around the country. Hardy says:

> The Azusa revival was a broad religious awakening that bridged various groups, encompassing local whites, Mexicans, and Russians…By forging an exilic rhetoric that extended beyond the exodus narrative, which had so gripped black Protestantism in the

[22] Ibid., 76.

> decades just before and after the Civil War, black Holiness leaders, often inspired by Azusa, helped their followers of migrating pilgrims adapt as their institutions began to span regional and racial divides. [23]

Day and Robert Beckford situate Black Pentecostalism in the Black radical tradition, especially in how it contends with racial capitalism.[24] Building on the work of Cedric Robinson and Gargi Bhattacharyya, Day has a genealogy of capitalism. She deepened the story as one marked by gendered White supremacy—noting racial capitalism's work is not only economical but existential— shaping longing and desire. Through

[23] Clarence E. Hardy, "From Exodus to Exile: Black Pentecostals, Migrating Pilgrims, and Imagined Internationalism." Accessed 16 Nov. 2022.
[24] Keri Day, Azusa Reimagined: A Radical Vision of Religious and Democratic Belonging (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2022), 63; and Robert Beckford, Dread and Pentecostal: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011).

the slave religion practices, the Azusa Street Revival hosted by William J. Seymour at the Apostolic Faith Mission rejected the logic of racial capitalism—an emerging Pentecostalism sought a new mode of being not constrained by the white supremacy protocols and educated blacks conformability. Day affirms:

> Black individuals at the revival saw their bodies as sacred sites of divine presence and activity. Through their religious practices and rituals, members were able to recreate themselves, to exercise their agency in ways that granted them meaning beyond American capitalism's instrumental usage of their bodies as labor.[25]

Day offers a critique on traditional angles of vision on Pentecostalism. She uses Black Marxist and postcolonial thought and argues that scholars focus on speaking in

[25] Keri Day, Azusa Reimagined: A Radical Vision of Religious and Democratic Belonging, 63.

tongues and otherworldly gestures have closed their eyes to the revolutionary mood at work at Pentecostalism's founding event. Day says:

> At the heart of classical patterns of Marxian agitation is a class consciousness among workers (or the poor) that lead to political revolution and the overthrow of modern capitalist state…Liberation is directly connected to upheaval and transformation of the state…However, while movements such as Azusa may not reflect the classical patterns of Marxist agitation, that does not mean that they share no traits in common with Marxism. For instance, like Marxism, Azusa does not place much value in the capitalist state (in its case, the American government) as the guarantor of rights and justice…While Azusa thin*k*s differently about the means under which the state is abolished, it nevertheless agrees that the state is an *irredeemable actor* in bring last peace and justice.[26]

White vigilantes and law enforcement agencies

[26] Ibid. 131-132.

physically attacked Pentecostal gatherings in the West and South because of the loud services and race mixing. Moreover, the sight of Black men laying hands in Pentecostal fashion evoked disgust in Charles Parham—the progenitor of the Pentecostal movement.

Mason attended the Azusa Street Revival after founding the Church of God in Christ with Charles Price Jones in 1895. He received the third work of grace—the third blessing, i.e., the gift of tongues as evidence of salvation. So convinced that speaking in tongues was key to Christian salvation, Mason would part ways with Jones and founded the Black Pentecostal denomination—The Church of God in Christ (COGIC)—in 1907. Jones, in the same year, filed a lawsuit against Mason and excommunicated Mason from the General Ministerial Council of Holiness

> Churches and Meetings over speaking in tongues. Underneath the doctrinal dispute lies a political critique of segregation and an ethical critique of the desire by educated blacks to conform to the standards of the White gaze by renouncing various religious practices of enslaved Africans.

Black Pentecostal exilic consciousness responded in a revolutionary fashion to race, class, and gender. When Charles H. Mason built the first COGIC congregation in Lexington, Mississippi, Holmes County, there was a 41% Black illiteracy rate, and 78% of all Black workers were sharecroppers or domestics. By centering Black domestic workers in her genealogy of Pentecostalism, Day takes up race, class, and gender without sacrificing any identity. As with contemporary insurgent theologies, Day applies queer theory to discern racial capitalism complexities.

In Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture, Cheryl J. Sanders positions us to appreciate that Black Pentecostalism concerned itself with transcendence and being, and it understood itself as a *theology in the wilderness.*[27] Sanders understand that Saints—Black sanctified folks—"dialectic identity reflects the social aspect of exilic consciousness, as manifested in the Saint's awareness of alienation or separation form the dominant culture, based on racial differences and religious practices."[28] For Sanders, COGIC—is part of the broader Sanctified tradition encompassing Holiness, Pentecostal, and Apostolic denominations and

[27] Cheryl J. Sanders, Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[28] Ibid., 5.

believers. "The Sanctified Church is an African American Christian reform movement that seeks to bring its standards of worship, personal morality, and social concern into conformity with a biblical hermeneutic of holiness and spiritual empowerment."[29] Saints developed, then, as an ethical category in Exile. "The Saints follow the holiness mandate in worship, in personal morality, and society based on the dialectical character of the tradition: "in the world but not of it."[30] They reenforce the status of the Exile in the Empire as a political and existential condition. Mason and his contemporaries appealed to the black folk just two decades removed from slavery.

