

Response from Dr. Cornel West
to *Prophesy Deliverance!*

I am honored and blessed by this rich cacophony of profound and provocative voices that lovingly and respectfully challenge me - and thereby teach me so much. I salute my brother Harold Bennett for facilitating this fascinating gathering of high-quality scholars.

I consider Cheryl Sanders to be one of the few great figures in modern Religious Studies and the grand pioneer in Black Pentecostal Studies. Her groundbreaking book, *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (1996), is a classic! Her heartfelt and honest appreciation of my work and witness means much to me. She speaks and writes with the highest spiritual and moral authority - a genuine

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divine calling manifest for over four decades rooted in a deep love of “the least of these,” especially precious everyday Black people inseparable from an intellectual vocation that revels in the life of the mind. I stand accused of overlooking the centrality of Pentecostal religion and culture in 1982 - especially given my beloved Black Baptist biases. In 2023, I would try to get closer to the truth. I was unaware of the grand Chancellor Williams’s 1949 dissertation on storefront churches. And I continue to learn so much from the intellectual brilliance and spiritual courage of Keri Day. I also must catch up with the relevant and enriching work of Dale Coulter.

A.G. Miller’s presence and witness are undeniable joys in my life! He and sister Brenda -his lovely wife- always bring a smile to my face and heart. He is the closest figure we have to the one and only James Melvin

Washington (with whom he studied at Union Theological Seminary). James Washington was my best friend and colleague in the world! Miller's multi-layered essay is the definitive treatment of the origins of this text, my favorite one. I would only add two points. First, the title was given to me by an "ex-Pentecostal" minister - the great and grand James Forbes (now claimed by we Baptists). Second, my book would not exist if it were not for the initiation and encouragement of three magnificent Pentecostal ministers - A.G. Miller, Herbert Daughtry, and Eugene Rivers (whom I met at Harvard over 50 years ago!).

Osagyefo Sekou is my beloved fellow cell-mate, intellectual interlocutor, street protester and Blues artist. His Renaissance gifts are immense. I embrace his crucial claim about the fundamental role of a flexible Marxist

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analysis of our predatory capitalist civilization (stretched as Frantz Fanon calls for in his classic *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) - in my work. As a revolutionary Christian - a fallible and fallen follower of Jesus unto death -I am looking for any armor or form of weaponry that fortifies me as I fructify the Holy Ghost inside of me. To follow Jesus entails being of service to the ‘‘least of these’’. Likewise, I embrace the fortifying insights of Saidiya Hartman (a past student of mine at Yale from whom I always learn), Christina Sharpe, Calvin Warren, Shawn Copeland, Kelly Brown Douglas (another student of mine I treasure), Achilles Mbeme, and others. We must try to understand and transform the predatory capitalist idolatry that sits alongside the white supremacist, male supremacist, homophobic and transphobic practices. Sekou’s roots in the beloved community of Martin Luther

King (with Stokely Carmichael dimensions) led him to understand this point better than most others.

Dara Coleby Delgado's poignant words and prophetic spirit touch me deeply. I have always conceived of my work and witness as a "love letter" and love offering, especially to "Black, tragic, and beautiful" Jamals and Rosa Lees! In fact, I wrote the book under the premonition that if this is the last and only text I finish that God would use me to try to educate and pass on by example the best of a grand tradition of a great Black people who taught the world so much about how to be love warriors, freedom fighters, wounded-healers, and joy-spreading! No other people in the modern world have done more than we have in the face of chronic hatred, terror, trauma, and sorrow to reshape the culture in the image of love, freedom, healing, and joy. Black music is

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the greatest tradition in the modern world of spiritual fortitude, artistic creativity, and moral courage. And the Pentecostal elements sit at the center of so much Black music (as noted by the greatest jazz artist of all time, Louis Armstrong!) I wholeheartedly agree with Miguel De La Torre and many Afropessimists who highlight the desperation and abjection of Black existence in the age of Europe (1492-1945) and its U.S. imperial aftermath (1945-2023). My Christian prophetic calling is Christocentric in content and cruciform in character. Must not a good Christian ever be ready to look good on wood? No cross, no crown! Dara Coleby Delgado captures this crucial dimension of my work and life in a persuasive way, though I wrestle with the strong arguments of my fellow Black womanist theologians rightly suspicious of most versions of my cross-centered work and witness. My

Blues-soaked, Chekhovian Christian witness is different, but the overlap is real!

Last but not least, Marlon Milner appropriately begins on a providential note. I deeply believe God called me to begin my intellectual vocation in publishing in the historic Rev. Dr. Herbert Daughtry's House of the Lord Pentecostal Church. Some parts of the book were delivered in the Biblical Seminary in San Jose, Costa Rica - also thoroughly evangelical with Pentecostal aspects! But my rich Black Baptist roots from Clifton and Irene B. West and Rev. Willie P. Cooke's Shiloh Baptist Church on the chocolate side of Sacramento, California, led me to 415 Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn under Rev. Daughtry's prophetic leadership. I also admit that the same holds for Rev. Dr. J. Alfred Smith and Father Michael Phelger, respectively Baptist and Catholic! We hang-loose, jazz-

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like Black Baptists simply try to love our crooked neighbors with our crooked hearts, to see Jesus more clearly, follow Jesus more nearly and love Jesus more dearly. - the rest is commentary! Marlon Miller's insightful interpretations and powerful descriptions of overlooked towering figures like Leonard Lovett, Bishop Smallwood Edmond Williams, and Bishop Robert Clarence Lawson send me back to the virtual and physical library! And again, he invokes the indispensable works of Keri Day and the pioneering and prolific corpus of Joy James (a former student of mine at Union Theological Seminary who always taught me more than I did her!). Let it never be said among my old school of Christian intellectual freedom fighters that the younger generation has dropped the ball or disappointed us. Even in this moment of immense spiritual decay, moral decrepitude,

and idolatrous sell-out, there remains a cloud of young witnesses holding up the blood-stained banner of courageous faith, costly grace, tear-soaked hope, and sacrificial love that puts a smile on the ancestors whose love for us was inseparable from the love of Jesus Christ!

Thank you, Brother Harold.

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