The Azusa Street Revival was queer, racialized,

[29] Ibid., 13.
[30] Ibid., 65.

and erotic. The taboo integrated altar calls where all genders laid hands and received the gift of the Holy Ghost, accompanied by wild shouting and tongue-talking—troubling oppressive apparatuses. Day notes that Mason had a distinctly Christian conjuring practice connected to Africa and his Pentecostal faith. The use of the body in worship through spirit possession was/is thoroughly African, eliciting racist tropes. Mason, too, opposed consumerism and was jailed by the United States for his opposition to World War I. In what DuBois called The Frenzy, Pentecostals reconstituted slave religion praxis. The ring shout, emotional preaching, and divining of material objects enfleshed a counterhegemonic space undaunted by normative White gaze and materialist consumption.

The alienation and disappointment in a strange

land dislocated the American salvific. Rejecting the money eschaton—"the idea that money secures and inaugurates a new era of wealth, health, and well-being"—the emerging Pentecostal movement was "deeply engaged in a form of political agency that is actualized in and through its religious life, which directly challenges modern American political and economic institutions because this institutions failed."[31] Through their faith claims reconstitute selfhood by transcending Fanon's zone of non-being.

4. Toward a Pentecostal Liberation Theology

An understanding of Black Marxist and Pentecostalism is central to Black liberation theologies. The contemporary insurgent theologies provide

[31] Ibid., 6.

theological resources that transcend cisheteropatriarchial capitalism. While there are gestures and mentions of capitalism in insurgent theologies, most do not explicitly use Marxist thought, making them inherently classed. This bias may explain the lack of an explicit engagement by Black liberation theology and insurgent theologies with Pentecostalism.

Through the religious and cultural practices retained from Western sub-Saharan Africa and sustained in the heat of slavery through the Nadir, Black Pentecostal praxis embodies Cornel West's revolutionary Christianity. Though Marxism appears to marginalize Black thought, Black Pentecostalism, as a theology of the Black poor, is the most Gramscian theology of Black people. The dependency upon African religious practices and deployment of cultural phenomena such as shouting

is counterhegemonic. The use of the Black body—demonized and defamed—in Pentecostal worship overcomes Fanon's zone of nonbeing.

When Black Pentecostal thought is "rooted in the progressive Marxist tradition, with the staunch anticapitalist, anti-imperialist, antiracist, and antisexist stance, and its creative socialist outlook," it critiques racial capitalism. It transcends the zone of nonbeing, which is a salient concern of Black Pentecostal liberation ideology. West links this type of social critique to the mood of a revolutionary Christianity. He avers:

> The object of inquiry for Afro-American critical thought is the past and the present, the doings and sufferings of African people in the United States. Rather than a new scientific discipline or field of study, it is a genre of writing, a textuality, a mode of discourse that interprets, describes and evaluates Afro-American life in order comprehensively to understand and effectively to transform it. It

> is not concerned with "foundations" or transcendental "ground" but with how to build its language in such a way that the configuration of sentences and the constellation of paragraphs themselves create a textuality and distinctive discourse which are a material force for Afro- American freedom.[32]

While I am interested in scaffolding a systematic theology concerned with "foundations and transcendental grounds," West's formulation is a guidepost for sourcing a practical Liberation Theology that gives an epistemic privilege to Black Folk agency and self-making in the American Empire. As noted early, situatedness is not reducible to economic determinism, moral fortitude, political habits, or cultural production. It is all those things at once.

[32] Cornel West, Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity, 15.

The beingness of Black people constitutes a "configuration of sentences," and the constellation of paragraphs themselves create a textuality and distinctive discourse, which are a material force for Afro- American freedom." This ideology points to my epistemic Black lumpenproletariat praxis. It falls within the later part of West's histography, namely in that part of his analysis that contends Black folks' experience of postmodernism is both paradoxical and problematic.

> The paradox of Afro-American history is that Afro-Americans fully enter the modern world precisely when the postmodern period commences…the Afro-American underclass and the poor working class exhibit the indelible traces of the their oppression in modernity and their dispensability in postmodernity: relative political powerlessness and perennial socioeconomic depression, cultural deterioration reinforced by devastated families and prefabricated mass culture, and subversive subcultures

> dominated by drugs and handguns which surface as civil terrorism in black ghettos and American cities…Let is suffice to say that a noteworthy product of the dispersive practices in Afro-Americans in postindustrial cosmopolitan American culture is the advent of Afro-American philosophy.[33]

Although I am suspicious of West's position that the Black poor and working class are experiencing "cultural deterioration," I agree that entering postmodern and postindustrial America marks the end of modernity (postmodern). And though he emphasizes the advent of Black philosophy, I will wrestle with theology as a "noteworthy product of the dispersive practices" among Black folks, "postindustrial cosmopolitan American culture".

Day, too, offers us a way forward. She positions

[33] Ibid., 43-44.

Black Pentecostalism to respond to criticisms raised by Marxism by situating Black Pentecostalism within the Black radical tradition. Day invites us to consider the counter-hegemonic praxis of African American Pentecostalism. If we understand Pentecostalism as a continued revelation of Black Theology, we can locate it with the Black Prophetic tradition. Suppose we place *Prophesy Deliverance!* in dialogue with Black existential thought, contemporary insurgent theologies, and Pentecostalism? In that case, we operationalize the Marxist critique of economic oppression, activate contemporary insurgent theologies, and transcend the zone of nonbeing. A Black Pentecostal liberation theology must be Marxist-informed and spirit-filled.

The tasks of a Black Pentecostal liberation theology, then, are to cast African American life as in

exile in the American Empire; discern and overcome how the spirit of empire constantly undermines subjectivity; craft a genealogy that forwards the theological praxis of the Black poor; and, above all, ground itself in local and global sites of struggle. The epistemic privileging of the religious practices of the Black poor elevates quotidian and extravagant ways Black folks sustained their being while laboring in the empire. Black Pentecostal liberation theology, therefore, prophesies deliverance!

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